

OCT. 9 1987

Molokai Hoe tests paddlers

Holmes supplies experience for Lahaina's 'novice' crew

By LOU ZITNIK
Sports Writer

LAHAINA — Twenty-two years ago Tommy Holmes set out from Molokai in a one-man canoe, in the night and paddled to Oahu.

That was the first of two solo trips that Holmes would make across the 40.8-mile Kaiwi Channel. Since then he has also crossed the channel eight times as a member of Outrigger Canoe Club's nine-man racing crews in the Molokai Hoe channel race.

Sunday morning at Hale O Lono Harbor on Molokai, Holmes will make another attempt at crossing the channel to Oahu but he won't be paddling alone and he won't be paddling for Outrigger Canoe Club.

Holmes was called in this week to steer for Lahaina Canoe Club's entry in the 36th annual Molokai Hoe, a race that has become the premier distance event of the long distance season. Holmes agreed to steer the crew after Trav Duro, the crew's original steersman, was ruled ineligible to paddle because he was six months shy of the minimum age requirement (18 years).

"We feel lucky to have Mr. Holmes steering for us," said Jeff Bogar, who, along with Tom Corrigan, is a coach and alternate for the Lahaina crew. "His experience and knowledge are going to be really helpful for this crew. Only one of them has crossed the channel before. It wasn't easy finding a steersman at the last minute. Most of the steersmen were already committed to other crews or they didn't want to go with a novice crew."

Holmes, the author of *Hawaiian Canoe*, the definitive work on Hawaiian outrigger canoe paddling, isn't the only non-Mauian on Lahaina's crew. Three British paddlers are also holding down seats for Sunday's race.

Robin Belcher, a teacher from Boulton; Richard Ward, a geography specialist from Exeter; and Peter Gehnich, a police inspector from Aylsbury, flew in two weeks ago to fill out Lahaina's nine-man crew.

The three men from England are experienced kayak paddlers and will leave for a kayak competition in Australia after Sunday's race. Their participation in this year's Molokai Hoe was arranged by Drake Thomas, a Lahaina Canoe Club member who met the three kayakers while he was competing in a kayak endurance race last year in England.

"Four years ago we saw a documentary about the race and since then, we've been trying to get into it," said said Ward. "When we met up with Thomas that sealed it."

Besides Holmes and the three

Englishmen, the crew consists of Flipe Duque, in his second year of paddling; Steve Wraith, second year; Nigel Faulkner, first year; and Mike Spah, two years.

The decision to race the relatively inexperienced crew was met with mixed emotions from Lahaina Canoe Club members.

"We got a lot of flak from some of the members," said Bogart as he watched the crew practice in water, crew changes Wednesday morning off Hanakaoa Beach Park. "They told us that we would get slaughtered and not make a good showing. But all these guys have a real positive attitude and they want to do it. I think they'll hold their own. They don't have much chance of finishing in the top 10 or anything like that. But they'll hold their own for a novice team."

Lahaina's veteran long distance crew ended their season after finishing 14th overall at the Queen Liliuokalani distance race at Kona, Hawaii.

"If we had finished in the top 10, we would have stayed on for the Molokai Hoe," said Corrigan. "We still had a good finish — 14 out of 58 canoes — but we told ourselves that unless we're in the top 10, we were out. That left these guys to represent Lahaina."

The inexperienced crew will not have an easy go of it Sunday. The

Molokai Hoe has become the most prestigious race of the season and attracts teams from as far away as Tahiti and England.

At last count, 55 teams were expected to compete, including entries from California (Imua and Offshore); Ontario and False Creek (Canada); England (Royal Canoe Club); Illinois (Illinois Brigade); and Tahiti (FAAA, Tahiti Nui, and French Federation Pirogue Polynesia).

Outrigger Canoe Club, the defending champions, hold the course record of 5 hours, 18 minutes, and 19 seconds (1984). Holmes last crewed for Outrigger in 1981.

Outrigger, Offshore and the Tahitian are favored to stage a tight race for first place. At the 1987 Hawaii state outrigger canoe championship regatta on Oahu in August, Tahitian officials stated that their crews this year would be stronger than ever, and that they were looking to win the race this year.

To keep Lahaina in the running, Holmes is hoping for some rough surf conditions.

"Calm water would be good for these guys because most of them haven't had experience in the surf," said Holmes. "But big surf is an equalizer. If they can keep it together in the rough water, they have a chance."

Big surf caused problems for the

novice crew two weeks ago during a night training session at Kapalua Bay. The crew paddled into Kapalua in the dark, cruised inside the surfline and was caught by wave that drove crew and canoe into the shallow reef at the center of the bay near the beach.

The accident split the Elua Wa'a Kauikaouli, one of Lahaina's new rocket canoes, in half, just behind seat two.

"It was quite a shock," said Gehnich. "I was just off the jet from England, still had jet lag, you know, and there I am pitched out of a canoe and crawling across the reef."

The accident has not dampened the spirits of the crew.

Just four days before the race the crew was meeting a new steersman, going over hull drills, learning where the balers were, how to do water changes (three relief paddlers enter the canoe from the water), how they should handle the start, what stroke rate was appropriate — all topics that an experienced crew would have mastered long ago. The crew took in the information without comment, nodding their heads that they understood.

"We make it," said one paddler. "We've been in every distance race except this year."

Except the channel. That's where Tommy Holmes come in.



Lahaina's patchwork crew leaves water after Molokai Hoe practice on Wednesday. The Maui News / LOU ZITNIK photo

OCT. 11 1987

Paddlers in action today

A total of 55 teams are expected to be on the starting line for the 36th annual Bankoh Molokai Hoe, Molokai-to-Oahu outrigger canoe race starting at 7:30 a.m. this morning off Hale O Lono harbor, Molokai.

Big Island clubs entered in the race are Kamehameha of Hilo, Kai O Pua, and a Kai O Pua master's squad.

The Molokai Hoe is a 40.8-mile paddle across the Kaiwi channel with a finish on the beach at Fort DeRussy, Waikiki.

Outrigger Canoe Club's senior men's team set the race record of five hours, 18 minutes, 19 seconds — approximately eight miles per hour — in 1984. They will be defending their 1986 title against 36 Hawaii clubs from the OHCRA, Oahu's Na Ohana O Na Hui Wa'a, the Maui County Hawaiian Canoe Association, Garden Island Canoe Racing Association and Moku O Hawaii from the Big Island.

Should they fail, F.F.P.P., another Tahitian team, is ready to wear the winners' leis. Seeded third due to its third-place finish last year, F.F.P.P. was second in 1985.

Fourth seeded is Imua of California, winner of the 31-mile Catalina-to-Newport race last month. They beat Outrigger by two minutes but, said Guild, "it's been such a long stretch since we've seen each other, you can't predict how we'll do against each other based on the Catalina race."

Offshore did not race Catalina — instead it has beefed up its crew with world-class kayakers. Names like Greg Barton, the world champion at 1,000- and

10,000-meter K-1s; Philippe Bocara, the French national champion and former K-2 world champ; former Lanikai resident and current U.S. national team member Bo Eastabrooks; and former Outrigger paddler Kevin Olds, also on the U.S. national team.

But if No. 5 Offshore is to win for the first time since its last of two straight wins in 1983, it could be because of its steersman, Billy Whitford is hoping for big waves as much as the Hawaii steersmen.

"Hey, if you want flat water, you might as well stay in California," he said. "We're going into the race with seasoned reality. We've got top athletes but have we got the top paddlers is the question. Luck and planning are all keys and I'd love to go on the big seas."

Steering supposedly gives the Hawaii teams an edge, but only if the waves are bigger than they have been in recent races. The

Molokai Hoe losing its koa

By Cindy Luis
Star-Bulletin writer

Ho'ola.
Lanakila Mau o Ka Lokahi.
Kai Holokai.
Naia.

The four survivors of a once all-koa canoe race across the Molokai channel.

Even the venerable 53-year-old *Malua*, the winningest canoe in the 35-year history of the Kaiwi Channel challenge, is sitting out for the first time ever. Sunday's 36th Bankoh Molokai Hoe will see only a quartet of koa canoes out of a fleet of 49 on the starting line off Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor.

It's tradition versus technology... and the trees have lost out to fiberglass.

"It's real sad," said Kailua Canoe Club's Pat Erwin, who will be making his 13th crossing. "I would like to race in our koa but the

crew is pretty competitive and is more comfortable with the glass. The *Lanakila Mau o Ka Lokahi* ('Victory through Harmony and Unity') is a great boat but we haven't had enough time to experiment working together with it."

The *Lanakila*, nearly destroyed last year by a freak wave off Diamond Head, was rebuilt by master canoe builder Wright Bowman to the specifications of the Hawaiian Racing Class mold now used by fiberglass canoe makers. Commonly referred to as a 'rocket boat,' the *Racer* is more streamlined than the *malua* mold used previously.

Still Kailua's second team will be using its koa. Defending champion, Outrigger, shipped four canoes to Molokai—one for each of its three teams, another lent to a Tahitian team. All four are fiberglass.

"What has happened is the race

has gotten so competitive that no one wants the deciding factor to be equipment," said Outrigger's Walter Guild. "Every koa is different but the fiberglass boats all have the same specs. By taking away the variable of equipment, winning comes down to who has the best athletes, who can move the hull with the least amount of effort and the greatest efficiency."

Guild, also a canoe builder, said he would have liked to use OCC's koas, the redesigned 50-year-old *Leilani* or the rocket *Kaoloa*, but won't for several reasons. Logistics and cost of shipping boats and possible damage to the koas, each worth \$10,000-plus, are some. Another is psychological.

"Last year, we were running sixth when we got to La'au Point (30 minutes into the race)," he said.

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"I know if we had been in the koa that everyone would have said it was the canoe, saying we had made the wrong choice because we did have the two to choose from on the beach."

"But by being sixth in the glass, we knew that the canoes ahead of us were also glass and that to win, we would just have to paddle harder."

That's an oversimplification, admits Guild. "Winning takes a lot of luck, a good course and a good combination of paddlers working together," he said. "But the standardized glass canoe has made it a race between athletes, not boats."

Outrigger is going for a record-breaking 12th Molokai victory. Waikiki Surf Club holds the mark, all dozen wins coming in the *Malua*.

Nappy Napoleon was a member of 10 of those championship Surf Club crews. His unprecedented 30th crossing Sunday will be in the *Ho'ola*.

"I believe in the canoe," said the 46-year-old coach of Anuenue. "Ho'ola is a good koa but it's a good boat, period. We've done good in her this season, not just good for a koa boat but good overall."

"We're not using the koa just so we can win the division. (Distance canoe races have categories for koa and fiberglass.) I have always raced (the channel) in koa. If I ever win again, it will be in a koa."

The first time fiberglass canoes were used in the Molokai Hoe was in 1960, unofficially by two mainland crews. Three years later, fiberglass canoes were allowed to officially enter; in 1976, Te Oro Paa became the first non-Hawaii team to win and the first to win overall honors using a glass canoe.

"You could see it coming, the trend away from koa," said Healan's Gary Murakami, a veteran of 22 races. "When it was a local race, it was easy to restrict it to just koa. But it's become international and fiberglass canoes have made it so. You don't go around lending your koa boat. And anyone who has ever lost a koa canoe knows what I mean."

Murakami was the steersman for Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club when their *Uwila* was lost in heavy seas during the 1966 race.

"Koa canoes are delicacies," said Toots Minville, considered the originator of the Molokai to Oahu race. "They have to be handled delicately. They are not easily replaced."

"It is sad. The tradition of racing the koa may be lost but not the tradition of the race itself. The canoe may not be koa but the tradition behind it is."

NOTES: Besides Kailua and Anuenue, California's Imua No. 2 and Hui Lanakila will be racing koa canoes. Conditions for Sunday's race are predicted as smooth with small swells. A record finish would have the first canoe crossing the Ft. DeRussy finish line at 12:48 p.m. Life magazine will be covering the race. Jerome Kalama, not Malama, was honored by officials during Wednesday's reception at the Waikiki Aquarium.

OCT. 10 1987

It's up to luck — or ti

By Cindy Luis
Star-Bulletin writer

On the eve of last year's Bankoh Molokai Hoe, a member of Outrigger Canoe Club slipped down to the beach at the Sheraton Molokai with some *ti* leaves. Alone in the stillness of sunset, she bowed in the direction of Oahu and asked the powers that be for waves—preferably big ones—for the next day's race across the Kaiwi Channel.

The woman figured that only by the grace of big swells would a Hawaii team—preferably Outrigger—win the 40.8-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor to Ft. DeRussy Beach. She got half of her wish. Outrigger won, for the 11th time.

But Tom Conner steered his seventh victory without benefit of heavy seas. Taking a chance on the currents off Sandy Beach, and taking advantage of the swell from the incoming high tide, Conner's triangular course gave fifth-seeded OCC an "upset" win.

The *ti* leaves may or may not have something to do with OCC's victory, but Walter Guild always mentions 'luck' as his first ingredient to repeat as champions tomorrow. Despite having eight of nine crew members back from last year's winners, he knows OCC will need more than luck to win for the fourth time in five years.

"The top five crews are very, very close," said Guild. "When you come this far in the season, you're not going to fool anybody with anything new. The secret is to get out in front and stay there, just outpaddle everyone to the finish."

Outrigger has the slight home-water advantage but anything could happen during the course of the 36th annual event. Waves, lack of them, conditioning, timing, steering—all are variables the 49 nine-man crews have to deal with.

Revenge is also a strong motivator. Tahiti No. 1 was heavily favored last year but a straight line course to Diamond Head and a 2½-hour bow-to-bow battle with California's Imua midway across the channel took its toll; the Tahitians finished second, six minutes behind Outrigger.

Tahiti No. 1 promises not to make the same mistakes that cost them last year, that of sloppy crew changes and being unaware of

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MOLOKAI HOE: It's up to luck — or the *ti* leaves

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OCC's position. The all-star crew wants nothing more than to be the second-ever Tahitian crew to win the channel challenge and end the drought since Te Oro Paa won in 1976.

Should they fail, F.F.P.P., another Tahitian team, is ready to wear the winners' leis. Seeded third due to its third-place finish last year, F.F.P.P. was second in 1985.

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Illinois Brigade, which dropped out earlier this week, won in 1985 on very flat water.

If the seas come up, look for Top Ten finishes from crews with the better steersmen. Nick Beck from Hanalei; Nappy Napoleon of Anuenue; and Kalama Heine, the young but very experienced steersman for the Healan Renegades.

Heine and his crew switched from Hui Lanakila and have looked strong during the distance season. With steersman Gary Murakami missing his first race in 23 years to coach his "young bucks," this could be the surprise team.

A Big Island top finisher should be Kamehameha of Hilo, bolstered by its always strong junior men's crew. And Kailua No. 1 and Hui Nalu No. 1, both mostly consisting of top local kayakers, could prove that the best training outside of a canoe is on a surfski.

The unknowns, the biggest worries to the top teams, are just that—teams that have never paddled here or in the big California races.

Arkansas Outrigger, which bought a canoe from Outrigger last April, could be the Illinois Brigade of 1987. Or it may be Atlantic Division from the East Coast or Canada's False Creek. And England's first-time entry, the Royal Canoe Club, has over 120 years of tradition to uphold.

Ti leaves may be a very popular item at sunset tonight.