

# ‘A`o Joins the OCC Racing Fleet

By Michael Durkin

This year, Outrigger distance paddlers will be enjoying a down-hill sled of a ride on the Club’s new unlimited class six-man fiberglass canoe. She was designed by Johnny Puakea to be an open ocean, down-wind run canoe. Light and easily maneuverable, the canoe is made to skip thru the ocean, connecting with waves seamlessly.

Kawika Grant was asked to propose a name for her. He chose ‘A`o, the shearwater. He said, “The bird itself seems to be the very personification of the designer’s intent.” The Outrigger Board of Directors agreed.

‘A`o was built by Tiger Canoes on the Big Island, one of their Makika (mosquito) class of unlimited canoes. The canoe weighs only 175 pounds. Two people can carry it. Rigging it is similar to a one-man, with button clips and twist lock collars. It has a foot brace for better power delivery in the stroke. It features a thru-hull auto bailer. Individual cockpit skirts have a channel to feed the skirt into, so installation is fast.

“Starting this year, all distance races, except for the Molokai Hoe, will have an unlimited division to allow for competition with this class of canoe”, said Al Darling, Club Captain. “Naturally, the OCC wants to be part of this new aspect of the sport, and be competitive. We anticipate a lot of use by the OCC Open Men and Women paddlers.”

Tiger Canoes has also delivered Makika class canoes to the Kailua Canoe Club, the Puna Canoe Club, and the Wa`a Kapaemoa Canoe Club on Molokai. So the competition will be out there.

After ‘A`o was blessed at the Club, Keahi Pelayo was one of the paddlers that took the canoe on her maiden run. It was a nearly flat sea day, but the canoe would still pick up energy from small, barely visible, bumps. Keahi said that when his crew switched from the 175 pound ‘A`o to one of the club’s 400 pound fiberglass canoe, they expected the heavier canoe to feel like a slug. But, instead, it moved faster than ever before.

Keahi thinks that paddling the faster ‘A`o had conditioned the paddlers to quicken their strokes, and waste less time in recovery, because the ‘A`o just moves so much faster. Paddlers have to move faster to keep up with the speed of the canoe.

Keahi says, “The Tahitians, who have been beating Hawaii teams for the last decade in the Molokai Hoe, do all of their practices in light weight canoes. This training activates, and strengthens the quick twitch muscles.”

The Club is planning to buy another Makika class canoe, not only so that two teams can race each other, but as a training tool for all of the Club’s paddlers.