



# On All Oars

Rowing has a fine tradition in the UK and is a superb way to get fit

**T**he first time you try to sit in a scull, it can be very unnerving. The boat is very light and twitchy – any minor miscalculation and you'll topple; 'catch a crab' with your oar and over you'll go (and if it's into the Thames, this isn't pleasant).

Once you're in, the actual rowing movement can take months to perfect. It's a kind of balletic coiling and uncoiling of the spring that is your body. With straight back, fiberglass oars feathered to flattening, you reach forward and the oars pivot on twin outriggers; a tiny seat mounted on rollers slides from bow to stern. You begin the stroke with the powerful thigh muscles of your legs leading, then you lean your back into it and the arms follow. All the while you're skimming along with your back facing the direction of travel. On the recoil, the boat glides through the water like a blade through whipping cream. Your hands cross over in the centre and you repeat the process, over and over until you have travelled a fair distance and your muscles are awash with lactic acid. Bliss, agony, grace.

## What muscles will ache?

Former Australian team rower Richard Wearne, a bronze medalist in the 1994 World Rowing Championships, spoke to us about rowing fitness.

"Rowers are often very fit people. I used to run 800m in 1m 50sec with only a few runs under my belt after the Worlds, and a friend of mine - German rower Jan Herzog - ran a marathon in 2 hours 48 minutes shortly after the Athens Olympics."

The main muscles used are the legs, back and arms. Competitive rowers do a lot of squats, leg presses, leg extensions, bench presses, bench pulls (barbell rows on a horizontal bench), one-arm dumbbell rows, cleans, chin-ups, lat pulls and military presses. Weights vary throughout the year: low repetitions with heavy weights to build strength, to high reps (30+) with lighter weights to help improve endurance.

"When training at the Imperial Rowing College, I saw some girls pressing up to 60kg above their heads," said Richard. (So if you are looking for love at the club, you'd better make sure you are over 60kg!)

## Where do I sign up?

Rowing clubs vary in size and prestige and many are bound by years of proud tradition and a special camaraderie that accompanies the rowing life. Rowing is great all-round exercise and is made up of two types: sculling and sweep. Sculling is carried out with two 3m oars (or 'blades') per person and sweep rowing is with just one, measuring approx 3.9m in length. Sculling

is carried out in singles, doubles and quads whereas sweep rowing is carried out in pairs, fours and eights. Beginners can expect to train once or twice a week whereas the Boat Race crews train almost every day. Great rowers tend to be tall and lanky in stature and possess good endurance and anaerobic (low oxygen) capabilities. They also tend to be early birds who can endure waking up at 5am to catch the flat water, which in the UK also means cold temperatures. If you are interested in taking up rowing you can find your nearest club by ringing the Amateur Rowing Association on 020 8237 6700 or visit their website at [ara-rowing.org](http://ara-rowing.org)

The cox is usually a small person who acts as the general of the boat, from the minute it leaves the trailer. Everyone remains silent, as the cox directs the other rowers as they put the boat safely onto the water. He or she urges the team on during practice and races and steers the boat. A knowledgeable coxswain can serve as a coach to the rowers and can be the difference between losing and winning a race. Generally only eights, fours and pairs are coxed, and out of these, fours and eights are by far the most common.

## What do I need, how much will it cost?

All you need to start rowing is some loose clothing that won't restrict your movements (eg. a tracksuit). Rowing club membership fees usually vary from between £35 and 180 per annum. This fee includes the use of the facilities and the boats. For those wishing to race, you need to register with the Amateur Rowing Association. Membership with the ARA also entitles access to an insurance scheme and subscription to the monthly magazine, Regatta. Imperial College on the Putney bank runs rowing courses throughout the year for ages 14 and upwards. Courses consist of intensive coaching on an informal basis for rowing and sculling over a five-day period. Training takes place on water and on land, and video footage is used to show and explain good technique. Many thanks to Cambridge University Women's Boat Club and James Appleton for the photographs.

Go to [www.cuwbc.org](http://www.cuwbc.org)



Luke Taylor trains his clients at the Imperial Rowing College in Putney, in parks, homes and even in their offices. For more info contact Luke at: [personaltrainer@inlondon.com](mailto:personaltrainer@inlondon.com) or visit [www.taylormadephysiques.com](http://www.taylormadephysiques.com).