

TRIED AND TESTED



Zegul 520 Composite Sea Kayak

RRP: €1999

More information:

www.zegulmarine.com

It's undeniable that the Zegul 520 sea kayak we have in for testing, in its race car red, and with its sleek, narrow body and pronounced fine ends and hard chines is a sexy-looking boat. Since it arrived at CK Towers we've had it out on the water at every opportunity and are now able to give a little more than the rather superficial summary above of this composite performance sea kayak.

The Zegul brand is owned and operated by the long-established European manufacturer Tahe Kayaks, from Sweden. Designer Johan Wirsén launched the brand in 2004, and since then has developed a sizable range of kayaks all targeted at the more advanced, 'hardcore' sea paddler.

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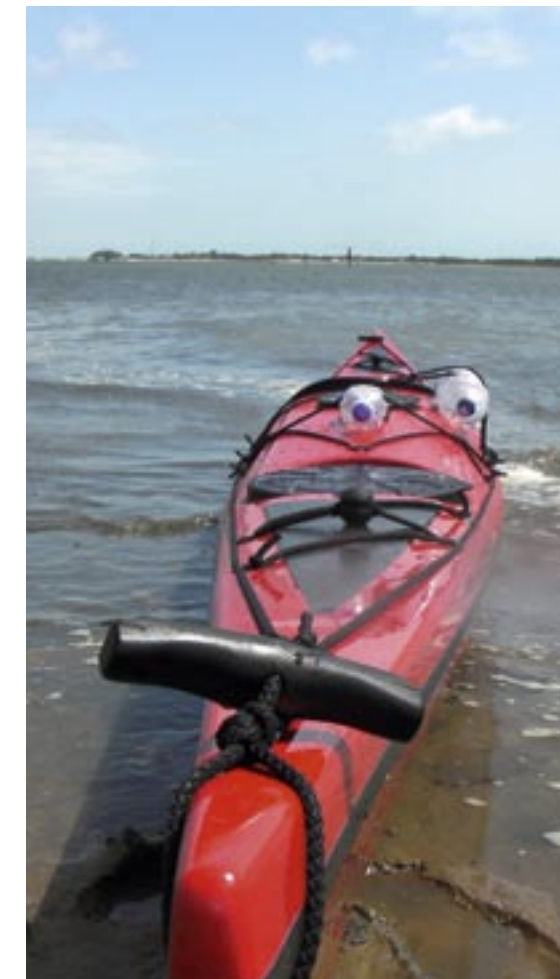
This is something that is very clearly apparent when getting into the Zegul 520. The primary stability is extremely slight, and to a beginner this boat would feel uncomfortably tippy. To the more experienced though, or a paddler coming from a whitewater or slalom background, this isn't a problem at all: the secondary stability is excellent, and the 520 will sit very happily on an extreme edge, and becomes very stable when doing so.

One thing to note, though, is that if you're planning on taking one of these for a demo, make sure you have a suitably watertight neoprene spray-deck. The hard chines, which give the 520 secondary stability at a very advanced angle combined with the narrow body - the benefits of which we'll discuss shortly - mean that when turning, particularly in swell, a large proportion of the surface-area of the cockpit can be submerged.

The Handling

The 520 is Zegul's 'playful' kayak. It is certainly true that the very functional rocker combined with the raised ends on the bow on the stern, the hard chines and sharp 'V' hull make for an incredibly manoeuvrable and fast boat, with all of the play that Zegul intended.

We've had it out in a variety of conditions and it has certainly proved to hold its own in the face of more challenging sea states. What makes the 520 such a delight to paddle, even when there's a bit of a breeze, is that the shape of the hull causes it to track



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incredibly well with the skeg up, and when you make the most of the secondary stability, get your weight over an edge and paddle aggressively you can make some really snappy turns. The edge-edge transition is fast and smooth, so you can positively weave in and between obstacles with striking ease.

This goes out of the window, however, when conditions force you to drop the skeg. You would obviously expect the skeg to have an adverse effect on manoeuvrability, but although it does a great job of keeping the kayak tracking in high winds, the turning becomes almost unbearably sluggish.

We've only tested the Zegul 520 with the standard-fit kajaksport skeg system, but as an optional extra or alternative you could opt to have it with a Smart Track rudder system.

As you would expect from such a playful sea kayak the Zegul 520 surfs beautifully, and never feels unwieldy or out of control, although be prepared to paddle aggressively, the rocker and bow position when the boat isn't loaded make it quite easy to get turned around and surfed backwards if you don't dominate it. We think that in the right hands this boat could really be put through its paces in the surf or on a substantial tide race. It's an absolute dream to roll, so you'll never feel uncomfortable pushing yourself for fear of not being able to bring it back up again. If you're a sea paddling thrill seeker out for a bit of fun on a day with good conditions the design of this boat is guaranteed to give you a fine ride and put a smile on your face!



When unloaded the bow skips over the waves a little

The Trip

Having said this, we've taken the Zegul 520 on longer, more mellow and sheltered day trips and it's served us just fine. Across the four storage hatches, one of which is a handy day hatch right in front of the cockpit, there is plenty of room to fulfil the needs of the day-tripper or someone on a longer trip.

Interestingly, we found that loaded only with the lunch, water, emergency kit and some photography equipment required for a day trip the bow would skip over the waves a fair bit, something that will presumably be brought under control by loading the front hatch with kit for a longer trip. Despite this, though, the water line around the cockpit seems quite low when the boat is completely unloaded. We thought it was a little strange that provision for a lot of kit is built into the design of such a playful sea kayak that, in our opinion, is much better suited to zipping around your local stretches of coastline and tide races, rather than being loaded up for longer, more serious expeditions.

We're not really complaining, though! At almost two thousand euros any attempt to make the Zegul 520 more versatile in purpose is a welcomed addition.

Construction

Standard construction is a carbon/aramid infusion. Aramids are synthetic fibres designed for strength and heat resistance, Kevlar being the most common example. This standard light and strong model weighs in at 22-24kg. You can also opt for an even

lighter, albeit slightly more delicate, vacuum infused carbon fibre lay-up version, a mere 19-21kg of boat.

Other Details

Take Kayak's long history of making sea kayaks shows in the quality finish of this boat. The outfitting is highly customisable to individuals if you're willing to spend a bit of time tweaking, don't expect to get it spot on first time out if you only spent a few moments making adjustments. There is a raised front deck, which allows room for a comfortable bend in your knees even when you're packed in quite tightly

with good purchase on the footrests. We've spent long days out on the water in the Zegul 520 and it's always been comfortable.

All the other finishing touches – the hatch covers, the bungee, the end handles are a similarly good quality job. All things considered, we think this is a very reasonably priced option for an advanced paddler's composite sea kayak.

Conclusion


We loved the Zegul 520, for the right person it's a joy to paddle but it's also definitely true to say that it

isn't for everyone, or everything. The rocker and hard-chines that limit primary stability rule it out entirely as a beginner boat, and even for an experienced sea kayaker the highly-aggressive paddling style it demands will take some getting used to if you're only familiar with the more traditional British fish-form style kayak.

Although it has plenty of storage and a high-riding bow when unloaded, we don't think it's best suited to long expeditions. We'd recommend it for a sea kayaker who loved a bit of excitement and wants a fast, manoeuvrable recreational or surfing

boat, or maybe even a whitewater paddler who wants to get into sea kayaking and is already proficient at the aggressive paddling style you need to get the most of this sea kayak.

Web



For more sea kayak reviews and videos plot a course for www.canoekayak.co.uk

There is plenty of accessible storage.

