

The Murray Marathon 2010

by Tom Simmat (winner on handicap)



The Murray in flood, it was amazing that the organisers managed to run the event at all.

Preparations

The production boats from Apollocraft are including a number of modifications, these I had included in the further changes I did to the prototype I took in the Hawkesbury Classic.

To get the weight as far forward as possible I made the deck hatch in the cockpit bulkhead bigger. I was able to have two 3-litre bladders in there on the floor in the bow. I led the two extended drinking tubes back to the seat. This worked well and the bladders stayed cool on the bottom of the boat right up in the bow.



I added a windscreen-cum-cowl over my legs at the front of the cockpit. This kept water out of the foot well and offered a bit of streamlining for upwind work. The screen was simply velcroed on. This arrangement made the boat sort of a hybrid kayak/ski and Apollocraft will offer it as an optional extra. The screen gave me a mounting position for my GPS in a position so it was just in my field of vision.



Some eyes and elastic I fitted to the back deck to put my PDF under. (compulsory)

I added a kick-up rudder which I took off my Tourer. I was expecting lots of snags in the swollen river.

I padded the seat up 70mm so it was almost level with the deck. Perhaps this was a bit high as it made the boat a bit twitchy, but I was able to get over my paddling stroke for maximum power.



This padding also moved my seating position forward about 100mm, so I was able to take out the adjustable foot pedals and mounted the pedals

directly on the front of the cockpit.

I took all the rubber handgrip that gave me all the blisters in the Hawkesbury off the Apollocraft paddle.

With all the usual pre-Christmas chaos perhaps I had no time to try out all the changes on a longer rougher paddle, but did manage to fit in two one-hour paddles fully set up and things seemed OK.

So the emails came out that they could not run the usual day 2 course and they were going to repeat another day, probably day 4. This threw our motel accommodation bookings out a little and it did involve a little extra driving to the starts.

Arrived at Yarrowonga ready to start and it was freezing. I did a last minute dash back to the car to get a thermal, and boy did I need it.

The Yarrowonga weir was open with a fast flow on the far side and a warmup area in a fairly fast eddy cum large whirlpool.



My race plan was to go straight through to the finish, but Christine was to go to as many checkpoints as she could in case I had a problem with my untried set-up.

A very fast river, with lots of big eddies and a very strong gale force wind, gusting from all over the place. The first start is always interesting – simply to see who and what speed everyone was going.

Jack Ward in his super light carbon Flash took off. I started more gently as the cockpit was full of water that had come up the venturies and too quick a start dumps all that water in your lap.

The cockpit takes about 5 minutes to drain, then I can put in the power.

A couple of girls sat on my tail, including Elizabeth van Reece. I noticed up ahead Jack was not reading the river very well, I told Liz to hang on as I was going to cut the corners.

I was up to Jack before long and he tucked himself comfortably in behind me. There were big eddies at each corner and violent gusts of wind and I was beginning to have trouble with my paddle. The blade was not self-feathering in the water and with a straight round shaft I nearly pulled myself in a number of times when the blade hit a whirlpool and spun around.

At the first check point I yelled for Christine to have my Epic paddle ready at checkpoint Beta. The Epic has a smooth oval shaft. This was the paddle I used in the Yukon.

After the checkpoint a double SLR2 came through, Jack slipped off my back and

onto the double. I nearly had a swim trying to follow and struggled with the paddle in the wind and nearly took at least another 10 swims. James Mumme and John Thearle went past and I was hoping they also would not give Jack a wash ride. Not much further on they were on the bank, John had a bad case of hypothermia in the freezing wind.

I was hoping that Christine heard my message in the wind. As I approached the check point, reliability showed through and she had paddle in hand and a rope down the bank as was hanging out with the paddle ready for the change over.

Then off after Jack who had disappeared.

As I approached the finish on a couple of the long straighter stretches, I could just make out Jack in the distance. I passed the usual finish beach at Tocumwal only to see it was completely under water, the day's finish being moved to a park a kilometre or so further on. Round and over a chain-wire fence and that was the end of a disappointing day one.

My GPS showed six kilometres shorter than the race program distance, and I assumed that was simply cutting the corners. My left bum cheek was hurting for some reason



so I needed to check my seat that night.

That night the press rang and surprised me by informing me I was leading on handicap by about seven minutes, with Jack second. Jack was Vet 50 Medium Rec, I was Vet 60 Medium Rec.

So I could not let Jack get too far ahead. I had beaten him over the line in the Hawkesbury Classic. Technically we had identical boats under the water as the Apollo XI is the same as Jack's Flash. However Jack had a much lighter carbon boat and I was dragging a couple of venturies under the hull, also Jack had better control as he had a great looking low profile underslung rudder.

So I set about working out why my bum hurt. What I had done to the seat was pad it up with closed cell rubber foam, there were a few gaps between and I had intended to completely rebuild it with no holes, however with not enough time, I simply blew in some of the instantly setting, expanding foam that comes in a can. It's the same foam builders use to fill up holes to keep out rats and possums.

Having smoothed it all down, over the top I put a single layer of moulded rubber foam, for a comfortable seat and to neaten it all up.

The problem was that a certain small section of the expanding foam had not gone off and was still growing, under the rubber top. This created the lump that was giving my bum cheek all the trouble. So I made a surgical incision through the seat and carved the ex-

cess away.

So day two became day three, this time Picnic Point to Echuca. Because of the extra driving to the start they started us all an hour later and then compressed the start groups so we would reach Echuca a bit earlier.

Here the river is normally flowing faster and the river much narrower. At one point there was a tree fallen over right across the river with only a few inches to get past the top of the tree and the opposite bank. I had caught Jack and followed him through



the gap. How the wide OC6s got through I will never know. Again a freezing day and Jack again tucked himself in behind me. Again he took off when the double SLR2 went past, but this time did not manage to get so far away. James and John came through and gave me a washride up until we caught Jack.

So Jack and I paddled together for a while, then Jack hooked onto a K1 and again got a bit of a break, but not as much as before.

And so that night again the press rang and said I had opened out my lead to about seventeen minutes..

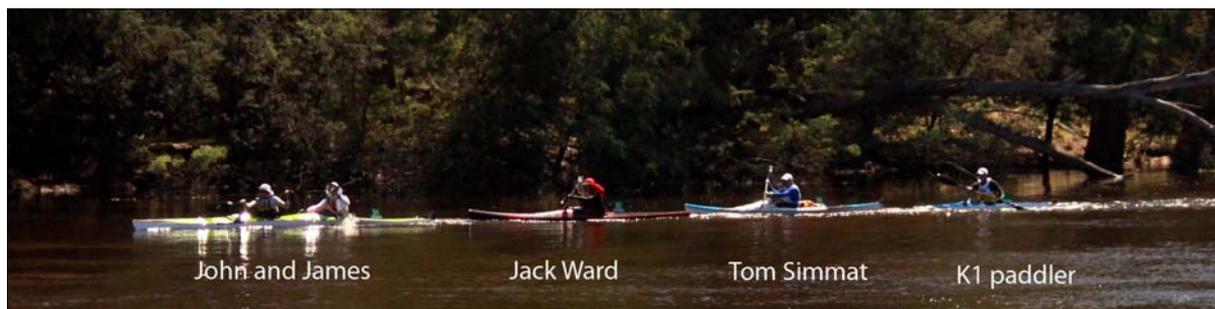
And so day three became day four Echuka to Torrumbarry, which is just above the weir and usually the flow is slower. This is a shorter day of only 63 kilometres.

And so the routine set in except it was now getting hot.

Jack would take off, I would catch him, he would tuck in behind me, but this day he did not catch the double SLR2, he waited for James and John whom he hopped onto. I hung on also for a while but John was steering and I was getting a little frustrated that he could not read the river and found I could go just as fast and hang on paddling my own course. That night on a paper serviette I gave John a lesson in how to read the river. Again Jack beat me over the line.

So the tactic the next day was for James and John to let me sit behind them. I would give them directions on where to be on the river. I was, however, opening up my lead on handicap on Jack each day with still two days after this day to paddle. I thought I should begin the get a little conservative. The object was for the Apollo XI to notch up another win for Apollocraft and break the class record at the same time, so I did not want to stuff it by hitting a snag, and holing the boat or pulling a muscle.

That is exactly what I did the next day, tucked in behind James and John and going around a particularly sharp bend we hit a huge eddy, I did a big sweep stroke to get round them and avoid being T-boned by Jack and bang I pulled something across my back. I backed off the chase and focussed on a nice steady stroke so as not to do too much damage.



This part of the river was particularly high and I took the opportunity to note a couple of short cuts through the trees. We were to be paddling the same part of the river the next and there were at least three opportunities to pull some real kilometres out on the next day if I had to.

So we finished for what was to be the second last time at Swan Hill in the real heat. Christine was anxious to get out of the heat and into the motel pool, so we waited for the rest of the Land Cove crew to finish and headed for our room.

The motel was supposedly nearly five-star and had its own restaurant. I answered a few press calls and we decided to reward ourselves and have a quiet romantic dinner away from the madding crowd and have dinner at the “resort” restaurant.

I could order extra potato and vegetables, to carb up, and Christine could have a glass or two of wine. Whenever there is no one else in the restaurant, my rule is to turn around and walk out, as there is usually a reason, particularly so in this busy holiday season. We were on our own in this huge five-star restaurant. I ordered the chef’s suggested potato and leek soup (\$12), lamb fillet on a garlic and potato bed (\$34), extra jacket potato (\$6) and extra vegetables on the side (\$10). The waitress-cum-restaurant bar manager kept informing us that the air conditioning would be on soon. Another couple did come but then walked out, but came back. They were also informed that the air conditioning would be on soon. By now dripping with perspiration, to cool down I ordered fresh fruit salad (canned) and icecream. Bill for two of us \$137.

On the way out Christine booked some internet time at the foyer desk, I did not quite make it to the desk as I had to make a dive for the men’s toilet across the foyer and promptly threw the whole lot up.

I cursed the poor girl at reception desk as I staggered back to our room. Christine wondered what the problem was, and then having seen me ghostly white went back and complained to the reception person.

So lying there on the bed, I had a strained back muscle and was feeling extremely weak, with a very fragile stomach. How was I to prepare for the next day?

Then came the text message. Due to an extreme fire danger, day five has been cancelled.