


Packer Review: by Steve Salins, *Canoe & Kayak Magazine*, August 2000

PACKER



Freeboard	0"	6"	12"
Capacity	500	220	
Pounds	500	400	300
Inches	6.2	7.3	8.2

Std Features: Bucket seat, footbrace, flotation tanks, bow & stern thwarts

Options: Gunnel covers, black trim package, custom wood trim package, wood web seat, removable yoke, foam thigh pads

SPECS: Length: 14' Beam: 24" / 27.5" (@ 4" water line) Bow Height: 16" Stern Height: 16" Center Height: 13"

WEIGHT: Fiberglass: 42 lbs. Ultralight: 34 lbs.

The Packer, by Western Canoeing/Clipper, has been around for a long time. I recall using it in a slalom race in 1979 because it was short and fast. Passing years dim the memory of that performance, but the Packer is a good design that performs well for today's solo paddlers. It might be easy to dismiss this canoe at first impression; it's workmanlike in appearance and not particularly sleek or sexy. But on the water, the first impression is of a surprisingly competent canoe. It's a very pleasantly roly boat, side to side. It has fine initial stability, but at the same time, it has a nice side-to-side roll that allows the paddler to lean a little to the side to turn the boat or if you like to paddle with the canoe leaned a bit to the side, it handles that position quite well also.

Paddling width is quite comfortable to hold the knees of a large paddler well within the canoe; knees can lock under the gunwales easily. Gunwales are pinched narrow enough in the center that using a sit-and-switch paddling style is comfortable. Best of all, the Packer moves right along. It's not a very big boat, nor does it seem particularly slender, but it's faster than the middle-of-the-road solo canoe. It'll keep up with most any group—even loaded with a week's worth of gear. At the same time, it has plenty of initial stability to suit more sedentary canoeing activities that call for quiet stillness.

With the bent-shaft paddle, the Packer moves up to speed quickly and gently. For a solo boat it moves smoothly through the water, and it is easy to turn by dropping a hip and sweeping to the side. The Packer carves a wonderful turn, very much under control. If you push it along, the bow wave starts to curl, warning that the boat has reached cruising speed and doesn't want to be pushed beyond that speed. Watching the docks and houses go by along the lake, I found that I was moving fast enough to suit someone who has a destination in mind. At the same time, there was lots of stability for just sitting in the boat and relaxing. The Packer tracks well enough that it is easy to get three to four strokes on a side without trouble. If you need to turn, drop a hip and the boat responds immediately. The Packer has one of those rare canoe hulls in which everything comes together. It's a canoe that effectively balances speed and efficiency with stability, turning response, and comfort.

Clipper sets the seat fairly low in the canoe. Were it mine, I'd raise the seat a little because as a big guy, I found that my hands hit on the gunwale, and I had to keep my shoulders a little higher than I like in order to clear the side. Clipper has a very comfortable bucket seat to complement their easy-to-use foot brace system. Normally, rivets on the outside of a hull don't affect a paddler. However, if you sometimes enjoy running the shaft of your paddle along the edge of the canoe to tuck the blade deep under the boat, the rivet heads from the seat angle may catch the paddle shaft. I don't think it's a problem—just an occasional annoyance. Small Heather felt very

centered using the large tractor-style seat; she's used to a northwoods solo style with the boat leaned over, and this particular seat setup doesn't lend itself so well to that. On the other hand, as a fan of sit-and-switch solo paddling, I loved the setup in the Packer. If you like the former, or like both styles, you may want to consider a bench-style seat because this hull performs well with a kneeled paddler. But the tractor-style seat is hard to beat; and Clipper's seat is *very* comfortable!

To check how this canoe would handle gear on a solo wilderness trip, I added two 60-pound bags (along with my 230 pounds) for a total of 350 pounds. As with any loaded canoe, stability increases dramatically and all reactions are dampened; moving, turning, waves. However when I pulled out a bent-shaft and paddled fairly easily (about what you'd do on a long day of paddling) this canoe maintained its way through the water beautifully. I'd take this canoe on a solo trip in a heartbeat. Gunwales are tucked fairly close; if you're used to the highly pinched gunwales of a racer, it may seem wide. If you're used to a "normal" solo canoe, or a small tandem that you paddle solo, it will seem quite slender at the gunwales. It's very friendly to good paddling procedure: vertical shaft, paddle tucked close to the canoe, and so on.

I selected the Packer for a relaxed day on Mayfield lake, including an upstream exploration of the upper portion of the lake, where current of the Cowlitz River still flows strong below Mossyrock Dam. My paddling budding was in an efficient touring kayak, but I had no trouble keeping up with him in the Packer. Surfing the wake of a passing powerboat, the Packer was steady yet responsive—no sudden surprises. Although not fast, the small hull accelerated quickly with a couple of dug-in paddle strokes. Working upriver, the Packer handled eddy lines with ease and even took on boils with no threat. On the return trip across the lake, a crossing wind created a few waves, along with the illusion that the canoe was off the tracking mark that is so common in crossing waves. But the Packer was easy to hold on course and slid right along as I unwound what energy I had left after four hours in the canoe.

So what can I say? The Packer was a fun little boat in '79, and it's a fine little boat in '00. See you in another 21 years?

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