

PADDLING 2006-10-09



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Shell Vaa crew members finished off their record run in the the Molokai Hoe yesterday.

## Shell Vaa paddles to record in Molokai Hoe

### Crews from Tahiti place 1-2-3 in the Molokai-to-Oahu race

By Brandon Lee  
Special to the Star-Bulletin

Conditions were about as flat as they get during the 55th annual Molokai Hoe yesterday.

Yet Shell Vaa made huge waves of its own by winning in record-breaking time and leading a Tahitian sweep of the top three spots in the race that is considered the world championship of men's long-distance outrigger canoe paddling.

Top-ranked Tahitian entry Shell Vaa simply dominated the international field of 102 other crews and finished the 41-mile course from Molokai to Oahu across the Kaiwi Channel first in 4 hours, 46 minutes and 4.5 seconds.

Shell Vaa broke the previous race record (4:50:31 by Lanikai in 2000) by more than 4 minutes, and finished almost 15 minutes ahead of runner-up Hiti Toa Erai (5:00:27.8) and third-place Raro Maitai (5:00:43.7).

It also earned \$5,000 from race sponsor Anheuser-Busch with the win.

"We're very happy," Shell Vaa paddler Karyl Maoni said. "The team was very strong, and the ocean was good."

Asked if he and his team expected the outcome, owner Richel Moux said: "Not really. We didn't even expect to be first. It was a good surprise, and also that the top three teams are all from Tahiti."

Still, Shell Vaa is not a stranger to success in the biggest paddling events.

Though it did not enter last year, the Papeete-based club placed second in the Molokai Hoe two years ago.

Yesterday's race record was also the third one it has claimed within the last year -- added to those it established in the two most prestigious distance-paddling events in Tahiti that also attract strong international competition.

Shell Vaa's nine crewmembers (six paddled at a time, with rotations made with open-ocean changes) yesterday were David Tepava, Heiarii Mama, Jimmy Pirato, Lucien Tara, Bruno Tauhiro, Jajon Ori, Roland Teahui, Vatea Taraufau and Maoni.

"We came here to (try to) win," Taraufau said. "The Molokai Hoe is a big race."

Besides crews from Hawaii and Tahiti, the field also included ones from other parts of the U.S., Australia, Canada, Japan and Italy, among other countries.

The race began at 7:24 a.m. at Hale O Lono Harbor on Molokai, with the finish at Duke Kahanamoku Beach in Waikiki.

Oahu-based Outrigger initially jumped out to the lead, with Shell Vaa, the other two top Tahitian crews and two-time defending champion Lanikai (Oahu) close behind.

Shell Vaa's paddlers said they were unsure of the approach to take to Oahu and content to follow Outrigger in the beginning.

But after seeing Outrigger's line and also getting its own set with help from its canoe builder -- Hawaii's Sonny Bradley -- Shell Vaa moved up from second place and took over the lead about an hour into the race.

From that point, "we didn't see anybody again," said Taraufau.

Outrigger (5:01:10.9) finished fourth overall, while Lanikai (5:05:56.2) fell short in its quest for a three-peat of Molokai Hoe titles and ended up fifth. Mooloolaba (5:07:53.9) of Australia and Lanakila (5:07:59.9) of California rounded out the top seven spots.

"We had a good run for the first hour," Outrigger steersman Karel Tresnak Jr. said. "Then we slowly started getting passed by Tahitians -- one Tahitian crew, then a second crew, a third crew. ... We're happy with what we did today, but what Shell did was incredible. To beat crews by 15 minutes is unreal."

Shell Vaa's victory marks only the sixth time the winner of the race has finished in under 5 hours and the first Tahitian win since Rai (which did not enter this year) in 2002.

While Tahitians are renowned for their ability to paddle in flat conditions like those found in their home water, there was also a receding tide yesterday that was working against the paddlers.

Flat as it was, the conditions were not exactly ideal for breaking the record, yet Shell Vaa did so convincingly, along with smashing the rest of the field.

It was the best performance turned in by Tahitian crews since a sweep of the top four spots in the 1976 Molokai Hoe.

"We came to win, and Shell won, so it's OK. It's a Tahitian thing," said Hiti Toa Erai's Nena Tauhiti, who is also Tahiti's minister of culture.

Notable among the non-open-division winners, Outrigger won the masters 40-and-older division in 5:29:18.8, good for 19th overall.

The Mooloolaba masters crew had won the division the past three years, but settled for fourth yesterday at 5:40:15.7.

## Molokai Hoe

### Hale O Lono to Duke Kahanamoku Beach

(40.6 miles)

#### OC-6

**Fiberglass open**--1. Shell Vaa Te Uira, 4:46:04.5; 2. Hiti Toa Era'i Na'u Ke, 5:00:27.8; 3. Team Raromatai Ai'a Man, 5:00:43.7; 4. Outrigger CC 1 Henry K, 5:01:10.9; 5. Lanikai 1 Kamehana'okal, 5:05:56.2; 6. Mooloolaba Henry K Pali, 5:07:53.9; 7. Lanakila-CA 1 Kealahou, 5:07:57.9; 8. Hawaiian CC 1 Mahi'ai, 5:10:05.7; 9. Team Paddler Kai Ko'ola, 5:11:33.8; 10. Hui Lanakila 1 Huaka'i, 5:12:33.8;

11. Tui Tonga 1 Malakai Mel, 5:14:54.7; 12. Team Pogue 'Iolana, 5:17:29.7; 13. Hui Nalu 1 Kalahikiola, 5:20:11.2; 14. Outrigger 2 Kainalu, 5:24:13.8; 15. Tui Tonga 2 Keokea, 5:25:47.8; 16. Namolokama Kikaha, 5:27:42.6; 17. Keaukaha Keaukaha, 5:29:18.8; 18. Hui Lanakila 2 Kawaili, 5:30:50.9; 19. Team West HI Komohana, 5:31:51.5; 20. Lanikai 2 Huihui Akolea, 5:32:00.4.

**Masters 40-49**--1. Outrigger 40's Kekio, 5:30:17.5; 2. Team California Kawaila, 5:33:50.8; 3. Hui Nalu 3 Malolo, 5:33:50.8; 4. Mooloolaba 2 Maka'ala, 5:40:15.7; 5. Healani Kealoha, 5:47:23.3.

**Masters 50-54**--1. Namolokama O Ha Tahiti, 6:10:40.3; 2. Kihei Holu Loa, 6:19:05.7; 3. Hawn Kanaktion Ka Makan, 6:19:52.2; 4. Kamamalahoe Pa'auilo, 6:31:21.4.

**Masters 55-and-over**--1. Waimanalo Te Uria Te Pa, 5:45:16.6; 2. Keauhou Konawaena, 6:05:36.8; 3. Anuenue Anona, 6:09:20.2; 4. New Hope 55's Kahuhipa, 6:17:14.0; 5. Lanikai 55 Ka O'lelo Pa, 6:24:24.0

**Koa open**--1. Outrigger 3 Kakina, 5:45:55.5; 2. Puakea Hawn Fnd Ho'ola, 6:33:59.0.