

Chair's Report to the 2022 ACM

It seems a long time since we had a “normal” season and during 2022 we have managed a full racing calendar. It has not all been plain sailing (or canoeing!) and regrettably we have lost some races due to different factors, most notably no races were possible on the Washburn. However, competition entries are significantly down compared to 2019. This is of great concern to all of us here today and collectively we need to find ways to attract new entrants and encourage past competitors to race again. There are encouraging signs that club taster sessions have attracted a significant number of potential new Slalom paddlers, with some progressing into the ranking system as indicated by the numbers paddling in Division 3. Division 4 entry numbers continue to be suppressed and given that this is the route into the ranking system the prospect of a large uptick in numbers across the divisions seems unlikely in the near future.

Addressing the challenges mentioned above will require cooperation and collaboration from all those active in delivering the many aspects of Slalom and this includes volunteer and paid staff across clubs, committees, and performance. Engaging a wide range of views and opinions is essential to shape the sport moving forward. Earlier this month British Canoeing hosted a meeting with representation from clubs, GB performance, Slalom committee, England talent and BC support staff with the aim of developing a collective approach to future Slalom development. The broad themes discussed were recruitment and retention of volunteers, support for clubs promoting slalom and kayak cross within their communities, improving access to coaching at all ability levels and development of the competition framework for both slalom and kayak cross. These are early days, but this initiative will be a major focus for the sport in 2023.

Internationally we continue to see British athletes delivering strong performances across all age ranges both in Slalom and Kayak Cross which is very encouraging as we move towards the Paris Olympic Games. As pre-cursor we can look forward to hosting the World Championships in 2023 at Lee Valley and I'm sure that will be an exciting event for our volunteers and athletes alike.

This is my final ACM as chair, and I willingly pass the baton to Andy! My involvement with Slalom started as a parent in 2000. In 2011 I was co-opted to the committee as Strategic Planning co-ordinator and subsequently I joined as a full member. In 2014 I was elected to Chair, a position I have held to date.

It is natural for me to look back and think about what I have achieved over the last 8 years as Chair and in many respects, it is for others to pass judgement. I have tried to be fair and supportive to all and recognise all contributions both great and small. My natural tendency is to embrace change and support initiatives that reduce the workload of volunteers in supporting slalom competition. During the last 8 years the adoption of online systems has had a positive impact for administrators and paddlers alike and I offer a special thanks to Dee, Duncan and Matt for their efforts beavering away in the shadows. That is not to detract from the significant contribution of all the many administrators and committee members without whom we would not be where we are today.

Our sport would not function without the tremendous efforts of our volunteers. Competitions don't magically appear, and organisers, clubs and officials are beavering away months in advance to endeavour to deliver the best experience possible for athletes. Many activities are ongoing throughout the year ensuring that bibs are delivered, entries are processed, and results and rankings produced. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their dedication, enthusiasm and sheer hard work in supporting our sport.

Dave Spencer
Chair, Slalom Committee
November 2022