

Hobie demo day

Back in March, I went along to a Hobie kayak demo day run by CFC sponsor The Great Outdoors Centre in Woden. The two craft I got a test run in were the Outback Fisherman and the Sport Fisherman. Here is a quick report on these two kayaks.

First impressions

When I arrived, the two demo boats were out on the water being tested, so I got a good look at a third one that was on display, a run-out model Outback. The first thing that struck me was the large amount of storage available. It had cargo nets front and back, a large tray behind the seat, plus two hatches to access the inner hull.

The tray behind the seat looked about the perfect size for holding some Plano tackle trays or a medium size tackle box (or an esky full of coolies if that's your preference). Soft bags or boxes could also be stored under the nets front or back. The hatches provided access to further storage, but anything that went in here would need to be waterproof or packed in dry bags, as a little water can get I through the steering cable holes.

There were four moulded-in rod holders and a cup holder within easy reach of the seat, plus a carry handle and storage spot for the paddle.



Layout of the Outback Fisherman

Peddalling in the Outback

My time came to have a go in the Outback and I was a bit worried at first about tipping it over, as I'm a complete novice when it comes to kayaks, and balance has never been a strong point. After a quick rundown on the controls, I got in and had the pedals setup to suit my leg length (about 2 clicks back from fully expended). I needn't have worried about stability; these things would be hard to tip over if you are a bit sensible about what you are doing.



Getting the run-down on the Outback. Sport in background

Forward motion is via pedalling, which works the "flippers" under the water. There is a lever to lower and raise the rudder on the right and a lever on the left to steer with. There's no reverse, but the paddle takes care of that if needed.

It only took a few seconds and I was pedalling away like a pro. The plastic tube in front of the cockpit is a speedo, and it's surprising how little effort it took to get up a bit of speed. A comfortable trolling speed is quite easy on the legs. You can paddle at the same time if your coordination is good and you are in a hurry. I stuck with one at a time...

The seat was well padded and I didn't end up sore after my 5-minute journey. I took a fishing rod along and had some casts. It's a different sensation casting from water level, but I quickly got used to it. Again, it's surprising how stable the Outback was. Judging distances was the only problem. Let's just say I got to test how easy it was to remove a lure from a willow tree out of a kayak. Keeping balance while kneeling wasn't too hard at all.

The two moulded rod holders behind the seat were easier to get to than I expected. A bit like reaching around to scratch your back. The two in front of the seat were also easy to reach with a bit of a forward lean. Heading back to shore, the things to remember are to flip up the rudder and push one foot forward on the pedals. This raises the flippers flat against the hull, allowing you to drift in very shallow water when like this.

Now for something more sporty



The smaller Sport Fisherman

I jumped straight out of the Outback and into the smaller Sport model. The most noticeable difference is that you sit further forward and there is less leg room. A bit too cramped for my liking, I much preferred the Outback. I found it a bit unnerving and it seemed like my feet were sticking over the front.

There is also a bit less storage space and it is a bit narrower than the Outback, but the Sport is lighter and more manoeuvrable as a result. I found it a bit less stable as well. Not unstable mind you, but I took a bit more care when moving about. Fishing again was not an issue after a couple of casts.

I found the Sport could be pedalled/paddled a bit faster than the bigger Outback too. Important when you are out chasing speedsters like Marlin or Tuna offshore like Rob Paxevanos (but probably a bit beyond my abilities). The trade-off being a slightly less stable craft.

Saying that, the Sport would be the better model for sneaking around little creeks chasing Bass or hunting spooky Bream in the oyster leases.

The final verdict

The biggest selling point of these pedal-powered kayaks is that they leave your arms free for fishing. This feature alone puts them in a class above any normal kayak in my opinion. They come with loads of features and there is a range of accessories available. It wouldn't be hard to mount a sounder to shoot through the hull, and being plastic, adding more rod holders and things would be fairly simple. They are also fairly light and with the addition of a set of wheels available as an accessory, they are very easy to move around single handed.

Bottom line – would I buy one? Well, I've seen the ads for the electric powered Viking kayak, which is probably the Hobie's only competitor. Both are similarly priced as far as I know. Having not tried a Viking, it's hard to say which would be a better fishing boat. At the moment though, the Outback Fisherman is pretty high up on my wish list for when I win Lotto. Sadly, I'll have to remain a "one-boat family" until then.

(this is a totally independent review written by Shane Jasprizza for the information of CFC members. For further details on the Hobie range, contact Gus at the Great Outdoors Centre on 6282 3424)