

True Innovation

TRAK kayak's T-1600



The T-1600 in action on the Ottawa River.

PHOTO: LISA UTRONKI

> FOLDING KAYAKS ARE NOTHING NEW.

Germany's Klepper kayaks have been produced since 1907, and people have accomplished some truly amazing things in them, including, in 1928, a solo expedition across the Atlantic Ocean (see Ask Eddy, p.24). Since then, there have been innovations in the category, notably the recent introduction of inflatable chambers to help make the boats more rigid. But in truth, any skin-and-frame boat that collapses into a duffel bag performs like what it is: a compromise. Until now.

TRAK kayaks T-1600 folding sea kayak is the most innovative paddling product in nearly a decade. It is the first folding boat that can keep up with a hard-shelled touring kayak in speed and performance. The reason: the outer skin is stretched drum-tight by three hydraulic hand pumps linked into the aluminum frame. Remarkably, company founder Gord Espeth took that innovation a few steps further. Beyond simply taking the slack out of the skin, the pumps can actually change the boat's rocker while underway. When surf or rock gardens call for added maneuverability, the paddler merely adds a few pumps of rocker, making turning easier. When it's time to cover ground, the rocker can be removed for more speed and better tracking.

But Espeth didn't stop there. The pumps can also be

used to subtly bend the hull to one side or another, creating a kind of side rocker. What good is that? In lieu of a skeg, this side rocker prevents weather-cocking in a side wind.

This stuff is no gimmick. We paddled the T-1600 alongside a fleet of hard-shells, and for a relatively short boat—16 feet—it was plenty fast. The high braces provide a snug fit that allows for snappy turning, surfing, and rolling. As for durability, we checked that out, too, albeit a bit unintentionally. A rogue swell caught one tester inside a La Jolla, California, sea cave, causing a hard landing on the rocks. Both kayak and kayaker were none the worse for wear.

There are really only two drawbacks to the T-1600. The first is minor—that the thin skin leaves your feet exposed to cold and hits from rocks. That's easily remedied by wearing shoes. Second is the price—over five grand. But if you live in a storage-space-challenged Manhattan or San Francisco apartment, or you're a fly-in destination addict, you'll definitely get your money's worth with the T-1600.

Trak kayak rethinkkayak.com

| Price | Length | Width | Weight |
|---------|--------|----------|---------|
| \$5,495 | 16 ft. | 22.5 in. | 47 lbs. |