

Pete Avery – Myall Classic 47km Race report

After a challenging few months on the personal and work fronts with more than 3 months without paddling I dragged myself back out on my V12 surf ski to try to get out of the rut I was in. I then decided to do something that seemed impossible at the time, I signed up for the 47km Myall Classic, a mere 7 weeks away, even though the furthest I had ever paddled my ski was 12 km and this would be my first race on a surf ski. Those 7 weeks of training were great, I managed to make nearly every Tuesday and Friday Training Wheels squad, working on technique, paddling fitness and gradually build up the distance, adding on 3, 6 then 12km additional paddles after most squad sessions (as I could only really paddle twice a week with family and work commitments). I made lots of changes to my ski to try to make it fit me better including new larger footplate, higher seat pad, seat padding and new rudder and tested out my race fluids and nutrition. I also did lots of off the water training with cardio, weights and yoga to improve strength and flexibility and have a few sessions at a Stretchlab Studio to work on my hamstrings and lower back. My longest training paddle was 36km for 3 x TTs back to back which went OK except for ongoing leg cramps.

I drove up to Tea Gardens on the Friday night (highly recommended) and stayed at the Pub and had a nice evening meal with the LCRK crew. Come Myall race day I was well rested and ready for the 8am start.

I had planned on paddling with Chris Johnson and John Duffy given that we had similar target times (I was aiming for 4h50m to 5 hours). The race started well with the fastest double taking off like a rocket with the tide running in nicely. I did my best to catch them and stay on their wash but after about 10mins I was clearly at my limit and needed to drop back a little. John and Chris were right there and we formed up a nice team and were quickly joined by doctor Chris.



The next few kms were really great, sharing the lead, wash riding, paddling at a good clip (possibly a little too fast for my race plan) and enjoying the beautiful Myall. Then we hit the outgoing tide like a brick wall which was an unexpected shock and speed dropped to about 9kmh and it started to get tough, given we were expecting an incoming tide for the entire first half of the race. I began getting cramps in my leg then bum and told John and Chris that I need to get out of the ski for a stretch at about 13km in. A quick stretch and a bite to eat then I was off again, although paddling solo and slower than before. The next section went relatively well with flat glassy sections and light winds, although the cramps keep returning and the outgoing freshwater run off tide was a bit of an ongoing slog.

I got to the halfway point in a slower than planned 2h37m and had to get out of the ski to stretch again but chose a poor spot with deep drop off and tree roots. Back in the ski after a longer than planned pitstop and now going with the outgoing tide I started to feel good again. I was flying along at 11.5-12km/h thinking I still had a chance at breaking the 5 hour mark and (delusionally) thought I might even be able to catch back up to Chris and John. It was all going great for about 6-7km after the 23.5km turning buoy then it all fell apart quite quickly. I hit the incoming tide and speed dropped to below 9kmh, I started to feel a bit nauseous as I was knackered and had basically hit the wall and there was something not right for my guts in my liquids, race fuel, solid food mix. I was only 30km in and was basically done but not ready to tap out. Out of the ski for another cramp stretch and bite to eat. Slowly back into the ski (those rest stop become longer) and the slow grinding slog home began. 37km ticked up (a significant milestone for my longest ski paddle to date) and by this stage I was totally shot, had let go of my 5 hour target time but was absolutely determined to finish it no matter how difficult it became. At the 40km mark I was feeling quite ill and had to stop, get out and vomit. Not good. 43km done and I was plodding home and surprisingly hadn't had a swim yet (given how often I fall off my ski at squad training). I think I jinxed myself with that thought.

By this stage it seemed the wind had picked up to 10-15 knots with the occasional 20 knot gusts (although I am probably exaggerating that) with 3-4km to go there was a long and wide crossing and the wind was perpendicular to the course with side on chop (my nemesis on my ski). Halfway across I fell in for the first time. I struggled to re-mount the ski and got back in 3-4 times only to roll over again. Fortunately Ian was in an Inflatable Rescue Boat and came over to see if he could help. He wisely suggested that I climb into the IRB then climb into the ski which sounded good to me. Ian circled the IRB around and in the strong wind I managed to get an IRB in the face and got run over a bit (Lots of swearing. Thankfully it wasn't a fibreglass boat and I was OK). I seriously struggled to climb into the IRB then with Ian holding my ski steady I successfully remounted the ski and was paddling again although was very shaky in the high cross wind and cross chop (did I mentioned how knackered I was). Less than 2 mins later I fell in again, this time in chest deep water (lots more swearing). Ian came over in the IRB to offer assistance but I declined and said I would walk for a while (I didn't want to get run over again and frankly didn't want to get back into the ski for a while and surely, walking is still allowed in a paddling race). Seriously a huge thanks to Ian, without that rescue assistance I doubt that I would have gotten back into my ski. I walked about 300m in chest deep water dragging my ski and paddle until I reached shallow water and the tree line (so I could hold onto a tree whilst re-mounting).

Back on my ski and then back in the water. Back on my ski and after another 5 mins I was thankfully through the worst of the wind and chop. Less than 2km to go now and I was telling myself that I was going to make it. I got to the final turn about 1km from the finish line and a gust of wind blew me over (lots of swearing). Rich Yates paddled over to check on me and I managed to remount after a few unsuccessful rollover attempts. Very slow paddling to the finish line and Rich and Tony thankfully helped me out of the water as I was a wreck.

Mission accomplished. My goal was to finish the 47km Myall, but it took me 5 hours and 38 mins. I had zero paddling fitness and only 7 weeks to train for it. It wasn't pretty and there are lots of learning's to take into my next race. I will be back to do the Myall again and am determined to break the 5 hours mark next time (hopefully with more than 7 weeks to train for it). A huge thanks to Tony, Naomi, Ian, the Training Wheels squad and the rest of the LCRK crew who helped me on the training journey and for hosting a very well organised race.