

## Record breakers: the 'rowed' to success

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### **What do you do when your husband announces he is going to make a bid for a 24-hour rowing world record?**

Apologise to the wife of the person he's talked into doing it with him? Set about making it into a fund-raising event? Brace yourself for long hours of arduous training?

The answer is all of the above.

### **Planning**

The record he (Julian Norton, husband, father, vet and sucker for an extreme physical challenge) coveted was for a tandem row on a Concept II indoor rowing machine. He'd looked at the figures and thought it was within reach. The existing record was held by two Brits.

To beat the record, two people were to row for 24 hours, alternating on a single machine, the attempt had to be in a public place, the division of time between the two rowers was to be no more than 60 minutes and 40 seconds and the distance to beat was 335km. Simple.

Julian's fellow nutcase was Roger Brown – friend and former Olympic rower (it's amazing who you meet at antenatal classes). He was quick to rise to the challenge. I did, as previously mentioned, apologise to his wife. She said she wouldn't let Roger and Julian have an unsupervised conversation again. We decided to use the event to raise money for Herriot Hospice and set an ambitious target of £7,000.

### **Groundwork**

So, the training began in earnest. They needed to clock up a lot of time and many kilometres each week and that meant late nights and early mornings. As the date for the record attempt approached, both men were rowing for three hours a day, which was spare time we didn't know we had. Most athletes training at this level would not be trying to go to work, manage night and weekend duties and spend time with their families. I was also trying to get ready for a half marathon, so we weren't very exciting company.

On Julian's birthday we dressed up ready for an evening out, sat on the sofa to wait for the babysitter and realised we'd rather stay on the sofa than stay up late pretending we wouldn't rather be asleep.

The children got used to playing around their dad while he rowed in the garden and became accustomed to the parent relay that evolved around work, rowing, running, rowing, gardening, rowing, cleaning, walking the dog, rowing and eating.

There was a lot of eating – two boys and a husband in heavy training equals a rapidly emptying fridge. Whole cakes would disappear in a couple of hours and a week's worth of shopping would last for about three days.

The website was soon running and the fund-raising was progressing nicely. A local businessman had generously agreed to be the main sponsor, the gym had done its risk assessment and all was going swimmingly.

Then, with about six weeks to go, two Germans took the world record. It was a dark day. There were panicked phone calls, rapid recalculations and 15 more kilometres to find, but Julian and Roger had to find them. The posters were up, the press releases were out and there was no going back. They decided that 30-minute sessions would enable them to keep up the required frightening pace and set about practising the changeovers.

## **Let the pain begin**

So, finally it was upon us. At 10am on the day of the attempt, amid cheering, fanfare and photos, they set off – way too fast of course. Somehow though, the pace came easily and for the first six or eight hours they were cheery and buoyant and well ahead of schedule.

They had time between each session to eat and lie down and were keeping up the energy and hydration with "MPD" – a magic pink drink. It had a sensible scientific name to do with carbohydrate and protein, but MPD was much more apt.

As the evening wore on, a few aches and pains started to emerge, but we had sports therapist Walter on hand to iron out the twinges. I went home towards midnight to try to sleep (not very successfully). I dredged the boys out of bed at 5.30 the next morning and we headed back to the gym with our breakfast.

The scene was not the happy one I had left. They were now so exhausted that they were unable to eat and drink properly between their 30-minute sessions without either feeling or being sick. They continued to row at blistering speed, but could barely move once off the rowing machine. We could just about scrape them up and move them on to the massage table so Walter could get them into some sort of shape ready for their next stint. It was a grim few hours.

## Crossing the finish line

There was never any doubt that they would beat the 349km target though. It was not negotiable.

However, there was something they had kept to themselves because they thought it unattainable. There was another record; 349km was the men's world record, but, unbelievably, on the same day as two German men took that record, a husband-and-wife team, also German, had rowed even further.

They held the mixed record, which clearly Julian and Roger couldn't, no matter how hard they tried (to be a mixed pair, that is), but this was also the overall world record, transcending all others at 363km. In the middle of the night, Roger confided to Julian that he wouldn't be happy unless they took that one.

So, when they passed the 349km mark with an hour still to go, the crowd roared, but Julian and Roger, and we, the wives, knew this wasn't the end. They had one session each left and 15km to exceed.

Roger saved his lucky Olympic vest for his last stint and rowed like a man possessed (if possessed men row). He pulled his last stroke and threw himself off the machine so Julian could take over for the very last stretch.

I didn't think he was going to make it. Everyone was cheering and I just felt sick. I thought they were going to miss it by a couple of metres and I couldn't contemplate what that would be like. But Julian and Roger smashed it, reaching 364,464m. Champions of the world. World record holders.

The whole endeavour had surpassed the target of raising £7,000. The generosity and support was amazing, so thanks to everyone involved.

To find out more or donate visit [www.hh24-7.org.uk](http://www.hh24-7.org.uk)

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