TESTED

EXPLORER HV SEA KAYAK

Some time ago, Nigel Dennis Kayaks re-branded as Sea Kayaking UK.Unsurprisingly, the SKUK Explorer HV is a variant of the hugely popular NDK and now SKUK Explorer, with the HV's modified deck -'designed to facilitatemore leg-room for the kayaker by increasing the volume in the cockpit area -being 'glassed' onto the same hull as the Explorer – which in turn is a larger, expedition version of the Romany 16. Having been the kayak of choice for numerous expeditions and circumnavigations, including those of Britain, Ireland, Iceland, New Zealand and South Georgia, the Explorer could easily be described as the world's most widely used expedition kayak. The Explorer HV comes from a fine pedigree, that much is obvious, but how does it perform...

Length:17' 8" (540cm) Width: 21.5" (54m) Volumes: Front compartment: 58 litres Middle compartment:39 litres Rear compartments:60 litres Deck: 2.5 oz C.S mat plus foredeck rescue patch of extra 1.5 oz mat. Hull: 2.5 oz C.S mat plus 8 oz cloth. Two-inch keel strip. Double thickness reinforced bow and stern Inside seam: Two-inch diolen plus three-inch glass cloth. Outside seam: One-inch glass cloth.

Tester 1 Height: 5ft 9 Weight: 85kg Years Paddling:25+

Tester 2 Height: 6ft 1 Weight: 100kg Years Paddling:25+

Tester 3 Height: 6ft Weight: 100kg Years Paddling:7+

Test locations: Cornwall, Dorset, Scotland and Wales, Test conditions: Open crossings, Surf, following seas, Rock gardens, Clapotis, Tide races, Flat seas; in conditions up to Force 5.

For more information see: www.seakayakinguk.com



For those that haven't come across NDK/SKUK boats before, we'll give you a guick rundown on paddled the Explorer, we'll give you an overview of the HV variant and how it differs to the standard Explorer.

The Explorer HV looks every inch an expedition sea kavak, but with two additional 'bumps' where issues aside) and exits, and the deck modifications your knees sit. These modifications have allowed an allow the larger paddler to position their knees additional one and a half inches between the top comfortably. The footrests are good, not great. of the seat and the underside of the deck, which allows larger paddlers to sit comfortably.

The Explorer HV's V shaped hull and a shallow as it moves outwards. The hull, complete with skeg, is moderately rockered and the deck features the standard three-hatch set-up, with appropriate deck-lines and elastics.

perhaps? The two test kayaks - one owned and I'll explain.. four months ago, are no different.

The HV is a spacious kayak that's capable of accommodating a range of kayakers. The seat, had the most dramatic effect?'.

though reasonably comfortable, tends to be a little slippery when wet and for extended trips would the performance and build, and for those who have be much better replaced with one made of foam or simply lined with a thin layer of foam. Consider changing the back band too as this turns, rotates and folds on entry

For the less experienced / novice paddler initial stability in an unladen Explorer HV is a touch 'twitchy', particularly when turning around or V shaped foredeck give the kayak fantastic strength taking a photograph. Add weight to the Explorer and rigidity. The curve of the sheer-line, which is HV, lowering the waterline, and initial stability more pronounced at the stern, gradually increases improves remarkably. Secondary stability is fantastic - allowing the more experienced paddler to make

the most of edge turns. Whilst the 'knee bump' deck modifications were predominately designed to accommodate the larger Kayaks designed and crafted by Nigel Dennis have paddler, they also have the effect of allowing the an enviable reputation; solid build, strength and paddler to place the knees higher and further apart longevity - a reflection of the rough waters and rock than if they were paddling the standard Explorer and gardens of their Anglesey home and testing ground indeed many other sea kayaks. Why is this useful?

paddled for over a year, the second bought three or Some time ago I was chatting to one of the UK's following seas, then surf; grin factor paddling! The Explorer HV rolls easily - 'if you can't roll this top whitewater coach's who asked, 'over the last ten years, which single kayak design innovation has you never will' and the three hatches stay bone dry.

Much debate ensued, with most of the people Both Explorers have a fitted skeg - the newer HV has Kari-Tek's wire cabled, 'cartridge skeg' system, in attendance arguing for the flat-bottomed hull. However, the coach argued that the single most which we'll discuss here. effective design change was not to the hull, but to The advantage of the cartridge skeg is that the wire the deck... The ability to edge control whitewater is flexible, so unlikely to kink - unlike the stiffer wire

The 'keyhole' deck allows easy access (back band

kayaks, he said, has become paramount to modern river kayaking. Placing the knees wider and higher, as is possible in modern day river kayaks, increases the paddler's ability to control and hold edges. SKUK, intentionally or otherwise, have, through the introduction of these deck modifications, replicated this design change – the result is a sea kayak that edges easily. The deck has also been 'tweaked' around the thigh grips; with the contact and extra control these minor alterations allow being a real plus. Sea kavakers in the market for a new kavak and those considering buying the regular Explorer should consider the HV on the basis of this extra control and edging capabilities.

The Explorer HV tracks superbly, accelerates quickly, cruises comfortably and handles beam winds well. In a head wind the bow lifts over oncoming waves with the high volume preventing plunging. However, it really excels in a following sea, accelerating smoothly to catch even the smallest of swell. Truth be told, for a boat this size, it feels remarkably playful and when surfing, the hull is sufficiently rockered to ensure the kayak holds a straight line with no pearling. We quickly found ourselves hunting out long downwind runs with

found in the majority of skeg systems (the notable exception being the P+H Cetus, of course see Issue 001 for our review). Here the outer sheath of the cable extends into the box by 50mm or so







and supports the wire; enabling effective operation while allowing 'kink avoiding' flexibility! The real beauty of this is the ability to remove the cartridge with just an Alan key and a screwdriver; making it perfectly feasible to service the entire skeg 'in the field'. This ingenious design allows 'retro fitting' standard kayaks, but it is bombproof'. If you ever so Kari-Tek's Hydro-skeg or Skeg-Rudder can be added (at purchase) or later.

We believe that the majority of people would find the wire option more than adequate; it's certainly sturdy enough to stand up to the HVs intended New for this year is the option to have personalised use and would almost certainly be the simplest and artwork done on your new boat, courtesy of Richard easiest of the options to repair. All the skeg really lacks is a pre-drilled hole for a cord to be threaded through. The cartridge box is a relatively large unit black Explorer HV with large Ocean Paddler 'OP' and as a result some of the rear hatch space is lost.



The build quality is solid and robust and more than capable of dealing with whatever you throw at it. The finish on the kayaks used in the test, both in 'standard lay-up' is excellent. As the SKUK web site says – 'We might not use the sexiest lay-up on our want proof, consider putting this to the test at one of Nigel's 'Bash and Smash' sessions held regularly at the Anglesey Sea Kayak Symposium.

Perkin (not to be confused with Ocean Paddler's very own Richard Parkin!). I can already see an all logos over it.



The Explorer HV is an exceptionally durable, userfriendly kayak that allows the inexperienced to get out there and the more experienced to progress their skills in rougher waters.

It's a playful kayak in which you'll relish seeking out rough water, following seas and surf, where it excels. The Explorer HV is a kayak that's made to use, to enjoy, to throw up a beach and to play in rock gardens – the P+H Cetus might be a Bentley or a Rolls Royce – but the HV's an Audi R8. Both kayaks will get you to your destination, and in good time - you'll just have more fun getting there in the Explorer HV.

SKUK's response to the review

We are always very keen to get feedback on our boats and have been keenly awaiting to read this one of the Explorer HV from the guys at Ocean Paddler. To put you in the picture of where this boat fits in let me quickly explain our range. The Romany is our day / weekend boat and the Explorer is our Expedition boat. Both are available in low volume (LV), standard and high volume (HV) to fit small, medium and large paddlers. Also available are the Greenlander, our traditional design boat, and the Triton, our double.

As you may know we build all our boats for rough water and expedition use and were glad to see the Testers appreciated this aspect of our boats in the 'unsexy but bombproof lay-up' and the wide knee positioning which all our range incorporate. The 'easy access' provided by the key

hole cockpit was an industry innovation at the time, along with the off set day hatch and sloping bulkhead close behind the seat. kind of car.

Adding to this innovation we now use the Kari-Tek skeg system, which provides a super smooth rear rope skeg, an unkinkable wire skeg, a bombproof hydraulic skeg and the revolutionary skeg rudder system. All of which are in the field maintainable and interchangeable.

We appreciate and take on board the testers comments on the pre-drilled hole for a cord to be fitted to the skeg blade. In response to the back rest issue we have looked at fitting a variety of backrests and found pros and cons with them all. In the end we decided on a simple but effective one that could easily be replaced should the paddler want to. If you have found a better system that you think we could use we would appreciate your feedback.

Thank you to OP and the three testers for their review, we're off to our local Audi dealer to check out the R8, it sounds like our



Sea Kayaking UK M

In 1995 Nigel Dennis Kayaks was formed with the design of the Romany, since then a range of kayaks have been designed. In 2005 Sea Kayaking UK was formed to manufacture Nigel Dennis Designs along with third party kayaks. We are one of the leading composite sea kayak manufactures within the UK and in 2008 will release our innovative new plastic boat.

Notable Recent Expeditions that have

2004

- Circumnavigation of Great Britain and Ireland, Fiona Whitehead.
- Circumnavigation of Ireland, Simon Oshourne
- Circumnavigation of Japan, Hadas Feldman and Jeff Allen.
- Circumnavigation of Tasmania, Gemma Rawlings, Justine Curgenven and Trys Morris.

2005

- Circumnavigation of Great Britain, Harry Whelan, Barry Shaw and Phil Clegg.
- Circumnavigation of South Georgia, Peter Bray, Jeff Allen, Hadas Feldman and Nigel Dennis.

2006

- Circumnavigation of Iceland, Rotem Ron.
- Greenland East Coast, Martin Rickard, Peter Jones and Phil Clegg

2007

- Circumnavigation of Vancover Island, Kierron Tastagh and Jeff Norville.
- Word Championships Adventure Racing, Team Helly Hansen.
- Circumnavigation of Iceland, Freya Hoffmeister and Greg Stamer.

2008

Circumnavigation of Ireland, Marcus Demuth.

In Progress

- Circumnavigation of Ireland, Sam Crowley.
- Circumnavigation of Vancouver Island, Joe O'Blenis.
- Circumnavigation of Newfoundland, Hadas Feldman and Tomer Sabag.
- Circumnavigation of Great Britain, Noel Webb.