

PADDLER PROFILES 2009 FENN CUP OCEAN SERIES

MURRAY STEWART

Written by Dean Gardiner
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Seems to be a bit of talk lately about who is the greatest all-round paddler. I thought I would throw this one in the hat.



Murray Stewart at the 2008 Surf Lifesaving World Champs - Winner

At 22 years of age Murray Stewart has definitely hit his straps. Over the last 12 months he has turned himself (in my opinion) into the best all round paddler on the planet.

The current surf lifesaving surf ski race world champ confirmed his world champ status recently with a win in the most prestigious of sprint ski races, the Australian Championships. For those that don't know much about this style of surf ski racing it is from where our current distance ski races evolved. Over 500 paddlers race over an out and back through the surf course in a series of heats and rounds to get to a final. This takes about 3 days with only the final 15 left to contest the

3 minute course on the final day of competition.

To get to the final is quite an achievement. To win the thing is incredible after having endured so many varying races and conditions over the 3 days. When you look at the last 15 years or so one man has pretty well dominated this event. That is of course Clint Robinson. He first won the event at Scarborough Beach in 92 and with the exception of a few years has won it since. This year's event was back at Scarborough and was to be Robinson's swansong, Muzza put a dampener on that.

National 500m Sprint Kayak Champs

The week prior to this incredible win Muz took out the National 500 meter sprint kayak championships. This is the event that Kenny Wallace won gold in at the recent Olympics. While Kenny was not competing, at the recent events Muz had beaten Kenny in grand prix event over the same distance just weeks before. Along with his single win Muz paired with good mate a partner Jacob Clear to clean up most of the team boat races.

LD Surfski

In the paddling world we are most connected with, distance surf ski races Muz has definitely left his mark. For most he would have first come to notice in Dubai at the Shamaal with a credible 6th place. The following week I was fortunate to have him on the back of the double with me for the Southern Shamaal in South Africa. The four day race featured a massive 50k stage on day one. A distance Muz had never tackled before. To make it worse, dead flat with a pea soup fog that gave you about 200 meters of vision.



Murray Stewart & Dean Gardiner - victorious (with Jeremy Cotter & Cain Eckstein) at the 2008 Southern Shamaal in South Africa (Pic: Owen Middleton)

Now over the years I have paddled with some pretty tough guys who given these circumstances would have melted halfway along the course. With the exception of the odd movement to adjust bum position I would not have known he was there and he powered through the day helping us to a great win over the other double combo's. Combined with Jeremy Cotter and Caine Eckstein who paddled the singles this team definitely knocked the wind out of the heavily inflated "Yarpies" balloon.



Southern Shamaal 2008 - Aussie A Team (Pic: Owen Middleton)

20 Beaches

A couple of weeks later the 20 Beaches event was on in Sydney. One of the first in the Surf ski.info World Series. Although only a minor star event it is still a well known and prestigious event for the Sydney paddling contingent. Tim Jacobs had dominated local events to date and all eyes were once again on him after his momentous win in Dubai. Ah ah not to be this time in pretty calm conditions Muz raced with Tim until the final third of the race then pulled away to stake his claim on the title. If you think you can paddle a ski well try pulling away from Tim Jacobs in calm conditions.



Murray Stewart (1st) and Tim Jacobs - 20 Beaches 2008 (Pic: Alex Braid)

With only one major ocean race to go Muzz spent his time between the K1 and his Fenn. The next big race and the first big race of the season was "the Doctor" in Perth in January. With a major kayak regatta the week before the pressure was on to perform at the kayaks then try and back up for The Doctor the following week. As previously mentioned Muzz knocked off Kenny Wallace in his event then turned up in Perth ready for business.

As well documented "The Doctor" was Robinson's day with a truly convincing win over the 23 kilometre downwind race. Muzz managed a 4th with a sprint up the beach against fellow future kayaking star and local boy Reece Baker.

Look at those results for second

Surf Lifesaving Worlds 1st
Australian lifesaving 1st
Dubai Shamaal 6th
Southern Shamaal 1st
20 Beaches 1st
The Doctor 4th

Kayak Grand Prix 1st
Kayak Nationals 1st



Murray Stewart and Jeremy Cotter - 20 Beaches 2008 (Pic: Alex Braid)

Looking Back

Let's go back a couple of years.

Leading into the Perth World Cup 2006. Muzz had finished a creditable 2nd to Dave Kissane in the 20 Beaches. Now primed to go to WA he contracted glandular fever. Out of action for about 2-3 months came back and made the under 23 kayak team to go to Europe.

Raced well in Europe with some fantastic results considering his recent illness. Came to Durban for the 2007 World Cup Race (this was the big downwind one that Oscar won, with the ship etc). Complained of stomach pains before the race but raced and finished from memory around 15th. Not bad considering he hadn't been on ski for a couple of months because of his kayak racing in Europe.

Appendicitis

Getting back to Sydney decides to see a doctor about his stomach complaint. After several tests and numerous days in and out of doctors surgeries it is discovered that during his time in SA his appendix had burst and because nothing was done the bad bits had somehow fused themselves to other organs. Now I am no doctor but this sounds pretty bad. After some time in hospital and some pretty major operations he was back on deck. Well at least we thought.

It's now late 2007 and Muzz is gearing up for the ocean races and sprint surf and kayak races. Here we go again out goes his back. Another couple of months off now put us into 2008 and only a couple of weeks to go until the kayak selection events.

He races well at the selection events and makes the senior squad that tours with the main team to Europe prior to the games. Muzza won the biggest under 23 regatta in the world and made B

finals of open events at the various world cup kayak events.

From these regatta he goes on to Germany to take out the World Sprint surf Ski Championships at the World Lifesaving Games.

Now for most that come across Muzz they wouldn't know he had such a great record. They wouldn't know that he has endured some pretty nasty inflictions and still powered on to get great results. He definitely wouldn't tell you.

In fact if you saw Muzz in the street with his 80s English pop group haircut and almost dopey like manor you would think he was more of your regular office boy . It's all most un-nerving how he can transform from that placid boy on the corner, race like man possessed and then back to what he was before, without a phone booth in sight.

Easy going, great to travel with and a major force in paddling events over all facets of paddle sports is what we truly have with Muzz. There a few that disagrees with this. Tim Jacobs says "he's the greatest talent I've seen."

I'm sure that over the next decade we will see a lot more of "Muzza" in all aspects of paddle sports. I would hate to see it if he started marathon kayaks and river races we might as well all pack up and go home.



Murray Stewart and friends - Dubai Shamaal 2008, Saffas & Aussies

And...

And did I mention that we cleaned the South Africans up in the Southern Shamaal?