

# Shimano Rowing Dynamics, *why not successful yet?*

After being successful and leading for years in the cycling and fishing industry Shimano entered the rowing industry in 2009. They did this by introducing Shimano Rowing Dynamics (SRD) and their first product: a new foot stretcher. From my point of view this was a real example of disruptive innovation. This because the conventional foot stretchers, despite its flaws and inconveniences, didn't improve the last thirty years. Although they are disruptive –integrating more knowledge and technology- in the rowing industry they are not really successful yet. I analyzed the evolution of foot stretchers in general and analyzed the Shimano foot stretchers, and then especially what the disruptive elements are and the causes of not becoming successful yet.

In the beginning of rowing as a sport, foot stretchers were just old shoes mounted on a simple board or laces to strap your feet on the boat. In the 90's the foot stretchers and shoes were getting made by companies as real products and not as DIY products, the biggest improvement was the use of straps. Around 2000 there was the introduction of HeelFlex and bigger companies like H2Row, Adidas and Nike who started making nice looking sport shoes that could be mounted in the boat. Since then there hasn't been real improvement until now. The SRD stretcher is a foot stretcher constructed with a virtual pivot point combined with 'quick release' clips, know from cycling pedals.

The conventional stretchers have four big inconveniences which the SRD stretchers reduce: hygiene, comfort, safety and efficiency. The hygiene has improved because every rower can now have his own shoes. No more sharing the mounted shoes with the whole rowing club or having to un-mount and mounting in another boat –which you have to do with for example the Nike shoes or older version stretch boards. Secondly the comfort has increased a lot. A shoe that finally fits good and on which you are able to walk normally. Also not having to endless strap or lace yourself to the boat, but just clicking in and out. The 'quick release' system also improved the safety of foot stretchers[1]. Before you had to unstrap or rely on the heel strings that should help you to escape while you are upside down, underwater. Lastly, the biggest improvement, is the efficiency. Shimano tested and did a lot of research in this area so the result is really nice. The pivoting of the feet gives less stress in the muscles[2]. This because the whole shoe pivots, so you don't have to use strength to bend your shoes. It also gives the rowers a more solid movement and a longer movement which results in more speed.

Then you might be thinking, if it is so good why is it not successful yet? Well I found out that it is the costs. Rowing is not such a big sport as cycling, where Shimano originally comes from. Rowing is not a sport, such as soccer or cycling, where it is usual to buy your own shoes. Also rowers are not used to have big innovation, everything has stayed more or less the same for years. Shimano is working on this problem by getting a cheaper version to the market that only uses the 'quick release' and not the 'vertical pivot system' in order to get the product to the normal consumer. They will keep the pivot system stretcher for the high-end market, such as Olympic rowers or rich clubs such as 'Het Spaarne'. You could say they will try to work their way down from the high-end to mid-end market.

By doing this SRD might still get successful in the rowing sport, but maybe not so much as they expected. What I personally learned from this case study is that you really have to ask yourself two questions before you try to make something disruptive: 'Is innovation really needed or wanted in the market I want to get in?', and 'Do I have a clear view of the demands of my future consumers?'



1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPS8p4jS6\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPS8p4jS6_g)

2 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1M7fodm2YU&list=PLHS7qHTLt\\_](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1M7fodm2YU&list=PLHS7qHTLt_)

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