

# the **Outrigger**



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# Austin Wins Kaiwi Channel Solo Race

By Jimmy Austin

*(Editor's Note: Jimmy Austin won the Kaiwi Channel Solo OC-1 Race on April 15, 2012 setting a new course record of 3 hours and 31 minutes, beating out Karel Tresnak Jr. who finished second in 3:32:45.)*

The Steinlager Kaiwi Channel Solo is regarded as the World Championship for single person outrigger canoe paddling. It is the title that watermen covet most. The solo race begins at Kaluakoi on the western end of Molokai, crosses the Kaiwi Channel, considered one of the roughest ocean channels in the world, and finishes in Hawaii Kai. Since its inception in 1993, there have only been six winners: Pat Erwin, Steve Cole, Mark Rigg, Karel Tresnak Jr., Kai Bartlet, and Danny Ching.

The level of competition in the past few years has become quite tough and in turn requires huge sacrifices to be fast. Training regiments consist of workouts six days a week, both morning and afternoon. Time is spent paddling, doing cardio, lifting in the gym, stretching and getting bodywork done (i.e. chiropractor/ massage).

To be competitive there are many things that come into play; experience is one of the biggest. Paddlers don't just come out here for the first time, step off the plane, and win the race. To win, it takes many crossings through the channel.

The winning recipe for everyone is different; for me, it's important to figure out what nutrition works, what course works, and how to push myself mentally through those painful moments when my body is telling me to quit.

On top of that, you never know what the conditions are going to be. The past few years have been upwind, downwind, and even flat. With such a variety of scenarios, you have to train for all three conditions and be prepared for whatever Kaiwi is going to throw at you that day.

I never knew what training at a high level was until John Puakea told me, "here's a program why don't you see how well you can do." I had recently lost my dream job with Aloha Airlines and the ocean was my way of getting my mind off of the situation. I put a wholehearted

effort into the training, and with my family's support I went all in.

In 2009 I finished third and was absolutely shocked; that year the course was upwind and I was not expecting such a good outcome. In 2010, I finished second even with an unfortunate mishap during the race (I flipped my boat). In 2011 I finished third again and thought to myself that I missed my opportunity in 2010 and thought I may never be able to win this race.

This year, on the day of the race I thought I had a chance of winning, but knew it wouldn't be easy. I would be up against Pat Dolan (a top waterman who had been training as an Olympic hopeful and who has done more training than me), Karel Tresnak Jr. (seven time solo OC-1 World Champion), and Danny Ching (2010 OC-1 world champion and the guy who had always edged me out over the past three years).

In the solo it's all about being patient, trying to maintain hull speed, conserve whatever energy you have and wait for an opportunity to present itself. If and when that happens you go all out to seize that chance at victory. For me that opportunity didn't come until the three-hour mark. I fought through everything you could imagine and then some.

Just when I thought I had the race won, Karel pulls up on a wave next to me inside Hawaii Kai and says "Hi, I'm back!" I knew at this point this was it. This is where all my training, sacrifice, and drive came in to play. I put my head down and gave it everything I had.

As I crossed the finish line I was in tears. It was so surreal. I had trained so hard and dreamt so much of that moment but for some reason there was always doubt of whether I was capable. My lifelong dream of being a world champion had come true. It still hasn't completely sunk in, but I thank God everyday for what He has blessed me with and look forward to what the future has to offer.

It just goes to show you that if you're willing to put in all the effort, your dreams can come true.

Jimmy Austin in the Kaiwi Channel Solo Race..



On the Cover: Jimmy Austin crosses the Kaiwi Channel on his way to winning the Steinlager Kaiwi Channel Solo Race in record time. See story on page 3.