



lesser crew might simply have struggled home a dejected and forgotten loser, our men started paddling with a vengeance and put on a performance that inspired all who witnessed it.

The story begins in the first light of dawn at Kaunakakai on Molokai. Despite a confused and disorderly assembly, Outrigger tore away from the starting line at 6:14 a.m. and after 20 minutes of furious stroking found itself in third place—already well behind the first place Tahitian boat but gaining open water on canoes to the rear. Then, suddenly, the fleet of escort vessels which had previously been seaward of Outrigger cut across our bow to join up with canoes proceeding closer towards shore. The result was that for 15 minutes "Kakina" pitched and yawed in the confused and turbulent wake kicked up by 40 or more powerboats. By the time the crew was able to find clear water, virtually the entire fleet had gone by OCC. Outrigger was in no better than 30th position with six miles of the race behind it.

The cause seemed hopeless. The front-running Tahitians were practically out of sight and Outrigger was barely holding its own against some of the weaker crews in the field. The initial air of optimism which had infused the paddlers seemed to have dwindled away with the sunrise.

I talked with Cline Mann, who was aboard our escort boat "Aukaka" directing navigation and supervising the change chart, about the way he felt at this point in the race. "I never once gave up on them (the crew)," said Mann, "but I wasn't sure that the guys could pull themselves together and move on the leaders. All of a sudden, though, we caught fire; the boat started moving smoothly through the water, and we began making up ground on the boats just ahead of us. I knew then that no one was going to give up and that incredible things might happen in the six hours remaining."

Outrigger began its inexorable march on the leaders just after it passed Hale O Lono, the previous starting point for the race. First to fall was Healani, who took its stroke up



Exhausted crew at the end of the race. Left to right: Tim Guard, Jay West, Don Mailer, Mike Clifford, Mark Buck, Brant Ackerman. Advertiser photo.

to 52 a minute in a desperate effort to ward off "Kakina," which by this time was virtually flying across the water. In rapid succession other crews, including Hui Nalu, Lanikai, Waikiki Surf, Lahaina, and Leeward Kai, fell to the onrushing Outrigger. In the intervening hours, canoes once so far distant that no one could intelligently believe they could be caught, were passed and left in "Kakina's" wake. The final crews to succumb to Outrigger's furious charge were two Tahitian entries—including Te Oropaa II in our own "Paoa"—the all-star crew representing California, and the Keauhou entry from Hawaii which had practiced for five months in the manner of the Tahitian paddlers.

In all, 22 crews were challenged and passed by OCC's resolute paddlers. A position at nearly the tail end of the fleet early in the race was converted into a respectable seventh place finish. Perhaps most importantly, a tradition of strong and courageous performances by OCC's Molokai-to-Oahu crews was maintained and the reputation of our Club embellished among our fellow competitors.

Coach-paddler Brant Ackerman summed it up for me after the race. "I think the crew performed brilliantly against very tough odds," Ackerman observed. "Three weeks before the race we lost three key paddlers; their departure at a critical juncture had a marked psychological impact on all of us. We had to go with a relatively

inexperienced crew. Only half the crew had more than one Molokai race behind them. And the conditions of the race itself were tailor made for the Tahitians. The Molokai channel was practically a 'glass-off.' Then to come back strong, pass 22 boats, and literally overwhelm crews like Surf Club, Hui Nalu, Lanikai, and the Californians, that's a fantastic performance."

Full credit must go to the Tahitians, of course, for their stunning showing in this year's race. Make no mistake that Te Oropaa and Maire Nui dominated the channel crossing from start to finish. As swift as the leading Tahitian entries proved to be, though, Outrigger's strong showing in the somewhat rougher channel waters convinced many observers that the sea is indeed the conditioning variable. On flat water the crews from Tahiti are all but unbeatable; given the rough, tempestuous conditions one might ordinarily expect in the Molokai channel, the best crews from Hawaii can hold their own against their South Pacific competition.

This year's Molokai crew included Mark Buck, Brant Ackerman, Jay West, Ed Pickering, Mike Clifford, Jay Pynchon, Mike Holmes, Billy Mowat, Milton Beamer, Donnie Mailer, Bill Bright and the author of this article. And there were, of course, many non-paddling Club members whose selfless contributions in time, energy, enthusiasm and spirit were part of the total effort.