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Kayaking is a fun alternative to high gas prices, low water levels

Tom Stienstra

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With the big lakes low, gas prices high and cash tight, an alternative for boating getaways and lake-based vacations is to find a cheaper, simpler way to have your fun.

Two new low-cost boats solve that: a rigid inflatable kayak that you can carry in a pack and a tandem hard-shell kayak with a pedal drive.

A new inflatable called the Airis, made by Walker Bay, is built in four sizes ranging from 8 to 12 feet and comes with an air pump and a backpack. The craft weighs 15 to 30 pounds, depending on size, so you can backpack into remote lakes and then have a boat to fish, explore and swim from.

In addition, these new boats are made from a material that allows you to pump four times the air pressure (seven pounds) of typical inflatable kayaks (under two pounds). This one handles and feels more like a hard-shell boat, that is, fast and maneuverable. Yet it has the ease of transport and storage that you only get with an inflatable. They are priced at about \$800 to \$1,200. Info at *walkerbay.com*.

Another new boat that is a seller even in the boat industry's crash this summer is the Hobie tandem kayak. The hot model is the pedal kayak with two seats that's designed for fishing, both saltwater and freshwater. You steer it with a hand tiller. The boat can accommodate rod holders, depth finders and downriggers, and has a space for a cooler and a dry storage area. The seats are adjustable and removable.

The key is what Hobie calls a "Mirage Drive pedaling system." Since it's pedal-driven, your hands are free. But instead of turning a paddlewheel, like the old pedal boats, you propel a pair of blades that flap back and forth kind of like sideways-mounted duck feet. The top saltwater kayak anglers in the world are switching to this boat and have caught marlin, yellowtail and sturgeon from them, what they describe as "the ultimate sleigh ride."

The top of the line Hobie kayaks sell for roughly \$1,600 to \$2,500. Info at *hobie.com*.

The advantages of an inflatable or car-top boat is that it's easy to store and transport, and can be hand-launched at the state's 190 lakes that do not have boat ramps. These lakes provide great value for those with SUVs and car-top boats such as kayaks and canoes or inflatables.

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