

RACE CLOTHING FOR THE HAWKESBURY CLASSIC



by Michael Mueller

It's not about looking good; it's about being comfortable and warm enough. Err on the side of being too warm than too cold (I almost had to withdraw in my first Classic with hypothermia). The day can be quite warm and so lull you into a false sense of security. As soon as the sun goes down it gets cold.

At the Start

If it is warm at the start, put something on that is comfortable, and always take warmer clothing with you (a warmer top that you can change into). Make sure that you have a beanie you can change into (I put a beanie on as soon as I reach Sackville). If you are slightly too warm at the start, your body temperature will regulate itself fairly quickly and you will be comfortable. If you feel cold, then it may well be too late to do anything about it.

I particularly recommend thermal clothing – polypropylene and other fabrics that are designed to stay warm, even when they get wet. Cotton and rash vests etc are just unacceptable (they really don't keep you warm when they are wet). Thermal fabrics are best, and a beanie is essential.

Outdoor adventure stores and kayak shops like Blue Earth and Prokayaks can give you advice on fabrics. They have a really good range of clothing.

During the Race

Before the race start, plan what sort of clothing you are going to wear. Work out what you are going to change into if you are going to change. Ensure your land crew has everything correctly labelled for your planned stops. If you are stopping more than once – let's say that you are not just stopping at Wisemans – then have the Wisemans bag separate, with the clothes in that you think you will need to change into at Wisemans. Have clothing all labelled so that your crew have that at the ready.

A change of clothes can also give you a real psychological boost. It just feels damned good getting into some nice warm, dry clothing.

At the finish

Make sure you have nice warm dry clothes to change into.

What I Wear

Having several layers (layering) does help you to regulate your temperature. The minimum is a simple polypropylene thermal, which you can get at most outdoor stores. I'll then have a warmer thermal with me as well. If it's not too warm at the start, I might even wear both. But at some point in the race, and certainly after Wisemans, I will have this warmer thermal on too. I only ever wear the two layers. I wear a long pair of thermal pants underneath and have kayaking shorts over the top. These kayaking shorts, I just wear them all year round so I'm used to them, and they also give me a bit of cushioning on the seat, which is useful.

It is important to find clothing that is comfortable and that you've used in your long training paddles. Don't try something for the first time on Classic night, because a little bit of aggravation, or rubbing at the start is going to turn into a massive problem not long into the race.

In critical areas that you find have chafed in the past, rub Vaseline or similar substance on before the race. Consider using a spray skirt to help keep warm and dry. Footwear has to be comfortable, but tough soled as you will/may have to get out of the boat, and there can be sharp objects in the river. Wetsuit booties or rubber shoes are available at K-Mart or Blue Earth. Gloves are important but only use them if you used them in training. When training, work out the sore and vulnerable spots on your hands that tend to get blisters and put a bit of tape over those areas to provide extra protection under the gloves

Wet weather

Wear fabrics that keep you warm even when they get wet, such as modern fabrics, or a cag (wet weather breathable waterproof jacket). My preference is not to wear a cag, however they are very good if it is cold and windy. Wool is also good when it gets wet and you can get a wool jumper from Vinnies a lot cheaper than other places.