

This year's marathon was the largest attended in its history with over 530 competitors and well over 320 canoes of assorted types. The signing in procedures were undertaken the day before on the showgrounds in Yarrowonga. Weigh-in provided a bit of a problem for me anyway, as my Kayak was seemingly the lightest they'd weighed due to the fact that it had been lying in the sun for a couple of days and had probably dried out somewhat, at any rate I got "a bag of rocks" weighing about 2½ kilos for my troubles to be carried in the Kayak at all times, duration of the race anyway. Seeing this, John promptly shot home and filled his Kayak with water for a few hours before weighing-in.

There were 14 in the Veteran TK1 class and they began at 7.45 am and some 60 in the Open TK1 class and we began at 8.15 am so we never ever saw the leading veterans. Tony Zerbst, the leading Open TK1 canoeist from the Mitta Mitta Club in Albury was probably the only one in our class to pass the leading veterans on most days and he went on to break the record on every day for a new record in the Open TK1 class of some 32+ hours which incidently is about 1 hour faster than the average K1 time. Second and third in the Open were very close with only some 29 seconds between them on overall time.

In the veteran class, Ron and John were doing very well, Ron completing the first day of 92 kms in 7 hours 50 minutes, which happened to be a new record, and John in fourth in 8.04.30. Ron went on to break the daily records on the 2nd, 4th and 5th days, missing out on the 3rd day due to some very consistent, blustery, windy conditions. John paddled on well to give the favourite and local personality, Super Chook, a bit of a serve and beat him in for overall second place by a considerable amount. Super Chook, as he's known, has been campaigning the Veteran TK1 class for awhile now but has never been able to win because somebody from Mount Isa keeps coming down and beating him. (John Price was the winner of the veteran class last year.) Next year he has announced he will not be paddling VTK1 because he concedes he'll probably never win and is going to paddle Mixed TK2 with his daughter.

At any rate Ron broke the existing records by 1 hour and 6 minutes and John in a creditable second also broke the existing record by 33 minutes. In general, paddlers were generally much fitter overall than previous years even though many admit the river was quite high and fast. The overall fastest time for the 403 km was by Colin Joss and James Sloan of the Mitta Mitta Club in a K2 (Double Racing Kayak) in 28 hours 20 minutes and I think the second overall fastest time was by Rick Pacey and Ken Poll in the TK2 in 29+ hours which was also a new record in that class. Other records to go were the Womens TK1, Mens TK1, Veteran TK1 by Ron Snow in 34 hours, 40 minutes, and EC1 (Experimental Canadian Single) by Willy Morris who broke the original record by 11 hours to complete the distance in some 34+ hours. There were probably other records broken but these are the ones which come to mind.

Finally some thoughts on Marathoning. This being my first marathon, it was an experience to say the least. It proved, to me anyway, to be a great learning experience in a number of fields. For those of you who are inclined to be like me and adopt a somewhat casual attitude towards marathoning then I strongly advise you to think again. Feet, hands and bum, preparation in these fields are essential, I wore very little protection on my hands the first day and by the third check point I found it necessary to have elastoplast wrapped around my hands, despite wearing cut down rubber gloves. On the remaining four days, it was up at 6.00 am and straight to the first aid tent to have my hands bandaged with adhesive foam and coban and if you're like me and have a fairly low threshold of pain then be prepared from the word go.

Feet - wear shoes or you'll find you have large blisters on your feet from rubbing on the footrest and the steering device. The major area, your behind, I was sitting on a fairly soft piece of foam which invariably becomes wet and soggy as you splash yourself with water to stay cool and after a couple of hours is no longer soft in fact far from it. Like I mentioned before, if you're like me and have a low resistance to pain, then after 5-6 hours you swear you'll never be able to sit down again and this was the main reason for my withdrawal on the 2nd day. Pretty weak I'll agree but it seemed a good idea at the time. After changing to a piece of heavier density foam and putting it in a garbage bag and also putting foam under your thighs for support, I was able to complete the remaining three days without much trouble. Many of the canoeists down south sit on a couple of layers of closed cell foam covered with lambs wool. I also had four chamois tucked inside my pants right against the skin which absorb the excess sweat. Many people use cycling pants which have chamois inserts.

Drink is essential, make sure you take adequate with you. On the third day, which was the windy day, I ran out of drink about an hour out of Echuca and after about half an hour paddling into that stiff breeze without any energy replacement, well you think how you'd feel. Ask John M how I was when I eventually got to Echuca.

The only things which require preparation are obviously equipment and fitness and your mental attitude. Are you prepared for those long hours on the river paddling by yourself?

For me its been a case of "you always learn best doing it the hard way" and I won't be making the same mistakes again. So to all you newcomers to marathoning I say - be prepared - or be prepared to face the consequences.

Finally, I look forward to Murray Marathon 81 and hope to see strong participation by Mount Isa in 1981. See you in Yarrowonga.

Overheard at the Marathon '80

A Veteran TK1 canoeist from NSW after a couple of days - "In NSW I'm the second best marathon paddler and I thought I'd surely get a medal, but boy was I wrong".

The wife of a Veteran TK1 paddler at the start of Day 4 - "There go those two Mount Isa paddlers again, they get out in front and don't let anyone near them". (Said in a fairly irate tone)

A young male spectator to a somewhat "stuffed" TK1 paddler who was lying almost submerged in the water close to the bank about half an hour from Echuca - "Hey mister are you dead?"

And finally in Yarrowonga 530 canoeists said "What the hell are we doing here" and in Swan Hill it was: "Thank God that's over".

Some Impressions About the Murray River Marathon by Ron Snow

The first day of the Marathon from Yarrowonga to Tocumwall was 92 km long and one of the hardest paddles I ever had. I went first over the line and took 10 minutes off the old record, while John was back a bit and took 4th place.

Day 2 was 96 km from Tocumwall to Binnia Point. John and I went first. The day was very hot and the river was high and fast.

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Day 2 was 96 km from Tocumwall to Picnic Point. John and I teamed together, washriding each other. We broke clear after about 30 minutes and steadily pulled away. I crossed the line at the finish a few minutes ahead of John to take 17 minutes off the old record and John had moved up to 3rd place overall, 58 seconds behind Geoff Major who was 2nd.

Day 3 - Picnic Point to Echuca - 77 km. Strong gusty winds made this a real battle, but John and I broke away again and opened up a 3 minute gap by the last checkpoint. Another paddler passed John who finished 3rd, but still picked up 20 seconds on Geoff Major who finished 4th.

Day 4 - Echuca to Torrumberry - 62 km. Again we broke away early and my kayak went first across the line at the finish taking 8 minutes off the record with John a few minutes behind, but now firmly into 2nd place.

Day 5 - Murrabit - Swan Hill - 76 km. I finished 1st again on the last day, taking 20 minutes off the day record and more than 1 hour off the overall record with 34 hours and 46 minutes. John was back a bit, but well clear in 2nd place. John's time was also inside the previous record.