

Devizes to Westminster Jean's Story

Jean Ashley

The week leading up to the DW conditions were so fast flowing, with the Thames on red Boards there was a bit of doubt knowing if the race would take place at all. All paddlers had to fill in a Matrix assesment 5 days before and if you scored above 12/20 you would be allowed to paddle. Adele and I felt we scored about 16, but our 'Support Team' marked us at 18 ... so their was no turning back, my stitches in my hand (from the dog bite 5 days before) had been removed so we had no excuses!



We knew it was going to be a very tough race with very cold weather forcast, and all chances of any records being broken had gone, due to the strong headwinds. We battled against sub-zero conditions after leaving Devizes at 11.20am on Saturday. We faced strong Easterly winds all the way to Reading, and were an hour down on our time, but plenty of other Crews were much slower and had suffered more. We felt good going into the night, we had superb kit 'Buffalo jackets' – worth their weight in gold! Very soon the -4 temperatures iced up their kayak, froze our drinks systems, life jackets, spay decks and pogies! The portages were like ice rinks, so you had to be so careful,

no running, we saw a few drop boats and break rudders. Our Support crew were amazing they looked after us so well, guiding us safely and feeding us hot soup and rice pudding! We managed to get our time back as we picked up speed on the fast flowing Thames. We hit Teddington just right for the tide, however the wind had picked up again and we had quite a battle with waves against wind, so it was a very bumpy tideway! One highlight for me, was paddling right past the Cambridge and Oxford Boats (they were rowing upstream) as they were having a warm up for the boat race!

It was strong determination that got us to Westminster Bridge on Sunday at 9.35am. They came 22nd out of 160 starters, they finished in an incredible 22 hours, 19 minutes, placed 2nd Ladies team and Winning the Ladies Veteran's Trophy! Also came 6th/42 overall in the vets catagory.



Jean says "Its certainly an amazing journey, with good times and dark times along the way. You push yourself to the limit and find your personal strengths, no mater how fit you are its your mental strength that drives you on. Its paramount having a very great trusting kayak partner, from whom you have no secrets, along with a positive support crew who never stop believing in your strengths!

We had the coldest Easter on record with 45% retirement rate due to the harsh conditions, we certainly had highs and lows but knowing we had so many followers back home and lots of sponsors that helped drive us on. We had tears of elation in our eyes, coming into Westminster knowing we had held onto our dream, we had a very emotional 'Team Hug' and we have a memory that will stay with us both for ever. A huge thanks to our support crew, Dave, Kate, Adrian and Margaret ... without them non of this would be possible they were truly amazing!