

UK Canoeing



Proposal for a National Canoe Time Trial series

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1. Executive Summary

This document proposes some ideas to create a National Canoe Time Trial Series for Great Britain.

The main objective is establish a national standard format for time trials, to form a competitive race series for high kneeling canoes, and also embrace the sit&switch style of paddlers.

The series will run throughout the summer and co-exist, but remain entirely separate from the existing Hasler race calendar.

The main ideas and recommendations described in this document are:

1. To outline a proposal for a standard race format for a canoe time trial.
2. For the proposal to be reviewed by the British Canoe Union (BCU) Marathon Racing Committee (MRC) for advice and recommendations.
3. That the BCU MRC should sanction a trial event format for the 2015 calendar year.
4. The proposal should be circulated to canoe clubs for wider consultation, comments and feedback.
5. That a central organising committee be formed of representatives from the canoeing fraternity, to agree a time trial race format, regulations and event organisation.
6. For a number of clubs who register interest, to be invited to test the concept during 2015, in conjunction with their scheduled Hasler marathon event.
7. That a review be conducted at the end of 2015.

This document is not prescriptive, but simply sets out some ideas for consideration and refinement by a central organising committee.

2. Introduction

It is generally accepted that canoe racing in the UK is approaching crisis in terms of the number of paddlers competing in sprint and marathon events. Team GB enter paddlers in most of the international kayak classes, but not so in the canoe events. This is mostly due to too few participants in the sport and therefore no grass-roots foundations from which to nurture high performance athletes.

1,038 paddlers raced at the 2014 national canoe marathon championships, all kayakers except 9 canoeists consisting of 5 senior men, 1 senior lady and 3 junior men.

The mainstay of UK based marathon canoe competition is the Hasler series and there are events across the UK most weekends throughout the summer season. In 2014, nearly 8,000 athletes from 113 clubs paddled the races hosted by canoe clubs across the country. Only 1.8% of these (142) were canoeists. 94 paddled C2 and 48 were in a C1, which equals 95 boats.

There are no separate Hasler races for canoes as there are too few competitors, so canoeists line up with the kayaks. Although paddlers are ranked separately for kayak and canoe disciplines, due to the speed differential between kayaks and canoes, it is difficult for a canoeist to get promoted and progress through the divisions. A “fast” and experienced racing canoeist is often limited to the lower divisions, with shorter distances, no portages and a regulation to wear a buoyancy aid, not an attractive option.

Although clubs are generally keen to promote open canoeing, there is little incentive for athletes to compete in these boats due to lack of specific race categories. There are also better prospects of more Hasler points for a higher placed kayak finish.

Unless changes are made to the support and promotion of canoe racing in the UK, there is a risk that even the die-hard canoe racing enthusiasts may abandon the sport.

This working paper describes some ideas for a proposal for a national time trial race series for canoes. Ideally, these could be run in conjunction with Hasler events, as clubs tend to support these events en-mass, alternatively they could run as stand-alone events.

This proposal is not prescriptive, but simply sets out a framework for discussion, rather than start from a blank piece of paper.

Now seems the right time to start the push towards promoting canoeing, especially in light of the news that the ICF have reduced the maximum C1 sprint boat weight by 2 kgs, and the ICF Marathon Committee have voted to introduce Senior and Junior Women's C1 classes into the World Championships.

All feedback, ideas, advice and guidance is welcome and should be directed to Nick Adnitt – nickadnitt@aol.com

3. Document Control

This is an open document. It is not commercially sensitive and does not contain any proprietary or protected information.

3.1. Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Changes
1.0	25 th September 2014	Nick Adnitt	Original document
1.1	29 th September 2014	Nick Adnitt	Addition of race officials. Minor changes in response to early feedback.
1.2	3 rd October 2014	Nick Adnitt	Integrate feedback from limited distribution
1.3	12 th October 2014	Nick Adnitt	Changes and suggestions from James Hinves. Addition of executive summary
2.0	12 th December 2014	Nick Adnitt	Encompass issues raised by the British Canoeing Marathon Racing Committee from their meeting in November 2014. Updates to planning schedule Distribution to Regional Marathon Advisors
2.1	4 th March 2015	Nick Adnitt	Distribution to Hasler event organisers

3.2. Document Distribution

Various versions of this document have been distributed to an increasing list of recipients.

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4. Background

Open (Canadian) canoe racing is very popular in many parts of the world especially the USA, where long distance marathon events attract large start lines of sit&switch single and double canoes. There are even professional races with commercially sponsored boats. The racing boats are generally wider, as the specifications conform to US regulations rather than International Canoe Federation (ICF).

Many European countries have strong bodies of high-kneeling racing canoe paddlers and are well represented in international competition. Canoe racing is also seen as a social, almost recreational choice for large club events where even C7s are raced by groups of club members.

In the UK, the Hasler marathon series is extremely popular, with over sixty weekend events from March to November. These attract large fields of kayak paddlers, but only a very small number of canoes.

Canoes are better represented in the classic, longer distance races including the Cheshire Ring, Glasgow to Edinburgh, Ross Warland challenge and the descents.

The Waterside Race series, Thameside series and Devizes to Westminster (DW) canoe races draw large numbers of canoes.

Twenty two double canoes entered the 2014 DW, plus five single canoes (including the first female competitors) and four junior C2s.

This is representative of a growing trend:

- 13 C2s in 2013, 2 single, 6 junior C2s
- 17 C2s in 2012, 4 single, 4 junior C2s
- 18 C2s in 2011, 2 single, 3 junior C2s
- 11 C2s in 2010, 4 single, 3 junior C2s
- 25 C2s in 2009, 0 single, 5 junior C2s

Unfortunately, there are very few events during the summer which are appealing to canoes, and these paddlers don't have much competitive opportunity after Easter. The sit&switch canoeing momentum generated for DW needs to be channelled into further events throughout the year, which would attract to this type of paddler.

There are a number of ways in which the opportunities for canoe racing could be increased and thus promote greater participation.

5. The Hasler marathon canoe series

The Hasler marathon canoe series is the main stay of competitive events in the UK and has run successfully for many years. It caters for all abilities, and the divisional structure helps develop high performance athletes for international competition.

There are 4,131 ranked Hasler paddlers as at 29th September 2014. 141 of these are canoeists, 115 male and 26 female. Many of them are registered as both kayak and canoe paddlers. This means that less than 3.5% of paddlers are canoeists, made of the following:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| • 41 senior male canoeists (including juniors?) | • Division 4 – 10 canoeists |
| • 15 senior female canoeists | • Division 5 - 10 canoeists |
| • 68 veteran male canoeists | • Division 6 - 8 canoeists |
| • 11 veteran female canoeists | • Division 7 - 6 canoeists |
| • 6 Junior female canoeists | • Division 8 - 11 canoeists |
| • No category for junior male canoeists | • Division 9 - 96 canoeists |

The numbers of canoeists who actually paddle a Hasler event are very low, which indicates a preference to paddle kayak, or an unwillingness to compete at all.

There are no separate races for canoes and in order to be considered for promotion, paddlers have to finish in the top section of the race. Over the short 4 mile course with at least one tight turn and often no portages, kayaks tend to be significantly quicker, especially from the start. There is little chance of a canoe winning or indeed earning

Hasler points towards helping a club to the Hasler finals. As such, over 70% of racing canoeists have not progressed beyond division 9.

To entice more canoe participation, there has to be a positive incentive for canoeists to enter Hasler events. Although there are not enough entrants to justify specific races, perhaps the boat type should be recognised and points awarded within the race division for the finishing position in the class.

This would mean that the first canoe within the division is awarded the same number of points as the first kayak. Once clubs realise the value of entering canoes, participation should increase.

6. Time trials

A better proposal is for a nationally recognised Canoe Time Trial Series.

A Time Trail (TT) is simply a timed effort along a known distance, which can be compared against the times of other athletes in the same event. Competitors are set off at regular intervals and their time is recorded as they cross the finish line.

To illustrate a highly successful parallel in the competitive cycling world, it's called "the race of truth" as it is just the rider's effort against the clock. It is easy for clubs to organise a TT to a national standard on public roads with up to 240 competitors. There are no large groups of riders disrupting traffic, and it is much safer. There are hundreds of club events, open events, national and international races, and a world championship. It is an extremely popular global sport and a well tried and tested formula, which translates extremely well to canoeing.

Many canoe clubs run regular time trials throughout the year, so that paddler's performance and progress can be monitored within a controlled test structure. These tend to be organised around local conditions and at varying distances. If a national standard format were established, there is potential for paddlers to compare their performance across a wider cohort.

The club time trials are popular and often draw large fields, especially over the winter months when there are very few races. A derivative of the TT, is a "Hare and Hounds" format where the slowest paddlers are started first and the fastest chase after them.

Logistically, such an event is much easier to organise than a mass start, multi participation race. Competitors are allocated a start time and set off in numerical order. Water courses, such as narrow canals and rivers which are not well suited to mass start events, can be better utilised for TTs.

TT's are also more appealing to paddlers who are not comfortable in the "rough and tumble" of a mass start, and the subsequent water turbulence as paddlers sprint to get "clean" water.

As the DW and Waterside race series demonstrate, the TT format IS attractive to canoeists and more provision for TTs could be made throughout the year to a national standard supported by a regulatory body.

7. A National Canoe Time Trial Series

Unless marathon events are made more attractive to canoeists, there is little likelihood of increasing participation, growing the sport and building a foundation upon which athletes capable of international competition will evolve. Ultimately, this will be canoeists who are able to adopt the faster, high kneeling means of propulsion.

Over the years, a number of initiatives have been tried in order to migrate paddlers from racing kayaks into high kneeling racing canoes. But athletes don't have the incentive or tenacity to persevere as it is a hard technique to master and there are far too few competitive opportunities.

There is an opportunity to cultivate a sit&switch racing forum as a smaller "stepping stone" to high kneeling.

In order to help meet this goal, it is proposed to establish a series of time trials throughout the year to run in conjunction with Hasler events, to form a National Canoe Time Trial Series.

The TT event will have absolutely no impact on the Hasler event what-so-ever. The race is simply on the same day, at the same venue and sharing the same event logistics and administrative resource.

7.1. Objectives

The main objectives for the series are:

- To be officially supported by the British Canoe Union (BCU) Marathon Racing authority
- To provide a national race format for canoe time trials
- To encourage canoe race participation in the UK
- To provide a standard metric to measure athletes performance on a continual basis
- To grow canoe racing at the grass-roots as a platform to improve performance
- To integrate canoe time trails within Hasler events with minimum impact
- To define a practical set of rules and regulations
- To define a standard template for TT race organisation
- To have fun!

7.2. Setup timescale

Canoe time trials are not new and many clubs organise their own races to a local style and format. What is required is a national standard format supported by the UK national canoe authorities.

The definition of the format, rules, regulation and organisation should be defined in partnership and collaboration with the canoe clubs, and ratified by the British Canoe Union (BCU) marathon committee.

This is not a difficult proposition, and it is entirely feasible to define an event format and schedule races ready for pilot in the 2015 season.

The table below shows a high level timescale consisting of the main tasks and activities:

Serial	Item	Details	Target date
1	Write Draft Proposal	Version 1.0 of his document.	September 2014
2	Solicit feedback from small selection of canoeists	Updates, refinements and ideas from a limited consultation.	October 2014
3	Gain approval and support from the BCU Marathon Committee	Dialogue with marathon committee to articulate ideas and refine plan.	November 2014
4	Marathon Regional Advisors	"Heads-up" email to Marathon Regional Advisors.	Early December 2014
5	Canoe clubs	"Heads up" email proposal to Canoe club committees.	Late December 2014
6	Collate feedback	Document feedback, identify themes, develop good ideas.	January 2015
7	Establish schedule to use 2015 season to pilot the scheme	Identify volunteer Clubs to trial the concept at Hasler events.	Early 2015
8	Setup a central organising committee	A small number of volunteers to centrally manage, administer and coordinate the race series.	Early 2015
9	Setup workshop	Establish meeting of representatives and interested parties from a cross section of the canoeing community to improve format and develop an action plan.	Early 2015
10	Publish plan for final consultation	Use social media to share proposals with UK wide canoeing population.	Spring 2015
11	Define event organisation template	Document guidelines on how to run an event, format, rules and organisation.	Spring 2015
12	launch	UK canoe authorities and governing bodies, canoeists.	After Devises to Westminster Easter 2015
13	Run pilot races at selected Hasler events	Run TTs in parallel with Hasler event. Review how it went, enhance format if required.	2015 season
14	Review pilot season	Document a report on pilot season. Publish for feedback.	Post 2015 season
15	Setup review workshop	Establish meeting of event coordinators and other interested parties to measure the success of the pilot and decide on future.	November/December 2015

		Define event best-practice.	
16	Establish programme for 2016		

7.3. Costs

This initiative is unlikely to impose any funding demands on the BCU. Events are generally organised by volunteers and event expenses are covered by race entry fees.

7.4. Race structure

It is difficult to anticipate to level of participation in the first year, so the number of classes may have to be limited in the beginning. There will probably be more C2s than C1s.

The races will be open to the following classes:

- Open C2 – male. Any type of C2 paddled by two male competitors.
- Open C2 – female. Any type of C2 paddled by two female competitors.
- Open C2 – mixed. Any type of C2 paddled by one male competitor and one female competitor.
- Open C1 – sit&switch. Any type of C1 paddled in a sitting or low kneeling position.
- ICF C1 high kneeling – male. A C1 in accordance with ICF boat regulations for marathon events, paddled by a male competitor in the high kneeling position.
- ICF C1 high kneeling – female. A C1 in accordance with ICF boat regulations for marathon events, paddled by a female competitor in the high kneeling position.

There may be junior classes depending on numbers.

By limiting the format to canoes, it does not encroach on the established Hasler race series or “poach” kayakers. As paddlers can only score points when racing events in their own Hasler region, clubs will not be deterred from encouraging canoe TT participation, as there will be no Hasler points awarded to competitors.

There should be a national TT ranking scheme.

7.5. Event principles

The definitive rules and regulations should be agreed by the organising committee. A high-level framework may include the following principles:

1. Competitors will be given a set start time. They are expected to be at the start in time, as the clock will not wait for them.
2. Standard Hasler number boards will be used.
3. Competitors will start at one minute intervals.
4. Boats will start from “standing”, held by the stern.
5. All races will be over a standard measured distance of five or ten miles.
6. The course format will be there and back (A – B – A).
7. There will be at least one portage.
8. Additional portages as dictated by practical limitations of the course.
9. Wash hanging is forbidden! Time trialling is the “race of truth” against the clock with no outside assistance. Paddlers will be warned about wash hanging and then penalties will be awarded. This will discourage a fast club boat “dragging” slower crews to a time which is not representative of their true ability.
10. Non-ICF boats eligible for competition will:
 - a. Have an open cockpit area
 - b. Not have a rudder or any sort of steering system
 - c. Be paddled with a single blade
11. Cash prizes may be awarded for first, second and third places depending on number of race participants.
12. TT series points will be awarded from 20 points for first position, down to 1 point for twentieth place, in each class.
13. *N* best places in events will count towards series results.
14. Courses will have record times recorded. Additional prizes may be awarded for breaking course records (starting in the second year).
15. Two stop watches will be used to time the event.
16. There must be a marshal at the turn point. Split times could also be recorded.

17. Buoyancy aids may be mandated for all competitors at the discretion of the host club.
18. Competitors must have current BCU membership. There may be a limited opportunity to pay for a day licence.
19. Boats will be inspected before embarkation to ensure adequate buoyancy.
20. A course risk assessment should be conducted and officially recorded.

7.6. Organisation

Canoe time trial organisation will be in parallel, but completely separate from the Hasler event. This minimises overheads by taking advantage of the existing logistics in terms of promotion, entries, parking, registration, management and administration and avoids “re-inventing the wheel”.

Events will be promoted alongside, and as an extension to the Hasler race. Administration will simply be another race class.

A national standard race fee of £8 will be imposed for each entrant. The revenue will be split between a donation to the host club, BCU race levies (£2) and prize money. Any surplus will be collected centrally and used to improve events, such as race bibs or bespoke number boards.

Not all host clubs will necessarily have the resources (or inclination) to run an additional race, especially at some of the initial events when entries are likely to be low. Then the actual running of the race will be the responsibility of a central resource pool of volunteers, and ideally will include:

- A pre-starter – to ensure crews are ready to start at their allotted time and issue any last minute instructions and manage the queue.
- A starter – to zero the stop watch, count down the crews to their start time and set them off.
- A recorder – to ensure the start time is entered alongside the crew names.
- Roving marshals – to deter wash-hanging, ensure fair play and assist if required. (perhaps following by bicycle?)
- A turn marshal – ideally in a boat to act as a turn buoy and paddle back to the start to ensure all boats have finished, after the last competitor has negotiated the turn.
- A finish judge – to inform the recorder when a boat number has passed the finish line
- A recorder – to record the finish time, calculate the elapsed time and collate the results.

The start and finish officials could be the same people as the will have time to move to the finish area whilst the race is in progress.

A separate start line will be setup out of the way of the Hasler event starting area. The finish line may not be in the same place, but must be a measured distance along the course of 10 miles after the start.

The first start time will fit in with the Hasler event programme. This could be before the first Hasler race or between divs 7,8,9 and divs 1,2,3,4,5,6.

A group briefing will be impractical because paddlers are not pre-congregated prior to a mass start. However competitors will be briefed during registration and updated with any last minute instructions in the pre-start area.

Additional roving marshals may observe the event to deter wash hanging.

Results will be published by the host club and on the BCU Marathon web site.

8. British Canoe Union support

It is recognised that the resources of the British Canoe Union (BCU) Marathon Racing Committee (MRC) are finite and are rightly focussed on aspects of the sport which attract the most participants, and offer the best prospects for international success. Accordingly, this proposal inflicts the minimum additional imposition in terms of organisation, resources and funding, and races should be essentially self-supporting by tight integration with existing Hasler event logistics.

The main requirement from the BCU MRC is firstly, advice and guidance. Then for some sort of official recognition to give the race series sufficient gravitas to generate the impetus to attract competitors, in the knowledge that the events are sanctioned within a national framework.

Support in the areas of branding, web site inclusion, results publication, PR and marketing would help promote the series.

9. Summary

Clearly something different has to be done to increase canoe racing in the UK. Without a grass roots base, Team GB are unlikely to have a pool of athletes for selection for international events. Initiatives in the past to encourage the take-up of high kneeling canoe racing have not been very successful and canoe race participation in the UK is woefully low. Sit&switch paddlers have been largely ignored except in the race classics.

This proposal is low risk, requires negligible investment and has the prospect of developing a canoe race structure which embraces sit&switch and high kneeling.

Mistakes will be made during the first pilot year, but lessons will be learnt and used to improve the format. Any formula will not please everyone, but the best way to establish what will work and what could be improved, is to try it rather than embark on an endless cycle of debate and discussion.

Canoeists are clearly attracted to time trail format races and this proposal exploits that popularity and offers a channel towards a national standard for time trial racing.

10. Annex A – issues raised by British Canoeing Marathon Racing Committee

Version 1.3 of the proposal was considered by the British Canoeing Marathon Racing Committee at their November 2014 meeting and a number of issues were identified, which are addressed in this section.

I accept that there are some concerns and would like to address those raised:

Actually getting the race organisers to put on the TT event 'on the same day, at the same venue' as suggested when they are already under the pressure of organising the main race, lightening's etc etc.....how are they going to feel about additional TT responsibilities?

You are right to raise this point, as organisation and logistics are the biggest part of any event. It is not envisaged to have a Canoe TT at every Haslar event. For the first pilot year, the series will be restricted to about six or eight races spaced throughout the season.

I anticipate the responses to be:

1. We don't have the space or resources to host a race – therefore no Canoe TT.
2. We have the space and resources, but don't wish to organise a Canoe TT – therefore no Canoe TT.
3. We have the space, but not the resources – therefore Canoe TT organised by non-host club resources.
4. We have the space and resources, but need some help and guidance – therefore Canoe TT co-organised by host club and non-host club resources.
5. We have the space and resources and are happy to organise a canoe TT based on the national format.

The non-host club resources will comprise of a central pool of registered volunteers, some of which will be available to help organise the race.

The proposal needs a champion - actually organising it week in week out during the season would have to be taken on by someone.

That person is me! Since I crossed over to the "dark side" four years ago and realised how few racing opportunities there were, I am determined to help change the situation and encourage more paddlers to take up the single blade.

I'm not going to do this on my own though, I have already been talking to other canoeists who support the idea and are willing to assist. I hope to setup a central organising committee to share the burden and take collective responsibility for decisions.

A number of volunteers would be needed, as well as a coordinator and they would have to turn up and run these events alongside the main event as a standalone, if race organisers could not provide the man power.

Yes, you are absolutely right. It is unreasonable to expect the smaller clubs to provide people to arrange another race. This is where I anticipate the central organising committee will come in, and I will ensure that each race is adequately resourced.

Do canoe racers want short' time trials' or long distance marathons? Sit down marathon canoe racers seem to want large distance races not short 'sprints' You only have to look to where it is 'big' in the US to witness that. The kneel up C1/C2 paddlers may prefer time trials but often do not favour the water conditions at our races when others are churning it up.....

I'm sure you know more than most, that you can't please everyone all the time! Whatever is proposed, it won't meet the approval of everyone, and some of the early feedback have suggested a number of alternatives.

The longer races tend to be available during the winter (DW, Waterside, Thameside, Ross Warland, Basingstoke challenge, descents etc) with a few in the summer (Cheshire ring, Edinburgh to Glasgow etc) so the long distance demand is fairly well catered for.

During the pilot year it's best to keep-it-sweet-and-simple, one ten mile format, A to B to A. Mistakes will be made, but lessons will be learnt. At the end of the first year we can conduct a review and refine the format as necessary.

Canoeist will always have the option of racing the Hasler event. Some will even prefer to do so, and others will be after Hasler points, if the event is in their region.

What is the supply of boats to compete in, simply are there enough to expand the idea?

This is an unknown. Most clubs I've seen do have canoes, and the longer races tend to attract more canoeists. However, this is a "chicken and egg" scenario, without races, there are no canoeists, but without canoeists, there are no races! It will take time to give people confidence that they can invest in a canoe knowing that there is an established race series in which to compete.

Additionally I made the point that the introduction of specific races/prizes tried by some marathon race organisers a number of years back resulted in very little take up....will the time trial proposal offer them what they want and see reasonable numbers appear at events? I do not know.. The previous initiative did not.

I accept that this is also an unknown and it may prove to be the case again, but I think the climate is changing and it may be led by female athletes. The female canoe race environment is growing and we are seeing more ladies in race canoes.

So whilst the MRC support your proposal to promote events for Canoe racing, there were some concerns over take up and organisation.

The MRC are right to raise these concerns and I cannot promise that it will be all plain sailing (paddling?). I hope that by the end of the pilot year, your concerns will be addressed, and we will witness a significant uptake in canoe racing.

Hopefully you may be able to champion this at a few key events to try and gauge success on a wider level? It would be fantastic if it could be taken forward and numbers increased.

It is my intention to take this forward for 2015. I have already got verbal agreement from two clubs.

← end →