

Fours Head and Vet Fours Head

On Saturday, racing in near-perfect conditions, the elite quad of Iztok Cop, Mahe Drysdale, Alan Campbell and Trigger won the Fours Head and set a new course record of 17:21.09. (This was the second course record in a week for Mahe: at the 11km Silver Skiff in Turin he broke the record by 27 seconds, finishing in a time of 40:23.74 and winning a bag of gold coins.)

The strength in depth of TSS crews was evident, with had four crews finishing in the top 20.

The following day the more 'experienced' sections of the club showed the youngsters how it's done, winning five Vet Fours Head pennants.

The vet E quad, an occasional crew stroked by Dave 'death or glory' Hudson, went over at 32 and surprised themselves by overtaking all of the other vet E quads to finish 13th overall. Perhaps only possible because the captain let them use the best boat!

The established vet E coxed four stroked by Frank 'where's my sheep' Llewellyn, with Rob 'the professional oarsman' Pinckney subbing in as bowman Ray Haylock is still convalescing from his heart operation, also recorded a convincing win.

The vet F coxless four finished second by just three seconds to a composite of some of the most experienced rowers in the land, despite the fact that Cliff De Souza at two is young enough to be the son of stroke Dave Gramolt.

Finally, the convalescents crew of Rob Rakison (broken hip), Andy Ripley (pulmonary embolism and prostate cancer), Kostas (overeating) and James Hamilton (better not to ask) competed against the odds and beat them, but not the five other crews in vet D coxed fours. It was, however, nice to see them all back racing.

A vet B coxed four of Andrea Finn, Pauline Bird, Claire McIntosh and Kate Grose were feeling optimistic when at 2.30 – race start time – neither of their opposition had turned up. They arrived late, some bringing out the GB leggings for the occasion, and so a race was on. Despite leaving a reasonable gap at the start – Kate didn't want any overtaking before Barnes Bridge – they soon caught the composite stroked by former world lightweight pairs gold medallist Miriam Taylor and, after a near-miss when sharply overtaking that crew, were left to row down Staines, catching them just before the finish.

The vet A quad of Tasha Reilly, Gretchen Kellner, Ruth Hatton and super sub Katrine McPherson opted for the same tactic, making sure they overtook the Thames quad starting in front of them to take the pennant by 18 seconds: not bad for a first outing. A second, largely novice, vet A quad had a solid row, finishing ahead of several more experienced crews.

The weekday ladies were also out in force and, given that their three novice quads comprised the entire entry in the category, were guaranteed a win in at least one of their events.

The novice coxed quad, for some reason drawn ahead of the other two (coxless) crews, was quickly overtaken at the start but, coxed by Maddy, heroically finished the course – the first time that any of them had sculled to Putney.

What they lacked in experience they obviously made up for in cunning as they returned to the club in the luxury of their cars whilst Smiffy towed their boat home!

Somehow the other two crews managed to lose the use of their steering before Hammersmith, which is their excuse for close encounters with the red buoy at Harrods. The resulting jolt woke up the second crew of Felicity Smith, Nicky Hocking, Frances Barton and Naomi Sellars, who caught up with the other crew and overtook them as they approached the finish to take the pennant.

The weekday ladies also fielded a women's vet D quad (a TSS first?), who survived the coxed quad's attempt to ram them when turning at the start. This left them sculling on their own until they encountered some opposition from Molesey loitering around Hammersmith Bridge. It seemed only polite to overtake them, which they duly did, to finish third behind a couple of well-known composites.