

Fireworks at Henley



The Aussies are coming – sparks Martin Cross previews what to expect on the water

If you're an Aussie, you might reckon that this year's Henley could be just the place for a spot of 'Pommie bashing'. The 21st century version of the 'Oarsome-Foursome' should lead the men from down under at the Royal Regatta. And in that crew, the partnership of Olympic legend Drew Ginn and the latest young Aussie sensation, Josh Dunkley-Smith, could set the regatta alight – even without the recently injured Duncan Free. The entry of Britain's squad will presumably depend on form and injuries. But the British four – let alone the rest of the squad – would love to 'put one over' on the top Aussie crew at Henley.

So look for fireworks in the final of the Stewards, if indeed the new 'Oarsome-Foursome' do line up against Britain's own new-look – and clearly very fast – four, with Tom James on board. That race could throw up a great head-to-head between James and Ginn – two of the world's most technically gifted rowers. And there's potentially another mouth-watering Anglo-Aussie contest in the doubles. Scott Brennan has returned after a two-year break to partner David Crawshay. The two Australians won an imperious gold in Beijing, ahead of Britain's Matt Wells. Now the Beijing doubles bronze medallist will be itching for revenge, with Marcus Bateman who will want to lay last year's Henley defeat at the hands of France to rest.

The Grand promises top-quality racing too. Although this time – if their website is to be believed – the German world champions may come in-between the British-Australian rivalry. Last year, the British eight were caught napping by New Zealand in Saturday's semi-finals and then lost to the Australians in Lucerne. But in 2011, Greg Searle's crew already look to have built on their 2010 speed.

But the women's eights may not have the same strength. Unfortunately – and almost unbelievably – there's no Australian women's eight travelling to Europe. But at least the Aussie women will have a fast quadruple to give the British world champions a stern test. And after her magical world championship win, Sweden's Frida

Svensson must have thought Princess Royal Challenge Cup. The 'word' has been around there will be a strong Australian events too. Seeking U23 honours joined Thames RC back in May row at Henley. British coach whose Eton College crew won Elizabeth last year, is now coach University and also expected to challenge though. The membership clubs, doesn't always fit easy qualification rules. So the quality their crews should sit at the club events, like the Thames punch above their weight in Visitors' Cups is an important

And the coaches of key British some important calls too. Phillips he is an Aussie – coached the four that lost the Wyfolds to last year. If entered in 2011, neutrals' sentimental favouritism also have a fast four in preparation

The Thames Cup – Aussie – could be a fight between British coach Tony Larkman's Thames the pick of the bunch. Molesey Lewis, has yet to decide whether lie. But a Britannia four's entry the club that last won this event

At the top-end, Leander looks to beat in the quadruple scull. Plate eight will presumably lose some of their US college rowers Holmes, return. They are proud British crew with a realistic chance Harvard's all-conquering 2008 back-to-back wins. American challenge British hopes of a win, though both Eton and A know that the domestic competition tough enough anyway.



Henley 2009



Spectators in the Stewards' Enclosure

PHOTO: JOHN BATTY



The umpire's launch

Despite taking its place among the aristocracy of English summer sporting occasions, Henley Royal Regatta is one of the very few events where anyone – irrespective of ticket or tie – can watch top athletes in world class competition for free.

"I would definitely say it is one of the best regattas in the world to watch world class athletes up close," says James Foad, who hopes to be racing in the Great Britain men's eight again this year. "You can see them up close for free at any point in the race from the start until about 500 metres to go where the Stewards' Enclosures begin."

For those in the know, and those who make it past the beer tents, the start is often the best place to watch. It's here on the bank, just past Temple Island, that you can often get the most revealing insights into the races, the crews and the individuals: the final drills, the little rituals and the intense calm, all before the explosion off the start and the blade-to-blade action. With the course running for more than 2100m, the opening stretch is the only guaranteed 'side-by-side'

racing, especially on the first few days, as crews vie for the crucial psychological edge.

As ever there is free access to the bank side at the start for the fans that make it this far up the river. This year there will also be the Mosimann Start Enclosure, which will be free to enter and contain a grandstand as well as featuring live results.

"I particularly like watching from the start where you are within ten feet of some of the best crews

“ANYONE CAN ENJOY THE RACING AT HENLEY”

in the world, going off at a very hard start," says Ted Bates, Honorary Secretary of Molesey, who rowed in his student days and has returned to Henley as a fan for every year since, bar the ten years when he was in Canada.

While the Regatta and Stewards' Enclosures offer pay-per-view access to the final stages of the racing, the stretch further up the river, where the

congestion thins out and the space opens up, is undoubtedly best suited for those wanting to support and pitch camp for lunch. Why retreat to the car-parks and congestion when you can lie out on the bank, in front of the action?

"Anyone can enjoy the racing at Henley," says Foad. "You could pack up a picnic, grab a rug and sit anywhere along the bank from the start up to the Enclosures, which is about 1600 metres of the course."

Around here there are also some of the best drinking holes. The Barn Bar is always a favourite among the younger crowds, with a great atmosphere and relaxed vibe in contrast to some of the more formal bars and Enclosures. Entry is free during the week with fees only being charged on

Friday and Saturday nights. Outfit-wise, anything goes, whether it is shirt and tie or the shorts and T-shirt that are more natural on a hot summer day.

This year there is car parking at Remenham Meadows, right next to the bank, for £35 along with the multitude of car-parks on Remenham Hillside. But if you're prepared for a short walk, there is often cheaper parking on the other side

of the river on the Fair Mile or at Henley Rugby Club. The canniest visitors come by train, safe in the knowledge that the slightly longer walk will be rewarded with a few relaxing drinks at the destination.

But where to stay? For those on a tight budget, the best option of all is surely camping. There are three campsites in total with two on the Remenham Hillside – Glebe and Hillside – and one on the opposite bank, run by Swiss International Farm. They offer a range of options from pitching up and camping to superior pitches, plus all the latest facilities at a range of prices from £10 per night for adults (rising towards the end of the week).

"If you're considering a few days of racing or the whole event then camping at Remenham Farm is great," says Foad. "This way you can enjoy the racing during the day and, when the racing has finished, you can also enjoy the many bars set up along the bank into the night."

Find out more about this year's Henley Royal Regatta at www.hrr.co.uk



Who will beat the results board in 2011?