

Wind Seeker Sail Rig by Feathercraft

Review by Christopher Cunningham

The kayak we've been using as a test bed for sailing rigs is riddled with holes, remnants of masts and deck rigging that it has carried in the past. Fortunately, I didn't need to add to the damage when I installed Feathercraft's Wind Seeker Sail Rig. The mast and outriggers attach to a hard-shell kayak without having to drill any holes in it. The rig straps onto the kayak with an adapter plate that flexes to fit almost any deck shape. (Ironically, the rig requires special modifications to fit some of Feathercraft's own kayaks and isn't compatible with some of its others.)

The straps that hold the rig to a hard-shell kayak are somewhat larger than seat-belt webbing and are laced through buckles on the adapter plate. Lacing them correctly is the key to getting the rig to stay put. Make sure you know the routine before you head to the beach, or take the instructions with you. I didn't, and I discovered several ways to lace the buckles that didn't work. Properly laced, the buckles allow you to pull the straps hand tight while the buckles are open. When you close them, the buckles act like cams, cinching the straps very snugly around the hull and pulling the flexible adapter plate tight against the deck.

Having the straps wrapped under the hull may not appeal to some, but they lie flat, and if they add any drag, who cares if the sails are doing the work? Even when I was paddling, I didn't get the sense that the straps were making the going any harder.

The mast is attached to the adapter plate with a mast step and a pair of struts. The aka (outrigger crossbeam) is attached to the base of the mast and another pair of struts. All four struts need to be adjusted to fit each particu-

lar kayak. Once the mast and aka are squared up you drill holes through each two-piece strut and install a bolt to fix its length.

It took me about 45 minutes in the shop to get the rig prepared for our test kayak. With that taken care of, whenever I wanted to go sailing, it took me 10 or 15 minutes set-up time at the beach to put it all together. The fully battened mainsail has hoops to attach it to the three-piece mast and a halyard

gust of wind.

The aka supports a pair of leeboards that pivot down if you're sailing and pivot up out of the water if you're paddling. The amas are inflatable teardrop-shaped floats. They have dual air chambers and an internal sleeve that slips over the akas. The air pump provided with the rig makes quick work of filling the amas.

I took the rig out in some light air and in 10 to 15 knots of wind, about

The Wind Seeker is a generously sized sailing rig that you can attach to your kayak without drilling holes in your deck.

to raise it. The aft end of the boom has an upward-turned extension for flying your flag (which is the proper thing to do on any yacht).

The jib has its own halyard and a loop of line to run the tack (the bottom corner) out to the bow. Feathercraft offers an optional spinnaker for working off the wind. It goes aloft in place of the jib using the jib halyard. The jib sheets run through jamb cleats that are attached to a line tied to the deck. They can be a bit tricky to work with one hand.

The main sheet runs through a combination fairlead/jamb cleat at the base of the mast. The sheet, unfortunately, won't run free if you release it from the jaws of the cleat and let go. It pulls itself back into the cleat. I'd definitely change the arrangement here and get some distance between the fairlead and the cleat. Being able to ease or release the main in an instant is essential to keep from being overpowered by a sudden

the limit, according to the instructions, for carrying the jib or the spinnaker. With the main and jib up, the rig was pretty well balanced. With the jib down, the mainsail's center of effort, being aft of the leeboard's center of resistance, puts some of the lateral pressure of sailing on the rudder. That made steering sluggish, especially in light wind. With stronger wind and more hull speed, that steering response improved, and the rudder would only stall when put hard over.

The main and jib moved the kayak along at a good clip in 12 knots of wind, but it was easy to see why dropping the jib is recommended when the wind is any stronger. The unstayed mast bowed, and the jib's luff (leading edge) sagged. That wasn't a problem for running, but the loose luff impeded working to windward.

Dousing the jib and raising the spinnaker is best done methodically to

avoid making the cockpit a tangle of lines and sails. Once set, the spinnaker pulled well, although it would have been nice to have had a way to hold the sheets out wide to keep the spinnaker from curling. A couple of simple fairleads lashed on the aka would do the trick.

The amas ride high enough that I could paddle the kayak on an even keel and easily keep both of them out of the water. Under the press of the sails, they have plenty of buoyancy to keep on the surface. At one point, the port ama “tripped” and pivoted to skim over the water, tail first. This didn’t seem to slow me down, but it looked odd. Feathercraft is working on a new version soon that uses water ballast to keep the amas from flipping over.

Overall, I thought the Wind Seeker did very well all around in light air and off the wind in stronger breezes. With the jib up and working to weather, I tacked through about 130 degrees—not great windward performance, but as with lots of small craft, pulling out the oars or the paddle is often the fastest way to make progress into the wind.

The rig packs up in one long bag for the mainsail and spars, one wide bag for the adapter plate and a few smaller bags for pump and parts. It can be carried on deck, as Feathercraft illustrates on its website and in the instructions, but the 20-plus pound weight is a lot of load to carry on deck. For kayakers going on a long trip, the camping supplies packed below deck would help offset the loss of stability caused by having the sail rig on deck. Still, the rig is compact and can be carried aboard when you don’t need it and offers the option of letting the wind rack up some high-mileage days while you sit back and enjoy the ride.

Occasional kayak sailors may be drawn to rigs that are more compact, less complex and less expensive than the Wind Seeker, but those who know their vangs from their outhauls will be able to put the Wind Seeker to good use. **SK**

Wind Seeker Sail Rig \$2,700 (Cdn); U.S. price subject to exchange rate

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Sea Kayaker photos

(Top) The Wind Seeker has plenty of sail area to take advantage of light breezes. (Bottom) The sails, spars, outriggers and floats go together as a single self-contained assembly. A pair of straps around the hull and a cord around the cockpit coaming hold it securely to the kayak.