



## Bedford Star Head - Sunday 22nd November 2015

### ***Becky writes:***

This event is always popular and of a high level, so it's important to get our entries in early. It's not usually possible to use boats, oars or rowers in subsequent divisions - so unfortunately I could not enter all the crews who wanted to race, and felt it was fair to give priority to the more established crews on this occasion.

After an extremely windy day on Saturday I was pleased to wake up to a calm if cold morning. My alarm woke me up at 6.00am and I must admit I did have a few minutes unable to get out of bed wondering why I chose to do this sport. How could a 12 hour day for an 8 minute race make sense?

A few of us met at the club at 6.50am and we were off. We had a good run, managed to get a great parking space and very quickly O.T.R.C. crew members appeared out of nowhere to help get the boats off the trailer, rigged and ready to race.

As usual O.T.R.C. was very well supported and the shouts from the bridges and banks really spurred the crews on. It was great to see everyone working together and I especially enjoyed seeing how far some of the Junior Crews have come. It is really important for the crews to develop a shared sense of responsibility and to look out for each other. For some Juniors it was their first race day experience and they should be very proud of themselves.

For myself, we had a great row with a lively rhythm. Half-way down the course I remembered exactly why I love this sport and, why I wouldn't want to be anywhere else on a cold November Sunday.

Must be mad!

**WMast C 8+( Vicky str, Jo, Becky, Jennie, Keely, Libby, Fiona, Claire , cox: Rhona. (Time 8.09)**

We rigged the boat at 8am bundled up like we were off to the Arctic. As is traditional for Star Head, it was a freezing cold day, but unusually no sleet, snow or freezing fog, which made a nice change.

As the usual car park was out of commission we boated at the finish and rowed up to the start. This was a longer warm up than we usually get at Star, and very welcome. It was a bit of a rocky ride, with the balance and timing all a bit out of synch. Some 'legs only' exercises helped to get the crew a bit more focussed, whilst Rhona steered through the obstacles and small boats clogging up the river ahead of us.

We bravely disrobed at the start and turned, ready for the off. The crew in front of us clattered through the first bridge, and had to stop and regain their composure. (They actually hit the bridge so hard I thought John Milborne might have been steering it!) . Backstops again, heads in the boat, and we were off. We rowed through the start at 32 strokes per min and quickly settled into a lovely rhythm, never really dropping below 30.

Rhona kept up some great calls, and the crew really responded well. As the Oundle roar came from the last bridge, Vicky put the rate up a pip and we had a good strong finish at 32 for the last 20 strokes or so.

A very happy and elated crew at the finish. Although we weren't winners, I think we all enjoyed the ride, and knowing that we could have carried that rhythm and rate for longer bodes well for the tidewater race planned for March. The opposition of St Neots (7.57) and champions of the Thames (7.45) were not that far ahead, so all in all, a very positive outing.

**WMastD 2x Jo(str) Vicky (Time: 8.46) WINNERS**

I had looked at the oppo on the boating order, and it was a little while before I remembered we were now master D, not C., which was a bit of a reality check! We boated in division three, having already rowed in the w8+, and paddled up to the start. As usual with the small boats, we hung around at the start for much longer, whilst the big boats went before us. We entertained ourselves by chatting to the nice young men in their singles. Vicky did her hair, I went through my pockets, we restarted our stroke meters etc., etc. Never let it be said that rowing is boring! Eventually one of the fit young men pointed out we were supposed to have moved on, and asked if we were going?

We paddled through the bridges and built up to the start. There was a bit of steering, and said fit young men passed us in their singles. We struggled to really settle into an easy rhythm and the

rating hovered around 27, which was a bit slower than we would have liked. We were both concentrating on the front end of the stroke, and the actual entry and extractions felt coordinated, but the row itself felt quite hard work. Both of us had really wobbly legs at the end, which became apparent as we stood up to get out of the boat. This made an interesting change from our old style of rowing where our shoulders used to ache, so perhaps we are learning...

We didn't expect to win, especially as there was a Vet E crew in opposition who were awarded a 14 second handicap against us, and Angela and Claire had come close to beating us at Milton Keynes in the summer. We consoled ourselves about our lack of boat time, and called in all the other excuses about the cold, bad backs etc., after the race. However, we were pleasantly surprised when the results came out, and we both celebrated our success with a hefty gin, which is a much easier way to get that wobbly legs experience.

### **Mast E 4+ Andrew, Martyn, Hugh, Peter cox Becs (Time: 07:51)**

Following some banter by our bow with a young ladies crew queuing for the start we luckily managed to get his head back in the boat just in time to start the race. Becs, at cox, was in full control and we were, as usual her obedient servants. We quickly settled into a good rhythm with some decent leg drive and felt we were doing ok, although there were some intermittent lapses and occasional adjustments of balance. However about half way it became clear we were tiring a little, shortening and rushing our strokes, Becs read the situation brilliantly, called "down one on the slide" and we found our rhythm and energy once again. It felt a satisfying and thoughtful row, we had given a lot and been responsive as a crew to the instructions of our cox. Having done the same course 6 weeks ago in 8.30 we were pleased with our time of 7.51, and being aware of our shortcomings this has become a good benchmark for us to progress from. Afterwards, our crew marked the occasion by walking to Star clubhouse in the warm sun for a bacon buttie and cheered on OTRC from their balcony – what a lovely Sunday morning.

### **J16 4x Rohan, Connor, Harry, Jordan (Time: 07:34) WINNERS**

Harry: It was -1c at 9am in Bedford on a clear but frosty morning, one of Oundle's recently re-arranged quad line-up, Jordan, Rohan, Connor and myself were all set for our first race together and were not going to be put off by anything. It was a focused and solid performance thanks to Rohan's beautiful pace, Connor's beast horse power and Jordan's impeccable steering. We tired slightly on the last 300 meters but I forced my voice in the hope to give everyone the encouragement and power to maintain their full potential throughout and until the end of the race. Pleased to say our first race together was a success and we came first, closely followed by our fellow Oundle quad with brilliant times and results.

Connor: Despite the bitter cold and the drowsiness of an early-start, we exceeded our own expectations and finished first place in our race. Harry's shouts of encouragement spurred us on and helped the rest of us overcome tingling limbs and throbbing fingertips. Rohan set an excellent pace at stroke whilst Jordan steered us effortlessly at bow, without fault as is always the case. Most important of course, regardless of our ranking, was the fact that we were slightly quicker than the other J16 quad! Always an achievement to be proud of!

### **WMast BCD 4x Anita, Martine, Angela, Becs (Time 08:21) WINNERS**

Just before the off we agreed to have fun and be fast. Anita set a cracking pace, which we more or less kept up, although we had to reset as we hit some choppy water. A spectator commented from the bank on the fantastic racing line Bec steered which definitely gave us an advantage. A good race all in all, we had fun, and we won – which we weren't expecting. We could do with being faster but it was a really good bench mark for Northampton.

### **Mast D 1x Philip (Time 08:14) WINNER**

Not having trained particularly hard this year and not having competed since Lincoln in February/March, I decided to treat this race as a training event.

Right, excuses over.....!

As with everyone else, I found the conditions fairly benign, albeit flippin' cold, so the only problem was deciding what to wear - not a problem I usually worry about....as you may have noticed. How many layers? Hat on, hat off? ....and of course I got it wrong, so had to strip naked (top half only, fortunately.....!) to pin my number onto my base layer.

Off I went, leaving a decent gap after the previous rower. I used a steady rating, but concentrating on my check as Cap'n John (ret'd) has been telling me recently that I'm prone to bounce down the river - giving it too much "Beef" and opening up too early. I was happy with the row - a little choppy by the piling at Star, but largely uneventful.

Thanks must go to Martin for helping me onto the water and Claire & the junior girls who helped me off the water. Most of all though, I think that we should all shower grateful thanks on Becky Smith for quietly getting on with organising our entry. Regardless of race results, the result of her organisation was complete success.....so, top marks to Becky!

+++++ STOP PRESS +++++

I won - Woo hoo!

**Mast DE 4x Simon (Captain, Sir) Murray, Bob Carpenter, Charlie Efford, John (not the captain anymore - unless one calls the person steering the boat captain.. but still very much Sir) Milborne.(Time: 07:29)**

This was the first race of our campaign, with 5 training outings under our collective belts... The brief was to keep the row steady and controlled, rating 28spm. The race started off very well. Smooth efficient rowing, Simon setting a cracking rhythm, which carried on into the 2nd 500m keeping relatively smooth passing The Wall and host club (many thanks to vociferous land based support.)...

.. before hitting the town bridge.

John (nee The Captain ) succumbed to his nemesis, unable to decide which arch to go through in time, went for the middle option.

Losing time here, our attempts to make up for this clash and lost time in the following 500 failed totally as we fought against each other trying to regain our former form. Eventually the crew's tenacity shone through in time for the boat to pick up again for the final 500m.

Lessons to learn - we need more time on the water - and probably much more time on rougher water and there is really nothing that can replace lots of race pace full course training. Our time was 10s slower than our training time over the same weekend.

Still plenty of time left to the 4s HOR...

On official race times, the masters D/E4x is the fastest club crew. 7:29, despite hitting the bridge.

**Nov 8+ Ian, Charlie D, Dick, Mark F, Peter C, Jason, Antony, Ron, cox Paul (Time 07:36)**

Our intrepid crew of Ian Bradshaw, Charlie Dunn, Dick Meads, Mark Felton, Peter Cook, Jason Ellis, Antony Dodworth and Ron Hansen were positively encouraged through the race by our cox Paul Pearson. We had actually managed to be available for training together the day before, but the wind prevented this. Thanks to the Women's Eight the boat was at a place that was easy to launch. So we set off in bright sunshine with time to spare for a warm up that included passing other boats and, as we waited a fine view of a double capsizing – only to see them walking up the tow path to race. We were first off, followed by two Women's Eights giving an initial scintilla of concern, but we were rapidly into race pace under the bridges and settled into a rhythm that felt relatively slow and together. It turned out to be 29-30 throughout the race – and we felt pleased that this was our best row as a crew, and that we had kept up the effort throughout the course giving a result of 7.36. The photographs showed evidence of effort and being together,

but for older members showed that a straight back is a mental construct rather than a real one! Relief at the end was stronger for me, as I had caught a crab in our last two practices, and worried that John's advice "Just do what you did in training" might happen. We were beaten by school Novice crews, and just pipped by our own J16.4X crew by two seconds. However, a great race and a good time providing a stepping stone for future improvement.

### **W Mas DE 2X. Angela and Claire (Time 09.41)**

Like most people, we were relieved that the high winds of the previous day had abated, that there was no rain and that the rowing conditions were almost ideal, which is unusual for both Bedford and this time of the year. Even the sun came out!

This was the last division of the day and both of us had had a lengthy wait between races, but a trip to McDonalds put us in good stead for the race!? I wonder if Catherine Grainger adopts these tactics?

A very slow warm up to the start was encountered as the river took on the appearance of the M25 at peak rush hour, a bit of a wait pre-race, no sun now, then our onto race. Once Claire's leg muscle cramp disappeared she was able to join in with Angela who set a great stroke rate, aided by the new 'toy' she had for her birthday. We had previously chosen a designated route, having watched a number of 'pin ball wizards' earlier in the day, and decided to hug the north wall for most of the race. It was a steady race with nothing exciting to report.

Reflecting on this outing, we felt a little disappointed that we had failed to put some of our training techniques into action, particularly keeping the check rate down, which cost us some time. However, it was our first head race in this crew and we intend to improve.

Congratulations to Jo and Vicky for winning and bringing home a medal for OTRC.

### **WNov 4+ Rhona, Mel, Jacqui, Kate E (Time 10:35)**

Beaten by schoolgirls with age on their side!

### **Results without reports:**

WJ14 4x+ Stokes time 09:04

WJ16 2x Moyses/Gutteridge-Smith time 09:05

WJ16 4x Gutteridge-Smith time 08:55

WJ17 2x Smith/Cox time 08:43

WJ18 4x Whittemore time 07:52

WNov 1x Leer time 09:27

Mx IM3 2x Box/Leer time 08:43

J16 4x Pendred time 07:47

Nov 1x Box 09:35