

Water way to float your boat

Natalie Murphy joins Hull Rowing Club for a taster session

As the rain began to plummet down, I knew I was going to get wet one way or the other during my taster session with Hull Rowing Club.

Out on the water of East Park's boating lake, there was no escape from the heavy showers and I just hoped I wasn't going to be taking a bath too by toppling in.

Having never rowed before, I carefully watched some of the members who were already out on the water, surprised at how shallow the boats were and I was doubtful that I would be able to keep my balance, bottom perched perilously on the water line.

Fortunately, club member and coach Gavin Coates had selected a slightly bigger and more stable vessel for me, but I was still anxious about the chance of capsizing and lowered myself into it somewhat gingerly.

But Gavin, a former professional coach who has worked with schools and rowers at the highest level, was an excellent teacher and did very well to put me at ease.

With the club offering regular learn to row courses and taster sessions, he is used to welcoming beginners like me.

Once on board, I felt happier and Gavin encouraged me to wobble the boat from side to side while safely next to the launch to demonstrate how unlikely it was that I would tip it.

He also tethered the boat to a rope, which



DIFFERENT STROKES: Natalie Murphy rowing with East Park rowing club. Picture: Peter Harbour

he kept hold of to ensure I didn't drift away and get stuck.

After a quick safety briefing, during which I was shown which position to take up if I felt unsure, it was time to take my first strokes.

The oars, made of carbon fibre, were much lighter than I had expected and fixed into position on the sides of the boat, so manoeuvring them was actually quite straightforward.

Gavin explained that they and the boat

were of good quality and that therein lies an oddity about rowing. The equipment is costly – many clubs will have a collection of boats worth up to about £500,000 – yet membership is cheap, less than £100 annually for adult members in Hull, for example.

And it's a year-round activity too, only fog, ice or lightning will prevent members heading out.

Realising I had thousands of pounds of equipment under my control brought back

the nerves and I adopted a hunched position on my first few attempts at moving under my own steam.

But with Gavin's patient encouragement, I soon managed to drop my shoulders and relax, improving my technique drastically.

Moving smoothly on the lake felt fantastic and I understood then why the club was so busy – every boat was out when I visited, despite the weather.

What I couldn't believe was that some of the other rowers zipping by me were also new to the sport.

They looked confident and accomplished yet were only recent graduates of the club's learn to row course.

Others have been members much longer. Dave, who stayed on the shore for the session, has been rowing in Hull for decades for example and he explained that one of the lake's original uses had been for rowing.

And since moving to the park from sessions on the River Hull, the club has seen a upsurge in interest as there are many more people now passing by their weekend training sessions.

Seeing the rowers float serenely by, it's not hard to see why and even in the pouring rain, it was excellent fun and so much more satisfying than sitting on the static rowing machine at the gym.

Most of all, the club seems friendly and welcoming, allowing members to develop at their own pace and commit as much as they want to.

As Gavin said, as long as people were safe and having fun, he was happy, and my taster session delivered on both of these aims.

■ Visit www.hullrowingclub.org or follow @Hull_Rowing on Twitter.



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