

Sculling rivals join for course record

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It took a composite crew of some of the best scullers in the world to rein in the course record at the 52nd annual Head of the River Fours in Great Britain. Slovenia, New Zealand and a couple of Great Britain internationals joined together in the quad to win the 4 ¼ mile head race.

Finishing the course in 17:21 gave Olympic gold medallist Iztok Cop of Slovenia, current World Champion Mahe Drysdale of New Zealand, Great Britain's top single sculler Alan Campbell and Olympian Mike Hennessy of Great Britain the course record. The previous record had stood since 1998.

Cop, Drysdale, Campbell and Hennessy, rowing under the

local club, Tideway Scullers, defeated last year's winner Leander which included British national team members Matthew Langridge, Stephen Rowbotham, Matthew Wells and Colin Smith.

As the top scullers of their respective nations, Drysdale and Campbell spent the 2006 international season racing against each other. But for the Fours Head they united filling out the centre spots of the quad and allowing Slovenia's most medalled rower, Cop to set the rhythm. Hennessy, who raced for Great Britain in the lightweight four at the Athens Olympics, was given the job of steering the four-bridged course.

Leander earned the number one starting position of the 500+ entries, but they were hauled in by the Tideway Scullers going into the second half of the race.

A major upset in the men's coxed four relegated two-time World Champions (from the British men's four) Steve Williams, Alex Partridge, Peter Reed and teammate Marcus Bateman into second with Cambridge University crew winning the event. The Cambridge also boasted international blood with German World Champions Sebastian Schulte and Thorsten Engelmann (men's eight) teamed up with British national team member Tom James and Olympic champion Kieran West (men's eight Sydney 2000).

The top women's boat, stroked by Great Britain's most accomplished woman rower, Kath Grainger, finished at the head of the quad field. Grainger's lineup included national quad team mate Sarah Winckless along with top British national team scullers Elise Laverick and Annie Vernon.

Raced on the river Thames the start time is dictated by the flow of the tide giving the rowers a chance to race on the outgoing tide. Top crews get the best advantage by leaving early in the one-at-a-time head race style. By the time crew number 550 has started, the tidal advantage has waned as the race takes on a procession for starting one at a time.

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