

We're testing Seabird Designs

# NorthSea and Touring

**In Padling number 2, 2006 we tested the kayaks Seabird Designs Expedition and H2O from Kajakk.net. They were very reasonable and the relation between price and quality impressed us. Since then new boats have arrived from the same manufacturer.**

TEKST JAN FJELDE • FOTO ATLE TVEIT

Late fall 2006 Kajakk.net could present two new boats, the classic sea kayak NorthSea and the tour/training kayak Touring. Len Ystmark gets the boats produced in a country where salary and manufacturing cost lays on a level we haven't seen since the war. The workers use exactly the same amount of time on building a boat as we would, but the Chinese salary level make sure that the retail prices stays low.

The kayaks are made out of first class raw material. Vinyl ester is used as adhesive. Many consider this to be the ideal material for building of boats in composite. It's more elastic than polyester, which still is the most common adhesive used with fiberglass, carbon and Kevlar. They are vacuum molded with sandwich core in honeycomb. The kayaks are heat cured in order to achieve maximum strength. The boats can be delivered both in

fiberglass and Kevlar. For those of you who want something really special almost all the models can be ordered in black carbon. Even the most reasonable priced models in fiberglass are reinforced on exposed places. The cockpit door got a lay of Kevlar and the deck has several frilling with carbon on the underside.

Both NorthSea and Touring have steering pedals based on the Smart Track system. This makes it possible to kick and steer at the same time. The distance can be adjusted in relation to the seat without adjusting the acid resistant control wire. Several manufactures can deliver similar solutions for their kayaks. The clever mode of operation secures both good push-off and constant steering. Gliding pedals along the hull sides aren't prioritized by persons who like to paddle actively. It's difficult to get a good push-off is with these without disturbing the steering. "Power-pedals" is delivered as standard on all Seabird boats.

The seats on the two test boats are identical. The seat is molded in fiberglass and the cut suited me good. This can be adjusted in the longitudinal direction by loosen four screws. This need only turns up if very large persons wish to exploit the space in the cockpit to the maximum. The seat is then fastened in the hindmost assembly holes. The pedals are adjusted with a little handle at the back, and the operation takes only a few seconds. The pedals incline between the top part and the bottom can easily be fine-tuned. The padded and adjustable back rests are identical on both models. They can be removed and laid down if you wish to paddle without.

Seabird Designs Touring.



# Easy to paddle and a little challenging

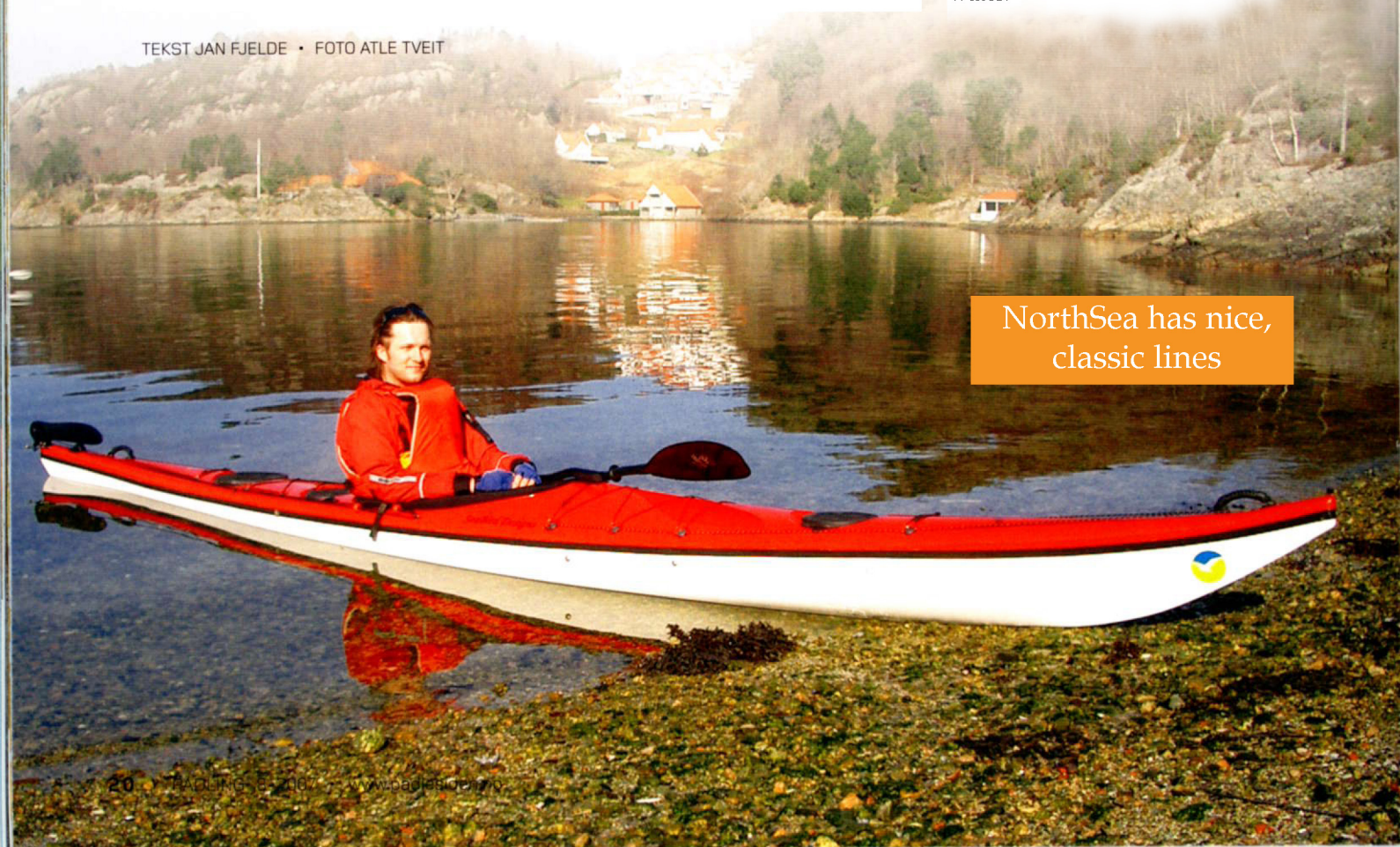
**NorthSea has a traditional sea kayak design. It has a marked leap in the hull and an evident curved keel line. The shape reminds of classic English sea kayaks that have been on the market for several years. It's also inspired by Greenland kayaks with its high bow. The tested model is nicely rigged with adequate amounts of lines and rubber bands.**

The tested model is nicely rigged with adequate amounts of lines and rubber bands. Quality on the plastic work seems good and the work is properly done. The seam between the hull and the deck has proved to be very strong and solid on all the Seabird boats.

The deck stands out with unusual great finish for this price class, and can without a doubt be compared to far more expensive kayaks. The boat has effective inswing that secures a tight response between the paddle and the water.

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NorthSea has nice,  
classic lines



1. The tight hatches on NorthSea are secured with lines. 2. NorthSea has good carrying handles. 3. NorthSea has good proportions in the cockpit. 4. The rudder on NorthSea can be operated from the cockpit. 5. NorthSea has knee rests that ensures good contact.

The high bow and the sidewise curved hull make sure that hardly any sea reaches the beam. The hatch covers are of the traditional round type in rubber. The one in the front is 8 inches, the day hatch behind the cockpit is 6,5 inches and the posterior 10 inches. On this years models the hatches are completely watertight. The first manufactured models turned out to let in a few drops of water by capsizing. It's a little different design on the inner tightening rings on the new ones, and the problem is solved. Naughty

The rudder, which is very effective, can be tipped up 270 degrees and be laid flatly on the stern deck. This type is called ice rudder and it gives in if it should bump into something. It's operated by lines that are easily accessed from the cockpit. The underwater hull is slim at the bow and stern. The sea is cleaved effectively and the rudder gets brilliant operating conditions. The backside of the medal is that the kayak gets reduced support at the stern and sits down heavily at top speed.

As on all boats from Seabird Designs NorthSea is equipped with holes in the hull side. These make it possible to execute a double side floatation rescue. From reasons unknown is this solution something that only VKV delivered for many years, until the manufacturer Trapper could offer crosswise installed pipes in the hull as extra equipment. We support those who think that VKVs invention is the safest way to enter a kayak after a capsizing. Without entering a discussion, it has been showed that this method is easy to learn for anybody. The best paddlers may choose other rescue techniques, but on kayaks that are prepared for double floatation rescues or paddle bags you have the opportunity to choose. It's good to have an alternative that always works if the other super methods should fail.

### Very easy driven

NorthSea is not the boat for those who loves to surf at high speed or likes to compete on short distances. The hull isn't designed for extreme top speed. It can in many ways be compared with the traditional smack where good speed with low energy consumption and good

sea capacity stands in focus.

In normal traveling speed NorthSea shows some unused moves. It's constructed to be very easy driven at speeds between 4 and 5 knots. The kayak glides softly and comfortably, and even less experienced paddlers can keep a decent speed for a longer amount of time without wearing themselves out. We measured the average speed in our test track to be 4,6 knots. The numbers are identical to the Seabird H2O, which has a rumor for being a fast boat with high top speed. This clearly shows that a kayak that doesn't have an impressive maximum speed can excel on longer trips. We measured the top speed on NorthSea to 6,3 knots. Then the bow starts to rise and it gets difficult to press the hull to perform more. All the speed trials were done both with and against the stream and the numbers represent an average. On longer trips it's the average speed that counts - not the top speed. In NorthSea the paddler can last unusually long without the need to stop for recover.

### Requires a little balance

For an inexperienced paddler the boat may feel a little straight. The primary stability is somewhat below average and can tend against low. The secondary is also experienced as a little below average, but the kayak still catches a little at strong capsizing. NorthSea speaks to those who have worked up a certain balance trough experience. If the ambitious rookie chooses to go for the Seabird, we recommend using ballast until the kayak "grows on you". After finishing the experimental period the chances are good that the relationship grows to deep and long-lasting love. As apposed to many steady sea kayaks the NorthSea is a kayak it's hard to get bored with.

The stability definitions are very subjective and hard to express. The parameter is related against other boats PADLING has tested and thus to is mutually fair. It's a big difference in stability on this boat and Seabird Designs Expedition which we tested last year. The first time paddler can with advantage go for the last one as a safe and steady experience is important for this group.



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*NorthSea has an effective rudder which can be tipped up on deck.*



*The bow on NorthSea takes the waves softly and elegant. The deck has a high finish.*

### Good sea capacity

In lousy weather you notice how good the construction on NorthSea is. The kayak lives with the sea and never makes an unexpected move. The bottom shape combined with the good rudder makes it very direction stable. The kayak goes where you wish with few or non rudder corrections. The boat never does anything unexpected. It meets huge waves which break completely without drama. As a good sea boat it both rocks in the longitudinal direction and rolls sidewise, but everything happens smoothly and controlled. The boat has its own rhythm, if explained through the music language, which never gets syncopated. In other words there is no room for any form for rhythmic displacement. You can calculate the moves of the kayak at advance and in that way avoid unpleasant surprises. The bragging should not be interpreted to indicate that NorthSea is the best sea kayak in the world, but to that price the sea capacity is simply supreme.

On one of the test days my paddle companion and I were out on the Fana fjord, south of Bergen. The weather was disgusting! The wind was up to near gale and the waves were one and a half meter high. Surly we were equipped with all that's needed to ensure safety under terrible conditions. My companion paddled a sea kayak of an established brand. None of the boats had ballast. In the end he was unfortunate and capsized. I managed just because I had the best kayak of the two of us under these circumstances. NorthSea loves bad weather and proved to the full how seaworthy it is.

### Who those it fit?

The tested boat has neither especially fancy nor super modern forms. The design on NorthSea basically is hard to separate from other sea kayaks. It's based on traditional and classic lines. It's not until you paddle it that it stands out. The boat is slim and has less volume than the biggest kayaks on the market. The shape of the hull gives the paddler a feeling of being on board on a craft that really lives WITH the sea and the waves.

It's quite simply a kayak that gives YOU the feeling of weather or not you have the balance right. Maybe you've gone sick of the fast sea racer that is as hard to maneuver in bad weather as a sofa from IKEA. You may have lost interest in paddling for longer trips in a boat that wears you out. Or are you tired of lifting your heavy as lead sea kayak up and down from the car roof?

If you want a comfortable, easy paddled and a little challenging sea kayak that doesn't run of with all your holiday money, you should consider this one before you make up your mind. The relation between price and quality is simply phenomenal. Many who paddles gets scared of the fact that some kayaks are rather expensive. Even though the price sometimes can be defended; it doesn't matter if you're not willing to pay up. The tested kayak requires a little balance, but it's unusually sea capable. Low weight can also be putted up on the bonus account.

### Technical data

Lenght : 540 cm  
Width : 54cm

#### Weight and price:

21 kilo fiberglass Kr. 9.600,-

#### Tested version

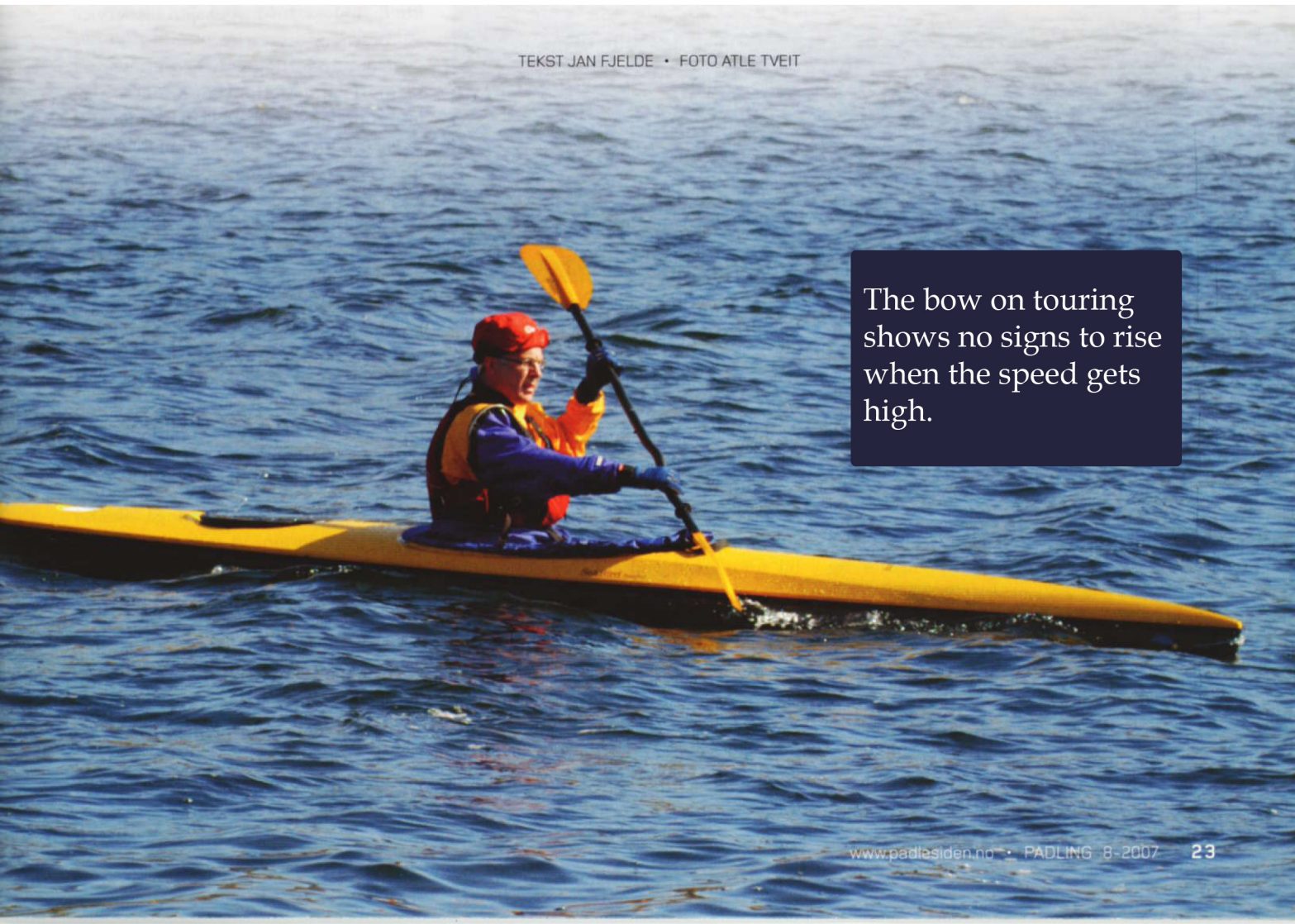
19 kilo kevlar Kr. 12.200,-

18 kilo carbon Kr. 19.900,-

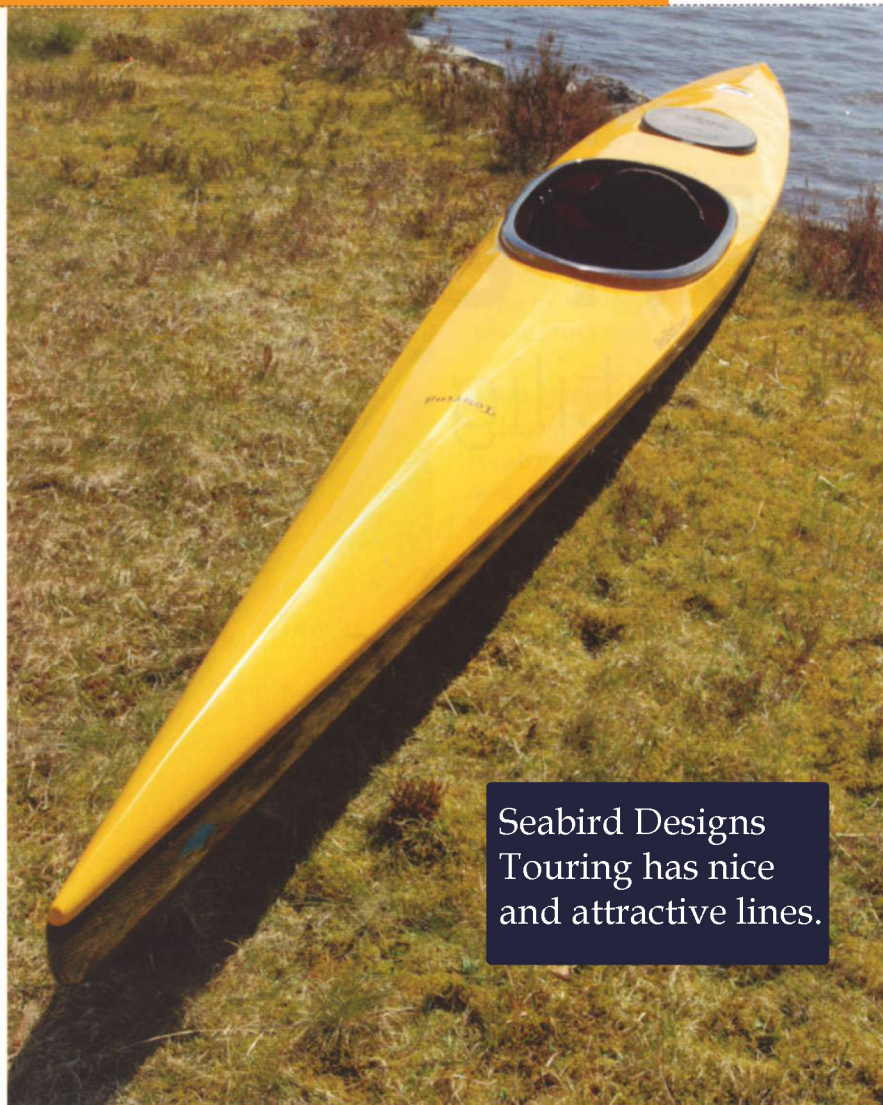
# Naughty and stylish

Seabird Designs have with Touring introduced their contribution to the tour/training class. The boat we tested is made of 100 percent kevlar on deck and a mix of kevlar and carbon in the hull. The weight is pleasingly 15 kilos. Even the basic model in fiber glass, which only weights two kilos more, has kevlar reinforcements on deck and areas in carbon below deck.

TEKST JAN FJELDE • FOTO ATLE TVEIT

A photograph of a kayaker in a yellow kayak on blue water. The kayaker is wearing a red helmet, a blue jacket, and a yellow life vest. The kayak is yellow and has a black deck. The water is blue with small waves. The kayaker is paddling with a yellow paddle.

The bow on touring shows no signs to rise when the speed gets high.



Seabird Designs  
Touring has nice  
and attractive lines.

The design has no similarities with the other test boat besides the framing of the curve on the front deck, which is mutual for all boats from Seabird. The lines are filled with speed and the top side of the kayak has a negative rocker in the longitudinal direction. In my opinion the bows shape is naughty and stylish. There is no unevenness and the work is perfectly executed. The hull is smooth and even and you can see right in on the kevlar/carbon armoring.

The qualities and area of application appeals to paddlers with completely other wishes than those who prefer a sea kayak with great load capacity. Like other tour racers, as I like to call them, the test model was completely free of rigging on deck in the form of lines and rubber bands. However, when this is being read,

the boat now has gotten rubber bands on the back deck so that the flotation for self rescue can be placed where they belong.

Touring has in usual Seabird tradition a hole on each side of the hull so that outriggers with flotation get a stable anchorage. This type of kayaks are broadly speaking totally free of rubber band and safety lines. They therefore may often be more difficult to enter after a capsize than traditional sea kayaks.

The eskimo roll is not a subject for kayaks that lacks knee support and have very large cockpit openings. The champions of the "roll" who claims that they master such gymnastics in a training racer have been extremely lucky with the genetic material. They must

have large amounts of acrobatic in their genes. In my knowledge, only the training kayak VKV-101 is made for double-side stabilization in this segment besides Touring.

### Oval hatch

Several boats of this kind has the storage hatch mounted on the bulkhead right behind the paddler. The circumference gets small and it's hard to place gear that has a little volume. This solution is picked to get a completely plain stern deck which gives an esthetic overview. Touring on the other side has a big oval hatch in the middle of the stern deck. This opens the possibility to bring a tent, the sleeping bag and other gear for a weekend trip. At the very back of the deck there is a small manhole cover for inspection and service of the rudder arm and the guiding wire.

The underlying rudder is of the racing type. Between the rudder system and the cargo compartment the factory has installed a tight bulkhead. A clever detail that several manufactures should follow up. It's a simple and efficient way to prevent sea water which might penetrate trough the rudder tube from reaching the baggage. Wet deck in the cargo compartment is a known phenomenon for kayaks with underlying rudder. When paddling fast, water might be pushed up in the space between the rudder axle and tube. Within a couple of hours deciliters of water can enter the boat. By setting the axle in with sea water resisting grease the problem is usually solved.

Touring is shipped from the factory with the rudder disassembled to avoid damage under transportation. We sat the axle in with grease ourselves before it was put in place. Both the rudder space and the compartment for cargo were completely watertight under the whole test period, which lasted for ten hours. Good made hatches have part of the honor in this matter.

### Steady and fast

Appearance is deceptive on the test boat. By first glance it looks like a training racer for advanced paddlers. From the side it's barely possible to see the difference between the test boat and a racer. However, if you look closer the width of 59 centimeters reveals itself.

1. Touring has tight manhole cover over the rudder. 2. The seat on both boats has a very nice fit. You can adjust the back rest. 3. The rudder pedals are identical on all Seabird boats. The forebody on Touring holds a lot of cargo, but it should have had some emergency buoyancy in the bow. 4. Touring has a racing type rudder.

Because of this the kayak is unusually steady. Both the primary and the secondary stability are high. Most people will be able to paddle Touring without problems. It's easy to believe that the kayak gets slow and hard to paddle because of the generous width. These assumptions are put to an end when the speed capacities are tested. It's an easy paddled boat and it runs like a bullet. The GPS stopped on 7,2 knot when we measured the top speed. The kayak has a great supporting stern and shows no tendency to tip backwards when the paddler puts in some effort. On flat water we clocked the average speed to 4,9 knot.

The test boat has a moderate curved beam profile. Despite its high freeboard, it's not designed for tough weather. Small racing rudders have poor efficiency on high sea and hard stream. The rudder on Touring is not an exception. Tough the hull is surf willing the joy is soon spoiled if the surf doesn't go in a completely straight angle according to the waves. The rudder can't compensate for the broadside powers. Therefore the paddle needs to be used so actively that the exercise is reserved for the best of paddlers. Athletes of this caliber probably could surf anything as long as it floats... The same thing applies when it goes white on the sea. The kayak is not as direction stable as a good sea kayak and the pedals have to be used actively. In return it is splendid under calm circumstances.

Even though Touring has no chine, it reacts effectively on easy incline of the hull. On flat water it's unnecessary to steer with the pedals to keep a dead straight course. Tilting the kayak a little to the sides with modest use of the hips is enough. Gradually it gets easier to paddle straight forward for longer amounts of time without using the rudder. The kayaks steadiness is so high that it causes no trouble to learn the technique, no matter how experienced you are.

### Something for you?

Except from those who decides to pursue professional paddling in young age, most of us debuts in boats we

choose to call sea kayaks. Several beginners soon fall in love with this activity and after a while they wish to advance by changing boat. Traditionally the newly "redeemed" buys a good sea kayak that can handle a lot of sea. Nevertheless some prefer to paddle only in nice and quiet weather. The trips seldom last more than four hours, and the load on the kayak is therefore insignificant. I think steady tour - and training boats are a good choice for this group. The reason why few of us think this way has origins in the rumors about this boat type's poor balance. This is also true in many cases.

When considering a boat such as Seabird Designs Touring you have a reason to stop and reflect. Is this not the type of boat fine weather paddlers need? It's light, fast, steady and stylish. The kayak has room for everything you need on your day trips and it offers a comfortable seat. Good quality and unusual reasonable price makes it a strong candidate in the class.

### Technical data

Length : 520 cm  
Width : 59 cm

Weight and price:  
17 kilo fiberglass Kr. 9.600,-  
15 kilo kevlar Kr. 12.200,-

*Tested version*

13 kilo carbon Kr. 19.900,-

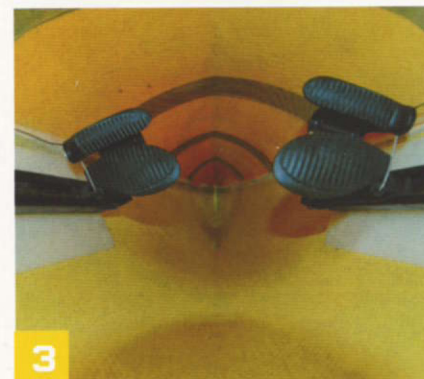
*Manufacture and importer for both kayaks is kajakk.net*



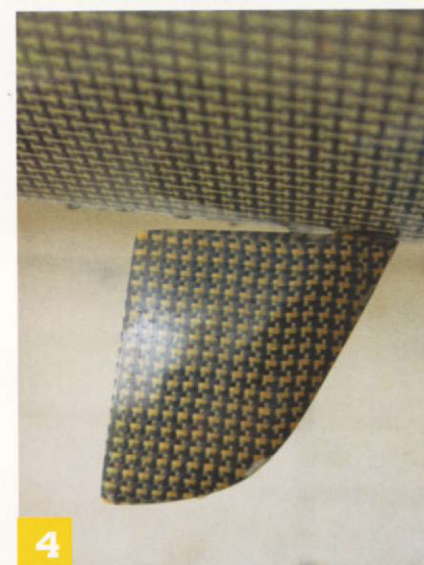
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