



HAPPY LANDING—Members and well-wishers of Tahiti's Te Oropaa team celebrate yesterday at Magic Island after winning the non-koa canoe division of the 50-mile Molokai-to-Oahu race, giving the Tahitians a clean sweep.—Star-Bulletin Photos by Jip Pruden.

Tahitian Crews Score Molokai-Oahu Slam

By Grady Timmons
Star-Bulletin Writer

It was 2 p.m.—Dressed in their cloaks and feathers, the members of the Royal Hawaiian Court sat under the white tent provided them yesterday at Magic Island, arms crossed and countenances suggesting stern disenchantment at the thought of the Aloha Week Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race being won by Tahitians.

But it was to be as not even 10 minutes later the salsa wood canoe of Tahiti's Te Oropaa crew emerged out of a maze of off-shore sailboats and surfers and began the paddle down the Diamond Head side of Magic Island, the thousands of on-lookers clustered on the shore letting their "bikinis" and "bellies" ripple with applause as the crew crossed the finish line exactly seven hours, 53 minutes and 40 seconds after they began the 55.7-mile crossing.

ANOTHER 12 MINUTES later (8:05:04), Tahiti's Maire Nui crew finished in its koa canoe. At day's end, the Tahitians had not only swept both koa and non-koa canoe

divisions but had placed five of the first six finishers.

Kailua's fiberglass canoe was the first Hawaiian entrant to rest its paddles, placing fifth over-all (8:32:14).

"We were so far ahead that we didn't have to strain too hard," said Te Oropaa Coach Hugh Laughlin, whose crew members were Maino Damiens, Roy Terii, Maitere Jilfes, Mai Poehi, Tuairau Temata, Terii-taumihaui Albert, Maa Ilorai, Maraemro Paul, Maa Terii, Tuarii Pou, Taarii Teritehau and Savoie Emile.

"We are not tired," he added. "We trained hard. Two hours and 2,500 kilometers a day for four months."

Actually, from the moment it was evident that the waters would remain calm the entire length of the race, it was to be expected that the Tahitians would arrive first.

TAHITIAN PADDLERS are, on the average, much older and considered to be professionals, with a shorter, brisker and more efficient stroke. Their one disadvantage is that coming from Tahiti they are not

used to the rough water of the open sea. Hawaiian crews realized the rougher the water, the better their chances.

But the Molokai Channel was anything but swirling. Placid, almost flat conditions prevailed so that the transition from the first part of the race—two hours or 14 miles of flat water from Kaunakakai to the entrance of the normally raging channel—did little to alter the pace and the 1/2-mile lead of the Te Oropaa crew, a lead they maintained for the duration of the race.

INTERESTINGLY, TE Oropaa's win marked the first time a non-koa entry has won the crossing. The salsa wood canoe, made from the breadfruit tree, was designed by Laughlin, built last month at a cost of \$5,000 and flown to Hawaii at a cost of \$1,000.

It has a sleeker design, made for flat water. The consensus was that had the ocean been rough, Te Oropaa would have been hard pressed to win, maybe even finish.

But then, good fortune is an element in almost any victory.



JOB WELL DONE—Maire Nui No. 1 team members congratulate each other yesterday after the Tahitian team won the koa division of the torturous Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race.