

# Great Expectations Suberb Achievements

by B. Colvert

*A summer evening by the river, senior eights and sculls gliding past with a slight ripple in the wake, a rowing fraternity exchanging memories, men and women champions, past and present, gathering for the accolade to Caroline Ryan for her year's achievements. The Garda Rowing Club has witnessed many joyous occasions this too deserves to be put on the record as Commissioner Fachtna Murphy presented Caroline with a commemorative plaque on the 23rd July 2008.*

Club Captain, Brian Hoey rang the bell and gave the floor to A/Com. Dermot Jennings, Club President, to welcome the guests and to introduce Commissioner Fachtna Murphy. In his address he named many rowing achievers, club patrons and supporters amongst which I recognised Leo Larkin of Allied Irish Bank, Ned O'Dea (former President and now life member) and Pat O'Toole for many years the leader of Coiste Siamsa; as well as representatives of St Raphael's and St Paul's GCU's. He invited Commissioner Murphy to speak.

Garda Commissioner Fachtna Murphy praised Garda Caroline Ryan, Pearse Street Station, Dublin for her achievements in rowing at National, as well as International competition during the year. Speaking at the event, the Commissioner said *"I congratulate Caroline on creating rowing history by winning the Princess Royal Challenge Cup at Henley Royal Regatta on 6 July 2008 and in so doing became the first Irish Woman to win a trophy at Henley Royal Regatta and the first Irish person to win an open event there since the Garda coxed four, which included her father Willie and uncle Ted, won the Prince Phillip Cup in 1979. This*



Caroline Ryan receiving her plaque from Commissioner Murphy



Garda Commissioner Fachtna Murphy, Caroline Ryan & Mr Leo Larkin, Allied Irish Bank



Club Captain, Brian Hoey & Caroline Ryan with scull provided by AIB



Kenny McDonald, Rev. Fr. Denis Ryan (Caroline's uncle) & Orla Clark celebrating at the Garda Rowing Club

*is an outstanding achievement for Caroline and an honour for her and An Garda Síochána".*

In the course of his address he declared that *"winning at Henley was as good as winning an Olympic medal"* and he observed that he was *"pleased to know that you have begun your training for the London Olympics"*. He further commented on the tradition in the Ryan family for Olympic rowing and he related a humorous report in the 'Irish Press' written by noted athlete Noel Carroll who described spending some time training with Willie & Ted Ryan and Jim Muldoon at Ballinteer. After 45 minutes Noel decided it was time to take sit down and take it easy; he then realised that these tough men regarded the exercise as a warm up for the real training to follow.

Commissioner Murphy paid tribute to the sponsors who made a valuable contribution to the success of Garda Rowing Club; in particular he praised Allied Irish Bank, represented by Leo Larkin, which had donated the boat and blades in which Caroline had won gold at Henley.

Mr Murphy concluded by saying *"So Caroline, well done. I, as Commissioner, you as a member of An Garda Síochána; it is a great honour for me to be able to acknowledge your achievement; please come forward and permit me to make this presentation to you"*

The inscription on the award reads:

*To mark the occasion of Caroline Ryan's outstanding achievement in winning the Princess Royal Challenge Cup at the Henley Regatta 2008, from the President and Committee of the Garda Rowing Club.*  
(Irish bog oak and yew 5,000 years old.)

Caroline completed the rowing season at the National Championship Regatta in Cork (11/12 July 2008) by winning the Senior Sculling Championship title for the second time. Her previous win was in 2005. In the final, Caroline won in a time of 7min 40sec, over 26 seconds ahead of her nearest rival Virginia Hourihane from Skibbereen. In the Women's Senior Quad, Caroline joined up with Sheila Clavin, St Michael's R.C., Majella Bolger, Carlow and Virginia Hourihane, Skibbereen to win the title in 6mins 50 secs from a composite Old Collegians/UCD Crew (6.53.9). Queens/Belfast came third.

Caroline has had a very impressive year of competition. She started off the season by winning the Dublin Sculling Ladder on 13 October 07 in a time of 7min 17sec and in doing so finished in 8th position overall and became the first woman to finish in the top ten and also the first woman to finish within 47 seconds of the top man.

Caroline followed this performance by winning the Leinster 5Km Time Trial at Newry on 4 November 07 in a time of 20min 14 sec, which was 51 sec ahead of her nearest rival – Orla Duddy, Belfast. She also won the first 2Km National Time Trial in Cork 3 February 08. As the next National Time Trial was cancelled, Caroline next competed in the Tribesman Head of the River Race on 22 March 08, which she won in a time of 16min 32 sec.

As the International Rowing season approached, both Caroline and Sinead Jennings, a former World Champion in the lightweight single, were asked by the Irish National Squad to trial at an International Regatta in Piediluco, Italy for selection for the Olympics; they finished only 0.1 seconds apart, with Sinead taking Silver and Caroline Bronze, behind the Italian sculler G Bascelli, who won in a time of 8.22.00, sixteen seconds ahead of the Irish girls.

As the Irish girls were considered too far off the pace for Olympic selection in the single, they were asked to try the Double Scull and Caroline & Sinead trained for a week at a camp in Piediluco following the Regatta. National coach, John Holland was happy with how the girls were coming together in the double over the week and they were selected for the first World Cup Regatta at Munich in the heavy weight double scull event.

However, following a disappointing performance in the Double at Munich, both scullers were dropped from the Irish Olympic Team and not selected to compete at the Olympic qualifying Regatta in Poznan, Poland in June. Caroline then turned her attention to a Club Programme and entered Dublin Metropolitan Regatta, Amsterdam International Regatta, Henley Women's Regatta, Henley Royal Regatta and the Irish Championships.

At Dublin Metropolitan Regatta at Blessington on 31 May 08, Caroline won in convincing style and proved far too strong for the opposition at Blessington, winning the final by 34 seconds, in a very fast time of 7mins 39 secs.

At Amsterdam, Caroline had an excellent performance in qualifying direct for the semi-final by finishing second behind the World Silver Medallist Mirka Knapcova of the Czech Republic. In the semi-final, Caroline finished second behind Freda Svensson of Sweden in a personal best time of 7min 36sec and six seconds ahead of Sinead Jennings. In the final, Caroline had a disappointing performance and finished in 6th position.

Caroline's next test was Henley Women's Regatta, where she won the George Inns Cup comfortably beating Hayley Arthur, South Africa in the final by four lengths. Caroline was the only Irish winner at this Regatta.

In the Princess Royal Challenge Cup at Henley Royal Regatta, Caroline beat Fran Jacob (Glasgow) in the quarter-final and A Labots from Holland in the semi-final. The final was against Mathilde Pauls, a German-born member of the British Team. Caroline won by 3 ½ lengths in a time of 9min 18 seconds and became the first Irish woman to win a trophy at Henley Royal Regatta.

Club President, Assistant Commissioner Dermot Jennings said *"that it was a memorable occasion for him to be present in the Steward's Enclosure at Henley Royal Regatta to witness this great win for the Club and hear Caroline and Garda being cheered on by the crowd."*



Assistant Commissioner Dermot Jennings, Caroline Ryan with her father Chief Superintendent Willie Ryan. Q. Who looks after the 'shop' while the two stalwarts rejoice at the Club?



Have flashing blade will travel. Caroline Ryan exhorts all young Gardai to consider the potential for world travel



Club Captain Brian Hoey & Club President Dermot Jennings accept a gift of transport from Mark Barrett of ISUZU Ireland on behalf of Garda Rowing Club

Brian & Caroline shared some club lore with me. In seeking suitable talent the club has the assistance of Kenny McDonald who teaches in the P E Section of Garda College. Kenny seeks tall, strong and rangy bodies and puts them through their paces. Every three months Garda Rowing Club takes them to Dublin and offers them a chance to become future rowing champions. Kenny McDonald knows a rowing prospect when he sees one; this year he won with coxed and coxless fours with Shannon Galway Rowing Club, last year he won Senior 8 with Shannon St Michael's, back in 2000 he won Senior 8 with Garda Club. I'm told he has many other 'pots' in his cabinet.

My parting comment is to offer our young members of IPA the chance of a lifetime; join the Garda Rowing Club and participate in the social and sporting life. I visited there with my IPA colleague Eddie Nolan who has been a proud member for the past 37 years. Having met such pleasant company I understand the lure; I regret I am too broad of beam to scull but I can admire those who do.

