MEAT AXE ROWING

9 BOAT DRILLS

MY FAVOURITE BOAT DRILLS.

Nine drills I'd do with any crew: why each one works, when to use it and how to run it.

These are my favourite drills in the boat. The build off the front is one to do every session. The rest you pull out when the crew needs them, so start with whatever isn't working.

WHICH DRILL FIXES WHAT

If your crew is struggling with	Reach for
Balance	Gunnel taps, the pauses and the delayed feather
Catch timing	The build off the front and catch slaps
Rhythm	Low-pressure starts, eyes-closed rowing and full backs
Locking on together	Full backs

Balance is often just a timing issue, so if the boat won't sit, try the timing drills too.

01 THE BUILD OFF THE FRONT

WHY It's the key exercise for any boat and any rower who wants to get really skilful at the catch. It brings everyone together on catch timing and puts the emphasis on the catch.

WHEN At the start of every session, and again at a turnaround point, like halfway through.

HOW Full crew, all on the square blade. Start by bobbing at the catch, where the blade enters and exits together at the front stop. Then front quarter of the slide, front half of the slide, full legs, legs and body, and finally full strokes. Do about 10 strokes at each length until the boat's settled, then move on to the next.

> **bring everyone together on that catch timing and provide that emphasis on the catch**

02 CATCH SLAPS

WHY They build the decisiveness you need at the catch of a fast-moving boat, and show you how relaxed you can be while still being decisive.

WHEN When the crew is struggling with catch timing, and right before race-pace work.

HOW Roll up to the front with a feathered blade and slap it in as hard as you can, the whole crew together, for 10 or 15 strokes. Then go back to normal rowing.

> **That helps so much with that decisiveness that you need to get on the catch on such a fast moving boat.**

03 GUNNEL TAPS

WHY They exaggerate your clearance off the water, so your blades don't hit your own puddles, and everyone taps out to the same point.

WHEN When the crew is struggling for balance.

HOW A light tap of the handle on the gunnel at the square-off mark, as your hands clear your knees, all together. 10 strokes on, 10 strokes off, about 3 or 4 times through.

04 LEGS ONLY, THEN LEGS AND BODY

WHY You sit on each part of the stroke for a while before you put the whole thing back together.

WHEN Any time the crew needs to slow down and get the basics right.

HOW Body forward, in your catch position. Legs only: drive the legs down and complete the stroke. Then legs and body: bring the body in. Do 20 strokes legs only, 20 legs and body and 20 normal rowing, then go through it again. That's 120 strokes.

05 THE PAUSES

WHY A good timing drill. The whole crew finds the same point at the same time, which helps the balance too.

WHEN Coming into race season, and when the crew is struggling for balance.

HOW Four places to pause: at the finish with the blade dropped, finding that height together at the drop-out point; hands away; body over; and quarter slide. Pause at each point in one stroke, or take one at a time: 10 strokes pausing at one point, then normal rowing, then the next. Do them in a row or in a combination, depending on what the crew needs.

06 THE DELAYED FEATHER

WHY A very deliberate delayed feather helps with balance and with your extraction timing.

WHEN When the boat won't sit, or the crew is getting the blades out at different times.

HOW Pull the blade out square, then let it feather, then row normally. Make it very deliberate.

07 LOW-PRESSURE STARTS

WHY You find out how easy you can make the start feel. Often you'll build a surprising amount of speed when you think about it that way.

WHEN When the crew is struggling with rhythm.

HOW A full race start, 10 strokes, together but with no pressure. Your rate will be down because your pressure is down, and that's totally fine. Think about how easy you can make it feel.

08 EYES-CLOSED ROWING

WHY Another great one for rhythm.

WHEN When the crew is struggling with rhythm.

HOW Full crew, eyes closed, 20 strokes on and 20 strokes off. Your cox keeps their eyes open.

09 FULL BACKS

WHY Really good for rhythm, and for learning how to lock onto the water: all those muscles and that ligament chain.

WHEN When the crew is struggling with locking on together and with rhythm.

HOW Back the boat on the full slide. As you get to the front with your blades buried, let them grip at your catch position, then take a stroke. One stroke, over and over, to feel how much lock and leverage you can create.

YOUR CREW'S DRILL PLAN

Write down what you're fixing and what you tried. The drills that work for your crew become your warm-up.

Date	What we're fixing	Drills	How it felt

Send this to a Meataxe who needs to hear it.