

Taking Part in Your First Marathon Race.

Entering

Entering a race is easy. It is usually done individually online, and we can help you with your first one. If you are not a member of British Canoeing, you can still race initially under the club's Associate Membership.

Boats

You can use the club boats to race, but you'll need to request which boat you want to use on the sign up sheet. If two people want to use the same boat, then the team leader in consultation with the lead coaches will decide. There are normally enough boats to go around though.



You will need to transport your own boat to the race, or find someone to transport it for you.

For club adult racing boats you will need special kayak carriers. Most people use V bars - these aluminium bars attach to your roof bars (most cars can take these) and hold the boat firmly in place. V bars can be bought from several retailers, but the cheapest way to purchase them is through the club, and we will put in a wholesale order once enough orders have been taken. Until you have your own you can usually borrow a set – please ask.



If V bars are not available, then **Lightnings and plastic boats** can be transported by strapping the boat upside-down to your car roof bars. To protect your boat, put pipe insulation lagging onto the roofbars. This can be bought from any DIY store. However it is always better to use V bars to prevent damage to the boat.

You'll need to buy some straps. Don't go buying ones with a ratchet fitting: pop down to Halfords and buy a couple of 2.5m luggage straps. Their own brand ones are a lot cheaper than the Thule one illustrated.



Make sure that someone shows you how to put the boat on the roof and strap it down correctly. Boats need to be strapped pretty firmly. Before strapping the boat down, you may need to take the seat out and put it in the car, and make sure any buoyancy is firmly fixed in the boat, or put it in your car. After a few races you might buy a cockpit cover so that you don't need to take out the buoyancy or seat, and they have the added bonus of reducing the drag and keeping petrol costs down, as well as

keeping rain out of your boat while you are driving to the race.

Numbers

If you are racing in the Southern Region, number boards are supplied and the club's team leader will give this to you at the race. This is a rectangle of white plastic that fits into a slot on the back of the boat. For some other regions you'll need to buy your own blank board and construct your number out of black electrical tape. The number boards then sit in the holder behind the cockpit of the boat. It's always useful to have a supply of split pins to keep the number safe – the number and the holder have pre-cut holes in them.

Divisions

Marathon racing is based on a divisional structure. Under 12s (and U14s new to racing) start in the Geoff Sanders Series, racing over 2 miles. Everyone else goes straight into divisional racing, usually starting in Division 9, the lowest division. If you are in a single boat, you'll be entered for the Division 9 K1 race: if you are in a double boat, you'll probably be entered in the Division 9K2 race, unless you are paddling with a much stronger paddler, in which case you might get bumped up a division. Your number will show your division. All division 9 numbers will start with 9. K1 numbers will be 901 to 949; K2 numbers will be 951 to 999. The same principle applies to other divisions, so for instance, 721 would show a division 7 K1 paddler, and you'd know there are at least 21 paddlers in that race. Division 9 races are normally about four miles.

Procedure.

Before the day, find out what time your race starts, and what time the briefing is. Make sure you arrive a good half-hour or more before the briefing. When you arrive at the race, you'll need to book in with the team leader. At out of region races, sign in and pay at the booking in desk. Get yourself ready and get your boat set up. Make sure all the wing nuts on the footrest are tight - they might have come loose during the journey. If you took the buoyancy out, make sure you've put it back and it's secure.

At the briefing, the race organiser will explain the course, talk about any hazards and then announce the order of the races. Races normally go off at one minute intervals, and Division 9 races are usually the last, or among the last, to go. You'll be told where to warm up, and where to wait for the start of your race.

On the Water

After the briefing, there will be a rush to get boats on the water. Take your time: you're in no hurry. Once on the water, do some warming up: get used to the choppy conditions - with boats everywhere, the water can seem very lumpy. Try practising a few starts. After a while, the first races will be called to the start. Now's the time to find where the rest of the Division 9 paddlers have located themselves, and to join up with them. Watch the other starts and see how paddlers go sprinting off to gain a good position.

The Start

Eventually it will be your turn. Don't be tempted to tuck yourself in behind the other boats: all that will happen is that you'll get a lot of choppy water to deal with. Get on the front row and get ready to sprint. The starter will try to get the boats into some sort of line: this can take a while. Eventually, the starter will say, "Are you ready? Go!", or "Attention! Go!" or something similar. The water will be a bit choppy and there might be boats everywhere. If your boat develops a mind of its own, don't panic - just keep paddling as hard as you can and maintain your balance. It will all settle down and you'll find yourself in relatively calm water.

The Race

If you are going downstream, stay in the middle of the river. If you are going upstream, hug the bank. You're supposed to stay on the right hand side of the river, but paddlers often cut across. Copy the boats in front, the paddlers will (mostly) know what they are doing. Try to tuck yourself in right behind another boat and ride on their wash wave. This saves a lot of effort.

Eventually, you'll come to the turn. You'll know you're getting near when you see paddlers from the earlier races coming toward you on their way back. Give them plenty of room. Sometimes the turn is round the pillar of a bridge, but more often it's round a buoy. Take your time. People most often come to grief when they approach a turn too fast. If there are other boats around, be prepared to get bumped into. If you are unlucky enough to swim here, or anywhere else for that matter, get your boat to the side, empty it, get back in and carry on. As you near the finish, you'll hear plenty of Banbury paddlers cheering you in. Put on a good sprint finish and bask in your achievement.

After the Race

Once you've recovered, make sure you get your paddler snack. Food and drink is provided free to all paddlers. Sometimes this can just be a drink of squash and a piece of fruit; sometimes it can be considerably more than this.

Results are usually put up quite quickly after the race: you can find your position and compare your time with those of people in other races.

Promotion

If you have done exceptionally well, and your time is as good as those in Division 8, you might find yourself promoted to Division 8. In rare cases, paddlers have been promoted in their first race, but normally it takes a while before this happens.

Points

Racing is regional. We are based in the Southern region, and whilst we can do races in any of the regions (Midlands, Eastern, London & South East, Yorkshire, North West, South West, Northern, Scotland) we only score points if it's a Southern region race.

The first paddler home in each race scores 50 points, the next scores 49 and so on. The overall winning team on the day scores 10 points, the second team 9 and so on. The top few teams in each region go through to the National inter-club finals at the end of the season – these are the Hasler finals. The Southern region is the strongest of all the regions, so it's often a real challenge just to qualify.