

# Why black?

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'Why black' asked my wife in response to my returning from B&Q clutching a pot of their finest Gloss Black paint. My answer was a quite uncommitted 'Err...because they all are...'. At this point I realised I knew very little about the origins of the kayak I had just built and was about to paint. The kayak in question is a Greenland style 'Shrike'. This is a 'new' set of plans created by the guys at CNC Kayaks and is an interpretation of the kayaks of Disco Bay in West Greenland. [www.cnckayaks.com](http://www.cnckayaks.com)

Recent focus on training and competing in the Devizes to Westminster race had seen me sell my NDK Explorer to fund my K1 kayak, and now that the race was over (unsuccessfully in my case unfortunately – but that's another story) the big sea kayak shaped hole in my fleet was hurting. With no funds to go buy a kayak my mind turned to a plywood build and hence I started searching for suitable plans. The 'Greenland' kayaks have always caught my eye with such sleek lines and finesse, and it soon became apparent that it is also a form very suited to home build plywood construction. Unfortunately most of the plans I found were quite expensive and low cost was a big driver for this project, I happened to mention this to Sprucey who pointed me to the CNC website where I discovered the 'Shrike'. I was delighted – not only was the kayak beautiful, but CNC are making the plans publically available FREE!! In addition to that a comprehensive build book, advice and tips are all on the website. Such rare philanthropy in this day and age should be applauded.

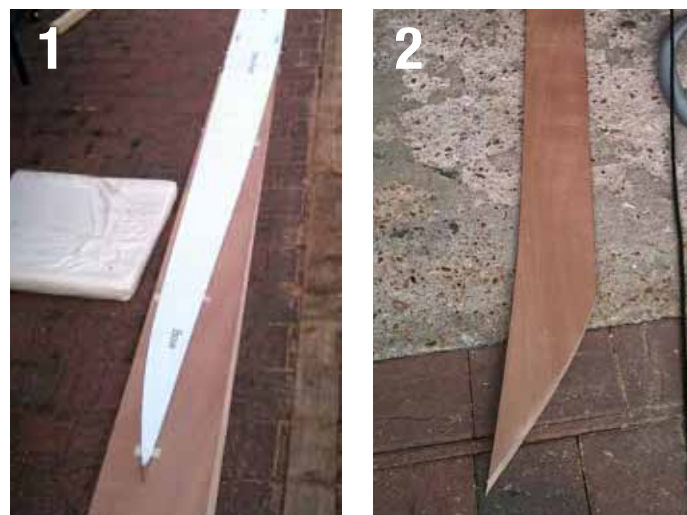
I straight away downloaded and printed off the full size plans (I'm lucky as I work in a design office with a full size plotter) and read the build book front to back to get my head around the construction method. Having previously built a 16ft Prospector open canoe using the 'stitch and glue' method I was already quite familiar with the technique but the CNC boys included some very useful additional tips. To source the wood I initially contacted Robbins Timber in Bristol as they are renowned in the boat building world as supplying top quality marine timber – it comes at a cost however. I decided to give Fyne Boats a chance as they were cheaper and quoted next day delivery for £10!! I was rather dubious of how my expensive and delicate sheets of 3mm marine ply wood arrive with such a low delivery cost – but I couldn't have been more delighted when it arrived in a pre-notified 1 hour delivery window, fully packaged in thick cardboard and handled with great care. Top service.

[www.fyneboatkits.co.uk](http://www.fyneboatkits.co.uk)

For any project, getting started is always the hardest part – it is so easy to sit back and fluff around with preparation, always thinking something else needs to be in place or researched and delaying the actual job. So to avoid this I got stuck straight in – within a couple of hours of the wood arriving I had the plans transferred and begun the cutting the hull panels. For stitch and glue boats this stage is one of the most laborious but critical in detail as the panel profiles directly dictate the hull form. Any variations along the profile can cause quite significant changes in the hull shape. If money were no object I would farm out this process to be laser cut and proceed from there.

All of the stress and work of creating the panels was instantly rewarded by the next stage which for me was the most enjoyable moment in the build – stitching the panels together. In just a few minutes the 2D flat panels that took all that work suddenly came together to create the 3D form of the hull. It's a very inspiring result and really fired me up to push onwards. I used simple thin gardening wire to create the 'stiches' and although I didn't count them up I think there's probably getting on for 200 of them – each one twisted together by hand so at the end of it my fingertips certainly knew they'd been at it!

*One of the best... no, THE best tip from the CNC website was to use something called Mitre Adhesive (basically superglue with an aerosol accelerant) to fix the panels together once the hull form is set in the premade build jig. This saved me a huge amount of time and money over the previous method I had used which was to use little dabs of thickened epoxy. Top tip.*



1. Plans transferred. 2 Cut panel 3. Bow stitching 4. Stitched hull

Strengthening 'Sheer Clamps' were then fitted along the top edge of each side of the hull to provide stiffness and also increased surface to adhere the deck to. At this point I had no intention to create anything other than a painted finish to the hull so I paid no attention to things such as pencil marks and drilling assembly fastener holes – I regretted this later and will show why later. I 'filleted' the panel joints using thickened epoxy and covered them with 50mm glass fibre tape. I always use West Systems epoxy that I source from East Coast Fibreglass; it's not cheap but I've always been so impressed with how good it is that I don't feel I want to investigate a few pound saving of the cheaper epoxy that is available.

[www.ecfibreglasssupplies.co.uk](http://www.ecfibreglasssupplies.co.uk)

To provide the shape of the top deck a 'Masik' is made to fit just in front of the cockpit. (An arched deck beam which functions as a knee brace) This component was made by laminating five strips of plywood over a jig and epoxied. I actually made this right at the start so I could allow it to remain in the jig for a number of days to ensure maximum set in the epoxy and therefore minimum spring-back in the Masik. The CNC plans cater for a couple of different profiles of the deck – as I really dislike a big deck in front of me I chose the lowest of the options – time will tell if I've cut down the cockpit space too small.....?

One fact that is widely accepted in the kayaking world is that holes in the bottom of the boat are a bad thing, so it was with great trepidation that I fired up my jig saw to cut a chuffing great hole in the bottom of the cherished newly created hull to take the skeg box. I took a lot of time over this as I felt it had great potential to completely scrap all the hard work of the recent weeks. However it all went well and after yet more epoxy fillets, I had a full functioning adjustable skeg. The thumb slider was bought from Kari-Tek in Scotland along with the outer tube and thread fitting. The inner operating cable was one I had left over as a spare I bought for the Explorer – it's not the Kari-Tek item, I've previously found that far too flexible and prone to kinking, it was a length of stainless steel rigging wire (7x19 I think) and it does the job brilliantly. I also changed the angle that the wire passes through the skeg box and into the skeg – it didn't seem to have the best path for efficient operation, hopefully it'll be ok once I get it on the water. The last change I made away from the plans on the skeg was to make the cable removable from the skeg in the field. The plans suggest epoxying the cable into the skeg but I didn't feel comfortable with that, so mine is now held in with a screw, as per the Kari-Tek original.

A big advantage of choosing the lowest profile deck is that the top deck plywood panel was very easy to fit, the build manual suggest that curving the panel can sometimes be a tricky job but I had no problems at all. Stepping back once the deck was on was very exciting; the kayak really showed its lines and final shape – very motivating. Lots of time was consumed sanding and shaping the keel and chines to be fair and true, I had to be careful as the 80 grit sandpaper I was using could really plough through the wood if I wasn't paying attention. More glass tape on the keel and deck edges and I felt like I was on the last lap.....

Of course that proved not to be the case. The cockpit combing and rim took a great amount of time and effort to get to a satisfactory result. Even now that it is on, fitted and secure, I'm



5. Inwhale fitting 6 Hull stitched 7. Taped seams 8. Masik jig 9. Mask in place 10 Foredeck fitted 11. Skeg fitted



still not convinced that there isn't a better way of fitting it – my main concern is that I couldn't get a 'fillet' (yes, another one!) onto the outer edge of the top rim joint. With a layer of glass over the top and down into the cockpit I'm sure it'll be strong enough, but I would have loved the full belt and braces.



Once all the construction had been finished I coated the entire outer surface with epoxy, and here began the aesthetic dilemma that I mentioned earlier. The natural wood finish was just stunning. Had I known how good it would look I would have taken care to eliminate all the marks and holes that I had created during the build – but I didn't. Time to put up with it and just move on, something to remember 'for the next one'.



So that's where I'm up to. Currently in the process of painting over the beautiful natural wood hull (move on Paul, move on!) and back to the original question – Why Black? I've since started to read up on the history and culture of the Greenland 'Qajak' as it's known, but I'm none the wiser. I do know that it looks very good though and I'm really looking forward to the launch and first paddle.

I've never paddled a 'Greenland' style kayak so I'm not sure what to expect on the water. My hopes are that I can begin to further develop my kayak control and rolling skills which are all intermediate but with plenty of room to grow. After so many recent months focussing purely on paddling in a straight line as fast as I can, hopefully the Shrike can reintroduce the almost forgotten 'control' element back into my paddling.

I've totally loved building the Shrike and would recommend it to anyone. If anyone does decide to take it on as a project please feel free to get in touch for any advice or help I can offer. Happy paddling and see you on the water.

12. Skeg box 13. decked kayak 14. Keelstrip. 15. Cockpit rim 16. Epoxied hull 17. Cockpit rim fitted 18 Black and finished



## the slinky Shrike finished