

Below: The Heineken Roevierkamp in full swing on Amsterdam's River Amstel

PHOTO: MERLIN SOETERS



DESTINATION

HEAD RACES



Adding a new event to your club's usual racing schedule gives both crews and coaches something different to look forward to. **Helena Smalman-Smith** looks at 10 great heads in the UK and abroad, and explains why they're worth adding to your 2019 race calendar



1 – Heineken Roeivierkamp www.roeivierkamp.com

Where? Amsterdam, The Netherlands
When? Early March (tends to clash with WEHoRR)
Why? Probably the craziest-format rowing event in the world, this unique, two-day event for eights and coxed quads (yes, really) involves time trials over four different distances. Your result is calculated by adding up the average 250m time for each one. Racing starts on the Saturday with a 2.5km time trial, followed immediately by a two-abreast 250m sprint. Sunday begins with a 5km head with the start order based on your results so far, and concludes with a leg-testing 750m side-by-side race.



My masters eight is going back for the third time this year. It's a brilliant mixture of fun and flat-out racing, charming people and a whole lotta bikes everywhere!"
Geoff Peel – Quintin BC

“PROBABLY THE CRAZIEST-FORMAT ROWING EVENT IN THE WORLD, THIS UNIQUE, TWO-DAY EVENT FOR EIGHTS AND COXED QUADS INVOLVES TIME TRIALS OVER FOUR DIFFERENT DISTANCES”

Below: Waiting for the crews during the Head of the Dart at the boathouse of Agatha Christie's holiday home Greenway, which now belongs to the National Trust



PHOTO: COLIN LEWIS



PHOTO: BRUGGE BOAT RACE

Above: Racing starts in Bruges

2 – Brugge Boat Race

www.langerei.be/bruggeboatrace/?page_id=124

Where? Bruges, Belgium
When? Early March
Why? In a fun twist on the usual head race format, eights entering this 5km event have to submit their best 5km time which is used to match them in pairs for side-by-side starts that are individually timed. The small boats event on the second day starts the normal way. Extra celebrations are promised for the event's 25th anniversary in 2019.



The whole event is very friendly and well organised – and with no stream to worry about, it's certain to run which is often not the case here in the UK at that time of year."

**Colin Greenaway –
Director of Rowing, Hampton School**



3 – Head of the Dart

www.darttotnes.co.uk/event/head-of-the-dart

- Where?** Totnes to Dartmouth, Devon (direction alternates each year – always with the tide)
- When?** Early April
- Why?** At 15km, the Head of the Dart is a long haul to race, but with stunning scenery, an interesting section through an area of moored yachts, and with the unusual sight of gigs, Seine boats and even the odd seal, you certainly won't be bored.



It's a great event although challenging to navigate. One year an eight passed our quad, but missed a sharp turn shortly afterwards and headed up a side channel. When they caught us again, their cox commented it was the first time he'd overtaken the same crew twice in a head!"

**Geraint Lewis –
Kingston Grammar School Veterans BC**



PHOTO: NIGEL READ

Below: A chance to row on one of the most historic courses in the UK at Henley Fours and Eights Head

4 – Henley Fours and Eights Head

www.henleyopenevents.co.uk

- Where?** Henley
- When?** February
- Why?** Experience Henley without the booms or blazers! This 3km head is a pleasure to race at with plenty of warm-up, marshalling and – most importantly – overtaking space, as well as the chance to practise pushing away from Temple Island.



The date of this event gives us the opportunity to see just how far our gruelling winter training has got us in preparation for the Women's Head and it gives our coaches one last chance to see which crews work best together. It's a great privilege to row on one of the most historic and revered courses in Britain too!"

**Francesca Lawley –
Women's Vice-Captain, Putney Town RC**

5 – Bedford Autumn Fours and SBH

www.bedfordrowing.co.uk/eventdates

Where? Bedford
When? Early October
Why? Love head racing but hate sitting around for ages at the start? Then go to this event which has a whopping seven divisions, but as each one is quite small, the marshalling time is quite short. As the course is only 2km long, it's not a question of which division to race in, but how many to do.



"We come for the flat water, and because our juniors' parents can get close to the action by watching from the many bridges over the course, which they really like."

Dave Connington –
Director of Rowing, Emanuel School



Above: Spectators can get close to the action at Bedford Autumn Head

PHOTO: JIM GODBOLT

“ THE USA OFTEN CLAIMS IT DOES EVERYTHING ‘BIGGER AND BETTER’ AND IN THE CASE OF THE HEAD OF THE CHARLES REGATTA IT’S TRUE! ”

6 – Head of the Charles Regatta

www.hocr.org

Where? Boston, Massachusetts, USA
When? Late October
Why? The USA often claims it does everything ‘bigger and better’ and in the case of the Head of the Charles Regatta it's true! It takes a massive two days for every sculler and crew to start this 4.8km head race. There are huge crowds right along the banks and the shopping area is practically a mall. Combine that with the eye-watering entry fees (\$525 for an eight in 2017), and this is inevitably an expensive trip.



"Boating out of Radcliffe was a real buzz. If you have a chance then it's well worth crossing the pond for it!"

Janet Vickers –
City of Sheffield RC



Above: Part of the 4.8km course at the Head of the Charles

PHOTO: MARTHA SHAW

7 – Dee Autumn Head
www.grosvenor-rowingclub.org.uk/events/dee-autumn-head

Where? Chester
When? Late October
Why? While most head races in the south focus on either small boats (before Christmas) or eights and fours (after New Year), northern heads are generally less prescriptive and Dee Autumn Head is a great example, offering all categories from eights to singles over their 3.8km course.



Dee Autumn is ideal for universities like us as it's the perfect time for our first racing experience with a new cohort of senior rowers. We can try out what we think our crews will be for the term and get valuable miles under our belts on a lovely stretch of river.”
Richard Dawidek – Senior Men's Captain, Sheffield University RC



PHOTO BRIAN CHAPMAN

“NORTHERN HEADS ARE GENERALLY LESS PRESCRIPTIVE”

8 – Head of the Trent
www.sites.google.com/site/nottinghamtrenchhead

Where? Nottingham
When? Late February
Why? With all eights, fours and quads categories from J14 through to elite, the Head of the Trent really does offer something for everybody. Crucially though, it's not 'one size fits all': while the first and third divisions offer a serious race over 5.7km, the shorter middle division provides an ideal alternative for less experienced crews.



“We enter crews from our women's, men's and junior squads every year as there's always a good number of opponents for some competitive racing – and a loud, motivational cheer as you race past the boathouses!”
Sophy Nicholson – Women's Captain, York City RC



PHOTO: HEAD OF THE TRENT COMMITTEE

Above: Pushing on after Trent Bridge

9 – Armada Cup

www.armadacup.ch

Where? Near Bern, Switzerland
When? Late October
Why? Strictly speaking, this 9km race for single scullers is not a head because the 250 or so competitors start at the same time – in rows, 25 abreast. Without a doubt it's the most exciting start you'll ever do! Divers in the finish area help speed up the process of getting everyone out by shoving boats into the landing stages.



The start of the race is a frantic sprint to get the best line round a dog-leg bend after 800m. Once you're past that, just find some like-speeded competitors and race it out for another 40 minutes!"

Donal Casey – Wiltshire Scullers



PHOTO: BERNHARD MARBACH

Above: Rowing's most exciting start gets underway in Bern

“ THERE ARE SERIOUS MONEY PRIZES FOR THE FASTEST THREE SCULLERS OF EACH GENDER OVERALL, WITH AN EXTRA €1,000 ON OFFER TO ANYONE SETTING A NEW RECORD! ”

10 – Trofeo Silver Skiff

www.silverskiff.org/en

Where? Turin, Italy
When? Mid-November
Why? Another single-sculling super-festival – which attracts over 600 entries – this 11km race follows an out-and-back course. There are serious money prizes for the fastest three scullers of each gender overall, with an extra €1,000 on offer to anyone setting a new record!



It's worth practising turning a buoy a few times at home and on the course if you can before the day, and keeping your plans flexible during the race to avoid a crash!"

Tom Carter – Upper Thames RC 



PHOTO: CLAUDIO CECCHIN

Above: Trofeo Silver Skiff in Turin