

Bristol Race Report

As a race virgin I have the dubious pleasure of writing the race report. I have been told to start from when I got up to when I got home.

I shall veer from this path a little and start from training a couple of weeks ago when Jim told me I was ready to compete with you all. I was chuffed to bits (Northern to Southern translation – really pleased). I was rubbish at sports at school and to find a sport now that I enjoy and I have to potential to be good at is fantastic.

Anyway back to the plot: The alarm went off at 5.35, 5.35 on a Sunday should be illegal (unless it's on the pm), but for some never seen before reason I was straight up and raring to go. A good mood that early on a Sunday is unnatural. My bag was already packed so all I needed to do was heat up the porridge and put the coffee on and get myself ready. I was being transported to Bristol in the Rat mobile. Excellent directions from Love Rat got me to his house in plenty of time and we set off at 7.00am. I know it was my first race but at least I had paddled before but Baby Rat had never drummed and was about to be thrown in at the deep end.

The drive to Bristol took place without a hitch, there was only one twit on the road who after trying to map read and steer with the inevitable 3 lane wobble, took a last minute decision to leave the M4 at Junction 18. (Charles the directions said junction 18 of the **M5**). When approaching Bristol we spotted the Batchworth boats and followed them straight to the venue.

Most of the team was already there, the major exception being Jim & the boat but it wasn't long before he joined us. Amathus were in the way and blocked the dock for a good ten mins but before long our two boats were in the water and we ready for the first race.

I wasn't in the first race but I will make a good guess at what captain Dave's pep talk was "This is the most important race of the day....." Whatever was said it worked as we stormed home in 2nd position, beating Henley & Wasps

Race 2 and I was in this one, after a great warm up from Jeanette and I have to say that all the warm ups and cool downs were fantastic so thank you. The pep talk was "This is the most important race of the day.....". As we lined up for the race I could decide which emotion was going to win, fear excitement or nerves. I think it was excitement and we had a great race and came in 1st (despite me falling off the seat near the end, I kept paddling though and I think in time).

As Captain Dave said I should retire now with an unbeaten record. Was he hinting at something? Even if he was, I was still in the next race, now this one "was the most important of the day" as it set our positions for the first 500m. This was a tough race with a lot of wash, we were pipped to 3rd place by WAM (half a second in it) but neither of us made the minor final.

Now for the big races and our first 500m and as Captain Dave stated "The most important race of the day, and the 200's don't count at all". I was beginning to spot a theme in his briefings. We were in Lane 3 for this race, which involved us weaving in and out of the buoys and I'm sure at the end of it our drummer looked just a little green from all the bobbing about. We came in 2nd beating Cardiff (Jim was very pleased about this, some would say smug) and 7 Warriors.

The 500m Rep was a very important race in fact the most important of the day and all we had to do was exactly as we had done before. I wasn't in this race but it looked fantastic from the bank and we all cheered the team in a resplendent 1st place. Although I did hear we nearly lost Pam at one point as the wash came in over the front of the boat and all but drowned her, like a true pro she kept going and the equally wet drummer kept the beat.

The 500m semi and I was back in the boat, now this really was the most important race of the day and we were going for a timed result. The first place would be in the major final but the fastest losers would be in the minor final. We were going for it. And as Dave said all we had to do was exactly as we did before. Well we did and we were triumphant and came in a close second and made the minor finals. Our first final of the season.

At this point I would just like to thank the supporters, I know when I was paddling hearing "come on BA" helped to boost morale and really give me a lift (not at least because I knew we couldn't be that far from the finish line). The Minor Final line up consisted of us, Henley, WAM and Bristol. There did seem to be a lot of faffing about at the beginning. We had to wait for other boats to get into position, for either this final or the following one. I started to get nervous but just remembered Captain Dave's words of wisdom "This IS the most important race of the day and just do exactly as you did last time". It was a good start and we all gave it our best, we could all feel the boat lift when Jim called for a reach, I think it was the promise of a beer at the other end. We came in a respectful 2nd to Henley and by all accounts they only beat us by 4 rows of the boat. So the overall result was that we came 6th.

This was fantastic, our best performance of the season so far and we all had a good time, the event seemed well run and to time and I really enjoyed it.

All we had to do was get the boats out of the water, onto the trailer and head off home. Easier said than done as Amathus managed to manoeuvre their trailer into everyone's way, a skill I believe the driver has honed over many years of practice. Once loaded many of us adjourned to the bar for a swift half.

As my first every experience of Dragon Boat racing I learnt many things a few I have listed below.

- Jeanette really doesn't like Wasps
- We need to bring our own stove, as £1.50 for a cup of tea is criminal
- The Rats bought the best food selection (although I wasn't sure about cocktail sausages after the recent Prescott allegations)
- Cup cakes only make a good throwing missile for about 6 throws.
- The moths in Leslie's wallet are still alive but being treated for shock.
- I have to get some shorts.
- The Love Rat has a unique sense of direction.
- I need to pack suntan lotion next time.
- The teamwork and friendliness of the squad is great and it's wonderful to be part of such a team.

We left Bristol at about 7.30, we were driving towards Bristol again at about 7.50 and made it to Chez Love rat at about 9.00.

A thoroughly enjoyable day.

Thank you for letting me be part of it