

BUILD YOUR OWN WOODEN KAYAK

By Dick Dieckman

I built my own 15' 8" long Pygmy Goldeneye kayak about eight years ago, and have been very satisfied with the results. It is beautiful, tracks well, and I always get lots of compliments on its classic looks and on the warm marine grade plywood hull and deck.

Wooden kayaks can be made from a kit. Various manufacturers can provide kits containing all the materials necessary to construct a boat except for a few basic woodworking tools and some clean-up materials. The builder must provide a construction room with a flat floor and way to keep the room at least at 55 degrees (F) to allow epoxy to set up overnight. I built mine in the garage during warmer weather.

You will need approximately five or six weeks to complete your kayak. Longer if you plan to install bulkheads and hatches. A great deal of that time will be spent waiting for the epoxy to cure. Usually overnight. The method of construction, at least on most kits is by the "stitch and glue" method. The boat is built on the floor, and the floor must be flat as any variance will be built into the keel.

The materials came in two 8 foot long boxes. The Goldeneye is a multi-chined boat, which means that there are four panels per side. The basic construction process is to start by butt joining the four foot long panels into full boat length panels. The side panels are then stitched (attached together at the seams with wire through matching holes you drill every six inches along the seams) and glued (injecting a bead of epoxy along the seam.) The manufacturer will supply temporary frames which provide a framework for construction during this initial stage. Starting with the keel, you work upwards stitching and gluing the panels together until you reach the sheer (where the sides and hull meet.) Once the basic hull is constructed, all the wires are removed, and the boat is turned upside down to draped with fiberglass and saturated with epoxy. After drying overnight, the hull can be given another coat of epoxy or two. Then the temporary frames are removed.

The deck is constructed in much the same way the hull is. When completed, it is joined to the hull using the stitch and glue method. The deck is then epoxied and glassed as above. You now have an incredibly strong boat body.

The actual construction of your kayak is not as simple as I have explained as I have left out many of the details. The construction manual provided is about 20 pages long, and gives step by step instructions. After construction of the basic body of the kayak, you will have to attach the cockpit coaming, install a seat (I made my own), foot pedals, finish with marine grade varnish, add hand toggles (for carrying), deck rigging and add bulkheads and hatches if desired.

I recommend the installation of hatches and bulkheads for flotation and ease of loading and unloading. Hatches and bulkheads are usually an "add-on" item and require more work and expense. I feel they are worth it. A sea sock will also keep water out of the boat if capsized. Air bags will provide flotation, but will not prevent water from completely filling the boat if you capsize. In heavy seas your boat will ride very low in the water with waves rolling over it. A boat full of water will become unstable. Bailing out a boat completely filled with water is extremely difficult and all but impossible in high seas.

Building a kayak is hard work and sometimes be frustrating. I have several epoxy paperweights I could let you have. So take it slow and easy. The rewards are a beautiful, strong, lightweight and durable kayak you can say you made with your own hands.

You can call me at 303-980-0573 if you have questions. See your copy of Paddler Magazine for free product information on kayaks, canoes and other product and service information advertised.