



Taking a river racer to sea

I started canoeing in 1962, in a wood and canvas kayak. It was built, along with a trailer which attached to my bike, by a John Brown Shipyard carpenter, who was working on the *QE2* – a real craftsman, who could turn his hand to anything. I lived in Alexandria at the time, and cycled to and from Loch Lomond, some five miles away, to go paddling. I kept a record of all my trips, and still have it. My father insisted on lead weights in the boat to improve stability – I still have them, but not in the boat any more! You could have held a dance in it, it was so stable! But I still fell out.

Then I bought myself a fibreglass Wessex Sea Rapier kayak, which I kept for a couple of years, before switching to a river racer, a Mendesta Coursier. This was just like a slalom kayak, although longer and slimmer. I fitted it with an overstern rudder, so that I could paddle on Loch Lomond and the sea, as well as race it in long distance races, as they were called.

Why do I tell you this? It's the rudder on the racer which is the key point. I never fitted one again, until 2011, when I had a bespoke Marlin RR built for me by Nomad kayaks in Wales, fitted with a T-bar and understern rudder, for paddling on lochs, lakes and sea.

Since then, I've had a second one built, also with an understern rudder. So I now have two, and that should 'see me oot', as they say in Scotland. You might be wondering what boat I use for paddling on rivers. Answer, a third Marlin, without a rudder, which I've owned for over 25 years. I rarely hit rocks, so no problem on that front. In fact on

the sea, I do my utmost not to touch the bottom at all, especially on leaving and returning to shore.

The rudder and T-bar were fitted before the hull was attached to the deck. Could you retro-fit a rudder? Yes, Kenny Fraser has done it, but I'm not aware of anyone else adapting a river racer in this way. The trick is to cut hatches in the deck, fore and aft, which can be removed for working on the T-bar or the rudder stock. If you do decide to have a go, make sure you put the rudder a long way from the stern, so it never comes out the water when you are running down a wave. My rudder stock is 80cm from the stern, and that works perfectly – the rudder never comes out the water.

So what did I do for almost 40 years when I wanted to paddle on the sea or lochs? I either used the Marlin without a rudder, or paddled a K1. The old K1 boats were relatively stable. So I was able to paddle from Ardrossan to Brodick on a few occasions, and from Arisaig to Rùm once. I also raced K1s on the sea on many occasions. After all, if paddlers can race down the Liffey, Exe and Tay in a K1, what's so much more difficult about the sea? Nothing, except if you do fall in, you have a long swim. I just fitted a roll bar, which worked fine. I even rolled a K1 at the bottom fall in Grandtully once. You wouldn't see me in a K1 on a river or sea now – those days are long gone. But I've got my bespoke racers which are a dream to paddle in the waves.

That's me arriving at Rùm in a Rapier K1 a long time ago. Probably no more unstable than some racing skis today.

So what's so attractive about a river racer with a fin rudder? There are many:

GMACH'S
Wessex Canoes

IN BEAUTIFUL *tough* FIBREGLASS





HIGH CLASS CRAFT – IDEAL FOR RACING – TOURING – POTTERING
 CONSISTENT WINNERS & RECORD HOLDERS OF THE DEVIZES TO WESTMINSTER RACE

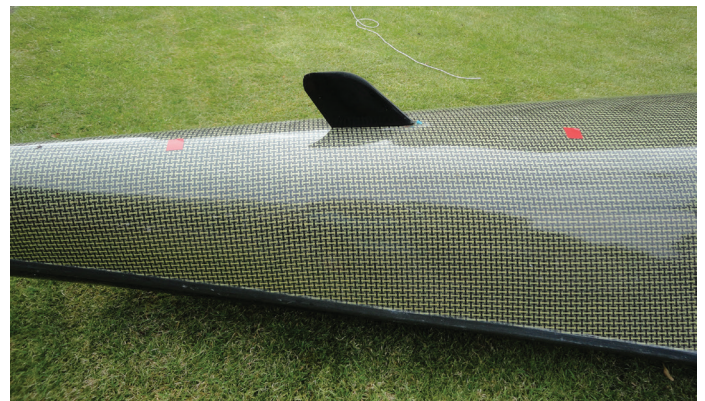
Also supplied to H.M. Forces
 Illustrated: Dry-land portability of the WESSEX SEA RAPIER

FREE LITERATURE FROM:—

J.L. GMACH & CO., LTD
 FORDINGBRIDGE HANTS
 Tel 2422

MODELS FROM £36/15⁴

 21'6" G/F ACCORD E57/10:0	 16'6" WESSEX Mk111 E46/17:0 WESSEX Mk11 E39/17:6
 16'4" SEA RAPIER E37/15:0	 15'9" SPORTS RAPIER E36/15:0



The Marlin with a rudder.