

OCC Women 2nd, 8th and 17th in Na Wahine O Ke Kai

By Steve Scott

The official record for the 1995 Na Wahine O Ke Kai Molokai to Oahu Canoe Race on September 24 shows that 49 crews from Hawaii, California, Canada and Australia started the race at Hale O Lono Harbor, and Outrigger Canoe Club placed second, eighth and 17th.

For the crews from Outrigger, this was only the end of a very productive and colorful long distance season.

From the outset of the distance season, it was apparent that this would be a different year. Not only was there a solid returning nucleus, but there was an abundance of some very enthusiastic women from the novice crews.

For the first time, Outrigger fielded three complete crews of

Finishing second in Na Wahine were, Coach Steve Scott, Nicole Wilcox, Diana Clifford, Sara Ackerman, Traci Phillips, Pam Clifford, Donna Kahakui, Kaili Chun, Lisa Livingston, Kisi Haine and Mary Smolenski.

nine women in the Dad Center Race and Queen Liliuokalani Race in Kona, and on another weekend had a crew competing in the Newport to Catalina race and two crews in the Pokai Race.

Going into the Molokai to Oahu canoe race, all of the women had proven that they deserved the right to represent the Outrigger Canoe Club.

As the crews prepared for Molokai, the first crew had shown that it was very good. After a hard fought victory over Kailua in the Dad Center Race, they met again in the Queen Liliuokalani race in Kona.

After establishing an early lead over Kailua, Outrigger fell behind with about 10 minutes to go. What followed was possibly the most exciting race finish I have ever witnessed. As the two crews approached the last point entering Honaunau, Outrigger cut to the inside and passed the back of Kailua's canoe. They collided and Kailua spun. Now both canoes were even, and a 16 mile race came down to a 200 yard sprint.

At the finish, Outrigger was ahead by two seconds, setting a

record of 1:56:04 with the help of some very strong currents. My heart still beats fast thinking about that finish.

The next race for the first crew would not be any easier, as they would face Offshore Canoe Club in the Catalina Race. Outrigger would jump out to a slim lead early, but Offshore came back and two hours into the race took a solid hold on the lead. Once again, the record for the race was broken, with Offshore winning in 4:19 and Outrigger second, 1 minute 20 seconds behind, also breaking the record.

This set the stage for the Molokai race, with, in my estimation, three crews capable of winning it: Outrigger, Offshore and Kailua.

On the starting line, with 49 canoes lined up, the situation can be crowded and dangerous. With a race

delay, the start became Outrigger's worst nightmare. The first crew was set in the Moana, when another club, Lokahi, moved past the starting line prior to the start and proceeded to back into Outrigger, effectively blocking us.

As the green flag went up, Outrigger had to back water to get around Lokahi before setting out to compete for the lead, with Nicole Wilcox, Donna Kahakui, Lisa Livingston, Diana Clifford, Traci Phillips and Kisi Haine pulling their hardest.

By Laau Point, Outrigger was second and pulling up to Offshore. Changes were made, with Mary Smolenski, Sara Ackerman, Pam Clifford and Kaili Chun filling in. For the first 90 minutes, both crews were side by side, stroke for stroke. Offshore, however, was able to slowly pull away.

With Outrigger now behind, it was decided to take a different course towards Oahu, and we went with the current towards Koko Head instead of Diamond Head. Early on, this worked as Outrigger pulled up to and passed



Outrigger's second crew finished eighth—Coach Steve Scott, Genie Kincaid, Tiare Finney, Tracy Selling, Starr Dawson, Jennifer Lowe, Norma Santiago, Heidi Friesse, Jennifer Thayer, Jackie Muller and Robin Nonaka.



Photos by Marilyn Kali

The OCC Maui Jim crew included Michele St. John, Coach Steve Scott, Baba Muller, Shannon Dudgeon, Nancy Muller, Kendra Jenkins, Susan Ireland, Janna Arakaki, Liz Perry, Corinne Gentry, Possie Dudgeon, Kim Merrill, Conne Sutherland, Laura Williams, Darcy Wilcox.



Offshore, but we were one-half mile north. We weren't able to gain a substantial enough lead, and when we turned towards Diamond Head, Outrigger was still behind.

The race to the finish was now for pride, and the Outrigger ladies paddled as hard as they could. At the finish, Outrigger was second in 5:31:09 to Offshore's record time of 5:24:32, with the first seven crews breaking the old record.

In 1995, Outrigger was involved in three races where they broke the old record. Unfortunately, we were to finish first in one race and second in the other two. This crew is very good, and if they stick together and train, they will continue to be the crew with the greatest potential for winning the Outrigger has seen in a long time.

For the second crew, their race in Pokai was perfect, and great preparation for Molokai. They found that they could compete with the best, and finished a strong second, losing only to Kailua's first crew. They had a combination of youth and experience, and were finally hitting their stride.

The paddlers for Molokai with experience were Genie Kincaid, Tiare Finney, Robin Nonaka, Norma Santiago, Jennifer Thayer and Jennifer Lowe. The first time distance and Molokai paddlers were Jackie Muller, Heidi Friese, Starr Dawson and Tracy Selling.



Paddlers cross the finish line at the Hilton Hawaiian Village pier.

Their start would prove to be a disaster also, with other crews colliding into them and cracking the front manu of the Kapuawehe. Later, the crack would be found to be leaking water and filling up the front well. They would paddle a strong race, and after their start, they passed quite a few crews to finish a strong eighth in 5:48:18.

When the canoe was taken out of the water, there were two to three gallons of water in the front well, a substantial disadvantage to overcome in any race, much less the Molokai race.

For the third crew, who were almost all new to distance paddling,

their season was a definite learning experience in and out of the water. They showed they could do it in the Dad Center and Kona races, but in the Pokai race, under the whip of Liz Perry, they placed 10th out of 20 crews and in the process beat many second crews from other clubs.

They deserved a chance in Molokai, but this was not to be as the Board of Directors and the powers that be would not fund their effort, even though three women's crews had been budgeted for Molokai. To the rescue came Maui Jim to provide funding and Na Wahine O Ke Kai to supply the Bankoh canoe, and the third crew was on its way to Molokai

under the Maui Jim banner.

Keeping disastrous starts the norm with Outrigger crews, the third crew collided with two other canoes on the start, at which point one of those crews reached down and grabbed Outrigger's ama and over they went. By the time they got going again, and reached Laau Point, they were in last place.

What followed for them is what legends are made of and memories that will never be forgotten. They passed 32 crews and ended up in 17th place overall in 5:59:33.

The Maui Jim/Outrigger ladies that showed that they were more than worthy to be in the Molokai race were Susan Ireland, Baba Muller, Possie Dudgeon, Prancer Muller, Laura Williams, Kim Merrill, Darcy Wilcox, Shannon Dudgeon, Janna Arakaki and Kendra Jenkins.

The 1995 Na Wahine O Ke Kai Molokai to Oahu canoe race is now history, but hopefully the seeds of the Outrigger's futuresuccess in the women's distance program have been sown. There is no substitute for experience and in the process of gaining that, the women paddlers from the Outrigger Canoe Club have shown that they are all winners. ☺



Photo by Alan Johnson The Kapuawehe crew paddle hard in choppy seas.