

TONGA from ZBS – Kick the Waves

By Emmanuel Beauchard (Edited by Chris Norbury)

I got my first Tonga in 2011 with a TOP AC construction. I picked the color black, that made it easy to repair with carbon fibre and to keep clean. The weight of the boat was right at 11kg. I kept this boat for more than 3 full seasons and trained in the boat, it stayed in perfect condition. When I first got a Tonga I was paddling a Corvette, so the Tonga appeared to be the perfect compromise between stability and speed. In shallow water the boat is perfect to paddle because as long as the speed is high enough the bow stays out to make the control possible (Emmanuel weighs less than 160lbs). In nearly every white water conditions the boat acts and response perfectly and is quite forgiving. If you are able to use the water configuration (like wave peaks) the boat will instantly turn, perhaps even too much sometimes. The good volume on the boat allows it to stay over the water and not smash into waves like the corvette could do. But in very big conditions the boat appears to be hard to steer, especially in boiling water. Combining this difficultly steering in heavy water with high speed (during a sprint for example) it makes it a hard boat to sprint well in.

The second boat I got from ZBS in 2013 was not as good. This Tonga was very stiff and light weight (9,3kg fully equipped, the new limit is 10kg in international races). But appeared to be extremely fragile. If you touched a rock you just knew you were going to have to repair it. However, even if today the construction of the ZBS boats are not as good as it was in the past, the design is still one of the best mix between a quick unstable boat like a Corvette and a stable one like the Essox. From my point of view the Tonga would be a perfect choice for the 2015 World championships, either the Senior Championships in Vienna (which is much lower flow than last year in Valtellina) or the Junior U23 World Championships on the Nantahala.