

Kekai rides ripple to snare paddle event

By **NANCY KELLOGG**
Advertiser Sports Writer

Rabbit Kekai, who has been surfing or paddling to water sport wins as long as anyone can remember, pulled to a first place in the open division of the six-mile Diamond Head Surfboard Paddling Championships yesterday.

He made the grueling round trip from the Moana Hotel sands, around Diamond Head buoy and back in 61 minutes, ten seconds, on his open style board.

EIGHTEEN years ago Rabbit paddled a 170-pound redwood board to win the first championships. This time he did it with an 18-pounder.

Aka Hemmings, first in the stock division, finished in 61

minutes, 17 seconds, using a board of specified length, width and weight.

Twelve-year old Kainoa Downing won the half-mile men's open division of the 18th annual paddling championships, while Luana Froiseth took the women's division.

Leigh Josephson captured men's 35 and under prize, Rabbit and Evie Black teamed for a tandem win, and Evie won the quarter-mile girls 17 and under event.

Heidi Hemmings won the girls 14 and under division, with Rick Arbeit taking the boys 11 and under.

JOSEPHSON, John Wilcox, Jim Baird and Linda Noda

scrambled to a win in the run, swim, paddle mayhem, where five teams swim and paddle, relay style around an offshore buoy.

Rabbit, who added a close second place in the 35 and over category to his two first places, said if he had been training, he wouldn't even be tired.

"I picked up a ripple to ride on in the home stretch," he said, "but you know, when the finish line is near, and you're a little ahead, you don't know where your strength comes from, but it comes."

Rabbit led the field of six paddlers heading out to the

buoy, then traded the lead with stock winner Hemmings on the drive home.

"**I FINALLY** came inside to catch the calm water and passed him for good," said Rabbit, who is as solid as the redwood board he paddled 18 years ago. "With a surge, I won it."

Rabbit is the beach captain at the Outrigger Canoe Club. He says he is "old enough," or in his 40's, or enough years for wins in the Makaha International, or spots on winning teams in the Molokai to Oahu Canoe Race, or simply, "lots of 'em."