

through darkest hyperbole by canoe

John Winters

So you want to buy a canoe? Where's a good place to start looking? Why the ads, of course! You'll get all the information you need right there in the ad. Or will you? Let's just see what you get by examining an ad from one of the largest canoe manufacturers.

Our sample ad is from the Sawyer Canoe people and shows a gentleman paddling a shiny brown canoe (The colour was chosen by an interior decorator who said it was the "in" colour.) against a backdrop of reeds, blue sky, and fluffy white clouds. The canoe is the "Summersong" designed by Dave Yost. (You know him don't you?) The bottom caption on the picture says, "A Concerto for Blue Water, Sunlight, and Solo Paddle". OH WOW!! This is what we want. Let's read on. "The Summersong. Dave Yost's twenty-ninth hull, and the tenth hull in his 'R' series, which includes the legendary D.Y. Special." You don't know what the "legendary D.Y. Special" is or the "R" series? Why, in that case you shouldn't be reading such an esoteric ad but you may as well keep on, you might learn something.

"This tidy (They swept out the bilges before the picture was taken.) 15'4" canoe has a working waterline beam of 26 inches..." the ad says. Now that is important to know. Can't you just see that little beam "working" away? Just what is a "working beam" anyway? What happens if it quits working? Later we are told that the maximum beam is 28 inches and the molded beam is 22 inches. Do you know what a "molded beam" is? I suspect the writer meant that the canoe has 4 inches of tumblehome but that would not have been flowery enough nor would it have sounded "technical" so we are given "molded beam" as if it were somehow better than plain old everyday tumblehome. On to the hull shape, where the poet in the adman flows as freely as the Salmon River in late summer.

"The hull is an asymmetrical vee-arch-vee of exceptional cleanliness, with generous freeboard flare fore and aft." Now I don't want to be picky, but what does "exceptional cleanliness" mean? Does it mean the canoe doesn't have a keel? If so, why not just say so? As for "freeboard flare", isn't that a bit redundant? Where else would the flare be in a vee-arch-vee hull but in the topsides? (It should have read topsides, as freeboard refers to the amount of hull above the waterline not the portion of hull itself, but let us not be too picky. No one expects canoe builders to know what the correct names of the parts of a hull are.) No need to concern ourselves with what is meant by "generous". What this canoe has is "generous". All others are either too "generous" or stingy. "But no recitation of numbers can convey what this merry little boat is about." (You can say that again.) Why don't we skip the jolly little poetic verbage in the rest of this paragraph and get on to the next wherein the timeless question, "Should I sit or kneel?", is asked. In my church we kneel but this "boat doesn't care"! OH JOY, OH JOY!! You know how some canoes throw up on your duffel when you sit in them. But not this merry little vessel. It is so tolerant as to be positively disgusting.

Moving right along we are told how roamy this boat is. "That Yost 'bubble' gives you a lot of volume above the waterline where you need it and there's lots of flare in the ends too." Did I hear an echo? Do you know what a "bubble" is? Can a boat be "exceptionally clean" and still have "bubbles"? Is Mr. Yost the only person who puts "bubbles" on his canoes? Let's just skip that and find out how stiff (stable) the canoe is. Well, the stability is remarkable on such a slim canoe. Which is all that much more amazing in that the canoe is both slim and has lots of volume. It is narrow while it is wide. Tell me Mr. Yost is no genius. Next he will turn that lovely blue water into a delightful but unpretentious Cabernet Sauvignon.

Opus 29. The Summersong.
By David Yost.



A Concerto for Blue Water, Sunlight, and Solo Paddle.

SAWYER CANOE
Box 439C, Coonville, MI 48750
The Sawyer Canoe People

Sawyer Canoe ad, reprinted from *Canoe*, Sept./Oct. 1983.

So much for the mundane, now let's talk about speed, and this little jewel has it. Why it is almost as fast as the "legendary D.Y. Special" (You remember that don't you?), except for normal touring when she is just as fast which means..... What does it mean? How fast is "fast"? If you were any kind of canoeist you would know. That's the problem with writing ads, the public isn't smart enough to know what you are talking about.

Meanwhile, this canoe really tracks. Why the wind doesn't bother it at all. It tracks like it "was on rails" but it is still easy to turn. So easy, it takes no effort at all, yet that 20 kilometre per hour cross wind won't turn it. Who said Yost wasn't a saint? And look at that little 110 pound woman just stroking along with no effort at all while even that flabbily old 200 pound man is managing just fine too. How can that be? It's because Yost didn't quit designing at the 4 inch waterline like other designers. (Makes you wonder how other canoes manage to get their shape doesn't it?) Where is the 4" waterline? Why it's 4 inches above the bottom which is either above or below the working waterline depending on whether the working waterline is working or not. Confused? Take heart the best is yet to come, for wonder of wonders, Sawyer didn't quit building at the 4 inch waterline either. (Good thing too.) This little work of art has those shiny sides, aesthetically pure decals, aluminium rubrails, aluminium thwarts, and a nifty orange stripe down the side to make the whole thing look like a stock car racer. These are the signs of quality to look for in a canoe.

Finally we are told that we too can be virtuoso canoeists. If we will just purchase a Summersong, we too can paddle off into the sunset to the sound of massed strings and the occasional plop of a meadow muffin. Be still my beating heart.