

Junior rower **Alex Cheyne** explains how the sport has transformed him from an underachiever with behavioural problems into a focused athlete with ambition and a fresh lust for life.

# From Rebel to Rower



## Alex's coach comments...

*Rowing seemed to switch Alex on and give him a focus almost right from the start. He fitted in well with the sport and, more importantly, with the other people around him.*

*Alex made very good progress and has become a key figure in the junior organisation of the Club, both on and off the water. This is reflected by the fact that he has taken on the role of junior captain.*

*He really has got potential at rowing and if he maintains his commitment and interest, I do feel that he could reach the highest level in the sport.*

*The last few months have been really difficult for Alex. A major shoulder injury at work (take care when carrying a ladder) has kept him off the water for six months. It will be a real test of his character to see if he has the drive and commitment to rise above it. I do hope, for rowing's sake, that he does.*

**Dudley Fletcher**

**M**y name is Alex. I'm currently rowing for Doncaster Schools' Rowing Association. I've been rowing now for nearly four years and have spent three of them rowing competitively.

I started rowing when a friend of mine asked me if I'd like to go down and try out the sport. I went along and met Dudley Fletcher, the club captain, who taught me the basics of rowing and sent me out in a 'Mondego'.

Before I got involved in rowing there really wasn't a great deal for me to do, except hang around on streets and in parks, really not doing

anything productive with my life. I was seriously underachieving at school and faced being expelled for my behaviour. The teachers expressed concern that I wouldn't pass any of my GCSEs, or even last long enough at school to sit the exams.

A few months after I starting rowing, I competed in my first ever race and won at

expelled. Thanks to my coach Dudley and his wife Mary who gave me home tutoring, I was able to catch up with my studies. I have now left school, having passed all my GCSEs at grade 'C'.

Before I started to row, I rarely exercised and was really overweight, but now I'm a lot fitter and stronger. Four years ago I would have never expected to represent my county in any sport,

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Bradford Autumn Regatta, in a 4x+, which was reported in a local newspaper. Some of the teachers at school noticed the write-up, and approached me to say well done. Teachers used to know me as 'Alex, the lad who misbehaves in class', but knowing that I was doing something productive in my own time, they started to refer to me as 'Alex the rower'. Soon, I started to earn a new-found respect from the teachers.

As my behaviour progressively started to get better in school, I was no longer at risk of being

but four years on and I have reached the National Schools, National Championship finals, represented my county at the Junior Inter-Regional Regatta and been selected for the National J16 Sculling Camp.

I have now set my sights on the J18 GB Trials for next year. Representing my country at World Championship level would be a dream come true – but even if it doesn't happen, I can safely say that rowing really has changed my life for the better in many ways. ■

Has rowing changed your life? Send your stories and photos to [sarah.chapman@ara-rowing.org](mailto:sarah.chapman@ara-rowing.org)