

Extract from a reply to Lord Brabazon of Tara [an aviation pioneer and former Minister] who had written to enquire about the 3rd Lent Boat's performance.

From: The Captain
Fitzwilliam House Boat Club
10 May 1962

Dear Lord Brabazon,

We were all delighted to receive your letter today and think it quite splendid. I was flattered to hear that our 3rd Eight's efforts were noticed and are still being talked about. As we are trying to make ourselves a rowing college and with high ambitions are determined to compete at Henley for the first time, this is valuable publicity indeed. I will gladly enlighten you to the best of my ability about the quite incredible performance of our 3rd boat in the Lents, and the mechanics behind it. My apologies in advance if I fail to explain it well or insult your knowledge of rowing by making the assumption that I write to one who knows little of bumping races.

The 3rd boat was in the fifth division with a start position near the Guns. By the Ditch, Corpus 3, Queens 5 and Billy were equally spaced a mere canvas apart. Fortunately - as it turned out - Queens 5 caught Corpus on the corner just before we caught them. As both boats involved in a bump immediately stop rowing, there was some chaos in getting past. Also it is quite a disappointment to see one's prey in the bank. However, the crew kept going well and coming out of 1st Post Corner, Kings 3 were just entering Grassy corner 100 yds ahead. They made up this distance remarkably quickly, bumping just round Dittons corner. This was an Overbump, a not uncommon occurrence and remarkable only for the ease with which it was made.

It made the Crew into the Sandwich boat, which has to row twice, first at the head of its own division and then again 3/4 hrs later at the bottom of the next division. Hence, rather apprehensively they turned round and rowed back to the start with a sprig of greenery in the bows showing they had made a bump.

It was jokingly mentioned that if Jesus 5 in front of them and known to be fast, did bump early another Overbump would be made. The secret fear however was that they would fail to bump and would have to row over the full course which would also mean rowing over twice on the morrow, still as sandwich boat.

I was therefore horrified to see Jesus 5 make a very quick bump by the Little Bridge and the Crew must have been even more worried. Then Selwyn 3 caught Christs 4 by the Guns and Trinity Hall 4 caught Magdalene 3 by the Ditch. There was now clear river ahead for 300yds, the nearest crew - LMBC6, 7 places higher, just disappearing in the distance round 1st Post. Even the most optimistic stopped hoping for a bump and the crew settled to row over. However the next time we saw LMBC they were still in the Gut, definitely nearer and the Crew started to take it seriously. We don't know if LMBC took the challenge seriously at this stage.

Rounding Ditton corner the crews were 150 yard apart and we could see how fast our boat was closing, still rowing well. The umpire cycled back, decided we might make it and looked up his book of rules. By the Glasshouses things were getting very tense. Two lengths separated the crews, excitement was very high, a huge crowd was running after the crews and both boats were racing hard for the finish at Morley's Holt. I particularly remember the Umpire saying "I'll have to allow it, I'll have to allow it".

As you know they made it - just. It was never publicised that this bump - a treble Overbump was made just 50 yards from the finish, very dramatic and a most exciting finish. Great jubilation on the bank as a treble is extremely rare, having occurred only once or twice in the history of bumping races. Combined with the overbump made in the fifth division the crew went up 10 places in one day; they went on to make a further 3 on following days.

In the House, champagne was served in Hall and the 1st eight took the 3rd boat to dinner. As all the crew are rowing again this term we hope to have equal success in the Mays. Indeed we hope that all our boats will continue winning their oars with the monotonous regularity that they have in the past.

In all fairness and the crew themselves are the first to point it out, it must be said that such a feat requires the favourable combination of many factors. It is no mean achievement to be 330 yds faster over 1.5 miles - 1 minute in 10 - than a crew about a whole division above you - but it requires much luck to demonstrate it. If Queens 5 had been just a shade slower we would have bumped them before they got Corpus and made a 'mere' 4 bumps. However it is these occurrences and possibilities that give Bumps their charm.

[Letter finishes with an invitation to the Bumps supper - elegantly declined! - and thanks for the interest.]

David Knowles
Captain

[Transcribed in 2020 from the handwritten draft]