

P&H HAMMER

The P&H Hammer, its design blending whitewater and sea kayak features, is one of the more unusual-looking kayaks we have ever reviewed at Ocean Paddler. P&H describe the Hammer as '...A radical new kayak primed to take 'play the sea' and river exploration to a whole new level'.

Design and construction

The Hammer is constructed from single-skin polyethylene, a material already used on the Delphin Surf and Pyranha whitewater range. This provides the increased durability, abrasion resistance, longevity and impact resistance demanded by today's paddlers, but also keeps the weight of the finished kayak at a manageable 28 kg (similar to the Diolen Quest or Cetus).

Design wise, the Hammer looks more akin to a 'stretched' or elongated whitewater kayak. The Hammer appears to have a slightly Swede-form design, although the contoured/chined hull and deck may give the illusion of this. On the underside of the Hammer, a stubby nose slopes steeply down towards the hull, with a hard chine running from almost the tip of the bow: immediate evidence of the high level of rocker provided by the Hammer's design. The hard chine runs almost the full length of the kayak. Under the bow, a reasonable V-shaped keel quickly relaxes into a flat planing hull, which runs for a significant distance before a shallow V-shape picks up again at the very stern of the kayak.

The deck is more familiar in terms of layout and features (albeit with a more pronounced and 'boxy' look) with a slightly chined section running around most of the kayak. This gives an immediate feel for the Hammer's high volume. A light V-shape to the front deck runs from the bow to shortly before the cockpit where the deck flattens out. The rear deck also retains some volume, finishing in the squat stern point.

The Hammer's robust construction and incredible manoeuvrability make it an awesome kayak to use in rock gardens and caves, particularly when conditions pick up.

SPECIFICATION

LENGTH: 407cm
WIDTH: 60.5cm
INTERNAL COCKPIT LENGTH: 84cm
INTERNAL COCKPIT WIDTH: 42cm
VOLUME: 320L
WEIGHT (CORELITE): 28kg
RECOMMENDED PADDLER WEIGHT RANGE: 65-110kg
RRP: £1299
FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE WWW.PHSEAKAYAKS.COM



Features, fittings and ergonomics

Fixtures and fittings are a true blend of the whitewater and sea kayaking markets. Working along the top deck, the Hammer provides four hatches: a front and rear hatch (each 10"), a day hatch (8") and a deck hatch. Thick foam bulkheads are well sealed to provide watertight compartments. Standard decklines run the full perimeter of the deck, with a substantial set of deck bungees for on-deck stowage. These lines are held in place via recessed, bolted mounting points, which provide the opportunity to add further lines if required.

To the rear of the cockpit is a security bar for padlocking the Hammer to the roof rack or for secure storage at home. Just ahead of the deck hatch a flat, square-mounting area allows for the use of peripherals such as a camera or GPS. While the majority of the deck has a textured finish, this mounting point is smooth, ensuring suction mounts work well.

The skeg control sits on top of the deck just to the left of the cockpit, with its midpoint in line with the front point of the cockpit coaming (an unusual position). At this point the deck begins to introduce some whitewater features: the Hammer provides both traditional end-toggles (attached through the bow and stern by cord) and heavy-duty tape whitewater grab handles, which are bolted to the deck. This allows for both safety in bigger water and easy carrying.

Utilising the cockpit fittings found in the Delphin and Aries, the Connect outfitting is more akin to that found in a river running (creek) boat; it includes a well-padded seat and back band, along with thigh grips that use a ratchet system to adjust the level of connectivity. A foam pillar is situated just ahead of the cockpit opening to provide deck rigidity, while the footrest is a foam-covered, adjustable full-plate design. The cockpit is cavernous (when compared to traditional sea kayaks) and incredibly comfortable and, thanks to the Connect system and adjustable full-plate footrest, allows for the paddler to 'lock in' as much as they desire.

The skeg is operated by the now familiar P&H skeg slider system; a corded skeg controlled by a pinch grip skeg slider. The skeg blade is a good size, lowers to a substantial angle when required and is supplied with a thin cord pre-attached for a partner to assist with any on the water unjamming.

In use

The P&H Hammer is an incredibly comfortable kayak to paddle and the cockpit outfitting is superb. Taking to the water for the first time you are struck by both the volume of the Hammer, despite its diminutive length, and its handling. Initial stability is excellent, as is secondary stability, even in the most confused of conditions.

Pile on the forward paddling power and an impressive acceleration is quickly followed by the Hammer reaching its cruising point. The Hammer is never going to be a fast kayak to paddle. Over the test period it was obvious that, in the hands of a fit and experienced paddler, it can keep up with a group over short or more relaxed sea paddles; it has not been designed to cope with long days eating up the miles, however. Tracking relies heavily on the skeg; on a journey you need to view the skeg more as a tracking control than using it solely to combat weather-cocking. To this end, it rewards paddlers who are happy to make effective use of the full range of skeg adjustment. To give some perspective, whitewater paddlers would say the Hammer has great tracking while a sea kayaker would suggest the Hammer does not track.

Given the hull design, manoeuvrability was something we were keen to test. Initially the Hammer was run through some flat-water tests in keeping the kayak flat, then edging using both positive edge (whitewater style) and negative edge (sea kayak style); it responded to all three. Kept flat, the Hammer will spin well over 180 degrees from a single sweep stroke with no effort at all, as would a whitewater kayak. This is a kayak that really does spin on a dime. The narrowed stern helps keep the

Hammer loose on the water and, without a doubt, it is the most manoeuvrable kayak we have tested to date.

However, the Hammer was designed primarily for dynamic water and this is where it really comes into its own. The Hammer's robust construction and incredible manoeuvrability make it an awesome kayak to use in rock gardens and caves, particularly when conditions pick up and/or sets come through. The ability to turn the Hammer instantly allows you to turn and meet waves and swell head on, rather than getting stuck side on and risking being smashed into the rocks. These characteristics provide the confidence to play in areas you would not intentionally take a traditional sea kayak, and therefore increase the opportunities for fun and excitement. If (when) you do get the timing wrong, the Hammer takes the knocks in situations a composite boat (and, indeed, some plastic sea kayaks) wouldn't.

In tide races and surf the positive acceleration allows it to pick up waves easily, while the planing hull keeps it incredibly manoeuvrable on the wave. The Hammer is able to travel across the face of the wave beautifully, yet turn down or up the wave instantly.

First time out, after previously having surfed a traditional sea kayak, the Hammer can prove almost too manoeuvrable; it can be hard to handle until you become used to its characteristics. By moving away from straight-line runs and allowing the bow or stern to purl, it is possible to start pulling off some excellent tricks (when the full-plate footrest and excellent connectivity really come into their own).

Conclusion

The P&H Hammer is a new style of kayak. To use P&H's own words, it has been designed for 'ocean play', for use on dynamic water, surf, sidecars, rock gardens and so forth. It will never replace a traditional sea kayak and is not designed to.

The build quality is superb; the outfitting is superb; and the fittings and seating position are superb. The hatches, bulkheads and decklines all make the Hammer a fully equipped sea kayak, but a wonderfully manoeuvrable fully equipped sea kayak.

We are lucky to have some superb designs on the market; paddlers looking for a 'playful sea kayak' that can play in the surf or tide races, but could also cope on weekend or longer trips should probably look at the P&H Delphin, the Valley Gemini SP RM or Tiderace's Vortex, as this is where more traditional sea kayak designs excel. However, for paddlers looking to play in close to the shore and surf in rocky and potentially difficult environments, or mix it up on lower-grade whitewater and then the sea, the Hammer is absolutely perfect; it is one of, if not the most exciting and fun kayaks we have tested to date.

Outside of the purely sea kayaking environment, the Hammer also has enormous potential for multi-day river trips.

Being relatively new to the market and such a radical design, we are only just starting to discover the Hammer's full potential. We need to learn what the Hammer is good at and explore new environments in which it will excel. And excel it will. If the review period is anything to go by, there are (many) exciting times ahead. 🏡

Manufacturer's response

“Thank you for such a balanced and enthusiastic review. When we first planned the Hammer we knew that it could potentially be a step too far for paddlers to accept, but we couldn't be more pleased with the way it has been received. We are really excited to be involved with the growing market of paddlers exploring the boundaries of ocean play and developing products that excel in the blurred lines between whitewater and sea kayaking, and the opportunities it offers for the industry.”