



It's now been more than a month since we landed the exciting new Zegul range of boats from Tahe Marine. Of most interest to Rob & I has been the Zegul 550, a boat with so many of our 'ideal' boxes ticked that we have been hanging out to get our hands on one & really find out what it's capable of.

So, in the past month we've been getting the Zegul 550 out in as many & varied conditions as we can, and also handing our demo around to a wide range of paddlers to get their valued feedback & impressions.

While we haven't had the boat out 'in the middle of hell' yet, something we like to do with all of our boats to get a feel for the performance of the hull at the true pointy end of things, we do feel that we're now able to provide an accurate & honest appraisal of what the Zegul 550 can do, and of course, what it can't.



First & foremost, this boat is fast. I don't mean fast as in the typical Sea Kayaker review where you read that it can maintain 6 knots over a 200m burst, I mean a fast as in a genuine 9kmh cruiser over 12.5km. That puts it in the range of the two or three very fastest sea kayaks out there, including our own Wind 585, all of which are a full foot longer than the 550. The foredeck is very narrow & allows a great close catch, so a nice efficient forward stroke allows seriously powerful paddle drive, while the Swede hull form mirrors other performance speed kayaks like the QCC700 & other similar shapes.

It's also the hardest tracking, lowest windage skeg boat that Rob & I have ever paddled. Born in the fiords of Scandinavia, where wind is the greatest danger, it is so neutral in the wind as to make the skeg an almost unnecessary inclusion. Thus far in testing we've been in winds topping 20 knots in lump & bump, and also on flatter water with less breeze, where most skeg boats can be annoying without a little skeg deployed. The Zegul tracks like an arrow, but happily requires only very small adjustments to edges when knocked off the rhumb line by a wave or current. A lot of stiff tracking boats are a real bugger to get back on line when shifted, not so the Zegul.



The rather innovative hull design, with a hard chine running from forward of the aft hatch to halfway between the seat & forward bulkhead makes the boat very stable. Even in confused seas & serious rebound, the Zegul is a 'photo snapper', one of those hulls that looks after you well enough to allow some challenging-water photography. The chines give way very quickly to an ultra sleek bow & stern profile which is the source of the super terminal hull speed, but most definitely the Zegul is one of the rare designs with a narrow beam, a great burst of speed & stability way above the average.

As far as build quality goes, the Zegul is a beautifully put together craft. The hull is a full carbon kevlar layup, constructed with cutting edge aerospace vacuum infusion technology, with a GRP deck. So keen were Zegul to manufacture something that was pleasing to the eye, they commissioned a consultant more versed in the arts of visual aesthetics to stylise the deck, and the results show, with nice lines accentuating several practical features. When was the last time you saw a clear carbon kevlar panel through a deck, with a de-bossed boat logo? No drama attracting attention when this little baby goes onto the roof racks!

Now, we've spent the past 3 years encouraging people into boats that have manoeuvrability as the key to their performance, so it is a definite anomaly to have a boat in our range that rests more comfortably on the fast-stable-hard tracking tripod. We've been busy laying our alms at the foot of the God of Playfulness, and the Zegul is something different to the types of Brit boats that we have enjoyed paddling so much since we began importing them in 2007.

So to performance.....



In reasonably challenging water - 20kn+ & 2-3m of confused swell & sea - the Zegul is a low-fuss cruiser that gets on with the job of moving ahead without giving the high octane return of an Aquanaut or Nordkapp LV. In a head sea it has sufficient bow volume to ride over oncoming water & ease into the trough without slamming, and the usual stalling that this incurs. Speed into a headwind is barely compromised, with the low deck volume & windage combining nicely with the distribution of bow volume to neutralise opposing conditions. Down sea, the boat doesn't give the feedback of the British boats, but boy does it go fast. I first experienced this on a paddle with a guy in a Nordkapp, another great down sea performer. In a 15kn tailwind & moderately steep 2m following seas, I felt like I was just cruising along with the waves without getting the usual charging acceleration I get in my Aquanaut. I looked around to pass on my observation to the Nordkapp paddler & was surprised to see him about 200m behind me, giving it a good go. My conclusion? The Zegul was just getting on with the job of going forward at a great rate, without the technical joys required in other boat designs.

Rob has paddled the boat extensively in & around the harbour & has commented on it's no fuss handling. He considers it to be a fantastic harbour tourer or fitness boat for a paddler with an eye to distance touring & expeditions. In longer swell, the hull unleashes and can motor with the best of them, giving a very surf-ski like run without the demanding balance required to keep a ski upright.

It's suited to paddlers from about 60kg upwards, probably topping out at 95-100kg depending on the size of the paddlers' legs. I'm 95kg with big thighs & fit comfortably enough, and could easily paddle the boat for a day without any discomfort, but you wouldn't want to be proportioned any more umm, amply than me! The Zegul fits the bill for any paddlers looking

for a speed machine for the Hawkesbury Classic (Medium Rec. Division). While the volume is fairly low - about the same as a Nordkapp LV - a good packer would get ample gear into the hatches for an extended trip.



In conclusion, if the loose tracking responsiveness of the Brit boats is not to your taste and you want a kayak that holds its heading with real tenacity in a range of conditions then the Zegul is definitely worth adding to your shortlist. The build quality is something to behold, and at just \$3790 it offers unparalleled value in the market for a kayak made to these lofty specs. We have a demo available for test paddling.



ZEGUL 550 Manufacturing data

Designed	2007
Designer	Johan Wirsen
Standard construction	Vacuumed carbon/aramide lay-up with extra reinforced keel area
Optional construction	Vacuum infused full carbon fiber lay-up
Standard features	Light weight. Click-on hatches, retractable skeg, thigh pads
Optional features	SmartTrack Professional rudder system, aramide reinforced keel str

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