

MY VERY BIG YEAR 2017

By David Hammond

The Very Big Year is a competition started by Shannon from Sydney Harbour Kayaks to help promote the major paddling events around Australia, in particular the Massive Murray Marathon run by Sydney Harbour Kayaks. Without entering the Murray Marathon it would difficult to complete the Very Big Year. It's a year of having a big go, completing 1000km of racing in a year.

I thought it was a great idea and as it coincided with my 2017 paddling goals jumped on board. This was my little way of helping support some of these paddling events that are struggling to survive.

I quickly drafted up a plan and thought to myself, I can do this.

Event	Distance	Total
Paddle NSW Marathon Series	11 x 20km	220km
Batemans Bay Paddle Challenge	26km	246km
Riverland Paddling Marathon SA	208km	454km
Myall River Classic	47km	501km
Hawkesbury Canoe Classic	111km	612km
Massive Murray Marathon	404km	1016km

Batemans Bay is a beautiful spot on the NSW South Coast. We used the Batemans Bay challenge to complete the single blade requirement of the Very Big Year. The TC2 we had borrowed was a tug boat and although experimenting with it at the Wednesday night time trial the week before it took some time to work out how to steer it straight. I spent 20km of the 26km without feeling in my toes. It was a painful paddle in a lovely location and great to see Meg on the podium next to Matt Blundell and Brett Greenwood.



Batemans Bay 2017



Batemans Bay 2017 – Time and Dave



Batemans Bay 2017 – Tim and Dave

Known as the coldest paddling marathon in the country, the Riverland Paddling Marathon didn't disappoint. If you held onto a ladder in a lock, to stabilise your boat as the water level dropped, you just may be left hanging there with your fingers frozen to the rung. Having just completed the 2016/2017 Dragon Boat season, where 500m sprints is the norm, and feeling a bit undercooked, we opted for the SLR2 double. Tim and I surprised ourselves in the Riverland Paddling Marathon and had a great race.

It wasn't until I was part of the way through My Very Big Year that I started to realise just how tough it was and plaguing the back of my mind was the thought taking 11 months to do 500km and then having to complete the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic and Massive Murray Marathons all in the last month, to finish. I wasn't sure I could do it as I have had years in the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic where my back has gone and I've really struggled. That thought haunted me for months but there is no doubt the fear of failure is a mighty source of motivation.

I wasn't all that impressed with my paddle in the Myall River Classic this year. Expecting a double tide, I psyched myself out before the start but the Myall being the Myall, things don't ever go as planned and the paddle home was way more enjoyable than the tide charts would suggest. Another 47km in the VBY bag.

Having completed my first solo Hawkesbury Canoe Classic in 2016, I was feeling more confident this year. I have a very sophisticated training programme consisting of 6 super paddles (40km) between July and October. The problem is, I have to paddle past my car, so quite often when the pain starts, I end up in it. Training builds confidence and I was relying on this belief to get me through. I was pretty happy with my race despite failing to meet my goals.



RPM 2017 Day 3 - Tim and Dave paddling past The Murray Princess. Keep clear of the stern. The trailing wave is a shocker.



RPM 2017 - Very Big Year Paddlers



HCC 2017 - Big Dave



MMM 2017 - Meg

About 12 years ago I land crewed for a bunch of girls who did the Murray Marathon in a TK2 relay team. A couple of years later, I went back and did the Murray Marathon in a relay team myself but it's taken me 10 years to find the courage to return and have a proper go.

The 404km Massive Murray Marathon is a total head spin. I don't think I slept for a month leading into the race. Like everything we break it down into days, then checkpoints, then 5km legs focusing on different things to take our mind off the distance. If you can manage to paddle in a group this is made even easier. The river flows, thank God the river flows. I hit speeds on day one I had never seen on my gps before. Saw glimpses of it again on day 2 but couldn't get close for the remaining 3 days as energy levels faded.

The race was ok actually. If you can do the Hawkesbury you can do the Murray. Keep an eye on your hands and any chaffing, carry a spare paddle (or make sure Meg is nearby) and know how to fix a rudder.

Thinking back, it was a wonderful experience, bloody tough but a real buzz to finish. It's well run in a beautiful part of the Country. The Dungulayin Mileka – Blues Brothers Team are an amazing bunch of people who add a very special atmosphere to the event, on and off the water. Their Kayak valet service to your car at the conclusion of each day is a delight.

The Very Big Year paddlers formed a great group of people with loads of encouragement and support united by a similar goal. A real mixture of paddlers from the seasoned veterans who would do 1000km as a warm up to those just wanting to have ago and see how far the journey takes them. In the words of John Young / Steve Dawson "You paddled places you wouldn't normally paddle, entered events you wouldn't normally have entered, met people you wouldn't have met and supported races that struggle for survival" and learnt about other events along the way that just might end up on the bucket list too.



MMM 2017 – Tom



MMM 2017 – Tom



MMM 2017 – Day 5 Barnes Family crosses the finish line



MMM 2017 – Day 5 Meg crosses the finish line

But be warned if you are in search of paddling goals don't talk to Tom or Richard, they're both mad.

I'm so stoked I finished. Bring on 2018 My Very Small Year !!

If you are interested in having a go register now for your Very Big Year. Go For it.

<https://www.sydneyharbourkayaks.com.au/very-big-year>



MMM 2017 Day 1 – Race to the finish Barnes Family v Big Dave



MMM 2017 Day 2 - TSKI2 Broken paddle with 8km to go, Meg saves the day and my Very Big Year.



MMM 2017 - Very Big Year Paddlers