

A BIT OF HISTORY

The biennial 2308 nautical mile Victoria to Maui ocean racing classic was the brain child of Jim Innes, a sailor, member of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and a senior pilot of what was CP Air, now Canadian Airlines International. The 1992 Victoria to Lahaina, Maui, race is the 14th sailing of this Pacific Ocean test of leading skippers, boats, and crews. It has become a major event on the Pacific Coast sailing calendar and competition is keen among those who are able to pass the tough entrance requirements.

It's fitting that Jim Innes should receive recognition for his contribution to the race. CP Air accordingly put up a trophy bearing his name. The waters of this classic ocean race were the setting for the Pacific explorations of Captain George Vancouver. In 1792/93, he explored the British Columbia coast using Lahaina as a winter headquarters. The modern-day racing yachts travel these same waters between B.C. and Hawaii which are flown over by Canadian Airline's fleet of jet aircraft.

Jim Innes' idea was to create a challenging ocean-crossing race that would start in his home province and would attract ocean-worthy yachts and capable skippers and crews. In 1965, Jim's "Long Gone," Lol Killam's "Velaris," both from the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and M.R. Ramsay's "Norena of Wight" of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, made the trail-blazing passage from Victoria to Hawaii. It was strictly an unofficial race, an experiment, won by Jim's "Long Gone" in 15 days, 55 minutes, but it was the beginning of a strong bond between Royal Vancouver and Lahaina Yacht Clubs which now act as the joint sponsors of the Vic-Maui Race. Royal Van looks after all details in Vancouver and Victoria, including the start, while Lahaina each year sets new standards for hospitality and efficiency at the finish.

The first official Victoria-Maui race was in 1968, starting from just outside Victoria's harbour. This year there will be two starts to accommodate a wide range of yachts on their way to Maui. The five yachts sailing under the PHRF (Pacific Handicap Racing Fleet) Division "C" will hear the starting gun on Thursday, July 2nd at 1000 hrs while the remaining 23 yachts sailing under IOR (International Offshore Rule), PHRF, and IMS (International Measurement Standard) ratings will leave on Saturday, July 4th at 1000 hrs. From the starting line off Victoria's Brotchie Ledge the racers will sail out through the notorious Race Rocks into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, heading westward to the open Pacific.

This Victoria-Maui Race isn't everyone's cup of tea. Not all yachts or yachtsmen are qualified to pass the strict entrance requirements. For those who do, an exciting ocean race awaits, managed by a team of capable, experienced ocean sailors from the two host clubs. Since the first official race in '68, this blue water classic has attracted some of the world's finest ocean racers. Bill Killam's 47-foot "Porpoise III," out of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, won that first race in 16 days, 7 hours, and 15 minutes. The record for the 2308 mile course was set in 1978 by the ultra light displacement flyer, "Merlin," sailed by Seattle Yacht Club's Doug Fryer syndicate. In the 1992 race, Dan Sinclair, of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and his all-Canadian crew have once again brought out the mighty "Merlin" in an attempt to break this speed record of 10 days, 2 minutes, and 9 seconds, a record that will take some beating.

Other notable Vic-Maui contenders in years past have included Lol Killam's "Greybeard," John Long's "Indomitable," John and Barb Dunfield's "Discover," Doug Fryer's "African Queen," and the 1982 winner, Tom Friedland's "Cadillac Snapper". But any of these entrants can take second place to Dan O'Brien in "Scotch Mist;" in the 1970 race, these fellows broke their mast only three days out and, under jury rig, managed to place among the finishers, complete with bagpiper and instrumental crew lining the weather rail at the finish in Lahaina.

This summer, when the starting guns are fired, the boats of the 1992 Victoria-Maui fleet will be vying for the favoured position at the start line with the navigator's sights firmly fixed on line honours and/or corrected time victory across the finish line at Lahaina.

The big boats should arrive in Lahaina 11 to 12 days (or less!) after leaving Victoria, given fair winds. Smaller boats may take as long as 17 to 18 days to complete the race. On arrival, each finishing yacht is royally entertained by Lahaina Yacht Club's welcoming extravaganza, specially put on for each boat, day or night, when they cross the finish line.

Adapted for the 1992 race from an article by Don Tyrell, "Boating News"