

VALLEY NORDKAPP ENTHUSIAST RM

Fittings and construction

I first saw the Nordkapp RM at the 2006 Jersey symposium and was immediately impressed that, despite the change in construction, the fine lines of the original Nordkapp had been maintained. Sitting between a Nordkapp LV and a Nordkapp Jubilee it looked much more like the bigger Jubilee. The finish of the polyethylene is excellent, easily the best I have seen from a RM manufacturer.

The Nordkapp RM has the full set of Valley deck lines, elastics and end toggles that its composite siblings have. The seat is a plastic moulding covered with a removable

foam cover. The base is comfortable enough but it is fitted much higher in the boat than the original composite seat fitted to older Nordkapps. I have removed the similar thick layer of foam from under the seat of my Nordkapp LV. The lowered seat height has made that boat feel much more stable and is certainly something I would do if I owned a Nordkapp RM. Hip pads are fitted to the seat and can be adjusted by inserting your own foam behind them for a snug fit. The back band, a standard Valley back band, is secured, by a thick velcro adjustable strap, to loops on the seat mounts. It is also secured to the rear cockpit rim and the seat pan. This makes it very good for wet re-entries, as it will not fold forward under your backside.

The footrests are standard Yakima units supported on alloy tracks. These adjusted

easily when new, but were easily jammed with sand during a session playing (and exiting!) on a surf beach. Paddlers with big feet complained the pegs were too small. With practice, you could release the locking lever with your toe and adjust the position while seated, but adjustment is not as convenient as the systems used by some other manufacturers.

The long keyhole cockpit is easy to get in, and out of. The cockpit rim is quite low in relation to the high position of the seat and the seating position feels more similar to the Nordkapp LV than the Nordkapp. The Nordkapp RM is fitted with adjustable rubber thigh grips, which give a firm fit in the cockpit for edging and rolling.

The three bulkheads' edges are like a tapered cone and are neatly welded in place instead of being just a flat plate bonded to the hull at right angles. This reduces pressure points and spreads the load as the hull flexes during landings. None leaked during the three



months I had the boat. The kayak is supplied with the same, high quality, fore and aft, and day hatch covers as the composite boats but they do not have securing leashes fitted. These provide a firm dry seal, but two testers noted that the fore hatch had become unsealed during use in short, steep waves. The bulkhead is not fitted with an air vent and we suspect that the flexible hull of the RM may flex inwards in such conditions and loosen the hatch by air compression. There is space for an optional compass to be fitted to the deck. There is a stainless steel, wire controlled skeg that worked faultlessly during testing.

Performance and handling

This was assessed by male and female testers who weighed from 65kg to 95kg. Their experience ranged from intermediate to 5* level. Testing took place in a variety of conditions over three months in the winter of 2006/2007 and a month in the early summer of 2007. Performance was assessed on flat water to three foot windblown waves and six foot swell in exposed crossings. It was used in tidal races of the Argyll coast in surf conditions on the Solway and much further south along the Dorset coast. On most occasions it was paddled alongside a composite Nordkapp and Nordkapp LV.

They said: "The most famous sea kayak in the world is now available in what is probably the best roto-moulded polyethylene (PE) construction of any manufacturer. This kayak retains the legendary Nordkapp handling and incorporates all of the features expected of an expedition-capable kayak. A rare combination of performance and value."

We said: It was immediately apparent that the performance and handling was closer to the larger composite Nordkapp than to the Nordkapp LV. The Nordkapp RM has a narrow round bottom and so when stationary on flat water it does feel much less stable than a boat like an Alaw or a Capella. However, it has a lot of rocker and once edged its secondary stability makes it easy to hold. It has more secondary stability than the Nordkapp LV. It responded very well to edging in turns. It felt very stable during bow rudder and cross bow rudder strokes. Interestingly the least experienced tester, who found it tippy on flat water, found it much easier to handle (he said "more stable") in moderate clapotis conditions than his Capella!

More experienced testers loved its handling in rough water. The combination of a narrow, round bottomed hull with a lot of rocker and low volume ends does seem to make crossing confused water (as found in tidal races in particular) much easier for all grades of paddler.

During the time I had the boat I found on repeated occasions that it had exactly the same maximum sprint speed on flat water as the composite Nordkapp.

The Nordkapp RM is a full sized expedition boat and the lighter paddlers (understandably) found it a bit of a handful in windy conditions. The boat responded superbly to the skeg to allow effortless tracking off the wind without weather cocking. However, crossing steep waves (e.g. those found in wind against tide conditions at the mouth of sea lochs) the bow does rise high and the wind catches it with the result that it tends to get blown down wind. Heavier paddlers did not notice this so much, particularly when the boat was loaded with 35 kg of ballast.

The boat crossed eddy lines on a spring tide in the Cuan Sound with hardly a flutter; the round bottom helps intermediates that have not quite mastered edge control. Playing in the surf in the Solway I could detect no difference in how easy it was to catch waves, in surfing speed or resistance to broaching compared with the composite Nordkapp. Rolling the RM was very easy and larger paddlers felt that it was easier than the composite boat which lacks the rubber thigh grips. Finally, everyone enjoyed the extra confidence given by the robustness of RM construction when rockhopping. We were much more likely to attempt that narrow gap through or over the rocks during a surge of a wave!

Specifications

(as measured with composite Nordkapp in brackets)

Length: 540cm (547cm)
Width: 52.5cm (53cm)
Depth at front of cockpit: 33.5cm (35.5cm)
Weight: 27.5kg (24.5kg)

RRP: £999

Special thanks are due to Mike Thomson of Scottish Paddler supplies who lent his demo for extended periods on three separate occasions.

TESTED



VALLEY

Manufacturer's response

When we first started the Nordkapp RM project it was with some trepidation, the Nordkapp being one of the most famous kayaks in sea kayaking history. We knew there would be no hiding place and that every aspect of its performance would be compared to those of the composite version. Mindful of this we spent more time checking and double checking every aspect of the design than with any other project to date, always with the primary goal that first and foremost this was a Nordkapp and needed to provide the same level of paddling performance and enjoyment.

Thankfully, as this test reinforces, we seem to have hit the mark. Many commentators have gone further saying it is the highest performance plastic kayak they have ever paddled. Although praise like this is very welcome, the root comes from the fact that the Nordkapp RM is probably the only plastic version of this style of kayak. Check the stats and you will see most other manufacturers steer clear of long, narrow, highly rockered models preferring to play safe with more conservative plastic offerings. We do recognise that Nordkapp's are not for everyone, fortunately as also mentioned in the article we have some very good products for those who want something a little smaller or a little more forgiving.

Regarding the sizing the Nordkapp is sized between the LV and full size composite versions and whilst a good range of paddler sizes are easily accommodated within the standard outfitting, as was pointed out in the article, it is relatively easy for others to adjust the standard items to make themselves comfortable.

As was made apparent in the test we design all areas of the kayak to be as functional and serviceable in real world conditions as possible. To this end, all parts of the skeg system are easily accessed and serviced with basic tools; hatches are pressure tested before leaving the factory and are standard across our entire range of kayaks, also all ergonomic adjustments in the cockpit are easy to make. Additionally I must add that we are now the only UK manufacturer using rigid welded bulkheads in our plastic kayaks, these significantly add to the strength and rigidity of the boat and will outlast the cheaper foam alternatives. Bulkheads are now vented, unlike the earlier version tested.

Thanks to all those at Ocean Paddler



Polyethylene Sea Kayaks

Most people associate rotomolded (RM) polyethylene sea kayaks with stable but slow boats suitable for beginners. As polyethylene sea kayaks are cheaper than composite (usually glass reinforced plastic, GRP) boats they are more affordable for the newcomer, so it is unsurprising that manufacturers have traditionally used this construction for entry level boats. Another advantage of RM boats is that they are able to stand every day knocks better than composite boats. They are however, about 15% heavier than similar sized composite boats and although this is unlikely to make any discernable difference to on the water performance, it may make the difference as to whether you are able to lift the boat onto a roof rack single-handed. Composite boats are stiffer than RM boats and some say that this makes them faster in rough water as no energy is wasted in flexing the

hull. After considerable use, the harder surface of the composite boat will still be smooth between the major scratches. In contrast the softer hull of the RM boat will have gathered many minor "hairy" scuffs and scratches, which will cause resistance to smooth water flow over the hull and potentially reduce paddling efficiency and top speed. If holed, a composite boat can usually be repaired to near original condition. A holed RM boat is difficult to repair and the "heat welded" patch is not as strong (or as good a cosmetic finish) as a repair to a composite boat. Although polyethylene boats are very robust, they are susceptible to deformation if stored or transported incorrectly. A hot day and the hull strapped tightly down onto narrow roof bars will soon create depressions under the pressure points. It is probably wise to invest in some J or V bars for your roof rack

Conclusion

The surprising thing about this test was how little difference in performance and handling was found between the RM and composite Nordkapps. Many people are now considering buying two boats: an expedition boat and a day boat for rockhopping. I would suggest that heavier paddlers might consider buying just one, the Nordkapp RM! Lighter paddlers might find that it has a bit much volume

to use as a day boat and would be better off using something like an Avocet RM for this purpose. If they do need an expedition boat for a few weekends in the year, then lighter paddlers could save a great deal of money by buying a Nordkapp RM and in no way be disadvantaged when paddling alongside friends in expensive composite boats. I also hope that centres and outfitters across the

world will recognise the qualities of this boat. Imagine flying to your destination with only your clothing and being able to hire a Nordkapp! Finally, this test has reinforced that the Nordkapp is a truly classic and enduring design; it has long been appreciated by experienced coaches and expeditionary paddlers and now it is accessible and affordable to a much wider group.