



# Beginners Guide to Rowing

**Aberdeen  
Inter-Company Row 2011**

sponsored by





## **WELCOME**

Welcome to Aberdeen Boat Club (ABC) and the 2011 Aberdeen Inter-Company Row, sponsored by GDF SUEZ E&P UK Ltd. The Inter-Company Row is now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year and is the biggest event in Aberdeen Boat Club's calendar and the largest event of its kind in the UK.

This year's event is made possible by the generous support of GDF SUEZ E&P Ltd, for which Aberdeen Boat Club is most grateful.

This pamphlet has been produced to help you get the most out of your Inter-Company experience and your training sessions. It also gives you some pointers on how you can continue rowing after the Inter-Company Regatta.

Remember also to log onto our dedicated Inter-Company website – [www.abc-intercompany.co.uk](http://www.abc-intercompany.co.uk) for other useful information.

### **About the Inter-Company Row**

The Inter-Company Row is many things – a chance for people who have never rowed before to try it; an occasion for some friendly rivalry between north-east businesses; a healthy team-building exercise for the workforce and an opportunity for ABC to introduce new people to rowing and gain new members.

### **About the Race**

The Inter-Company Regatta race is over a 500 metre downstream course finishing in front of the boat house. Each race takes about two minutes. The competition starts with a round robin, with four crews in each group, so each crew has a minimum of three races. The winners of each group and the best runners-up progress to the knockout stages and the final. There is also a race to decide third and fourth place.

Each member of the first four crews receives a prize. There are also prizes for the best names, best dressed and best supported crew.

### **Safety**

As with all water sports safety is of paramount importance in rowing. You will be reassured to know that rowing boats, especially fours and eights, rarely capsize, and, in the unlikely event that they do, will remain afloat and act as your buoyancy aid.

Before going on the water your cox will go through the essential health and safety information you need to know. You should make your cox aware of any crew members who are weak swimmers or any other issues which you think may affect your ability to row safely.



## GETTING STARTED

### Getting your team together

While it may be possible to play football with ten men, it is impossible to row with any less than four people and a cox – unless you plan to go round in circles all night! Coordinating the diaries of five individuals can be tricky, so forward planning is essential.

To make the most of your six permitted outings it is a good idea to arrange them fortnightly in advance with your cox and crew and book your boat at that time. Swap phone numbers with all your crew mates so everyone can be contacted if anything changes.

Boats can only be booked on the booking sheet in the club house. Please remember to cancel any bookings which you have to rearrange so another crew may use the boat. The session times are available to view on the website as well so you can refer to them while planning your outings – [www.abc-intercompany.co.uk](http://www.abc-intercompany.co.uk) – but no bookings can be made via the website or email.

To get the most out of your 1 ½ hour session you should aim to be on the water at the start of your session – so arrive at the club in advance to get changed and get the boat and blades out. This could take up to 20 minutes – perhaps longer at busy times.

Please also be considerate to other crews and return your boat on time at the end of your session – another crew may be waiting on the bank to take it out.

### Clothing

The good thing about rowing as a novice is you do not need any specialist equipment other than a pair of wellies to wear while getting the boat in and out of the water.

Standard exercise clothing is ideal for rowing. Your trousers should be loose enough to allow you to touch your toes but not be too loose as they may catch in the mechanics of the boat. Your top should allow completely free movement.

For footwear, trainers are ideal, but if you don't have wellies be prepared to get them wet! Best idea is to buy a cheap pair of wellies rather than ruin your Nikes. (The club has a supply of wellies you can borrow if you forget.)

Wearing several thin layers which can be peeled off is better than a few thick ones. Remember to wear an appropriate number of layers for the weather. For your first few outings in particular, you may not be rowing all the time and there may be periods of inactivity while your cox explains things or works with other members of the crew. It is essential that you keep warm at these times.

You should ideally have a waterproof top layer for use in inclement weather – rowing in Aberdeen is not a fair weather sport!



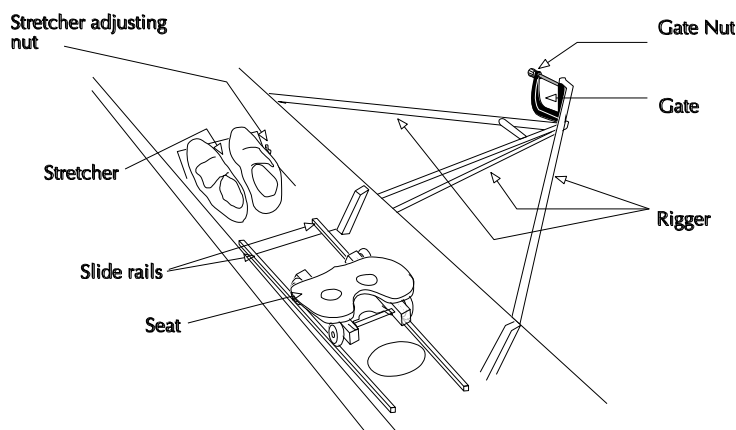
## ABOUT THE BOATS

Inter-Company training and racing is carried out in 'restricted fours' boats made of wood. These are more stable and less fragile than the fibreglass shell boats which are used by more experienced rowers.

Please bear in mind that all boats – be it wooden or fibreglass – are expensive and easily damaged. Please treat them with care. The golden rule is that the boat only touches air, water and bums.

Your cox will give you commands to move the boat from the boat bay to the water – please pay attention to your cox at all times.

Once the boat is in the water you will get a clearer idea of how the boat is set up. The diagram below shows you some of the key parts of the boat.



Each **seat** has wheels underneath which are placed within the **slide rails** which are affixed to the boat.

The slides are affixed to cross-braces which are the only part of the boat that you can put all your weight on. Please note that the hull is not strong enough to take an adult's weight. Your cox will show you the correct part of the boat to stand on

as you get in and out of it.

In front of your seat is the foot **stretcher**. This is the part of the boat which your feet are strapped to. It can be moved forward and back to suit your height by loosening the **stretcher nut** and is angled to give you a good platform to push from.

You should make sure your feet are not strapped in so tightly that if the boat were to tip over you would be trapped underneath.

The **rigger** is the arrangement of metal tubing that supports the blade (oar). At the end of the rigger is the **gate** in which the blade is placed and secured by turning the **gate nut**. The gate swivels freely allowing the blade to swing through an arc as you take a stroke.

Please do not remove any part from one boat to use on another for any reason. In the event that any part of your boat develops a fault your cox will report it to the club captain for repair or replacement.

## POSITIONS IN THE BOAT

The diagram below shows the four different rowing positions within the boat.

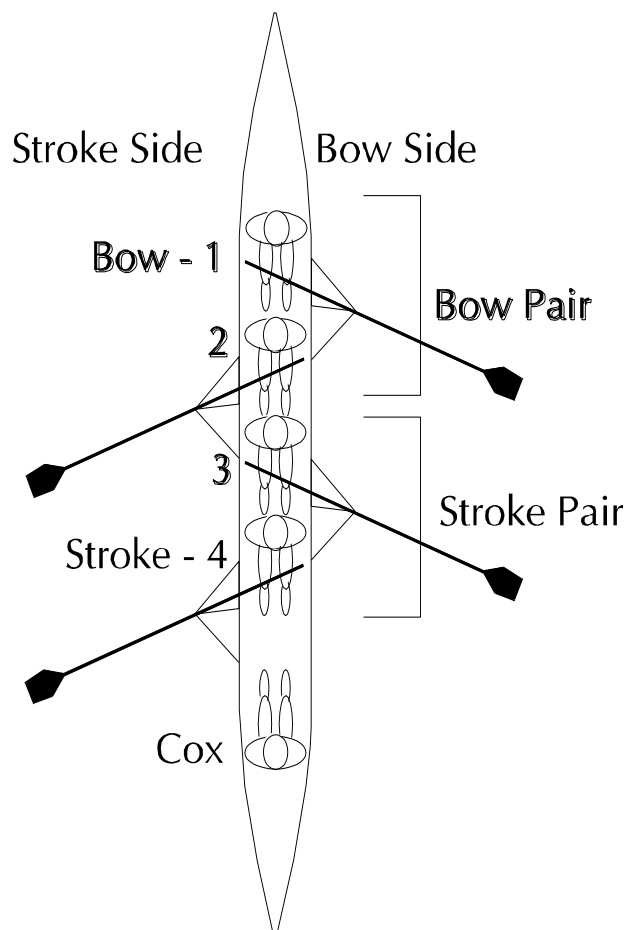
The most important is the stroke position. This is the person who sets the timing which everyone else has to follow and which has to be even and controlled throughout the race. The stroke person should not necessarily be the strongest person in the crew, but should be the fittest so they can keep going!

The strength should be balanced across the boat, which normally means that there will be a man and a woman on bow side and a man and a woman on stroke side. Remember rowing is all about team work – not any one individual. Everyone makes an important contribution to the boat and your cox will help identify which position you are best suited to.

Each member of the crew has three designations – a number, a side and a pair.

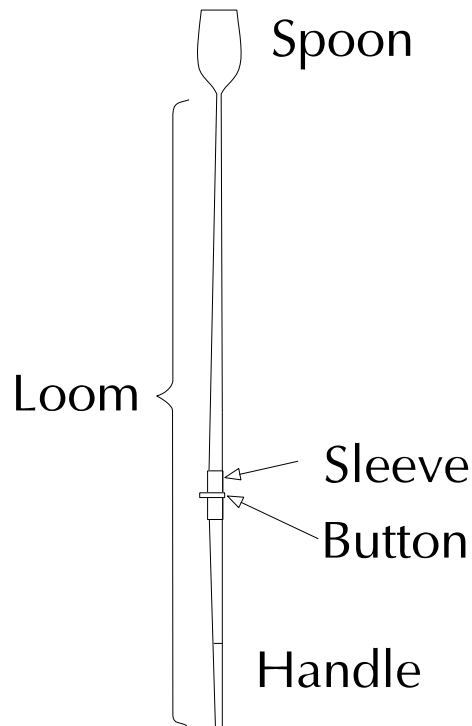
So person 1 and person 3 are on bow side and person 2 and 4 are on stroke side. 1 and 2 together make up 'bow pair'. 3 and 4 together make up 'stroke pair'. 1 and 3 together make up 'bow side'. 2 and 4 together make up 'stroke side'. The person at 1 is usually referred to as 'bow'. The person at 4 is usually referred to as 'stroke'.

It is important to remember your number and listen out for instructions!



## THE BLADE

Each rowing crew member has one blade (oar) which is placed in the gate. The parts of the blade are shown below:



As you might expect, you hold the **handle** of the blade.

The **sleeve** rests inside the gate, with the **button** on the nearside to stop the blade sliding out.

The **spoon** is placed in the water and is used to propel the boat.

## ROWING LANGUAGE

Like many sports, rowing has its own language so here is a glossary of some of the terms that your cox may use. Don't worry - these will be explained during your training!

Backstops	Legs extended, with the blade drawn up to your chest, the spoon flat on the water. The normal position for starting when practising.
Frontstops	Legs bent, arms straight in front, with the blade in the water, squared. Only used when practising a racing start or the real thing.
Easy	The blade at 90° to the boat, the spoon feathered. When the command is given while rowing, the blades should be held off the water until the cox says 'drop'. This is the position for setting the boat.
Pull on	Means take a normal stroke. Usually given to a specific oarsman, pair or side when manoeuvring the boat.



Back down	Used to manoeuvre the boat. The blade is square in the water with the concave face toward the bow (blade reversed). The blade is slowly but firmly pushed away from the body, and the body drawn down the slide by the legs.
Checking	Used when a quick stop or turn is required. The blade is squared in the water and held firmly to 'check' the boat's movement.
Catch	The point in the stroke when the spoon is dropped in the water. This must be done as a crew.
Finish	The end of the stroke, when the spoon is extracted from the water by knocking the handle down smartly. Must be done as a crew.
Recovery	The movement down the slide towards the stern while the blade is off the water.
Drive	The part of the stroke while the blade is in the water, powering the boat.
Square	The position the spoon should be in in the water during the drive. The blade should be squared well before the catch, not as it is dropped in.
Feather	The spoon parallel to the surface of the water. This cuts wind resistance and means that if the blade does touch the water during the recovery, it will skim the surface.

## GETTING THE BOAT IN AND OUT

In your first lesson your cox will teach you how to handle the boat and move it safely in and out of the boat bay and onto and off the water. When lowering and lifting the boat you should ensure that your back is kept straight to minimise the risk of back injury.

As soon as you enter the boat bay your cox will take control of your outing and you should follow his / her instructions carefully. He / She will show you how to carefully lift your boat from the rack. (The procedure for this will vary slightly according to where the boat is positioned within the boat bay.)

The boats are removed from the boat bays slowly, taking care not to touch any other boats, especially with the riggers. The boat is carried by the four crew members upside down at waist level to the top of the steps. Everyone then turns and faces the river and slowly walks the boat down the steps to the bank keeping it parallel to the river.

Once at the water's edge all crew members will face the boat and turn it on its side, grasping the V-shaped ribs of the boat. One at a time the people on the river side of the boat come under or round to the bank side. The boat is turned over and the crew takes a few small steps into the water (hence the wellies) and gently place on the water. Coming off the water you will do the same but in reverse.



## **GETTING THE CREW IN AND OUT**

Once down at the bank your cox will instruct you to move the boat along the water towards the jetty. Boating always takes place from the jetty. The bow person gets in the boat first, while the cox holds the number 2 rigger. The rest of the crew should be getting ready to boat as the bow man climbs in. Then the rest of the crew boats in the same way from bow to stern with the cox getting in last.

Once you are in the boat you may wish to adjust your foot stretcher to suit your height. Remember to keep your blade under control at all times while you are doing this as the blades are the 'stabilisers' for the boat and should be flat on the water throughout. It's a good idea to tuck the loom under your arm while you reach forward to make your feet adjustments.

While the others are boating, bow may be required to take light strokes or back down to keep the boat in line with the bank. Bowman therefore needs to stay alert for instructions from the cox as he is boating. If the boat drifts away from the bank you will be asked to pull on, if it's drifting towards the bank you will be asked to back down.

### **Returning to the jetty**

On returning to the Boathouse at the end of an outing, you will approach the jetty facing upstream. Listen carefully to the cox, as you will more than likely receive the command 'lean to bowside'. When this happens, all the crew should lean slightly to bow side allowing the stroke side rowers to lift their blades clear of the water allowing the jetty to pass underneath them.

Getting out of the boat is done in reverse order - bow may be required to keep the boat lined up properly with the jetty. As soon as you are out of the boat, taking your blade with you, get your wellies on to get the boat out of the water (unless you have the luxury of a crew taking over the boat from you).

Before putting the boat back in the bay, the hull must be washed. Once this is done, you may retire to the bar to dissect your performance! It is courtesy to buy your cox a drink as a thanks for his / her time (and to warm them up if it's cold or wet!)

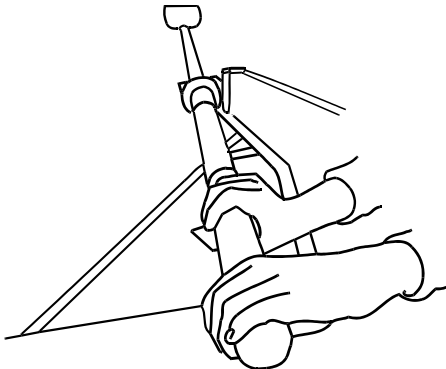
## THE ROWING ACTION

Rowing is an easy natural action that will be picked up very quickly by most people. Most of us have tried rowing in some small dinghy on holiday, and found that all the effort is made by the upper body, with the legs providing only a balancing aid. Sport rowing uses nearly all the major muscle groups in the body - legs, back, stomach, shoulders and arms.

The challenge of rowing in a crew is to keep all your movements as one, providing the maximum power to effort ratio. (It is not difficult to waste effort with poor technique) Hence, a lightweight, but well coordinated crew will beat an immensely strong, but poorly coordinated crew.

### Hand position on the blade

The hands should be about three hands widths apart. The outside hand is used purely as a hook, to pull the handle round. The inside hand is the technical hand, used for squaring and feathering the blade. The grip on the handle should only be sufficiently strong to control the blade. Relax the grip as often as you can, or you can start suffering from intense pain in the forearms. If this starts happening, tell the cox, so that a closer look can be taken at your technique.



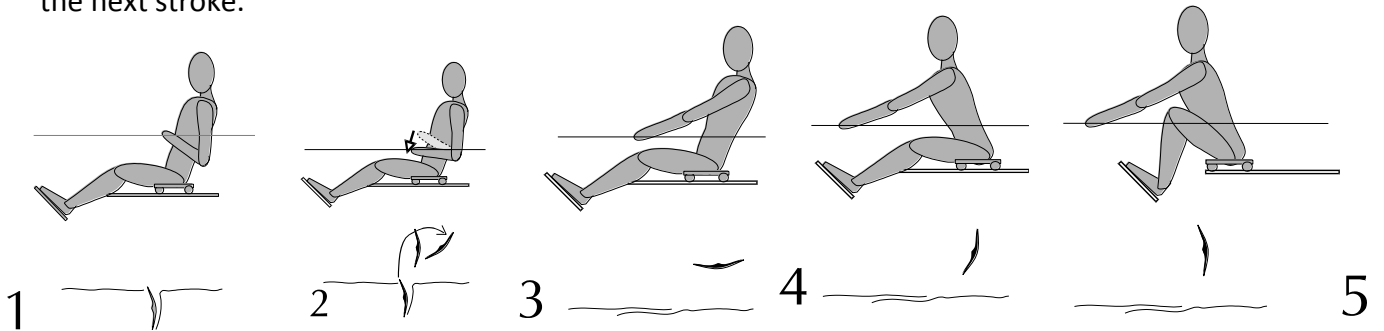
Hand Position on the recovery

## Body movements

In all practices in the Inter-Company Regatta, you will start rowing from backstops. In this position, the legs are fully extended, the body leaning back at about 20° from vertical, the blade drawn to the chest with the spoon flat on the water. (See figure 1)

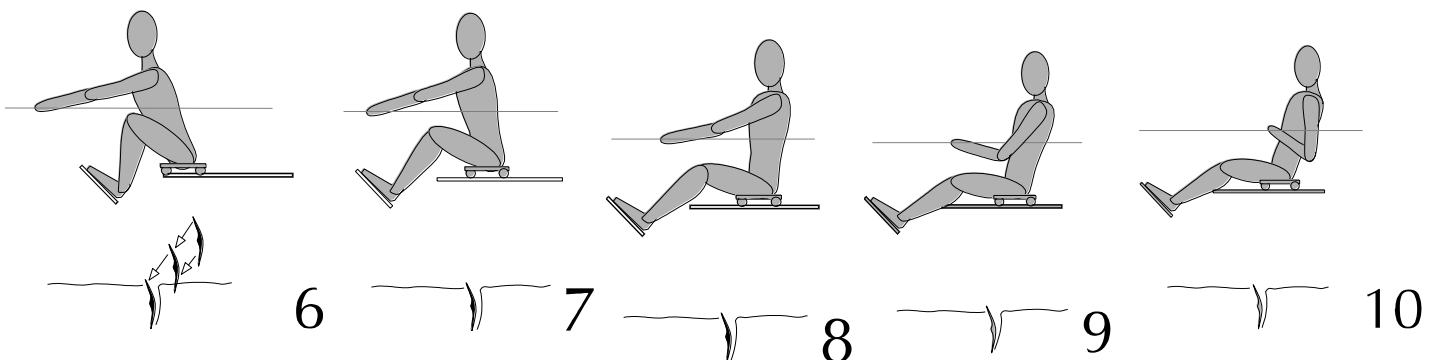
The cox will tell you what type of work you will be doing (light pressure, half, etc.), then shout 'Ready'. On this the blades are squared in the water (1), then 'Row'.

The hands are then pushed smartly downwards (see 2). This is called 'tapping down'. The blade is then feathered and the arms straightened to push the loom over the knees (see 3). The body then leans forward (4), then starts moving up the slide (5), squaring the blade smartly, ready for the next stroke.



This part of the stroke is called the recovery. All the crew must move up the slide at the same time and speed, otherwise the boat will be subject to varying deceleration. When it happens you will be able to feel the slightly jerky movement of the boat. You should use the recovery precisely as that – a chance to relax as you come back up the slide, ready for the next stroke.

When the crew reaches front stops (6), the legs immediately start extending. At the same time the blade is dropped into the water for the catch. As soon as you can feel the pressure on the spoon, you put the effort into the leg drive (7). When the legs are fully extended (8), you then follow through with the arms (9), while starting to lean back, keeping your hands at the same height the whole way through the stroke. As the hands accelerate to reach the chest at the finish (10) of the stroke, they are pushed down quickly, and the process is started again.





## Blade Angle

It is important to get the angle of the blade in the water correct. If you are holding your blade correctly, this will happen without effort due to the design of the loom and the gate.

When pulling on, the flat side of the loom is held in the correct position against the vertical bar of the gate by the pressure exerted by the rower. You should leave the gate to put the blade at the right angle in the water, and relax the inside hand.

A common fault is to leave squaring the blade until just before the catch. The blade should be squared and ready for the catch as your hands are moving over your feet. If the blade enters the water at an angle, it will dig deep into the water, reducing the power of the stroke, and making it very difficult to extract at the finish. When this happens, it is called **catching a crab**.

There are few people who take part in the Inter-Company Regatta who will not catch one while they are practising (and a fair number will catch them on the day).

If you feel during a stroke that your blade is digging too deep into the water, slacken your pressure immediately; this will allow the blade to be extracted far more easily at the finish in time with the rest of the crew. It is far better that you lose the power of one stroke than catching a crab, losing a grip of the blade, and disrupting the rest of the crew for two or three strokes.

You will discover the joys of catching crabs while practising - some can be quite spectacular with the handle swinging right over the unfortunate victim's head!



## **YOUR FIRST LESSONS – What to expect**

Training regimes may vary slightly from crew to crew depending on your cox and what he / she thinks will work best for each particular crew. However, in your first lessons you can expect to be taught:

- The correct basic rowing action on the ergometer (rowing machine)
- How to handle the blade (oar)
- How to manoeuvre the boat in the relatively confined space of the River Dee

### **Setting the boat**

One of the first things you may do having moved away from the bank in the boat is to 'set the boat'. To do this the oars are placed flat on the water, and kept under control in your hands. At this point, the cox will get everyone in the crew to square their blades in the water, under very light control, to show you where the balance of the boat lies and at what height your hands should be while pulling on (taking a stroke).

After the boat is set, you will practise rowing in pairs, with the other pair setting (also called balancing) the boat to keep it steady. If the boat starts leaning to bow side, the bow side member of the 'setting' pair lifts their hands to bring the boat back to the level position, and vice versa.

While setting a moving boat, it helps if the leading edge of the blade is twisted up slightly in order that it rides more smoothly over the water.

Once the cox is satisfied that each pair has the rudiments of control of the blade and action, he will try the crew as a whole.

### **Turning the Boat**

Once you have done a few hundred metres in this manner, you will be required to turn the boat. This is achieved by one side holding their blades square in the water and the other side pulling on.

Normal rules on the Dee are that boats keep to the left of the river, so turns are normally made in a clockwise direction, with bow side holding and stroke side pulling on. Your cox will ask the bow side rowers to square their blades then stroke side will take a series of strokes until the boat is turned and on positioned on the opposite side of the river.

Occasionally it may be necessary for a pair to row together for a few strokes as part of the turn to take the boat fully across to the other side of the river.



## Training Exercises

As you progress through the training sessions, your cox will introduce you to more aspects of rowing and work on improving your technique. In the last few days before the regatta you will have the opportunity to do a few informal practice races with other crews practising out on the river.

Once you have shown the cox that you have the basic body movements and blade work under control, you will move onto tidying up your technique. There are various exercises which are used to improve techniques; the list following are some which are commonly used in the Inter-Company Regatta training.

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Single Stroke       | Having achieved reasonably balanced steady state rowing, this exercise will further improve the balance of the boat. As the crew returns up the slide, the action stops as the blade passes over the knees, with arms straight, and knees slightly bent. The hand height is varied by each member of the crew to balance the boat. |
| Hand down the loom  | A common fault in novice rowing is leaning away from the rigger during the stroke, when you should lean into it, such that the cox should see a V of bodies at the catch and finish.   |
| Eyes Shut           | Without the visual input, you are more dependent on your other senses, you will be surprised how well you row with you eyes shut.  |
| Inside Hand only    | Rowed at very light pressure, this exercise is intended to improve your catches and finishes.  |
| Square blade rowing | This is an exercise that will be returned to by coxes if members of the crew are consistently squaring late. It also helps get the balance of the boat right.  |
| Short Slide Rowing  | In this exercise you reduce the length of your travel on the slide, first to using $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length, then $\frac{1}{2}$ , then $\frac{1}{4}$ , then using arms and body only, and finally arms only. This exercise improves the catches and finishes.   |

## Racing Starts

Don't expect to start doing racing starts until your fourth or fifth outing on the river. The aim of a racing start is to get the boat moving as fast as possible as quick as possible, then to build the speed having overcome the inertia of starting the boat.

There are many types of racing start. The type of start favoured at ABC is three three-quarter strokes followed by building for five or seven, then 'striding'.

A race is started in the front stops position, blades square in the water, at the catch position. The seat is three-quarters the way up the slide, with the body vertical, so that you can maintain



the position while waiting for the start. The commands from the umpire (in a race) or cox (in a practice), are 'Attention....Go!'

On the 'GO!' the whole crew take a powerful controlled stroke, followed by two more three-quarter length strokes at a slow rating, but with plenty of power. In the build, the rating and stroke length is then increased to the maximum in order to establish an early lead over the competition.

After the build, the cox will scream 'stride'. On this, the rating drops, the crew concentrating on putting maximum effort into the stroke, while keeping the rating at a level that can be maintained for the length of the race.

If it is a close race, it is possible that close to the finish, your cox will tell you to build and stride again, in order to increase or regain the lead.

## RACING

### Preparation Tips

- Though there is a temptation to always practise in the best boat available, it is advisable to go out in some of the 'less good' boats that will be used on the day. Then, you will be mentally prepared to row a good race in them.
- Make a note, mental or on paper, of your stretcher settings for the different boats. These can make all the difference to the power that you can put into your rowing. On the day, the stretchers will be changed by everyone else, so make sure that yours fits okay.
- If possible, arrange for someone to be on the bank when you boat to take any kit which you want to peel off when you get into the boat, and store it in a safe place.
- If time permits, have a quick check of screws, and bolts on the boat before leaving the bank.
- **Always** check your gate nut.

### A few points about racing

- Rowing is one of the few sports where the leaders have a psychological advantage in being able to see how far ahead of the opposition they are. So if you can't see the opposition, you are not rowing hard enough!
- If you are level pegging against the opposition, keep looking straight down the course, and concentrate on your own rowing - looking at the other boat will distract you and reduce your effort.
- If your blades start clashing, the best way to extricate yourself is for the side with clashing blades to pull on harder, and the other side to reduce pressure.



Come to enjoy the day!

### **Inter-Company Regatta Day**

The great day dawns, and you get up willing yourself to win - there will be 159 other people thinking exactly the same, and you are rowing against 156 of them. Have a good breakfast, you will need the energy. Be at the Boat Club on time.

Throughout the day, punctuality is crucial to the smooth running of the regatta - be late for a race, and you might lose it by default. There are over sixty races to be run, which last from 10am through to about 6pm; there is little room for late running. A programme will be issued to each rower on the day, which will tell you what time your races will start.

In the week prior to the Regatta, a programme will be distributed to the teams, and pinned on the board. Make sure you know what time your first race is, and be at the club a minimum of an hour before. You need to park, change, do what you have to, and you will boat fifteen to twenty minutes before the race start.

The boats are raced in matched pairs. You will not have any choice in which boat you are racing. The actual method of allocation of boats will be made known on the day.

Be sure you know what time your next race is, and be in plenty of time to pick up the boats as they come in from the last race.

Before going out on the water, make sure you are properly warmed up. Don't drink alcohol before rowing. Do have a pee! Keep yourself warm and dry before you go out.

### **The Inter-Company Regatta Party**

Held on the evening of the Regatta is by far the best party of the year at ABC. Make sure you include this in your plans for the day and bring all your friends.



## **FURTHER ROWING AT ABC**

The Inter-Company Regatta is run partly to recruit more people to the sport. You may have become completely hooked and want to carry on competitively or you might be one of those who just enjoys spending an evening rowing on the Dee. Or you just don't want to see another rowing boat again in your life! If you are one of the latter, thank you for participating, we hope you enjoyed it. If any of the other statements apply to you, Aberdeen Boat Club will welcome your application for membership.

First Year Rowing Membership is £125.00, second year £187.50 and subsequent years are £250. This allows you free use of the facilities and boats appropriate to your standard throughout the year.

### **Further Racing**

Inter-Company competitors can race against each other again in the Aberdeen Novices category at the open spring regatta in September. This is for both single-sex crews and mixed crews.

Additionally, the Scottish Sprint Season runs through September and into October, prior to the start of the Head of the River Races. Rowing in any Scottish Amateur Rowing Association Regattas requires a rowing licence, which costs £38.

### **Sculling**

If you wish to try sculling, ask the Captain of Rowing or one of the senior rowers to start you off. You will start in the playboat, in which you can learn about the different handling techniques of a scull, then progress after a couple of outings into the clinker. After at least six outings in the Clinker, you will take your sculling test with a senior sculler and be passed to use one of the plastic shells.

### **Coxing**

If you wish to carry on rowing at all, you should learn how to cox. This is an essential part of rowing. You will start coxing with an experienced crew, then, when you have shown that you are able to control the boat effectively and know the basic commands, you will be allowed to take out novice crews. Coxing can be an immensely satisfying role in rowing - a good cox does not necessarily need to be a good oarsman, and will always be in demand.

### **Further Training**

Following the Aberdeen Sprint in September, a training program will be published for any new members who wish to carry on rowing seriously. At this point, it is expected that you can become more self-sufficient in your rowing – forming your own crews, booking boats, arranging coxes and entering events. The more you are seen to help yourselves, the more the experienced rowers are likely to help you when you need it. Don't be afraid to ask for advice, help, and coaching - the senior rowers will be keen to assist.

***Good Luck and Good Rowing!***