

DVD REVIEW: 'ROUGH WATER HANDLING' ROCK AND SEA PRODUCTIONS

AVAILABLE FROM: ROCKANDSEAPRODUCTIONS.CO.UK

PRICE: £24.99

It is awe inspiring and more than a little intimidating to watch great sea kayakers cruising through rough water. In mountainous seas, they accomplish turns and surf runs most of us can barely attempt in a force four. Many of their skills seem to be utterly instinctive, and I doubted they could be dissected, codified and explained. Yet after watching this DVD, I think I understand a little more about how they do it.

This is not the sort of DVD you settle down to watch from start to finish one evening, with your dinner on your lap and a glass of wine in hand. I made this error, missed some of the chapter headings, and after fifteen minutes found myself thoroughly confused about what was watching. This is an instructional DVD and should be afforded the same attention you'd give a coach if he or she were standing in the corner of your living room.

Ignore the "Play All" option and watch it chapter by chapter so you isolate exactly what you're meant to be learning in each section. I found the more effort I put in, really studied what was on the screen, and picked-up the smallest comments being made, the more I gained. Frankly, there is so much in this DVD you simply cannot absorb it all in one watching, which I suppose adds to its value.

There are four 'presenters', each taking different sections and each of them, a top kayaker. Olly Sanders does most because he produced the DVD, an effort that has taken two years. "Never again!" he told me. Olly takes us through the use of Forward Speed in different parts of moving water; Edging contrasted to Leaning; Support strokes; and Stern Rudder. These may sound basic, but he doesn't labour the points and they are all fundamental to the advanced stuff coming later.

Trys Burke does draw strokes, but not the basic stroke you learnt for three star. She coaches a sequence (bow draw, power, pry and slice), which she develops into what she calls the "circular draw". Trys explains how keeping the blade vertical in a flow, then rotating it, can be used to turn the kayak without losing ground. At key stages, the moving television image is frozen and graphic arrows are superimposed on the screen to emphasise the direction of flow or angle of blade. This works well.

It's particularly effective in the chapters on Breaking In and Breaking Out presented by Nick Cunliffe. The calmer water sequences are filmed looking down vertically from the Menai Suspension Bridge at water flowing through the side arches and

a kayak breaking into and out of the eddy lines behind the pillars. Again, a large graphic arrow is superimposed to indicate the direction of the flow and a clock face superimposed to indicate the effects of different approach angles. However, when the filming moves into rough water, where the sea is confused and the camera can only point at a limited section of sea, it's much harder to understand what is going on. In which is the water flowing? Where's the eddy line. It's even more confusing when two sequences are cut together with the flow travelling in opposite directions. Those big graphic arrows would be extremely useful here. That said, after watching these chapters several times, I was eventually able to work out for myself what was happening; why the kayak was being edged to that side at that point. Perhaps this is a more subtle form of learning than I initially thought?

The big arrows appear again in the chapter called Reading Rough Water along with another excellent graphic, superimposed on aerial shots of tide races at North Stack and Penryn Mawr tidal races in North Wales.

If the BBC is looking for a natural performer on camera they should turn to Aled Williams. While the other presenters sound a bit like they're reading scripts, Aled talks about surfing a sea kayak with the same fluency and enthusiasm with which he actually does it. If anything, there's too much of him talking and not enough pictures of him surfing a spring ebb tide at North Stack. I know Olly filmed some of this from a microlight and was disappointed most of the pictures were too wobbly to use. Aled makes this an entertaining and engaging chapter, and if more of his explanation of how he rides a wave could have been matched up precisely to sequences of him doing what he was talking about at the time, then it could have been un-missable.

There are two 'Extra' chapters both of which feature Nigel Dennis. He talks about kayak and skeg design / selection in one and paddle design/selection in the other. Filmed in the factory, the first of these has a distracting level of background noise, but when it moves outside it becomes an easier listen.

This is the second kayaking DVD from Rock And Sea Productions, and compared to the first, Sea Kayak Safety is a major improvement in terms of both visual content and technical ability. It is an altogether more sophisticated production, an instruction manual with moving pictures. Since it costs almost £25 then it ought to be. Buy from Rock and Sea Productions.