

Road Testing the Rowperfect

by David Cameron

I've often heard the saying "erg's don't float". This is usually said by people who have just finished a 2000m test having not done so well. Whilst this machine still doesn't float, the makers believe that no matter what your level of expertise in rowing, the Rowperfect should help your on-water performance. I thought I'd give it a go.

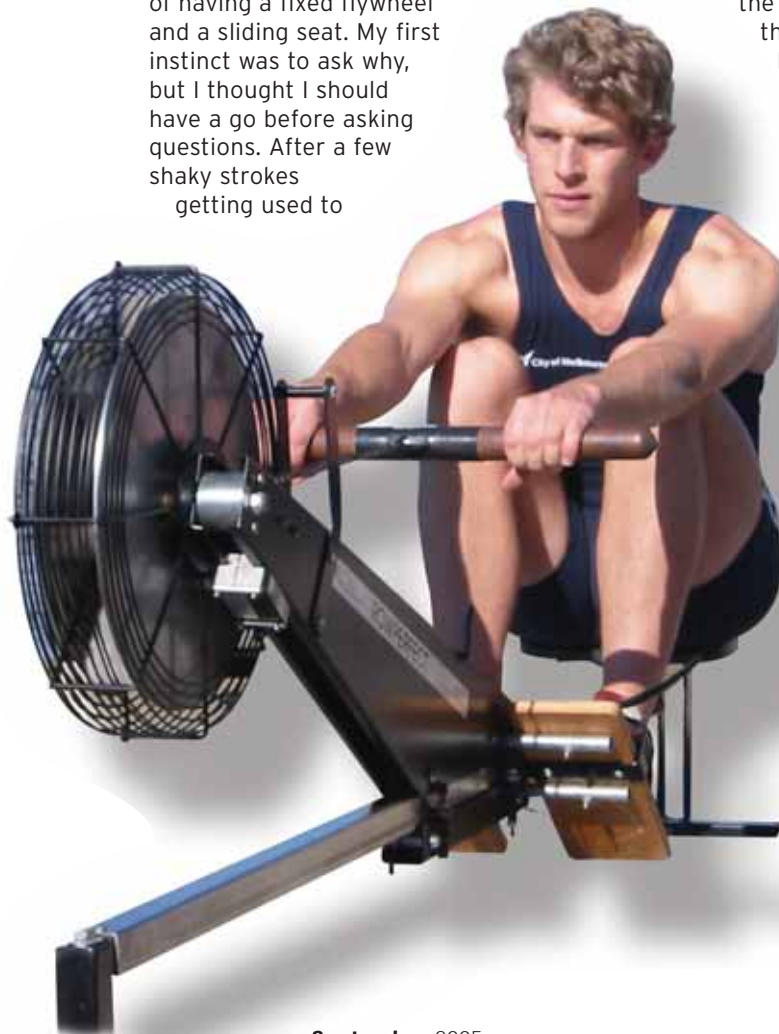
I met with Mark Campbell, the Australian Distributor for Rowperfect, at his office near Freshwater Beach to test drive the Rowperfect. Having spent many years using a Concept machine, I'd never tried a Rowperfect always deciding to put it off until "later". I have used just about every type of rowing machine that ever existed, from the Repco to the Jessing, the more common Concept II, and I'd say ninety percent of the many variations available. Having the opportunity to test yet another machine I thought it would be a simple formality, have a few strokes and compare it to the machines I've used most frequently, not really expecting anything terribly different from any of the others.

The Rowperfect is just that, different in one simple but unique way. A specially weighted flywheel slides along the same track as the seat instead of having a fixed flywheel and a sliding seat. My first instinct was to ask why, but I thought I should have a go before asking questions. After a few shaky strokes getting used to

the very different feeling, it quickly became clear that this was a rowing machine with a very big difference. It was a lot livelier. Some people say it's closer to the feeling in a boat. Close, but I don't think anything can replace actually being on the water. That said, if you need to row indoors, this machine goes close to the feeling of the real weight in an oar handle, and doesn't feel like it's about to rip your back apart.

A significant amount of research has gone into recreating the sliding flywheel, and some basic, yet complex physics has been applied to accurately recreate the feeling of a boat on the water. I won't go into too much detail with the physics only to say that in rowing it's actually the boat that moves back and forwards the most each stroke (relative to the water), and on this machine it's the flywheel that moves the most each stroke (relative to the ground). The aim of the Rowperfect is for the net effect of flywheel and bodyweight to remain stationary during each stroke, and for most of the energy to be transferred into spinning the flywheel. In a fixed flywheel, a lot of energy is wasted in simply moving the body backwards and forwards. At first the physics seems quite complex, but in fact it is very simple, but I won't go into it in any more depth than this - if you want to know more, speak to Mark.

One of the drawbacks of a sliding flywheel is one of the features of the machine itself. The sliding flywheel concept takes some understanding of some basic rowing concepts. If you are someone who misses water at the catch, or rushes into front



David Crawshay, Current Australian Champion in the Single Scull as well as the Representative at this year's World Championships in the Single Scull



Never too young to row



Mark & Gillian on Rowperfect at Wallabies Camp Gym in Coffs Harbour

stops, this machine will give you immediate feedback and will probably feel like riding a bike with a square wheel. At first those people complain that "this machine has a problem" and walk away hating it. If you rush into front stops your seat will move too far forward and the flywheel will slam into

the end of the slide when you take up the slack and become a stationary flywheel, and you'll probably hit the other end of the slide at the finish. It's not a good feeling. This "problem" however is completely due to the rower and not the machine. Yes, it was hard for me to face up to that at the

beginning too, but when I started rowing more like I do in the boat and less like I do on a "normal" ergo, the better it was. Row well and it's easy to handle, start losing your technique and you'll know about it. So in effect, it's a great tool for practising boat skills, but frustrating at first.

It's hard to rate a machine out of 10, so I used a few measures to come up with an overall score.		
FUNCTIONALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This rowing machine most accurately recreates the handle weight of a boat. Points off, simply for being a rowing machine - never liked any of them. Rowers belong on the water, not indoors. 	7
EASE FOR BEGINNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you don't row smoothly, the Rowperfect will be frustrating at first, but persistence will pay off. 	4
IMPROVEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After the initial frustration, the Rowperfect should help beginners to improve their rowing. You just can't get away with rough rowing, and beginners will quickly "get it". 	9
ELITE ROWERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elite rowers will easily adapt, and constant mechanical feedback will stop rowers from getting lazy and falling into bad "machine habits" that eventually work their way into the boat. Points off because again - elite rowers should be on the water training, not inside. 	9
WORKOUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A good cardiovascular workout without the pressure on the lower back. Points off because the machine still wouldn't actually do the workout for me. Guess I'll have to wait for someone to invent that one. 	9
DIGITAL FEEDBACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No readout as standard, but come with an optional (very impressive) PC-based software readout: 	6
AESTHETICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thing looks quite ugly. Let's face it. Nobody likes to admit it, but humans love smooth shiny things. This one looks like it should be towed behind a tractor. It shouldn't really matter, but somehow it does. 	3
FITTINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The model I rowed had pretty basic foot stretchers and handle, but really, as above, shouldn't really matter, but probably does for some people. 	5
Overall score		6.5

Even though this is a simple idea in a rowing machine, the Rowperfect still doesn't float, but it is an improvement on the theme, and anyone looking for a training advantage would be well advised to use a Rowperfect. After all,

Gold medals don't float either! If you're not sure about the Rowperfect, I would suggest you spend 15 minutes on the machine, and then jump off and get straight on a fixed flywheel machine. I never thought I'd say it, but I don't think

you'll be on the fixed flywheel machine for long. While I'd always used a fixed wheel machine, and said I'd give the Rowperfect a go later on, having had a go, I now wished I had tried the machine long ago instead of putting it off 🙄