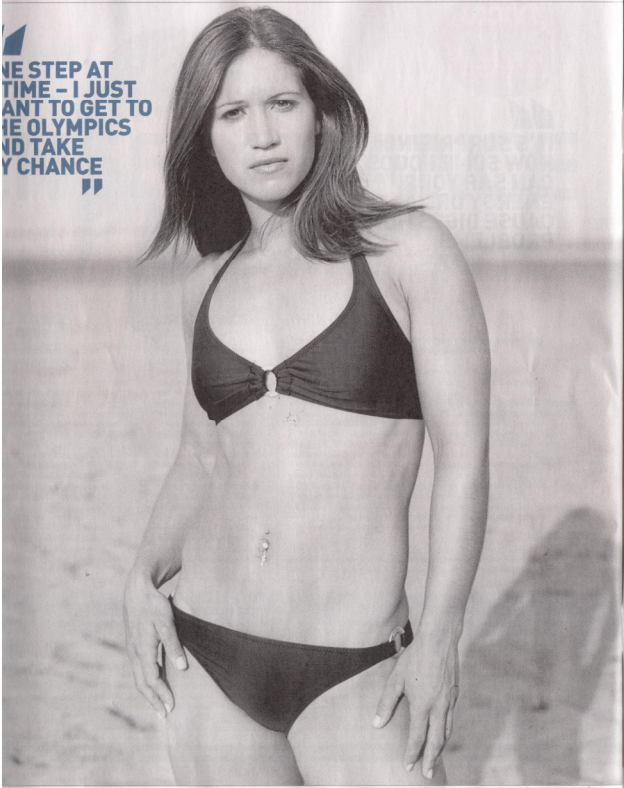


NE STEP AT  
TIME - I JUST  
WANT TO GET TO  
THE OLYMPICS  
AND TAKE  
MY CHANCE



# ANNA HEMMINGS BLAZING PADDLES

Long-distance canoeing isn't a sport for the faint-hearted, but in Anna Hemmings we have pretty much the best there is in the world. Roll on the Olympics then, eh?

## FAST FACTS

**ANNA HEMMINGS**  
**Born** December 19 1976  
**Birthplace** Surrey  
**Height** 5ft 7in  
**Sport** Marathon canoeing  
**Career highlights**  
**2007** Named BBC London Sports Personality of the Year after becoming K1 World Marathon Champion for the third consecutive year  
**2001** Became only the second athlete to win K1 and K2 classes at World Marathon Champs  
**1999** First British woman to take K1 World Marathon title

→ You probably haven't heard of Anna Hemmings. She is a multiple world champion, but doesn't tend to trouble the judges when it comes to voting for Sports Personality of the Year. That's not because she doesn't deserve the recognition—she most certainly does—but because she paddles a canoe, and in this country we don't much care about that.

In total, she has nine European and world titles to her name and, come August, will be one of our few genuine hopes for an Olympic gold medal. That in itself is impressive, but it becomes even more so when you consider that, just a few years ago, she was struck down by chronic fatigue syndrome. At one stage in 2003, it was so bad that she struggled to even dry her hair.

"It's hard to explain," she tells Sport. "CF is hard for anyone, but as an athlete used to competing over marathon distances—and then not being able to spend even 20 minutes in a canoe doing light training—well, it was so difficult. Everything became a challenge, and I suffered this profound achiness all the time. At its worst, my arms were so aching when I tried to dry my hair."

But, thanks to a new treatment known as "reverse therapy," Hemmings was able to get back in her boat in 2005—and she went on to win a clean sweep of national, European and world titles. "It was emotional," she says. "When I won the Europeans, I cried—a lot."

Hemmings came by canoeing thanks to a mother keen for her children to stay active in the summer holidays. "I can't say I was begging her to take me canoeing," she says. "I was always sporty—I ran cross-country and played hockey for Surrey, and did judo for Middlesex. But then, one summer holiday, Mum took my brother and I to a canoeing session. I loved it, and got the bug there and then. I was eight."

Part of the attraction for the lively young Anna was the fact that she kept winning. "It definitely helps," she says. "I was happier to keep going when I knew I could win."

She won her first world title in 1999, aged 22, but since returning from chronic fatigue syndrome she has won three world golds in

a row, taking her total to six. And, with the 2008 season now under way and the championships taking place in Nottingham next week, Hemmings looks set to get her place in the Olympic team for Beijing.

The European Championships take place next month, but the Surrey paddler isn't looking too far ahead. "One step at a time," she says, with her back straight but "I want to get to the Olympics to take my O2. Oh, and just because Sport readers like to like to know this kind of thing, are you per chance single?" No. "Oh, well."

Anna Hemmings is sponsored by print and media company Pindar—see [www.pindar.com](http://www.pindar.com)

## MARATHON CANOEING TOUGH

Canoeing is big, in whatever way these things are calculated, it's the "sixth largest sport at the Olympics," which sounds impressive to us. Anna Hemmings competes in marathon canoeing, but in the Olympics all women's races are over 500 metres. That shouldn't detract from her chances, though.

The men's events go up to 1,000 metres, although if you're feeling really ambitious there is the annual Devoza to Westminster race, which at 125 miles is a sight further than 1,000 metres. It should still be quicker than negotiating the M4, especially at rush hour. Yeah, especially then.



WEBLINK [www.annahemmings.co.uk](http://www.annahemmings.co.uk)