

Kayaksailor 1.4

by Christopher Cunningham

When the summer doldrums give way to autumn winds I always look forward to raising the sail on my kayak and racing along at speeds that are hard to reach under paddle alone. So when the Kayaksailor 1.4 sailing rig arrived for review, I was eager to give it a try. A tree-rustling northwesterly was blowing the morning I brought the rig to my workshop and I wanted to get on the water as quickly as possible. From opening the box to having the kayak ready to sail took only 35 minutes. The instruction manual is clear and well-illustrated and the process straightforward. The kit includes a long strap that you can use to attach the rig temporarily and test-sail it before you commit to drilling a few small holes in the deck.

The rig mounts to the deck with four pad eyes: a pair to anchor the crossbeam and a pair to secure the forward end of the aluminum main body tube. Each padeye requires two holes drilled in the deck. The padeyes, while they aren't recessed deck fittings, are unobtrusive when the sail rig is removed.

To raise the sail there are two cords to pull, the mast car control line pulls the base of the mast aft and as it does the forestay pulls the mast upward. The halyard draws the topmast upward, extending above the mast. When both lines are taut, knots tied in each lock them in place in the mast car. It's a nifty rig and fun to watch it work. The two-piece mast allows a tall sail that stows in a short bundle when dropped on deck.

The 1.4 sail is a fully-battened batwing. It sets well and has a good looking shape.

Leeboards affix to each end of the cross tube and have a friction fit that keeps them either raised or dropped in the water. Push rods with plastic tubing hinges lead back to the cockpit and make it easy to deploy and adjust the leeboards.

I first tried the sail at the West Coast Sea Kayak symposium in a light offshore breeze and smooth water. It took next to no time to get used to the rig. Only one thing caught me by surprise: the rig didn't drop because I hadn't released the sheet. Back at home I mounted the



Kayaksailor 1.4 on a Tahe Wind 505, a kayak with a beam a shade over 21 inches. The sail manufacturer recommends a wider kayak for greater stability, but I thought I'd poke the edge of the envelope with a narrow boat. Once I had the rig mounted, I left it on the kayak, loaded it all up on the roof rack and headed to the water.

The rig weighs only 10 pounds so it wasn't too much of a burden to carry the

kayak to the beach with the Kayaksailor on the foredeck. Taking the rig off is easy enough, and it comes with a bag to make it a tidy package for transport.

Before launching I tied the bitter ends of the three control lines to a deck line to keep them from drifting out of reach. Once afloat I dropped the rudder, put my bow into the wind and raised the sail. The sail popped up quickly. Shortly



after leaving the beach the rig tilted to one side. I paddled to a dock, got out of the kayak and readjusted the crossbeam straps. I hitched the tail ends around the webbing between the padeye and crossbeam and that helped lock the cross beam solidly in position.

Offshore, the wind was blowing about 20 miles per hour and the waves were 2-feet and occasionally peaking at close to 4-feet and whitecapping. With a leeboard down the boat sailed well close-hauled into the wind. On its own the sail drove to windward at 3½ knots (GPS measured). On a reach I clocked 5 to 6 knots. On any point of sail, paddling while sailing got the kayak moving fast: A half-effort paddling on most points of sail provided the equivalent of all-out paddling speed. Running downwind, a bit of paddling got me surfing and I saw the GPS showing 9 knots.

The fully-battened sail holds its shape even when the sail is too loosely sheeted, so it didn't give me the softening of the luft that usually indicates the sail needs adjusting. Adding some telltales would provide a reference for setting the sail for best efficiency.

The leeboards are easy to raise and lower using the control rods. The boards will also lift themselves over obstructions. I sailed over a thick floating hawser and just had to reset the board. The leeboards are remarkably stiff for their thickness.

When I was sailing hard, they flexed very little. Their purpose is only to keep the kayak from side-slipping when sailing across or into the wind. They are not meant keep the boat upright as a weighted keel on a sailboat does or like outriggers on many kayak sailing rigs. The inherent stability of the kayak will counter the pressure of the sail to some degree. And in light air, you might not have to do much to keep on an even keel. By putting the sail on a narrow kayak and heading out in a stiff breeze I knew that I'd have to take an active role in keeping the kayak from heeling excessively and from getting knocked over by a gust. With an outrigger, the support would come from the leeward (downwind) outrigger. Without it I used hip pressure to keep the kayak upright. I could feel a set of muscles between my leeward hip and my ribs working as I applied upward pressure with my leeward hip. Sometimes I'd lean back and bring my weight to bear on the windward side of the coaming. Contrary to what you might expect, I braced on the windward side because that's where I had to keep my weight. Occasionally a gust would require slapping a brace to the leeward side, but as soon as I could I'd lean again to windward against the pressure of the sail. In a stiff breeze and a narrow boat I fully expected to be working, and the effort I put in paid off in an exciting sail with the Kayaksailor.

I didn't go to the trouble of capsizing with the Kayaksailor. In my experience flipping with other sail rigs, there's no point in trying to roll. When the sail's in the water the kayak won't come upright easily and the sail and lines can interfere with rolling techniques. The drill is to bail out, collapse and secure the rig and then reenter.

Sailing rigs for kayaks run the gamut from simple handheld downwind sails to complex rigs that can tack into the wind. The Kayaksailor is nearly as compact as some downwind sails and provides windward sailing ability without turning your kayak into a different kind of vessel. The Kayaksailor keeps the feel of a kayak: You still have a single hull and you still have a paddle in your hands to brace, steer or propel the kayak. The Kayaksailor complements a kayak and won't leave the sailor in you—or the paddler in you—feeling short-changed. **SK**

A video of the Kayaksailor in action is available on the web at www.seakayakermag.com/Resources/links.htm

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