

How Can I Smooth Out the Scratches on Polyethylene (Plastic) Kayaks?

by Joanne Schwartz

Scratches and scuffs surely look messy on plastic (polyethylene) kayaks, although they rarely amount to more than cosmetic damage. But even small scratches, like those made 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. 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. If you have a gentle hand, you can try a butane or propane torch, purchased at a hardware store, with a flared tip. Quick, wide sweeping strokes of the torch will make your kayak appear years younger in five to ten minutes. This is especially nice on dark colors (purple, blue and deep reds) which show scuffs much more than lighter colors. Make sure your boat gets no hotter than you are comfortable touching with your hand or you might very quickly melt a hole right through the boat.

If your linear polyethylene kayak has major dings, they can be filled by adding more polyethylene with a hot knife, torch, hot air paint stripper or glue gun. I recommend attempting these last three methods only if you have enough experience with them to have a very light hand since these boats melt very easily and if you know about the various types of polyethylene so you can select the right one for your kayak. 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.

To complete your refinishing, a thin coat of 303 Protectant, or other non silicon and non-petroleum products can certainly make any boat look a whole lot nicer and will also add a measure of UV light protection, in the case of 303.

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