



ULTIMATE ▶▶▶ HEAD RACING GUIDE FOR MASTERS



Faster Masters Rowing: Ultimate Head Racing Guide for Masters

Here at Faster Masters Rowing we love the challenge of head racing. The tactics, the strategy, hitting the right cadence, steering the best course, all while racing against the clock and passing other crews. Here are our top suggestions to help you get ready to row the race you want on the day.

Row Faster This Year,

Rebecca Caroe & Marlene Royle

Your Faster Masters Rowing coaches

Experts in Training as you age & Technique as you age.

In this Book:

- Quick Tips: Advice to make the most of your head race.
- It's Head Racing Season: 5 Reasons Head racing is the BEST
- It's Head Racing Season: Finding the right rating is challenging
- Head Race Pace Setting Trials
- Race Day Warm Up; Prepping Your Mindset
- Finishing Touches for Head Racing Day
- Coxing long races (without sounding repetitious)
- Ramping Up Your Training Before the Head Race Season

Quick Tips

by Marlene Royle

ADVICE TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR HEAD RACE THIS WEEKEND.

1. Take ownership of the course; make it your territory from start to finish.
2. Just do it. Be confident in your training; resolve to row the race that you want.
3. Stick to your race plan; pay attention to steering. Concentrate.
4. Row it one stroke at a time; treat it like 600 one-stroke races. Each stroke matters.
5. Have a plan to get back up to speed quickly in case you clash oars or have a collision.
6. Give yourself enough time to launch & warm up so you are ready to start on time.
7. Do not talk to other rowers at the start. Listen to the starter's commands; stay in line.

It's Head Racing Season!

by Rebecca Caroe

Head racing requires totally different tactics from side by side. Mostly because the clock is a different motivator than another crew alongside you. But that's not the only difference.

5 REASONS HEAD RACING IS THE BEST

1. It tests your personal motivation and drive – like no other.
2. Steering is critical to success – it can win or lose the race and so adds more “jeopardy”.
3. Dealing with adverse weather and water conditions rewards skilful boat and oar handling – the strongest don't always win.
4. You can race multiple times in a day – some events have divisions so you can race, swap crews and race again.
5. Judging your boat speed and optimal rate is tricky and worthy of experimentation.

What are your favourite reasons?

Finding the right rating is challenging

I prefer to go off into the race at a rate which I know to be “comfortable” or “achievable”. This allows the crew to **get into the rhythm within the first 2 minutes** and to warm up. This is important as you often start races colder than you would like because of the waiting around at the start marshalling.

Then **take the rate up one point every minute** until you have got to the rate where the boat speed and the technique are no longer giving speed gains for additional points in rate. This can be judged using a GPS speed meter or by “eye” and “feel”. If the catches get sloppy or the balance goes off and doesn't recover fast – that may be a sign that you are at the point of no additional gain.

Here you have a choice – to stay at that rate or to take it down one point. You will quickly find out if the wobbles are due to rate if it settles and stabilises. Beware of going down in rate too much and compromising your boat speed. Also be aware of the wind and water conditions. A head wind will make your “best” rate lower and a tail wind will tend to make it higher. It's my advice not to be ruled by the numbers from your stroke meter – but also to think about the conditions and the crew's tiredness.

Most crews find they can take the rate and speed up as they approach the finish line of a head race. Challenge yourselves to **start your finishing sprint earlier** than you think you should. I expect many will find that they can last the distance and also that the increased boat speed is a positive to mental focus and physical effort. However, if your sprint comprises taking the rate up one every ten strokes.... don't do this when you are 1km from home. You will run out of puff and end up at an unsustainable rating. Choose a different **finishing sprint tactic** – it could be power alternating with rating, for example. Or a technical call for 10, a power call for 10 and then a rating increase for 10. 1000m is approximately 100 – 130 strokes (depending on experience, boat class, wind and tide).

Enjoy the race; analyse afterwards what went well and what to improve next time.

Head Race Pace Setting Trials

by Marlene Royle

Once head racing season is upon you; tuning your pace for the best combined stroke rate and speed over longer distances is a key element of fall training. And so including early time trials and set workouts in your program will help you nail the rate and effort you need to stay strong as the kilometers click by.

Establish the types of control tests you need to prepare for your event. Consider the distance, time, and conditions of the courses you'll race on. For example:

- set distance at a set stroke rate recording elapsed time;
- set time at set stroke rate and monitor the number of meters rowed;
- set distance with an open rating for the fastest time; or
- set time with an open rating for maximum meters.

Gauge your head race rating with a set workout of:

7 x 3-minute pieces with 2 minutes rest between

Your target head race stroke rate will be the rating that you can hold for all seven pieces. Row this session regularly during the specific preparation for your peak event to build your rating up so you can row aggressively but not spin your wheels.

You can also include straight time trials over your race distance or a 20-minute trial piece for maximum meters with your stroke monitor covered up. During a blind trial aim for a competitive rating but focus on moving the boat well and finding an efficient pace you can sustain to improve your meters.

Time your trials carefully to avoid the stress of too many maximal efforts each week. If you typically include two hard sessions per week then every two to three weeks exchange one for a control test rather than adding in another hard session.

During your taper designate a race simulation day to be as near to actual competition as possible; row at the same time of day and row the same number of meters. Watch out for signs of over stress. If your results are getting slower with the same perceived effort or increased perceived effort, you are either starting too fast, not giving yourself enough recovery, or both.

Race Day Warm Up; Prepping Your Mindset

By Marlene Royle

A big event morning is filled with a lot of hustle and bustle and nerves. Whether it's your first race or 100th race when you are waiting to launch for the start you are probably going to experience some race-day anxiety.

You might find yourself thinking:

What if I don't finish?

I should have trained more...

What am I doing here?

This is normal when you are getting ready for a challenge and you are unsure of the outcome.

Simple strategies along with a simple head race warm up can get you dialed into your stroke rhythm quickly and efficiently.

Accept the nerves, expect it and take it as a sign you are ready to race. Extra adrenaline that causes butterflies in your stomach are also a positive sign that you are ready to go.

Avoid comparing yourself to your competitors, step into your own shell and focus on what you have control over, every race is different and you must be mentally prepared to grasp opportunities as they appear on the course.

Stay in the moment. This is one of the most important things you can do to alleviate your anxiety and one of the hardest. You must keep your mind in the present.

Stop thoughts of past training or future training, stay in the conversation with your crew and your boat and you are more likely to be able to respond with your best efforts.

Shift your mindset the present you put your boat on the water and start your warm up.

Do not cut your warm up short on a big race day, it is a critical part of your race preparation and ensures you can row over the line at your target race pace.

A sample head race warm up includes:

- 15 minutes at stroke rate 20. If there is a specific drill that “gets your head in the boat” include it early in your warm up.
- Follow this with 3 x 30 strokes building to your head race pace with 2 to 3 minutes paddling easy between.
- Progress to 3 x 30 seconds at your maximum tempo with a moving start with 90 seconds paddle easy between.
- Make sure that you have rowed enough to hit your target stroke rate before you cross the start line.
- Then relax, focus, and stay warm until the start.

Finishing Touches for Head Racing Day

by Marlene Royle

With roughly 600 strokes to execute your peak head race plan, now is the time to map out the final details of your main event off the water, as well as, on the water. At big events such as the Head of the Charles or the Head of the River, there is a sense of excitement at the course that we don't always experience in our daily training.

This is much of what makes going to competitions festive events but it can also cause us to forget important details or become distracted.

Spend time before your regattas to work out the fine points of what you will do to get ready to race. If you are a single sculler you are solely responsible to have everything you need. If you are a team coach or coxswain you will need to be concerned with each rower having what they should in addition to your equipment.

Make a checklist ahead of time for racing days so you take what you need with you to put your boat in the water.

Your equipment includes your car rack, boat cover, boat, seat, foot stretchers, oars, slings, tie down straps, tool box, SpeedCoach® or Cox Box®, tools, towels, extra fin, spare parts, and duct tape.

Make sure you have your racing suit, tights, wind shirt, wind pants, rain gear, dry clothes, hat, neck warmer snood, pogies / gloves, a change of shoes, and a warm jacket for after the race.

Take your entry information, hotel confirmation, mobile phone, map to the site, food, sunscreen, sunglasses, water bottle, a blanket for stretching, and some extra cash for the unexpected.

Arrive at the course early enough to get your equipment ready without rushing and to check carefully for breakage.

Take some quiet time away from the crowds before you need to get in your boat to race.

Starting your warm up on land with easy jogging can be beneficial if your time is limited or less time than you are accustomed to.

Launch in time to go through a routine that you are familiar with and gets you comfortable in your boat.

Once you've made your way to the starting line, find the bow marker of the boat that

will be ahead of you, listen carefully for instructions from the starting officials, and get your boat pointed in the direction you want to go.

Bring your focus into your own boat and try to minimize distractions as you prepare to start. Once you are on the course, steering, conditioning, technique, and mental preparation have to come together during your performance.

Keep your technical reminders in a positive tone and use keywords that will help you row better.

Target elements that will improve each stroke such as catch timing, relaxed hands, or blade depth.

Stay in the present and carry out your strokes one at a time.

Stringing together a successful chain of attentive, well-executed strokes will give you the likelihood of performing at the best level that you are capable of.

Coxing Long Races (without sounding repetitious)

by Rebecca Caroe

What should a cox say during a long (15-25 minute) race to keep the rowers motivated, without sounding repetitive?

A long race is a challenge. Happily, there's a great solution.

PLAN THE RACE BEFOREHAND

Take a look at the landmarks (bridges, bends etc), know where the straights are and how long they are, decide where your starting and finishing sprints begin and end. Also know your crew - what are the technique things which they need to be reminded of to keep their pattern of rowing efficient and effective? Discuss this with the coach.

What you need to do is divide the race into segments. Think quarters. Then overlay the landmarks and write it out like a list. Something like this:

Start

First Bridge

Long Straight

Second Bridge

Tight bend to RHS

Short straight

Finish line

Then you insert these quarters of the race. It may help to have distance markers aligned with the quarters and the landmarks as well.

Start

First Bridge

Long Straight- first 500m

Halfway point

Long Straight- second 500m

Second Bridge

You get the idea.

Now you have **landmarks and distance markers**.

And the next part is to overlay some pre-prepared tactics

These are designed to help keep the average boat speed up – keep the technique optimal and give the crew something to focus on.

Now you will have some power pushes. How many strokes? What does the crew do to prepare for the power push? (do you sit up 3 strokes prior, or check the boat is level etc); What happens after the power push ends? How do you prevent the boat speed dropping down?

The technique points you get from your coach and these should be planned as 10 – 20 stroke focuses. ... You can tell the crew **HOW** to do the focus so calling “*Next ten focus on catches by squaring early*” or “*next ten accelerating the finish by drawing the inside hand in the last quarter of the power phase*”.

All these technique focuses need to be practiced in advance, so the crew is **REALLY GOOD** at doing them.

Join these two together

Your job as cox now is to take the list of race features and plan your pushes and your technique around the features. So you insert a sequence in every time you know you are going to have to steer by doing a power ten push on the last bit of straight before you have to steer (this increases the boat speed before you slow it down by steering) and then you can push for another 10 after you have stopped steering. Another thing is to push into and out of bridges and also through the distance markers.

Each focus needs advance preparation (mentally getting the athletes ready by telling them you’re about to do it, how to approach it) and then you do the thing itself. Minimum is 10 strokes for each one.

If you have a GPS you can see average boat speed or distance per stroke and telling the crew what this is can be helpful so they know how efficient each move and push has been.

Now write this out in full in your document adding in the pushes, technique around the framework of the landmarks and distance markers.

Your Race Plan

1. Start (sequence of strokes)
2. Focus on long strokes for 20
3. Power push into bridge
4. First Bridge
5. Power push out of bridge
6. Technique onto the catches
7. Power push as steering ends and we move into the straight
8. Long straight – first 500m
9. Power push for 20 through the 500m mark

you get the idea.....

This is the BASE RACE PLAN. Print it out, put in to a plastic wallet and tape it to your thigh so you can look down and see it during the race as a reminder. Use highlighter pen if you need for key points not to be missed.

Race Day

On the day, what happens can be very, very different.

Say there's a giant head wind – you need to revise the technique to be very focused on techniques to take advantage of a head wind. Say there are crews to be overtaken – how to throw in extra moves to overtake and then get clear water. if you are being overtaken, have the crew hold off the other guys.

There will be plenty to say without being repetitive.

A skillful coxswain also judges distances and tells the crew how far to another crew or a landmark so they can focus on just that one marker and mentally tick it off as being passed.

Overlay all this with periods of QUIET. While the crew is pushing for 10, you don't need to say anything as long as they are being effective. But come stroke 8/9/10 you may focus them on maintaining the boat speed after the push by removing extraneous movement in their body, by telling them the boat speed and telling them to transition off the push and into the main race pace rhythm.

The key is to practice everything beforehand. Know HOW to do each move and have the crew know what you MEAN by everything you say and WHAT they have to do and HOW to do it.

Have a great race!

Ramping Up Your Training Before Head Racing Season

By Marlene Royle

When your long distance events dotting the race calendar are coming. Two months out is the time to return to some foundation work to get ready for your head races. Taking a moment to review your strengths and weaknesses of the previous season will help you prioritize what you need to focus on before these events begin. Here are some important workouts that you should include as part of your distance race preparation.

BASIC AEROBIC CONDITIONING

Basic aerobic conditioning and your anaerobic threshold are big determining factors in long distance racing if you want to row your best possible pace without hitting the wall midway through your event. Now is the time to add in a distance row each week, perhaps over the weekend when you have more time.

Your distance row should be your longest row of the week by time or kilometers.

If you practice 60 minutes daily, your long row might be from 75 to 90 minutes. Building up to a 2-hour row once a week is a good goal.

The emphasis of these outings should be low intensity, high volume, with a focus on good technique. Only stop briefly about every 15 minutes to drink or turn around. If you will be rowing for more than an hour take a bottle of sports drink with you, as well as, water so you can take in two to three-hundred calories in the second hour of your session.

Keep your stroke rates low between 18 to 20 strokes per minute and your effort should be conversational. If you are breathless you are rowing too hard for this type of session.

These rows will help your body learn to burn fat more efficiently, increase your capillary density for better blood flow to your muscles, develop good concentration, and work the bugs out of your technique because you are moving relatively slowly.

You can include occasional drills during this row such as inserting 1 minute of pause drills every 5 minutes, rowing square blades for 10 strokes on/10 strokes off for 5-minute segments, or rowing the entire session feet-out changing slide lengths, especially one-quarter and half-slide. The variety will make the kilometers pass by quickly and your skills will get finer.

ANAEROBIC THRESHOLD WORK

Anaerobic threshold work needs precise attention too. I would rate this intensity of rowing “comfortably hard”. You are breathless but the pace is doable; it is by no means race pace but is still substantial work.

Row 1 or 2 anaerobic threshold workouts per week spaced 2 days apart in order to get your glycogen stores to recover. You may also want to place your rest day between your long row and before your threshold work.

Plan for 30 to 60 minutes of work at this intensity keeping stroke rates in the range of 24 to 26 strokes per minute. Some examples of continuous sessions:

3 x 20-minutes with 7 minutes rest between

4 x 10-minutes with 5 minutes rest between

1 x 30-minutes at set stroke rate 24

Each week you try to increase your distance.

For more variety you can work above and below your anaerobic threshold to get the net training effect that you want such as:

40 to 60-minutes

alternating

5 minutes at race pace

with

5 minutes at steady state.

There is still time to boost your fitness before the races start. The training you do will pay off with more consistent hull speed, better mental toughness, and the ability to bump the boat that started just up on you.

A masters rower's life is tough - we are on our own- few clubs prioritize older athletes and so we have to look after ourselves. You've come to the right place!

Our expertise is training as you age and technique as you age.

Faster Masters Rowing is a program designed for masters rowers by masters coaches. It's for athletes from age 27+ who need a training program, need technique coaching, need motivation and advice to achieve their rowing and sculling goals.

Founded by Marlene Royle and Rebecca Caroe in 2017, this program will help you gain skill, build fitness and enjoy the wonderful sport of rowing more and more. Whether you have a regular coach or training on your own, you will learn more, advance faster and reach your goals with the professional experience built into the Faster Masters Rowing program.

Row Faster this Year with Faster Masters
www.fastermastersrowing.com

