



## HIGHLY RATED

### *New Spins on Cox Boxes and Stroke Watches*

BY TOPHER BORDEAU

THREE NOTABLE NEW ATTEMPTS AT SOLVING OLD challenges in cox box and rate tracking technology hit the rowing market this spring. Two of the products, from relative newcomer Active Tools, attempt to deliver on the Holy Grail of stroke rate technology—wireless capability. They also add a few features designed to make the product easier to use on coxless crews. The third, from industry standard Nielsen Kellerman, spruces up an old standby.

#### **Active Tools ActiveRate Rate Meter (\$145, [www.active-tools.com](http://www.active-tools.com))**

The ActiveRate Rate Meter makes in-boat rate monitoring completely portable, as it requires nothing of the hull—no wiring, magnets, or mounting. The unit, about three quarters the size of a conventional stroke watch, can be permanently affixed to any foot stretcher with the included mounting bracket or temporarily mounted anywhere with a suction-cup mount (also included).

The device delivers rates using an internal accelerometer that senses the variation in hull speed as it calculates strokes per minute. The single button setup makes the watch relatively easy to operate—press or hold the button to turn the unit on or off and navigate between functions—though navigation between modes could be more intuitive with more on-screen guidance. In the boat, the device is meant for rowers only; orienting the watch with the screen facing toward the stern for use by a coxswain will render the accelerometer inaccurate. But the company allows the watch to double as a stroke watch for coaches by offering push-for-rate functionality with the top button when the unit is in stroke rate mode.

#### **Active Tools ActiveTime Rate Meter (\$220, [www.active-tools.com](http://www.active-tools.com), \$245 with heel switch)**

The ActiveTime Rate Meter offers everything included in the ActiveRate plus a couple of clever new tricks that could simplify the life of scullers and other athletes in self-steered boats. The ActiveRate takes the motion-sensing automatic start feature of many devices a step further with an ingenious mechanism designed for the rolling starts of head races. A fiber optic sensor attaches between the heels of your shoes and triggers the clock to start when you twitch your heels apart as you cross the starting line. Installation can get a bit tricky and makes the unit less portable from boat to boat, but the feature might make self-timing substantially easier for scullers and small-boat sweep rowers.

The ActiveTime meter also offers a check-measuring functionality, using the same accelerometer chip to measure hull deceleration between strokes. And finally, the ActiveTime meter will store the average ratings and average check factor of up to 10 timed pieces.

#### **Nielsen-Kellerman New Cox Box (\$509, [www.nkhome.com](http://www.nkhome.com))**

NK has tweaked their industry-standard cox box in a few noteworthy ways to simplify the user experience. The most notable change is also cosmetic. NK now offers the cox box with wraparound protective bumpers that come in custom colors. The bumpers shield the unit from minor drops and bumps and the eight possible color combinations offer a simple way to tell one cox box from another.

Other new ease-of-use features include an improved microphone connection to the device that improves both volume and voice clarity (note that microphone cords from NK's older cox boxes will not work on the new unit); an easier-to-use, three-button control scheme; a battery life indicator on the main screen; and swappable, longer-lasting battery packs. The new box plugs into NK's existing speaker technology, so ordering one won't necessitate a rewiring of hulls with the old speaker setup. NK has also made the unit lighter, at two pounds, and it now floats. ■