

Vic-Maui 2002 . . . A Race in Review

Vic-Maui 2000 was a hard act to follow. Everything was “textbook”. The Pacific High cooperated by parking itself directly above the rhumb line, providing perfect conditions for records to be shattered . . . and shattered they were. We started 20 boats and finished 20 boats all well within the time limit with an evening to spare allowing everyone a full restful night’s sleep before the banquet. The banquet was a festive bash to end all.

And then there was the Vic-Maui 2002. Barely 24 hours after the first start a gale engulfed the fleet. The boats were battered, sails were torn and some of the crew became so seasick that it caused boats to withdraw and head back to various ports. We started 19 boats and only three days into the race were down to 15. When the gale ended, the Pacific High flattened out into a cucumber across the rhumb line, forcing the boats to sail south rather than a more easterly course toward their destination. The big, lightweight, aerodynamic sleds managed to find the right course through the constantly changing wind conditions. The smaller boats and the heavier boats requiring a much steadier breeze were often becalmed, averaging one or two knots an hour. Frustration followed aggravation.

It was pretty obvious by July 5th that the time limit was going to have to be extended or the majority of the fleet would not make the deadline. The question was how far to extend it. While all of us hoped that when the boats made it to the more stable trade winds they would make much better time, the fact remained that many had more than 1,000 miles to go and only seven days to do it in. They would have to average more than 6 knots during the entire balance of the journey. The averages were looking more like 4 to 5. So the meetings were held and it was decided that the time limit would be extended a full five days which was the last day before we had to leave the room in Kaanapali that was our finish line room. The extensive amount of arrangements that had to be “rearranged” was staggering.

And then there was the question of what do we do about the banquet. Already at break even at 400 attendees, meetings were held to decide how many people would actually make it. At the first meeting, one ticket had been sold. Would the families of the crew members who had not finished by the time of the banquet still come? Four boats were estimated to arrive the day of the banquet. Would the winds hold so that we could get them in and greeted in time to make the banquet? Would one of them come in during the banquet, which would force many of the volunteers to leave the banquet to take care of them? How many of the trophies would actually be able to be given out? Would there be enough time for the engraving on the plaques for the last minute finishers? How many people do we commit to? And finally, what about the ones who don’t make the banquet . . . how do we make sure they get their party?

So these were the things facing the committee plus a couple of dozen other things behind the scenes. With each boat that finished, there was a promise of increasing wind. As each daily update came out, it was either encouraging or discouraging as the wind was doing whatever it damned well pleased. The truth? We just didn’t know. We planned for the worst and hoped for the best.

Saturday morning at 5:00, “Show Me” finished. At 9:22 “Greyhound” crossed and at 12:17 “Charlemagne” finished. The dock parties started before the sun was up and finished about 3:00pm, just in time to get to the banquet that started at 4:00. We gave the caterer a count of 200 but she was flexible and was able to feed the 260 at the banquet. We had a little mixup with a few of the trophies but we adjusted. The awards that could be awarded were awarded. Then

there was dancing and after the dancing, there was the next greeting down at the dock for “Surt” who finished at midnight thirty. Then to bed.

Sunday found a packed Lahaina Yacht Club for the “wrap up” party for a race that was far from wrapped up.

Meanwhile, there would be no rest for the truly weary still out to sea. We still had four boats out there praying for wind. Oriole with her 26 crew members made up of young cadets, officers and civilians is a naval training vessel for the Canadian Navy. Oriole took first overall corrected honors in the 2000 race and was destined to finally start her engines and motor the last bit due to time constraints for returning crew. She finally arrived at the dock Monday afternoon and it was none too soon. One of the cadets had stepped into a coiled rope a few days out from Maui. The line hung him by his foot upside down over the water. He was the first to offloaded once they reached the docks and was about to be whisked away to the emergency medical facility in Lahaina. He requested that he be able to join the party and he hobbled over to join in the festivities for mai tais and a hula show with the rest of the crew. That night was the first of the “subsequent banquets”.

“Niya Keema” had already withdrawn from the race and was motoring to find the trade winds to bring her in. That left “Piper” and finally, the lonely 63 foot steel hulled “Rusty Unit” many miles behind. “Piper” was the last “official” entry to finish the race at 10pm on Monday night. As of this writing, “Rusty Unit” is still out there. I just received a call from Chairman Joe Gallagher to say that we will have the second of the subsequent banquets tonight (Wednesday) to award the last of the trophies before “Piper” and “Niya Keema” crews depart. There is also a rumor that “Rusty Unit” may even start her engines and motor down to Lahaina in time for the party. “Rusty Unit” “didn’t even make the deadline extension so the coveted “turtle” trophy will go to “Piper”.

So to say that this was an unusual race would be the understatement of the century. Comparing the picture perfect Vic-Maui 2000 to the trouble riddled Vic-Maui 2002, I’d have to say that Chairing the Vic-Maui 2000 was “cake”. My hat is off to Chairmen Joe Gallagher and Nancy Goode and their Committee Chairmen for making this mess of a race work. To Lahaina Yacht Club Manager, Eve Jordan, let her be labeled “Ms. Flexible” as she and her staff did whatever needed to be done for just “one more greeting” or just “one more banquet”. To all of the people behind the scenes, it was as flawless as it could have been. To the competitors and their prevailing persistence, I give a hearty hip hip hooray.

And my one final thought . . . boy am I glad my Chairmen days are over!

Bonnie Nelson
Vic-Maui Race Trustee 2002
Vic-Maui Chairman 1998 and 2000