

# THANK-YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND



Rowers have a special relationship with the rowing machine. It is there for you no matter what. It doesn't mind being second best to the boat and it always tells you the truth. It's also one of the top fitness tools in the world. **Nick Hartland** asks rowers and non-rowers what the rowing machine means to them...



For Kevin Spacey's conniving character in American drama House of Cards, the rowing machine is the joker in the pack for burning off his frustrations. For others, it's all about trumping the opposition in brutal indoor combat, or the means to acing a sporting dream, on the water or on the land.

Still more people use one of the world's most popular exercise machines to simply deal themselves the winning hand of a healthier and fitter life, with many even tweeting and blogging about their endeavours.

Ahead of 10 December's British Rowing Indoor Championships (BRIC) at the Lee Valley VeloPark, we ask rowing machine users from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines about their sessions on the indoor rower... →

## LORD THOMAS OF GRESFORD

*Parliamentary Rowing co-chairman, 79, Wrexham*



The rowing machine's a great way to keep healthy and active. I use it to train for the Parliamentary Boat Race, as do many colleagues. And whilst there's nothing better than getting out in a boat, I enjoy rowing on a machine and all the health benefits exercise brings, especially during the winter.

It's an excellent introduction for new rowers, and I hope more people will get onto a rowing machine, get active and enjoy recreational and competitive sport."

### FAVOURITE SONG: STRAUSS'S BLUE DANUBE

"To make the boat sing and to get a proper one-two-three swing... I've had my Rex RC crewmates rowing to it – it's better than a military two-step!"

## DR CAMERON NICHOL

*Olympic rower, coach and RowingWOD founder, 29, London*



It's a valuable tool that teaches so much. But as a rowing community, we need to change the language and narrative around it if we're to make it accessible for everyone. It's a rowing machine, not ergo. It builds rhythm, fitness and health and isn't just about pain and suffering.

I believe every human is an athlete, and every athlete should row. It's a valuable movement that can be used to forge fitness, build strength and make people healthier. From aspiring pro athlete to stay-at-home mum, anyone can use it.

In the CrossFit community, it's a machine everyone loves to hate as it tests not only your physical fitness, but what's between your ears too."

### FAVOURITE SONG: N/A

"As Jürgen Grobler would say: 'The music of the wheel.'"

## NICOLA MURDOCH

*Champion gig and indoor rower, 35, Bristol Gig Club*



The rower's a Marmite thing for me, I love and loathe it. You dread the tests, but there's nothing like posting a personal best.

Although gig rowing's fixed seat, I use the sliding seat. And sometimes you can't walk afterwards, but it's by far the best training we do on land.

You can't hide because the screen tells you the



PHOTO: SIMON WAY

truth. It's a genuine test of your ability and courage. The third quarter of a 2km's the worst. It's a mental battle, but you just have to get through it and ignore that little voice saying 'Stop!'

It bonds the crew as everyone can see your score, and you have to give it everything. And if you can put yourself in that place where you just want to stop but keep pulling, you know you've got it in you on the water."

### FAVOURITE SONG: THROUGH THE LOOP – PENDULUM

"It's got a great big beat, with a line about 'keep on rowing!'"

## GARATH ARCHER

*Ex-England rugby international and British indoor rowing champion, 41, Durham*



I began rowing after finishing my rugby career and still train on the indoor rower, though I don't have time for racing now with four kids.

Second row is 'the engine room' on the rugby pitch, and I found a similar place on the ergo. There's pain and discomfort and, along with the relentless back-breaking yakka, little glory – just an occasional nod of recognition from your teammate or coach.

But I loved it, as I learned to thrive where others couldn't hack it. It wasn't glamorous or sexy, but it was my backyard: 'Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough!'"

### FAVOURITE SONG: I'M ON FIRE – KASABIAN

"The tempo's just right for racing... With a start, a long strong middle, and just when you think it's over, a powerful finish!"

**PIETER VODDEN***Fitness trainer to the stars, London*

For movie prep we usually need results quickly with very low risk – and the Concept2 rower is invaluable. From Kevin Vance, Nate Brown and Tyler Grey, the Navy SEALs on Suicide Squad, to Margot Robbie, Cara Delevingne and Scott Eastwood, the Amazons on Wonder Woman, all the actors learned, suffered and got great results.

If you're building superheroes, you need to give them that feeling of strength, fortitude, determination and resolve. And the rower is crucial, whether working with individuals on intervals for fat loss or bigger groups in relays to increase the bonds within the group dynamic. It's the cornerstone of our cardiovascular work, and a safe means to create the intensity, resolve and lean body composition these projects demand."

**FAVOURITE SONG: BORN TO RUN – BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

**JON GOODALL***Team Mad indoor record holder and Wipeout TV show winner, 41, Cardiff*

I started using the indoor rower to get fit to trial for TV's Gladiators, but got on and won Wipeout instead.

I'm on my machine most days, and trained for the Snowdonia Marathon recently on it. It never lies... Sometimes you're looking at the dial going 'come on', but you come back for more and it lifts your game.

I've never found anything that hurts as much, but it makes you mentally tougher for other sports... It's a massive confidence booster and makes you realise you can do much more.

I love indoor racing, it's a red-line test of your ability and courage, there's just nowhere to hide. I've been part of three world records with Team Mad, and hopefully we'll be back to defend our BRIC title."

**FAVOURITE SONG: FIRESTARTER – THE PRODIGY**

**PAUL WINTON***Royal Navy Indoor Rowing team, 60, Portsmouth*

The rower's highly regarded in the navy, with rowing machines on every ship and submarine... It's a great way to prepare for sailors' annual fitness tests.

It's great aerobically and a whole body workout. And it's inclusive: anyone can do it... It's just you, the machine and the monitor. And it lets you know the minute you start easing up, it never gives up on you.

Anyone who claims they've never had a potential handle-down moment would be lying. If you haven't had demons two-thirds through a race 10k, you're not rowing hard enough!

But it's low impact injury-wise and great for older athletes with wear and tear. I've had two hip replacements, but it lets me be competitive. And there's nothing more rewarding than doing a personal best and hitting targets – that's when it grabs you!"

**FAVOURITE SONG: PARADISE CITY – GUNS AND ROSES**

**WESTON TOWLER***BRIC medallist, 87, Seaford*

I started indoor rowing at the leisure centre after retiring, and I've never looked back. I enjoy doing an hour three times a week, and I've just done one – steady state and 4 x 500m.

It works for me more than other machines. It makes me puff, gets me hot and I feel a lot better for it. It works every part of my body and keeps me active. I think it helps keep me young, as it improves my suppleness and gives me energy. At last year's BRIC I was pipped by seconds, but I enjoyed racing at the Olympic velodrome, and hope to be back."

**FAVOURITE SONG: N/A**

"I just listen to the machine, I'm afraid!"



“ IT'S THERE FOR YOU  
WHEN IT'S DARK,  
WHEN IT'S BLOWING A GALE  
AND WHEN YOU NEED TO  
TEST YOURSELF.  
AND LIKE A TRUE FRIEND  
IT ONLY ASKS YOU TO BE  
THE BEST YOU CAN ”

**JO MOSELEY**

*Mum-of-two, fitness blogger and @OneHappyRower tweeter, 51, Skipton*



I'll never turn my back on the rowing machine. It's changed my life and I'll always love it.

I started rowing because I couldn't sleep – and after two weeks, I was sleeping. And when my mum died, rowing helped me through.

Indoor rowing became my life. I fell in love with it, how it made me feel – exhausted, but energised.

So I started tweeting, and got so much help from the rowing community... Like rating 33's too high! Helen Glover even retweeted – amazing!

I did a million metres for Macmillan Nurses, a marathon for my 50th birthday, and started a fitness blog, [healthyhappy50.com](http://healthyhappy50.com), for older women.

Friends say my body shape has changed, my shoulders are back, my head's up and there's a glow in my face... It's given me so much confidence."

**FAVOURITE SONGS: TRY – DOLLY PARTON & LET IT GO – FROZEN**

**SEAN GRAY**

*Firefighter, 45, Winchester*



The rower keeps me fit for work and I've just done two back-to-back half marathons in full firefighting gear weighing 35kg to raise £1,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity.

Firefighters have to be ready to wear heavy gear,

Below: Fireman Sean Gray on his rowing machine



breathing apparatus, and to carry hoses, equipment, even people, and the rower helps prepare for this.

For the charity row, the kit felt even heavier when I started sweating and my visor steamed up, but I wanted a challenge. It took over four hours, and I could hardly walk the next day, but I was really proud.

The station has machines, and I've got my own at home, and it's a full-on workout doing 10-15k. I use the LiveRowing app, and am trying to get other firefighters racing for fun."

**FAVOURITE SONG: SURRENDER – ELO**

**WALLACE BRUCE**

*Oil rig medical services manager, 35, Aberdeen*



Exercise is really important offshore, when you're away for long periods, and the rower's great for fitness and well-being. Rowing on the rigs makes you feel better and you can transport yourself somewhere else.

Our cardiovascular health initiative included rowing, where each installation competed among themselves and against other rigs, like a mini-Olympics, with medals for the top rowers and a trophy for best overall. It raised morale and built camaraderie.

Before a 12-hour shift, a session wakes up your body, and makes you more alert – the guys were getting up early to try and post a faster time. It's not just a stamina workout, it's working the big muscles, too, and it's user friendly... You can set the parameters of what you want to do."

**FAVOURITE SONG: SWEET NOTHING – CALVIN HARRIS**

**SARAH LEWIS**

*British Masters medallist, 34, Greenbank Falmouth RC*



The rowing machine's a loyal friend – it's there for you no matter what, it doesn't mind being second best to the boat and always tells you the truth. It won't let you make excuses, as you can't blame the wind, the waves or your rig. It helps improve your body and mind, and doesn't care how many times you sweat over it or swear at it.

It's there for you when it's dark, when it's blowing a gale and when you need to test yourself. And like a true friend it only asks you to be the best you can."

**FAVOURITE SONG: THE OBVIOUS CHILD – PAUL SIMON**

# “ THE LIKES OF OLYMPIC FINN CHAMPION GILES SCOTT EMBRACE IT. THEY LIKE TO DO HIGH INTENSITY BURSTS AND LONGER SESSIONS ”

## MARK TELFORD

Wheelchair athlete, 37, North Lanarkshire



I've just won the Great North Run in a personal best and it's all down to the rowing machine. Scottish Rowing's John Blair put me on it, and it's made an amazing difference. I should be fading away at 37, but I feel like a new athlete, going faster than ever.

It's the only exercise where I've been able to push myself close to passing out. I've never been able to push myself that hard. And now I can hurt myself more on the road.

I love jumping on it, hurting on it. Intervals are brutal, but it really rewards you. Nothing surprises me now thanks to the rower, and I'm hoping it will help me represent Scotland in the 2018 Commonwealth Games.”

**FAVOURITE SONG: DREAMY DAYS – ROOTS MANUVA**

## JASON ALLEN

World Masters judo medallist and Concept2 master coach, Bideford



It's a brilliant bit of kit. I've had an indoor rower for ages, and coach rugby players, rowers and others on it. It's the best cardiovascular workout – you can't beat it, nothing comes close.

It takes you to places where you don't want to go – the splits don't lie – and it makes you mentally tough.

I can do short burst pieces on it replicating the effort of judo without having the contact. And when you've got to do 12 x 500m with a minute's rest, there's nowhere to hide.”

**FAVOURITE SONG: GOD SAVE THE QUEEN – SEX PISTOLS**

## ALEX GREGORY

Double Olympic rowing champion, 32, Leander Club



The rowing machine – there's nothing quite like it. With my hand on my heart, I don't think there's another fitness tool that is so complete.

From the toes up, it works every part of you – your muscles, your lungs and your mind. Stepping off the rowing machine, once you get your breath back, satisfaction is guaranteed!

In a year we might row nearly 10,000km. It's the amalgamation of sessions day after day, week after week that's the tough bit. But working towards that single big goal keeps that consistency and momentum. And once the goal's achieved, every bit of excruciating pain, monotony and struggle is worth it!”

**FAVOURITE SONG: HEY BROTHER – AVICII**

## MATHILDA HODGKINS-BYRNE

World U23 sculling champion, 21, Reading RC



The rowing machine tests you to your max and at times pushes you down a hole so deep you question whether you'll ever get out.

After my first 12k back training after three weeks off, I can firmly say there's no hiding on it. Time off had taken its toll! But you know that when you finally sit on the start line you'll be the fittest you can be because of it, and you know just how tough your crewmates are, because you've all survived the winter sessions. They are going to be what gets you down the track.”

**FAVOURITE SONG: PEANUT BUTTER JELLY – GALANTIS**

## SWYN WILLIAMS

Coastal rower, 18, Llansteffan



We race for over 20 minutes and the tide means we can't always row, so the rowing machine's vital. Myself and my Yole partner Charlie Heath have been doing 5km pieces together, which helps our rhythm and spurs us on when our lungs are hanging out of our throats.

I guess we love to loathe the rower... You collapse at the end and ask 'why are we doing this?' because it's so mentally tough but it really boosts your stamina and resolve. When you get a good time, you know you're making progress.”

**FAVOURITE SONG: HYSTERIA – MUSE** →

**LAURA TRY**

Ocean rower, 34, Brentwood – [www.ltfactor.co.uk](http://www.ltfactor.co.uk)



I'm entering the 2017 round Britain 'Great British Row' and the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, so I'm on the rowing machine to get the metres in.

It's an essential part of my life, getting me closer to achieving my dream. I've always been up for the challenge, so when some athletes at an obstacle race asked me to row the Atlantic, I bought a rower.

I love getting fitter, improving my technique, strength, endurance, efficiency and resolve, but it's painful.

But if I can't do two hours on the rower, how can I do 12 hours a day at sea? So I'll do long rows when friends run a marathon, and think of matching them."

**FAVOURITE SONG: ARCHANGEL – THOMAS BERGERSEN**

**TIM JONES**

British Sailing physiologist, 34, Portland



It's a whole-body workout, which suits sailing as a combination of arms and legs, and I practise what I preach and join in.

We test everyone's base fitness on them, so sailors like Ben Ainslie have used them.

It's probably the most specific form of exercise for the likes of the Finn class and windsurfing, which demand violent upper body movement, combined with lower body – like rowing one-armed with pushing simultaneously.

The likes of Olympic Finn champion Giles Scott embrace it. They like to do high intensity bursts and longer sessions.

In high winds, the cardiovascular stress can be high, so indoor rowers are good for that and for the endurance of racing day after day.

And it's low impact, injury-wise, and you can just load it into a car and take it to training camps."

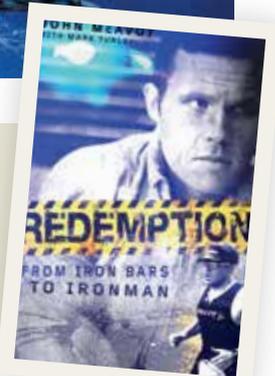
**FAVOURITE SONG: BANGARANG – SKRILLEX (FEAT. SIRAH)**



PHOTO: JOJO HARPER

**Win win win!**

John McAvoy's story 'Redemption: From Iron Bars to Iron Man' is out now, priced £16.99. We have two copies to give away, courtesy of Pitch Publishing. To be in to win, email [magazine@britishrowing.org](mailto:magazine@britishrowing.org) with 'Iron' as the subject line, by Friday 16 December. Editor's decision final.



Above: Redemption for John McAvoy

**JOHN MCAVOY**

Convicted robber turned world ergo record breaker, ironman athlete and personal trainer, 33, London



PHOTO: JOJO HARPER

The rowing machine saved my life... Redemption 100%. It's only a machine, but when I found it in jail, it gave me focus and drive. I'd row for two hours, transporting myself away.

I rowed millions of metres for charity, then a prison officer told me I was good and I began breaking records. It transformed my life and gave me belief I was good at something, that sport was positive.

I still do hour pieces. Ex-rowers in ironman have that strength and endurance, and lots of triathletes now use it. They can suffer more, because the rower gives you more bangs for your buck – six minutes hard is more painful than a nine-hour ironman! If I could only train on one thing ever again, it would be the rower."

**FAVOURITE SONG: THUNDERSTRUCK – AC/DC**

“ THE ROWING MACHINE SAVED MY LIFE... ”