



# Getting ready for your first race

MARATHON PADDLING IN VICTORIA

Sally Miller  
sally\_miller@bigond.com

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## Welcome to racing

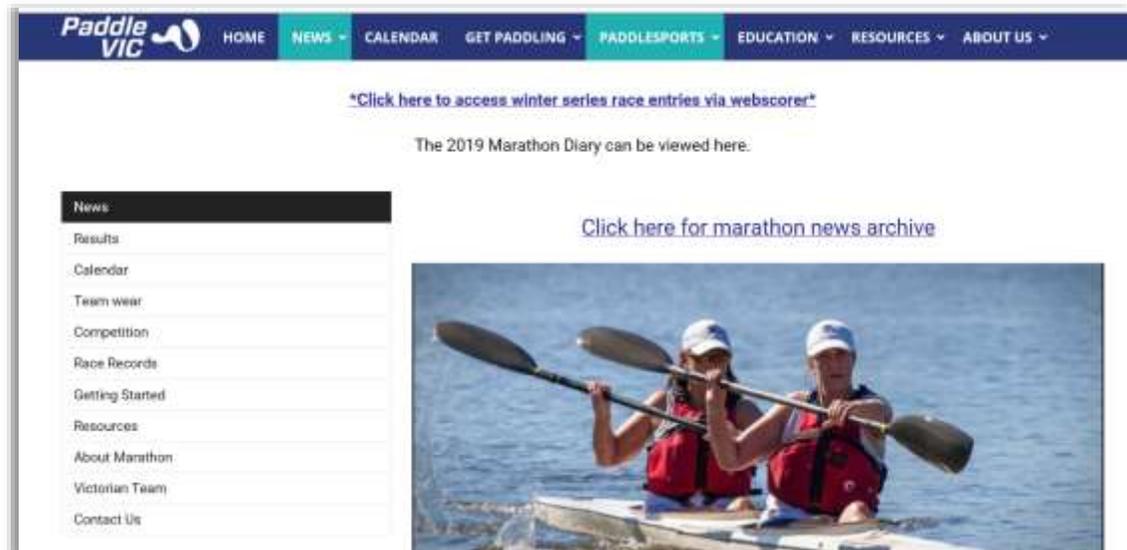
So, you want to try out your first marathon kayak or canoe race. That is fantastic.

The marathon paddling community are absolutely delighted to have more people coming to the races. The races are not daunting, there are many divisions and ages groups so beginners will definitely not feel out of place. Quite the reverse, as beginners are made to feel very welcome by all the other paddlers and the officials and will assist you should you ask.

## How do I find out about what races are on?

Paddle Victoria has them on its website under paddlesports/Marathon

<https://vic.paddle.org.au/paddlesports/marathon/>



If you look in **Calendar** you will find all the Paddle Victoria marathon races for the year with dates and most have flyers and a link to the Online Entry if there is one for the race.

The other great resource for all the paddlers, and especially for beginners, is the **Marathon Diary**. This has all the years races and information about Marathon Paddling in Victoria, the rules and explanations about the divisions and so forth. The Diary can be accessed on the Paddle Victoria website in PDF form and the link to it is found on the page shown above.

## Which race should I go in?

Marathon races in the summer months are generally run by individual clubs, while the Championship races, around March, and the winter races are run by the PV Marathon committee.

The Winters Series are great races for beginners because you can choose a Division to suit your ability. They are usually on Sundays. If this doesn't work for you then look at the calendar at some of the other races.

As an Adult first time racer in the Winter Series, it is suggested that you enter Division 7. (Div 8 & 9 are for U18 and U16 years respectively).

Division 7 races are generally 8 km in distance.

There may also a Social Paddler event which is designed for people who want to paddle the course but not race.

## How do I register for a race?

Firstly, when you joined our club you will have automatically then been joined to Paddle Australia so you are able to enter races and are covered by insurance. So now you are good to enter a race.

Go to the Paddle Victoria website, select the Paddlesport of Marathon. Then select Calendar and then select the link under Entry for your chosen race.

<https://vic.paddle.org.au/paddlesports/marathon/>

Race entries for the PV Marathon races and most summer races are done via "Webscorer", however, some clubs have their own arrangements. Follow the instructions in Webscorer. The first time you will need to create a Webscorer account with a username and password.

The race entry fee for an adult is usually around \$30.

For the Winter Series (WS) and most other races you need to enter online by 5pm the Friday before the race. WS has a late entry fee of \$10 allowing you to enter up to midday Saturday but you cannot enter on the day. Some other races do allow this, but not many nowadays.

## In the weeks before the race

### TRAINING

Mostly the races you would do as a first race are 8km and up to 12km long so if you work up to doing a 12km paddle in a training session, then you are in pretty good shape to be able to do the race distance. If you are not sure of the distances at the river you train on then ask an experienced paddling at your club, they are sure to know.

Generally speaking, I think if you are doing a 12 km training session twice a week leading up to the race then you should be fine.

## CAN YOU MANOEUVRE?

When lining up for the start of a race you will need to be able to manoeuvre your boat. You will also be instructed by the starter. I suggest you take time in the weeks preceding your first race to get confident with doing this.

Specifically, you need to be able to keep your boat stationary without falling in. Not as simple as it sounds so please practice. The other critical skill is to be able to paddle backwards for up to 10 metres in still water. In flowing water, you may need to paddle backwards for a period of time to stay still for the start so you don't float downstream.

## PRACTISE CAPSIZING

You need to know and have practiced what to do in the event of a capsize just in case it happens to you in the race. The INCC website has a video showing you what to do so please feel free to watch it.

<http://www.incc.org.au/training/technique-tips>

In summary though:

- Turn the boat over (before it totally fills with water)
- Put your paddle in the cockpit of the boat to free up your hands
- Swim the boat to shore finding a place where you can stand up
- Empty the boat (refer video);
  1. Push down on one end of the boat so the water flows down that end
  2. Then in a quick motion lift and turn that end so water flows out the cockpit.
  3. You will likely need to repeat step 2 several times to remove all the water.
- Get back in

## AM I READY?

It is not as daunting as it sounds. The paddling community really encourage and welcome new paddlers to the races and the Winter Series has divisions to suit beginners (Div 7 and Social division).

If you are still falling out of the boat a lot in training then maybe you are not yet ready however, if you rarely capsize, then fine. Do keep in mind that the course conditions may vary and be a little rougher than your usual training ground so choose a very stable boat for your first race.

You might also consider coming along to watch a race prior to competing in your first one and that will give you a good idea of the logistics and what to expect. I went to many races watching my daughter before I raced myself so I was well prepared on what to expect then for my first race.

# Preparing the week before the race

## TRANSPORTING THE BOAT

Think about how you will get your chosen boat (which is probably a club boat) to the race.

Your options are:

- On a club trailer if one is going to the races. Posting the question on your club Facebook page is often about the best option or put a note on a noticeboard at your club to find out if a trailer is going to the race.
- Ask if another club member who is racing can fit your boat on their car. Again, your club Facebook page is your best place to ask.
- If someone else is taking your boat, or towing the trailer, then it is expected you will assist with boat loading and boat unloading at the start and end of the day. They will expect you to bring a set of two tie downs (available from hardware shops such as Bunnings and amongst others). Label your tie downs (see below) as they easily get lost.



- Put the boat on the roof of your car.
  - Okay for singles. (5.2 metres)
  - It is more challenging for the doubles as they are longer (6.5 metres). Your club may have cradles for that purpose. Reach out FB again to a committee member.

So, you going to put it on your car?

- Roof racks and the boat holders: Autobarn or Supercheap Auto are a couple of suggestions.
- Thule racks and Rola holders are fine but ask around.
- Again – buy at least 2 tie downs and label them. They get lost and you can't guarantee someone else will have a spare.
- Be aware of the overhang rules and flag requirements that apply in your state (basically, the back of the kayak can't extend more than 60% of the wheelbase behind the centre of the **rear axle** (not the back of the car); the front of the kayak can't extend more than 1.2 m in front of the front bumper: see <https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/20-096sra%20authorised.pdf> for more information. There are exemptions for overhangs for kayaks on trailers (see [https://vic.paddle.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/08/Class-O-Rear-overhang-Exemption\\_v2.pdf](https://vic.paddle.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/08/Class-O-Rear-overhang-Exemption_v2.pdf) for more information).

## IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE RACE

- Choose your boat and you may need to register it in your club's Race Booking sheet.
- Confirm transport for your boat.
- Know what time and who is the contact for boat loading. Make sure you take your Tie Downs with you.
- Collect a paddle and life jacket from the club (PFD mandatory at all races)
- Get yourself set up with a drink system (i.e. Camelbak) for during the race.
- Check the Race Flyer so you know what time you need to be at the race to register (for the WS this is 8.30 am) and that you do know where the venue is and allow time to travel there. If you not sure where it is then post the question on your club's Facebook group or asked an experienced paddler.
- Look up the weather predicted for the race day for that location. WS can be very cold and some courses more exposed to wind. WEAR THERMALS! Seriously don't let yourself get hypothermia. If you should happen to capsize you get cold very quickly. Long sleeve and long pant thermals are your best shot. Booties are also needed to protect your feet if you capsize. Some outdoor equipment suppliers have sock type booties. I quite like surfer wet suit booties which keep the feet very warm and safe from scratches.
- In the Summer Series it is hotter so take care to avoid sunburn. Cap, sunscreen and actually I paddle in a long sleeve top. Be careful about getting sunscreen on your hands because once your hands are wet, they will slip on the paddle. Ideally have someone else apply your sunscreen. If no one able do that for you then wash your hands in soap afterwards. As a last resort rub your hands in the dirt to remove sunscreen. You get used to it.

## PACK YOUR RACE BAG

- Take a change of clothes (warm clothes) for after the race. I often find I am quite cold after a race as you do get wet and once you stop paddling you cool down a lot.
- Pack a towel and soap and shower after the race if there are facilities to avoid potential infection in the event of scratches.
- Nearly all the race host clubs put on a food stall with hot food and drinks, although this may change with COVID-19 restrictions. I only paddle for the food afterwards! It's a highlight of my day. Take cash (or card post-COVID) to pay for the food.
- Fill your on-race drink system with water from home or bottled water as the water in other towns doesn't always work for your digestive system.
- Paddle, PDF and drink system
- Duct tape and scissors for emergency repairs and to tape up the drinking tube.

## Race Day

- Don't forget to eat breakfast – you need the energy during the race.
- Arrive on time to register. Yes, you have already entered online but on race day you must go to the registration desk as soon as you arrive so they can tick you off

in the Webscorer system (or whatever they are using) and give you your boat number.



- Put your boat number in the holder on your boat (see above). Not sure how to do this then ask other racers to assist. Remember your number!! When you get on the water you can't see your number. If you have forgotten and already on the water then ask a fellow racer to tell you what your number is. You need to know beforehand as the starter will address you by your boat number when giving instructions. *'boat 143 move forward 2 metres'*.
- Get into your paddling gear and probably life jacket ahead of the race briefing, typically at 9.30 for a 10:00 am start.
- Stay warm.
- Check your drink system is working (tap turned on) and ensure that you can reach it when you will be paddling. Typically, this involves lots of duct tape and trial and error. No simple instructions here – ask other racers and look at what they have done.

## LISTEN AT THE RACE BRIEFING

- N.B. With COVID-19 restrictions it is now common for race briefing instructions to be sent by email prior to the event. Make sure you read these instructions. If the briefing is conducted on site, make sure you listen to the instructions. As an official after the briefing if you require additional clarification; make sure you understand what you need to do before getting on the water.
- Make sure you know;
  - the number of laps you need to paddle and your distance
  - which start number (also known as the wave number) you are in (i.e., Probably about start 7)
  - what colour are the turn buoys
  - which way to go around the turn buoys (generally anti-clockwise)
  - in which direction will you finish (upstream or downstream) – even the elite paddlers can get this wrong!
- The turn buoys are usually red on the long laps
- Yellow for the short lap
- Pink are marker buoys in the middle of the river (keep to the right of these)
- Finish line buoys are white AND you must go through the two white buoys as you finish. Do not go between the white buoys before your last lap.
- Check the race course map which is usually located on the white-board
- At the end of the briefing, you usually have about 10 – 15 minutes to get on the water. They will call you on to the water usually all paddlers at once.

# The Race

## GETTING ON THE WATER

- All boats must have floatation (foam, fixed in place at the front and back of the boat) and so there are scrutineers checking your boat as you pass through to get on the water. This area will be marked, just follow others.
- Once on the water warm up a little. Practice a couple of starts. Get a good feel for the water.

## THE STARTING LINE

- Listen out for them calling your start number. If you are not sure which start you in then look around for others with a similar boat number to yours then hang out with them (e.g. if you have boat number 703 then look around for other 700 series people and ask them which division they are in)
- Don't go too far away when warming up or you will miss your start.
- The starts go in waves each about 3-4 minutes apart and generally the fast paddlers go in the earlier waves.
- The aligner will get the next wave ready across the river then pass you on to the starter and you will paddle slowly in a line towards the starter.
- The starter will address you by boat numbers so be prepared. They may ask you to move forward or back a few metres and so forth. Try to keep in a line with the other boats.

## AND WE ARE RACING!

- The start is quick!
- As soon as the starter feels you are in a line then they will shout READYGO and you are off.
- The water in a big start is quite turbulent and this can alarm you.
- STAY CALM
- You are in a stable boat and the trick is to plant your feet firmly on the footplate and keep paddling – and breathe – and you will be surprised that you get through it okay. The turbulence will level out before long.

## TURN BUOYS

- Remember where to turn. You must go around the turn buoy or you will get a penalty and risk disqualification.
- All turns are made in an anti-clockwise direction unless they specifically state otherwise at the briefing.

## SCARY FAST PADDLERS

- All divisions are on the course at the same time in most races. There are going to be several packs of very fast boats that will pass you. Don't panic, keep your line and stay predictable and they will avoid you and harmlessly pass you.

- The only thing to consider is if they are with you at the turn buoys then go a bit wide so they can pass on the inside.

Have fun. Keep breathing. Don't forget to drink fluids and finish between the white buoys.

## UH-OH

- It can happen, hopefully not, but we have all at one time or another capsized in a race (even happens to the very best paddlers)
- What to do? Just like you practiced at home (see earlier section).
- However race courses may be wider than you are used to so you may assistance – you just ask the other paddlers to assist. That is part and parcel of our racing fraternity, and everyone is expected to help a paddler in trouble.
- They just need to keep a rough record of the time they took out to assist you and they will be credited with that time at the end of the race. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance if you need it.
- Also, there are safety boats on the course at the races. They are there to help and if you are unable to continue on for whatever reason you can get a lift back in the safety boat. If one is not in sight and you need them, call out to a passing paddler to alert one as they see them on the course.
- Be aware in the cold weather if you have capsized you are at risk of hypothermia and it may be best to withdraw from the race.

## You Finished!

- Well done!
- Take your boat out and hand in your boat number. That is important as then the officials know you are safely off the course. On that note, if you do decide during the race to withdraw please notify the officials – otherwise they keep looking for you at the end of the race.
- Go shower and change – get warm
- Eat the great food put on by the host club.
- Stay for the presentations. It is the celebration part of the day. You never know but you may find yourself on the podium or going home with one of the door prizes.

## Homeward bound

- Paddling can be exhausting and we all have done it where we forget to tie down equipment. Just double check that paddles and boats are tied on securely.
- Careful on the drive home, you will be tired.
- Help with boat unloading if someone else has transported your boat or it was on the club trailer.
- Wash your boat and sign it back in in the book,

Happy racing & best of luck

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