

05 FLOAT Kayaks

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This year's new kayaks all share a refreshing purity of purpose. The new trend in whitewater is a return to the simple pleasure of river running, while sea-kayak companies are unabashedly specializing their wares. Whether you're into splashing in the sun, heading out for a month, or day-tripping a local coastline, there's a boat just for you. And if you're into speed, may we direct you to this year's Gear of the Year winner, KayakPro's Nemo: It's the fastest and most comfortable do-it-all sea kayak we've ever tested. BY BERNE BROUDY



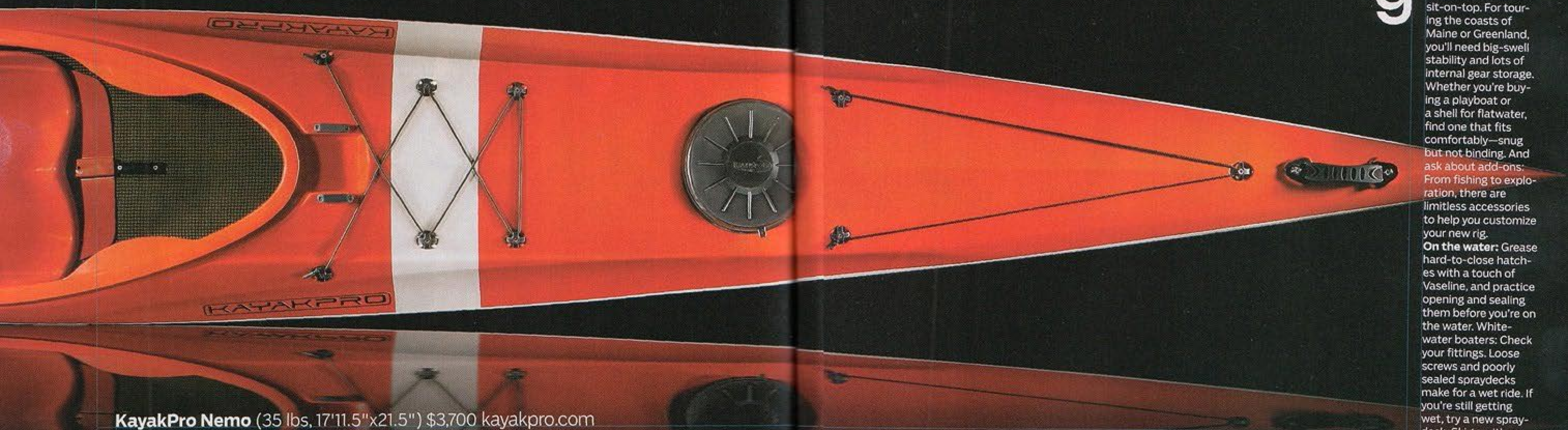
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LEARNING CURVE

In the store: Know where you want to paddle and for how long. For splashing around SoCal, think sit-on-top. For touring the coasts of Maine or Greenland, you'll need big-swell stability and lots of internal gear storage. Whether you're buying a playboat or a shell for flatwater, find one that fits comfortably—snug but not binding. And ask about add-ons: From fishing to exploration, there are limitless accessories to help you customize your new rig.

On the water: Grease hard-to-close hatches with a touch of Vaseline, and practice opening and sealing them before you're on the water. Whitewater boaters: Check your fittings. Loose screws and poorly sealed spraydecks make for a wet ride. If you're still getting wet, try a new spraydeck. Skirts with a European-style neoprene flange tend to seal the best.

At home: Sling webbing under the hull and hang your boat right side up, out of the sun. This keeps the pressure off the hull and prevents UV rays from weakening the plastic or glass.



KayakPro Nemo (35 lbs, 17'11.5"x21.5") \$3,700 kayakpro.com

1. Developed by five-time Olympian and world champion Grayson Bourne, the Nemo is the ultimate fusion of race and touring readiness. After weeks on the water, testers found it has the optimum mix of speed and comfort for everything from high-intensity training to all-day touring.

2. Unlike most mass-market boats, which are designed for slower speeds, the Nemo's knife-blade bow is calibrated to be most efficient at 6 to 7.4 knots. And you can tell. On Vermont's Lake Willoughby, our kevlar model accelerated in a dozen strokes and tracked like a cruise missile.

3. The flat cockpit rim and deck allow total freedom of movement, whether you're training or touring. Scalloped side cutouts in the cockpit accommodate close strokes, which minimize yaw, the side-to-side movement (or slop) that robs a paddler of forward momentum.

4. Our prototype tracked so straight that it was difficult to turn back toward home. KayakPro improved production models by adding a longer rudder, which purists will hate but intermediate paddlers won't be able to live without. It's not retractable but will give if it hits a rock.

5. In a true race boat, outfitting is secondary. Not here. The Nemo comes with a comfy fiberglass seat, dual hatches (they're a bit tricky to open but completely watertight), bulkheads, deck lines with recessed fittings, carrying handles, GPS mounts, and a gas-pedal-style rudder.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN HEFFERNAN