



OUNDLE TOWN
ROWING CLUB

A Fairytale Day (Match report from the WEHORR)



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❖ The Women's Head of the River 2014 ❖

Cambridge



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Once upon a time river, eight ladies of a certain age were contemplating a boring life of rowing up and down the same 3km stretch of the River Nene. Even the cosmopolitan lights of Bedford

and Northampton were no longer “floating their boats”. “What can we do?” they wailed. “We need something new and challenging in our lives to counteract the onset of wrinkles and grey hair.” Suddenly, in a flash of light a tall, handsome man in a sparkly all-in-one, waving a stroke side oar appeared. It was their Fairy Godfather! “I will mould you into an Eights crew of such marvellous skill that you will be able to take part in the Women’s Eights Head of the River Race,” he declared. “Excitement and adventure will be yours.” The ladies were enthusiastic, although a little dubious.

In spite of various setbacks – including the paradox of too much water in the river, which stopped them training for weeks – John, as the Fairy Godfather was affectionately known by the crew, dedicated his time to a combination of criticism (“Stick those chests out. You’re still missing the catch. Don’t lean away from your rigger!”) and encouragement (mostly: “You’re better than the Men’s Eight”) in order to hone their skills to perfection.

After much training and swapping of seats, the day came when the eight ladies of a certain age, their illustrious cox, the Fairy Godfather (cunningly disguised in jeans and an OTRC t-shirt), two young and handsome supporters and one slightly older, silver-haired, but divinely useful supporter piled into Landrover and cars and headed towards the bright lights of Ye Olde London Towne. The air buzzed with excitement. The sun shone down on the expedition, which was, verily, a good omen, as OTRC Head Races were usually very cold and/or very damp affairs.

On arrival in Ye Olde London Town, the Fairy Godfather took the country bumpkins on a guided road-tour of the course using the magic of speaker phone to converse with those in the other car; unfazed by the cries of “Are we nearly there, yet?” He then, without the aid of SatNav magic, deposited the crew in just the right location (one of the benefits of a local, private education in Fairy Godfather Land), where the boat was unloaded and then rigged.

Once that was done, the serious business began: A spot of essential retail therapy, a good scout around at all the other crews and their outfits/hairdos/makeup followed by prolonged and serious debates on whether it should be “tops on or tops off” for the row up to the start, how many layers to pack in the boat and most importantly of all – the timing of the last wee before pushing off. The ladies of a certain age were all too aware of toilet queuing protocol and with 250 boats, each full of 9 women, precise timing was essential.

Finally it was time to boat. The novelty of boating on a sloping jetty, wearing wellies, excited Jenny (seat 7) too much and she went in too deep, ending up with wet feet. Jo “Paparazzi” Milborne (seat 5) had to surgically detach her camera in order to row. Cox, Rhona, map strapped

needlessly to her leg (needlessly, as the course will be forever imprinted on her mind), took control and we were off.

Off into another world of an enormously wide, choppy, Eights-infested river. Rhona pointed out landmarks on the way as she steered to avoid the entourage of other boats travelling the same route. Every now and again the crew heard the unintelligible but encouraging shouts of the Fairy Godfather who was now on a bike rowing along the towpath! The crew rowed all the way through the allotted course, in a surprisingly easy manner. Mrs Izod (seat 1) and Auntie Angela (Seat 2) had been dreading the row up more than the race itself, as it was against the tide and reputedly extremely hard work!

But unbeknown to them, their job had not finished. "Tap on, One and Two!" instructed the cox and One and Two proceeded to TAP ON for another 30km in order to keep the boat from drifting in the tide.

"Row on two strokes, Bow Four! Tap on One and Two."

"Row on bow side for one! Keep tapping on, One and Two."

Having being threatened with death by the Fairy Godfather if they talked in the boat, One and Two, being good girls, were reluctant to speak but eventually Mrs Izod muttered "I'm getting cramp" while Auntie Angela whispered back "I'll be too knackered to race soon". Luckily, cox finally realised that MAYBE the division of labour was a little unfair (possibly a comment from Becky in the Stroke seat) and switched to torturing Seats 5 (Paparazzi) and Seat 6 (Vicky), to a resounding 'Thank You' from the bow end!

All too soon, they were turning the boat just before Kew Bridge (and NO, no--one had said they would have to row that far!) and, under the instruction of some surprisingly lovely, polite stewards, the crew were on the way to the start at Chiswick Bridge.

Up to medium!

Building to firm over 5.

Firm!

Boat 148. GO!!!

Rhona called and steered brilliantly, Becky set a fab stroke, Jenny set up the timing well, while Paparazzi, Vicky, Cool Keely (seat 4) and little Becca (seat 3) put on the beef, while Auntie Angela and Claire, having recovered from the tapping on, kept the balance and the rhythm at the pointy end of the boat.

Under Barnes Bridge. Not feeling too bad. Great rhythm. Finish together. Under Hammersmith Bridge. Cheer and encouragement heard from the young and lovely supporter, Lucy. Halfway! Bit of choppy water and cross wind. Loss of rhythm. Get it back. Catch together. Past Fulham

Football Ground, where they definitely heard “Come on Oundle!” Up to the Black Buoy. Sit up!!!
Knackered but nearly there – one and a half minutes to go. Up one at Vesta and then
Rhona was enjoying herself so much they didn’t stop at the finish and were still doing 31 strokes
a minute under Putney Bridge!
It was all over. Lungs and muscles grateful to be paddling light, but.... That’s it. Experience over.
And no chance of an Action Replay to revisit it.
Then it was the usual endless row back to the jetty, lots of help from Simon, Jack, Lucy and Mick
to get the boat out of the water, derigged and loaded on the trailer. A cup of tea or a cider,
depending on your preference. Back in the Landy and car and home to the Ship for lots of ‘Top
Banter’.

The Fairy Godfather had done it! Turned the ladies of a certain age into a crew who rowed in the
Women’s Eights Head of the River Race in a very respectable time of 23:14.1. Not bad for a first
outing (on the Thames) and a fantastic experience.

What next, Fairy Godfather?