

Understanding the USCA Kayak Classifications

4/30/2025

During the United States Canoe Association Nationals, kayaks compete in three classes (*Sea Kayak*, *Touring* and *Unlimited*) with one class racing each day. It is important to note that these names are NOT descriptive in nature, but merely the name of the class as it appears on the championship trophy. Generally speaking, beginner race boats like ICF K1 trainers, beginner surfskis and fast sea kayaks fit into the *Sea Kayak* class. Intermediate skill race boats like intermediate surf skis, longer fast sea kayaks and more stable ICF K1 boats compete in the *Touring* Class. Boats like elite surfskis and ICF K1s that are too long and narrow to fit in *Touring* Class compete in the *Unlimited* class.

As defined by the 2025 Competition Rules (<https://uscanoe.org/competition-rules/>), the technical specifications are as follows:

- *Sea Kayak*: any single kayak, sit-on-top or surf ski with a maximum overall length of 18' and a 4" waterline beam of at least 8.5% of length.
- *Touring*: Any single kayak, sit-on-top, or surf ski with a maximum overall length of 20' and a 4" waterline beam of at least 17".
- *Unlimited*: any single kayak, sit-on-top, or surf ski.
- Any boat that meets the SK spec will also meet the Touring and Unlimited Specs. Any boat that meets the Touring Spec will also meet the Unlimited Spec.
- Regardless of class, all kayaks must have sufficient flotation to support a 25-pound weight in a boat full of water. Over-stern flip up rudders are not included in length for measurement purposes.

An UNOFFICIAL listing of how various boats have measured at previous USCA Nationals Events follows. While this list is useful, it is important to note that many of the models listed have undergone design changes over the years, so the fact that one individual boat fits in a given class is no guarantee that all boats of the same model will do so. All boats are officially measured at USCA National Events, so pre-measuring your boat prior to arrival is prudent.

Sea Kayak

Epic – V7, V8, 18X, 18X Sport

Stellar – S18R, S18, S18S**, S18SX**, Osprey, Apex-T

Simon River Sports – Laser

Nelo – 520, 540, Viper 48***

Guillemot Kayaks – Yukon (G1)

Touring

Epic – V8 Pro, V9, V10 Sport, K1 Sport

Stellar – Falcon, SR

Think – Zen, Six

West Side Boat Shop – EFT, EFT Sleek

Guillemot Kayaks - Mystery

Unlimited

Epic – V10, V10L, V11, V12, V14

Stellar – SEI, SES, SEL, SEA, Eagle

Think – Uno, Uno Max

West Side Boat Shop – Thunderbolt, Thunderbolt-X, Thunderbolt T-rex, Dark Star, Marauder, and X-par Missile.

**Some early 1st generation S18S boats are too narrow to pass spec for Sea Kayak. The majority of 2nd generation boats easily pass, but one new S18SX SM in multisport layup did not. If you plan to paddle any S18S in SK class, make sure that you measure it in advance.

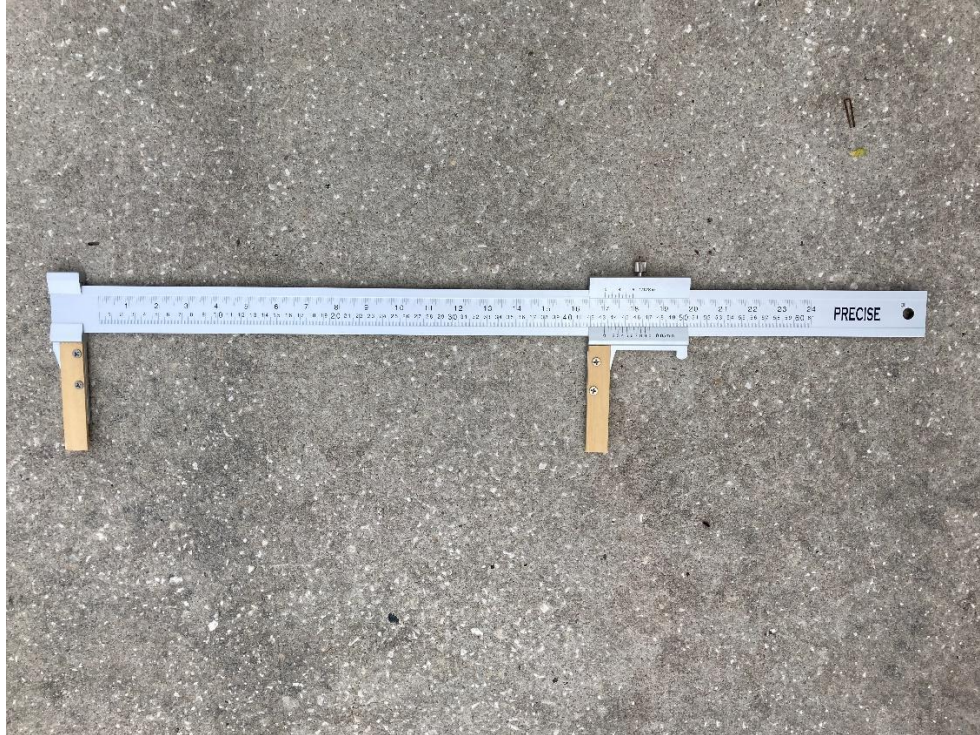
***This boat is very, very close to minimum width for SK class, make sure that you measure it in advance.

Measuring Your Boat

Length – It is strongly recommended that you measure the length of your boat vice relying on the manufacturer's published specifications. This is easily accomplished by laying a long tape measure on the ground and extending to the desired length. Next, place your boat beside the tape measure, align one end and take the measurement at the other end. Beware of parallax error. As you can see from the pictures, my SEI(2G) measures about $\frac{3}{4}$ " longer than the 20' listed by Stellar.



Waterline Beam (4") – The best tool to use to ensure that your kayak meets the waterline beam requirement is a caliper with 4" jaws. The jaws on my caliper were only 3" deep so I used some scrap wood to extend the jaws to 4". As an alternative, a homemade jig can easily be made using a yard stick and two pieces of wood.



Set the caliper to the minimum 4" waterline beam specified for the boat class you are measuring for. With the kayak upside down, place the caliper against the hull jaws down and move it forward/backward over the widest part of the kayak. If the jaws do not contact both sides of the hull, then the boat is too narrow. The first picture shows measurement of a SEI(2G) for Touring Class. The caliper is set at 17" and the left jaw does not touch the hull at its widest location. Second picture is measurement of a Yukon for SK Class. The Yukon is 18' long so the minimum 4" waterline beam requirement is 18.36". The jaws contact the hull on both sides, so the boat can compete in SK Class.

