



The Three Rocketeers at the Murray Marathon

as told by Steve Russell



404km sounds a long way to kayak but Lane Cove's Murray Marathon relay team of John Thearle, Steve Russell and Tony Hystek all ended up trying to get back into Tony's Rocket at any chance we could. It was the most entertaining time in a kayak for years, supported by the most important team member, Alanna Ewin, taking care of all our needs and actually any wants we may have dreamed up. Sorry, this didn't include bum massages Tony Carr, well at least not for me.

On the first day we saw such a wide diversity of boats, ranging from a 10-man surfboat to a very interesting propeller-driven pedal boat that could maintain a speed of 13km/h without too much difficulty. Combine this with serious and downright crazy people and it made for entertainment on and off the water.

The first day was probably the hardest with the change in climate (I still thought it was hot) and jumping in and out of the boat, which became an eternity. Finding ways to reduce our changeover time became a paramount goal. Most days we paddled with Rob Vallis, Tom Simmat, Tegan Fraser (first woman to finish, in 32h 12m) and Steve McLay. For some periods of the day the Lane Cove snake was not seen but the Murray Delta wing was definitely in vogue.

The competition from these paddlers was a great motivation to improve our times each day. For me, some stimulating motivation came from a double canoe with two camouflaged girls singing terri-



John Thearle, Tony Hystek and Steve Russell



bly. When I asked if they had any motivational music, they sang ACDC's TNT. I must have been doing 20km/h at this point!

The Murray River, being a totally new part of Australia to me, was both spectacular and treacherous, with dangers hidden just under its murky surface and the odd paddler doing a crazy Ivan to avoid some obstacle directly in his path.

Paddling into Euchuca was a highlight. Seeing the paddleboats coming past and their giant wash that swamped a lot of tired TK2 paddlers just metres from the finish. The high wharf built to accommodate much more water in the river but, with the current low water level, now towering above us paddlers sitting right at the bottom. Hundreds of people lining the banks towards the finish cheering everyone to the line. You can't help the sensation from the crowd becoming your own as you join them on the banks cheering more people in.

The last day of the paddle was Tony Hystek's big finish. He led out, powering in his usual fashion, then left John Thearle and me to try and keep him in a reasonable position. I don't think either of us had much left in the tank when we hopped out of the kayak at the end of our stage, overjoyed to have finished but bitterly disappointed because we wanted to continue on for a few more days. Seeing Tony round the last corner at Swan Hill was unbelievable – he had raced with his target, the Polka Dots, (Dave Provan and Kim Willocks), and they crossed the line side by side.

This event, bringing paddlers from all over Australia, is something I will do many times now – the great BBQs in the evenings, chatting about everyone's moments of joy, tragedies or injuries sustained. Seeing James Mumme's very lower back injury definitely caused me some psychological damage. But to everyone who helped and was on the water with us, thanks for making this one of the greatest events of my life. I will hopefully see more of Lane Cove there next year.

