

ROCKPOOL TARAN

ABOUT THE TEST: PADDLING CONDITIONS AND PADDLER

The legends, tales, speculation and history surrounding the Rockpool Taran has led to much assumption about its design, purpose and potential use, let alone if it would ever be a production model boat. However, rumour and speculation should not mean the search for the truth is ignored.

So, the truth is, the Taran is now in full production by Rockpool and has the potential to change the way we think a Sea Kayak should look and feel, let alone how fast and efficient it can be. The future is here.

The Taran was paddled in a variety of conditions during the test period so as to experience its handling characteristics on flat and in more lively waters. On the days when it was paddled on the flat, it was timed so that there was very little tidal movement and no wind on the surface. The Taran was also tested in winds of force 3-4 and with sea states up to moderate to see what effect chop would have on it. The paddler was 60kgs in weight and 176cm in height.

DESIGN

Complimenting the other futuristic designs of the Rockpool genre, the Taran is no

exception. The Taran has had a minor cult following since its inception and following its use in the setting of several sea kayak distance records by its designer; notably the circumnavigation of Anglesey in under ten and a half hours, Anglesey to the Isle of Man in a little over eight hours and more recently the circumnavigation of the Isle of Man in under thirteen hours. The Taran, and its designer, were criticised even before the kayak had entered the market as a production boat; this criticism was often from people who had not paddled or even seen the Taran and weren't aware of the records it was setting.

The Taran is a fast sea kayak, however, it also has excellent handling characteristics due to its advanced and futuristic hull design. On first impressions, most folks will look at the Taran and equate it very quickly with a White Water Racer, because of preconception and with the designer's achievements in that field. However, the Taran embraces and marries together experience, knowledge, proven design features and the ability to think outside the box. In the past the speedier sea kayaks of the racing breed have been invariably less stable than would be desired and not able to handle lively water conditions that

well, but not the Taran. It incorporates a flat section on the hull that some have said will slow the potential boat speed, but during research and design stages it was found that it had little, if any effect upon the speed potential of the hull. I mistakenly, during a quick think back to my Welsh vocabulary, took the Taran to translate to 'Shield' and that is how I perceived the flat section to be on the hull, as it looks like a flat shield in an otherwise rounded section. However, Taran not Tarian translates to 'Thunder', so that was my preconception out the window! However, aptly named it is, as when it gets going it goes like thunder!

In practice the boat, which is three inches shorter than the next longest boat from the Rockpool stable is incredibly fast, able to cruise at 4 knots and achieve 5 knots with the introduction of some effort by the average paddler; even more from those accustomed to paddling at speed with technique.

Due to the incorporation of an over-stern single boat size rudder, the Taran tracks well and turns easily, yet still has the feel and performance of a more traditional style of boat that most paddlers will be familiar with. The rudder system is of excellent quality, construction and fitting. It is also easily adjustable by the user for length, stiffness and response.

At the water entry point of the bow, its shape is similar to that of Nemo's Nautilus and it gives a high, dry ride; cutting nicely into and through the water without any effort. The Taran's shape then continues with a rounded section through the front, followed through to the flattened section beneath the cockpit, then rounded again toward the stern into the square stern tail section, complimented by its rudder.

The Taran could be the future in expedition and touring craft design, especially for those whose minds are open to a little more than the accepted ways. The Taran lends itself to being fast and manoeuvrable, yet seaworthy in moderate conditions, accompanied with the Rockpool standard of comfort and fittings. This combined with the potential speed gains mean that it is already a full quarter more efficient than other boats of its length. It has a long water line, however, still retains a little rocker near the bow.

Above the waterline, there is a raised deck and voluminous bow. This has achieved excellent volume distribution throughout the craft.

The boat's beam is 52cm and visually its lines give the Taran a strange look, differing from the 'normal' sea kayak profile. It is quite large in the deck area around the cockpit and it is high, followed through to the stern with a lower back deck. This does provide a comfortable paddling position and cockpit area, which I would imagine, would allow an extremely pleasurable paddle on the longer haul / expedition style trip. One thing is for sure; it turns heads as you make your way to the beach and even more as it glides effortlessly through the water and past other paddlers.

CONSTRUCTION, FINISH, FITTINGS AND ERGONOMICS

As with all Rockpool boats, there are a number of construction and manufacturing processes available to suit both pocket and requirements. The model on test was the standard construction and weighed in at 24.5kgs, yet felt lighter. There is one option for seat size and fit, however, different to the other Rockpool boats, the seat is fixed ▶



SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH: 549cm (18') WIDTH: 52CM (20.5") VOLUME: 383Ltrs RRP: STANDARD CONSTRUCTION £2295.00 CARBON EPOXY £3195.00
FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE: WWW.ROCKPOOLKAYAKS.COM

'THE TARAN COULD BE THE FUTURE IN EXPEDITION AND TOURING CRAFT DESIGN, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHOSE MINDS ARE OPEN TO A LITTLE MORE THAN THE ACCEPTED WAYS.'

but the foot pegs are adjustable for length and are fixed by bolts drilled through the hull. This is different to the other Rockpool boats, however, this is no ordinary craft and so special measures have been extended to the design. There are plans afoot to develop a fully adjustable seat that is not glassed in directly to the hull, however, Rockpool have said this is not an option just yet.

The attention to detail and overall finish of the Taran is as would be expected, very thorough and aesthetically pleasing, with thought given to every item of equipment; with fixtures and fittings thoroughly considered for position, use, function and form. There are a few notable fixtures not included that most paddlers would be used to seeing on sea kayaks, however, they are not missed in the slightest on this boat. Which leads me to ask the question about whether we do have too much fuff and excess equipment on other boats. There is no day hatch behind the cockpit and there are no toggles either because of the way the bow is designed and constructed.

The deck lines, which are not static line, do travel through the bow, but if a toggle was added and then used for carrying it would place undue strain on the seam at the bow, so they have been excluded; this means the kayak must be carried by the support of your hand from below. This did not prove to be a problem in the slightest and actually makes more sense with this boat. All deck recess fittings are the standard Rockpool design, glued in and the Taran boasts an added security fixing point as well as the usual paddle and chart elastics.

The cockpit area is large enough to accommodate paddlers of most sizes and

allows a comfortable paddling position to be maintained. This gives excellent control, connection and transfer of power to the boat, which in a boat of this spec is entirely what you want. As with the other Rockpool boats, the Taran has relatively aggressive thigh braces, which will require some foam padding, but the seat width allows the paddler to fit it out to the comfort level they require.

The Taran comes with three hatches, all Kayaksport in brand, including the fore day hatch for all those essential goodies, but still allows a clean deck. The other hatches, are round at the bow and oval at the stern and allow access to the seemingly never ending caves that are the fore and aft hatches.

DIMENSIONS

The Taran's length is 18 feet or 5.5m which contrary to popular belief is actually not the longest boat from Rockpool, the beam is slightly narrower than most boats at a fraction over 20" or 52cm and the standard production weight with a glitter deck is 24.5kgs.

It comes in at a voluminous 383 litres in capacity, split into 117 litres for the front hatch, six litres for the cockpit day hatch, 145 for the cockpit itself and 115 in the rear hatch compartment. This is more than enough to be a serious contender for major trips and expeditions.

CONCLUSION

The Taran, like each and every other boat from Rockpool's portfolio proved to be an outstanding and refreshing craft to paddle during testing. On the flat water paddle test it left me feeling hungry to get even more speed out of the boat, pushing myself harder to see what I could achieve. Not

content with being able to sustain close to 5 knots for two hours, I gave it some effort and got the craft to maintain a fraction short of 6 knots. I want more speed now!

There were no real surprises when the boat was taken out in more lively water and the only decisions I had to make were based around whether or not to use the rudder. Other than that it handles and responds when you want it to and with a predictable nature. I had no expectations or pre-conceptions of what I thought the Taran should feel or paddle like, so was intrigued initially by its shape and design. In short, I was extremely pleased with how adaptable the boat was compared to its shape being reminiscent of a more traditional White Water Racer style craft. It has massive potential for speed and yet it hasn't got the turning circle of an oil tanker as might be expected.

I think this boat has huge potential for the expedition paddlers' market and even more so for those folks who are into multi-sport events such as Quadrathlon or for adventure races such as the Hebridean Challenge. It is most definitely of interest to those wanting to save a little energy or cover a little more distance for their efforts over a weekend or week of paddling.

The Taran has cavernous amounts of volume and buoyancy, and despite its narrower beam, it is stable and responsive. The rudder system can be chosen to be engaged or left up, however, if I am honest it felt natural to have it engaged and its ease of use added to the pleasure of the handling. The use of a rudder on a sea kayak was something I had not used since being in New Zealand and I had forgotten how much simpler it makes

things, allowing you to just concentrate on paddling. Why are we stuck in the Victorian age of sea kayaking without a rudder was a question that sprung to my mind whilst gently pushing my right foot forwards a little to alter my direction whilst still maintaining my paddling cadence. It trims well and responsively and the overall performance would probably be even greater if I was a little heavier.

Overall, with its advanced hull design, ergonomic fittings, high level of comfort and its response and connection to the paddler, this is the next generation of Sea Kayak that many a paddler will enjoy and develop in and Rockpool, once again sets the bar for other manufacturers to attempt to follow.

Don't let your prejudices get in the way of trying the Taran. Everyone I gave the opportunity of trying the Taran was pleasantly surprised as to how much they liked paddling it and its handling surprised them even more, because they went to the water with pre-conceived ideas of not being able to paddle it, thinking it was a high end race boat that would be unstable and not wanting to embarrass themselves by falling in. No one did fall in, but each came back smiling!

Go and try one for yourself. Fee your mind. ■

MANUFACTURER'S RESPONSE

It has been a long time coming but the Taran is now in production. Many prototypes have come and gone but the results of your test hopefully show that we have achieved what we set out to; a fast kayak that is fun to paddle.

Mike Webb, Rockpool Kayaks.



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