

Paddle or Sail: Why Choose When You Can Do Both?

by Greg Chesaux

Ever been paddling along wishing you could harness the power of a breeze, if just for a few moments, to give your aching arms a rest? Member Greg Chesaux describes how he made this dream a reality with his sailing kayak, Tupper.

I may be lazy, but I love catching the breeze with my Pacific Action kayak sail system. I'm always looking for ways to improve on things, going for speed and safety, not always simplicity, but always more fun. I guess I'm a student of the "too much is not enough" school.

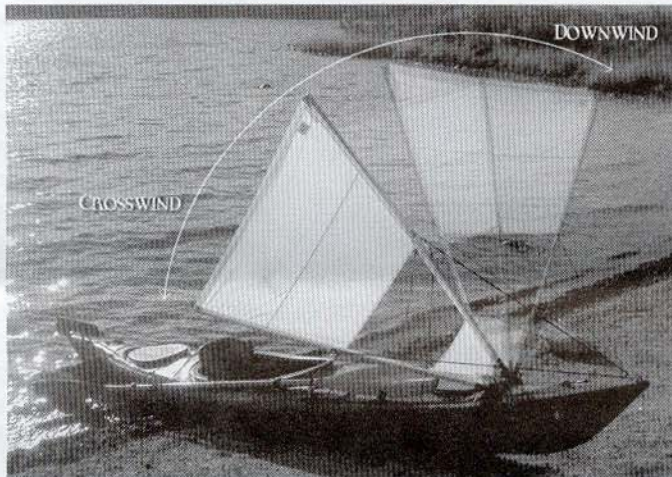
I'm finally back on the water after ten years of spending my spare time on two wheels. After moving inland to Standish from Peaks Island, my 18-foot cedar strip sailing canoe seems to stay put, hanging on the porch ceiling. It wound up being too much effort to move it around and set it up. Having it on an island mooring just outside my window had spoiled me.

Last summer I bought an Old Town Castine touring kayak. She is 11' 9", weighs 50 lbs (and growing), and is made in part from recycled plastic milk bottles. I named her *Tupper*. She's the kind of boat you can throw in the back of the pickup at a moment's notice and which you don't mind dragging over the rocks too much. I've even heard of these handy boats taking flying lessons off of roof racks on the Turnpike and coming away none too worse for wear. (As tough and versatile as she is, I'm still tempted to glue on some bits of wood to stay in good graces with my wooden boat friends.)

Searching for Sail Power

I spent the best summer exploring some of the finest ponds, lakes, and rivers that western Maine has to offer, with an occasional trip to Pine Point and Blue Hill. I found myself wishing I had something to grab some air when paddling downwind. At first I tried holding a paddle up, then a towel, T-shirts, and a shawl tied between a friend's kayak and mine. I even tried an umbrella.

This past fall, after surfing the web for sailing rigs, I found a nifty



Breezy or becalmed, Tupper is prepared. The double-masted design allows for sailing downwind or on a beam reach.

sail system from New Zealand based on an ancient Polynesian double-mast design. Most other rigs require outriggers, are more complicated and costly, and really start turning your kayak into a sailboat. I copied one (for, errr, educational purposes, of course!), throwing it together one night out of duct tape, a shower curtain and wooden dowels. After trying it the next night in half-knot winds, I was so excited I sent away for the real thing. They even custom-made one for me at no extra charge in my favorite colors, white on white.

The design allows you to go downwind with the sail in an upright "V" position. By pulling either mast back and to the side, you

can sail on a beam reach or across the wind. A bungee cord pulls the sail up in seconds. And you can pull it down easily at any time. Some improvements in the works are small jam cleats that allow one-hand adjustments to the sail and a small leeboard that will let me get closer to the wind and keep the kayak from slipping when I go across the wind.

You gotta try this. It's really fun when it's blowing like stink!

Maiden Voyage

I took it to Ferry Beach where the Scarborough River empties. Anyone who has been there knows how strong the current is in the mouth of the river. The tide was whipping out and a steady sea breeze was blowing in. I popped up the little sail, and headed out into the current. I hung there in the channel like I was anchored, with a rather large wake coming off the bow. I crept up into the estuary, turned off, and coasted back around and did it over and over. I could go anywhere I wanted and I barely dipped a paddle. I smugly noticed a group of paddlers having a heck of a time getting around the point. Been there, done that – and will do it again when the wind is blowing the wrong way.

I just wanted to add that after dumping my sailing canoe a number of times in Casco Bay, and having been fished out of the water by the Portland Harbor Pilot in May, I found out the hard way that the ocean is deadly cold and you must be prepared to take a swim, just in case. But you knew that, right?

I think this is a great design. Small enough to be safe and take along all the time. The only thing is it'll be a drag going out with your friends if they don't have one too. ■

Greg adds that his Kiwi sail supplier, Pacific Action, can be found on the web at www.pacificaction.co.nz. He says to "Tell 'em Greg from Maine sent ya!"