

## Parallel Parking for Paddlers (The Draw Stroke)

Moving your boat sideways can really come in handy when you need to manoeuvre along side a landing stage, riverbank or even to raft up with your mates. It's not a stroke you will use very often but it's a necessary addition to your stroke repertoire. Think of it as a kind of parallel parking for canoes and kayaks. There are various types of stroke you can use to move your kayak or canoe sideways but in this issue we will be focusing on the simplest form, the draw stroke.

### THE SET UP

Sit with the paddle held horizontally across the boat. Your hands should be in the usual position for forward paddling with the knuckles of your control hand lined up with the edge of the blade. Using body rotation, place the paddle in the water on the side of the boat that faces the direction to which you wish to move. Make sure you place the paddle as far out from the boat as is comfortable. Your bottom arm should be almost straight and the bottom blade should be completely submerged. Your top hand should be level with your forehead.

### THE PULL

Draw the paddle towards the boat, level with your hip. As you do this, the boat should start to move sideways. Try to keep the paddle as vertical as possible during this stage as this will prevent water from slipping off the blade face, which could result in a loss of pulling power. Slightly raising the boat edge with your knee will help the water that you are pushing with your blade to pass under your boat easily. Keeping your torso rotated will help you to lift the edge and allow you to look where you are going.

### THE RECOVERY

This is the tricky bit. Once the paddle reaches the side of the boat you will need to start the stroke all over again. If you simply try to push it backwards or lift it straight out of the water you will find that at best it sticks and undoes all your hard work, at worst it will trip you up, resulting in a capsize. The trick is to push your wrists forward and turn the blade through 90 degrees. This will allow you to slice the blade up through the water ready to be placed for the next stroke. When you get really confident, you can try slicing the blade out into position without removing it from the water.

### TROUBLE SHOOTING

If you find that rather than moving sideways the boat starts to turn bow first, your paddle is positioned too far forward. Likewise if the boat starts to turn stern first then the paddle is too far towards the back of the kayak. A position level with your hip is about right but in reality you will find that you will need to make small adjustments to paddle position to keep the boat travelling nice and level.

### LOVELY BUBBLY

As you perform a draw stroke you are actually driving water under your boat. If you are performing the stroke correctly you should get little boils and bubbles coming up on the opposite side of your kayak.

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

When they are learning, most people tend to look at the blade rather than where they are going. This is like driving a car and staring at the steering wheel and not looking at the road, it just doesn't work. Try practising by lining your bow up to 90 degrees with a riverbank or pontoon and try to draw stroke along keeping the bow at 90 degrees. You should find that having a reference point to focus on will really help to get the hang of keeping the boat in line. Remember to keep the leading edge of the boat slightly raised. If you forget and actually lean the boat in that direction you may find yourself taking an early bath. The more you practice the more familiar you will become with the feel of the stroke.