

**MEDIACOM**

BLOG

# The Great River Race 2018

CHARITY PEOPLE FIRST UK

OLLIE JONES-EVANS 14 SEP 2018

This week, media exec Ollie recounts his experience as one of 30 MediaCommers who took part in the Great River Race.

For a second, everything goes quiet and all you can hear is the monotonous thunk of 8 oars in and out of water. Somebody behind you shouts upwards and their voice bounces back down from the underside Tower Bridge. Seconds later, a wall of noise greets you as crowds of well-wishers hang over the blue railings, cheering you and 330 other crews on. There's about 2 and half hours of racing left, boats of all sizes are coming at you from all directions, waves are throwing you up and down and you suddenly remember that you and your crew only rowed together for the first time just over 2 months previously. You take a breath and remember how you got here.

This year 30 Mediacommers took to the River Thames for the Great River Race to raise money for Cancer Research UK. As a group of novices who started out thinking the difference between Port and Starboard was that one is for drinking at Christmas, it's fair to say we were going on quite the journey.

Wednesday evenings were spent down in Richmond, learning on the water from our esteemed coaches: Phil, Ian, Matthew and Steve. Between them, they had 10 sessions to get 30-odd Media sorts into 3 slick, tidy teams. Despite our ticking clock you couldn't find four more reassuring mentors. Experienced and unflappable, we were in good hands. Plus, they'd only tell you about the previous year's boat's near crash into Richmond bridge (with potentially dire consequences) once or twice a session. Very relaxing... But genuinely, couldn't ask for better people to navigate us through the challenge.

The great thing about rowing is it's a leveller- everybody is starting from nothing, so all hierarchy goes out the window and you get to learn something deeply enjoyable together. On the other hand, the tough thing about rowing is it's bloody hard to get eight people to do exactly the same thing at exactly the same time over and over again, seamlessly. Those Wednesdays were full of discoveries: who could steer; who could motivate; who could sit in the bows and top up their tans the longest before the coaches got them working again. They were properly glorious summer evenings, full of laughter, sweat and weekly competitions to take the best photo of the sunset over the river.

As much fun as it was to prepare for the race, an equal amount of energy went into raising as much money for Cancer Research as possible. People were approaching it from all angles- a sponsored Rowathon, a huge quiz with Media and Publishing Partners, aggressive raffling throughout the agency, near-constant hustling of friends and family and colleagues and strangers and anyone else we could gleefully tell about the mad race down the river we were all doing. And on that note, THANK YOU to all those people, because we raised an absolute shedload of money- over £30,000- which is a phenomenal effort, way more impressive than 3 hours of trying not to crash your boat into a bridge (you're welcome coaches- no deaths under your watch a few years in a row now).

The course- through the heart of London- took you past iconic location after iconic location. Except, instead of enjoying the views from an open top bus, you're propelling yourself and 9 teammates along a dirty great river in a wooden boat and you only have a second to snatch a glance of the sights before a procession of Dragon Boats try to mow you down. So not sight-seeing in the traditional sense.

A week on, the memories of our 3 hour marathon down the river remain clear. But cheesy as it may be, it's not the sights or sounds that come to the fore. It's the feeling of being part of a crew that sticks. A team that was brought together over 2 months of laughter and hot summer evenings and a great cause.

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