Escape - Review

By TubeDude

I started float tube fishing about 1958. I was one of the early pioneers of the sport. I didn't know it at the time but other anglers around the country were also experimenting with paddling around in an inner tube as a cheap means of pursuing fish from afloat.

My first experiences were the result of seeing fish below me while riding waves in the surf off the beaches in southern California. I started carrying out a spinning rod, some hooks and bait…and even caught a few fish. I ruined a spinning reel with the salt and sand of wave tumbled beachings. But I was hooked.

I began by sitting in a car tire inner tube…kicking with bare feet and sculling with my hands. I progressed to using swim fins, for better propulsion. And I later acquired a larger truck tire inner tube. At some point I devised a canvas sling down inside the tube that allowed me to sit more or less upright…and to paddle more efficiently with fins.

Unlike most other float tubing pioneers, I started in salt water and later moved on to fresh water. The first few years I made all of my own covers and seats. In the 1970s a few commercially made models started showing up. I quickly recognized the quality and engineering. I began buying and trying as many as I could find and afford. I did not occur to me that I was laying the ground (water) work for a lifetime of "floatation fishing".

In the years since I have really gotten serious about tubing and tooning. And I have had the good fortune to have traveled widely around the country… both on business and vacations…and to have fished a wide range of waters. Much of that fishing has been from a tube or toon. My angling resume includes most species of fish…from both fresh and salt water…in the northern hemisphere…mostly from one of my succession of floatation craft.

Those first five paragraphs are not meant to brag. I merely want to help establish that I have a fair bit of experience with tubes and toons…and fishing from them. I have a pretty good idea of what suits me best…and what works for the majority of fellow anglers.

I have known Dave Scadden since the 1970s…when he was an associate of the Anglers' Inn chain of retail fishing tackle outlets in Salt Lake. Business called me away from Utah for a few years but I followed Dave's beginning of his own business, in the growing float tube and pontoon industry.

Coincidentally, my float tube of choice by the time I returned to Utah in 2004 was an Outcast Super Fat Cat…a craft designed by Dave for another manufacturer. Dave has always been at the forefront of floatation craft design and construction.

As a moderator for a float tube fishing website, I was obliged to research available tubes and toons to keep up with the rapid changes in our sport. Dave Scadden's NFO craft always seemed to get rave reviews from owners and users. I looked them over whenever I saw them on the water…and at his booths at various sports shows.

For a long time, the craft looked better to me (and my budget) than the price. As country boys might say "Dave is mighty proud of those things." But he has always believed in high quality over mass offshore production merely to offer a lower price.

After retiring from the work-a-day life, I had more time and enough "net spendable" to justify an upgrade in my fishing craft. Many of the NFO craft were larger than I wanted…requiring the use of oars and/or a motor. That did not easily allow for my hands-free finesse style of fishing. In answer to a perceived need, Dave brought out the H3 Freestyle float tubes in the mid-2000s. I got a pair…one for me and one for my wife.

This photo includes the two H3 Freestyle tubes my wife and I used for a couple of years.

But when the Outlaw Renegade came out, I made the leap. "Big Blue" replaced my Fat Cat…at least for a while.

My Renegade…with all the PVC stuff. It includes 5 rod holders, tool rack, sonar and electric motor.

I loved the Renegade. It was a frameless and bladderless pontoon…smaller than some one-man pontoons but with big floatation capacity, big pockets, etc. However, I have never been fond of using the oars on a pontoon…especially if I have it rigged for an electric motor. As mentioned, I prefer "hands-free" fishing. I use fin power for short moves and for maintaining position while casting. The electric works well for longer moves and for getting back to the vehicle at the end of a long fishing day…especially if that requires bucking against a stiff breeze blowing from the wrong direction.

The Renegade was just large enough that it required a noticeably greater amount of physical exertion throughout a full day of fishing than I was used to in my smaller float tubes. I had to either quit sooner or kick less to keep from getting leg cramps before the end of the trip. And if any kind of breeze came up the higher profile caught the wind more and I had to work even harder.

Another angler made me an offer for my tricked out Renegade that I couldn't refuse and I went back to fishing from a Super Fat Cat. But I missed the motor, so I installed one.

One of the first float tubes upon which I installed an electric trolling motor. This Fat Cat required the addition of some extra floatation (boat bumpers) behind the seat (under the tube) to support the added weight of motor and battery.

Adding a motor and heavy battery to a float tube requires extra floatation in the motor end…and a customized motor mount. I made it work and it helped make me more mobile. But I lusted after a slightly larger craft…although not as big as the Renegade.

When Dave Scadden brought out the first models of the Escape, I studied the specs. My first evaluation was that it offered a bit more size and a lot more floatation than I had with the Fat Cats. But it appeared that there would not be sufficient space behind the seat to carry my large deep cycle battery. So I procrastinated on looking more closely.

The Escape had been on the market for a while before I finally got an opportunity to see one up close and personal. I was immediately impressed. It was close in size to the H3 Freestyle I had previously owned, but slightly larger. And the large air chambers visibly provided much more floatation. The final kicker was that there was clearly enough space behind the seat to squeeze in my large battery…for an electric motor.

I truly believed I could fish comfortably and efficiently in an Escape. So I bought one. After tricking it out with my customary rod holders, utility (tool) rack and sonar I put it in the water. I was pleasantly surprised to find that even loaded down in front with the 40# thrust electric motor and the big 65# deep cycle battery the fully equipped craft floated virtually level upon the water…with no need for the addition of extra floatation.

This is my Escape, with all the PVC pimping. It is becoming an efficient fishing machine.

The detachable pockets are a mixed blessing. They are larger than the pockets on any other float tube on the market. But they require strapping down and adjusting on every trip. Of course you can leave your craft fully set up between trips…or set it up the night before a trip so it is ready to rumble when you reach the water. In the separate writeup on modification I will offer suggestions for streamlining the process.

The oars are another item that has both positive and negative facets. The positive side is that the Escape is about the only "pontube" on the market…of similar size…that comes with oars as a standard feature. For anglers relying on fin power alone, the oars provide an alternate form of propulsion. This can be great for moving longer distances, for light trolling or for fighting your way back in against a wind.

On the flip side, the standard oars are short but you can get longer upgrades if you plan to do a lot of rowing. If you are a large person, as I am, it is difficult to use the oars without interference from your anatomy. This is especially true if you try to use the foot bar for leverage while rowing. It is far too close to the seat for anyone with long legs. But it is possible and increases speed if you kick your fins simultaneously with the rowing. That takes coordination and concentration.

The last item I will mention in this discussion will be the seat. On the Escape the seat is inflatable…with its own separate air chamber…independent of the two side air chambers. This allows for adjusting the air pressure to attain a more comfortable ride. However, my first experiences showed that any reduction in air pressure…to anything less than a firm hard seat…was enough to allow me to slide forward and potentially out the front of the craft. It is possible to tinker with the various adjustable straps and clips on the seat to position it for maximum efficiency and comfort. But, again, a large person finds it difficult to get the seat back far enough to eliminate the forward slide problem…and still have room for a battery for the electric motor…or other cargo.

Having past experience with modifying seats to provide more comfort and back support, I have experimented with several options to make the Escape seat work better for my needs. I will discuss some of those in my pictorial on modifications.

The Escape is frameless and without air bladders. It deflates and compresses into a fairly small bundle for transport or storage.

This picture shows my Escape fully set up and almost ready for the water. I deflate it only enough to slip into the cargo section of an SUV. I have also carried it on my roof rack…fully inflated and ready to launch. But you can also detach everything and roll it up into a very compact bundle if space is at a premium.