

Canoe News



The Kraken

Pursuit of Litter

FreeStyle Canoe Clinic

Winter 2020/2021 Vol. 53 No. 4



FOR SALE

BELL MORNINGSTAR ROYALEX CANOE

Length: 15' 6"
Width: 36"
Weight: Approx 55 lbs.
Mfg. year: 2006
Condition: AS NEW
Price: \$995.00
Delivery: TBD

From MORNINGSTAR REVIEWS on line: “...fairly fast for its length, good initial stability and very good secondary, turns well especially if you heel it a little, paddles well solo or tandem...” from paddler.com

This true Royalex boat has only been in the water two or three times. It is “As New” with no scratches, in or out. It has the optional aluminum rails (not vinyl). A third seat is factory installed. The Morningstar was designed by David Yost of DY Designs, perhaps the most prolific canoe designer.

Located in Anderson SC Contact: Roy Ivey at 864-314-3341 or iveycma@bellsouth.net





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From the Editor:

2020 is about to pass as this edition goes to press, with few mourning the passing of a tumultuous year. Those of us who love racing on the water are looking forward with hope to a more "normal" 2021, complete with a full racing schedule. Only time will tell if that materializes, but be sure to keep in shape over the winter in preparation! And to help motivate you in that respect, we have some great articles about FreeStyle paddling, water conservation efforts, and a wild MR340 attempt with a triple-pedal-paddler!

Keep paddling strong!

Steve

Front Cover: Pukea Designs OC1 preparing for an early morning paddle. Photo courtesy of Pukea Designs.

Inside Front Cover: Camping at Lamplugh Glacier, Glacier Bay National Park. Aug 2017. Photo courtesy of Glenn Box.

Back Cover: Paddlers and friends before the races at the 2015 Nationals. Photo courtesy of the Warren Picture Place.

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VIEW FROM THE STERN

USCA PRESIDENT REBECCA DAVIS

Goodbye 2020! For the first time in many months, I am beginning to hope that someday soon I can see my friends and family once again. While the last year has been one of the hardest of my life, it has taught me—and I think all of us—many lessons.

Things We Have Learned

We can adapt. Across the country races did happen as we learned better how to cater races to the changing regulations. Events were held safely both in person and virtually. Our paddling base didn't dwindle. It appears that at least the early season of 2021 will be different than seasons past, but we are better equipped to handle the challenges. I'm not sure what this means for the Nationals in 2021, but we can flex to fit the needs of our paddlers and hosts.

We have the opportunity to grow. 2020 brought up conversations of diversity, equality, and recognizing differences. These topics were not easy to talk about, but we understand there are groups of people in our communities that may not have the access or knowledge of our sports. Realizing this, we can work to expand and welcome others into our fold. Hopefully as we

gather back together, it will be as a larger, more varied group of paddlers.

Fresh air is the best medicine.

On the darkest days of the pandemic, there wasn't much to do besides isolate and wait. The world could seem so grim, but getting outside put things back into perspective. Acknowledging that the sun rises and sets, seasons change, and the river is still there for paddling added both routine and normalcy to our days. In some ways the distancing allowed us to appreciate our own backyards in a way that we hadn't before.

What is important. I have spent many years volunteering across multiple organizations, but this last year has forced me to realize that I am spreading myself too thin. My mental and physical health has taken a beating, and with that my work has suffered. While I wish I could do it all, I understand now that I



can't. For this reason, This Winter 2020/2021 issue of Canoe News will be the last where I am submitting the "View from the Stern" column as your President. By the time this reaches your hands I will be serving a different role in the organization. This does not mean I will be silent in the world of the USCA, it simply means I can spend time in the areas I think I can make the biggest impact. My stepping down gives someone else the opportunity to step up and steer us forward.

FREESTYLE CANOE CLINIC

TRACY HUNT / PAUL KLONOWSKI



Photos in this article by Deb Gohr

“The freestyle workshop was a fantastic way to spend the day. The location was an ideal low-wind space for playing around with new techniques. Tracy and Deb are expert paddlers and instructors, and catered to our differing ability levels with patience and a great sense of humor too. I am new to solo and my paddling skills increased tremendously in one day! “

(Lara Smetana on the recent Solo FreeStyle Canoe Clinic, in the Chicago area.)

So what is this workshop about? Several years ago, I proposed we set up a one-day local FreeStyle Clinic. The rationale was simple: try to generate some interest in FreeStyle, convince people of how functional it is for their everyday

paddling, and who knows, maybe interest some people enough to come out to one (or more?) of the Symposia. What could possibly go wrong? Well, nothing so far anyway!

Paul Klonowski had previously found a nice quiet site at Lake Atwood, in The Hollows Conservation Area, in Cary, IL. The lake is

pretty well sheltered from the wind, no gas motors are allowed, there's public access to the boat launch, it has pit toilets, a hand-pumped water well, and a parking lot... what more is required?

Advertising was done by as many venues as we could find... local paddling clubs and organizations, and word of mouth, seemed the most effective means. With two local instructors, we had a maximum of ten participants, which we divided into two groups, based on existing skill levels.

Since mid-March of this crazy 2020 year, paddle sport gatherings, group trips, and training symposiums have pretty much been non-existent. Larger gatherings in our

FreeStyle community that have been cancelled (due to Covid-19 restrictions) include the Western PA Solo Canoe Rendezvous, the Wisconsin Canoe Symposium, the Adirondack Canoe Symposium, the Midwest Canoe Symposium, and the Pine Barrens FUNctional FreeStyle Workshop.

But the nature of a one-day event, such as the Solo FreeStyle Canoe Clinic, is different: a small group, coupled with the lack of need for group housing, organized meals, and evening social gatherings, meant it was possible to hold the event, even within COVID-19 guidelines.

So on August 1 we gathered with Lara and six other enthusiastic students for a small class at Lake At-

wood. This year Deb Gohr provided able assistance in Paul's absence. Covid-19 restrictions limited the group size and everyone was compliant with face coverings on land, social distancing on breaks and lunch, etc. The weather was perfect for improving skills and having an enjoyable time.

So in 2020, the year of a global pandemic, we pulled it off!

Afterward, the question was raised as to how long have Paul and I been conducting this "event" I never really considered it an "event", perhaps it was. So after a little researching of records, we discovered that 2020 was the tenth year of this clinic, held consecutive years at the same venue.



How does this happen?

What does it take to start an event like this in your area? There are requirements, of course:

- A lake with adequate protection from the wind (it's easier to learn skills when you can't blame the wind!)
- Safe, legal access to the lake, for small boats
- Adequate parking
- Restrooms

Other things that are nice to have, but not required, are a water supply, picnic shelter, and restrictions on motorboats.

Once you have these lined up, contact your nearest instructor:

<https://freestylecanoeing.com/find-a-freestyle-instructor/>

...and see what you might be able to arrange. Timing is, of course, critical... If you select a weekend that conflicts with any of our other

events, instructors may be hard to come by... but then, just attend the larger event! You will learn things, and you will have fun!



grbnewmandesigns@yahoo.com

THE PURSUIT OF LITTER

ROY IVEY



Photo courtesy of Friends of Broadway Lake

Soon after Peg and I moved to Broadway Lake in South Carolina, some paddling friends visited. Someone suggested that we all go paddling on our beautiful lake. But suddenly we realized that it wasn't so beautiful. In fact, we were somewhat embarrassed by the amount of litter that had accumulated in the years before we moved here. "Someone should do something about this," we thought. And so a plan was hatched.

Once our guests had departed, we began to tackle that challenging task of cleaning up the 360 acre lake and the neighborhood that we now call home. Who could have made this mess? There were cans and bottles, a toilet, a newspaper vending machine, two televisions, and many

tires, some on rims. What kind of person would throw all that junk into the lake? So, we got to work.

Our community organization, *Friends of Broadway Lake*, began the lengthy process of reversing the effects of years of neglect. Semi annual cleanups of the roads around the lake improved curb appeal. And a twice-a-year "Log Out" removed fallen trees and logs from the lake that had come down the creek. Power boaters towed most of the larger logs but canoes were able to reach

the ones in the shallows. Since this is a paddling publication, I will focus on the role that the canoe has played in reclaiming this beautiful lake,

When we moved here, we had looked forward to paddling every day on this little lake. But "every day" would now take on a whole new meaning. This lake could not be cleaned up in a day or two. We had our work cut out for us.

With "Don't Litter

Broadway Lake" emblazoned on both sides of my Mohawk Solo 13, that little canoe became the perfect boat for the job. It was fairly light, stable, and very maneuverable. I questioned my own sanity as I began going after litter, one piece at a time. It was be-



coming fun. I soon stopped worrying about who had thrown that stuff in the lake and began to enjoy the PURSUIT OF LITTER.

That litter provided an interesting lesson. Since aluminum and glass are heavier than water, you would think that cans and bottles thrown into the lake would sink to the bottom and

Photo courtesy of Peg Ivey





stay there. But that is not always true. It turns out that over time, micro-organisms, snails, and even small fish go in and die, ultimately decaying and giving off gas, causing those cans and bottles to pop to the surface once again. “Ah-Ha! You can’t get away now!”

Things learned in Free-Style canoeing were now finding purpose. Picking a bottle off the rocks without damaging the canoe requires serious boat control. Such situations helped to refine my side slips, sculling, axles and posts, and to hone my reverse maneuvers. Canadian Style rounded out the drills. It almost became a game.

There are four parks around the lake. Sadly, after a day of fishing, some people abandon their bait cups and drinks on the docks, to be blown into the lake by the next wind. Old habits are hard to break. Though it was not the intent, it seems that there really is virtue in leading by example. Now, many more people are picking up after themselves. That is very rewarding.

Speaking of rewards, two of my favorite things to find are fishing lures and bobbers. I’m not a fisherman so I clean them up, put them in sandwich bags, and give them to fishermen who fish from the docks. There is a note enclosed in each bag. It reads, “We hope you will enjoy these bobbers, rescued from the lake. Please, help us keep the lake and

docks litter-free.” That seems to be working.

But there are stressful times too. Flip-flops, shoes, and sneakers are often found in the lake and picked up with a grabber, as is every other type of litter. A few days before Christmas in 2018, one sneaker that I grabbed didn’t move, as if it were attached to something. I had worried that this day might come. I took a deep breath, and slowly raised it until the ankle was visible. Breathing resumed. It was only an artificial leg. “ONLY?” I thought. What else would I find? My mind was racing as I called the sheriff.

It turned out that this expensive prosthesis had been reported lost. Divers had searched the lake, to no avail. And now it was safely in my canoe. The deputy was patched through to its owner. A woman who answered the phone was overjoyed and said, “It’s a Christmas

Miracle!” Picking up litter is a good thing but Christmas Miracles are above my pay grade!

Nearly twenty years later we are still at it. The now-much-older, scratched and dirty Solo 13 has stood the test of time and is going strong. All of the litter in these photos, and more, has been hauled out of the lake with this



great boat. It is a champion *Litter Gitter*. Well done, Mr. Mohawk.

On my “days off,” I can now paddle my favorite Loon Works Solitaire without worrying about litter. Thanks to Friends of Broadway Lake and that little Solo 13, the beautiful lake that I wanted to paddle is now more beautiful than ever. Litter will never be eliminated but, by working together, we can make a difference.

For me, there are many rewards for cleaning up this beautiful lake. I get exercise and sun, meet interesting people, rescue the occasional lost canoe, and perform a miracle or two.

I highly recommend THE PURSUIT OF LITTER to add to the joy of paddling.



Unlabeled photos in this article are courtesy of Roy Ivey

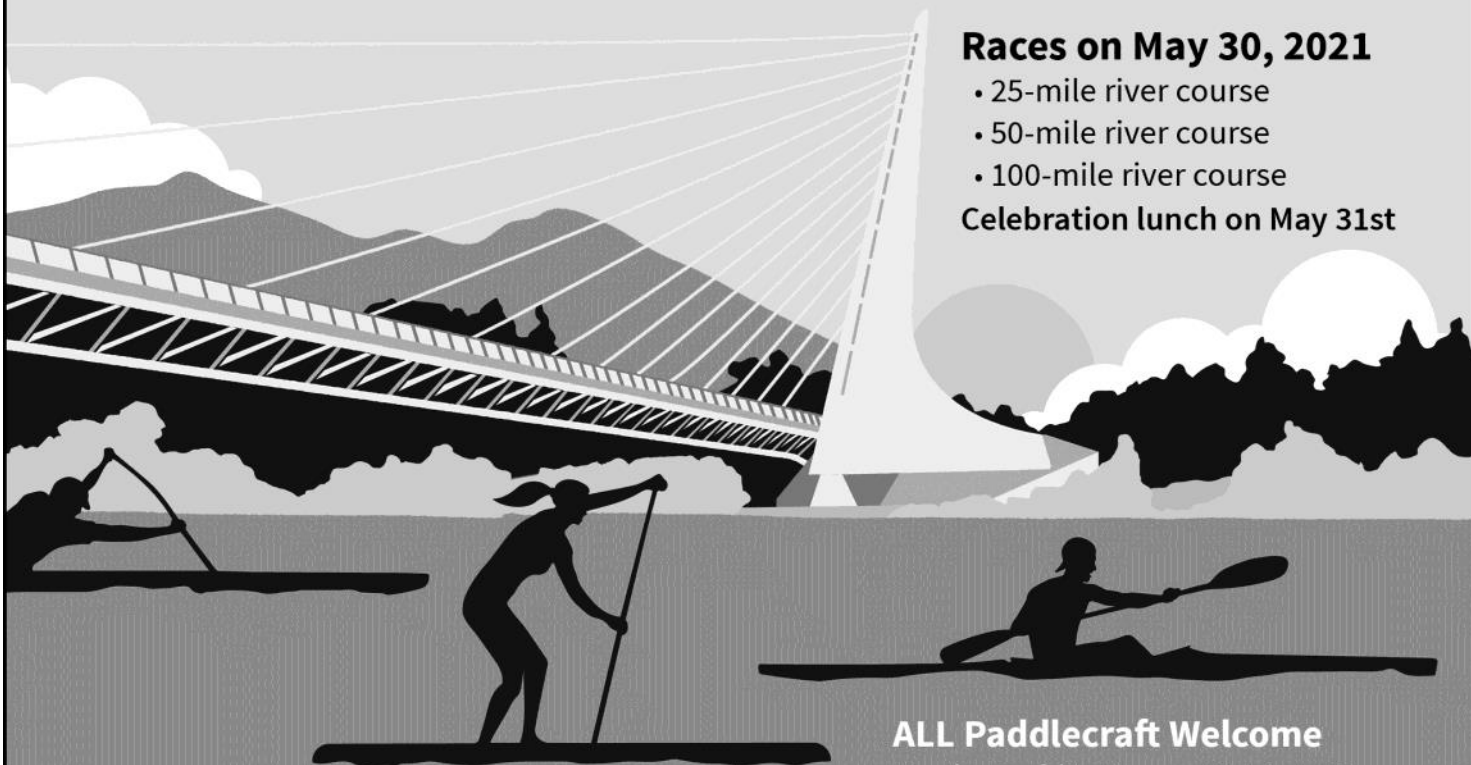


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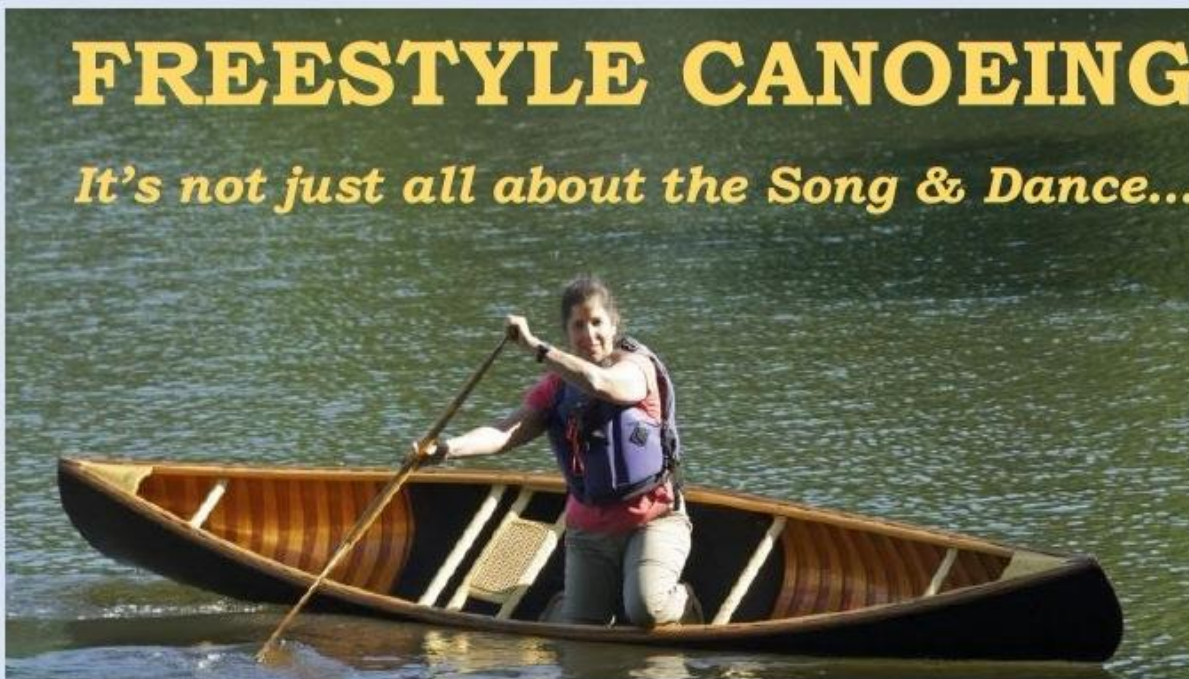
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www.freestylecanoeing.com



THE KRAKEN—UNLIKELY MR340 STORY

JOE MANN



Matt Walters, Joe Mann, and “A-Dog” (Adam Burns) pedaling the Kraken on their way to an MR340 win!

“Nine days.” I said. “We have 9 days until the MR340, and we haven’t been out in the Kraken yet without something breaking.” Uncle A-Dog nodded. “I AM a little nervous.”

His real name is Adam Burns, and he is not my uncle. We have been friends for close to 15 years, and the race moniker is one that his race friends know him by. Kind of like Bruce Wayne and Batman. Who is Adam Burns? I don’t know him. I only know Uncle A-dog or, as most call him, just “A-dog” ...but that is another story. He and I live near each other, and we train together regularly.

We were parked at the Lamine River boat ramp off I-70 near Boonville waiting on our third partner, Matt Walters. He was driving from his home in St Louis, whereas A-dog and I drove from our homes in Lee’s Summit. We were in the thick of an insane idea (Matt’s idea) to race a 3-person pedal drive boat in the MR340. A pedal drive boat is not a new idea, mind you. There are several types of pedal boats, and in fact there have been pedal drive classes in the MR340 for many years. What was unique about this one is that it was unlike any pedal drive that has ever been created before, and it was all Matt’s idea.

The most common pedal drive systems are what you’d see on a sit-on-top kayak that a fisherman would use. Pedals are connected to two fins under the boat that cross back and forth next to each other propelling the boat along. Other pedal drive systems can include a propeller at the end of a long shaft, or even a paddle boat that you might see used for leisure activity on a small lake. Matt had something different in mind. Matt took the idea of a pedal drive system to the extreme, and we were excited to try something completely different.

“He was supposed to be here 10 minutes ago. I hope everything is OK.” Just then, my phone rang.

When I answered it, I immediately heard through the receiver a loud blend of traffic and wind in the background. “My car just broke down!” Matt’s voice yelled out of the phone, “Can you guys come get me and the boat?” We quickly discussed details of his location, hung up, and headed out.

A-dog’s eyes met mine. No words were spoken. None needed to be. We were both thinking the same thing. Was this project doomed? Were we too ambitious in our plans trying to take something from the drawing table to suc-

cessful race in less than 6 months? This was no small feat of design, engineering, and build. The boat itself is 37 feet long, with 2 amas that stick out 4 feet on each side. (An ama is a wing or extension off the side of a boat that helps for balance. Originally made on outrigger canoes by Pacific Islanders, an ama helps support a boat to give stability).

Matt was stuck on the side of the Interstate with a 37’ boat strapped to his car. By the way, his car, affectionately known as “The Donk” is a 1972 Buick Electra with custom trailer hitch ex-

tenders mounted on the front and rear bumpers to transport the Kraken. We would have to move the boat off his car, onto my car on a very narrow shoulder of the Interstate. Why so narrow? The Donk broke down as he was crossing a bridge over the Missouri River... How many more bad omens would be laid at our feet?

As we pulled up, the situation was worse than expected. Although he had put it in neutral and allowed it to coast as far as possible, it was only a couple hundred yards off the bridge and not yet



Matt’s Buick broken down on the side of the interstate; a challenging place to transfer a 37’ boat!



Unloading the Kraken

past the rail to protect vehicles from falling down into the flood plain. There was only about 4 inches between the car and the guard rail, which meant the left ama of the boat was actually hanging over the yellow line on the right lane of the Interstate. There was no way to walk on the right side of the car due to the rail and the steep grade of the land, and therefore moving the 37' boat from one car to the other would have to be done using the right lane of the 2-lane Interstate.

We eventually got the boat loaded onto my VW Atlas (luckily I had brought my hitch extender!), and we waited for the tow truck driver. A-dog and I commented to each other later on: *you need to be a bit crazy and have some balls to do the MR340*. But that doesn't hold a candle to the amount of crazy you need to have if you are a tow truck driver. This guy just backed up into the lane of a highway, put out some cones, and got this thing going with vehicles speeding by him only a foot or two away.

We finally made it back to the Lamine River parking ramp. We spent 3 hours on the water, and to our surprise, nothing broke!! A-dog and I took the boat back to Lee's Summit to rig it for the race. We had not, at this point, put anything on the boat to hold gear – there was no outfitting as of yet. We needed to mount navigation lights, hydration holders, GPS mounts, seat foam, reflective tape, boat numbers, not to men-

tion the very necessary custom paint job on the bow of the Kraken.

History

I suppose I should explain how the boat became the Kraken. It is quite common to have a team name; most are a bit silly, and people have fun with them. Things like Paddle of the Sexes, Blistered Sisters, or even Cool Name Pending. It took us a while to figure out our team name, but we finally landed on "Make Mine a Triple" This actually has a triple meaning which is even more apropos: 1) There are 3 of us in the boat, 2) We also like to drink bourbon, and 3) Well, I don't want to give out the 3rd meaning just yet as I don't want to jinx anything ... However, over the course of the year, Shane Camden, owner of Paddle Stop New Haven, started calling the boat, "The Kraken" – the monster of the Missouri River. Shane has a huge warehouse, and he builds SUP paddleboards and canoes there. Paddle Stop is actually the home of the Kraken, and Shane did a ton of work on the boat for us. Shortly after he began calling it The Kraken, the name just stuck. We'd show up for a weekend to work on the boat or to train, and we'd get locals and other paddlers ask us, "So how is the Kraken coming along?" We found ourselves in no time referring to it as The Kraken, and it seemed to wear that name well. It was this big, crazy looking beast that would surprise no one

if it actually ate another boat on the river but could easily get cantankerous and decide to break down with no warning! So, while our team name was *Make Mine a Triple*, the name of the boat is *The Kraken*.

As I had said before, we had raced it 3 times previous this year, and each time something broke. The worst disaster we had was about 3 weeks before the MR340. The Freedom Race is a 63-mile race that finishes in Jefferson City, MO. It is always well attended, usually with over 100 paddlers. We were doing well for the first 20 miles when one of the crank arm connections broke. This meant that we had to go down from 4 paddles to 3 paddles. We continued to "limp" along with 3 paddles for another 20 miles. When all 4 paddles were operational, we had them set at 90 degrees apart. One paddle was always going into the water when one was coming out. When we had to go down to 3 paddles there would be a second or so where there was no resistance in the water, and when the next paddle "caught" the water on entry, it really put a lot of stress on the chain. 20 miles of this caused a section of chain to break, and this was 2000-lb rated Shimano chain!

We had also taken it out on several training runs and each time something broke. This included a broken chain, a broken paddle, a broken crank arm, a broken spindle, a broken crank post, and

myriad other little things. Each time we would break something, we would analyze and discuss the events that led up to the break, and the domino effect of what else then broke because of it. We'd go back through the entire boat and try to reinforce the "weak points." (I say "we", but really it was 99% Matt.) The next time we would take it out, something else we didn't think of would break.

So now, with just more than a week before the race, the bad luck of a broken-down car killed half our training time, so we only managed to get 3 hours in, but it was a solid 3 hours where nothing broke, which was amazing! However, we expected to race for around 40 hours in the MR340! Could it handle that? We took it out 2 more times, once for 2 hours later that week, and once for an hour the day before the race. 6 hours total in the 9 days leading up to the race with no failures. We would simply have to cross our fingers.

The Maserati

You always WANT to get a good night sleep before an ultra-race like this, but the fact is, it is such a huge endeavor that there is always something that still needs doing. We met in my garage the day before the race with our ground crew comprised of the MR340 veteran Chris Thurman, Andrew "Otto" Otto, and John Smith. Each racer had a dedicated ground crew member. They only met each other the day be-

fore for the first time, but they had each known their respective racer for years if not at least a decade. It was the best, most cohesive and efficient ground crew. They were always where we needed them, and never let us down. They kept us stocked with fuel, hydration, and any gear we might have needed. The most unique component of our crew was the fact that it included a Maserati. John drove my old Expedition, Chris drove his always capable Jeep Cherokee (the original model), and Otto drove Matt's Maserati. The legend goes something like this: Matt walked into the dealership in May, handed the salesman a check for \$29,999, and said, "I can't spend any more than this on a car, but I'm not in a hurry. Someday, you'll get something in here that you are desperate to move and that's when you'll

call me. Until then, you can just hang onto this." The dealer called him 4 days before the race, and history was made. So why did Otto drive it? "It is the only all-wheel drive car I own!" Matt reasoned, "Plus what other ground crew do you know that has a Maserati? What if we need something fast?!"

To say Matt is eccentric would be a gross understatement. During a training weekend after the Kraken had broken, we decided to all go on a 40 mile out and back on the Katy Trail. We pulled our bikes out and began changing clothes. Matt and A-dog were waiting on me because I could not find my bike shorts. "Dang it!" I exclaimed, "I must have left them in the freaking hotel!" Matt looked at me with a very neutral expression and asked, "Oh, you need a pair of shorts?" This is



Matt, A-Dog, and Joe enjoying a beer following the 40 mile ride.

coming from a guy who normally shows up to a canoe race in a cotton t-shirt and a plastic shopping bag with some water bottles in it. “Yes, but do you have...” Before I could even finish the sentence, in one fluid motion, Matt grabbed the waist of his shorts with one hand, peeled them off his legs, and handed them to me. My eyes couldn’t believe what they were seeing! I was holding Matt’s shorts in my hands, but there were still shorts on Matt’s body... wait, what? My eyes must have been playing a trick on me! I just saw him take his shorts off, but he still had shorts on his body?! Understanding my confusion, Matt quickly explained, “Oh, I always wear two pair of bike shorts,” as if that was a completely normal thing that everyone does, “But you can have one today.” I didn’t want to contradict him, but I think the real story is that he is a sorcerer who conjured up a pair of bike shorts out of thin air.

The ground crew helped us load the vehicles with everything we ever thought we might need. We looked like we were prepared for a 2-week excursion, not a 2-day race. Tools, spare paddles, spare *pedals*, extra lengths of chain, rivet guns, a blow torch. We were prepared for almost anything. After going through the planned route and supply stops, we finished our Fun House Pizza (best pizza in KC) and headed to bed around 11pm.

Race Day

Race Day arrived, and as always, racers are allowed to stage their boats at Kaw Point overnight. It is very safe as it is somewhat off the beaten path, and there is security hired. Whether you are a novice, a veteran, a ground crew, or a spectator, it is an impressive site to see 500 boats spanning across the park the day before the race. Kayaks, canoes, surf skis, outriggers of all sizes, shapes, and colors stretch as far as you can see. It is not uncommon at all to see home-made crafts or some very creatively engineering applied to a custom modification of a spec boat, but this year, there was one boat that really stood out: The Kraken. Many had seen it (fail) at previous races, and many more had seen pictures or video clips online. Some had just heard rumors and whispers about

this crazy looking boat. It was staged on the side of the hill below the parking lot, but above the rest of the boats.

Under a giant tree, it was resting like a giant beast that would soon rise; it appeared lazily calm, but its dark red eyes, which it would occasionally open to gaze across the field of boats revealed the truth of its strength and cunning.

Getting your boat in the water at the beginning of the 340 is never simple. There are literally hundreds of boats that need to get into the water, and if you are in the second wave then you only have an hour before the gun fires at 8:00am. We estimate The Kraken itself weighs around 100lbs – although that is a point of debate as Matt believes it is closer to 75. Regardless, with a



Starting line of the MR340.

length of 37', a two 12' long amas that extend 4' off each side, and a drive tower with 8 crankshafts it is extremely awkward to carry. It also has a 6' long fixed keel, so it cannot be set on the ground without a raised pad of some kind underneath. Shortly after the first wave of boats started the race, we lifted The Kraken off the ground and made our way to the ever-growing queue of boats. Like trying to get into a concert or sports stadium, there were several lines from different areas of the park all merging together, bottlenecked at the ramp waiting to get into the water. By 7:30, we had not moved very far at all, and based on a quick assessment, we would NOT be in the water by 8:00. This would prove to be the first of many challenges that day.

I made eye contact with A-dog. He knew we couldn't just sit here. We'd miss the gun and put ourselves into a hole from the start. He knowingly nodded to me, and said quietly, "Do your thing" and I took off to find an alternative route to the ramp. I ran past the queue and saw that next to the ramp, there was a section of ground that seemed like it would work. It was just dirt, but it should be fine. Several spectators were standing on it watching the racers get into the water, but no racers were using it. We would not be cutting anyone off if we went this way. I ran back to the boat and yelled to the team, "OK guys, follow me!" The boat rose up again and I began politely but

firmly asking folks to step to the side as we came through. From the view of anyone in front of us, it would certainly look like I was asking them to move so we could get in front of them, and therefore I repeatedly said, "We aren't going to the ramp; we are going PAST the ramp, thanks!"

We finally got to the dirt section, which gave way to mud a few feet from the water (and I can't say for sure that no shoes got lost for good in the depths of that) but we finally got the boat in the water, with just 10 minutes to spare.

The race began at 8:00am on Tuesday and as usual, it is somewhat anti-climactic. This is a 340-mile canoe race...you don't have checkered flags flying, engines roaring, or tires squealing. From the shore, you have what looks to be a large fleet of small water craft slowly crawling towards the confluence of the Missouri river, becoming dark little specs against the contrast of the rising sun over the cityscape of Kansas City: little ants moving down a shimmering sidewalk until they disappear from view around the bend.

The Kraken wasn't built for a sprint. In fact, it wasn't even built for a 50 or a 100-mile race. We geared it for a 30-40-hour race. The longer the better. So, we weren't surprised that we found ourselves in 5th place after the first 15 minutes. Slowly we reeled in the lead boats. There were three exceptionally strong teams in the front: a men's tandem team, a mixed tandem team,

and a multi-women team, all from Texas. The women's team had a great name, "The Single Bladies," and it took us about 2 hours before we finally caught them. Again, any of those boats could easily outsprint us, and in fact could probably maintain a faster pace than us for a couple hours. The strength of the Kraken is efficiency at holding ~7 mph flatwater speed with very minimal effort.

The first day was uneventful, and the competition was hanging on pretty tight. The intel from our ground crew told us that the Single Bladies and the men's tandem team were always around 15-30 minutes behind us. In my experience, the lead boats stay fairly tight on the first 12-18 hours of competition – within an hour or less of each other. You won't really know if you are falling behind or creating a good lead until around 24 hours into the race. What happened during the night? Did anyone slow down? Who made a push? And there is typically a 6-8-hour delay on good data on the competition behind you. After you pass a checkpoint or supply spot, your crew might be able to stick around and see how far behind the next boat or two is, but they can't tell you that until they see you at the NEXT stop.

Sometimes the ground crew doesn't have time to stick around at a pit stop for very long before they need to get moving to the next stop. So if the nearest boat



behind you doesn't arrive within 15-20 minutes, your ground crew has no idea where they might be. This is a long way of saying *you never really know just how close or far you are from your competition*. All you need to remember is they aren't stopping, and anyone could run into an issue at any time, so stay in the boat and keep your paddles moving!

Unfortunately for us, the evening caused us some significant issues, including 3 mechanical ones. A-dog and I have become all too familiar with hearing Matt yell from the back *STOPSTOP-STOP!!!!* I think I probably have

PTSD because now when I hear Matt Walters yell *STOP!* I cringe and my guts twist up. We had been pedaling for a solid 12-14 hours with no issues when we heard Matt yell, "Stop!" for the first time that day. A-dog and I both thought to ourselves, *Here it is. 12 hours in. It was a good run, but this is now the beginning of the end.* It turns out it was a broken pedal on the lower end of one of the paddles. "Scotty" as we sometimes called Matt, slid out of his seat into the water, and "spacewalked" back to the drive tower. He was floating in his life jacket trying to remove the broken pedal while A-dog

used the kayak paddle we brought to keep the Kraken straight, otherwise it would begin to slowly list sideways like a dead ship in space. The repair was one of those things where you just need 3 hands, especially when you add the complexity of floating in the water in the dark – and whatever you do, don't drop the wrench! A-Dog, aka "Spock", slid out of his chair and moonwalked back to assist Matt, while I then took over paddle duties. The repair only took 10 mins, but now we only had 1 spare "right side" pedal left. A-dog and Matt got back in their chairs, and we carefully resumed pedaling. Within 5

mins we were back up to full speed.

Shortly afterwards, an alert came up on my phone, "Barge @ mm 180 going upstream at 6.5 mph. Plans to pull off if fog builds up." We calculated that we might intersect this barge in the next 3-4 hours, and within the next couple of hours we did, but the fog had settled in as predicted. It was worse than I have ever seen in in my 15 years of racing the MR340.

The Barge

In the dark, it is extremely difficult to judge distance across water. Add fog to that, and it is impossible. At some point, we saw a light high above us, and far to the right, but we weren't sure what it was or exactly how far away it was. Soon we heard a sound that you never want to hear on the Missouri River: the sound of rushing water!! All the sudden a barge came into view and we realized with horror we were only 20 yards from it! *Evasive maneuvers! Peddle hard! Turn left!!!* Then we realized we were moving, but the Barge wasn't; it was anchored to the side of the river. Panic subsided, as we realized we were not going to get crushed underneath the maw of the barge, but it was startling none the less.

We rightly named this 2 to 3-hour period in the wee hours of the night the "Foggy Log-Fest." A-dog had a very difficult secondary duty during this section, and that was to keep debris out of what we referred to as the

"engine intakes." These were the 4 feet on either side between the ama and the hull, the section of water where the paddles operated. In a regular canoe or kayak, we have all occasionally hit something in or under the water with our paddles. Most of the times, if the paddler is responsive enough, they can pull their stroke, and let up before doing damage to the paddle or tipping them over. In the Kraken, if a paddle hits a log or stump, the machine can't let up, it will hit the obstacle with the full strength and speed and, if the log is heavy enough, the paddle will actually lift the boat out of the water. That is, all 700 lbs. of boat and people slamming through the paddle, the pedals, and the crank arms of the drive tower! That is exactly what happened to us during the Mean Lamine race earlier in the season.

A-dog had fashioned a small polearm that resembled a shepherd's staff to push logs out of the way of the "intake" area or to hook it, grab it, and toss them away. There was so much debris in this section, and we couldn't see things well until we were right on top of them. It was an arduous, frustrating exercise for A-Dog, but also for us, because many times he couldn't reach it or didn't see it in time and he would yell, *Stop!* We'd pause pedaling for 3-4 seconds and wait for the debris to clear. Then we'd have to slowly start the cranks again, getting back in sync, etc. All of this was painfully

frustrating, causing mental anguish as we'd get out of the groove again and again.

The second mechanical issue was completely my fault and occurred during the "Foggy Log-Fest." Underneath each of our seats, a section of the 50 feet of chain crosses itself and runs through an idler. I was in a standing position taking care of some business when I lost my balance. I slid my foot backwards instinctively and pressed against whatever my heel came in contact with to keep me from falling over/off the boat. Unfortunately, my heel was pressed against the chain itself, right in front of the idler. A-dog and Matt were still paddling at the time and as such, my heel acted as a derailleur, and pushed the chain through the idler cover and to the outside of the idler. The chain immediately felt loose, sounded horrible, and worried us immensely; again there were lots of *STOPSTOPSTOP* shouts. At first, we couldn't understand what happened. We floated for several minutes shining flashlights under my chair trying to determine the problem. Once we identified it, we were worried, because the gap between the idler and the idler cover was too small for the chain to naturally fit between. Only because of the pressure I put on it while it was moving, did it squeeze out. I was careful not to bend the cover as that is what is supposed to keep the chain from doing exactly what it just did. Finally, after several



Matt and A-Dog making repairs during the Freedom Race.

soft attempts, I was able to get the chain back into the idler by pressing on it while A-Dog and Matt slowly pedaled, similar to how you would put a chain back onto a bike ring while slowly turning it. We all exhaled, relieved that we were able to fix this, albeit my hands and forearms were covered in grease, but at least I didn't get my fingers caught in the idler!

No Laughing Matter

Our moment of relief was short lived, however. Because this repair took so long, we drifted off

course and couldn't even see the track line on our GPS anymore. We had no idea which direction we were facing or which side of the river we were on. We floated aimlessly, completely disoriented due to the fog as we were trying to zoom out the screen on the GPS. Suddenly our ears picked the telltale sound of rushing water again! We could not see anything, but the sound was getting closer. Within seconds it came upon us, and we saw it – a long stretch of a miniature waterfall only a few yards in front of us – a wing dike! We were getting

pushed straight into it at a 45-degree angle, unable to steer or control our direction.

We could not see the rocks, but we could tell they were just barely under the surface. We all held our breath as we slid over the turbulence, waiting for a horrible sound or preparing to be thrown from the boat. Somehow, we skidded over it, sustaining no damage whatsoever. The sound disappeared behind us as fast as it had come upon us, followed by a loud silence which hung in the air for a few seconds as we each

tried to process what had just happened. Almost in unison we began incredulously laughing like kids on the playground who had just done something completely stupid and only through dumb luck dodged the consequences! We found the track line on our GPS and got back in the channel with haste. We pedaled through the rest of the darkness without any more excitement, for which we were thankful.

When the sun comes up, the lead boats have usually put around 200 miles of the course behind them. As many have said before, "The race doesn't start until Jeff City." Jefferson City to Hermann, a 48-mile stretch which typically has less current and more headwind, is absolutely the most demoralizing part of the course. We passed Jeff City just a few minutes after 7am as the sun was beginning its ascent over the capital building. With the fog gone, both from the river and from our sleep deprived

minds, we had a new lease on life, and perhaps only 12-14 hours left of the race if things went well.

We were excited to see our crew at our next scheduled pit stop, Mokane, around 9:30am. When we arrived, they informed us that they weren't exactly sure, but the Single Bladies and the other 2 tandems might be somewhere between 20-40 minutes behind us. They didn't see them at Franklin Island, but they saw their crews. We made haste to Hermann, which was still another 3.5 hours away. Our goal was to push hard to Hermann and put more time on them. When we arrived at Hermann, the only crew there was ours; Chris Thurman had waited at Mokane for

45 minutes after we had passed and never saw any of our competition in that time. That meant we had at least a 45-minute lead, which is solid, but could really mean only 5-6 miles.

The Race to the Finish

With 68 miles left in the race, we focused on running clean, ensuring that we didn't put any stress on the drive components. With victory both close at hand and ours to lose, the last thing we wanted was to break something simply because we tried to break some arbitrary time goal. We passed Washington around 3:30pm with 40 miles to go. I had gotten a second wind, and said out loud, "Alright guys, the Joe Mann 'strong finish' just arrived."



*Enjoying a cold beer at the finish line of the MR340!
Photo courtesy of Cindy J. Hiles, cindyhilesphotography.com*

And with that, something broke...

But it wasn't mechanical. It was my knee. A tendon or ligament on the outside of my left knee decided at that point that it didn't like me very much and went on strike. I literally could not pedal, and when one person goes down, it puts a lot more pressure on the other two racers. Luckily, I had prepared an insurance policy for this. In front of A-dog's seat, there is a 5-foot section of the hull that is completely flat. During the

week before the race, I had made a kayak seat up there with a foot brace, foam seat, and backrest, explaining to Matt, "What if we are in the lead with a handful of hours left to go, and something irreparable breaks? This is what is going to allow us to bring it home without losing too much time!" Little did I know that it would be my body and not the drive tower that would fail me at the eleventh hour.

I crawled up to the front, playing Twister with A-dog as I

scouted around him. I got my RPC3 double blade out and began paddling. This took the pressure off Matt and A-dog, and we managed to only lose a half mph. With a little luck, we could finish the race still in the daylight with a race time of under 36 hours, a feat which only 3 boats have ever achieved in the history of the MR340.

When the final bridge came into view, I got back into my pedal seat, and 10 minutes later we crossed the finish line at 7:42pm, with a race time of 35



The Kraken team and their support crew at the finish!



The Kraken

hours, 42 minutes. We beat sunset by 30 minutes. Our crew was waiting for us, cheering along with some family, friends, and spectators.

We took pictures, high-fived, and drank beer from our trophies letting it wash the dirt, sweat, and exhaustion from our bodies. I hugged Matt and A-dog, an unlikely team of misfits that took a design from drawing board to racing in only 6 months. I don't know what I am more happy for: Matt Walters bringing his creation and dream to life, being only

the 2nd winning team in the history of the race where every member is from Missouri, or the fact that the traveling trophy will forever have the name "Uncle A-dog" inscribed on it.

Finally, as the darkness began to creep up the edge of the eastern horizon, we decided it was time to get to the hotel. We left the Kraken to rest on the grass, where it took its rightful place next to the boat ramp as the first boat that finishes always does. As we were walking up to the parking area, I looked back, scanning the sight of

the finish: the river, the ramp, the race officials, a few fans with Tiki torches and pop up tents, and then our magnificent steed. Its red eyes sparkled quickly in the dying light of day as it curled up to rest after the long race. That last wink in the sunset whispered to us, *You know I had this. Don't doubt me again.*

I am The Kraken.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this article are courtesy of Joe Mann.



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