

Plastic Rudders – Get rid of them

Some years ago when the Sea Leopard was being made in Geelong I used to get emails like this:

Hello Laurie,

Not sure if the last email got to you,

I have had Phill Woodhouse from Queensland, who contacted you once about the sea leopards, now go on a forum and slate the sea leopard has problems in a following sea, "The only problem I found with it is when you have a decent following sea it wants to broach easily. It will go very well with it up to about 15kn but over that the back wants to overtake the front. However if you are strong and fit and know how to edge a kayak it will respond."

I was wondering what your comments might be on this subject as you have far more experience in them than anyone else I know of.

Hope this finds you well,

Regards

Bob

I was quite amazed at this because having paddled a Sea Leopard for about 30 years its downwind performance was one of its outstanding virtues. I could confidently say that in a reasonable following sea I could probably beat most double kayaks fairly easily.

But there had been a lot of changes made to the Sea Leopard that I hadn't really seen or paddled with, and in actual fact I personally would not ever paddle the "modern" version. The original Sea Leopard was fairly perfect as far as I was concerned.

So this was my answer to that email:

Bob, I'm not prepared to make any comment. I'm sure you have tried it out. The kayak you are selling is not the one I paddle.

Last year I got to see one of the new Sea Leopards in Tasmania and talked to the owner – he had exactly the same problem as described in the email above. UNTIL one day there was a paddler right behind him and told him that his rudder blade was flat on the surface. Well no wonder you can't steer them downwind. He replaced it with a fibreglass blade and problem solved.

Last year (2015) I took two new paddlers to Flinders Island, they were paddling plastic Sea Birds with plastic rudders. They ALSO had trouble steering the kayak in strong winds.

This is one of their rudders:



Obviously fairly useless.

The following photos show what I did.





Stopped the plastic cheeks twisting.



Made a fibreglass blade.



Cut new spacers with a hole saw.



Piece of aluminium tube to take a ¼ inch bolt.



