

## OF OARS AND OARSMEN

By Kendall Pearson

Dorymen seem to be looked upon with a combination of respect and cautious curiosity. Who are these guys that take these specially designed row boats through the surfline and back? Oftentimes the boat, the equipment, or even the oarsmen don't even return to shore in one piece. These are the guys who can be overheard telling stories that sound like: "You should have seen it. We were going out on our second lap when an eight foot set came in. We made the first wave but the second one caught us inside. The boat backslid down the face and planted the transom. The next thing I knew, the whole boat was standing on its tail and my partner was hanging on to the bow twenty feet in the air. I hope somebody got a picture." Spectators at these types of events usually have one of two reactions. Either, "Those guys are animals!" or "Those guys are insane!"

It takes hard training and years of experience to be successful in dory racing. One other thing that dorymen have in common is the need to maintain and repair equipment. This past summer I found out how really critical this need could be. After a several year hiatus, my partner and I decided to row the PLSA circuit here in Southern California. We had no delusions of grandeur and embarked upon the season with three basic goals: To finish every race, to not get injured too badly, and not to break the boat. Being neither "insane" or "animals," we went through the season finishing races in the second half of the pack. The week before regionals we were out riding some three foot waves when we flipped the boat and broke an oar. Our oars were purchased from a man who could be called the father of modern dory oar design, Steve Saylor. Steve handcrafted every oar blade and mated it with a fiberglass shaft that was like a pole vault pole. This produced an oar that was strong and lightweight. This style of oar became the standard for successful competitors. When I contacted Steve for a replacement set, I found out that he had decided to retire from making oars. After some panicked searching, I finally located an old Saylor's shaft in the gold room of a lifeguard station. With some minor modification, we were able to compete at the regionals.

This experience has basically brought me to the point where I am now. With the encouragement of my father and some of the other competitors that I met at the nationals in Santa Cruz, I have begun making oars specialized for lifeguard dories. With the assistance of Paul Van Wig, a professional pattern maker and long time seasonal lifeguard, a blade has been designed to combine strength and efficiency. This will be placed in a fiberglass shaft and topped off with a wooden handle, either round or pistol-grip style. My father, Al, works in the aerospace industry, and is presently looking at design options for the collars and buttons. All in all, I expect to be in production by early April, just in time for those spring workouts. I don't think that I will become the Donald Trump of the oar industry nor do I think I will ever be one of those animals of dorymen legend. I do believe that I can contribute to the sport by providing quality oars for competitors, whether world class or first timers. Maybe this could generate a new round of stories, "So there we were on this ten footday.."