

Behind the Scenes of the Molokai Race

by J. H. Beaumont

All the glory and press coverage goes to the participants of the Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race, especially if they win. But winning an event like this takes lots of planning, scheduling and behind-the-scenes leg-work.

Initial planning and budgeting for the Molokai race was started many months ago by the Canoe Racing Committee headed by Stew Brissette. This committee established the budget for the season and selected Tom Conner as head coach and Jeff Kissel as chief logistical officer.

With the help of checklists prepared from the experience of many previous Molokai crossings, the logistic ball started to roll. Hotel, air and barge reservations were made so as to get people, canoes, cars and trailers to Molokai on schedule. Escort boats were also lined up and chartered.

As race day neared, the coach set up his requirements for the crews' training table. Kissel and Bill Cook went to work with Ray Ludwig and staff to set up the menus and pack the meals in the club's coolers for transport to Molokai.

Thursday prior to Saturday's race, the advance detachment of Jeff Kissel, Bill Cook, Cline Mann, Wayne Faulkner, John Beaumont, Stew Brissette, Kimo and Gay Austin headed for Molokai. Their job was to pick up the canoes, trucks and equipment from Young Bros. barge and get them to the Hotel Molokai. With all the chores done, the advance detachment headed for Kimo and Gay Austins' Molokai home. After some horseback riding, horseshoes, a delicious dinner from one of the coolers, and a couple of hours of "Shogun," the support crew called it a day.

Friday morning, all hands were at the airport to meet the paddlers. Because big jet airliners sometimes cannot land on Molokai if the wind isn't right, our people used Royal Hawaiian Air Service to be sure of getting there. Joining the welcoming party was OCC member

Evie Black, now with the Molokai Police. She welcomed everyone Hawaiian style. Ever kissed a cop before?

From the airport the paddlers checked in at the hotel and started rigging the canoes. Bill Cook headed out for some last-minute shopping, and to prepare the paddlers' dinner. Once the canoes were rigged, the crews took them by trailer to Hale O Lono for final testing and rigging. This took most of the day.

Again, Bill Cook and Gay cooked up a fabulous meal out of the coolers; spaghetti with meat sauce, steaks, salad and French bread heavy with garlic butter—a diet designed to get the crews across the channel the next morning without a big breakfast.

With the final crew selections made, Cline Mann and Kissel went to work on the "change charts." These charts specify which paddler is in which seat, and for how long. It is designed to give each paddler equal time in the boat, equal rest and a little variety as to which seat he is in. The keepers of these charts must be flexible enough to adjust the cycle in case a paddler can't go back in for some reason.

With an early call planned race day, Conner got his crews to bed early. At 4:00 a.m. all hands rolled out and assembled. Another cooler was opened and juice, sweet rolls and muffins were served. The crews then headed for the Hale O Lono starting line and the support people headed for the escort boats at Kaunakakai.

The OCC had chartered two large (36 foot plus) escort boats and had two Boston whalers outboard motorboats as change boats. One of the large boats was captained by OCC member Mike Holmes, himself a veteran of 4 Molokai crossings as a paddler. The support fleet left Kaunakakai about 5:30 a.m. so as to get to Hale O Lono by 7:00 a.m.

The race started with no crew changes for the first half hour. Each

crew consisted of 9 paddlers, 6 in the canoe and 3 in the change boat. Upon instruction from the change charts, the whalers captained by Kimo Austin and Wayne Faulkner would take the replacement paddlers out ahead of the canoes, the paddlers jumped into the water and then into the canoe as it came by. The whalers then picked up the replaced paddlers for their rest period.

If necessary, the paddlers could come aboard the big escort boat for more rest, first aid or a rub down. To transfer people from the whaler to the escort, the whaler would come up and push against a mattress hanging over the stern of the escort. This provided a very stable and safe method of transferring paddlers from one boat to another.

As we all know, the OCC crews took first place in the open division and our koa entry took third koa. We also heard that some of our toughest rivals lost some time to navigational errors, equipment failures (an ama came untied) and one escort boat lost a propeller.

Our crews this year were in superb physical condition and our support team gave them the support they deserved. We should all be proud of the entire team. I know that I am.



TV COVERAGE: NBC photographed the race as a segment on "Sports World" to be shown next year.