

# Towing

- Three alternative methods tested

By James Whitworth & Steve Smith



The boys at Manukau Canoe & Kayak decided to test three methods of towing:

- the bungee direct tow system
- the short tow, direct tow,
- the 'dog leash' for the assisted raft tow

We decided to test the gear over a period of time; in calm and "challenging" conditions. What we wanted to establish was: is it safe to use, was it easy to use, and establish the pro's and con's.

First up was the bungee direct tow system. The equipment consisted of a length of 6 mm bungee, about 150 mm long. Tie it in an overhand knot and attach it with a cow hitch to your deck lines on either side of your kayak.

The bungee tow is a fast effective tow used when you have to get a kayak out of a dodgy situation, or you

need to retrieve and return a kayak that the paddler has fallen out of. The technique is simply hooking your bungee onto your buddy's front carry handle, and paddling off. The buddy should hold the rear of the

rescuer's kayak during the entire rescue. (See picture below right)

**Was it safe?** We wanted to know if you as the victim could roll up if rolled over. We both could as our rolling skills were good, but we found that either of us capsizing while in the tow was very unlikely, as we were effectively in a rafted set up. The victim is grasping the rear of the rescue kayak and adds a lot of stability to the set up.

**Was it easy to use?** We both found that it was very easy to use, and if cold and



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wet with numb fingers (or not all there in my case) it was still no great effort.

**Pro's:** Cheap to set up & easy to stow.

Can be used on either side of the kayak.

Easy to use.

**Con's:** No way to 'quick release' the set up.

Cannot be used on some kayak models, as their bow carry handles are not suitable for this system.

The second set up was the short direct tow system. This consisted of around 1.5 m of 4-5 mm cordage and 2 stainless steel clips. This can be stowed over your deck lines forward of your cockpit where it can be used quickly if needed.



Left: The bungee tow on the deck lines, Above: The Short tow stowed, Right: The dog leash, Below: The bungee direct tow - note Steve is able to hold onto the rear of James' kayak.

The short tow, like the bungee tow is fast, an effective method to use in a situation where you have to get a fellow paddler out of trouble, or you need to retrieve and return a kayak. The technique is simply un-hooking either side of your stowed tow (depending on what side of the towed kayak you come up to), and hook on to the towed kayak, to the rear of their bow toggle, on their side deck line. The victim can hold onto the rear of the rescuer's kayak for stability, and allow the two boats to run parallel.

**Was it safe?** We tried rolling the buddy and found that there was sufficient room to carry out the roll without any problems. The chances of the assisted capsizing, in our opinion, were slim. Like the bungee tow, the two kayakers are very stable in a rafted type position.



**Was it easy to use?** We found that this tow was very easy to use in any conditions.

**Pro's:** Cheap to set up & easy to stow.

Can be used on either side of the kayak.

Easy to use.

**Con's:** Not ideal if you want to tow for long distance.

The last gadget was to 'dog leash' tow for a rafted situation. This tow can be used when your buddy cannot paddle, perhaps hypothermic, sea sick or injured in some way. The patient would need to be assisted, with an 'engine' or 'work horse' doing the paddling. So how does it work? Attach the dog leash to your buddy's bow toggle and thread the



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running end through the 'support' person's bow deck line, then back to the support person's cockpit where they have the ability to release the tow if required.

The 'engine's' tow line is connected to the 'dog leash' at a point between the two rafted kayaks, and forms a 'V'. The support person can vary the length of the 'dog leash' slightly to make sure the two kayaks that are being towed run parallel to each other, and not nose-in on each other.

The great thing about this tow is the ability for either the support person or the 'engine' to release the tow. This gives an extra level of safety to the set up as well.

**Was it safe?** With the support person and the 'engine' being able to discontinue the tow at any time, and the fact that the 'engine's' tow line is not actually connected to either the patient's or support persons



kayak, only to the bridle formed by the 'dog leash'. We believe it's a safer option than a direct tow.

**Was it easy to use?** The hardest thing about this was running the 'dog leash' through your own kayak's front deck line. Because we don't have arms two or three metres long, we would have to get another kayaker to do this for us.

**Pro's:** Cheap to set up & easy to stow.

Can be used on either side of the kayak

The set up can be released by either the 'engine' or the support person.

*Pictured clockwise from left: The 'dog leash' stowed on deck, 'Dog leash' tow in action, It's really easy to give support if required.*



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**Con's:** Support person has to hold the 'dog leash' in one hand and perhaps the patient in the other. As the support person, you could secure the running end of the 'dog leash' to your deck line beside your cockpit if you needed two arms to support the patient.

The rescuer / engine is towing two kayakers, so this may only be suitable for short distance tows.

Looking outside the square and trying out methods and equipment that we've seen other paddlers using, either here in New Zealand, or off-shore adds to our 'toolbox' of paddling skills. Try not to be limited in the way we believe things should be done and explore other options. We believe as long as they are safe and practical, give it a go. Ask your mates at your club what methods they use. Remember; many brains are better than one.

Other towing systems include the short & long tows from a cowtail on your bouyancy aid, tow pouches and deck rim tow systems. These will be looked at next issue.



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