

Off Shore first to shore

By Andy Yamaguchi
Advertiser Staff Writer

As the early afternoon sun turned the ocean into a sauna yesterday, four outrigger canoes rounded Koko Head and swung into the home stretch of the 31st Mōlōkai-to-Oahu canoe race.

"It's anybody's race," a race official squawked over a ship-to-shore radio.

No one had to tell that to the paddlers. "We had eye contact (with the other three canoes) and knew the whole time that nobody was running away from anybody else," Hui Nalu's Tom Conner said. "In that last hour, we took our stroke up from 58 to 62 (beats per minute)."

Outrigger and Imua also picked up the pace. But Off Shore of Newport Beach, Calif., used its superior conditioning to make the best finishing kick and win the closest Molokai-to-

Oahu race in memory.

"Ho, man. That was the closest race I've ever been in," said Hui Nalu coach Kala Kukea, who paddled in his 12th Molokai race.

It was the second consecutive Molokai Ho'e triumph for Off Shore and the third victory in five years for a California crew. Off Shore covered the 40.8-mile course from Hale O Lono Harbor to Fort DeRussy Beach in six hours, eight minutes and 35.5 seconds.

Imua, also of Newport Beach, duplicated its second-place finish of last year. But it dropped to fourth in the final results after officials levied a 10-minute penalty for allegedly cutting in front of Outrigger's canoe.

Hui Nalu placed second in 6:2:06.5., Outrigger third in 6:13:18.0, Imua fourth in 6:20:32.8. Lanikal was fifth in 6:22:45.3 and was the first fiberglass canoe to finish.

Choppy seas of 4-5 feet made the race rather slow. Off Shore's record of 5:25:07, achieved last year on a glassy Kaiwi Channel, was never threatened.

"Last year it was a horse race," said Off Shore stroke Carl Toepfner, who paddled in all three California crews to win Molokai. "This year there was more surfing. It was real big and sloppy; we'd come to a complete stop every 30 seconds."

Smooth and glassy, big and choppy, it seemed to make no difference to the Californians of Off Shore. They devote their lives to paddling, racing everything from Olympic-style kayaks and canoes in Europe to Hawaiian outrigger canoes in the Molokai race.

"We train hard, and we train all year," said Toepfner, a carpenter. "Most of us only work See Off Shore on Page D-3



Sweet smell of success: Off Shore's Jon Van Cleave (left) and coach Billy Whitford congratulate each other after winning Molokai Ho'e for the second year in a row.