

# Choosing a Canoe for Fishing



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by Jerry Bush

Canoes make great fishing boats. You can approach fish quietly in a canoe, and you can reach shallow water that is inaccessible to other boats—even jet boats. Canoes are also inexpensive and readily available.

Let this information help you choose a canoe for fishing.

## Stability

Stability becomes your primary concern, if you intend to fish from your canoe. Generally speaking, the widest craft in proportion to its length offers the greatest stability.

Pay close attention, however, to that phrase “in proportion to its length.” Longer canoes of the same width generally gain from increased streamlining, and slip through the water with greater ease. Simply put, a 19-inch wide canoe measuring 16-foot long will actually move through the water easier than a comparably designed 19-inch wide 14-foot long canoe.

## Hull shape

Be alert! Hulls may appear identical when viewed from above, but they are often shaped differently at the waterline. Therefore, when purchasing a paddle craft, try to evaluate its width at the waterline. Stand back and closely examine the boat from the front and rear. Now imagine its length cut in half and the cross-section shape at its widest point.

There are three important shapes. Typical bargain hulls are flat-bottomed. They suffer strong resistance to the water. Though very stable when level, flat-bottomed craft are actually tippy when leaned to one side or the other, because much of the hull opposite the lean-to side is lifted from the water's

surface. If you plan to use your craft in farm ponds and small reservoirs, or while floating with the current on Keystone State rivers and streams, this design may be a viable choice.

A “shallow-arch” shape is actually a better choice, especially for crossing large open-water expanses. Boats with this shape move through the water freely, while providing a predictable response when you lean to one side. Because the entire hull is rounded, a comparable amount of hull material maintains contact with the water when the craft is tilted.

Arched hulls also provide this same stability when struck from the side by waves. Consider boats with this hull design if you intend to spend any significant time exploring Pennsylvania's larger waterways, such as the Allegheny Reservoir, Pymatuning Lake, Raystown Lake or Lake Wallenpaupack.

Other shapes include the “shallow V” and “round bottom.” The shallow V provides characteristics like the “shallow-arch” boats, but they ride a little deeper and present slightly more resistance. This design may not suit your needs if you plan to navigate shallow streams regularly, such as the Clarion River.

## Keel line

The next factor is the keel line. View the bottom of a canoe from the side, as if you were viewing the boat “broad-side.” Look at the boat bottom at the bow and stern. Does it rise slightly at the bow and stern, or does it appear more as a flat, straight line? A “rockered” hull is one on which the bow and stern are lifted slightly—only about an inch or two. A straight-line canoe will track straighter and slip through the water easier, but it will not turn quite as readily as a rockered vessel.

Boats with a keel, mainly aluminum canoes, track better and are more stable. But a keeled boat doesn't turn as easily as a canoe without a keel, and it can hang up readily on rocks and cause upsets in rapids.

## Hull material

Consider hull materials. Aluminum hulls with a keel track better and are more stable than canoes without keels made of other materials. Aluminum canoes are less expensive than other boats, and aluminum is easy to maintain. However, aluminum won't glide over rocks and other obstructions.

Aluminum hulls are no match for paddling long distances on deep lakes. After struggling and exerting myself for a couple of days during a trip on the Allegheny Reservoir, an

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acquaintance permitted me to paddle his canoe, which was manufactured with a Kevlar hull. I knew his canoe was lighter, but I was amazed at the difference in performance. My friend's canoe seemed to fly through the water, requiring half as many strokes to move an equal distance as my aluminum one.

## Skills

You also need to evaluate your skills. Many paddlers are gifted with great coordination, possessing the ability to balance a boat that sacrifices stability for speed. Other persons are blessed with strength and stamina, thus preferring a watercraft that gives up some paddling ease in favor of gained stability. Of course, there are those rare individuals who we all envy—athletes possessing both incredible strength and marvelous coordination.

Stronger individuals enjoy a larger choice of canoes that are going to be used for portaging from lake to lake. Boat weight becomes a more important factor to those of us who acknowledge we are not considered for the title "Mr. Universe."

Visit specialty paddling shops for information on how to improve your paddling skills and choose specific canoeing equipment. In addition, the American Canoe Association's web site, [www.acanet.org](http://www.acanet.org), has loads of information on canoeing.

## Paddles

Prospective consumers are usually shocked to discover that several paddle designs can affect how well a canoe moves through the water. Paddles, like boats, are manufactured from various materials and designs. Choose a paddle that satisfies your primary requirements, and do not make the mistake of skimping on this purchase.

## PFDs

Choosing a PFD (personal flotation device, or life jacket) is also basic to a consumer's satisfaction with a paddling experience. I once purchased a PFD manufactured with a collar that caused a rash on my neck if I were on the water for more than a few hours. If you plan to fish mostly from your canoe, you might want a PFD equipped with several pockets to hold fishing gear.

Visit the Commission's web site, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us), click on "Boating," and then "Safety & Education" for information on PFDs. □



photo - Dan Martin

## Comparison of Hull Shapes

### Flat-bottomed.

Tippy when leaned to one side or the other, because much of the hull opposite the lean-to side is lifted from the water's surface. For calm farm ponds and small reservoirs, or while floating with the current on calm Keystone State rivers and streams.



### Shallow arch.

For crossing large, open-water expanses. Boats with this shape move through the water freely, while providing a predictable response when you lean to one side. Arched hulls also provide this same stability when struck from the side by waves.



### Shallow V.

Characteristics like the shallow-arch boats, but they ride a little deeper and present slightly more resistance. Not for shallow streams.



### Round bottom.

Favors stability instead of speed. Should be considered primarily by more experienced persons intending to use their crafts for racing.

