

Race Tactics for the Hawkesbury Classic 2013

The Hawkesbury Canoe Classic is a paddle for many different people of many different abilities and on many different levels. That is what is so great about this event.

I am going to talk about racing.

From a club point of view to again win the Commonwealth Cup we need as many people as possible to be within one hour of their class record.

Talking about race tactics overlaps with other areas, nutrition, clothing, land crew.

Hopefully by now, being about six weeks out from the event you have chosen what boat you are going to race in and therefore what class.

So race tactics starts now.

BOAT SELECTION, HANDICAP AND RECORDS.

Was your boat selection based on doing well on handicap or getting close to or breaking a record, or both? The handicap winner will always break a record, but breaking a record does not guarantee doing well on handicap. Handicap factors for each class are on the web site. To get your handicap time you multiply your actual race time by the handicap factor to give a handicap time.

K boats and Unrestricted handicap factors will increase your time, most other class factors will reduce your time.

Have a look at Rae's last year's handicap time 8hrs 48 minutes, divide that by your handicap factor and that will give you about the time you need to do to be in the running to get close on handicap.

CHECK OUT THE COMPETITION

The best performers in the classic come out of the marathon series. So who has been paddling what boats? Ask them if they are paddling the Classic. How have you been going against them? Are they faster at the beginning and then they are fading toward two hours, or do you fade?

The HCC is at least 5 marathons back to back.

The week before the Classic all the entries are on the WEB site, so you know who is in your class.

Check also what other classes are in your start. Is there a good wash ride there? Is there a wash ride that you can work with, or is there someone you can work all the way down the river with?

Calculate also when you will be passed by the groups starting behind you, the K2s and double skis.

Mark that on your map so you are ready to hop on.

Race day, have a look around, spend an hour or so at scrutineering to see if there is a dark horse.

Finally at the start, check who is there and get yourself in a position for a wash ride.

RACE TACTICS WITH FUEL, ENERGY and FERRIES and TRAINING LANDCREW...

Weight is critical. I will carb up and hydrate two days before the start and particularly fully hydrate that morning right up to the start involving a last minute pee just before the start.

I do not need a drink for at least an hour, so I can run on two litres of liquid to Wisemans. That is only 2 kilos additional weight.

I will take a banana and banana mix baby food to fuel up in the first half for after Wisemans.

Don't stop to eat at least until you are past the Sackville ferry and similarly the Lower Portland and Wisemans Ferries, simply because if you are stopped by a ferry use only that time to eat.

When approaching the Sackville and Lower Portland ferries, you can see them some distance off. So you can make an attempt at timing your crossing. Don't forget you have to cross in the middle of the river. You may have to put in an extra effort to get across, or ease up early.

Outgoing tide will be turning against us at Wisemans this year. Don't waste time stopping at Sackville.

Train your land crew for a quick turnaround at Wisemans.

My land crew, change bladders, give me a peeled banana, warm coffee, change GPS.

Daen has this all on a boogie board on the river, waist deep. Kirri counts down aloud from 60. Hopefully out in less than 60 seconds.

Practice that with your landcrew.

My landcrew also tell me how many minutes I am up or down on my target times at Checkpoint A and Sackville.

PRE-RACE HOMEWORK and RACE TARGETS.

Training with my GPS gives me a good indication what speed I can hold through still water in the boat I have selected.

I put this into a computer program that also has a tidal input. This gives me my real GPS speed, with or against the tide. This also gives me a target time at each check point.

I have one map that has marked on it at each check point the time I should reach that check point and the speed I need to be going to reach those target times. Also marked on the map are the ferries, where the tide will turn, and when the faster classes will pass me.

So I have on the deck, only a GPS showing speed in big letters and a digital clock with big letters and the one map.

WISEMANS TO SPENCER.

Wisemans to Spencer is where the race is won or lost, particularly this year against the tide.

The race is won or lost in the head, so keep your focus. Tell your land crew to enthusiastically get you out of Wisemans. Think about where you need to be on the river against the tide. Are there any wash rides about? Maybe it is about this time some doubles are coming through? Can you regroup with your team at Wisemans?

WORKING TOGETHER AS A CLUB.

Each paddler paddles with individual aims but, as a club, our target is to win the Commonwealth Cup. When I first did the HCC I recall groups of K1s and K2s working as a team paddling down the river. Two, three, or four kayaks working together are faster than one, as in bicycle racing.

As a club we should be doing some of this.

So as a club, what are our groups; Medium Rec, Long Rec, Long Rec 2?

Forget age categories; concentrate on start times and target finish times.

May I suggest that those groups from now until the HCC train together as much as possible and, in particular on Wednesday nights, start together.

Practice your wash riding formations and encourage one another.

A BIT MORE ON WHAT YOU PUT IN YOUR MOUTH

Following our discussion last night, I treat all the current “go fast” gels and supplement mixes with a great deal of suspicion.

They are heavily promoted by certain athletes, exercise gymnasiums and unfortunately sports institutes, simply because they are paid to do so. There are all sorts of theories about their content, electrolytes and protein requirements, but there is very, very little real evidence of their benefits compared to real food. I suspect because the comparison is not favourable.

I have seen too many people, particularly in the HCC not achieve their goals simply because they believed what they read about this chemical garbage.

My advice is that if the HCC is your first or only real endurance event, eat real food, bananas, apples, egg sandwiches, chicken sandwiches, tomato and chicken pasta, creamed rice, apple juice. If you need a caffeine hit, have a cup of coffee at Wisemans..

The only disadvantage of real food is the delivery system. Think a little about it. Have some sandwiches in a clip lock container. I have the wonder food bananas taped to my deck. I only loose a couple of strokes, biting off the top and taking a bite. I then put it on my lap and after a few minutes take another bite. Takes a bit of practice in a K1, but not that much slower than taking a gel, and taking a gel means you need a lot more water and that extra water is weight and weight slows you down.

Tom Simmat