

Rowperfect

UK Newsletter September 2007

Dear Rowperfect community

Another year is starting for the northern hemisphere. We are noticing a real sea-change in rowing and sculling as new products are being developed many more clubs and individuals are prepared to try out something new. This is very encouraging because Rowperfect UK tries to stay up to date with new technologies and products to help you row and scull with improved technique and to go faster.

The first new product we will be launching this year is from Coxmate. The top of the range Coxmate SCT now has a GPS speed measurement plug-in that needs no calibration and is a little larger than a 50p. We are taking orders now.

We have two interviews in this issue. Craig Hoffman a top international junior sculling coach and Michelle Guerette the USA womens single sculler. Both bring insight into the USA's sculling capabilities on the world scene.

Rebecca Caroe and Grant Craies, Rowperfect UK

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New Coxmate SCT with GPS

Coxmate has made an alternative to the speed measurement impeller for its top of the range SCT cox box. The GPS attachment mounts behind the cox and plugs into the base of the SCT magnetic mount.



GPS pick-up



GPS and SCT showing size

The Coxmate manufacturer has this to say comparing the impeller and GPS measurement systems.

GPS vs Impeller Speed sensing

Now we offer both speed sensing options, we can offer some advice which will not be seen as having a commercial bias. Like many technological choices, there is not a simple answer. Each has its merits. We can summarise the argument:

- GPS is simpler to install, produces no drag, is not prone to interference from weed or damage from impact – on and off the water, and requires NO calibration. A GPS gives land speed. It can easily be moved between boats.
- Impellers give a speed reading every few milliseconds, compared to around a second for GPS, they use less power – GPS uses comparable power to the audio amplifier. This high frequency speed reading enables stroke velocity profiles to be analysed – not possible with GPS. Impellers give speed through the water which is a better indication of rowing performance. Impellers are not affected by overhead line of sight obstructions – bridges and city high rise can affect performance of GPS.

The main questions in making your determination are:

- Are you rowing on moving water?
- Is water free of weed or similar?
- Are you interested in (and will you do it) analysing the stroke velocity profile?

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- Do your crews look after equipment to minimise damage to fin?
- Do you have time and a measured course for calibrating speed sensor?
- Do you use speed sensor on same boat – GPS can easily be transferred between boats?
- Is there restricted line of sight to sky?

If all the answers are all YES then an impeller is the way to go. If they are all NO then a GPS is. For most people the answers will not be all YES or NO.

My experience is that despite good intentions, most impeller sensors are not calibrated by users, and few coaches use the stroke profile analysis capability of the SC, and so for most users the convenience of the GPS is hard to beat.

Some people will argue there is a slight lag with the GPS – due to the delay in getting speed signal. Whilst this is true the Coxmate SC/SCT firmware has compensation for this. Finally to avoid giving you an easy economic choice – they cost about the same for the SC/SCT! I would also like to add that we are continuing our developments with impellers to make them smaller – less drag and less chance of damage. We do not see any end to the use of impellers – and GPS is unlikely to take over for small boats due to their power requirement.

Coxmate has also revised its pricing structure so that the Coxmate software which used to be supplied with the SCT unit is now sold separately. This has reduced the price of the SCT to £470 (from £545) and the software is £110.

Existing SC/SCT units can be upgraded to GPS for £25 plus the cost of the GPS (£130) and postage.

Craig Hoffman interviewed by Rowperfect

Craig Hoffman, head coach, Malvern Preparatory School, Chair US Rowing Junior Mens Committee and Member of the Board of Directors of the Scholastic Rowing Association of USA

<http://www.malvernprep.com/> <http://www.sraa.net/>

Craig came to HRR with three junior quads and a double, and we caught up with him in the café after his busy week in which his top crew went out of the competition on Saturday to Windsor Boys School.



What is your background in the sport?

I was a cox at high school and at Syracuse University and then the Undine Barge Club. 20 years ago I started helping to coach at my high school and doing some juniors in the summer. Some of the kids had aspirations towards the Junior World Rowing Championships and since then around 7 times I've coached singles and doubles to the Junior Worlds. 10 years ago I became head coach at Malvern Prep which is a small (for the USA) sculling programme in Pennsylvania. The USA doesn't stress sculling.

What are the aims of the School's rowing programme?

For our athletes the opportunity to become very good scullers "as the English know" if you start them sculling they have a great opportunities to make college (university) boats.

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Our boys train hard 6 days per week for the whole year. It freezes from December to February and so we are inside in a tank sculling then from the end of February to July we are out on the river.

In winter we do long races, the Head of the Charles, **Head of the Skuykill**, the Philadelphia Scholastic City Championships, and Stotesbury Regatta which is the largest regattas in North America with 6000 children competing. Then there are the Scholastic Nationals and the US Youth National Championships.

In spring we race in quads. Do singles in autumn and summer in order to make the quad go fast you have to be able to move a single. The difference in US mindset is the strongest kid will make it go fast.

What do you look for in a young athlete?

For the past 14 years I have been looking for children willing to make a commitment. Few are athletic when they start but they become athletic. Rowing isn't for everyone. We don't cut kids we allow them to cut themselves. If you are not willing to come to all the practices it becomes clear to the individual and they drop out.

What is your international involvement?

We run a Junior International camp for 8, 4+ and 4- and small boats are open to trials. You have to make a minimum speed standard. Camp coaches have identification camps and about 15 events around the country where they look for talent. From the group they invite 30 to the final camp.

New this year is a 4- camp for development athletes. They have to have 2 years of eligibility remaining for junior international. These juniors will go to Beijing this summer. *To be successful at junior level you have to have one boat in development for experience at that level who can race the following year.*

Selection regattas are in Canada and Mexico, the CanAmMex Regatta whose venue rotates. The winner of the youth national champs in 8 and quads can go to these events.

US lags the rest of the world in its starting age we begin at age 14 or 15 and there are few opportunities to learn younger. In Italy, UK and Germany they start recreational sculling at 9 or 10 years. In the main, children start in 9th grade (14 years) and are encouraged to sweep before sculling. *In my opinion, this hinders the development in their boat moving skills.*

What are your favourite skills drills?

Skill drills – once you are proficient in a single try these to improve your speeds.
[note in brackets I have used the UK phraseology to describe each drill]

1. Half slide end pause (single strokes to half slide)
2. Top of slide drills (quarter slide push from catch, half slide push)
3. Pseudo release drill (legs and arms straight at quarter slide drive to finish keeping arms straight and using the body)
4. Blades flat up to the catch and take the stroke with blades flat. Develops hand heights and horizontal draw. Do in pairs.

The pseudo release drill is so important because kids are timid with their swing. The skill set in sculling is more advanced than sweep. When you have mastered these drills they get success in sculling with pressure. We may not have the athletic erg scores at Malvern but we are very proud of *how* they row. I believe in good technique.

I believe that 20 minutes of drills before every workout is imperative. We develop skills for a short amount of time but this is overlooked by many. Teaching athletes what they need to know in order to win at international level takes 6 years. For an athlete with talent to become a good international athlete; most need improved skills.

We know you as a Dreher scull user – why do you choose Drehers?

I chose Drehers because they make the best balanced oar available on the market today. The company gives me the great personal service that we need when we buy.

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We have tried every type of scull and found that the Drehers are very comfortable and I find their sculls have good stiffness that is maintained year on year. This is because they are made in an autoclave with heat and pressure – the only sculls that are. We buy 30 pairs of sculls each year.

Coming to Henley Royal Regatta, I chose the Big Blade spoon for my quads – this is what they use at home. But you lent us Apex spoon sculls for the double and I was really impressed with them for the stronger athletes. I will consider getting them next season to augment our stock.

What advice do you have for coaches?

Stick with what you know; if you want to learn how to coach sculling take your time and do your diligence and understand the technique fully. Many programmes do many things. My advice is to do half the things very well and stay at it.

How do coaches develop their skills in USA?

US Rowing has a mentoring programme for coaches to meet more accomplished coaches. It takes initiative from young coaches to reach out. Sweep programmes produce most coaches. There is a dearth of sculling coaches. Except for the national team, there are no full time paid sculling coaches who can coach across the country.

How does sculling compare to sweep in US?

There needs to be an expansion of sculling education in US. The quality of coaches we need to give scullers a clear track from school to U23 to elite level competitions.

I think you can't convert a sweep rower to a sculler once he's developed as a sweep rower. It takes 6 years to reach international standard and if someone's done sweep for part of that time and then switches to sculling there's a need for extra years of practice before he's ready for international competition in sculling. A junior in my programme will scull for 4 years and then at College will probably be in a sweep crew. If he wants to represent his country, in either discipline, it'll probably take him another 2-3 years to get good enough in that discipline. This is one of the reasons the USA is not strong in sculling events at the World Championships – College regattas only offer sweep events.

How would you improve the US international sculling programme?

To improve our international performance, I'd suggest we identify young gifted school rowers and keep them in the sculling pipeline through college. This long term track will help the elite national sculling team and will bring in gold medals. Anything less puts them on track to be the top of the B final. Which is what's happened in recent years.

Special offers

Why not 'treat' yourself for the start of the new season with a pair of magik oarlocks for your boat? Until 30th October, the MK1 Rowing and Sculling gates are now £35 per pair, a saving of £4. These prices will be held while stocks last.

And there are some ex-demonstration Dreher sculls also available.

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Michelle Guerette interviewed by Rowperfect



Michelle Guerette, US Rowing W1x – career highlights World Champs Bronze 2007 and 2005, Olympics 2004 W4x 4th. She writes a Blog for US Rowing News
<http://www.rowingnews.com/sub.cfm?section=blogs&authorid=2>

Michelle spoke to Rowperfect in the Press Office after winning the Princess Royal Challenge Sculls – beating Jen Goldsack in the final.

How has your season gone so far?

It will be good to race at the worlds and qualify for Beijing. [She did qualify, winning a bronze medal in the process – her career second].

National selection in April was cancelled and there will be a trial in July 30 at Princeton because I am not going to Luzern. But Liz O’Leary entered me for HRR without my knowledge. I had thought it would be a distraction and very “wakey” but Charley Butt, my coach, thought it would be good for me. It has been a perfect challenge. It is fun.

I have never raced Henley before. I heard a lot about it. First impressions are the course looks like a cup cake all pink and white and very beautiful. Strange to have a race course down a social scene but quality is great, it’s very high. The mix is interesting in the womens singles event. On this course you can’t let your guard down. You have to fight for every stroke. I heard cheers and wanted to look across today but I knew that was trouble from my first race when I nearly caught a crab.

Just like the Longfellow Bridge on the Charles it is swirly, rough water and this was a challenge for me.

Today I pulled into the wrong station at the start. The Elvis boat distracted me. [An annual attraction at HRR is a group of men dressed up as Elvis on a motor boat driving up the river.]

What do you think about before a race?

5 minutes before the start I am thinking... I make sure things are set, I check my uni [all in one rowing suit], focus on little things. Think about legs and feet standing off the catch, don’t want to get into my shoulders. My start was a little shaky today.

What do your row in?

I row an S15 Empacher with 2 stay riggers. It was the first boat I had as I was getting up to speed in and, like a little superstition, I stick with it. It feels solid.

Charley is my technical coach. I do pieces with Riverside [her Club] and Steve Tucker at Union twice a week. The rest of the time it’s just me and a speed coach.

Tom Terhar writes the programme. He is the new U.S. women's national team coach. I’ve done pretty much the same thing with a couple of tweaks each year.

How are you preparing for Beijing?

The heat in Beijing will be bad and I’ve started training later in the morning to get used to it. The recovery will be an issue – getting tired just walking to the course. We used ice vests in Athens to combat the heat there.

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What is your background in Rowing?

I started rowing in 1998 at Radcliffe [Harvard University] in sweep. I was not that fit. I played tennis in high school and I wanted a team sport, choosing ultimate frisbee initially. The rowing meeting was before the frisbee one and I tried it as my room mate had rowed and said I would be good.

What advice do you have for young athletes?

Just have fun. I came to the sport later and wish I'd started at 12. Use it to gain athleticism.

What is your ultimate aim in rowing? And how do you get there?

I would like to win a Gold medal in Beijing.

I use smaller goals, improvements every day. Be in peak form and the best shape. I push my limits and feel that each year is it better.

When it's tough I think of the goal and what does it take – what the competition is doing. This motivates me not to slack.

Crew mates say *"if you want to be good you will have to do it more than you want to do"*. I try daily to do my best; make an improvement. Stay on task in a broad sense.

I can push myself through which is a learning I got from being in the single. It has been good to get more people interested in sculling in the US.