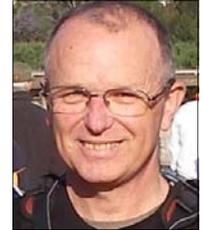


HAWKESBURY CANOE CLASSIC

FOR THE FIRST TIME PADDLER



by Paul van Koesveld (Classic first-timer in 2006)

I just want to make clear that I found that finishing the Classic makes you feel so good that you float for days. A real emotional high. A grin from ear to ear.

My top ten recollections and learnings:

1. A **stable boat** is a great thing to have for your first Classic. When you are feeling fresh and concentrating, I guess every boat other than a K1 feels steady enough. But what about when you are really tired, losing concentration, fiddling around looking for your energy bar, twisting around to get into another warm layer. In the dark it is a bit different. It is great to have a boat in which the risk of capsize never enters your mind.
2. Think of the race as **a series of three or so 3-hour races**, just very close together with a small break in between. Each section means a new start.
3. **Keep the “out of boat” breaks short.** It gets pretty cold on the river working hard, but it gets even colder off the river, cooling down and being attacked by the wind.
4. **Brief in-boat breaks** can be worthwhile. If you are really sore and your paddling style has become really, really bad, I now think it is better to take a brief rest, maybe stretch and then start again with reasonable style, than to doggedly push on, getting slower and slower, making your physical problems even worse. I recall several times when someone I was gaining on stopped briefly, then cruised back past me shortly after.
5. Talking about **stopping**, if you are struggling a bit and see low tide pit stop in front of you like a beacon in the night, don't feel embarrassed to stop. The warm welcome, warm fire, tea or hot chocolate, scones and camaraderie are unbelievable and set you up for the final leg. Just make sure you don't get too comfortable or you'll never leave.
6. The race will find **your weak point** in a way that 3-hour practice or familiarisation paddles may not. For me it was my lower back. So it occurs to me it is good to do a sufficiently hard long paddle some time before the Classic to provoke your weakest point to show itself. Then you can take steps to minimise its impact, such as adjusting the seat, doing different stretches, take along a cushion or back support.
7. Apart from one of these weak-point locator paddles, **3-hour paddles are good.** Certainly two 3-hour paddles in reasonable form are much better preparation than a poor form 6-hour paddle. The familiarisation paddles are excellent 3-hour paddles, and a must to get the feeling of the river.
8. If the familiarisation paddles don't include one where **the tide turns against you** in its second half, plan one that does so you get the experience handling the change when you are already tired.
9. I never thought much about **moon set** until the Classic. I didn't find night vision much of a problem, in fact the river was a beautiful sight until about 2.30am when the moon set and it was pitch black, and everyone was spread out and thinking “where the hell does the river go next?”
10. **Don't try to light up the river** with a bright torch. It only reduces your vision for everything outside the small area just in front of your boat. The only time I ran into the bank was when I had a torch on!

That's it, apart from repeating that you feel so good inside when you finish that you want to bottle the feeling. Outside you probably look like sh*t, but who cares.