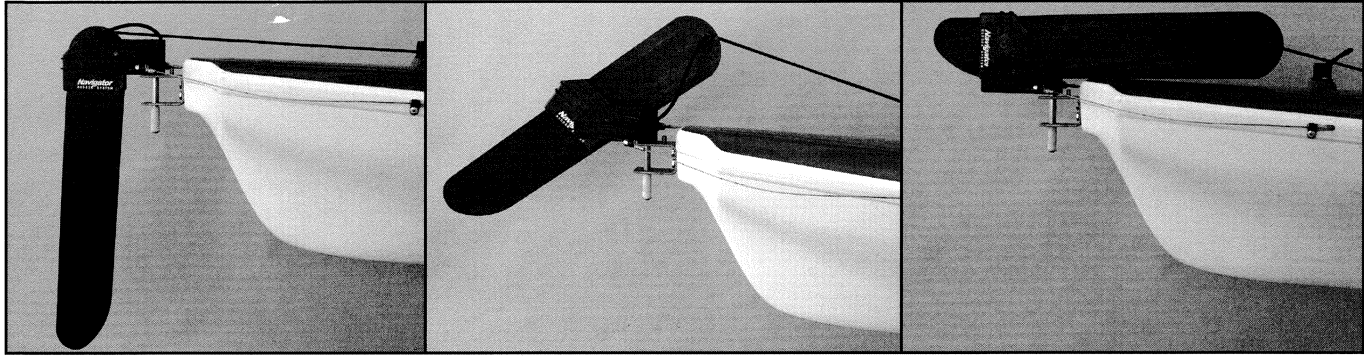


# NAVIGATOR RUDDER SYSTEM

## BY GLOBAL OUTFITTERS



*Instead of pivoting 270° to stow itself on deck, the Navigator rudder slides through a pivoting sleeve.*

**K**ayak rudders are almost always retractable: They'll extend well below the hull when you are in deep water, and when you come ashore, you can get the blade out of the way so it won't get hung up on the bottom.

The most common form of retractable rudder is the over-the-stern type. The blade pivots 270° from its vertical deployed position to a horizontal retracted position on the aft deck. The Navigator Rudder System from Global Outfitters has made a complete departure from that design. It gets from vertical to horizontal the short way, by pivoting only 90°. When you pull on the retracting line, the blade slides within a pivoting sleeve and comes head-first onto the stern.

Global Outfitters' design provides a couple of significant advantages. The rudder is self-centering as it retracts. As long as the retraction line is anchored along the kayak's center line, the rudder will come to rest properly lined up on the aft deck. With an over-the-stern rudder, you have to take your best shot at setting the rudder pedals even when you retract the rudder and hope that you get the rudder blade to land in the V-block on the deck. If you don't, the rudder will come to rest off center, and your rudder pedals will not be even with each other. I'm fairly flexible, but in a dry suit and a PFD, I can turn only so far to see where the rudder is lined up. If I can get the rudder in the V-block, I count myself lucky. More often than not, I have to make a second attempt to stow the rudder properly.

The Navigator rudder not only finds its way home automatically, it also comes aboard gracefully. It almost slithers up on deck. The over-the-stern type often comes down hard. It takes some effort to swing the weight of the blade out of the water, and if the blade goes beyond vertical before you ease off on the deployment line, the blade comes down like a karate chop on the deck.

What I like best about the Navigator rudder is how well it works when it is not needed. It takes its leave from the water with grace and decorum. That's not to say it doesn't perform well when deployed. It functions just as well as other rudders:

It extends far enough below the hull to reach past the turbulent water around the hull, and it kicks up and drops back as the kayak passes over obstructions.

When the rudder is retracted, there are deck fittings available to lock the rudder and, to some degree, the rudder pedals in place. (The stiffness of the rudder pedals is a function of the cables and the type of rudder pedals, not of the rudder.) A bungee cord pulls the rudder blade aft when you release the retraction line. After the bungee cord has done its job, the weight of the outboard end of the blade makes it pivot and drop into the water. The bungee is knotted at one end and held by a plastic crimp that joins it to the deployment line on the other. If the bungee cord needs to be replaced, the crimp can be reused or the bungee cord and the retraction line can be run through the hole in the top of the rudder blade and jury-rigged with stopper knots.

The deployment line ends in a pinch toggle. Running through the same toggle is another shorter line that is secured at both ends on the deck near the cockpit. To raise the rudder, you pinch the toggle and pull it forward. When you release the toggle, it locks on the deck-mounted line. To lower the rudder, you pinch the toggle to let it slide aft.

The Navigator rudder is available in a number of configurations to fit the various standard rudder fixtures. Installing the Navigator is quite straightforward. On the version I set up, the pin was fitted with a flat-head machine screw and a washer for a stop. I'd rather have a round-head machine screw, a lock washer and a flat washer: That combination would give me less concern about coming apart.

I think the Navigator rudder is an interesting and useful step in the ongoing evolution of kayak rudder design. Like a lot of good designs, it is simple and functions without the user having to give it much thought.

The Navigator Rudder System is available from Global Outfitters. The basic rudder unit is priced at \$125.

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