

# Tideway Scullers pull out victories

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- [Daniel Topolski](#)
  - [guardian.co.uk](#), Sunday November 9 2008 00.01 GMT
  - [The Observer](#), Sunday November 9 2008
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Beijing Olympic rowers from all over the world were back in harness yesterday for the 54th Head of the River fours at Putney and they found the going tough. Instead of the hot sweaty conditions in China it was back to the wind and rain of a typical London tideway providing them with a rude return to the hard-slog reality of winter training.

Competing in club crews, they were hard to spot individually among the 2,400 athletes taking part in more than 500 boats. But there was no mistaking the class of the winning Tideway Scullers quadruple scull, successfully defending the title they won last year. With Olympic medal-winning stars Iztok Cop of Slovenia, New Zealand's Mahe Drysdale and Alan Campbell of Team GB sitting in front of him, Tom Gale, the club's head coach and an ex-international himself, could scarcely believe his luck in his choice of crewmates. They came home nine seconds in front of a brave and battling Reading University crew of British under-23 internationals and third-placed Leander.

Britain's gold medallist Andy Hodge from the British four, was tipped to help his club mates secure the coxed fours pennant but they could not hold off Cambridge's fast-moving crew, which finished a remarkable fourth overall beating all but three boats in a field of much faster boat categories. Cambridge, stroked by new president Henry Pelly were 14 seconds ahead of Molesey at the line. Leander's coxless four won their division but were a full 10 seconds behind Cambridge, yet racing in a faster boat class.

Oxford's Boat Race ambitions suffered a serious jolt in the face of the aggressive racing of their light-blue rivals. Their top boat, stroked by Colin Smith, who led the British eight to a silver medal in Beijing, were 19 seconds behind Cambridge despite having two fellow Olympians and former world champion in the seats behind him. And to rub salt into the wound, Cambridge's second boat finished ahead of their Oxford counterparts.

Tideway Scullers, with French Olympian Sophie Balmory, Sweden's Frida Svensson, the Swiss Nora Fiechter and British Olympian Natasha Howard, also claimed the women's title by seven seconds from London Rowing Club.