



Thousands of spectators on Fort DeRussy beach leave little doubt for Outrigger Canoe Club's paddlers that they have arrived at the finish line of the 32nd Molokai Ho'e Oahu. The crowd was boosted by a midday Hawaiian beach concert staged by race organizers. Outrigger won its fifth Molokai title in the last nine years.

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Outrigger crosses out its foes

By Andy Yamaguchi
Advertiser Staff Writer

Outrigger Canoe Club was passed by Imua as the leaders paddled their koa canoes away from Molokai yesterday morning.

Imua was shooting through the water like a torpedo. Outrigger was falling behind. Winds, swells and chop lay ahead in Kaiwi Channel.

Outrigger had Imua right where it wanted it.

OCC used its "home-sea advantage" to win the Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race and bring the title back to Hawaii after victories by Californians in the last two races.

"I was tired of those Coast haoles beating us," said Outrigger steersman Brant Ackerman, who guided OCC over rough seas while his competition was tossed.

Outrigger, as fit and well-trained as any crew Hawaii has produced, won the 32nd Molokai Ho'e Oahu in 5 hours, 45 minutes, 9.3 seconds — 20:02.3 slower than the record.

Off Shore and Imua, both of Newport Beach, Calif., were second and third, respectively, in 5:56:39.3 and 6:12:10.8. Canadian Outrigger was fourth and Hui Nalu fifth.

Thirty-nine crews finished the 40.8-mile race.

Outrigger has won five of the last nine Molokai Ho'e titles. The other four were won by Tahitians and Californians.

Outrigger's crew yesterday consisted of Ackerman, Bob Riley, Bil Bright, Ed Pickering, Walter Guild, John Finney, Henry Ayau, Gib Bintliff and Marc Haine.

"Oh, it's so nice, brah, so very nice," Haine said. "We said the

whole time that we wanted it for Hawaii. This is our water."

That statement was never truer.

Paddlers love a rough Molokai crossing because it makes for a complete test of paddling — not only of strength, but of steering and seamanship.

Conditions were relatively calm the past two years, aiding "flat-water" teams such as Off Shore, which won the last two Molokai races.

But yesterday, there were six- to eight-foot swells and 20-knot winds in the Kaiwi-Channel — much milder than forecasted but not glassy, either. And Outrigger was ready to use it.

The race was 45 minutes old when Imua surged past OCC to take a one-canoe-length lead. Imua looked extremely strong, while Outrigger appeared to be weakening.

But when Imua and OCC left the "shadow" of Molokai's lee side and found the full brunt of windy, choppy Kaiwi Channel, the race turned upside-down.

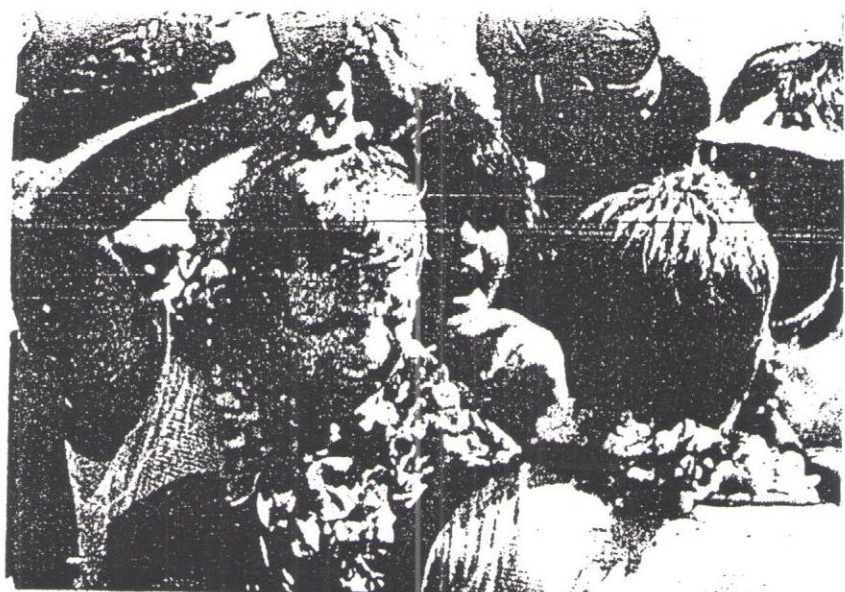
"I could tell we could outsurf 'em," Ackerman said.

That is precisely what Outrigger did, riding waves and negotiating chop far better than its Mainland opponents. While Ackerman found the right angle for OCC's Leilani to ride the swells, Imua's canoe was fishtailing all over the channel.

Outrigger didn't trail again and led its nearest rival, Off Shore, by a mile when it passed Koko Head. The race was all but over at mid-channel.

The rough weather might have been a godsend to Outrigger. "In flat water, Imua is an awesome crew," OCC's Bright said.

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Advertiser photo by Carl Vit.

After nearly six hours of paddling a koa canoe between Molokai and Honolulu, a champagne shower is the pause that refreshes for Outrigger paddler John Finney.

Outrigger paddlers win channel crossing

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Imua steersman Dennis Campbell said his team tried to prepare for rough seas by paddling canoes and surfskis in California surf, but "when it comes to this race, there just isn't enough time to prepare for riding in swells.

"We're great in flat water. But (today) we got stuck in troughs and couldn't get out. We weren't as good as they were."

Said Off Shore's Billy Whitford: "When the water got rough, Outrigger walked away with it. Brant just makes his boat run so well."

Ackerman's teammates heaped praise upon their steersman. "I think Brant makes a huge difference," Haine said. "He has a feel for the ocean. Brant knows waves come three to a set, and we'll catch the first one on a rush, have enough hull speed left to catch the second one and still catch the third. VAROOOM!"

Said Ackerman: "We do our homework. We go out there and practice tipping over. We know we get it righted in 30 seconds, which is a whole lot better than three minutes."

Outrigger's experience also made it tough to beat. Going into yesterday's race, the nine crew members combined for 49 years of Molokai race experience.

Also, they were extremely fit. Through the entire race, they averaged about 72 strokes per minute. Imua, for comparison, averaged about 64.

"We just kept going up and up, and 70 to 72 seemed to be what the crew wanted," Ackerman said. "We trained hard early. We've been gearing for this race since May."

Said Bright: "Mentally, we were real strong in the middle of the channel. The tendency is to get fatigued — Koko Head

But we kept pushing."

"There lots of confidence in this crew," said Ayau, who made his 18th Molokai crossing. "Lots of aloha spirit. The mana."

The Outrigger paddlers got a huge aloha from a small navy of marine craft — yachts, fishing boats, kayaks and sailboats — that met them at Diamond Head. The welcoming party numbered between 80 and 100 crafts.

Ackerman said he was happiest with the fact that Outrigger defeated Off Shore's team of Olympic-caliber kayakers. "This is an Olympic year, those guys are in peak condition," he said. "It makes us feel pretty good that we, in a club situation with full-time jobs, can beat teams of all-stars."

The race was free of major mishaps, race chairman Mel Kalahiki said. One member of Off Shore's second crew sustained a cut left foot when he came in contact with a moving propeller. The race doctor bandaged the wound. The wound to Ted Vantiburg apparently was not serious and he rode in his escort until the conclusion of the race.

32nd Molokai Ho'o Oahu

1. Outrigger (k) 5:45.09.3
2. Off Shore (k) 5:56.39.3
3. Imua (k) 6:12.10.8
4. Canadian Outrigger 6:14.28.9
5. Hui Nalu (k) 6:18.00.3
6. Ihilani Nuutere (k) 6:19.44.6
7. Hui Lanakila (k) 6:21.09.9
8. Lanikai 6:25.08.3
9. Kamehameha (Hilo) 6:27.25.9
10. Hanalei 6:28.14.2
11. Kailua 6:34.32.8
12. Anuanue 6:38.37.9
13. Kai Opua 6:39.28.2
14. Hanalei 6:39.41.6
15. Lokahi 6:42.14.2
16. Lanikai (k) 6:42.24.9
17. Molokai 6:42.36.2
18. Waikiki Beach Boys 6:43.56.6
19. Kihei 6:46.53.8
20. Healani 6:48.03.7
21. Illinois Brigade 6:51.18.7
22. Kai Opua (k) 6:51.39.1
23. Waikiki Surf Club (k) 6:55.17.6
24. Hui Nalu (k) 6:57.02.5
25. Quebec 6:58.10.2
26. Off Shore 7:01.03.6
27. Koa Kai 7:03.43.4
28. Leeward Kai 7:06.11.2
29. Imua 7:06.17.9
30. Na Kai Ewalu 7:08.14.8
31. Napili 7:10.14.3
32. Kamehameha (Oahu) 7:12.32.8
33. Geronimo 7:21.09.4
34. Hawaiian Warriors 7:24.10.4
35. Kamehameha (Hilo) 7:27.39.8
36. Hooliehua 7:33.03.3
37. Na Keiki O Ka Mo'i 7:33.29.7
38. Kamanu 7:42.39.3
39. Hawaiian Warriors 7:56.05.6
40. Kai Oni, did not finish

(k) indicates koa canoe. All others liber-