

// Zegul Searocket

About the test: paddler and paddling conditions

The Zegul Searocket has been paddled over an eight-week period in predominantly windy conditions of F3–7 with sea states in the range 2–4. Though predominantly paddled by an experienced primary reviewer (who is 5'9" and weighs 93kg) additional feedback was sought from a small number of paddlers spanning experience from 'relative newcomer' to advanced skill level.

Manufacturer's summary

The ZEGUL Searocket is listed under the 'racing' section of the Zegul Website. It has been designed as a fast cruiser that is suitable for entry level through to advanced paddlers rather than an out and out racing sea kayak manageable only by the more experienced.

Design

At 550cm (18') the Searocket is a long kayak. In fact, I was surprised it was only 18ft long. The rounded hull and low level of rocker, coupled with squat, close to vertical bow and stern give the illusion of greater length. The bow carries a lot of volume and in profile looks like a halfway house between a standard sea kayak bow and that of a Rockpool Taran/ Tiderace Pace style of sea kayak.

Looking down in plan view, the thin bow point tapers out gradually to the cockpit then the Searocket carries a good proportion of its width through a sizeable section of the stern, before tapering back in.

The front deck slopes away to either side of the deck hatch whilst the rear deck slopes up from the rear of the cockpit then remains flat all the way to the stern.

Construction, fittings, ergonomics and finish

The Searocket is available in two constructions, A-Core or 3D C-Core and built using a vacuum infusion method. The quality of the construction on the review kayak was excellent with no obvious blemishes and very good finishing. Areas of the deck feature the embossed pattern that is becoming a trademark feature of Zegul sea kayaks.

The Searocket is a four-hatch layout that uses Kajaksport click on covers. A front round hatch and oval

rear hatch provide access to the large storage compartments. The deck and day hatch both use smaller 10cm Kajaksport covers to access the storage. The specifications for the Searocket suggest it has a 140kg (309lbs) capacity and it is easy to see why with the ample storage it provides.

Decklines run the full length of the bow and stern of the Searocket with reasonable deck bungees for securing items such as splits and navigation equipment. The deck line and bungees immediately in front of the cockpit are set very close together when compared to many sea kayaks, possibly due to the way the front decks slopes away to either side. This does mean larger (wide) charts cases may be difficult to stow under the bungees. The recessed fittings are neatly arranged and also offer opportunities to add further deck bungees if desired. The deck fittings are recessed to ensure a flush surface. The bungees at the extreme ends of the kayak have 'deck beads' attached to them making it easier to stow a paddle.

On the stern, a large security bolt is sited in the middle of deck in a deep recess. This is large enough to take a variety of size padlocks and, unlike some security bolts, can also take a thick chain or wire through it. At the bow and stern comfortable carrying handles are provided.

The cockpit is spacious with plenty of room for larger footwear and paddlers with longer legs. However, it is narrower with plenty of height as opposed to space width ways. This leads to a seating position with more raised knees. On longer paddles the Searocket remained very comfortable, with the padded seat and simple wide back band providing good support. The thigh grips are not huge, but provide reasonable connectivity, whilst the space within the cockpit is excellent and allowed for good leg movement, there is plenty of room for knees to rise and drop when applying foot pressure during the forward stroke.

The SmartTrack footrest system also controls the rudder. It is fully adjustable while seated in the cockpit using extended arms. Unusually, the Searocket also has a skeg. To the right hand side of the cockpit is the skeg control unit and on the left rear of the cockpit is a cleat for the thin cord that raises and lowers the rudder. This cord runs into the stern of the kayak through a glassed in tube. The skeg is a wired version with a control unit utilising a bar mechanism to avoid kinked cables.

Performance

The Searocket is primarily designed as a fast cruiser. As expected, given its 18' length and very long

waterline length it tracks exceptionally. The powerful sitting position aids power transfer from the legs and feet and the Searocket picks up speed nicely, holding a fast cruising pace, which is sustainable over long periods of paddling.

In small chop the bow cuts through the waves nicely, in larger chop the bow can tend to slap down over waves. Due to the higher volume bow, water is shed effectively meaning the Searocket is a dry kayak to paddle. Running with wind and swell the pace of the Searocket allows it to catch waves easily, providing enjoyable downwind paddling.

In terms of stability, the Searocket offers good initial stability, nowhere near the level of a Cetus or Etain but good enough to provide relatively new paddlers with reassurance when at rest. The rounded hull allows a smooth transition into secondary stability, however it does not have an obvious 'stopping' point where it likes to rest when on edge and newcomers may find themselves struggling to hold the Searocket on edge – albeit that this is as much to do with skill/practice as kayak design. That being said, it was easy enough for an experienced paddler to hold with water lapping over the cockpit rim although this did rely on some additional outfitting in the cockpit to improve connectivity around the hips.

With regard to maneuverability, when held on edge, the Searocket does respond, however the long waterline and near vertical stern means that it does not disengage when edged and tends to skid around the turn, providing some resistance. For less experienced paddlers with less confident edging, the Searocket may prove a struggle to maneuver. Even for more experienced paddlers, the Searocket took that bit more effort to turn and never, throughout the test period, felt that it would produce a tight turn. That being said, the Searocket is not a sea kayak that I would expect to take rock-hopping or playing in rough waters. The Searocket is all about fast cruising and primarily straight-line paddling. For directional control, the rudder works well and the Searocket responds quickly.

In higher winds, the Searocket continued to track well, particularly when loaded. Despite the higher volume bow and stern, the long waterline and low level of rocker mean that there is a decent amount of inbuilt resistance to weather cocking. When side winds really did pick up the skeg made a good job holding course. The control is not the smoothest in operation and the thumb grip and bar feel a little loose, however it does allow for variable degrees of skeg to be deployed, rather than feeling that it is either on or off and the skeg blade itself is a decent size, so fully deployed it offers plenty of resistance.

Loading kit into the Searocket is a joy. The storage is cavernous, particularly the stern compartment. Coupled with the oval hatch this makes storing larger/bulkier items a breeze. The front hatch is thinner and with the round hatch better for smaller, thinner items. It also means you need to exercise a little care with weight distribution as it is easy to overload the stern due to the capacity available. The day hatch has plenty of space, however, the use of the smaller 10cm hatch cover is a tad disappointing given the space available on the rear deck. A larger hatch such as those found on other sea kayaks would provide much more effective access to the day compartment. The deck hatch provides a good level of storage without intruding into the cockpit excessively and hindering foot room thanks to the high front deck.

Conclusion

The Zegul Searocket achieves its aim of providing a fast cruising kayak that is capable of carrying big loads. It has good acceleration and cruising speed and a cockpit design that promotes good forward paddling technique. It is comfortable to spend extended periods of time in and fun to paddle in downwind conditions where it catches waves nicely and zips along. However, the positive tracking and speed certainly come at the expense of maneuverability and therefore it becomes quite a specialized sea kayak and is likely to appeal to a small section of paddlers.

There are a couple of modifications that we would like to see implemented into the Searocket design; a bigger, more substantial day hatch would make a long day on the water so much easier and making the deck bungees slightly wider apart (despite the slope of the deck) would allow for stowage of navigation items. Finally, the skeg control should be a little firmer and smoother in operation to aid more subtle deployment.

For ocean paddlers looking for a fast, high volume touring sea kayak a demo paddle is highly recommended.

Dimensions

Length: 550cm (18)

Width: 54cm (21.25")

Capacity: 140kg (309lb)

Cockpit: 82 x 42cm (32.25" x 16.5")

Weight: A-Core 24–26kg (53–57lbs)

3D C-Core 19-21kg (42-46lbs)

Front hatch: 24cm 10" round hatch

Rear hatch: 44 x 26cm (17" x 10.25")

Day hatch: 15cm (6")

Deck hatch: 15cm (6")

Available with retractable skeg and/or rudder

For more information go to www.zegul.taheoutdoors.com

//Manufacturer's response