

OTRC Match Report - Master's Champs, June 2016



John writes:

Over the past few years, The British Masters Championships has been a major event for the senior section of the club. This event has the advantage of not only having age categories, but also Novice, Intermediate and Championship level events. Over the last couple of years the organisers have altered the qualifications for the Intermediate category to make it a stronger National Championship event, meaning our successful crews from previous years now have to enter at Championship level. Due to the number of crews entering the competition is now spread over two days. This National level of competition produces some of the highest level of competition in the country at Masters level, and many of our crews felt this was a step too high.

However our Novice Men's Eight, which started a year ago, have made such progress and produced such good results that John suggested they have a crack at this top level of competition. They had to make an adjustment in personnel to get into the Masters category and so Charlie, the youngster in the crew, made way for Richard. The ladies who had been rowing in the Eight earlier in the year swapped to sculling and put together a Novice "pointless" quad for the event, and these two crews were our representatives on the Saturday.

The Men's Quad unceremoniously ditched Simon so they could race at Intermediate rather than Championship level and asked Jon Heaney to take his place. Jo & Vicky despite having a sac full of medals from previous Championships are still only Intermediate in sculling, so they joined the Men's Quad racing in the Intermediate races on Sunday.

In the week proceeding the event there was the usual referring to weather forecasts as the steersman and cox prayed for no crosswinds, the rowers for no choppy conditions and the ladies needed to know who many outfits to bring. In the end all forecasts were wrong and it was sunny for righteous on Saturday and rainy for the dodgy Intermediates on Sunday.

The club has competed as a group in the past and it felt strange to turn up on each day with just two crews. On the Sunday the two boats were racing at similar times and so there wasn't the usual army of supporters providing help with for shoes, oars and numbers etc. - but the OTRC spirit shone through. Despite there being only a crews worth of supporters we made a good fist of producing an OTRC roar in the final 100m. Overall it was a great experience for our Novice crews who had not competed at such a Championship level, and a successful outing for the club in general - four crews, one Gold and one Bronze. Well done OTRC!

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W MasA Nov 4x-: Zoe, Fiona, Jennie, Smithy – Time: 4:04.82 (not bad but not quite in first place)

This surely was a race of 2 halves

We had a smooth row up to the start line; our best ever practice racing start and the nerves began to settle down.

However, our actual start for the race was probably our worst one ever and it took the first 250 to get going well. The steerswoman had some work to do as the boat was not traveling in a straight line. We had lots of calls for heads, legs, and god knows what else, and the crew responded with a really good second 500m. We took half a length out of the boat ahead of us as we raced towards the finish and we could really hear the shouts of support from OTRC.

All together we enjoyed our day out, including the spot of post-race retail therapy where Smithy had a big splurge at the Crew Room stall (look out for her new stuff everyone!)

Thank you to Zoe for the homemade cake - an essential for an OTRC away day. We know we have plenty to work on, but were encouraged by our time.

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MasC Nov 8+: Dick, Richard, Ian, Leslie, Peter C, Jason, Antony, Mark; cox: Paul —
Time: 4:19.31

We arrived at Nottingham excited and eager to prove ourselves in our first race against peer-level novice crews. The day started well with a focused warmup enabling us to shake the nerves (as much as possible) and get into the proper mental space.

We set off with a strong start and by all accounts we were rapidly pulling ahead of the opposing crews after just 50 meters.

...and then the crustaceans came out to play.

First a little Saint Piran's Crab (for the BBC Springwatch fans among the readership) had a nibble, briefly interrupting our rhythm, but to no major effect.

Not satisfied, the crustaceans sent up their next offering, a Sally Lightfoot Crab. More successful in their effort, the crab managed to pull one of the bow oars under. Quickly recovered after a half stop, we were back at it, regaining distance and momentum with the oppo in sight; accordingly, the crabs were not pleased. Finally, the crustacean army sent forth their nuclear option -- the Alaskan King Crab. The mighty and most fearsome of the clawed crustaceans took hold of another bow oar, pinning it firmly against the rigger to its breaking point. During the struggle, the boat was forced to a full stop before the satisfied crab military retreated, but not before costing us at least 30 seconds of time stopped, and more in momentum lost.

Out of contention, but not to be defeated by ourselves, we regained our composure and finished the race as a crew, rowing hard, and with precision. The winning time was 3:45 and, notably, 10 seconds slower than the row the Eight put forward on the same course at the Nottingham regatta in May, otherwise indicating we are very competitive at this level.

I can't help but relate the race to the iconic struggle depicted in the Hemingway classic, *The Old Man and the Sea*. We didn't win any hardware, but carry with us the hard and valuable lessons learned from our battle with nature and ourselves. And, of course, pleased with our survival (so far) of a Blue-Green Algae outbreak.

The eight will see you next year, fish.

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W MasD 2x: Jo, Vicky – Time: 4:29.03 (final)

Having waved the women's novice ("pointless") quad off on Saturday morning before their race we were sorry not to have been able to race at the British Masters Championships with them and the Men's 8+. Not just to cheer them on, but because the weather was dreadful on the Sunday! We left the club in drizzle, and this turned to really 'wet' rain (the sort that goes through your clothes) as we headed up the A1. Soggy ground and soggy pants. Great!

Vicky and I had to race a heat with the fastest three crews going through to the final, followed directly by another heat of WMasD 2x with the same rules. Six boats to fight it out in the final after that....

We set off for the first of our obligatory pre-race wees, whilst John M and Jon H rigged our boat. (Thanks guys) They then carried it to the rowing lake while we took our oars and got our number, and had the essential second wee. (Note to self. Don't put all-in-one straps up until final wee undertaken, especially if all kit very wet and sticking to clammy flesh..) It was great to have a couple of boatmen, and we think this would be a great thing for all ladies races..

We paddled up. Practiced our warm up as per, and got attached without any problem. A slightly slower start than the North staffs double on our right, and Twickenham on our left, but ahead of Lincoln. No steering issues, but rating a bit lower than we would have liked. We came in third, with a time of 4:34, and had made it to the final. Phew!

A quick turn around of under an hour. Another wee, a flapjack and some fluid (so we could have another wee later if we wanted) and in no time at all we were back on the water. Same warm up.. ("a race is just practicing what you do in training") different lane. We had discussed that we should maybe go for a faster start, and this we did. We got away first this time, pulling ahead of all our oppo and held it together to still be second at 500m. We were eventually passed by the crews who had beaten us in our heat, to take a bronze medal after their gold and silver. Our time for the final was 5 seconds faster than our heat, which made us feel that we had had a better row despite having already been down the course not very long before.

We were really pleased to have medalled (s captain Becky had sent strict instructions), and delighted to finish in time to see the MasE 4x coming down the course in gold medal position in their race, just as the sun finally came out..

Another wee, then home to re-rig and celebrate.

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MasE 4x-: Bob, Charlie, Jon, John – Time 3:51.25 – NATIONAL CHAMPIONS!!!!

Well after Peterborough expectations had been raised, so the pressure was on.

Our final training outing was one of those outings where your school report would have said can do better. So a level of anxiety was creeping in with the author if not with the others crew members.

We all knew the weather was going to be a critical factor, wind is not a good thing on a 2K exposed rowing lake, and a cross wind even worse. With one crew member well known for not getting his hands down enough at the finish the slightest amount of chop could ruin our day. So an eagle eye was kept on the forecast, which as forecasts do, kept changing.

So arriving to rain but little or no wind and a flat looking course, we were reasonably pleased somebody had been listening. By the time we boated the rain had stopped and conditions were looking good.

A few practice starts to focus the mind and get the body moving went well so we were feeling ok as we waited with our opposition for our turn on the stake boats. There were a few butterflies but it wouldn't be a race without them.

We attached to the stake boat/raft without incident. Then we were under starters orders, then we were off, not our best start of the day, the first 3 strokes weren't in our race plan.

Luckily for us nobody else got a flyer and we recovered our composure over the next 5 or so strokes, getting the legs on, and were pulling away. By 20 strokes we had clear water and according to the race plan should have been settling into our race pace. However due to the poor start I think the red mist had come down and the race plan was out the window, we kept driving hard, too hard.

At 500m we were comfortably in the lead, my legs were burning, and the rating was still the wrong side of 30 strokes a minute. At 750m a call was made to drop the rate which came down to a more modest 30 strokes a minute and we cross the line with a bit more style and well in front of all opposition in a time of 3:51.

Another Gold Medal win for Oundle Town in the Vet E4X-, 2 years on the trot.

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