Mauna Kea Dream Comes True

By Tiare Richert-Finney

For close to two decades, I have been a fan of the Mauna Kea 200 motorcycle race held every Memorial Day on the island of Hawaii.

For years, I went along with OCC riders as the "Team Mom", helping "wrench", as well as drive the team vans and serving as the medic. The race consists of over 200 miles of rock, sand, mud, roots, jungle, dust, and lava, lots and lots of lava, not to mention sometimes snow!

I have, over the years, had the honor of riding with some of the best. The Outrigger Canoe Club had a motorcycle team consisting of such greats as Brant Ackerman, Walter Guild, Matt Kresser, Kevin Olds, Alan Pflueger, Steve Quinn, Al Serafin, Keola Sheehan, Doss Tannehill, Derrick Wood, and our greatest, most gifted rider, John Beaumont.

Because of logistics and a lack of manpower, the race took a break in 1998 and was not reinstated until 2004. Again, I was Team Mom but this time for Jim Triplett, an excellent, young rider competing on his own. Jim let me tag along and we rode part of the course prior to the race. I was hooked! 2005 would be my year to ride Mauna Kea.

At 55 years of age, this would be a big commitment, and training was necessary. "Seat time" was critical and upper body weight lifting workouts were a must. My husband, John, and I trained at the Kahuku track for several weekends, and Dave Dolman helped out by taking me to some of his special trails on the windward side.

Our bikes needed to be re-worked due to the high elevations we would be riding, and time was needed for our acclimation to the higher elevations. With all arrangements made, our bikes were sent and we were on our way to the Big Island.

Race morning was early and cold. A crisp, half moon hung over the Mauna Kea summit. Riders were everywhere. Blue smoke from exhausts was hanging in the still cold air. I was nervous. In the riders meeting, they said "you can die" several times. I looked at John and he seemed calm. Okay, I thought, I'll be okay. But I was still really nervous.

John and I rode together on the same starting minute as A and B.

The first 10 or 15 minutes were uneventful, just getting into your rhythm and feeling out the terrain. The first challenge was a deep dust and rock uphill. Actually seven miles of uphill. This was hell and many riders never made it past this point.

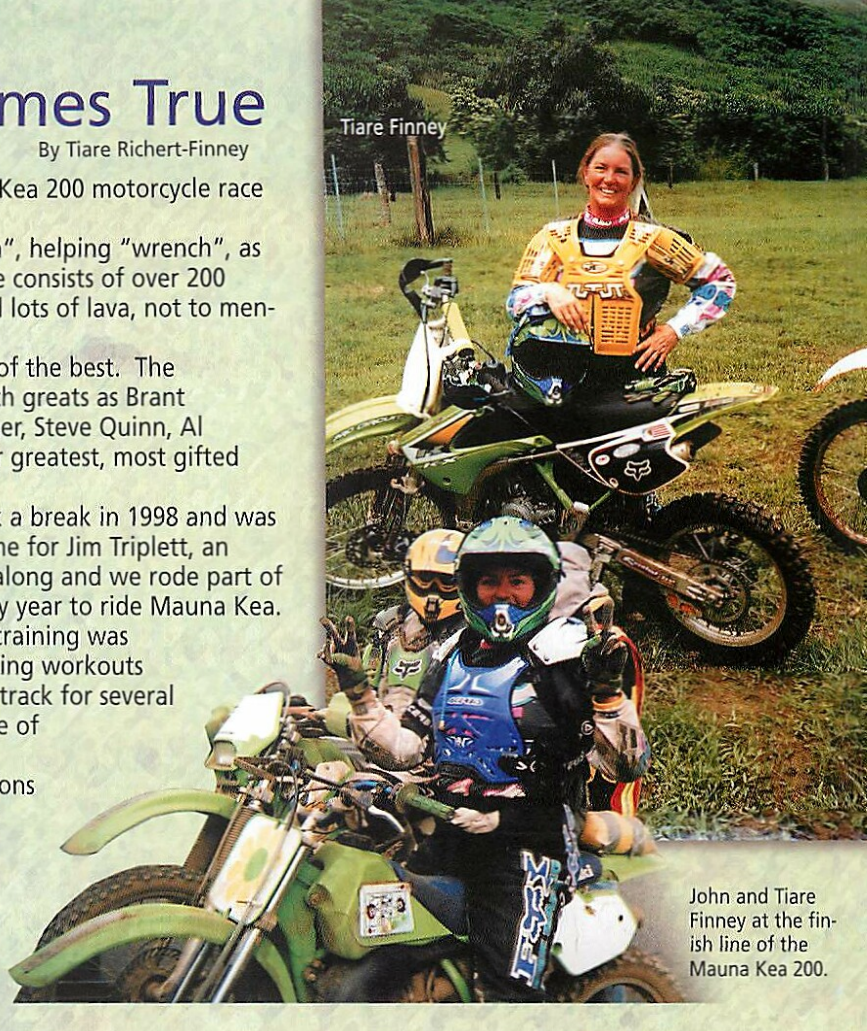
After surviving the uphill portion, things get better. There were long stretches of red pumice trails, soft sandy roads, lava rock jeep trails, and always loose rocks looking to take you down. Total focus was an absolute must.

Between the 15 and 50 mile gas check, my bike ran out of gas. This was not a good thing. It was as if John and I were on the moon. Sharp, black lava was in every direction that you can see. This took some time, but I used plastic tubing from my Camelpak, fit it onto John's gas line, and drained gas from his bike into mine. This worked and we were back on our way.

As I rode, I told myself, "look ahead," "soft and smooth," "relax your hands," "ride easy." This went on for hours. There were many crashes, the downhills were brutal, and I went off trail and into the rocks and even into a tree at one point.

Poor John rode in my dust, and watched me crash over and over again, but I always got up and got going again. There were so many more amazing sights and sensations, far too many to tell you here, but I must say that in all my life, I have never done anything so hard and yet so fun. The feeling of accomplishment was huge, and to do it with John was great. I could not have made it without him.

Of the 150 riders entered, John and I finished 111th and 112th. There were 12 women in that field and just three of us made it to the finish, allowing me to take home a trophy as well as fulfilling my Mauna Kea dream. I cannot wait for next year.



Tiare Finney

John and Tiare Finney at the finish line of the Mauna Kea 200.