

Freedom 15-4 Review

By: Chuck "Old Sparkey" Littleton



PRODUCT DESCRIPTION:

<u>Design</u>	Freedom Kayak 15-4
<u>Overall Size</u>	15'4 x 28" (4.7 x .71 m)
<u>Cockpit Size</u>	18.5" x 46" (.47 x 1.1 m)
<u>Estimated Hull Weight</u>	45-55 pounds (20 - 25 K)
<u>Capacity</u>	150 - 350 lbs on board. (68 - 159 k)
<u>Intended Use</u>	Calm to moderately windy and/or choppy conditions, camping trips up to 5 days, casual paddling, recreational fishing
<u>Stability</u>	Comfortable for a novice paddler to relax and stroke with ease. Generous flare will help slice through waves and reduce rocking motion.
<u>Cost</u>	Cost to build range from about \$350 for a basic hull to \$1000 for an ultra tough, very lightweight version.
<u>Time to build</u>	55-65 hours
<u>Required builder skill level</u>	Moderate (a careful first-time builder would do ok)

ABOUT THE BUILDER:

Chuck, AKA "Old Sparkey" has been building boats for 9 years since retiring. He's paddled canoes and kayaks for over 50 years. He built his first boat when he was 13 years old. Prior to this boat, he built 10 boats including canoes, pirogues, and kayaks.

He is the owner of www.southernpaddler.com and can be contacted by posting a message in his forum or writing to him directly at LOldsparkey@aol.com.

REVIEW OF BUILDING THE BOAT

This hull was easy to build. I choose to measure and cut all panels myself. The number of panels was small enough and the quality of plywood I wanted was available near by. So I didn't feel the need of a precut kit.



I didn't want to cut holes in that pretty deck. So I made sealed bulkheads and installed hatches in them. The only problems I had when making the boat were self inflicted and not from the plans. She was easy to assemble but I made some bad cuts on a couple of panels and had to redo them. So make sure you measure twice or more before you cut. It is a good thing the folks I get my wood from are just a few minutes drive from my place.



During assembly, I took some measurements of the main hull without any deck.

- *The bow is 13 inches in height
- *The stern is 10 inches in height
- *The center is 9 inches in height



The deck fit the hull like a glove.



While building this one, I was thinking it would make a good boat for a trip into Canada. It is a good combination between a canoe and a kayak. The coaming was easy to stack up and assemble.



Graphite applied for a slippery bottom.





When he was drawing up the plans, Matt asked me what I would be using it for and I told him extended trips, primarily one in the Everglades and 10,000 islands area of the Everglades. So it would have to take my 200 pounds, plus all of my camping gear, food, and a gallon of water per day. The idea is that the house (tent or hammock or both, sleeping pad, sleeping bag) would go in the bow. Next to them a couple gallon jugs of water, then the paddler.

In the aft area, I packed clothing, food, camp stove, and incidentals, along with a couple more of the water jugs near the bulkhead / hatch. Heavy items go near the center, and lightest in the ends. Daily items , (rain coat, camera, snacks, etc.) are in the center cockpit with the paddler. We figured around 100 to 130 pounds of stuff plus my weight.

TESTING FOR THE FIRST TIME:

My first test paddle was on Lake Katherine. The stability of her is better then I expected. Getting into her (in the shallow water) she just sat there for me, and I did not go swimming. Pushed off from the shore and out in the deep water she was nice and solid as I paddled along. This surprised me because I was using one of the seats I made for the pirogues and was sitting 5 inches above the bottom of the boat. I was sure she was going to object to that height but she didn't.



While I was going around the lake, I would take an easy stroke on the kayak paddle and I know I was going a lot faster then a tandem canoe would be with two guys paddling like maniacs. She just drifted along, nice and easy and held a straight line for me, no corrective strokes were needed. Just going along and throwing a bow wake.

Making a turn was even easier - lean to the right, give a stroke on the right side, and make a left hand turn. Just like a kayak, want to go left lean to the right, just the reverse for the right hand turn. Sitting still and starting out, a couple easy strokes and you are under way, it is that easy. Maintaining a cruising speed it just as easy - about one stroke per 1 ½ boat lengths.

With me (200 pounds @ 6-1) in her, the water comes up to the green line next to the graphite at the center of the boat. While paddling the edge of the coaming can be used as a knee brace if a person would want to. I would suggest covering it with some foam if it is going to be used that way. One of those foam pipe insulating tubes, split and put over the wood would work great. It would be removable.

The cockpit is large enough where getting in it is easy: get in the boat then grab the front of the cockpit and lower yourself into the seat.

Getting out is just the reverse or you can place your hands where the sides of the cockpit meet the back of it and give yourself a push up and forward. Either will work but I like grabbing the forward portion of the cockpit , leaning forward and standing up.

The cockpit is roomy and if a paddler wants to he can bring one leg back and rest the knee on the opposite side of the cockpit railing , then switch legs if he wants to. I did this with a large ammo can between my legs and under the forward deck , this is where I had my camera. Just pull the ammo can out when a picture was to be taken or leave it out from under the cover when there is a chance of a lot of pictures. My water jug was also there so when I wanted a drink it was handy and close by.

SHAKE DOWN CRUISE:

After the above test on the Lake, I took the Freedom for a 3 night 4 day trip down the Ocklawaha River here in Florida. The Freedom 15-4 was packed up with all you see here:



She did everything I knew she could do, and did it even better. One easy-paddling, stable, and fun boat for river tripping... even when loaded down with camping gear. If I wanted to stay with one of the guys paddling a canoe and talk with him I would have to back paddle to stay there or I would find myself on down river and away from him without any effort or work on my part. The guy's accused me of not working (paddling) on this trip, just having fun and keeping my paddle dry. I did dip it in the river now and then.

"OH" I need to tell you this. Joe (the outfitter at the Outpost) tried the Freedom when we launched at the start of the trip. He is around boats 24-7 and all he could say when he came back to the landing was "I want one ". The reason is because it is very stable and can be fast if the paddler wants to. When he runs the guided trips on the river the speed & stability would let him keep an eye on all other paddlers.

I did use one new item (for me) on the trip , the Sit Backer Chair. Matt sells these on his site It is comfortable , really comfortable. The thing that appeals to me is the 2 inches of foam in the seat. When my rear end is happy - then I am happy.



CONCLUSION:

This will be a fun boat to use for recreational paddling or covering a long distance if a person wanted to do some tripping down a river. She is a fast boat (if you are in a hurry), easy to paddle (no work just easing along), good stability (I did not go swimming and felt really safe in her) and just fun to paddle.

To lean her over you have to lean your body. She is nice and solid unlike my kayak which if you sneeze you roll from one side or the other. Two different boats for two different types of fun and both will do an exceptional job for what they are made for.

For me, paddling, having fun on the water, and camping - or as they call it today, touring, is a real blast. She would be a good boat for someone who wants to paddle after work. Drop it in a lake and paddle for a while to relax. It will allow you to have some freedom from stress and worries, then load up and go home.