

# What to Do After You Finally Buy a Touring Kayak?

by Joanne Schwartz

You've read articles discussing the stability and speed of various models: not as many differences as you hoped for! You've read the product literature provided by manufacturers: any boat in their own line is great! You've talked with store owners and sales staff: any boat they carry is great. And you've listened to friends extolling the virtues of the wonderful kayak they bought. You've tried a different model each time you took a class or trips or joined in a demo day, just to get the feel and select the boat of your dreams. Or, you searched your local kayak club newsletter and store bulletin board for boats figuring you'd just start out with a less expensive model until you learn what you really want. However you got here, you finally bought one! Hooray! Assuming you selected an enclosed cockpit touring kayak, read on.

## What to do next...

First you bring it home, admire it, remove any stickers you don't like and rub it with 303 sun protectant, perhaps, if it is made of fiberglass. Maybe you put on your own decal (your favorite store, kayak club, nature organization, or just a mermaid!). And of course, you invite your friends to admire it with you. You might even give it a friendly or an exciting name, put into your pool and have a champagne christening!

Second, you design a storage place for it. You might hang it in a garage with a commercially available set of straps for one to four kayaks or just toss loops of rope over your rafters and add a pulley system so you can raise it above your car. Or maybe you build a wood rack in the garage, or on the side of your house. If nothing else, you buy or build a set of PVC "saw horses" with a soft sling of lawn chair webbing, fire hose or rubber tubing. Your kayak has a home.

## Personalize your kayak

Next comes the real fun. You personalize your new kayak, realizing that you'll probably spend hundreds of hours paddling it. Some of this you can do right away and other parts you will want to wait until you have some experience with her. Buy a sheet of closed cell foam (mini-cell L-200 is the best, but an old sleeping pad you haven't used for years will do OK.) This can be cut and adhered to your craft with waterproof contact cement (yes, even to polyethylene boats if you wipe them with alcohol or another degreaser first). You'll want to place a pad under your heels right away (about 6" by 12" wide). For delightful comfort glue some to the underside of your deck, right where your knees touch the kayak when you're locked into the ready-for-action position. Also glue some to the seat back (unless it is already padded) and perhaps to your foot pedals (sometimes a couple inches of pipe insulation foam tubing will just slip over the pedals nicely). I always add these foot pads for barefoot paddling in Southern California!

After some experimenting you might want to add padding to your seat itself, either for comfort or to change the tilt and contour of the seat and to the sides of your seat, if you want to be a bit tight for better control in bouncy water. Knee braces are also nice additions which increase boat handling control. These are available pre-made or can be cut from a piece of L-200 foam about 6" x3"x3". Cut this into a long triangle shape and glue them just to the insides of your knees when in that ready-for-action position. Thigh braces (again pre-made or handmade) can be added to the sides of your seat if you want to have more control for handling rough conditions and for rolling your kayak.

Look at your deck next to see how you might want to personalize it with lines and other hardware. Very few boats come with tow lines fore and aft (you never know which end of the tow you'll be on!) The best tow lines (which also double as painters for tying to a dock or rock or cliff) start near your cockpit and run to a fixture on the bow or stern, then back again to your cockpit. This allows you to have control over one end of the line so you can untie as well as tie on while still seated in your kayak. People who simply run a line from the end to the cockpit and use that end to tie on soon learn that they can't release themselves quickly if the need arises. Bungee lines across the front deck, and perhaps the rear deck as well, come in handy for temporarily storing charts, a compass, and personal items like a hat, water bottle or a windbreaker temporarily. Be sure to get bungee cord which is relatively thick (1/4 inch) since it is easier to handle with cold fingers and easier to place your paddle blade under. You might want to rig the lines on the deck right behind your cockpit so a paddle can be secured under them for use in paddle-float rescues, although there is much debate whether

this is needed. Good quality line costs about \$.30/ft. polypropylene deck line ("kern mantle") also costs \$.30/ft and is worth the extra cost because it floats.

All of these lines must be secured with deck hardware: cleats, pad-eyes, line guides, clips and security rings. Hardware can be pop riveted on (a tool costs about \$10) or can be bolted on. Some manufacturers swear by bolts but others claim they damage the skin of a fiberglass boat. Pop rivets are easier to use anyway. These hardware items generally cost \$.40 to \$4.00 each in plastic and up to \$6 in stainless steel. Most paddlers find plastic works quite well.

It can be convenient to have an extra cleat or two near the cockpit to attach a line from a friend's kayak, a kite string, or whatever. Some paddlers also attach under deck or behind the seat clips to hold paddle floats, hand bilge pumps, emergency signaling kits, etc. You'll just have to see what you need quick access to and where best to keep it. One friend even installs a tiny hammock or sling of flexible net or plastic under the ridgeline of his deck. Here he can toss little things (sun screen lotion, spare sun glasses, a windbreaker) which he doesn't mind losing if he were to capsize. This can be mounted on tiny clips or hooks well out of way of your knees.

There are two major items which can be mounted permanently on your kayak: a bilge pump (either hand operated or electric) and a compass. Both of these add convenience and safety in some circumstances, but they require a major expenditure of \$\$ (\$120-\$200 for the pumps and \$50-\$120 for a compass) and major surgery to your kayak. But both can be installed in a fiberglass kayak at home, if you have the skills and access to the materials, or by your local kayak shop.

Now you're really ready to enjoy the water world in your new kayak! Sure, there's more you can add as you get to know your boat better. But you're now ahead of most paddlers in having a very comfortable and functional kayak. Have fun!

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