

# MY STRATEGY FOR THE HAWKESBURY CANOE CLASSIC

by Graeme Jeffries



1. **Stay warm** – I can't stress this enough. I start in polythermals. Last time my race notes show it wasn't a particularly cold night. I started the race with two thermal pants on, and a pair of paddling shorts over the top. Two pairs of socks (put on after getting into the boat so that they are nice and dry). Two thermal tops, rash vest over top to hold thermals in place so they form layers. The rash doesn't give insulation but keeps some wind out. Then another thermal over the top of that which is my spare take-on take-off thermal. Non-stop race strategy, so what I wear at the start is what I wear at the finish. I regulate my temperature by pulling my sleeves up and down. I start with a cap on and as soon as the sun goes down or I get stopped by the Sackville ferry, I ditch the cap and put the beanie on for the rest of the night. I don't wear gloves because they give me more blisters than without. You get blisters more easily in fresh than salt water, so expect some blisters. Move the paddle around and change your grip to help. That is my preference. Other people wouldn't do it without gloves, so just find what works for you. One disadvantage of more gear at the start of the race is you might get a bit hot before the sun goes down. I have a cag with me that can be put on if it becomes too cold or wet. Hands getting cold: it happens. Deal with it. Wear gloves if you can. I have just got a pair that I can actually wear, neoprene with rubber things on. Got them from Blue Earth – full hand cover. I found with good quality leather gloves just one little crease can cause a blister. If using gloves and stopping, put on a dry pair of gloves. Putting wet gloves back on hurts. Pseudo leather ones seem to hold their grips. Avoid the ones with the rubber nipples – they can slip on the paddles. Each to their own. Do what works for you.

2. **Keep it steady.** One of the problems with the race is that you tend to go a bit fast at the start. Towards the end you're going to be going slower so get it right early, work out how fast you can go for the entire race and stick to that speed. As soon as you go over that, your energy expenditure goes up for very little return and you will pay for it later on.

3. **Don't use anything that you haven't used for a long time before.** It's very tempting to use something new – don't do it. Make sure you have worn everything for many hours before you use it. Don't try a new drinking system that you haven't used for at least 20 or 30km. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

4. **Make sure you keep hydrated and energy going in,** especially for the first half of the race. By the time I get to Wisemans I still try to keep stuffing food down, but your stomach doesn't want to deal with it or digest it. If you haven't taken on enough food in the first six or seven hours of the race you will end up running out of energy in the latter part. Likewise if you're not taking on enough fluids, you are going to dehydrate. Read about this. If you don't take enough food on board you are either going to have to stop, or not finish the race. Keep it going. Don't use food you haven't used before. My digestive system just shuts down after a few hours and it doesn't want to work. If you try and give it something that you haven't used before, it's not going to like it. What you should and shouldn't eat is another whole topic and it would be different for everybody depending on your race tactic.

5. **You must go through your goals with your landcrew.** Preparation is assumed and you have a race plan. Tell your landcrew what your goals are, how you intend to achieve them, what you need. You'll need to work out a way to find your crew when stopping, dealing with the unexpected. Different coloured cyalumes on the boat, torches, funny clothes or hats all help identify your team. Pick the spots you are going to stop at, know what they look like. Wisemans is really long, covered in boats and is pitch black except for a string of fes-

toon lights over the boat ramp. I tend to do a non-stop strategy. I have someone who stands 40m down from the checkpoint at Sackville, and when they hear my number called, they will call out to me and let me know how my time is according to schedule and ask me what I want. I tell then what my plan is, or what I need. One year I ran out of water by Sackville and so arranged to pick it up a Wisemans. If planning a longer stop, make your boat recognisable, and give your landcrew an idea of what time you will be coming in. Make sure landcrew have a system in place to start a lookout for you. Don't sleep through your alarm etc. I recommend that landcrew do stop at every checkpoint they can get to, to give the paddler a wave and a yell.

6. **Landcrew.** Put on a big BBQ for them the night before and tell them how wonderful they are. Two landcrew per craft is more enjoyable, reliable and versatile. If you can't find two, consider joining with someone who will do a similar time. 2 persons in 2 cars serving 2 boats is better than one person for one paddler

a. Landcrew should be careful about driving. Take a rest between Wisemans and Brooklyn – they will have been up for a long time, and the road between Spencer and Brooklyn is windy and long, so they need their wits about them.

b. Also, landcrew potentially get colder than the paddler. They need warm clothes, towels and a change of footwear, as they will be getting into the water to assist the paddlers. Take raingear too.

7. **Don't stop.** It is really difficult to stop less than 5 minutes, so you lose 1km, and that's hard to catch up. Starting again isn't much fun. Especially, aim not to stop at low tide pitstop unless you are completely exhausted. This is the rule you can break, but the more you can go when it hurts – just paddle through it.

8. **The first time you finish** the Hawkesbury is an awesome feeling, so good luck everyone, have a great race and go and enjoy it.

9. Some say the worst bit is Dargle to Wisemans. I use a **3-part strategy**. Start to Sackville, Sackville to Wisemans, Wisemans to finish. 3 x 3-4hr paddles. Then break this up into every corner. You should know the course as best you can so that you paddle in the right part of the river.

10. **Music.** I had an MP3 player but couldn't stop to turn it on. Music is probably a good idea, but I have never tried it. Either way, put the effort in beforehand and get fit so that you can do the race as comfortably as possible.

11. **Commonwealth Bank Cup.** This is a trophy for club points. In 2003-2008 Lane Cove River Kayakers did well. The more boats, the more points. Boats within an hour of the class record earn more points (big points). Even bigger points awarded for breaking a record. Lane Cove needs at least 30 boats to win it again.