

## Loading a Kayak - the Solotec roof rack loader



Imagine this – it's a beautiful day, not too much wind, flat sea, tide is full – perfect for a few hours kayaking or paddle boarding. You need to get down to the water soon before the tide changes – but first, you've got to get your kayak (or paddle board) on the roof rack again. Last time you nearly wrecked a shoulder joint – lifting that thing onto the car is just a hassle – maybe you'll do something else instead – what's on TV this afternoon?

But hang on – what about the money you've spent on all that gear – kayak, buoyancy aid, paddle, maybe some kayak fishing gear, spray deck or your paddle board etc., etc. – thousands of dollars just sitting in the shed!

You're not alone! Fiona McNabb, a long time Tairua resident and local pharmacist, now living in Raglan, had the same problem – in fact she not only hurt herself trying to load her sea kayak on the roof of her car, she dropped the kayak, smashed a window guard and scratched the paint work – time to get rid of the kayak or find a better way to load it.

An internet search confirmed that many of the available options wouldn't fit her car, or her roof rack, or her budget, so she set to designing a solution of her own.



Initially her friend the local panel beater made a steel tube and lawn mower wheel, number 8 wire version which slotted into her old bike rack, set up on the tow ball. But every time she used it she envisioned a light, easy to use version which wouldn't need to rely on having a tow ball to work.

That was 3 years ago and since then she has been working on the product she now calls the Solotec roof rack loader. Fiona joined forces with Auckland based industrial design company Procreate to develop her initial sketches and concept. Lots of tweaks and refinements later and she now has a final prototype which works brilliantly.



See [www.facebook.com/Solotec.co.nz](https://www.facebook.com/Solotec.co.nz) for movies of it being used.

Fiona has had some great feedback on the product, she had a presentation spot to demonstrate it at the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers annual forum in Anakiwa recently. Several key innovators in kayaking have also given her advice over the development phase including

Stephen Tapp from Viking Kayaks in Matamata and Ian Ferguson from Fergs Kayaks in Auckland.

The next step is a big one though. The cost of manufacturing tools to get the Solotec loader to production is huge and once again Fiona has come up with a unique solution to the problem.

An advertisement last year caught her eye, and so she attended the inaugural Kickstarter workshop in Auckland last November. Kickstarter is a global community set up in the last few years to support people with creative projects wanting to raise funds to get their projects into production. The platform allows creators of projects to post their story on the website and offer a list of pledges that people can choose in order to back the campaign. Backers generally can choose from pledges as low as \$10 and upwards to various levels. Fiona has set up a range of pledges for her campaign from \$10 – you receive a big “Thank-you” Raglan postcard from her, to \$35 – you receive a copy of Kiwi film maker Clive Neeson’s DVD Last Paradise featuring Kiwi innovators and extreme sports pioneers including AJ Hackett and the late Alan Byrne. \$45 and you receive a custom designed Solotec T-shirt and \$200 gets you a forward order for the Solotec loader - \$250 gets you a loader from the very first production run, and \$1000 gets you a night’s accommodation in Raglan at Solscape eco-retreat, a kayak tour around some of Fiona’s favourite spots in Raglan harbour plus a loader from the first production run, a T-shirt, and the DVD!

Pledging is safe and protected – the pledge amount isn’t charged to your credit card unless the campaign successfully reaches it’s target. If the campaign reaches or betters the target, once the campaign comes to a close, the money is charged and transferred to the successful project creator. If the target isn’t reached by the time the campaign closes, no charges are made and the pledges aren’t delivered.

So there’s real incentive for backers to get behind the project and spread the links to all their friends and contacts – they want to get their reward,so encouraging others support the project helps get to the target successfully. Campaigns run for a fixed time frame somewhere up to a maximum of 60 days – the most common being about 30 days. So time is critical, and getting momentum behind a campaign is essential.

Fiona launched her Kickstarter campaign on Tuesday night the 8 April and her campaign finishes at 4.00 p.m. on Sunday, 11 May – 29 days to go and the clock is ticking. You can support the campaign by going to [www.Kickstarter.com](http://www.Kickstarter.com) – click on the “Search projects” link and search for Solotec, then you can view the project she has put together – watch the 2 minute video clip, read about how this all came about, who’s in the design and support team and choose a pledge.

Kickstarter has created a unique and alternative economic option for small or even large business ventures to show case their new products and raise funds to get them into production – even musician Neil Young has run a campaign to launch his new Pono Music device.

Fiona has a strong environmental focus, so right from the out-set, she was determined to only use materials which could ultimately be recycled, including the packaging and any printed material. Fiona has also been determined to produce the Solotec loader in NZ, to build a business where she can create jobs for Kiwis and keep it local. The various parts will be made

in Christchurch and Auckland then assembled and finally distributed from the Waikato – ideally from her home base in Raglan.

Well worth checking out and helping to support – see Fiona’s Facebook page for further details - [www.Facebook.com/Solotec.co.nz](https://www.facebook.com/Solotec.co.nz)