

The Boat Race

One yearly event which is well known in the south of England is the Oxford and Cambridge boat race. The annual boat race takes place at the end of March on a wide bendy stretch of the River Thames in London. It has been held nearly every year since 1856, although the first race took place in 1829, which makes it more than one hundred and fifty years old.

In this race, students from Britain's two most famous universities compete with each other by rowing long, narrow boats. Each boat is powered by eight men, who are steered by one man sitting at the back of the boat. This man is called the cox and he is usually very small so the boat can go faster. Oxford supporters wear dark blue ribbons; Cambridge supporters light blue. These are the university colours and the colours the teams wear when they row. The race is a very popular event, and both crews are supported by an equally large number of people.

The race is a rather long one, a little under four and a quarter miles, about six and three-quarter kilometres. In March it is often cold and rains a lot and because the river is wide it can be quite a rough ride. It is all over in about eighteen minutes. In that time, television camera crews, newspaper cameramen, radio reporters, sports writers and a host of ordinary spectators give their full attention to the two boats flashing through the water. Many watch it on television but lots of people go to the river to see the race. Most of the spectators are students from Cambridge or Oxford or maybe they used to be students but now work in the city. When it is all over, the cox of the winning boat is lifted in the arms of the eight-man crew and thrown into the water. At that time of year the water is very cold but the cox doesn't care because he is so happy his team have won the race!

One particular race has been given permanent remembrance at Oxford. It is the race of 1843 when Oxford rowed with only seven men-and won. But to the men who row, every race is important, and to be chosen to row for the university – to get a “rowing blue” – is the greatest honour an Oxford or Cambridge man can have.

So far Cambridge have won the most races with 79 wins, whilst Oxford only have 75. There was once a dead heat where both teams finished at exactly the same time.