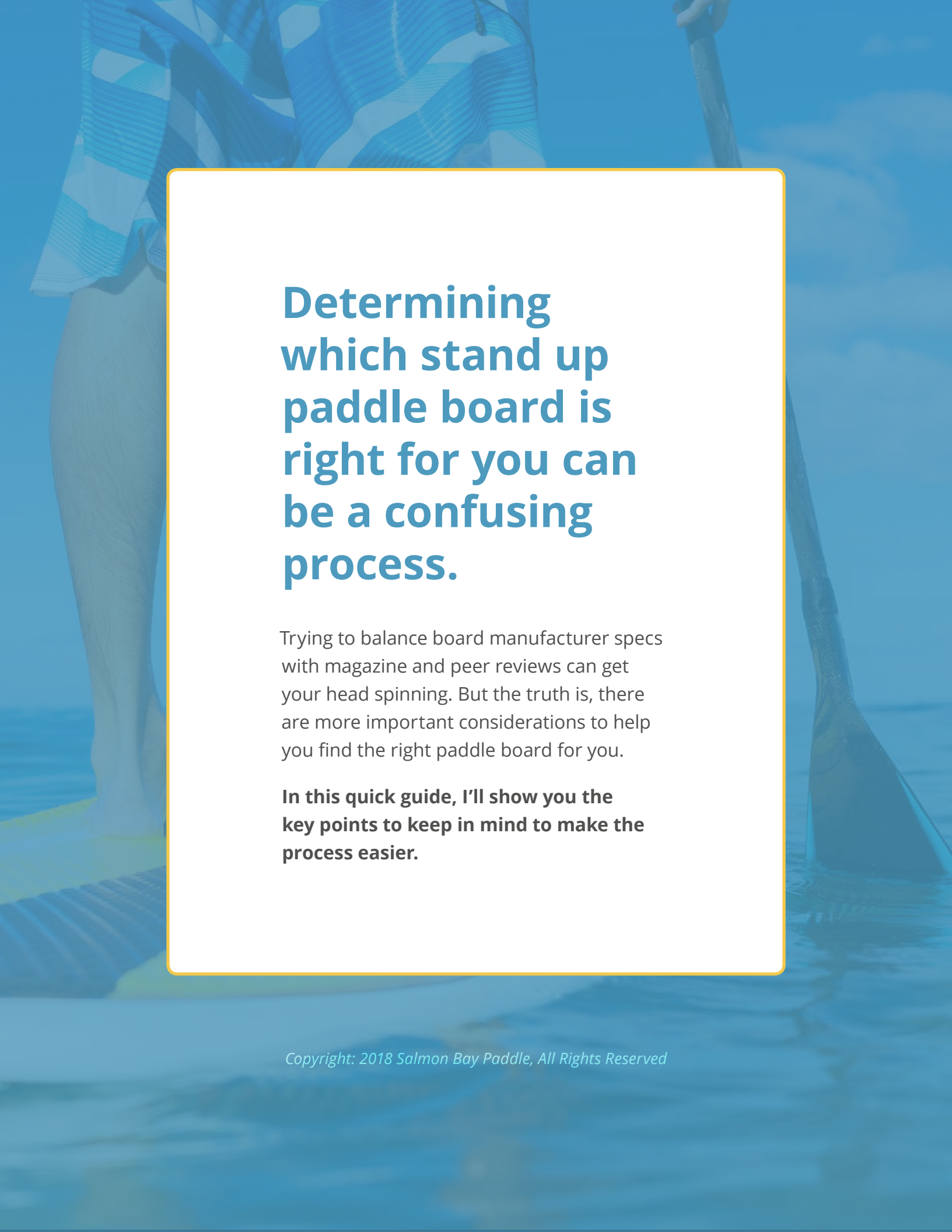


How to Choose the Right Paddle Board for You

Rob Casey



A person is standing on a yellow and blue paddleboard on a body of water. The person is wearing a blue and white patterned shirt and blue shorts. They are holding a black paddle. The background is a clear blue sky and water.

Determining which stand up paddle board is right for you can be a confusing process.

Trying to balance board manufacturer specs with magazine and peer reviews can get your head spinning. But the truth is, there are more important considerations to help you find the right paddle board for you.

In this quick guide, I'll show you the key points to keep in mind to make the process easier.

First, Determine What Type of Paddling You Want to Do

The right paddle board makes a big difference in your enjoyment and success for a particular type of paddling.

CASUAL PADDLING

If you're seeking a stable board and are not planning on paddling long distances you'll want a "surf style" or "all-a-rounder" board. These range from 10' to 12' long and resemble a large surfboard. Good starting widths for stability include 32" to 34" wide.

RACING OR TOURING

Race and touring boards tend to be longer than a surf style board, since longer is generally faster. Lengths are typically 12'-6", 14' or longer (Unlimited lengths). These boards have a displacement style nose, which means the nose (or front) is pointed. This makes it easier to slice through the water.

Some touring boards have four leash plugs on the front deck to allow for carrying gear. Beginners should start with widths 27" to 30" wide. Experienced paddlers are now getting 22-23" wide boards that are fast but also unstable in rough water.

DOWNWINDING

Downwind boards are similar to race and touring boards in terms of

length, width and also being displacement nosed. The difference is that the nose tends to rise up higher, allowing for easier surfing of wind swell to avoid pearling (or digging the nose into a wave).

Some downwind boards have foot controlled rudders to allow for easier paddling in wind swell. Unlimited boards (longer than 14') catch waves with less effort and get longer glides.

YOGA

Yoga boards have to be very stable. They typically look like surf style boards and some even have flat or square noses.

Tie-down options such as leash plugs are common to hold gear and allow for attachment of anchors and lines. Many prefer a smooth deck pad to be more comfortable for your knees. These boards tend to go as wide as 38" wide for maximum stability.

FISHING SUP

Like yoga boards, fishing boards are generally quite stable to allow for comfortable standing while fishing. A few brands make fishing specific boards. Look for options that allow for tie-downs to secure your gear and/or mounts to attach poles, cameras and other accessories.

Board lengths tend to short as paddlers may not venture far. If you do need to paddle further, consider a faster touring board.

SURFING SUP

Surfing stand up paddle boards vary in length depending on the skill

level of surfer you are or the type of surfing you want to do. Beginner surfers prefer more stability until they get more comfortable in waves and rough water. This means choosing a surf style or all-a-rounder board with widths to 33" wide and lengths to 12'.

Experienced paddlers and surfers who want a short board surfing experience, meaning quick turns, tricks and fancy moves should look at a shorter surfing sup in the 6'-9' lengths that come with a thruster fin box (3 fins).

RIVER SUP

River paddlers use a variety of boards depending on the type of rivers they want to paddle on. A class 1 river (which has very light current, no rapids and is often deep) is ideal for fiberglass and inflatable all-arounders, race or touring boards.

Class 2+ rivers are shallow, fast and with exposed rocks. Short stable river specific fiberglass, plastic or inflatable boards are best in those conditions. Fins are very short and made from flexible rubber or plastic. Inflatables are most common. Common river board lengths for whitewater range to 10' long with widths from 33" and 38".

Now that you know what kind of paddling you want to do, and what kind of paddle board you'd need, it's time to start shopping.

To help you get the most out of your stand up paddle board buying experience, I'm giving you my... **5 Essential Tips for Buying a SUP**

1. ALWAYS TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Boards always look good online but unless you've tried it, have lifted and carried it and paddled it, you won't know how it feels. Many return boards as they aren't not stable, are too heavy to lift on the car or came in the wrong color.

2. BEWARE "BAD BALANCE" EXPERIENCES WITH RENTAL COMPANIES – IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S THEM.

"I have bad balance" is a common myth we hear from newbies. It's common for rental operations to give smaller boards to beginners who then struggle to stand and blame it on themselves. Truth is, there's a board for everyone. Tall or larger folks need wider boards than someone who is smaller. Someone who feels concerned about balance should get a wide board to start with.

3. WHAT ABOUT INFLATABLES?

Inflatables are super light to carry, allow for anyone to lift on their car and can be deflated for easier storage. Their stability is the same as a fiberglass board in regards to your height and weight. Stiffness for some of the better brands are only a tad less stiff than a fiberglass board. Some inflatables come in 14' race length and are as fast as carbon racing boards. And most major brand inflatables rarely leak or get punctured.

4. STILL NOT SURE WHAT YOU'LL NEED?

If you're unsure of the type of paddling you're interested in, or what type of board to get, consider an all-a-rounder to start with. And then choose between fiberglass or inflatable. Think about whether you'd be able to carry and lift a 35lb board on your car by yourself. If that sounds daunting, get an inflatable.

5. TAKE A LESSON TO GET A TRUE FEEL FOR SUP

Take a lesson to get the basics down so you can explore more, paddle on your own and be more confident on the water. Bad first experiences getting into SUP are often not because of the sport itself or just not being "built for it," but just a lack of some basic skills, the right board, and a little confidence – all of which a good SUP class can solve for you.

Ready to get started?

Get the basics down with us with your safety and your enjoyment as a top priority. Or start exploring different types of a water with skill and confidence.

Small groups, personal attention, and a focus on safety and confidence on the water are core to Salmon Bay Paddle classes and trips.



FIND OUT WHY SO MANY PEOPLE LOVE STAND UP PADDLING ONCE THEY HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE ON THE WATER.

Check out our classes and trips at salmonbaypaddle.com

"Okay, I admit it. I am a demanding student, wary of wannabe 'instructors' who buy a few boards and think they can ride the wave of trendiness of SUP, providing mediocre at best lessons. That was not what I found with Rob. Rob has committed not only to becoming an expert instructor but also to promoting excellence in SUP instruction. He was accommodating, knowledgeable and able to take anyone from novice to advanced to a new level of ability. We had a great time and I feel really good about my skills..."

—HEIDI H.

