

Outrigger paddlers dominant

By Andy Yamaguchi

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The beach-front clubhouse, the board-room roll, the affluence of Outrigger Canoe Club ~~are often cited for its paddling success.~~

But it was experience money can't buy that enabled OCC to dominate yesterday's 33rd Molokai Hoe Oahu, a 40.8-mile outrigger canoe race from Molokai to Oahu.

Thirty-eight canoes started and finished.

First, Outrigger's A team held off its California nemesis, Off Shore of Newport Beach, to win in a course-record time of 5 hours, 18 minutes, 19.62 seconds.

It beat the previous record, set by Off Shore in '81, by 6 minutes, 41 seconds.

Off Shore was second yesterday in 5:20:27.

Then Outrigger's 35-and-older masters crew, a pickup team if ever there was one, finished third.

Outrigger's B team finished eighth, completing the roll-out-the-Panzers display of OCC depth.

"One hundred years of crossings paid off today," said Fred Hemmings, a steersman for the OCC masters.

It was Outrigger's 10th Molokai victory, its second in a row and its fifth in the last eight years.

Off Shore (a.k.a. Blazing Paddles in 1978) is the only other team to have won in the last eight years. In seven tries at this race, it has three firsts and four seconds.

Hemmings probably wasn't exaggerating when he said Outrigger's paddlers collectively have 100 years of experience in the Molokai race, recognized as the world's best test of open-ocean canoeing.

That kind of depth created
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Outrigger's koa canoe glides under the stringed ti leaves that mark the finish line of Molokai Hoe Oahu.

Advertiser photo by Ren Jett

OCC dominates Molokai race

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fierce competition for OCC's nine A-team spots. Two members of last year's winning crew did not make the cut, and feelings were bruised.

"I went around with my nose wide open for the last week, but I was happy to get a chance paddling with the masters," said John Finney, one of the deposed paddlers. "Any one of 11 guys could have gotten the job done. It's really intense — our practices are worse than any race."

The result was what some called Outrigger's strongest crew ever, and it needed everything it had to beat Off Shore, which has four '84 Olympians — including two Canadian gold medalists in kayaking and canoeing.

Unlike last year, when Outrigger won by out-surging Off Shore on big Kaiwi Channel swells, yesterday's conditions were relatively calm, making it a test of power.

In the glassy lee of Molokai, from Hale O Lono Harbor to Laau Point, Off Shore had the advantage.

"We walked on 'em at the start," Off Shore steersman Billy Whitford said. "I mean, we were doing 60 (strokes per minute) and they were doing 72, and we're pulling away."

"Then we hit the open water. They started working the water a little better and caught every little bump. Outrigger just plays the bump so well."

"They've got all the finer points really, uh, refined."

Outrigger's other significant advantage was its skill, in making changes in which three relief paddlers jump in as the canoe passes an escort boat,

losing as little momentum as possible.

"It was a two-boat race, but we never could establish a big enough lead to relax," OCC steersman Brant Ackerman said. "We always led by 300 yards to a quarter mile."

"There was no groundswell today, just a choppy, choppy, sloppy, which made it feel like we were paddling uphill the whole time."

Members of Outrigger's winning crew are Ackerman, Henry Ayau, Bill Bright, Keone Downing, Mike Fox, Marc Haine, Kevin Olds, Ed Pickering and Bob Riley. They paddled in a 51-year-old koa canoe, the Leilani.

The third-place finish by OCC's masters was a bit of a surprise, since the crew was put together in three weeks and had never practiced together.

"I didn't know I was going to be in the race until yesterday," Tom Conner said. "I thought I'd paddled my last race in the sprints at Long Beach. I even gave away my paddle to a Tahitian."

"We just set conditioning back 50 years."

The last crew to finish were eight men from Hamburg, West Germany, who had learned to paddle Hawaiian outriggers only eight days before. They finished in 7:44:50, an hour and 10 minutes after the next-to-last finisher.

Their canoe flipped twice in the channel, but they were all smiles when they hit the beach at Fort DeRussy, where their wives welcomed them with multicolored plastic hula skirts and cans of beer.

"Bootveiser? This is American beer?" Volkmar Tiede said.

"Is light, but good on a hot day like this."

"German better," said Ingo Bleuss, clutching a can. A moment later, a woman sprayed the group with champagne.

33rd Molokai Hoe Oahu

1. Outrigger 5:18:19.62 (k); course record; old record 5:25:00.7, Off Shore 1981. 2. Off Shore (Hawaii Sport Beach, Calif.) 5:27:14.40 (k). 3. Outrigger Masters 5:28:49.75 (n). 4. Hanalei 5:30:39.38 (non-koa wood). 5. Hamilton Island (Australia) 5:31:34.02 (n). 6. Hui Nalu 5:34:03.77 (n). 7. Manee's (Molokai) 5:34:57.20. 8. Outrigger II 5:35:45.07 (n). 9. Kamehameha (Hilo) 5:37:17.04 (g). 10. Illinois Brigade 5:37:28.33 (g). 11. Molokai 5:39:04.74 (n). 12. Lanikai 5:39:18.52 (n). 13. Hui Lanakila 5:39:21.96 (k). 14. Kaiiua 5:40:19.12 (n). 15. Lokahi

5:45:17.57 (n). 16. Waimanalo 5:47:37.25 (n). 17. Kihai 5:51:48.59 (g). 18. Loeward Kai 5:52:25.74 (n). 19. Lanikai 5:52:27.95 (g). 20. Hui Nalu 5:53:38.26.

21. Waikiki Beach Boys 5:57:48.22 (g). 22. Quebec 5:59:54.85 (g). 23. Healani Masters 6:00:42.18 (n). 24. Hawaiian Warriors 6:02:20.03 (n). 25. Lanakila (Redondo Beach, Calif.) 6:03:07.18 (g). 26. Koa Kai 6:03:38.85 (g). 27. Waikiki Surf Club 6:05:14.77 (g). 28. Kaiiua Masters 6:06:28.76 (n). 29. Anuenue 6:07:58.89 (k). 30. Off Shore II 6:08:18.70 (g).

31. Ka Wai'anae 6:13:49.37 (k). 32. Hui Lanakila 6:15:14.77 (10-minute penalty for interference infraction) (g). 33. Geronimo 6:18:29.04 (g). 34. Kilakila 6:18:34.60 (n). 35. Napuu 6:23:07.80 (g). 36. Lokahi 6:28:17.91 (n). 37. Kamehameha (Hilo) 6:34:49.58 (g). 38. Luftthansa Sportverein Hamburg (W. Germany) 7:44:50.39.

k—Koa. g—Fiberglass. n—Hawaiian Class Racer fiberglass.