

Best Sit-on-Top Kayak

Tarpon 120 by Wilderness Systems



The Tarpon 120 is one of five kayaks in the line of Tarpon sit-on-top kayaks ranging in length from 10' to 16'. The 120 is 12' long and 28" wide. It is available in rotomolded plastic at 60 pounds or in thermoformed plastic (pictured here) at 43 pounds. Both versions have a list capacity of 350 pounds. With my 210 pounds aboard I still had ½" of "freeboard" showing in the scuppers, so I was happily seated in a dry cockpit. The seat was quite comfortable and the foot braces were solid. The stability of the Tarpon 120 is very good, making a good platform for fishing or photography. Some SOTs are wide enough to stand up in, but the Tarpon 120 isn't wide enough for that. The tradeoff for higher stability, of course, is a wider beam and the 28" beam of the Tarpon 120 isn't so wide that it got in the way of paddling. Underway the Tarpon tracked well, and, as I expected, was quite maneuverable. It was hard to get the Tarpon pushed up to nearly 5 knots, but it's not a boat meant for speed: most kayakers fish with a rod and reel, not a harpoon. It coasts along easily at 3.5 to 4 knots. The cargo well in the stern (or tank well if you're a SCUBA diver) has good storage capacity and a hatch forward of the seat provides access to small items in a recess in the deck.

\$1,450 (Ultralite) or \$850 (rotomolded plastic)

Wilderness Systems

www.wildernesssystems.com



Best Extended Touring Kayak

Explorer by Nigel Dennis Kayaks

The Explorer is the Romany's younger sister. At 17' 8" long and 21 ½" wide it is 20" longer but no wider. The longer hull gives the Explorer 20 percent more volume for cargo and a bit more speed. With a top end of 6.25 knots, I found it a half knot faster than the Romany. The Explorer has more footroom and legroom for larger paddlers but the keyhole cockpit has the same secure fit as the Romany and the same ease of entry and exit. The aft deck is similarly low to provide full clearance for a head-to-the-deck layback; it's an excellent boat for rolling.

The stability profile is very good—the initial and the secondary stability inspire confidence. I could get the coaming dipped in the water and still feel solid support. With an edged turn the Explorer is quite maneuverable and still tracks well, even with its skeg retracted. The three cargo compartments are accessed through round VCP hatch covers: 10" covers for the fore and aft compartments and 7 ½" for the day compartment.

The Explorer has the capacity for carrying a lot of gear but it doesn't have the feel of a large boat. Without a load of camping equipment aboard, it's a lively kayak that makes day paddling a pleasure.

\$2,999

Nigel Dennis Kayaks

www.seakayakinguk.com

