

Malahide Swords Canoe Club

Our Kayaks: A Guide for Parents & Guardians

Understanding the boats your children paddle — and the skills they will learn

Introduction

At Malahide Swords Canoe Club (MSCC) we are lucky to have a varied fleet of kayaks for our junior members to learn and develop in. Each type of boat serves a different purpose and introduces children to different paddling skills — from their very first strokes on the Broadmeadows Estuary to competing at events around Ireland.

This guide explains the three main types of boat we use, what makes each one special, and what your child will learn from paddling them. You do not need any prior knowledge of kayaking to make sense of it — that is exactly what this guide is for!

Did you know?

All of our sessions are run by qualified coaches with Canoeing Ireland accreditation. Safety is our number one priority, and every session is carefully planned around tides, weather, and each child's ability level.

Our Three Boat Types at a Glance

Boat Type	GP (General Purpose)	Slalom	K Boats (K1 / K2)
Fleet size at MSCC	12 boats	13 boats	41 boats (various)
Best for	Beginners & all-round skill building	Boat control, technique & competition	Speed, fitness & racing
Stability	High (great for beginners)	Medium (responsive & nimble)	Low–Medium (narrow & fast)
Typical level	Intro / Level 1	Level 1 onwards	Level 2+

1. GP Kayaks — General Purpose (12 boats)

What is a GP kayak?

GP stands for General Purpose, and that is exactly what these boats are — versatile, robust, and welcoming to paddlers of all abilities. GP kayaks are typically wider and more stable than other kayak types, making them the ideal starting point for children new to the sport. At

MSCC we have 12 GP kayaks available, and they are the workhorses of our Saturday morning sessions on Broadmeadows Estuary.

These are sit-inside kayaks made from durable plastic. They are forgiving if a paddler wobbles or makes a mistake, which makes them perfect for building confidence on the water.

What does a GP kayak look like?

- Wider and more rounded hull than other kayaks — gives plenty of stability
- Generally shorter in length than racing boats
- Made from tough plastic — they can take a knock on a rock or jetty!
- Open cockpit that is easy to get in and out of
- No rudder — the paddler uses paddle strokes alone to steer

Who paddles GP kayaks at MSCC?

GP kayaks are used primarily during our Level 1 sessions (11am) and are the first boat most new members will sit in. They are also used during winter pool sessions where children learn capsize drills and water confidence in a controlled environment.

What skills will my child learn in a GP kayak?

- ✓ Forward paddling — the basic paddling stroke to move in a straight line
- ✓ Steering strokes — using sweep strokes and draw strokes to turn and manoeuvre
- ✓ Capsize and wet exit — learning to safely exit the boat if it tips over (very important!)
- ✓ Self-rescue and assisted rescue — getting back into the boat after a capsize
- ✓ Water confidence — becoming comfortable and calm around and in the water
- ✓ Reading the water — understanding tides, currents and conditions in the estuary

Strengths and things to know

✓ Strengths	⚠ Things to know
Very stable — great for first-time paddlers	Not designed for speed or racing
Forgiving if technique is imperfect	Less responsive than slalom or K boats
Durable plastic construction	Heavier to carry — parents may be asked to help transport
Good for building core water confidence	
Suitable for pool sessions and capsize practice	

Parent tip

Don't be surprised if your child gets wet! Capsize drills are a planned and important part of learning. All children wear buoyancy aids and are supervised closely. Getting comfortable with capsizing is one of

the most important safety skills a young paddler can develop.

2. Slalom Kayaks (13 boats)

What is a slalom kayak?

Slalom kayaks are shorter, more manoeuvrable boats designed for precise boat control and navigation. They take their name from the slalom discipline of kayaking — a competitive sport where paddlers race through a course of hanging gates on a river, similar in concept to ski slalom. Slalom has been an Olympic sport since 1992.

At MSCC, slalom kayaks are a fantastic tool for developing technique. Even when practised on flat or sheltered water like the estuary, the skills learned in a slalom boat — balance, edge control, turning strokes — transfer to every other type of kayaking. We have 13 slalom boats available in a range of sizes to suit different ages and body sizes. You may see them stored in fabric covers beside our containers.

What does a slalom kayak look like?

- Shorter and more rounded than a GP or K boat — typically 2.5 to 3.5 metres long
- A fully decked cockpit with a spray deck (a tight-fitting cover to keep water out)
- A rocker hull (curved underside) which helps the boat spin and turn quickly
- Available in multiple sizes — junior sizes are available for our younger members
- Usually made from plastic (club boats) or composite materials (competition boats)

Who paddles slalom kayaks at MSCC?

Slalom kayaks are introduced once children have developed some basic paddling confidence — typically at Level 1 and beyond. They are used for estuary sessions, gate practice, and at slalom events. MSCC participates in local and national slalom events which are run in a safe environment with experienced paddlers on the water.

Slalom events are particularly good for children as they are run on static or slow-moving water, which makes them easier to manage safely. They also give children a taste of friendly competition and a sense of achievement when they complete a course.

What skills will my child learn in a slalom kayak?

- ✓ Edge control — learning to tilt the kayak deliberately to aid turning
- ✓ Turning strokes — bow rudder, stern rudder, and sweep strokes for quick changes of direction
- ✓ The kayak roll — the skill of righting an upside-down kayak without getting out (a key safety skill)
- ✓ Reading water — understanding currents, eddies and how water moves
- ✓ Gate navigation — steering precisely through hanging poles in sequence
- ✓ Balance and body movement — using the whole body to control the boat

Strengths and things to know

✓ Strengths	⚠ Things to know
Excellent for developing boat handling and technique	More tippy than a GP — takes some getting used to
Skills transfer to all other kayak types	Spray deck required (club will provide) — takes practice to fit
Slalom events are fun and accessible for juniors	Learning the roll takes time and pool practice — patience needed!
Multiple sizes available for different ages	
Exciting introduction to the competitive side of the sport	

Did you know?

Canoe slalom is an Olympic sport! Great Britain and France are among the strongest nations in the world. Practising gate skills even on flat estuary water is the same foundation that competitive slalom paddlers around the world build on.

3. K Boats — Sprint & Racing Kayaks (41 boats)

What is a K boat?

The "K" stands for Kayak, and K boats are the long, sleek racing kayaks you may have seen at the Olympics or in canal racing events around Ireland. The number after the K tells you how many paddlers are in the boat: K1 is a single-paddler kayak, K2 is for two paddlers side by side, K3 for three, and K4 for four.

At MSCC we have 41 K boats of various sizes and types — by far our largest fleet. These include junior-sized K1 boats (smaller and more stable than adult racing kayaks) as well as K2 boats which are great for beginners as the shared effort makes them easier to balance and control. Some of our K boats are stored at the estuary pontoon, and others are at containers used for canal and coastal racing events.

What does a K boat look like?

- Long and narrow — a K1 can be up to 5.2 metres long and feels very fast on the water
- Completely flat hull with almost no rocker — designed to go in a straight line at speed
- A rudder controlled by the paddler's feet — essential for steering such a narrow boat
- Sit-inside cockpit, with the paddler seated close to the water
- Junior K1 models are shorter, wider and more stable than adult racing boats
- K2 boats are longer still and have two cockpits

Who paddles K boats at MSCC?

K boats are introduced as children gain confidence and progress through the paddling levels. Junior K1 boats are accessible from Level 1–2 upwards, with the paddler building balance and straight-line paddling. K2 boats are excellent for beginners and less experienced paddlers as they offer more stability and allow a child to paddle alongside a more experienced partner.

Our K boat sessions on the estuary are mainly in the January–March winter period. K boats are also the main boat used for racing events on the canal — these are called 'sprint' or 'marathon' races and are a great way for children to experience friendly competition and team paddling in K2 and K4 boats.

What skills will my child learn in a K boat?

- ✓ Power paddling — developing an efficient, powerful forward stroke for speed
- ✓ Straight-line tracking — keeping a long narrow boat on course using the rudder and stroke technique
- ✓ Rudder use — controlling the steering via foot pedals
- ✓ Team paddling (K2/K4) — timing strokes with a partner, communication and coordination
- ✓ Race skills — starting technique, pacing, and race tactics
- ✓ Fitness and strength — K boat paddling is a great upper body and core workout

Strengths and things to know

✓ Strengths	⚠ Things to know
Fast, exciting boats — children love the speed	K1 boats can be tippy at first — balance takes practice
K2 boats are accessible and great for beginners	Not suitable for rough or choppy water
Ideal for racing events and canal sessions	Rudder control takes getting used to
Junior-sized boats available at MSCC	Best used on flat estuary or canal water
Strong fitness and teamwork benefits	
Opens up the world of sprint and marathon racing in Ireland	

Races & Events

MSCC participates in canal sprint races and some coastal events around Ireland. K boats are used for most of these events. Canal races are particularly safe and family-friendly — parents are encouraged to walk the bank and cheer! Throw bags are always on hand for safety.

Canoeing Ireland Skill Levels

Canoeing Ireland runs a national skills award framework which MSCC uses to track your child's progress. Here is a brief overview of the main levels:

Level	What it means
Intro Skills	First time on the water. Basic paddling in calm, supervised conditions. Typically in GP kayaks on the estuary.
Level 1	Can paddle safely on flat or sheltered water. Basic strokes, capsize awareness, and group paddling with a coach.
Level 2	Confident paddler on flat and sheltered water. Can perform capsize drill and assisted rescue. Begins to paddle more independently. Often transitions to slalom boats and K boats.
Level 3	Competent on moving water. Can perform a roll (self-rescue). More advanced strokes and route planning. This level underpins coaching and instructor qualifications.

A Note from MSCC

Every child at MSCC starts their kayaking journey in the same place — sitting in a GP kayak on Broadmeadows Estuary with a coach beside them. From there, the progression through different boats is a natural part of building skills, confidence, and a love of the water.

We are a volunteer-run club and we rely on the enthusiasm and support of parents and guardians to keep things running smoothly. If you ever have questions about which boat your child is using, what skills they are working on, or how to get more involved yourself, please don't hesitate to speak to one of our coaches or committee members.

We hope to see you on the water!

— *The MSCC Committee*