

## No record, but win No. 4 for Shell Vaa

By

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No tradewinds ... no waves ... no course record ... no problem.

Shell Vaa of Tahiti braved relatively calm seas and muggy conditions en route to claiming its fourth straight Molokai Hoe early yesterday afternoon while failing to set a record, something it had done in each of the three previous victories.

The 41-mile race — considered the world championship of outrigger canoe paddling — began at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor, spanned across the treacherous Kaiwi Channel and finished at Duke Kahanamoku Beach adjacent to the pier fronting the Hilton Hawaiian Village.

Shell Vaa, which manned a canoe aptly named "Lightning," dominated a record-breaking field of 113 crews from around the world, including representatives of the U.S., Tahiti, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Russia. The red-and-yellow-clad crew completed the 57th edition of the race in 4 hours, 40 minutes and 17.2 seconds — nearly 2 minutes behind its record mark of 4 hours, 38 minutes and 35 seconds set last year. The victorious crew included: Georges Dehors, David Tepava, Lucien Tara, Roland Teahui, Tereirarii Hamblin, Roland Tere and James Hei-Moana Mairau.

"We expected much more of a battle and competition from the other clubs," said Shell Vaa president Richel Moux. "The conditions weren't that good. When you think of Molokai, you think of surf. There were waves, but from the side, so no way to surf. The conditions were sloppy, and the current was in front of us, so it was impossible to have a (record-breaking) race."

After enduring early-morning rain showers, the competitors overcame light winds and resulting waves from the north that pushed the canoes from right to left instead of the favorable wave pattern created by traditional (and preferred) easterly tradewinds that push crews from behind toward Oahu.

Team Primo, an all-star crew composed mostly of paddlers from Oahu and Maui, finished second overall in 4 hours, 52 minutes and 24 seconds. However, despite besting Tahitian crews Paddling Connection (third place, 4:57:51.8), Erai Vaa (fourth place, 5:02:15.4), and local rival Lanikai (fifth place, 5:05:22.6), Primo never really challenged Shell Vaa.

"It was really sloppy, but good fun, and paddling with these boys makes it a bit easier," said Danny Ching of Team Primo. "Shell had a good jump on the start, and it took us a while to try to start reeling them in. But by the time we got close, they took a little detour, headed south, and surfed away."

The other members of Team Primo are Kai Bartlett, Mike Judd, Kekoa Cramer, Carlos Felipe Gomes, Peter Konohia, Tyson Kubo, Mike Pedersen and Mael Carey.

### **Next stop: Tahiti**

While they came up short of catching Shell Vaa yesterday, Team Primo will get another chance as the local crew has been invited to participate in Tahiti's long-distance championship race, the Hawaiki Nui Vaa. The race, scheduled for Nov. 4-6, includes three stages spanning 78 miles and will give Primo the opportunity to go up against a full collection of Tahitian talent.

"We heard about that, and it was a little incentive to make sure we stayed ahead of all the non-Tahiti teams," Ching said of the rare opportunity. "We were definitely looking to give Shell a run for their money, and I saw them look back once or twice and that's a bonus, but hopefully we get a little closer next time."

Moux is also looking forward to the Hawaiki Nui, and counts on the competition being much stronger than yesterday's field offered.

"We have our other (long-distance championship) race, and some of the best teams in Tahiti stay there to train," he said. "I think it will be less easy than the Molokai race because they are ready, and while we're competing here, they're training. It will be difficult to win the Hawaiki Nui this year."

### **Mastering the competition**

Mooloolaba of Australia was the first senior masters crew to finish, coming in 25th overall in 5 hours, 35 minutes, 34.8 seconds. The crew, which includes paddlers 50 and older, finished ahead of the top masters (40-and-older) crew from Outrigger Canoe Club that crossed the line in 5 hours, 39 minutes, 45.4 seconds.

"We had a fairly straight run line through to Portlock. We kept our line and stayed out a bit and it seemed to pay off for us," said Mooloolaba president and member of the winning crew Ron Grabbe. "We've had some very hot weather back in Australia, so we faced similar heat conditions, but the waves gave us a bit of a challenge. This is the first time we've won the senior masters, and we're going to keep going and try to make history like we did in the masters division by winning nine races since 1994. We're trying to be the new wave of quality in the senior masters for 10 more years."

### **Molokai Hoe Top 10**

<b>Crew</b>	<b>Time</b>
1. Shell Vaa	4:40:17.2
2. Wailea/Team Primo	4:52:24.0
3. Paddling Connection	4:57:51.8
4. Erai Vaa	5:02:15.4
5. Lanikai	5:05:22.6
6. Outrigger	5:07:24.3
7. Livestrong	5:08:33.6
8. Hui Lanakila No. 1	5:09:00.1
9. Kailua No. 1	5:12:08.0
10. Hui Lanakila — U not dat one	5:16:04.7