



River Technique *by*



Steve Fisher

I was recently in Norway preparing for the Voss down-river race on the Brandseth River. Being the local 'bread and butter' run, the boys all know it super well and took great pleasure in leading me down it with no scouting and no instructions. I was having a tough time (but a lot of fun) trying to keep up with Matze Brustmann, and that got me thinking...

Staying on course at speed

Why

is it that whenever you're following someone down a run that they know and you don't, they keep pulling away from you no matter how hard you try? Well, mostly because you're paddling defensively and because of that you seem to spin out or get sideways a lot. Here are a few tips for keeping your boat pointed downstream when you need to go fast – like when you're racing.

Let's assume that we're talking about fairly long or linked rapids:

- You're following your buddy but he's getting away. Firstly, before you get started make sure that you ask if there's anything in particular that you'll need to avoid at all costs. Other than those one or two things, the fact that he's leading you down something blind probably means that following his exact line doesn't matter that much.
- With that said, once you get going, stay focused more on what you're doing than on what he's doing. Glance only occasionally at where he is and focus on your immediate future more than the long term. (The same applies to racing). Don't let him be more of a distraction than a lead.
- Get yourself into an attacking position. Have a forward posture and act like you know where you're going even if you don't. The "leaned back with neck stretched" position does nothing for you – ever!
- Stick to long positive strokes that keep you moving forward. No back strokes and if you must control spinning out in an eddy use a stern rudder way back with as little resistance as possible. Don't hit the brakes.
- If you must use a bow rudder, turn it into a forward stroke once you're done. Try to only use sweeps for turning – and remember in the last issue (KS#22)... Look where you want to go, don't twist with your sweep (point your body where you want to go) and point your paddle where you want to go.
- Another thing that I find helps is to concentrate on pushing on your footrest with your foot on the same side that you're doing a sweep. This helps to transfer the twist from your sweep directly to the boat.
- All of this speed will naturally help you to stay in the current and off the eddy lines but if you do see that you're going to be pushed towards an eddy by a wave, shift over towards the eddy before that happens and just charge down close to and parallel to the eddy line rather than hitting it at an angle against your will.

Sounds like a lot to think about but it isn't really. Most of all it's just an attitude of looking like you've got somewhere you need to be... Try these tricks and you'll have a good time following buddies down new runs, and you'll place better in the next race you do.



Steve Fisher is sponsored by Riot Kayaks, Helly Hansen, Seven 2 Paddles, Stohlquist, Snapdragon Designs, and Red Bull.

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