

Swimming lessons

Last Updated Sunday, 06 May 2007

Fall of 2005 at the Kickapoo, I met an ex-pat Kiwi named Phillip paddling a very cool kayak he'd brought over with him from New Zealand. Since he soundly kicked my tail in the tri, I spent some time picking his brains and decided that I'd have to get me one of those "New Zealand Multisport boats" for the canoe tris around here.

So last spring, I wound up with a very fast, very tippy boat called a Ruahine F1. Did I mention it was tippy? Last spring, I kept track of swim/no swim for about the first 20 times out. It started out boat 5, Marsh 0, but eventually, I got so I could keep it rightside up most of the time. I had a couple of pretty decent finishes, and found I could keep up with just about anybody in a pro canoe in that boat. Only major problem was that I couldn't get in and out of it without tipping over - cockpit was very, very small. Several people suggested a rotozip tool would solve the problem, but instead I found another person who was interested in a very fast, very fun 21 foot boat. Bye, bye F1. Hello Lancer - ICF K-1.

Now if I thought the F1 was tippy, the Lancer took it to new heights! On the 10 scale, with a Nelo Vanquish (Olympic sprint kayak) being a 1, and a CD Stratus (love that boat) being about an 8, the Lancer is a 3 (F1 was a 4). Still, 20 hours and a few swims, and I felt pretty comfortable - as long as the waves were in front or behind. I hate beam seas.

Anyway, spring rolled around this year, my canoe partner from the past couple of years has gone back to college, and I didn't have a stable kayak in the garage. So what did I do? Well, the first couple of times out, I grabbed a Stratus. But running over to the shop to borrow a boat seemed a long way to go just to take a quick lap around the lake. So on with the neoprene pants, fleece top, and out in the Lancer I went. And you know, I stayed dry until last week. Surf was up, and I was feeling cocky, and that beach break just slapped me down!

Since then, I've been swimming a couple of other times - including one memorable slog thru the muck at the south end of Lake Owasso (thanks for helping me get out Pam). And a swim on the St Croix out playing on surf skis in the wind last week. And this afternoon on Rice Creek. And I'm sure there will be more.

The point of it is - even this early, with proper clothing, the water isn't bad. A PFD and a little fleece or lycra blend makes it pretty easy to get back safely (and probably dry before you get in).

Marsh