

Adaptive Rowing at Guildford Rowing Club

**Case study by Robert Hall, Coach of
Adaptive Rowing**

In 2005 a current member brought a number of adaptive rowers to row at Guildford, two of which went on to success at World Championship and Paralympic level. Guildford Rowing Club is proud of the contribution it made to their development but when they moved on to the GB Rowing squads, the adaptive equipment moved with them.

Early in 2009 the club decided to start a new adaptive programme that fitted the club's ethos of sport for all. Although the club has been active since 1882 the river at Guildford is one of the narrowest and shortest stretches on which an active rowing community exists. However these 'limitations' also make it a suitable venue for adaptive rowing. At roughly the same time that this decision was taken, a wheelchair user with MS arrived at the club, interested in trying rowing. The success of the programme detailed here is largely due to this person's determination and enthusiasm.

MS affects people in many different ways, so it can take time and effort to find the correct solution for any rower. Indoor rowing is a great starting point. This gives you the opportunity to experiment until the right solution for an individual is found. People with MS find endurance difficult to maintain. Our first recruit could do a leg press as part of her gym routine but needed her legs resetting after each cycle. In view of this we decided that fixed seat rowing in a support seat was the best solution. Another ex-college rower could row well, but for a period of two minutes, so to enable him to row for a sustained period we moved to fixed seat rowing. Other rowers could use a sliding ergo seat or the Concept2 postural seat without clamps. All potential rowers need to build up their stamina slowly before rowing on the water.

During the development period we were lucky to have access to the Samson Centre which is a gym supported by the SW Surrey MS Group. They have professional trainers who work with a rower with MS to ensure that the gym work complements their training. The centre have really invested in the development of indoor rowing and is now acquiring its own adaptive indoor rowing equipment.

Throughout that year we acquired funds and equipment to support the programme. We decided to make the initiative self-funding with regards to specialist equipment. The club provided all the standard equipment and infrastructure, such as new racking. We obtained grants from Windsor Housing Community Chest, Guildford Borough Council and the Rowing Foundation. Funding the programme in this way has possibly slowed the development but it has allowed us to learn about each element of equipment as we have acquired it.

Boats

We have an Alden double and two Wintech singles, one on loan and one new. The Alden double was the USA adaptive boat for the World Championships in Seville and had been unused for a number of years. This allowed us to acquire it for a very low price. The downside was it is very heavy and requires three volunteers to get it in and out of the water.

Changing the boats from fixed to sliding seat is a time consuming process. The new Wintech boat eases this transition.

Seats

We have a Concept postural seat and three Wintech seats. The Wintech seats give less support but are easy to use both indoors and on the water. There is a step in the carbon fibre base at the back of the seat which can cause pressure sores and needs carefully padding. Adaptive rowers may not feel the pain caused by this type of sore.

Sculls

Conventional oars are too long for fixed seat rowing. We have three sets of shorter sculls (one on loan) but we have still to resolve the best combination of inboard and overall length.

We now run sessions for up to four adaptive rowers at a time, and our only short term limitation is now is a constraint of volunteers rather than equipment. The SW Surrey MS group provides more interested participants than we have capacity for, so although we are happy to talk to individual rowers, we are not be looking to new groups until our current phase is consolidated. Our plans from 2011 onwards then assume we will look for funding to double our existing capacity i.e. purchase two doubles and four singles.