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Healani paddlers receive congratulations following victory.

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Healani triumphs in big canoe race

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The Healani crew always suspected they could be champions, but now they know for sure.

They lived up to that title by capturing an easy first in yesterday's Molokai to Oahu canoe race, one of Aloha Week's major events. The crew covered the 38 mile course from Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, to the Duke Kahanamoku Beach in Waikiki in a sizzling 5:59.02.

ALTHOUGH Healani was the defending champion, the victory came somewhat of a surprise to many — except Healani, of course — since Healani had not won a regatta all year.

But the Healani team felt it could win and as paddler Lance Mann offered after the race: "We've been after

the others a long time — it just took us a while to get them."

The 5:50.02 clocking was only three minutes 46 seconds off the record set by Outrigger three years ago, but yesterday's feat was done under a broiling sun and without benefit of wind or waves at Healani's back.

EVEN SO, there wasn't too much question about who was to win. "The major thing is that our canoe is the best," said captain and steersman Gary Murakami, talking about the koa Papa-loa. "As soon as we left the harbor, I knew nobody would catch us if the sea was smooth."

And it was.

Healani held the lead from beginning to end and it wasn't until some six minutes later the second and third canoes hit the shore,

BUT IF THERE wasn't any drama as to who finished first, that second place finish easily made up for it.

In a freak ending Outrigger sailed home four seconds and a few feet in front of Hui Nalu's fiberglass Kalia.

Outrigger, taking the inside, apparently steered too close to shore and realized it wouldn't pass through the winning poles, before Hui Nalu which was streaming in straight and fast. Outrigger cut out, but only enough to win. Its canoe — the Leilani — hit and knocked down one of the poles. The officials declared it legal, however, and Outrigger was awarded second.

THIRTEEN crews entered the race and all finished. Waikiki Surf Club's koa Malia came in fourth, followed by the Imua fiberglass canoe from California in fifth.

Ironically, last year's Healani koa crew also won after a string of defeats in the regattas, short sprints compared to the Aloha canoe classic marathon.

KOA AND FIBERGLASS

1. Healani (koa) 5:59.02. 2. Outrigger (koa) 6:05.37-3. Hui Nalu (fiberglass) 6:05.12. 4. Waikiki Surf (koa) 6:15.22. 5. Imua from Newport, Calif. (fiberglass) 6:20.32.
6. Kaula (fiberglass) 6:23.14. 7. Lanikai (fiberglass) 6:32.2. 8. Healani (fiberglass) 6:31.0. 9. Balboa from Calif. (fiberglass) 6:35.29. 10. Kai Ohi (koa) 6:39.47.
11. Malle Sons (koa) 6:49.41. 12. Leeward Kai (fiberglass) 6:59.56.