

# Slash & Burn

## The Black Arts of Fin Set Up and Outfitting

In the second of the series CKUK's resident surf kayak expert Chris Harvey explains how fin choice can enhance your surfing and how to outfit your surf boat for maximum performance in the waves.

### Fin Set Up

You only have to Google the word fins to get an idea of just how important they are to your set up. Without them, you'll literally be skipping across the water with little, or no, control. However, with such a massive range to choose from, it can be daunting deciding what to buy and difficult finding the 'perfect set up' for you. The main factors affecting performance are size, shape and position, so to help you get started I'll cover the basics, but much of it comes down to your own personal preference...



High Performance Surf Kayaking:  
The Black Arts of Fin Set Up and Outfitting



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**Tri-Fin (Thrusters)**

Most high performance surf kayaks are set up for a tri-fin configuration, which suits a more radical and explosive style of surfing. The side fins are mainly effective during turns, helping the rail to grip the wave, whilst the centre fin provides forward drive.

**Size**

Smaller fins will make the kayak looser, enabling easier turning, but they’re also more likely to lose grip and slide out! Whereas longer fins will lock the boat onto the wave creating more forward speed. So, as with most fin set ups, it is a case of finding a balance that suits you and your style of

kayak surfing. For the most part you’ll be looking at fins around three to four inches, although in bigger waves you may need to increase the size and some people prefer to run a larger centre and smaller side fins, which can be a good balance between drive and looseness.

**Positioning**

Most surf kayaks have an adjustable fin set up, which allows you to reposition your fins forwards and backwards, this has a similar effect on performance as fin size. With your fins positioned forwards it will give the kayak a looser feel, which on smaller waves can help give you that extra manoeuvrability.

It’s a good idea when you buy a surf specific boat to position the fins in the centre position, get a feel for how it handles and then try adjusting. When you find a set up you like, make a mark on the fin box, so that you don’t forget the exact positioning. My personal preference on my Reflex is about one inch from the front of the box.

**Shape**

There is probably as much variety in fin shape as there is in kayak design, which makes finding the right fins pretty difficult. You will be limited to a degree by the type of fin box that you have fitted in your surf kayak, i.e. a small box (most common in surf kayaks), future, etc. However there will still be quite a range of shapes to choose from, each claiming to do the best job. It’s a bit of minefield but there are some basics to bear in mind when you’re choosing. Longer fins will have more chance of staying in contact with the water, maintaining your control, but generally, the longer you go, the more surface area the fin has and the more locked in the feel.

**Traditional:** These will perform well with a thruster set up and they are my fins of choice for most situations.

**Cutaway:** With a greater surface area towards the tip of the fin, the cutaway means that you have more fin in the water more of the time. This is particularly effective on larger waves or when it is a little choppy and the kayak starts to bounce.

To begin with it is well worth trying to surf without fins to allow you to practice using just the rails and you’ll also be able to really feel the effect that the fins have on the kayak once you fit them. It’s important to realise that

there is no definitive fin set up; it really is case of experimenting and finding a setup that suits you.

**Outfitting**

With a dent in your bank account and a shiny new surfboat you’re undoubtedly going to be rearing to get out into the surf and find out what all the fuss is about. Before rushing to the beach however, it’s well worth taking the time to outfit your boat carefully, so that you can get the most out of it. Most surf kayaks come with very little outfitting so it’s best to get some foam and glue and spend an evening getting comfy in your boat while sat in front of the TV!

As with any kayak, it is important to get the footrest position right and make sure that you’re nice and tight at the hips. You may also have to actually glue in the seat, which can be a bit daunting. Don’t worry too much though, as long as you’re comfortable, because you can always move it again once you’ve got a feel for the performance. It is also worth considering the seat height, as the higher you are the more leverage you have when initiating moves. However, remember the higher your seat, the more difficult it is to roll. I’d suggest starting lower and then trying it a centimetre or two higher at a time until you find a height that works for you. **CKUK**

**INFO** **Forthcoming Events**  
 For surf kayak competition details please visit the BCU Surf website: [www.bcusurf.org.uk](http://www.bcusurf.org.uk)  
 For more info on Chris check out [www.chrisharveyonline.net](http://www.chrisharveyonline.net)

 **Take a surf to the features section at [www.canoekayak.co.uk](http://www.canoekayak.co.uk) for more surf kayaking articles or to contact Chris check out the Team page**



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