Jackie Dring brings back GOLD from France

Southern Gauteng Branch member and executive member of SAAPi, Jackie Dring, has just returned from Bordeaux, France, where she competed in the Canoe World Marathon Championships coming home with a gold medal! The championships were held in Tremolat on the Dordognes River.

Jackie paddled in the Masters K2 event in her age group. "For my age the race is 21 km. It was a flat water race, no current to help and no rapids," says Jackie.

Jackie started canoeing 5 years ago. "I used to race sailing dinghies with my husband, and at the end of a hectic day of racing with lots of shouting, concentrating on the sails and other boats etc. I would watch the canoeists paddle across the dam in the cool and still of the evening, and envied them their ability to be independent of the wind. I liked the idea of the peace of being on the water completely on your own with the opportunity to dawdle and watch the birds. That’s what got me started. Then I realised I could stay upright far better than most people - a very necessary skill!"

AH: Did you fancy yourself competing seriously, or did it just happen?
JD: I never imagined competing seriously. In my early days of paddling on rivers, all the other paddlers would be out of sight within 5 minutes of the start of a race and I would plod along all on my own, usually terrified of what lay around the next corner. In the long run that probably did me a lot of good as I learnt to cope on my own and found my strengths and weaknesses. With time, my technique has improved and because of that my overall speed. It’s good exercise and being on water is also a ‘cool’ type of exercise which I really appreciate, as I tend to overheat when I run. I’m seldom cold when paddling even on winter mornings on the Klip River, when there’s ice on logs in the river and thick frost all around.

AH: How often do you train and how do you fit it into your busy schedule?
JD: In training for the Marathon Championships, I planned to train every day of the week, knowing full well that there would be days when commitments to family or work would prevent it. So in the end, I managed to get on the water 4 to 5 times a week.

My family is very supportive. I sometimes worry that my children could be embarrassed by having a mother who is involved in something that no other moms do, but they assure me this is not the case.

AH: What’s next?
JD: I want to carry on paddling as long as I am able to, and plan to paddle the major races such as the Fish River Marathon, Dusi and Drak Challenge. There are very few women paddlers, although the numbers are increasing, mostly in the younger age groups. There is very little competition from women my age – only a couple paddling in each province, so I feel rather demoralised when I do poorly in a race, and then I have to consider who my competition is mostly males and mostly younger. Since I started paddling, I have introduced my son to it and he is doing well, and more recently my husband has joined me and is also improving with time.