



A great big party awaits racers and their families in Lahaina.

Sign Up Now *for the* 2010 Vic-Maui Yacht Race

Top off your sailing resume by making landfall in Hawaii aboard your own yacht

BY DAVID SUTCLIFFE

“**T**he Vic-Maui race is an institution for boats from the Pacific Northwest,” says five-time Vic-Maui veteran skipper Wink Vogel, whose latest boat, *Strum*, a Riptide 50, took line honours and the Division A and overall wins for the 2008 Vic-Maui. “It’s the pinnacle of long distance racing in our region. Whether you’re a sailor with local experience or you’re already an offshore veteran, your resume isn’t complete

without making that landfall in Hawaii.”

The next Vic-Maui International Yacht Race starts on July 1, 2010, from Victoria, and finishes half an ocean away, near Lahaina, Maui. The two sponsoring yacht clubs, the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club and the Lahaina Yacht Club, have committed to support the 2010 race regardless of fleet size, and mentors are available for prospective racers. If you have ever considered racing to Hawaii, now is

the time to get underway. Whether novice or veteran, skipper or crew, you’ll need to pick the boat that you want to sail on, select the team you want to sail with, prepare, train and cast off the dock lines.

“Challenge, adventure and teamwork!” says first-time Vic-Maui skipper Marque Thompson of his 2006 race on *Blue Moves II*, a Beneteau 393. “It was a challenge to get everything ready in time for the start in ▶

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Victoria. It was an even bigger challenge threading our way through the weather systems to Maui. And in the end, it was teamwork that got us there. I could never have imagined what a great adventure this race would turn out to be.”

The Route There are three major ocean races from North America to Hawaii: Transpac, which starts in Los Angeles and finishes in Honolulu on Oahu; Pacific Cup, which starts in San Francisco and finishes in Kaneohe Bay, also on Oahu; and Vic-Maui, which starts in Victoria and finishes in Lahaina on Maui. Each of these races is sailed every second year, with Transpac in odd numbered years and both Pacific Cup and Vic-Maui in even numbered years.

At 2,308 miles on the great circle route, Vic-Maui is the longest of the three races and presents the greatest challenges, testing navigators with more complex weather and routing choices, and all competitors with more varied conditions and points of sail. Boats usually beat against a westerly to get

out of Juan de Fuca Strait before either hugging the coast or rhumb lining it directly to Hawaii. Either way, it's vitally important to avoid the lightest winds near the centre of the North Pacific High and, finally, to find the right entry into the trade winds to sail the optimum angle to the finish off Lahaina. Getting these difficult decisions right and sailing the boat consistently well usually leads to the podium, while getting them wrong can lead to days and nights of light air despair.

Life Aboard The Vic-Maui adventure commences at the beginning of July, during the long days and short nights of midsummer. Racers peel off clothing layers as each day of the passage south into the tropics brings warmer temperatures. The crew settles into a regular routine of on and off watches, driving, trimming sails, keeping a lookout, doing preventative maintenance, preparing meals and huddling around the radio for daily roll calls with position reports from the rest of the fleet. Occasionally the routine is interrupted by an approaching squall, a sail change, a

KIM MCLEAN; DAVID SUTCLIFFE



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- 1 Strum makes her way up the Juan de Fuca Strait.
- 2 There were 19 boats on the start line for the 2004 Vic-Maui.
- 3 The pre-race dock party in Victoria.
- 4 Findlay Gibbons and son Peter share a laugh aboard Zulu in 2008.

gybe, a chafed halyard or a fast-moving container ship. During the days, visibility is usually pretty good and a favourite pastime is spotting a wide variety of wildlife including dolphins, whales, sea turtles and albatross. The boundaries between day and night are often illustrated by spectacular sunsets and sunrises. At night, visibility is more limited, making it more difficult to trim the sails and read the wind. This is offset alternately by moonlight and brilliant starscapes that are unlike anything seen ashore through the usual light and air pollution. The adventure continues and anticipation builds as the fleet approaches the Hawaiian Islands in trade wind surfing conditions. ▶

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Hawaii to Australia, to compete in one of the world's major ocean racing classics, the Sydney-Hobart race.

The Yachts Vic-Maui's roots go back to 1965, when Canadian Airlines pilot and Royal Vancouver Yacht Club member Jim Innes organized four boats to meet in Victoria and have an informal race to Hawaii. By the end of the race, all involved agreed that it should become a regular event. By 1968, the

Lahaina Yacht Club had been founded, and the two clubs agreed to organize Vic-Maui races every other year.

In the 20 Vic-Maui races held since then, a wide variety of boats and crews have competed. If there is a typical

Vic-Maui boat, it would be a racer-cruiser, 34 to 50-plus feet overall, based in the Northwest and with a crew of six to 10 people. Crews are often a mix of people with cruising experience, people with racing experience and people with overnight or offshore experience.

"Putting together a successful Vic-Maui program involves a solid boat, a good crew, thorough training, realistic objectives and always remembering that we're going out there to have a fun, safe time," says Warren Hale, whose 2008 team on *Turicum*, a C&C 44 from the Vancouver Rowing Club, sailed to a Division B win, their best Vic-Maui result to date.

Participation in ocean racing and specific races seems to ebb and flow in cycles. No one knows for sure whether these unfathomable fluctuations relate most closely to weather, fleet composition, economic cycles, solar activity or other assorted sailorly superstitions. Vic-Maui participation has been stable at around 20 boats for the last half dozen races, although the 2008 fleet was an exception with just nine boats. Organizers are anticipating a rebound in participation for the upcoming race.

Teamwork is a critical element on each Vic-Maui boat. This starts very early, with pre-race boat preparation and crew training, continues in the buildup to the start in Victoria, and truly gels onboard during the actual race. In the middle of the ocean, in the dark of night, with the wind building and a sea running, you need to know you can rely on your teammates. Good crew chemistry and teamwork combine with the challenge and adventure to make for lifetime memories. Teamwork also gets the boats to the finish line near Lahaina, where day or night each arriving boat is greeted with an outstanding welcoming party. Family and friends meet the racers to celebrate the accomplishment with hugs, leis and mai tais. The whole fleet attends an awards banquet, which includes Hawaiian food and entertainment.

5 Safety training is an essential and fun part of race preparation.

6 A sailor does some last minute tweaking to the rig.

Homeward or Onward After finishing the race, most crews stay in Hawaii for a vacation with their family and friends. Boats are re-provisioned and any essential maintenance items are attended to. Most boats do a delivery voyage back to their home port in the Northwest, while others continue on for cruises in the South Pacific and beyond. Three boats, *Gabrielle III* in 1968, *Greybeard* in 1972 and, most recently, *Kinetic* in 2006, have continued on from

Getting Ready Preparing a yacht and crew for a major ocean race is a significant undertaking. Vic-Maui has strict requirements, an enviable safety record, and fosters a spirit of cooperation among competitors, with past competitors acting as informal mentors to first-time entrants. "Building experience, trialing the boat and bonding the crew into a team before going offshore is very important," according to multi-race Vic-Maui stalwart Vern Burkhardt of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. "All these parts need to come together well for a team to have fun and be competitive when they are offshore."

Before heading across the Pacific Ocean, most boats and crew are regular participants in regional distance races such as West Vancouver Yacht Club's Southern Straits Race, Royal Victoria Yacht Club's Swiftsure International Yacht Race, Seattle Yacht Club's Smith/Protection Island Race and other notable races such as the Van Isle 360, Round the County and the Oregon Offshore.

Boat preparation includes acquiring heavy weather sails, emergency steering, a liferaft, an EPIRB and other safety equipment meeting the requirements of Category 1 of the Offshore Special Regulations (see www.sailing.org/1903.php). In addition to on-the-water training, crew training includes completing accredited Safety at Sea, marine first aid and radio operator training programs. Other early preparation includes establishing a relationship with an experienced marine insurer who covers ocean racing. If your current insurer doesn't offer this coverage, you will probably want to move your business well in advance of the race. Few insurers will write an ocean racing policy if they do not already have your regular local business.

Race after race, participants describe the Vic-Maui in terms of teamwork, challenge and the adventure of a lifetime. If this race is for you and your friends, now is the time to start getting ready for the 2010 Vic-Maui. ☎

Race Committee

David Sutcliffe has completed two Vic-Maui's on Kinetic, his Beneteau First 47.7, and is the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club's Event Chair for the 2010 Vic-Maui; Patti Link is the Lahaina Yacht Club's Event Chair and Greg Harms is the Technical Committee Chair for the 2010 Vic-Maui. More information on the race and organization is available on the official website at www.vicmaui.org.



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