

How to Make A Kayak Go Faster

by Joanne Schwartz

There's few facts and lots of folk wisdom about this. There's no generally accept magic potion to smear on your kayak to make it go faster. Folk remedies include everything from car wax and floor polish to Armoral and silicon spray. What is certain is that petroleum products must not be used on polyethylene, as they break down the plastic. This includes most commercial waxes.

If yours is a fiberglass kayak, the difference in speed by coatings is negligible for all except, perhaps, competitive racers. Having gel coat dings ("rock bites") in your hull obviously causes a bit of turbulence and adds some minimal drag. Luckily, gel coat is easy to repair. Some paddlers very lightly sand the bottom of a new kayak with 400-600 grit sand paper. The idea is to cause a thin layer of water to stick to the boat so the boat, along with its boundary layer of water, passes through the water more easily. Certainly never put anything with silicone on your fiberglass kayak. Sprays or waxes containing silicon make it almost impossible to get much longevity on later repairs.

For polyethylene kayaks, scratches, even those caused just by running the boat up on a sandy beach, cause lots of friction which slows down the kayak. Use a sharp knife or a plastic ski scraper to shave off any large curls below the water line. And to remove tiny fuzz, buy a 10 for \$1.00 bag of disposable razors at your favorite drug store and shave your hull. This is best done while the boat is cool. Then, go over the hull with a hair dryer on high to smooth out the little scratches. Make sure your boat gets no hotter than you are comfortable touching with your hand or you might melt a hole right through the boat. If your goal is simply to make your poly boat go faster, I doubt whether filling in a few dings will be at all noticeable when compared with shaving the bottom.

On any of the boats, a thin coat of 303 Protectant, Sun of a Gun or other non silicon and non-petroleum products can certainly make any boat look a whole lot nicer and might also add a measure of UV light protection, in the case of 303.

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