

Canoe Racing WOMEN PADDLERS TOUGH IN MOLOKAI RACE



Mahealani Batlik, Paula Crabb, Donna Kahakui, Diana Allen, Mary Smolenski and Kisi Haine race toward Diamond Head.

By Genie Kincaid

On September 28, Outrigger's women paddlers were among a record field of 72 crews in the Na Wahine O Ke Kai Race, which was sponsored by Hawaii Modular Space. This was the 25th anniversary of the 41-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor, Moloka'i, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Oahu, which is considered the women's world championship of long-distance outrigger canoe paddling.

First time OCC head coach John Puakea achieved his goal of having two open 10-person crews finish in the top ten, as Outrigger's first crew finished 2nd in a time of 5:36:20, while a strong second crew finished 8th in 5:55:26.

Mooloolaba of Australia was first overall in a time of 5:26:37, the third fastest time posted in the history of the race. A 12 person masters crew made up of paddlers from defending champions Kai Opua and Kailua Canoe Club teamed up to finish third in 5:44:31.

An outgoing tide and no wind made for hot, arduous conditions, but Puakea's training regimen had prepared his women well. Once the crews got through the channel and approached Portlock, they were able to take advantage of small runners to Diamond Head.

"We paddled the best race we could have," said Puakea. As starting stroke Traci Phillips quipped, "We woulda won if Australia didn't show up."

Nearly 50 years ago, the prevailing thought was that it was too hazardous for women to paddle an outrigger canoe across the Kaiwi Channel, though the first men's Molokai race started in 1952. With patience and persistence, the inaugural women's crossing began with the first women's race in 1979.

Over the years, the race has gone from being a local club sport to an international competition.

Some women do this race to win; others simply to participate. But for every woman in the Na Wahine O Ke Kai, it is all about challenging yourself, and feeling respect for the ocean and its connection to Hawaii's cultural heritage.

Mahealani Batlik, whose mother Rosie Lum paddled in the 1979 race, made her first crossing as one of the strokes for the first crew.

Both Outrigger crews had committed to an ancient Hawaiian protocol by learning a traditional oli, which was chanted upon arrival at Duke Kahanamoku Beach to Polynesian children mentored by Kai Makana, a

non-profit community organization with an impetus on ocean awareness.

Puakea's respect for the physical challenge that the ocean and the competition would present extended to his paddlers as they integrated one-man canoe training with regular sprint work to prepare for the last race of the season.

He deftly focused his paddlers to work, train, and play as one Club program, not as separate crews, nor as the women's program versus the men's program.

This has been one of the most successful summers of paddling for the women: winning Dad Center, placing second in Kona, second in Catalina, first in Pokai, and placing two open crews in the top ten for Molokai.

Puakea will typically dismiss any credit with remarks like, "I didn't do anything" or "(The paddlers) make me look good." And though he may be right, as usual, none of his paddlers will argue with him. There's just too much respect.

A sincere mahalo nui loa to the countless friends and family of the Outrigger Canoe Club ohana who supported the women and truly contributed to their success, and to the Board and the OCC staff for always finding ways to make things work.

We also want to thank:

- Courtney Seto and the Canoe Racing Committee for tending to the details so all the women had to do was worry about the race;
- Mike Fox for sponsoring the Na Wahine and setting the stage for the women to shine;
- Liz Perry and Tom McTigue for their invaluable assistance in coaching and escorting the crews;
- Art and Libby Kamisugi for sharing their technical wisdom;
- Kala Judd and Jimmy Austin for their sage advice regarding "the line" on race day;
- Marshall Rosa, Billy Mowat, Bill Bright, Bret Chuckovich, Tommy Damon, and Jenn Bossert for motoring along side the crews and providing moral support; and
- All the men of the Upper Division for being there ready to assist with equipment and encouragement.



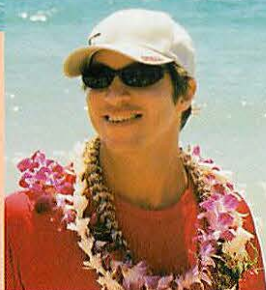
OCC's second place crew was Diana Allen, Malia Kamisugi, Paula Crabb, Traci Phillips, Megan Jones, Kisi Haine, Donna Kahakui, Jennifer Horner, Mary Smolenski, and Mahealani Batlik.



Finishing in eighth place was the crew of Laurie Lawson, Genie Kincaid, Kelsey Buell, Missy Mowat, and Linda Fernandez. Not pictured: Tana Kekina, Kristin Lee, Lisa Livingston, Ine Miller and Jen Thayer.



The White Crew finished in 5:55:26.



Coach John Puakea was happy with OCC's crews.

Red Crew

Diana Allen
 Mahealani Batlik
 Paula Crabb
 Kisi Haine
 Jenni Horner
 Megan Jones
 Donna Kahakui
 Malia Kamisugi
 Traci Phillips
 Mary Smolenski

White Crew

Kelsey Buell
 Linda Fernandez
 Tana Kekina
 Genie Kincaid
 Laurie Lawson
 Kristin Lee
 Lisa Livingston
 Ine Miller
 Missy Mowat
 Jen Thayer