



Spirits were high on Saturday October 28th as participants and landcrew for the 41st Hawkesbury Canoe Classic made their way to Windsor. Warm and sunny, with the river looking almost glassy, weather conditions at least seemed almost perfect for the 111km race into the night. Yet with final preparations being made, the niggling question for many was the tides. How would we fare in a mental battle with the incoming water? And just how muddy could Wiseman's get?

The Team that makes The Night

It's no secret that numbers were down for the 41st Classic, both in the race overall and those paddling for Lane Cove. Yet it was a night of high spirits, beautiful conditions and lots of encouragement from other paddlers...if you could find them on that massive river of course!

Lane Cove fielded a strong team of 37 paddlers in 29 boats, with 17 crafts paddling competitive classes, 11 paddling Brooklyn or Bust and Elke van Ewyk the Wiseman's Dash. Three records were broken, and six boats completed the race

within an hour of the record time. Yet it was without a doubt the strength in numbers both on and off the water that secured the Commonwealth Bank Cup for the second year in a row!



Landcrew and paddlers at the Lane Cove marquee



David Young clearing the bridge in the 4:45pm start

Lane Cove landcrew were out in force at all the checkpoints and even selected photo spots in-between. 2017 might be remembered as the year of the grand prix-style boat fixes, with landcrew securing footplates and replacing rudders to ensure that paddlers could get back on the water.

2017 was also the year that one double became a triple, and another became a single. Phil Newman and Bob Kenderes paddled a double canoe in the BoB2 category, with Emma Ridgeway along for the ride in the middle. Meanwhile Kenji Ogawa and Justin Paine set off together, but when Justin withdrew at Sackville Kenji decided to press on and complete the Classic alone...still in the double kayak!

LCRK Results

Name	#	Current Record	Official Race Cat/Class	Distance	Time	Htime	Position	Beat Record?	Within 1hr of Record?
Brendan Trewartha	255	08:51:10	Mens Veteran 40+ - ORS1	111.0	8:38:47	09:09:54	1 of 5	1	1
Tony Hystek /Alanna Ewin	246	10:08:05	Mixed Veteran 50+ - UN2	111.0	8:50:42	08:45:23	1 of 1	1	1
Adrian Clayton	238	13:07:24	Mens Veteran 70+ - UN1	111.0	11:54:12	-	1 of 1	1	1
Paul Gill	260	08:51:10	Mens Veteran 40+ - ORS1	111.0	9:09:39	09:42:37	2 of 5	0	1
Alexander Brown	236	09:37:50	Mens Open - Lrec	111.0	9:57:39	10:09:36	3 of 4	0	1
Naomi Johnson /Sophie Johnson	245	09:47:50	Ladies Open - K2	111.0	10:41:30	10:22:15	1 of 1	0	1
David Young	253	08:45:50	Mens Veteran 50+ - ORS1	111.0	9:48:01	10:05:39	2 of 7	0	0
Seth Berrange	237	08:27:48	Mens Open - ORS1	111.0	9:53:54	10:53:17	3 of 5	0	0
Suzie Rhydderch	252	10:16:24	Ladies Open - ORS1	111.0	11:21:36	10:40:42	1 of 2	0	0
david veivers	257	09:53:45	Mens Veteran 50+ - Mrec	111.0	11:33:10	10:51:34	3 of 4	0	0
James Farrell	258	10:02:49	Mens Veteran 50+ - Lrec	111.0	12:25:25	11:55:36	3 of 9	0	0
John Duffy	101	08:57:42	Mens Veteran 50+ - UN1	111.0	12:25:25	12:47:46	2 of 2	0	0
Meg Thornton	169	00:00:00	Ladies Veteran 60+ - ORS1	111.0	15:53:25	13:30:24	1 of 1	0	0
Carlos Perez	254	09:25:03	Mens Veteran 50+ - ORS1	65.0	5:24:00		6 of 7	0	0
Richard Yates /Craig Ellis	239	08:51:40	Mens Veteran 40+ - UN2	65.0	6:52:00		2 of 2	0	0
Tom Simmat	250	11:09:12	Mens Veteran 60+ - K1	47.4	5:22:00		1 of 1	0	0
Ian Hofstetter	242	09:25:03	Mens Veteran 50+ - ORS1	31.2	3:11:00		7 of 7	0	0
Elke van Ewyk	249	N/A	Wiseman's Dash	47.4	10:17:00		11 of 11		
Peter Fitzgerald	200	N/A	BOB1	111.0	9:25:18		1 of 46		
david hammond	247	N/A	BOB1	111.0	12:21:47		6 of 46		
Trevor Nichols	243	N/A	BOB1	111.0	13:05:53		9 of 46		
Darren Williams	248	N/A	BOB1	111.0	13:05:53		10 of 46		
Christopher Thompson	241	N/A	BOB1	111.0	13:14:39		12 of 46		
Rob Llewellyn-Jones	256	N/A	BOB1	81.6	11:35:00		37 of 46		
Craig Salkeld	240	N/A	BOB1	40.8	4:44:00		45 of 46		
Gerard Effeney /Tina Effeney	244	N/A	BOB2	111.0	12:46:58		5 of 36		
Richard Barnes /Chris Stanley	111	N/A	BOB2	111.0	14:23:43		12 of 36		
Phil Newman /Emma	171	N/A	BOB2	111.0	14:47:50		14 of 36		
Kidgway /Bob Kenderes	216	N/A	BOB2	111.0	16:13:54		25 of 36		

Results compiled by Ian Wrenford, sorted by proximity to race records with competitive classes first

How Far for a Photo?

The album for the 2017 Classic is again extensive, with photographers *Jana Osvald*, *Ian Wrenford*, *Tom Holloway*, *Oscar Cahill* and *David Young* snapping pics everywhere you looked. Pre-race preparations, the energy of starts, the determination and mud at Wiseman's Ferry. Nothing (except perhaps the women's start) escaped their keen eyes and even keener lenses. This year, though, Ian and Tom went one step further. Not content just to photograph from designated checkpoints, they took to the water between the start and A to document Lane Cove paddlers before their smiles wore off and it got dark. With Ian crouching knee deep in water at Pitt Town and Tom photographing from a floating kayak they got close enough to document the hilarity, enjoyment and focus of every paddler from front-runner Fitzzy to the final few. How long until these guys are snapped up by National Geographic?



Left: Kenji and Justin at sunset, captured by Tom Holloway

Records and Honours

Everyone paddles the Hawkesbury for a different reason, some for a great time or to raise money for Arrow, some to chase personal goals and records. For those that were inclined towards the latter, the HCC BBQ at LCRK on Wednesday 1st November saw the presentation of two perpetual trophies. Then on November 11th, the HCC presentation dinner in Mooney Mooney celebrated a range of outstanding achievements in the race, along with Lane Cove winning the Commonwealth Bank Cup for the second year in a row!



Brendan breezing past Pitt Town

Brendan Trewartha took out the trophy for fastest Lane Cove paddler, catapulting down the river in the blistering time of 8:38:47. The time is a new record in the Men's Vet 40+ ORS1, taking out the already very respectable record of 8:51:10 in only Brendan's second classic. The secret to his success? Apparently it's the bugs: "you don't need a protein shake because there's plenty of that stuff flying right at you!"

Hot on his heels were **Tony Hystek** and **Alanna Ewin**, teaming up in the Mixed Vet 50+ UN2 to paddle the best Lane Cove time on handicap. Their impressive first HCC together saw them clock in at 8:50:42, which takes almost an hour and a half off the previous class record. And with a handicap time of 8:45:23, they earned themselves a swathe of trophies at the HCC presentation night as well: the Handicap Cup, Jenny Barnes Memorial Trophy for the fastest mixed double and the Len & Dawn Farnham Memorial Trophy for the fastest Vet 50+ boat.



Tony and Alanna with their trophy for best LCRK time on handicap



Adrian all smiles at Cattai

Adrian Clayton set the final record for the night, with a new PB of 11:54:12 bettering his own record time in the 2016 Men's Vet 70+ UN1 by just over an hour. Adrian noted some important factors in the improvement: "No problems with the Queen Mary, no nasty mangroves confiscating my paddle and no damsels in distress to distract me this time." The impressive effort also earned him the Bruce & Joan Morison Memorial trophy for Fastest Vet 70+ boat for the second year running.

Peter Fitzgerald was also honoured at the dinner, both for his phenomenal efforts in fundraising and for having completed a full 20 Classics. Fitzzy was the top fundraiser for the event, collecting over \$13,000 and earning the Spencer Township Shield for his work. Though paddling Brooklyn or Bust, his time of 9:25:18 would've given many racing class paddlers a serious run.

Naomi and Sophie Johnson earned the Waterski Gardens Prop Assoc trophy for the fastest women's boat to complete the Classic. Teaming up as a sibling duo for the second year, they finished in 10:41:30 and posted a 40 min improvement on their 2016 time.

Hawkesbury the First

Alex Brown

Men's Open Lrec

Classics to date: 1

Time: 9:57:39

Alex is a relatively new face at Lane Cove, joining the club in 2017 to train for the New Zealand Coast to Coast. So why not warm up with another ridiculous endurance race and paddle your first Hawkesbury?



Alex looking happy at the 10km mark.

Given the volume of training I've been doing recently, tapering the week before the race was extremely tough! What I did find comforting was reading through some of the first timers' info on the website, following advice to eat plenty of chocolate and putting in longer sleeps. We are incredibly lucky to have all the combined wisdom of so many years paddling. In particular, the super calculator was really a handy way both to provide a heads up to landcrew on expected times, and also to break down the race mentally. Big thanks to the author of this – I geeked out pretty hard with it!

Despite the famil paddles, reading and mental preparation I still managed to make a mess of the start. Three rows of boats back in the middle of the river with tide going against us wasn't the smartest! I had to put on the afterburners to try and make amends, running HR >165 for the first couple of kms to get set on the back of a nicely moving K2 for a lift to Sackville. How amazing the landcrew were there! Nothing was left to chance, an easily visible stoppage and well oiled machine had water swapped/food replenished, and most importantly cheers of support as I got set to head for Wiseman's. Paddling into darkness, this part of the race was horrendously lonely! No friendly paddlers in sight, and despite a little moral boost from the tide, it became apparent I'd be doing this leg on my own.

Wisemans arrives and I'm greeted by a support crew knee-deep in mud. It took me a while to understand why I couldn't walk when I stepped out of the boat so I must have been a little delirious. A quick massage, toilet break, sandwich, in goes the caffeine and music (I've gone with heavy metal, something I used to listen to as a teenager for a change!) and being cheered out of the 'out' checkpoint I feel brand new. Rodrigo is egging me on to try hit sub 10 hours which I laughed off at the time.

Overtaking a few people, I realise I have caught Suzie. Offer her a ride on my wash and we paddle together for a little before she gives me a heads up to press on alone. I'm watching the GPS hold above 13km/h, see Rob L-J with some rudder issues and offer some assistance but he is happy to soldier on! I'm still hoping with a decent effort I'll catch Naomi. The GPS start to drop from 13 to 12, then quite quickly to 10km/h. I think for a moment I've snagged some shallows but realise that's impossible based on my position on the river. The free ride from the tide is over but I convince myself its 'only 1 Wednesday night time trial to go!' I'm reduced to 20 double strokes then a three-second rest in the last 5kms. Blue shimmers in the water could be the bioluminescence I've read about, or it could be my head playing tricks on me. Who knows for sure! I catch up to a guy in a ski, and finally we both start cheering, hooting and singing as we see the Mooney Mooney bridge lights.

Kieran couldn't have been a more appropriate landcrew, kudos to Richard for putting us in touch. A case of Peroni's as a thank you only goes some way to show my appreciation! And big thanks also to Phil Geddes for helping me out of the kayak at the end. Cramped abs had me stuck in the cockpit!

No Mangroves, No Damsels in Distress!

Adrian Clayton

Men's Vet 70+ UN1

Classics to date: 3

Time: 11:54:12

This was my third attempt at the HCC in Lane Cove colours, and it was by far my most enjoyable. A PB with an 11 (only just) in front of name was nice to achieve but 25 minutes longer (at least half due to overstaying shore breaks at Sackville and Wisemans Ferry) than I'd hoped for. It was also nice to be able to make a good contribution towards the Club's effort to retain the Commonwealth Bank Cup.



Adrian all set to leave Windsor

No problems with the Queen Mary, no nasty mangroves confiscating my paddle and no damsels in distress to distract me this time. Lessons applied from the two previous tilts certainly helped. And conditions on the night could not have been more pleasant – even the brief downpour downstream from Wisemans did nothing to dampen the spirits.

Pre-race plans to paddle with James Farrell were thwarted from the start (the only times we came together were at land stops and the finish) but Tom's Simmat's boat issues meant I was able to stay with him for around 7km in the early stages of the race. However, for most of the night I paddled alone, only occasionally picking up a tow from a passing double. I left Sackville approximately 10 minutes ahead of my plan but lost this gain on the leg to Wisemans. I paddled with John Duffy from the ferry at Naughty Wisemans but bade farewell to him and the other JD (Johnny Denver) somewhere between CPs J and K. From then on until the end I was on my own – no prospect of a wash ride as, surprisingly, no boats overtook me.



Warming up at Wiseman's before the final leg

I'm confident a better time is front of me but it will require more discipline. Also, I finished the event with a fair bit still left in the tank and my body quickly recovered from the exertions. Perhaps that's another lesson?

My one-man land crew, Lindsay Sommerville, looked after me superbly. Also, a great vote of thanks to the Mud Larks at Wisemans Ferry. To have a highly-trained medical professional washing my muddy feet as I prepared to leave perhaps a reflection of the commitment amongst the LCRK community to go well beyond the call. The assistance I got at the start from Oscar Cahill and then from Peter Harris and Don Johnstone at Sackville set me up nicely for the event. The vocal encouragement from all the volleys was a major factor in keeping my mood buoyant throughout the event.

Tales from the SHOCkers

Returning for another year, the SHOCkers were again out in force, and with a fundraising total to match. The six paddlers raised a phenomenal \$16.7k, taking their overall total since 1998 to \$214k. Not to mention that the ensemble had clocked up an impressive 41 Classics paddled and some 10,112 calories burned between them by the end of the night!



SHOCkers, along with a few junior SHOCkers-in-training, before the Windsor start



Fitzy dashing through Pitt Town before most realised the race had started

Peter Fitzgerald

BoB ORS1

Classics to date: 20

Time: 9:25:18

"All in all successful, with a PB in my 20th Classic," reports Fitzy, "despite two cortisone injections in the last six months following a baseball shoulder injury in January." A mention of having to stop for seat readjustments and three ferries makes us think he didn't stop for much else!

Brendan 'The Bull' Trewartha

Men's Vet 40+ ORS1

Classics to date: 2

Time: 8:38:47

"The competitive start was interesting, the biggest challenge avoiding being t-boned by all the boats wandering around before the race. I worked hard for the first couple of kms to catch a K4, then I could ease off and sit behind the group pretty comfortably. I did start to get a bit disorientated as the night wore on...I narrowly missed a massive boat at one stage, it had red and green lights on the front and somehow I thought they were cardinal markers in the distance. I should also mention nature's protein shake. Just before dawn the air was thick with bugs, so much so that I'm still finding some two days later!"



Brendan (and new bug friends) at the finish



Darren ready to start Classic No. 12

Darren Williams

BoB ORS1

Classics to date: 12

Time: 13:05:53

“For once everything went well for me, with no equipment failure and only the expected back and shoulder pain. Unfortunately Craig went into a bad patch just before Sackville, and we eventually left him at Checkpoint E huddled in a space blanket and eating gluten-free lollies. In hindsight, there is a level of annoyance that Craig's system waited for the favourable tide turn to shut down – we'll remind him of this for the

next 6-12 months. Meanwhile, we weren't aware that Trevor's race had also picked up an almost terminal blow 5km from the start when he paddled over a tree stump solidly rooted to the river floor. Trevor, who employs a strong leg drive with the resulting tail waggle, then paddled a further 50km having to compensate for a rudder with a mind of its own. Trying to wash ride him was like trying to chase a drunken firefly! Reflecting back, it was hilarious to watch Trevor paddle back to Wiseman's without a rudder into a strong outgoing tide. We tried tying his ski to mine and me towing him, guiding him with the nose of my ski but only through some impressive balance and core strength did he make it. The fantastic LCRK crew then went to work and rigged the biggest rudder I've ever seen from a double ski onto his boat...and 1:10hr later we pushed off again.”

Trevor Nichols

BoB ORS1

Classics to date: 2

Time: 13:05:53

"Within the first half hour I hit a submerged tree which knocked my rudder off centre. I stopped to adjust the cable on my pedals to re-centre it and thinking that I would now be ok. To cut a long story short, my handiwork did not do the trick and I assumed it was simply a case of my cables slipping through the foot pedals. Got excellent support from all the land crew at



Trevor at Pitt Town, after some 5km of rudder troubles



Wiseman's, adjusting the cables on my foot pedal, again, and said 'bye, see you in 4 ½ hours'. Well in an hour I was back having totally lost control of my rudder a few kms down river. It was then I really got to experience what the race was about – firstly a call to Darren's wife, Annie, resulting in the loan of a spare rudder from Craig Ellis (BIG thank you); then Darren sacrificing his race time to escort me back to Wiseman's and finally Kieran Babich and Rodrigo Matamala replacing the bent rudder. The second half was a lot more enjoyable with no dramas, yet we had more time into the tide than planned but Darren's sense of humour and the bioluminescence helped distract me towards the end.”

Right: Kieran and Rodrigo, LCRK's boat technicians extraordinaire, working on the rudder of Michael Laloli's boat

Craig Salkeld

BoB ORS1

Classics to date: 5

Made it to checkpoint E

"Congrats to the team for their triumph against time and adversity. Unfortunately, my night was the opposite, and disappointing and having to withdraw. Credit to Darren and Trevor for staying with me for a long time to help build recovery but it was not to be. My words here are therefore about our groundcrew – Tracey, Alistair and Beth, who on learning of my situation re-organised and traipsed along a very windy road to reach me. They deserve a medal as do the SES who immediately swung into action, sorting me out and then transporting me (+ boat) downriver to meet the crew. A much bigger appreciation now of the effort to run this race and thanks again to all."



Craig still looking chipper at Pitt Town



Seth - still bemoaning the loss of an Epic wash ride?

Seth Barrange

Men's Open ORS1

Classics to date: 1

Time: 9:53:54

"The race started with a bang because in true rookie style I was keen to see if I could make the bridge first...however it didn't stop there, the fast pace of the double Epic V10 (Tony and Alanna) I was planning to leach off for the rest of the night pushed me well beyond my comfort zone during the first 20kms before my senses prevailed.

Sackville was a scene out of a formula one race...it

felt like 6 seconds! The next 10km I pushed out a fast pace until my core decided enough was enough. Each stroke started to become more painful than the one before, and I was a broken man coming into Wiseman's. Step by step my landcrew managed to bring me back to life, then I took the next 10kms easy until the miracles they performed actually kicked in. I could not believe my eyes when I rounded the last bend and saw the bridge glowing in the distance. Wow, what an amazing race!"



Photo: Tom Holloway

View from the Epic

- Alanna Ewin

Tony Hystek & Alanna Ewin

Mixed Vet 50+ UN2

Classics to date: 8/1

Time: 8:50:42



Tony and Alanna passing Pitt Town

This year having chalked up the RPM relay (Ellis, Yates and Hystek conned me and I loved it), Marathon Series (very determined of my own accord) and Myall Classic (sneaky Tony had a plan), it seemed now might be the time I'd have my best shot at the HCC. At least that's what everyone convinced me. So with no

interest whatsoever in paddling the race, I agreed to do it to get everyone, including the monkey, off my back! All I had to do was finish. I had El Capitan Hystek, the HCC die hard, to steer the boat and make all the calls so I just had to be bum down, head up and soldier on.

My race prep was to paddle to keep fit, and otherwise pretend that it wasn't really happening. This was the only way I would not stress for months beforehand. I was too terrified to read Paul's HCC encouragement emails. I paddled the TT's and morning squad through winter, a couple of famils just for fun, and a 24km paddle every two weeks or so in the months leading up. Then I managed to damage my arms getting a PB in the TT using the wrong paddle, so the last three weeks' prep was resting and icing them. This was of considerable concern for me, but once again, I just pretended they weren't really hurt and it wasn't really happening.

We finally sorted our drink system on Friday afternoon (phew!), set up the boat on Friday night (sort of) and got a good night's sleep (that was a winner). Then the next thing I know I'm on the start line! With Tony's excellent start line placement we got off easily and quickly ahead of the throngs, and observed the first five fast boats charge ahead into the distance. We started at a decent pace, and I quickly realised if I got stuck in from the outset we could bank some time in case I fell apart later on. We had Seth Berrange and Paul Gill keeping us company for a few kms, and it was nice to meet them on the water and have a chat to calm the nerves as we settled in. Seth wised up and dropped off our wash, eloquently bidding us farewell. Then Paul dropped off for a gel, leaving us on our own for a bit until Mitchell Coffey dropped off the fast group and joined us for the long haul to Mooney Mooney.



Caffine, sugar, paddling endorphins? Alanna still looking energised at Wiseman's

Mitch was welcome company and without him I don't think he or we would have kept up the pace that we did. As we approached Wisemans we agreed to stop for no more than five minutes. We split up and Mitch re-joined us as we emerged from the LCRK pitstop. Mud larks and our fabulous, dependable land crew Friederike Welter, ensured a fast turnaround. We replenished fluids, donned thin wool tops, stuffed food in mouths and were off again with renewed energy.

The next bit really started to hurt. At about 30kms from Mooney, Mitch noted that if we kept up this pace we were all on track to beat 9hrs. I couldn't believe my ears, and with gusto said 'Let's get this. I don't want to have to do this again,' and I just paddled harder. By 10km out I was really feeling the pain, and Tony's by now unbearably crook guts were stopping us from keeping up our pace, so Mitch politely broke away, and his green cyalume disappeared off into the dark.

Boy, did I miss Mitch!! I hadn't realised until then just how important Mitch sitting next to me was to my wellbeing. Poor Tony was having to stretch out every 500m and this really knocked my determination about as the boat slowed and took time to get back up to speed. My stomach cramped, my muscles melted and a sleepy malaise drifted around my head. And so the cycle repeated to the end; stretch, back to speed, paddle hard. Thank goodness for a bit of entertainment to take my mind off the pain; bioluminescence, jellyfish clubbing, and an errant fish that propelled itself into Tony's footwell to join us for the last few kms of our journey. After that bridge was in sight, it felt like we were doing a crawling pace. The incoming tide and our failing bodies took its toll. The only saving grace was the beautiful water. So still and glossy, it appeared like an infinity pool, dropping off the edge of the world under the illuminated bridge. Suze told me it's a great feeling, almost there, when you see that bridge, but I was so stuffed nothing could boost my enthusiasm except solid ground.

The elation that I experienced at the finish was palpable. We lucked in with great weather, smooth water and mostly benign tides. It was when we were getting changed and someone asked what time we did, that I realised we didn't know. Kieran said it was 1.50am, so we'd been off the water for at least 5 minutes, and that was when it dawned on us that we'd respectfully broken 9hrs. I was over the moon! I'd never have to do this again!!

Without Tony's encouragement and faith in my ability, I would never have considered it let alone achieved the time we did. The most significant influence to get me through the night at that pace, was paddling in Tony's morning squad where his interval training had me groaning 'Again? Really?' With my head about to pop from exertion. The pain paid off.

We exceeded our expectations and I never knew I would feel such a sense of personal achievement. Now I've earned the stripes to annoy other people who haven't paddled the HCC, the way the others have pestered me all year to paddle it. And...did anyone else hear the delightful chirping sounds like crickets at various intervals during the night? They really made me smile. Tony decided I was completely mad! I reckon: "Whatever gets you through the night...It's alright...it's alright..."



Landrew Friederike Welter with Tony and Alanna at the finish



View across the river from Sackville. Photo: Jana Osvald

Musings on Great Expectations

Suzie Rhydderch

Ladies Open ORS1

Classics to date: 6

Time: 11:21:36

Charles Dickens penned the novel "Great Expectations". I'm not going to pretend that I've read it, but I'm borrowing the title to summarise my Hawkesbury campaign this year...

For anyone considering taking on the Hawkesbury river, the journey starts long before 4pm on the last Saturday of October - to give it a really good go, there are months of building up your tolerance for the distance, discomfort, and digestive issues that can truly make you feel like a hardened endurance athlete. And there is simply no better club to hold your hand as you prepare, than Lane Cove River Kayak Club, in my humble opinion (and this is my story, so I'm telling it as I see it!)

Given I did all of the above, it's fair to say that I had Great Expectations going into Hawkesbury this year. That's not to say I wasn't nervous - in fact, I wondered how many of these races you have to do to feel like you've "got it sorted". With numbers down this year, I was thinking that at least there would be smoother water. And there was, but there was also some serious loneliness, and I tested my own limits for the tolerance of isolation, especially as I became disoriented at one point and nearly checked into a residential bonfire, rather than checkpoint N! But let's back it up a bit (kind of like I did a few too many times because of the debris floating in the river, like a magnet to an unsuspecting rudder!)

Leaving Windsor, I watched as "the girls" - Naomi and Sophie - sailed off into the sunset (quite literally), and I set my mind to just get to Sackville, mostly against the tide. So far, so good, and my super efficient pit crew had me in and out in 3 1/2 minutes - smoking!



Suzie and landcrew Kristen Kosmala at Windsor



Suzie passing through Pitt Town

Leaving Sackville with Great Expectations that the river was due to be flowing out "for a full six hours" I was led to believe, this was supposed to be my time to shine - "watch out GPS, here come the 11's and 12's". Only they didn't... I zigged and I zagged across the river, trying to find the fast outgoing tide, watching my predicted splits disappear, and my great mood and even greater expectations with it.

By the time I got to Wiseman's (after nearly embarking a very garish houseboat that I thought was the Wiseman's Casino), it's fair to say I was broken. Without saying anything, I think my land crew sensed this, and went to work on my body, while I went to town on my head (I'm a psychologist after all!). The massages were great, the bite of banana was different, enough, but the bit that got my spirits soaring was the news that "others are finding it hard too". Not that I was gloating in others' misery, but my biggest issue was believing that I was doing something wrong, or that there was something fundamentally wrong with me, even though I knew I was

pacing myself well, and had done all this before. So with a healthy reality check, I shoe horned myself back into the boat, and away I went.

If my great expectations had been tested, it's fair to say that my faith in them was restored as I took the final 40kms home. As I'm writing this, I am wondering if perhaps I'm distorting the truth, because I am aware that I got a tad lost, at times my bum was so sore that I was prepared to have my feet bitten off by bull sharks by dragging them in the water to change my position and put padding in that was uncomfortable, but different uncomfortable (and that is key!), and the smell of mud and... more mud became overwhelming at times.

But then of course there's the back/bum stretches that resulted in taking in the stellar sky, and the occasional lane cove paddler, who probably felt shocked into being awake by my high pitched expression at their appearance (sorry Rob LJ!), the phosphorescence, dancing like fairies in the last 10-15km, and of course "that bridge" - my favourite in the whole world, simply because of what it represents to me - a journey completed, against the odds, solidarity with other paddlers and land crew, and expectations that are not only great, but exceeded.

So therein lies my musings from the night that was. It's not the tale I was writing out there, but it's this one that will get me back out there, pretty much thanks to "that bridge"... Well done to all of you who took part in some way - it's you who make it great.

Missed it by...

David Hammond

BoB1

Classics to date: 8

Time: 12:21:47

I was 7 seconds slower than last year...not happy!! It seems to be becoming a bit of a theme. About 12 years ago I tried to crack the OC6 record with a bunch of guys and we missed it by 15 minutes. Then Keg and I, when paddling the double, were always trying to crack 10hrs. Our best time was around 10hrs 20min. Missed it by 20 minutes.



David and landcrew Keg at the start

So my aim for this year was to beat 12 hours. My time was 12hrs 21min...missed it by 20 minutes! How do I find that extra 15-20 minutes?

My race was better than last year, although the time was pretty much the same. I felt average at Sackville, great at Wisemans but by checkpoint K I was wrecked. I don't know why. Too many nurofen maybe? And if only I could stop stopping at low tide pit stop. It's so hard to paddle past that place. I love that place and I love those guys. It's as close as you can get to heaven on the river. I just can't do it. Can we move it to M or N, just a tad closer to the finish? That might help.

I met the devil and spent some time in hell but not as much time as last year. I was paddling with Kim who was in a whole world of pain. He made me feel good, actually. It's a great feeling when you manage to drag your arse out of hell and get to the finish. I guess that's why we keep coming back. So...should I try again next year to crack 12 hours and find that 15-20 minutes???