

How to Choose an Open Canoe

We understand only too well how choosing an open canoe can be very daunting given the huge choice available. At Brookbank we supply many canoes to people with different needs, budgets and expectations and hope this article will go some way to helping you make an informed choice.

Here we will try to make the choice for a first time buyer easier. For more specialist advice for coaches, or specialist needs please see our other articles "Canoe Designs Explained" or call us to discuss.

Firstly do not be put off by the huge choice. You can narrow down the options quite easily by first understanding some basic principles of canoeing and secondly examining your own needs.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

Please also see our article on "Canoe designs explained" for more detailed information.

1. Usually, the longer the Canoe the better it will travel in a straight line.

Yes but there are exceptions.

2. Usually, the shorter the canoe the more easily it will turn.

Yes, but the shape of the hull will actually have more bearing on it's ability to turn.

3. Usually the Wider the Canoe the more stable it will be.

Yes, but again certain hull shapes are more stable than others

There are lots of contradictions in canoe design and quite often you will be trading off one quality against another for a compromise.

LOOK AT YOUR OWN NEEDS

How many people do you need your canoe to take?

Do you want purely solo, some solo with occasional tandem use, always 2 of you or maybe even the whole family complete with the dog.

Where is most of your canoeing likely to take place?

Do you live next to a canal, a lake or river or are you planning to travel to more remote areas for longer trips.

What is your budget?

For the most part Canoes fall into 2 price ranges £500 to £700 and £899 to £1100 or so. We will explain the differences shortly.

Now to help narrow the choice down we have a few categories of canoes. There is some cross over between the categories but you should be able to find what type of category you are looking at choosing from.

RECREATIONAL, FAMILY AND SPORTING CANOES.

These canoes tend to be used for activities such as fishing, bird watching, short trips and other general usage. They are not ideal for long trips and expeditions, extended solo use or white water use.

They tend to be wide and stable and are well suited to day use with 1, 2 or 3 people with no intention of covering any great distances. Canoes in this category will get you on the water easily and safely.

They are generally 15 to 16 feet long but some canoes do fall outside these lengths and cover both price ranges.

TOURING CANOES

This category covers more models than any other. Touring canoes can also be very suitable for the above recreational uses. They do however have certain design characteristics that make them more suitable for actually travelling somewhere rather than floating. By this we mean they will be easier to paddle whether it is a half day along a canal or a multi day trip taking in lakes and rivers. They are the true all rounders in the canoe world.

Lengths of canoe in this category vary from 15 to 17 feet long in most cases. They will also be narrower than the recreational canoes making them more efficient and easier to paddle but still stable enough to take a family and/or camping kit, etc.

Again canoes in this category fall into both price ranges.

SOLO CANOES

If you know that you want time on your own on the water then we have a canoe for you. Whether it will be flat water cruising or all round touring there is a design to suit. These canoes will come fitted with 1 seat only and are designed for 1 paddler only.

They can vary in length from 12ft recreational canoes to 17ft fast tourers. Because you will obviously be on your own they are usually only available in the lighter weight materials at the mid to high end price range of £899 upwards with 1 or 2 exceptions.

WHITE WATER CANOES

The thrill and challenge of tackling harder white water in an open canoe is made easier and safer by having a boat designed just for that role. White water canoes are shorter, turn more easily and come fitted out with additional buoyancy, specialist seating, etc. Lately some modern design of canoe almost resemble white water kayaks in their size, shape, etc.