

# How fast could you paddle the Classic?

by Tom Holloway

Most of us enter the Hawkesbury Classic with a target time in mind. The tricky question is: what's an achievable target? It can be a difficult thing to estimate, even for experienced paddlers, and most of us rely on guesswork to some degree.

It's tempting to choose an ambitious target, however this can lead to frustration if your goal is unrealistic and things don't go to plan. Conversely, some people underestimate how fast they really could go.

So just what is realistic and what isn't?

Thankfully there's plenty of Hawkesbury experience in our club which helps answer the question. By looking at the past results of similar calibre 12k paddlers to ourselves we can get a good idea of what's possible given our 12k results, our level of preparation, and our effort on the night.

## Lane Cove Hawkesbury results

The graph below shows Lane Cove's results from 2006 to 2013 (ie as far as our archived results go back). Hawkesbury results are plotted against people's season-best 12k result in their Hawkesbury boat (or similar speed boat). Needless to say, fast 12k results tend to translate into fast Hawkesbury results.

## Hawkesbury results relative to 12k results

There are three trend lines plotted on the graph (and reflected



in the table): **Slow**, **Typical**, and **Very Fast**. These are Hawkesbury results **relative** to 12k results, ie they reflect the usual range of Hawkesbury results obtained by different-speed 12k paddlers. These relative trends are what we're really interested in - there's no point comparing ourselves against much faster or slower paddlers.

Take a closer look at slow, typical and very fast to see what produces each of them. That way we can get a better idea of where in this range we might end up.

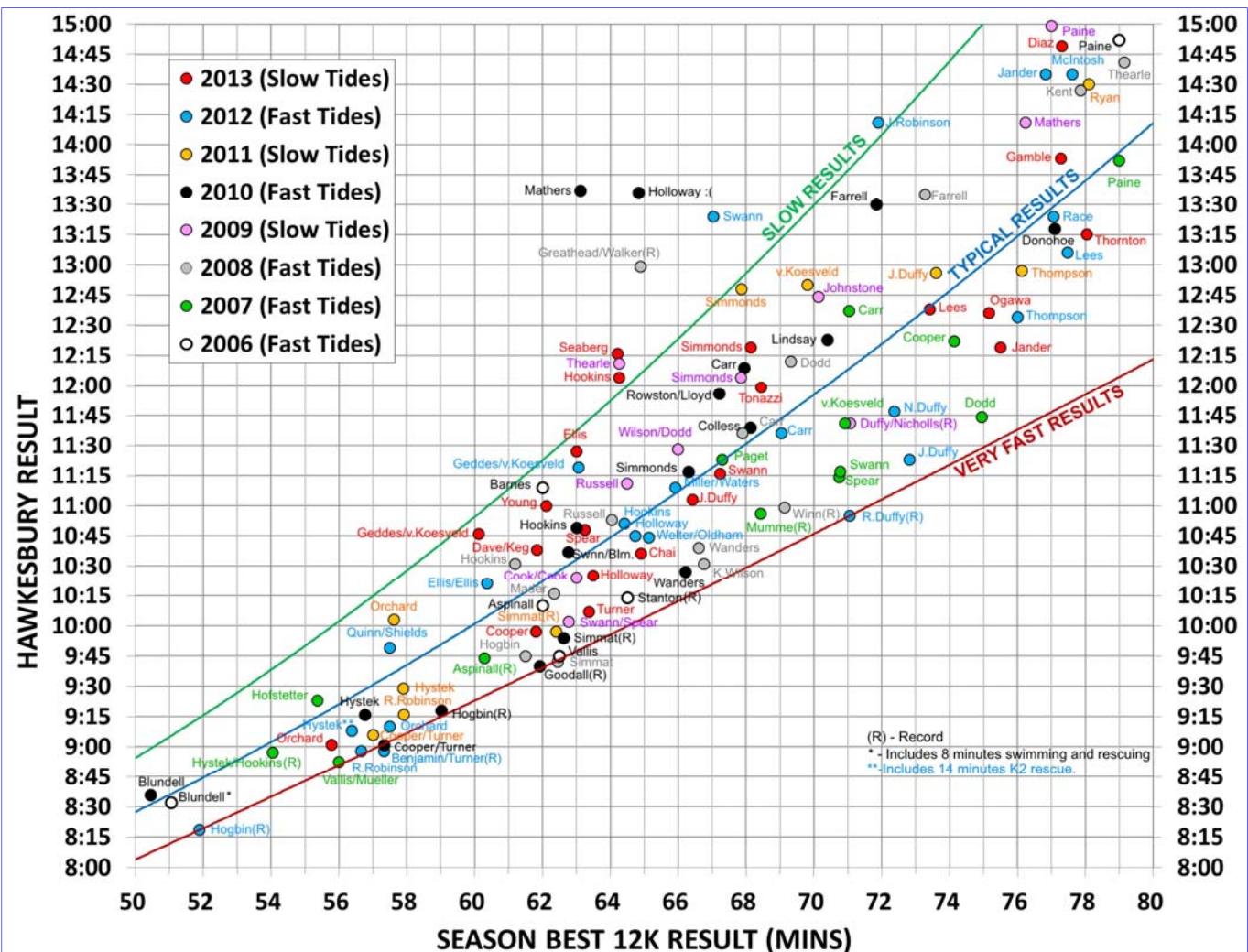
**Slow:** These are the slowest 5% of Hawkesbury results relative to 12k times, ie about 95% of paddlers will beat the green line given their 12k speed.

Slow paddlers might have had:

- a fun paddle (nothing wrong with that!)
- lots of stoppage time (stoppage time is what gets you)
- no prior Hawkesbury experience
- insufficient distance training
- gear trouble
- food trouble
- sickness or injury during the race
- navigation difficulties

All these things can contribute to a slow result.

**Typical:** These are the typical Hawkesbury results for each class of 12k paddler, ie about half of all Lane Cove paddlers beat the blue line. Typical Hawkesbury pace is around 85% of your 12k pace (including stoppage time). This is a solid effort no matter what speed 12k paddler you are.



A typical result generally requires:

- a decent base of distance training; training several times a week, with a number of longer paddles (30km+) in the lead up.
- previous Hawkesbury experience
- well organised gear and nutrition
- sustained pace
- not too much stoppage time – say 20-30 minutes in total for most people (less for top class paddlers, who typically don't stop much)
- no major problems, be it equipment failure, injury, sickness etc.

A typical Lane Cove result is a good result and will often win your class. You'll achieve a typical result with some training and effort, though maybe not on your first attempt.

**Very Fast:** These are the top 5% of results relative to 12k results. They're the truly exceptional efforts, hence all the records scattered along this line. These paddlers maintained roughly 90% of their 12k speed (including stoppage time), which is a phenomenal pace to maintain for 100km.

Interestingly these results are all clustered on the same line. This suggests that it's approaching the limit of what's possible given someone's 12k ability. To check this I asked these paddlers if they could have gone faster on the night. The general response was not much, maybe 5-10 minutes quicker with no ferries and a slightly better race. This would appear to confirm that it's getting close to what's possible. To go substantially faster (say 15+ minutes faster) the river would probably need to be in flood.

A very fast result generally requires:

- a lot of training; many of these paddlers do 10hrs/100km a week!
- a lot of experience
- the right boat and equipment
- the right nutrition
- a hard and focussed effort
- excellent navigation
- minimal stoppage time, especially out of boat time; a few minutes at Wisemans and that's about it; your support crew plays a big role here.
- good tides – notice how the very fast results occurred in fast tide years; the slow-tide years were about 15 minutes slower across the board, and no-one got down to the red line despite some stellar efforts.
- no major hiccups.

## Tips from top paddlers

Here are some first-hand tips from very fast Hawkesbury paddlers:

**Toby Hobbin:** In my experience a quick Hawkesbury comes down to a few things: Training, nutrition and a boat you can sit in and paddle at the speed you want over the race. You want to be doing the kms, starting at least six months out. I like to be doing at least 100km a week.. Carbs are good for the first two hours, after that you are going to need protein as well; endura optimiser works well. Hammer do some good products as well. Test them out as some sit better in the stomach than others.

**Rae Duffy:** The key for me during the race was to stay focused but relaxed. I stopped briefly at Wisemans but didn't get out of the kayak – there was plenty of attention to food, fluids, clothing, training etc. The month leading up to the Hawkesbury I paddled 4 times a week, 10-12 hours a week. finding a pace that I could sustain.

**Jason Cooper:** Bob (Turner) and I trained by doing the Wed Time Trials, a Saturday morning of 20-30km at good pace, and a Sunday morning paddle. I had 2 bladders set up – 1 with water and the other a weak mix of PowerAde, an energy bar before the race, gu every couple of hours. We quickly changed

clothes for warmer ones at Wisemans while stuffing another energy bar and handful of lollies down my throat. Never wanted to spend any more than 5 minutes there. It's always easier in a double.

**Bob Turner:** The key for Jason and me was to paddle to our plan – 2 hours, no more, then a quick rest, just enough time to have a Gu and a mouthful of drink. Mentally, I learnt not to listen too much to what everybody else is doing. I look at the HCC as just another paddle. You get in, you paddle, after a while you get out. You just stay in a bit longer than your normal paddle! I try not to over-think it. I certainly don't set myself times to be at certain checkpoints, and I don't really let the tide have too much impact on my planning. I have a general idea of what I want to do, and roughly when I'd like to be a Wisemans Ferry. I have 5 minutes out of the boat there, throw a towel around my shoulders, drink a coffee, eat a peanut butter and jam sandwich, a protein drink, 6 or 7 red frogs, and head off again, and then I look at it as a 40km paddle home. My approach with Kirsty was exactly the same, except we stopped every 1.5hrs, which I learnt worked better for me. I've also learnt that it's more than just carbs you need to take on at regular intervals.

**Bruce Goodall:** Make sure you get your seat right, and don't change anything on race day. I drink about 6 litres in total. I don't eat solid food; I use Endura and Up-and-Go. I increase my rate (cadence) when against the tide to keep the boat running. When I'm with the tide I slow my rate, and stay out wider in the river. I'll cut the corners, but try to stay in the flow. I aim for 1km/h less than the Lane Cove time trial, that's the average speed for the entire event. It's easier in a double, you keep each other motivated.

## How fast can you go?

Take your best recent 12k time in your HCC boat, decide whether you can manage a slow, typical, or very fast Hawkesbury result relative to paddlers who are your equal over 12km (or somewhere in between), then refer to the graph or table. That should be a reasonably good estimate of what you might achieve.

If it's a slow-tide year then add another 15 minutes to your target. People sometimes neglect to factor in bad tides and end up disappointed. 2014 should be fast so if you're hoping to make your mark this might be the year!

If you're experienced and you already have your Hawkesbury target worked out you can plot it on the graph to see how it compares against previous Lane Cove results.

Hopefully this compilation of results helps your Hawkesbury planning and sheds some light on what's possible given your 12k times, your level of preparation, and your effort on the night. Good luck!

HAWKESBURY RESULTS RELATIVE TO 12K RESULTS			
Best 12k Result	Very Fast Result	Typical Result	Slow Result
50	8:05*	8:30	8:55
52	8:20	8:45	9:15
54	8:35	9:00	9:40
56	8:50	9:20	10:00
58	9:05	9:40	10:30
60	9:25	10:00	10:55
62	9:40	10:20	11:25
64	9:55	10:45	11:50
66	10:10	11:05	12:25
68	10:30	11:30	12:55
70	10:45	11:55	13:30
72	11:05	12:20	14:05
74	11:20*	12:45	14:40
76	11:40*	13:15	15:20
78	11:55*	13:40	16:00
80	12:15*	14:10	16:40

\*-extrapolated