



MOLOKAI BOUND—Sleek koa canoe is loaded on barge at Honolulu's Pier 24 to be transported to starting point for Sunday's 15th annual Molokai-Oahu Canoe Race.

15th annual event

Dynamite blast to launch canoes in race to Oahu

By HAROLD MORSE

Eddie Tam, Maui County Chairman, will issue a blast Sunday morning that will be entirely non-political.

Three sticks of dynamite will explode with the sound echoing off the hillsides of Molokai at 7 a.m. when Tam pushes the plunger to signal the start of the 15th annual Molokai-Oahu Canoe Race.

Thus all Molokai will be wide awake as the 12 determined crews break for the open sea from Hale O'Loa Beach bound for the paydirt that awaits the first arrivals at the Hilton Hawaiian Village beach area in Waikiki.

The purse for the "World Series" of Isle canoe racing will mean \$400 for the winning crew in the koa classification (eight entries), \$200 for the runner-up and \$67 for the crew that comes in third.

The winner in the non-koa classification (four entries) will garner \$200, the runner-up \$100 and third \$33.

Canoes in the koa classification are just what the name indicates, canoes carved out of koa logs from the big koa trees that thrive on the Big Island.

Non-koa canoes are made of fiber-glass. All four of them entered in Sunday's race are patterned after a koa entry of the Waikiki Surf Club, the Malia.

The canoes are about 40 feet long and narrow, providing just enough width to permit the thin bronze line of six crew members to squeeze into their assigned spots.

In weight the koa entries range from 407 to 470 pounds. All the fiber-glass entries weigh less than 400 pounds.

A koa canoe costs about \$3,000, a fiber-glass model about \$1,500; the canvas cover each one requires runs about \$135, not to mention outriggers and paddles for the crew.

The annual canoe marathon between Molokai and Oahu, a 38-mile dash through some of the most hazardous currents in the world, has become a living legend.

And Sunday's race without a doubt will go down in the books as one more convincing argument that the traditional seafaring skills of old Polynesia have not become a thing of the past in the New Hawaii.

While the 12 crews of straining paddlers are competing against each other in what may be regarded as the ultimate in human physical exertion, the 12 steers-

men will be concentrating with all the power of mind and spirit they possess to navigate the difficult Molokai Channel in the shortest possible time.

In past races canoes have averaged about seven knots. The fastest time on record was turned in by the Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club in 1964, five hours 56 minutes.

So far the fiber-glass canoes have not proved any



PERPETUAL AWARD—Dillingham trophy for Aloha Week Canoe Race will go to the champion entry in the koa classification. The Outrigger Canoe Club won it last year and will be out to retain it in Sunday's competition.

faster than the old-style koa craft.

The brain trusts of some crews utilize elaborate scientific data in an attempt to find a route that will best balance the perplexing equation of the Molokai Channel.

Others rely more heavily on past experience and intuition, together with close observation of the swells, trade wind velocities and other nautical phenomena that can affect the time it takes to get an outrigger canoe from Molokai to Oahu.

Old hands cite instances when superior navigation won out over superior physical conditioning, and some may claim to know of instances where the reverse situation proved the maxim that there is no substitute for being in shape.

But Paul K. Jones, chairman of the race for the past 13 years, said all the teams will be giving the run everything they've got—in all ways.

The race will start about 3 miles east of Laau Point, Molokai's southwestern extremity.

Although the canoes can

be expected to follow differing courses throughout, Jones explained that in general the steersmen will swing north at Laau Point, for a couple of miles, then turn back west toward Oahu and "ride with the current right around Koko Head."

Guy N. Rothwell, grand marshal of this year's race, explained that the canoes are favored usually by a "heavy following sea and trade winds from the northeast" on the approach to Oahu.

But he stressed that near Oahu "there is a series of very erratic reversing currents." The currents may reverse from north to south as the wave-tossed canoes battle their way through them.

And in these tricky currents off Oahu the race may be won or lost.

Tidal variations are more pronounced close to land, and as the canoes venture into shallow off-shore waters the waves get higher and steeper.

In 1959 a California crew's canoe was swamped in heavy seas, and it failed to finish the race. The same thing happened to another California entry last year.

Accustomed to smoother waters, the California crews were overwhelmed by the rough seas they encountered.

But with each crossing there are different currents, different winds and different surf conditions. Each time it's a new ocean.

To meet this challenge, some steersmen may angle in near Makapuu to take advantage of currents along the Oahu coastline.

Others stay in open waters and aim directly for Diamond Head.

As Lawrence Kapanui put it, "My strategy is that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

Kapanui is the head coach of the entry of the Order of Kamehameha, the koa canoe Malolo.

Most crew members in the race are comparatively young men with regular full-time jobs. They train evenings and weekends.

Some run and do calisthenics besides paddling in their canoes at sea.

All are required to pass a physical examination to qualify for the race.

Three standby paddlers for each crew ride in the convoy boat that each canoe has.

When a paddler becomes exhausted, a standby replaces him.

Great skill is involved in changing paddlers without stopping. It's a little like the amazing pit stop routines in auto races; only the canoes don't stop.

Doctors and trainers along with the coaches for the respective entries ride in the individual convoy boats.

An exhausted paddler who has been replaced gets a rubdown from the trainer after he boards the convoy boat.

Also he may receive some nourishment—chocolate, honey, orange juice or whatever the coach prescribes.

The doctor is available in case of accident or heat exhaustion.

Six or seven hours in the hot sun can be dangerous.

The convoy boats leave the beach area before the race gets under way and wait offshore until the canoes have headed out to sea. Then they follow behind.

Most of the convoy boats are 40 or 50-foot pleasure boats.

There are a number of perpetual awards for the winners, including a koa bowl for the winning entry in the koa classification.

The bowl is about 80 years old, a family heirloom donated by the Dillingham family. The antique is valued at several thousand dollars.

Crews varnish the hulls of the koa canoes and give them loving care, as do the crews of the modernized fiber-glass entries.

All the canoes were shipped to Molokai yesterday. This year there are no Neighbor Island entries. The crews are expected to fly to Molokai tomorrow.

Crew members will receive a heroes' welcome when they arrive at Hilton Hawaiian Village Sunday afternoon.

Both victors and vanquished in the Aloha Week event will be introduced to Aloha Week royalty.

Following ceremonies for the winners, the weary men will be treated to milk, other cold drinks and hot soup, courtesy of Hilton Hawaiian Village and Foremost Dairies.

Judging from past years, thousands of spectators can be expected to be on hand for the finish.

Canoe clubs with entries in the big race are Molokai, Outrigger, Maili Sons, Waikiki Surf, Lanikai, Hui Nalu, Order of Kamehameha (Honolulu) and Healani.

Waikiki Surf and Hui Nalu both have two entries, one in each classification.

The Outrigger Club is the defending champion.

