

Race Day Organiser - Simon

Star Club's autumn head has been a fixture in the OTRC racing calendar since before records began; and has given us many memories, often due to atrocious weather. This time, however, we were greeted with cloudless skies on arrival, which together with a light tail wind were almost perfect rowing conditions.

Four crews entered, split over divisions 2-4 which meant no early start or late finish. Three quads (mens, ladies and mixed) and a masters G double represented the club, probably the fewest number of crews that we'd entered.

Marshalling prior to the start was different this time, due to overgrown trees above the normal start point. Crews were held in start order "Tideway style" just upstream of Star Club and paddled up to turn around a buoy just before the twin railway bridges. So the start was slightly further downstream giving a shorter course (1,900m). This seemed to work well with none of the usual scrum of boats at the start. And slightly more flattering race times...

The day passed without major incident, and despite the limited (or no) competition in our events, all our crews enjoyed the experience.

Thanks to everyone who took part, helping and supporting as well. Special thanks as ever to our trailer drivers Nick Bolton (outward) and Dick (return) for all their help as well.



Winners! Mas.FH.2x - Mark and Bish

After a late night at a Dara O'Briain gig I got up early enough to take the dog to his Probation Officer and got to Bedford Embankment to find the trailer brilliantly located right opposite the launching place. Bish seems to have driven around Bedford before finding the way. I had managed to try and rig the wrong double Weldon with the riggers for McMurdo - thank goodness the blazer of shame is missing!

Anyway we put some of that right and got McMurdo rigged and with the kind help of Claire and Angela Bish and I were lowered onto our seats and set off for quite a long wait in front of the Star Club luckily in the sun having a chat with the crew that were starting after us. We had confirmed the hat I had lost earlier in the year on the bank after the Town Bridge was not still there.

Eventually it was our turn so we slowly got into position to give us as much space as possible between us and the crews ahead, and then we set off with the occasional muttering "squeeze up", "relax the shoulder" and "patient catch" until the issue of getting through the bridges took over concentration, and a brief clatter of blades with some waiting singles. Then "push for the finish" came which we managed.

Didn't encounter the bank, not overtaken and didn't overtake anyone, a time of 8.09, and a win on handicap. Lovely.



MasG Mixed 4x- = Claire, Simon, Angela and Mark

The inaugural race for the newly formed MasG Mixed Quad of Simon, Claire, Mark and Angela didn't get off to a good start when we were told there was no opposition for us! Where have all the older rowers gone? Our only chance of a row was to enter the Open 4x- category in Band B.

We went for it.

Not expecting to beat our fit, young all-male opposition, we had a good race at 29 spm, with good rhythm and timing (Brian declared that we looked 'tidy'). We could have done with a tad more control on the slide, but were pleased with the feel of the row and a time of 07:38, just 30 seconds slower than our men's MasF quad.

Onwards and upwards (if we can find some appropriately aged opposition).





Oundle Town Rowing Club

MATCH REPORT - STAR AUTUMN HEAD



Mas.F.4x- - Nick, Gary, Brian and Dick

The news that Star hadn't entered their usual ace crew had raised our hopes in the days leading up to the race. Whisper it quietly, "we may have a chance". Our only opponent was Yare Club, a largely unknown quantity. They had previously beaten one of our crews at St Neots so we knew they were going to be a decent crew, but we had the advantage of local knowledge and awesome power of course... our confidence was good.

Confidence dimmed slightly when Jon failed to recover from Covid in time forcing a rethink on crew and seats, drafting in Nick as a super sub meant Dick was handed the Hospital pass of steering the deceptively tricky course.

As we paddled to the start, nerves jangled and the balance of the boat wobbled throughout the short warm-up bursts. We entered the organised chaos of crews being queued along the bank awaiting our turn to turn and go, time to lose the nerves. After what seemed like an hour it was our turn, our opposition went ahead and we build our strokes over 5, after only 3 ... bang... we hit a bouy, we reset and built again crossing the start line at our race pace. After a few only a few strokes Nick loses his right blade and I pause for a stroke until he regathered, the rhythm and pace snapped back nicely, we lost time but only seconds, my head says "it's ok, push harder!" Unfortunately, this pause had affected our course, in the blur and tunnel vision of the race I sense we are edging toward the centre of the course, my mind is "that's ok" "keep focused" "rhythm" the queue of boats waiting to start begins to enter my tunnel vision and I feel a big steer bringing us back on course "phew, well done Dick". Rhythm is good, pace feels quick despite the steer as we flash through the Town Bridge. The water gets more choppy as we pass Bedford RC. We refocus and push into the second half of the course.

As we headed into the more sheltered sections our up until now splashy blade-work began to improve and we kept the pressure and pace on. The footbridges came and went quickly as we finished strongly.

7:08 a decent time in the end but not good enough to beat a very quick Yare crew. We look ahead to Northampton!



W.Mas. 4x- = Becky S, Becky B, Angela and Claire

I couldn't think of a better way to end last weekend than with my first 2km row at Star Club Head of the River in Bedford. I was rowing with my committed and enthusiastic crew and the added bonus was that it wasn't cold and raining. That morning I had prepared for cold and wet conditions with my 5 layers of clothing based on Saturday's weather but as Nick and I parked up the trailer and started to unload I realised that the autumnal weather was going to be kind to us thankfully. The trees either side of the river were colourful, and the river was flat.

We were soon joined by Becky, Mark, Angela and Claire who organised the unloading of the boats from the trailer and then we all set to rigging and getting the boats ready.

Time passed quickly and no sooner had we got the boats ready, we were then carrying our boat down to the water's edge. I got terribly confused as we put our oars in and sat in the boat the wrong way around. Now I understand about muscle memory!

Once strapped in we made our way down to the start point. Claire skillfully navigated us through the bridges, practising some firm pressures along the way. The conditions seemed perfect compared to some of the most recent windy outings we'd had in Oundle. There were so many boats. In fact, way more than I'd anticipated, and as I peered into the boats, I realised that we were surrounded once again by the bleary-eyed youngsters who had now been transformed into live wires of long, lean muscle engaging in good, humoured banter between the boats. I have to say that I did feel my age at this point but that feeling soon went when I started to get slightly overwhelmed with emotion that I was there amidst all these keen young rowers! Just the day before I was going to pull out due to a chesty cough and sore throat (not Covid) but I pushed through and didn't let the crew down. I now felt proud to be part of the line-up of boats waiting patiently to be told to go.

Because we had no opposition to row against, we were doing a timed 2km and for some reason, the organisers decided that we should go first. Understandably as a crew we were quite surprised with this decision bearing in mind the younger, lean and fitter rowers were following on behind. But we didn't let this stop our determination of having a plan of not letting them catch us up.

So off we went building up as we passed the start line. It felt great. The boat felt fairly well balanced and in time. We found our rhythm with Becky stroking and Angela kept the calls coming to correct and motivate us as we put our all into the power of 10. Claire did a fantastic job of steering especially under the bridges due to the challenging conditions with the high-water levels. I appreciated the shouts of encouragement from across the water... "come on Oundle!" from Mark and John whilst they perched in their boat waiting in the line-up. We all dug deep and at times I felt splashes of water hitting my face and legs. Then Claire called "square early" and it was at this point that I realised that I was doing most of the splashing! As I tried to correct this we then went into a part of the river where we became unbalanced for a few hundred metres and it felt like we were on the sea. At this stage I couldn't concentrate on squaring early because I had too many things to think about. We pushed on and came out of the rough patch to see the younger boat was catching up with us, so this spurred us all on I'm sure for the last push on the legs. Before I knew it we had crossed the finish line and the whole row was over far too quickly. We were out of breathe, some of us were soggy than others and I think it's fair to say we finished in good spirits. Moreover, the younger crews didn't catch us up!

I'm not sure that the result was impressive (08:19) but what matters is that we put the effort in and went. Such a great achievement and I left excited for races to come.

A massive thank you goes to Angela, Claire and Becky for being reliable, proactive, kind and patient crew members, and to everyone else for helping out both before with coaching and on the day.

