

Was 2014 the last Murray Marathon?

by Tom Simmat

So it is no longer called the Murray Marathon, now the Massive Murray Paddle, and it is no longer between Boxing Day and New Years Eve, because it is likely that at that time there will be an extreme bushfires. No more camping on the local oval and being awakened too early by “Morning Has Broken...”, gone are the thousands of campers lining the river banks, but the course is the same, the checkpoints are almost the same, it is a little cooler, for those not camping the accommodation is a lot cheaper and all the shops are open. As also are, of course, the schools which seems to be a fundamental problem with the event being the last week of November because this year there were none of the traditional noisy schools, nor were there any paddlers with kids at school.

The end-of-event BBQ and presentation was fantastic this year, probably because it was not so crowded and everyone got a medal for a place in some sort of division.

I managed to escape my busy business for the event, but everyone seems busy at that time of the year, trying to get things finished for Christmas. A glance through the results indicates competitors consisted of only one or two super enthusiasts, a lot of semi-retired but not forgetting “The Blues Brothers” a brilliant program run by the Victorian Police for indigenous and other country at-risk kids.

There were only forty teams, singles, doubles, relays and K4s and a surf boat that did the full distance. Frankly, I cannot see the event financially surviving with such a limited market if the event date stays as it was this year.

I turned up at registration with a modified Fenn Glide and was entered as an ocean ski, but suggested I should be unrestricted because I had taken out the standard venturis and had a modified low-profile rudder. So I was moved to Unrestricted Vet 60 which unfortunately gave me a higher handicap, but I was kept in the same start at 8.30am, which let us at least sleep in.

After registration I had time to have a paddle on the river to check the flow and also have a look at any snag-cum-short-cuts that might be of use for the first five kilometres or so.





In the Murray 200, I had bum troubles, thinking I had enough flesh to survive the day sitting just on the fibreglass seat.

So now I had the seat padded up which lifted me about 20mm. The Fenn Glide is one of the fastest flat-water skis, but also the narrowest, so a bit tippy. But I had tried the higher padded seat at Lane Cove and on Narrabeen Lake and I seemed to be able to handle it.

Day One: Yarrawonga to Tocumwal, 94km, Supper Storm

8.30am Start. Watched the 8.00am start, about 15 boats and tried to pick out the fastest.

The two K4 s relay started at 8.15 and to my surprise only two starters at 8.30, myself and Scotty. Scotty was a Victorian fireman in a Think full-carbon ski, at least I was in safe hands if the river caught fire.

As we took off together it was clear that Scotty was a more powerful paddler than me, but I was a lot more aggressive on the corners with lots of snags and was able to hold him.

He hesitated on a corner just ahead of me, I took a short cut inside a snag and got ahead. The river was empty ahead, but at the first checkpoint I passed both K4s changing teams.

Not until I was at checkpoint Charlie, over three hours, did I start passing the stragglers. The Blues brothers teams in Mirage Doubles, big burly policeman in the back and a pint size but enthusiastic kid in the front.

Finally caught and passed entertaining and eventual handicap winner Mad Mick in his single canoe and feeling pretty good when the river opened up with some long straight stretches and Scotty came screaming past. I did my best to hang on but in the open river he got away and came in 6 minutes ahead of me at the Tocumwal launching ramp. Crossing the line, the sky to the west was deep purple and they were announcing over the PA system that a storm with high winds was expected any minute.

Christine, The Current Wife and faithful land crew, had just got my ski to the top of the bank when it hit. We managed to get over next to the road and I sat on the ski to stop it blowing away. The rain was horizontal and cold and water rushed down the road and built up to a depth nearly to the floor of our ute. Christine had on a Gortex and took over sitting on the ski and I waded to the car to get inside, change and get warm. There was obvious chaos among those paddlers still left on the river.

Eventually it passed. We packed up and drove to the cabin we had booked at the local caravan park. Everywhere was blacked out, including the caravan park. We cooked our dinner on the gas stove with torches.

Day Two: a repeat of Day One

Day Two was supposed to be Tocumwall to Picnic Point but turned to be a repeat of Day One and disaster after disaster.

We had planned and booked our accommodation at caravan parks close to the start, but the previous day's storm meant access was not possible for landcrew and safety to a couple of the checkpoints, so we had to drive back to Yarrowonga (about an hour) to repeat day one start.

Half way there in going through in my mind what I had to do at the start, I realised I had left my bladders in the fridge at the caravan park. I always try and get to the start at least 40 minutes early so we had just enough time to go back.

We arrived at the start without a minute to spare and I literally paddled off the beach as the gun went.

Again I managed to hold on to Scotty who told me he had hit a snag the previous day and been up late repairing the rudder and where it had cracked the hull.

Still I was able to keep him in sight on the winding river until checkpoint Charlie. Once the river straightened out he was gone.

Just after checkpoint Delta, I went through a particularly violent swirl, did a big brace stroke and crack! my right rudder pedal snapped off at the hinge. With another 19km to go to the finish, I was tempted to go back to the checkpoint, but I battled on holding the right steering cable between my toes. I finished 15 minutes behind Scotty. Fortunately the hardware store was open and I was able to buy a hinge and some bolts to do a repair.

Not having had me to put sunscreen on at the start, I was badly sunburned to my neck, nose, ears and the top of my feet.

Day Three: Picnic Point to Echuca, 7km

We managed to get a cabin in the caravan park at Picnic Point, within walking distance of the start, so, I was able to watch some of the earlier starts as I got the ski ready.

The old Alpha checkpoint has been abandoned because it is always difficult to get to if it has rained, so the first checkpoint on day three is at the Barmah bridge, 26km. But this part of the race (The Narrows) is the prettiest part of the river, you can see over the banks and there is also a lot of flow. I was feeling a little unbalanced in the faster river (perhaps it was the sunburn) and after checkpoint Charlie, when reaching round for a banana taped to my back deck, I fell in.

Coming into Echuca can be a bit rough with the big tourist paddle steamers pushing big wakes and not leaving you much room on the river. This was making me very nervous and I backed off a bit and Scotty finished a disappointing 19 minutes ahead of me, with the usual Ra, Ra and noise at the Echuca finish.

Day Four: Echuca to Torrumbarry 63km; balance becomes a problem

We had a truly 5-star river-front cabin at Echuka, \$65 for the night, and were able to watch the early starts from the front porch.

This is the shortest day and although the finish is just upstream from a weir and the flow drops off, I was anticipating a paddling time of only five hours.



The trouble with this short day and starting so far behind was that, once Scotty again got out of sight, I found myself paddling alone as there was simply not enough time to catch the other competitors.

So after about three hours, alone on the river, my brain started acting up and I found myself in this tippy ski, doing more and more brace strokes.

Since then I have had a number of discussions with top paddlers, those guys that paddle K1s in The Hawkesbury and pull out at Wisemans. I believe what happens is that all those smaller abdomen muscles that continually twitch and keep you upright in the boat, simply get fatigued and don't react as fast and then over-react, causing more fatigue.

A short day and I was 22 minutes behind Scotty, my time 5 hrs 21 minutes.

The ladies from the Torrumbarry CWA cook the best hamburgers in the southern hemisphere.

Day Five: Murrabit to Swan Hill 75km; on to the finish

We decided to stay two nights at Swan Hill and drive back to Murrabit for this day's start.

The ladies at the Murrabit CWA cook the best bacon and egg breakfast roll in the southern hemisphere.

I suspect the Torrumbarry CWA and the Murrabit CWA are the same people.

Feeling a bit nervous about today, I got on the water as soon as I could and got a good 20-minute warm-up before the start. One of the girls in the green K4 team was a past winner of "The Biggest Loser" and they paddled upstream to have a photo shoot.

"Tactically" I had no hope of catching Scotty and was placed well down on handicap but wanted to put up a respectable showing on this last day. I felt if I had balance problems I would take out the padded seat and bear any pain and bruising as there would be no paddling tomorrow.

Scotty and I had company at the start, joined by another ski paddler who entered just for this day. In an Epic V10 sport, he found himself between us and apologised, promising not to get in our way.

At the gun Scotty and I took off and he was left way behind and eventually finished way last that day. I don't know why he was put in our start.

My balance was shot after only a couple of hours and I stopped in a very awkward spot, balanced on a tree root, took out the seat padding had a pee and a banana.

I was OK for the next couple of hours, balance much better and I could hold a good pace, but slowly rotating on the fibreglass seat, my pelvis began working its way through what little flesh was left on my bum.

I stopped again to massage my bum and replace the seat, but it was no longer where I had tucked it under my PFD on the back deck.

Trying to ignore the pain I limped into Swan Hill to receive my completion medallion 38 minutes behind Scotty.



Rank	Num	Team Name	Class	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Adjustments	Elapst Time
1	40	Scotty Five Days Full Distance paddle	OS1 - Open Vet 40+	07:25:07	07:22:42	06:14:50	04:59:23	05:47:41		31:49:45
2	73	Shockers 2 Five Days Full Distance paddle	OS1 - Open Vet 50+	08:03:26	07:40:44	06:11:45	04:55:32	05:49:59		32:41:28
3	30	Adele and Stewart from Footscray Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL2 - Mixed Vet 50+	07:49:11	07:51:30	06:30:49	05:07:00	06:00:27		33:19:00
4	7	Geeb Smith Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 40+	08:12:21	07:37:00	06:33:01	05:08:15	05:55:43		33:26:22
5	20	EPA Relay Team Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	TK2 - Open	07:35:26	07:40:38	06:39:54	05:16:58	06:18:16		33:31:15
6	11	Tom Simmat Five Days Full Distance paddle	UNR1 - Open Vet 60+	07:31:57	07:36:56	06:33:13	05:21:32	06:35:38		33:39:19
7	120	K4 Challenge Green K4 Challenge	K4 - Open	07:33:05	07:53:58	06:30:31	05:28:38	06:18:10		33:44:25
8	90	Team ECK Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	08:06:45	08:12:25	06:29:54	05:14:28	05:57:16		34:00:50
9	69	Shockers 1 Five Days Full Distance paddle	OS1 - Open Vet 40+	08:05:26	08:08:54	06:30:51	05:14:30	06:08:01		34:07:44
10	151	K4 Challenge Blue K4 Challenge	K4 - Open	07:40:44	07:55:37	06:45:42	05:36:52	06:17:47		34:16:43
11	10	Derek Chart Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 40+	08:30:13	07:51:51	06:39:12	05:12:23	06:14:59		34:28:40
12	22	Greg Edwards Five Days Full Distance paddle	SS1 - Open Vet 50+	08:19:24	08:20:56	07:04:59	05:32:28	06:23:57		35:41:46
13	130	Just Doing It Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	TK2 - Open	08:24:34	08:17:01	06:53:28	05:39:46	06:31:11		35:46:03
14	149	Sandy Beard Five Days Full Distance paddle	SS1 - Open Vet 40+	08:25:17	08:22:48	07:06:04	05:36:54	06:18:34		35:49:39
15	100	DILLIGAF Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	OC2 - Open	08:41:20	08:25:52	06:54:53	05:36:28	06:21:41		36:00:15
16	27	Mad Mick... I'm Back Five Days Full Distance paddle	C1 - Open Vet 50+	08:42:31	08:33:31	07:07:19	05:41:03	06:26:43	10:00	36:21:09
17	119	FYMACC (Footscray and Yarrowonga-Mulwala) Five Days Full Distance paddle	TK2 - Open	08:14:32	08:53:16	07:20:51	05:33:56	06:35:29		36:38:06

18	4	Just Drifting	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 50+	08:47:33	08:37:44	07:14:19	05:41:03	06:33:42	36:54:23
19	58	Steve Morrison	Five Days Full Distance paddle	UNR1 - Open Vet 50+	08:57:45	09:04:57	07:29:30	05:55:08	07:10:10	38:37:33
20	91	Chicks with Attitude (CWA)	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Women Vet 50+	09:25:06	09:45:42	07:51:09	06:16:40	07:13:28	40:32:07
21	118	SHK Mirage Trevor	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 50+	08:37:28	08:48:34	07:24:18	07:02:50	08:39:36	40:32:48
22	97	Tathra Surf Club	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	MISC - Open	09:27:26	09:37:32	08:05:41	06:12:42	07:29:39	40:53:02
23	86	Tongway	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL2 - Mixed Vet 60+	09:14:55	09:37:38	08:03:28	06:29:45	07:30:35	40:56:23
24	52	NOT2SIRIUS	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 50+	09:48:37	09:20:52	08:12:26	06:26:42	07:17:52	41:06:31
25	37	Dreadnought	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 40+	10:08:18	09:20:48	07:50:01	06:11:04	07:53:46	41:23:58
26	53	ALLY J	Five Days Full Distance paddle	TK1 - Women	09:17:41	10:11:41	08:20:03	07:12:09	06:41:16	41:42:51
27	117	SHK Mirage 582	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 60+	09:53:37	09:33:05	08:19:17	06:48:50	07:45:07	42:19:58
28	201 4	Swan Hill Clubs	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL2 - Open Vet 40+	09:17:42	09:45:31	08:18:31	06:48:28	08:10:49	42:21:02
29	25	BILL AND GREGG	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL2 - Open Vet 50+	09:25:07	10:00:04	08:18:02	07:12:10	07:29:05	42:24:29
30	72	Craig van Dugteren	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Open Vet 50+	09:48:27	09:43:14	08:26:54	06:56:15	07:54:03	42:48:54
31	105	Blues & Brothers Red	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	10:46:21	09:51:26	07:49:49	06:32:47	07:57:20	42:57:45
32	107	Blues & Brothers Black	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	10:27:53	09:57:32	08:27:17	06:09:22	07:57:20	42:59:26
33	116	SHK Mirage 730	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Women	10:00:44	10:11:40	08:31:49	07:02:49	07:19:45	43:06:49
34	21	Uncle Cary	Five Days Full Distance paddle	TK1 - Open Vet 40+	10:03:26	10:03:14	08:35:21	07:05:03	07:53:49	43:40:55
35	111	Blue Mountains Grammar School	Adventure Cup	RKL2 - Adventure Cup	11:03:09	09:59:21	08:25:21	06:46:06	08:06:19 15:00	44:05:17

36	1	SHK Mirage 583	Five Days Full Distance paddle	RKL1 - Women	10:29:47	10:37:38	09:09:41	07:45:06	08:39:34	46:41:48
37	63	David Johnstone	Five Days Full Distance paddle	SS1 - Open Vet 50+	07:46:05		06:25:17	04:58:52	06:03:21	25:13:38
38	106	Blues & Brothers Yellow	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open		10:11:42	08:00:58	06:37:51	07:57:20	32:47:52
39	14	Maximus	Five Days Full Distance paddle	UNR1 - Open Vet 50+	09:17:56					09:17:56
40	109	Blues & Brothers White	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	10:27:50					10:27:50
OUT	81	Team Bill and Edna	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	MISC - Open Vet 40+	09:46:56	05:02:06	08:05:26	07:00:52	07:23:51	37:19:13
OUT	110	Blues & Brothers Orange	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	10:49:36	10:06:53	08:14:24	06:49:43	02:22:20	38:22:56
OUT	108	Blues & Brothers Blue	Five Days Full Distance Relay paddle	RKL2 - Open	10:19:25	10:03:06	08:06:52	06:50:43	07:57:20	43:17:26