



L2 winner Curtis McGrath.



L3 winner Charlotte Henshaw.



Stuart Wood, V1L3 winner.

Tough conditions start the season

Szeged Regatta

There were surprise fastest qualifiers on the opening day of the World Cup in Szeged, Hungary

New Zealand's Aimee Fisher, racing in wind assisted lane one, celebrated her return to international racing with a lightning fast K1 500 heat win, posting a time almost five seconds quicker than the heat of teammate and Olympic champion Lisa Carrington.

In the men's K1 1,000 it was a German who posted the fastest heat with Jakob Thordsen announcing himself on the world stage with a tough win, tipping out an impressive list of Olympic and world champions.

Racing was tough for the opening day of the season with strong crosswinds and cool temperatures providing an extra challenge for those who have come off long training campaigns. Lane one competitors had a distinct advantage over the rest of the field.

Other impressive heat winners on opening day included Cuba's Jose Cordova in the men's C1 1,000, the German men's and New Zealand women's K4 500 crews and Canada's Katie Vincent in the women's C1 200.

In the women's C2 500 Spain's Antia Jacome and Maria Corbera posted the quickest heat.

In paracanoe races Australia's three time Paralympic champion Curtis McGrath celebrated his first international race since the Tokyo Games with a fastest heat win in the men's KL3 but he could not post the quickest time in the men's VL3 with Great Britain's Stuart Wood recording the fastest mark.

Teammate Charlotte Henshaw was fastest in the new Paralympic VL3 event, Australia's Dylan Littlehales set the best mark in the men's KL3 and France's Nelia Barbosa was quickest in the women's KL3.

China and Lithuania caused major upsets on an afternoon of fierce racing.

The Chinese women's K4 and Lithuanian men's K4 both powered home to snatch 500 metre gold from their much more fancied rivals in challenging cold conditions.

Cuba's Yarisleidis Duboys won the women's C1 200, the only other Olympic event decided on Friday, while in paracanoe Curtis McGrath, and British pair Charlotte Henshaw and Emma Wiggs all showed strong form at the start of a Paralympic qualifying season.

The men's K4 500 was expected to see a continuation of the rivalry between the powerful Spanish and German crews who have dominated recent world championship and Olympic titles but it was a crew from Lithuania, fifth at last year's world championships and spearheaded by Maldonis brothers Simonas and Mindaugas, which stormed through to snatch the gold from Spain. Host nation Hungary held on to take the bronze with Germany finishing fourth.

In the women's K4 Poland, the reigning world champion and Olympic bronze medallist, started favourite for Friday's final but quickly fell off the pace as Australia, China and New Zealand set the early pace.

Over the final 100 metres the crew from China, which finished fifth at last year's world titles and sixth at the Olympics, powered over the top of the field to take the gold with Spain finishing a surprise second and New Zealand taking the bronze.

The battle between Duboys and Katie Vincent for the women's C1 200 went down to the final metres with the 21 year old Cuban eventually triumphing over the 2021 world champion.

A busy afternoon of paracanoe racing saw a triumphant return to international racing for three time Paralympic gold medallist Curtis McGrath. He took gold in the men's KL2.

Charlotte Henshaw hopes to become the first women's VL3 Paralympic gold medallist when it makes its debut in Paris next year but



had to dig deep to hold off teammate Hope Gordon on Friday.

Emma Wiggs continued her dominance of the women's VL2 while another Brit, Jonathan Young, returned to the top of the podium with a strong win in the men's KL3.

Frenchman Remy Boule was the most convincing winner of the day, trouncing the field to take gold in the men's KL1.

In non Olympic events Portugal's Fernando Pimenta and Romania's Catalin Chirila both had good warmups for their 1,000 metre races with victories in their K1 and C1 500 races respectively.

Antia Jacome and Maria Corbera won the women's C2 200, Poland's Dominika Putto won the women's K1 200 and Uzbekistan's Artur Guliev won the men's C1 200.

The Paris Olympics and Paralympics were still more than one year away but the pressure that comes with Games qualification was lifted a notch on day two on Saturday.

New Zealand's Lisa Carrington added another K1 500 title to her collection but had to withstand a strong challenge from teammate Aimee Fisher while Olympic and world champion Balint Kopasz had his K1 1,000 colours lowered by Hungarian teammate Adam Varga.

China's Olympic and world women's C2 500 champions, Shixiao Xu and Mengya Sun, again showed their class with a comfortable win while world champion Catalin Chirila confirmed his favouritism for Paris with another win in the men's C1 1,000.

In paracanoe Tokyo champion Charlotte Henshaw added another women's KL2 gold medal to her collection while Portugal's Norberto Mourao finally broke through for a VL2 title.

Carrington had dominated the women's K1 500 since 2019 and looked set to cruise to victory again on Saturday but former K4 teammate Aimee Fisher, back in the national team after walking away from the programme ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, finished strongly to push Carrington to the finish.

The Olympic champion said it was good to be pushed but wouldn't be drawn on what future NZ K2 and K4 combinations might look like.

'You just can't be complacent at all; it just helps everyone when the racing is tight,' she said.

'It's what is best for everyone in the boat; we're doing some awesome stuff with the team we've got at the moment and what's amazing is just learning how to paddle the boat as fast as we can so it's exciting.'

Fisher finished with the silver while Denmark's Emma Jørgensen picked up the bronze.

Xu and Sun have looked unbeatable in recent seasons with Olympic and world championship titles already on their resumé. They rarely looked under threat in Saturday's C2 500 final.

'Our ultimate motivation for us is to try and do better every time we race,' Sun said.

'Every time we race against the strong competitors from the different countries it gives us the goal to continue to push ourselves.'

In Tokyo in 2021 it was Balint Kopasz who triumphed in the battle of the Hungarians but on Saturday Adam Varga turned the tables with the 23 year old taking control of the K1 1,000 final early and then defying running down.

It was also the first gold medal for Hungary but Varga said he was feeling no pressure to break his country's run of minor medals.

'Of course I felt pressure but not because Hungary did not have a gold medal,' Varga said.

'It was a selection race for us in K1 1,000 and I felt pressure because it was my first race so I had no clue what I could do or what the others could do so it's always stressful for us in the first race.'

Tokyo bronze medallist Fernando Pimenta took the silver while Kopasz, racing in the outside lane, had to settle for bronze.

Chirila caused something of an upset when he beat Brazil's Olympic