

Long Drive, Long Write-up

As our regular reporter is traveling during the next few weeks he can't do a full race report on his own. Instead we have pieced together the musings of several characters; well they might not be actual musings, but then again if properly prompted, they might be.

Several BA Hurricanes - 9 hours driving for 9 minutes racing, no way!

Little Miss Sleepy Head - Saturday, laid out my race kit ready for the off. Sunday, woke up at 7am as normal. Saw dragonboat kit. Realised my lift was somewhere near Birmingham at the time. Where can I display that Golden Handbrake?

Malcolm - Oh \$hit, they are one down. Kevin's handing me a paddle. Cheryl (sorry re spelling unless by good luck I have got it right) has packed spare clothes for me. Very sneaky. Thank goodness, a load of guys from Batchworth Aspire have rocked up and saved my bacon.

Novice Manager - to BDA official "Do I owe you any money?" "Yes, £200" GULP!" Used the cheque's in the post excuse and she fell for it (Editor's note - Les, please put a cheque in the post)

Big Andy who owns the pool boats - BA will like racing in these sleek Chinese boats, but they'll struggle to lift them as there is virtually no gunnel to hang on to. They'll have sore fingers.

Race Organiser - "I know the finish looks staggered, but its not, we've been out with our compass and the start and finish are both square, it's the river that's crooked. (Editor's note - there was no evidence that either lane 1 or 3 was disadvantaged so he might have been right).

Quick word about the venue. Yes it is a long way away. But. The clubhouse is excellent, there are plentiful and clean facilities. There is a well stocked bar. A very good snack bar / café. A large balcony for your viewing pleasure. Enough parking. Lots of space to set up camp. The racing is right there in front of you.

Indra - I had a lovely day, the place was the best on the circuit and it was warm enough for me to sit ON my blanket rather than huddle UNDER it.

Whole BA team - there will be 21 different people in the boat today 8 of whom are debutants, so we all had to tell everyone our names - apart from Angela who forgot hers.

Batchworth Aspire guest - after coming second to someone (probably Amathus as they represented 4 of the 9 crews) - that rate was unbelievably fast (he was right) but it was great to be in contention rather than spectating from the back of the pack.

Time for 1st 200/250 was 1:04.xx Sorry no statisticians available.

Sam (very lovely and talented helm) after we had moved a few people around the boat, taken the rate down and achieved a second second. You guys are easy to helm (take note Jim) I don't put the steering oar in the water until the last kick to the line, I just shout at you.

Nathan/Dave (only Fools and Horses anyone?) (a young gentleman from Liverpool who stepped into the helm role for the minor final (3 Rivers pipped us to the major) as Sam was helming Powerhouse. "Where did that start come from? That was immense".

The final was slower by 2 seconds, but after that start we were in complete control and the call to the line at about 20m out was only for effect, Cool Running and Powerhouse were battling for the minor places as can be seen in the attached picture.

The major final was a cracker, won by Amathus, despite all my encouragement for Thames, on the very last stroke. I keep saying this, but if every team could get bodies out like Amathus do, this sport would be going places.

Lunchtime

Pond Life (local kids) It's a bit hot, why don't we go for a swim in that filthy water. Phew, we're a bit tired, luckily we can rest on these big orange space hoppers. Hang on. If we untie them we can use them to get back to the bank.

Cue the disappearance of the finish line! After that you had to paddle like mad until the horn sounded.

Afternoon and the 500m - or the 450m - or some other odd distance.

Race 1 v Amathus and Wasps - good start but eventually dropped by Amathus and we came off the gas at the marker buoys, which were about 15m shy of the finish - bad paddlers. Still we had a one second advantage over 3 Rivers going into round 2. In their second race 3 Rivers took seven seconds off their time to record a 1:53.xx; they were sure they were in the major final, though at this time we didn't know what was going on.

Someone from Liverpool - Saturday, dye hair and tache. Buy new sunglasses. Sunday, remember to strut around looking youthful and virile. Racing against those pesky BA people again and they have the gall to be in lane 2. We are the big dogs on the block, we should be there. I know. We'll slip over to the left and crowd them a bit. Helm brings the boat to less than 3 meters. BA helm asks her crew if they are happy. Odd. They are. Forward! Attention! Go! Goodbye BA. Hang on. The start sequence is over and BA is still right there with us. Never mind, we'll go into stride and smash them. What are they playing at the cheeky f'ers. Know your place and drop off. 350m done and they're still there. At last. They haven't got the legs to hang on to the line and we've done the fastest time of the day to claim lane 2 in the major final.

Meanwhile over in the BA boat the collective thought is "don't try and bully me you xxxx". Off we went and paddled our hearts out. More collective thoughts "Are they just cruising? No. They are clearly working very hard. Bloody hell we're doing well." Paddle up to the jetty to hear "Second BA in 1:52.66". **WE ARE IN THE MAJOR FINAL!!!**

3 Rivers Paddler - "where did that come from?"

Lenny - "send Kevin D'Mellow over so I can smack him"

BA Hurricanes - team hug and much euphoria

Off to the Major Final. Did I mention that we got into the Major Final? Well we did. We were in lane 3 in the Major Final along with other Major Finalists Amathus and Thames. Not wishing to mess up the Major Final, which BA was in, Amathus stuck to its own lane and blasted away from the start with Thames and BA in hot pursuit. BA got a little panicky on finding themselves down on the start for the first time all day and began to rate way too quickly. Sam (the helm, not the paddler) quickly jumped on that with a call to lock in a long strong stroke. Despite pulling like maniacs we still lost ground to Amathus, who were inspired, but held on gamely to Thames. The finish felt like it would never come but at last we crossed in what we thought was a poor time (the bow wave from the Amathus boat gave us some gip and the race felt heavy). I'll tell you the time later.

Powerhouse Crew - bring the boat up to the jetty and we'll take it out for you – Result!

Maybe I should tell you who was in the crew as a lot of the Major Finalists may be strangers to you.

Liam on drum (Robert's son) - great effort on his first outing and even some double beats to the line.

Pam & Kevin D

Ratty & Sam

Angela (back from retirement) & Little Rat

Clare ((transfer from Secklow/GB Senior/Rafter/debutant) & Mary (Worcester and she raced in Cork)

Robert & Anna (paddling on her wrong side and with a nasty cold bug)

Alan (transfer from Secklow/GB Senior/Rafter/debutant) & Kevin T

Chris (Batchworth Aspire) & Ashley W

Nigel & Arnie (Batchworth Aspire)

Chris (Batchworth Aspire) & Josh (Worcester and he drummed in Cork)

Sam (Worcester)

Nathan/Dave (Amathus)

Clare and Alan you will see a lot more of so introduce yourselves. Hopefully we will also see a lot more of Mary, Josh and the Aspire lads too. It was great to have them in the boat on Sunday, they really fitted in well and paddled brilliantly.

Back to the events of the day.

Liam - I had to go and pick up the trophy we were third in the Major Final (see picture) and although we thought we had a bad time we actually recorded 1:52.59, our fastest time of the day and just 5 seconds behind Thames. You beauty!

Amathus won in a blistering 1:42.xx to dispel any rumblings about this being a soft 16 points. Even the mighty Batchworth would have struggled against a rampant Amathus on that form.

A quick beer, best wishes to everyone and off down the motorway behind several people who think 70pmh is a limit not a floor. Into Leicester Forest services for a coffee to learn that the M1 was at a standstill from J13-8. Oh no it wasn't, the traffic was fine. The standstill was from J16-14 where there was a 3 car pile up and a lorry in a ditch (separate incidents) so the run home was an hour longer than the run there and the pub was shut when I got home. No traffic on the M40 I hear.

BA Hurricanes who were not in Stockton - They made the Major Final and I wasn't there to share in it. I wish I'd been in a Major Final. Will definitely be going up there next year. Will definitely be training hard to break into that team. **Didn't they do well.**

Thanks to Alan for the early photos, to all the contributors for their imaginary contributions and to everyone who made the journey to Stockton for a really great day's racing.