

# *The K4 – An Odyssey (Part 1)*

by Jeremy Spear



## The Original Idea – the Seed is Sown

The seed of wanting to be involved in team boats ie K4s was conceived a couple of years ago, when we washrode a K4 in the HCC for quite a while in the 2009 HCC – starting at 8 blades swinging along seemingly effortlessly. Prior to that a few of us had been invited to fill a fleet of K4s for a rally down river at Tacoma, after the marathon champs one year. Some of us had paddled K4 elsewhere before. Some had seen a bit of K4 action at the Olympics and on the web.

There had been a few paddles in borrowed K4s kindly lent for certain events by MWKC, in order to give them someone to beat. Bayview in a 25kt SE wind in a K4 is not pretty. The boat moves fast enough already. Downwind it's faster. Add a lumpy chop and a bit of wash from a "safety" boat and you can experience a few uncomfortable moments. By the time you've reacted the wave has passed and you are then exacerbating the lack of stability. Several LCRK members have experienced this, twice, in the last event of the fantastic harbour race series.

## Sourcing Long Boats - and a Long Trailer

We became aware over time of a few K4s which may be available. One private syndicate snapped up a beautiful, classic, mahogany Struer "Commando" and can't wait to complete the restoration WIP and to enter this beautiful boat in suitable sprint and sensible marathon events, conditions permitting.

In order to facilitate a K4 one needs a trailer. Not just any old trailer, but a strong, light, legal trailer. The boats have a lot of windage sideways so long trips on freeways can be interesting with truck wash. We looked at many trailers and trailer options. We know of some trailers that are either unwieldy, too top-heavy or badly balanced, or just plain heavy and hard to manoeuvre or need to carry ballast to remain upright. We located a suitable boat trailer



Testing — and racing — at Tacoma: Bob Turner, Craig Ellis, Jeremy Spear, Jason Cooper

chassis and over several weekends had it registered and able to carry two K4s (two is so much more fun than one!). Such a trailer had to be light enough that one person could manoeuvre it, that it could carry at least 2 K4s and around 9 singles or doubles. We put the plans for the gas lift support and boat elevation system on the back burner and stayed with simple, quick and achievable within time and budget. A coat of paint and a few more rails and it's ready to take LCRK paddlers on river trips eg Murrumbidgee down from Childowlah and others (sans K4s!!) or to assist with a mass club Murray Marathon one year.

CCCC had at least two identical Competition Kayaks K4s. MWKC have about 6 of them. Penrith has some too. One of the CCCC boats wasn't getting used. It made sense for them to offload it in the hope that they may gain someone to race against every now and then. LCRK organised, inspected, tested, trialled and raced the K4 at Tacoma



### The K4 trailer, and the deepwater entry at Tacoma

during the marathon series this year. On speaking with many members it was understood that there was enough interest in the club to justify organising such a boat.

During the testing and trialling at Tacoma the first problem was getting in. The "wharf" we were to use was a metre underwater from the recent rains so we had to do a deepwater entry x 4. This was proof that the boat is stable and would be ideal for LCRK use. We warmed up while getting the feel for the boat on the 12km run down to the start of the 20km marathon. No landing place for a 36ft boat there so a gymnastic display of aerial evacuation was performed by all. Necessity being the mother of invention! Martin Baker ejection seats might be a good idea.

The marathon went fairly well, we thought. Our plans were to finish – upright. After about the first 2 lengths it became apparent that we were unlikely to be the first K4 home and that hanging behind the two other duelling powertrains and staying out of trouble might be the best plan – certainly if we were to remain upright (having previously seen another LCRK K4 crew fall out on this particular stretch of water).

A few more emails saw us purchase the boat for the club. A price was agreed and considered to be fair and reasonable by all involved and subsequently approved by the Committee. We kind of had to all be happy as they don't come up on Gear Trade too often and as we had no other market valuation system. A new one would cost around \$8k plus freight minimum. They aren't made in Australia any more and, well, it would probably cost more money to dispose of one. Besides, we had already taken it with us by then and we reckoned possession is 9/10ths.

We are very grateful to MWKC for transporting the boat to their club for us and storing it for a few weeks. This was conditional on the boat being used there. So the boat was used for a few runs around Narrabeen for most weekends



### **A paddle for club members at the Lane Cove River required careful preparation**

over the next month or two, while we were completing our trailer in order to collect it – one perfectly customised and brand new cart and one very long horse with few reins, the wrong bit and no mouth to speak of.

We then started formulating further plans. All club members were invited to have a paddle in the K4 and consider being part of potentially several K4 teams – a few responses came in. A couple of us already had the thought that HCC was the goal. We were concerned whether a solid team could be worked up and all prep completed in the few months available before this year's race. There were however a few jobs to be completed first. A few working bees later, a beautiful buff and polish and a bit of attention paid to seats, rudder, flotation, lights and a general cleanup and we had a boat we could be proud of. A few training sessions and a few crew try-outs and most importantly an opportunity for everyone to experience the thrill of 15kmh+ later and we felt we were on the way to being able to start the race this year. Getting 11m/36ft of boat and 4 paddlers in the same place at the same time takes more effort and email than organising a crew for an ocean racing maxi yacht – 2 of the current crew can attest to that! We've had a bit of fun, beaten some times and had a few close encounters with some fast ferries and it's not even daylight saving yet!



**Paddling out to the start of the Myall Classic: Steve Newsome, Craig Ellis, Nigel Colless, Jeremy Spear**

## The First Goal – One Day at a Time

When sailing you never go to somewhere – you head towards it or aim in its general direction. You are often somewhat constrained by weather and other circumstances and events. Nothing is guaranteed on the oceans – or on a river either it would seem. We made a definite plan to entertain long-term goals, but treated every event one at a time. We would paddle an LCRK Time Trial with a plan and get the results we wanted. The next logical step seemed to be the Myall. The aim was to see how we would each go in sitting in a K boat racing seat pan, which is designed for a 1km sprint, for 3-4 hours. The crew for that event were selected on their availability, fitness, desire and ability to fit in and complete the event. Rule 1 – it must be fun. Rule 2 – it is a team boat, there are (at least) 4 opinions to consider. Rule 3 – it must be safe (enough). Then comes Rule 4 – it should be fast or at least last a long time. Perhaps the order is a bit wrong but we're still working on that. Decent K4 teams take years to meld. It takes a long time to get rhythms correct, to get synchronicity and cadence. The right members of the team should be in the correct seats in the boat – they all have different jobs to do and individual characteristics but this is all part of the thrill of such a challenge.

The Myall Classic has several classes, one of which is called K4 Challenge. I can't see why paddling a double or single for 12/24/47km is any less of a challenge than it is in a K4. Basically a K4 is just the same but in a 48km race you only do 12km each and the pain is over much quicker. We stayed up there the night before and loaded carbs via (burnt) pasta together while we watched rugby in the local pub. Race day was a contrast to previous years. A mostly favourable tide both ways and a clear windless day. Heatstroke and dehydration seemed to be the biggest risks. We got a good start and found ourselves very quickly running third. We had hoped that Tony Hystek might washride us the whole way and coach but we lost all of the singles after a couple of km. We locked in right behind the other CCCC K4 – a sister boat except they have a trailing/flip-up rudder and we have an underslung foil. They had a long slow rating loping stroke. We had a slightly faster rate but all were the same speed. Their experience together as a team was evident and we learned a lot by sitting behind them and watching for a while. We had a plan that if we were vaguely close we wanted to be in front for the top mark as the river is narrow there and we weren't looking forward to waiting for another boat to do a 7-point turn. So we pulled up alongside. Eagles soaring above us, really quiet, hardly any words spoken – just the tide pushing us along side by side, 3m apart at 16kmh and the sounds of banjos emanating from some of the waterfront shacks.

Well everyone knows that two boats can't just cruise side by side for long. We'd try them out. They'd respond and try us out a bit. We'd answer – and after a while we were in front. They seemed to accept that and dropped back but stayed close. We stayed that way for a while but we'd perhaps gone out a bit hard too early in the name of club honour. The prime reason we were there on that day was to test seats and systems as well as do a bit of work. As it turned out 25% of our seats had a failure. One of our paddlers succumbed to a case of "pinched nerve in hip and therefore unable to use legs" syndrome. We've all experienced it and were all sympathetic, so we pulled over to stretch and adjust. We were on a long-term plan, and short-term glory for the day wasn't ever intended to be part of that. At that time we were on target for 3hrs 15 mins. We pulled over again at the top mark, after having surprisingly gained a lot of ground on the CCCC K4 which only had around 200m on us after our stop. We turned in the tight tributary and pulled in to the beach to empty the boat which had got a bit of water in it by then, stretch and top up with

carbo gels and drinks due to the heat. We stopped a few more times on the way back down to stretch and try seat adjustments. The other K4 beat us by 24 mins in the end but we learned so much from the day. The team worked well together and we knew more about the boat, the seats, the "opposition", the pumps, the rudder and each other.

Since then we've pretty much confirmed the intended team for the K4 for HCC. We have a bit of a game plan. We are paddling together when we can and separately when we can't. Completing the HCC is the next goal and we will spend a bit more time together between now and then. If you see us in the HCC – give us a wave or say hi. Forgive us if we don't stop and chat. We'll try and stay out of your way but it does have a 30-second or so delay in answering the helm, so please be prepared to move a little if needed. We look forward to seeing you in the marathon, hope to see you on the finish line and to hearing all of your stories afterwards. And why not put your hand up to go for a run or put a team together for an event?

Stay posted for Part 2 – **The LCRK K4 Hawkesbury Classic 2011**



**The Lane Cove River Kayakers K4 crew for the 2011 Hawkesbury Classic: Jeremy Spear, Gareth Baker, Craig Ellis, Steve Newsome**