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## Racing as a Female: What to expect

Article by Astrid Wheatcroft

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If you are female, new to adventure racing or unsure what to expect from your first race, read on...

This article has been written to give you an insight into what to expect from the sport and also to give you some tips on how to enjoy your first race.



You can obviously expect lots of mountain biking, lots of trail running and some kayaking and you may also get the chance to try new activities for you like rafting and rope work. You will definitely get dirty, wet and often very tired both physically and mentally and the races last from a few hours to many days so you can select the one that you think will suit you best. The races are challenging but the biggest tip of all is to just bite the bullet and give it a go. You don't need to be superhuman to get through a weekend and have a lot of fun along the way.

As a female, it is likely that you will race within a team of men – the standard racing team for most events consisting of three men and one female (although in some races there are solo and pairs categories). In the UK there is one main all-female team (Buff Endure) racing against the mixed teams. This team was originally formed to develop the skill base of the elite females in the country – providing an opportunity for the girls to navigate, make decisions and practise towing etc away from the boys. However, it has quickly turned into a developmental squad of athletes running fun low-key training courses and opportunities throughout the country. (Get in touch with either [Anna](#) or [Fiona](#) if you would like their help when getting into the sport.)

In one of the first Ace races of 2005, the Buff Girlie team even 'incorporated' a solo female racing alone and slightly out of her depth into their team in the middle of the race. The slightly bemused young lady found herself firstly taken by the hand to make sure she kept up and then literally put on a tow rope alongside another member of the team. They insisted that it was normal and not a problem – and the only way for everyone to be able to stay together to continue working well together and as a result, she had a great weekend and learnt a lot.

If your team mates do offer to carry your pack or give a tow when running or on the bike, then take it with thanks. It will mean that your team is functioning well. Having a tow does not mean you are unfit – it's just a way of keeping the team moving at a constant pace. If they don't offer, then they are just likely to be fairly inexperienced, so be brave enough to suggest it or simply start to 'grab on'.

When you race within a mixed team, there is a tendency, especially in novice teams, for your team mates to assume that you are the weakest member of the team physically. This may actually be true, especially on shorter races, so go into your first few races with an open mind and no ego. In longer races, however, the girls tend to come into their own and you could very well find yourself carrying someone else's bag or even towing someone twice your weight. The key is to be prepared to either help or be helped at any time!

You may also find that the male members of a team make decisions without consulting the female, especially if you are slightly slower and arrive at the checkpoints a little behind them. If you are ok with this, then that is fine, but if you have an opinion or, for example, happen to be better at map reading than them, then make sure that your voice is heard.

The key to success when it comes to enjoying a race comes down to working well together and looking after each other as a team. It's also vital to ensure that you all have the same expectations before entering as a team so that no one is frustrated or disappointed. Above all, you can expect to have huge amounts of fun with other likeminded people and to find numerous training buddies through it who will be up for anything at weekends. The adventure racing community is very sociable and friendly with no trace of the elitism you find in some other sports. And within it, the concept of teamwork is light years beyond that in any other sport so no matter what race you choose you are likely to come out of it having had a very good time.

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