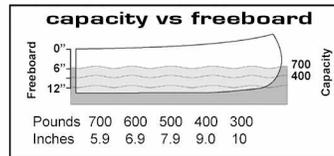


Solitude Review: by Steve Salins, Canoe & Kayak Magazine, March 1998

SOLITUDE



Std Features: Adjustable bucket seat (slides fore & aft, 3 vertical positions), footbrace, flotation tanks, bow & stern thwarts

Options: Gunnel covers, black trim package, custom wood trim package, wood web seat, foam thigh pads, wilderness lash system, removeable yoke, Expedition spray skirt

SPECS: Length: 15'6" Beam: 28" / 30" (@ 4" water line) Bow Height: 16" Stern Height: 14" Center Height: 13"

WEIGHT: Fiberglass: 52 lbs. Ultralight: 40 lbs.

First Impressions

From an aesthetic perspective, the Solitude definitely resides in the contemporary category. There are not many classic lines to this canoe—its built for function. Clipper installs a striking graphic design on the side of the Solitude, giving a forward-leaning, rakish look to a hull that otherwise might appear a bit bland. Don't let that mislead you : this boat is well constructed. Particularly noticeable is the continuous snug fit of the black anodized aluminum gunwale to the Kevlar hull. The exterior is smoothly molded using clear S-glass before the Kevlar portion is molded in, and the result is an abrasion-resistant hull with no pinholes in the laminate. Although this canoe weighs in at only 40 pounds, the bottom is absolutely stiff. Inside th hull, the large foam core is smooth and reinforced with unidirectional Kevlar cloth at seat-attachment points and near the end of the core. The inside hull is quite slick due to vacuum bag construction. I'd install knee pads.

End caps are perfectly fitted to the gunwale construction. Black flotation tanks set a striking balance with the black trim. End chambers are air-filled with an air-relief valve similar to those used on air bags. It would be nice if the valves were mounted farther under the end cap toward the stern. Air chambers are visible through the side of the canoe because of the translucent Kevlar, detracting somewhat from the aesthetics. With the Solitude, I'll happily accept visible flotation tanks to gain the light weight offered by the clear Kevlar construction. Gunwales are slightly pinched amidship to give the solo paddler a width of about 27.5 inches. Viewed from a distance, the Solitude has a very flat shearline. It is a fairly deep canoe, and the volume of the hull is carried well forward, suggesting high carrying capacity and a dry ride in waves.

Outfitting

Clipper outfits this model with their very large plastic tractor-style sliding seat, probably the most comfortable seat I've used. The seat assembly is adjustable to three heights and slides for trim. Usually I'm wary of complex do-everything seat designs, but this one works.

Seat parts fit precisely and seat height adjusts easily, although not while on the water. Unfortunately, Clipper does not provide a way to fix the slider in one position, so the paddler must either provide a clamp or drill holes in the slider and use a pin to hold the seat in place. When set at the highest level, the seat functions easily as a rest for a kneeling paddler. In that position, seat brackets may uncomfortably interfere with knees, so added padding is in order.

A foot brace is standard on the Solitude, which I think should be expected of any solo touring canoe. I particularly like the Solitude's. It's sturdy, well-mounted, and easily adjustable from the seated position using diaper pin clips. The crosspiece tends to rattle during transport, but foot pressure keeps piece tight when under way. This is a great feature if the boat will be paddled by lots of different folks.

Paddling Performance

The first few strokes of the Solitude on the water were impressive. With dead calm conditions, the boat seemed to have lots of glide, and I was surprised at the smooth ride from a design that appeared rather sedate. (Don't ever underestimate a Gene Jensen design!)

Initial stability is wonderful. This is a roomy canoe that works for any activity needing a stable platform. Side-to-side stability when leaned over also feels good as long as the bubble contacts water. The boat gets tender in a hurry when taken to the rail, but the Solitude has high sides, and the need to lean it to the gunwale line would be rare indeed.

As expected from an empty solo canoe, the Solitude turns easily when leaned to the outside of a turn. With the seat at the highest position, paddling is comfortable and surprisingly stable, even when the canoe is leaned dramatically.

Paddling the Solitude with the seat in the top position (which best suits a large paddler), I found I could manage four to five strokes per side when cruising with a bent-shaft paddle. I'd rate the Solitude as tracking well and turning well when needed. It's very well balanced, and although I would prefer gunwales a bit narrower at the paddling position, I found I could adjust pretty easily.

When cruising, the Solitude paddles smoothly and easily with a straight shaft. I'd be inclined to carry both straight and bent-shaft paddles when using this canoe.

In the lowest seat position, it's quite difficult to paddle with good stroke technique. I got to thinking the Solitude might work well using a kayak paddle (God forbid!). Under cover of darkest night, I tested the idea, and for those of you who want to paddle a solo canoe with a kayak paddle (shame on you!), a Solitude works fine.

When my small (5-foot, 120 pound) friend paddled the Solitude the boat floated much higher, making handling troublesome. From a distance, a small person looks lost in this large canoe, and I think the Solitude is simply too big for a small paddler to be comfortably seated. A small paddler using a straight shaft (and possibly kneeling to the side) can handle the Solitude quite well. However, in a kneeling style, the seat support interferes, and I'd consider installing a bench-style seat.

This canoe handles confused and quartering waves quite well. It has a soft sensation, neither grabby nor unpredictable in intersecting waves. I found it easy to bring back on course in such conditions. In the time trial, the canoe reached a certain speed and wouldn't go beyond it. The strength of the Solitude is not pure speed, but rather a blend of carrying capacity and handling, couple with reasonable efficiency.

With a heavy load, the Solitude is outstanding. It tracks very well, turns surprisingly easily when leaned, feels real solid, and has good glide. In choppy waves with weight, the Solitude was incredibly dry, with no unpredictable movement, no grabbiness and a very soft ride. It takes more strength to pull the Solitude through the water with a load because the full width of the hull engages the water, and the waterline shape isn't quite as efficient. Nevertheless, if you aren't in a huge hurry, it's a great touring boat.

Recommendations for Use

The Solitude is a large-volume canoe for big loads, big paddlers, and big water—its very dry. It is an excellent choice for those who like to incorporate canoeing as part of bird watching, wildlife observation or photographic activities from the water. It gives a stable platform, and paddles easily when it's time to move.

I would feel comfortable using the Clipper Solitude on a canoe trip involving large bodies of water. Its large carrying capacity, high initial stability, and general overall comfort complement excellent handling and extraordinarily dry ride when heavily loaded. It would handle very well on an easy river. The Solitude meets a variety of needs (tripping solo, platform for other activities). It's a versatile boat, both in seating as well as hull performance.