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AFRICAN
PORT
STAR

The following is an article published in the Spring 1980 issue of *Ka'na'ta*, Canadian Pacific Airlines inflight magazine. The accompanying photo is of *African Star*, owned by Doug Fryer of Seattle; a boat succeeded by *Night Runner*.

Victoria Maui Race!

By Murray Burt

The idea germinated during the summer of '64 after some idle chatter among cruising sailors at a quiet anchorage in the British Columbia Gulf Islands. It was yacht club talk for a while — a lot of enthusiasm from some quarters, a lot of pooh-poohing from others.

Then there was a blizzard of winter evening letter-writing, notes directed to all sailors and clubs in the Northwest. The message: let's race to Hawaii.

What started as chatter has finished — seven times now — to the pop of champagne corks, the clink of martini and Mai Tai thermoses, garlands of leis and a luau (suckling pig and all) with hosts and guests alike bombed from the air with 2000 tropical orchids.

Between starts and finishes there has been some of the finest ocean racing in the world, acknowledged internationally as a championship event, and indisputably the longest offshore sailing race run from Canadian waters.

The event, conducted every even-numbered year, is a biennial bucketing across 2300 miles of Pacific Ocean for the silverware and trophies of the Victoria-to-Maui International Yacht Race.

This summer, on the ebbing tide of a Dominion Day morning, about two score of the biggest and best of Northwest's racing cruisers will muster near Brotchie Ledge, in waters southwest of Victoria. To a countdown punctuated by the starting cannon's warning booms, $5-million worth of the best sailing hardware available will tack, reach and run toward a broad starting line, a choreography of keelboats mincing and pirouetting like dancers.

It will be a familiar scene to anyone who has raced offshore. Bit (sic) hulls thrash back and forth, sails filling, winch ratchets screaming, cordage straining. Skippers, two hands on the helm, look up and out, watching sail luffs, wind shifts and the opposition. Navigators or tacticians, perched aft, toes curled under lifelines, absorb the seconds ticking away on the stopwatches in their hands.

There's a standard final sequence of actions and orders:

"That's the five-minute gun!"

The tactician checks the sweep of the second hand on his watch and the key countdown begins.

"Lee ho . . . watch that C&C 48 to starboard ... okay, trim the jenny. . ."

"Two minutes 20 to the gun. Ready about..."

The boats make their last drive to the starting line to cross the second after The Honorable H. P. Bell-Irving signals the start on the stroke of 1100 hours.

Dry-mouthed skippers and crews settle down to rush for Tatoosh Light on Cape Flattery where they'll turn the corner and strike south and west with the prospect of 15 to 20 days of dipping across the long, bosomy swells of the North Pacific.

Ahead: constant motion, confined living, fog, storms, sun and sunburn; seas and skies of blue, green, white and purple; winds of every measure; marine life of a dozen surprises, great meals (for the lucky), *mal de mer* (for the unlucky), pain perhaps; unparalleled camaraderie, the thrill of the hunt — and the most romantic landfall you could wish for, Lahaina, on the Hawaiian island of Maui.

Jim Innes, a CP Air senior pilot, sometime gentleman farmer, quarterhorse breeder and four-time yacht builder, is generally given credit for being the founding father of the Victoria-Maui event.

He shares the honor.

"In 1964, there was a lot of consultation on the matter. Lol Killam of Vancouver, Ron Ramsay of Victoria, Boo Paschall of the Boeing family in Seattle — all of us talked it up. We'd done the Swiftsure and most of the local races. It seemed time to take to the sea — test boats and seamanship —but there seemed a better way than dragging all the way south to Los Angeles just to get into the Transpac Race to Honolulu."

Discussion started seriously at summer anchorages while doing the odd holiday or weekend cruise. And it became a conversation piece around the clubs for a while. "Lots of people, at the time, said they were very interested. I suppose a lot were skeptical and thought we were a bunch of ding-a-lings."

Innes and his wife Shirley spent hours, during the winter nights of '64 and '65, typing out letters and sending them to all parts of the Northwest.

"What happened out of all this was the production of a package of research on (Captain George) Vancouver's routing between Hawaii and Victoria in the 1790s — that gave it some historical perspective — and a firm decision to try to create a northwestern alternative to the biennial Transpac," limes says.

By June 1965, three starters were mustered: Innes' L-36 *Long Gone;* Ramsay's 42-foot steel sloop *Norena of Wight;* and the Killam 48-foot sloop *Velaris.* Hours before race day the well-intentioned crew of *Velaris* suddenly had a change of heart, and it took some press-ganged charm to keep them in the running.

The first race was a very informal affair. Innes admits he had the edge on research. "We were very fortunate. We had done some calculations on a least-time track. This is where you compute what the average wind should be, and how much off the great circle route you can deviate without adding too much time and distance to your passage."

It worked out well for him. *Long Gone* was as good as her name and completed the passage in 15 days, 16 hours and 55 minutes. But at this point nothing had been formally arranged with the Maui sailing authorities to officiate at the finish.

"We all agreed to take our own times passing the breakwater at Kahului, Maui, because that's where we planned to clear customs. After that we headed round to the Canadian resort at Napili Kai."

That's where the fun really began. The word spread of the Canadian sailors' exploit and ambitions. Crew members, flown-in well-wishers and some of the locals turned out for a big party, and the Lahaina Yacht Club people were soon in the thick of the enthusiasm as co-sponsors with the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club.

It was considered neither safe nor logical to compete with the Transpac, which finished in Honolulu. So 1966-67 were preparation years, and the first official Victoria-to-Maui International was set for July competition in 1968 and even-numbered years thereafter. The entry list has been swelling ever since.

Despite its present international ocean-sailing championship ranking, the Maui race is not usually rated as one of your toughies. It's not likely to be such a misery as a Fastnet or a Tasman or a Bermuda race can be. But it does accomplish, just as well, the original objectives set for it.

Innes, Killam and Ramsay wanted it to be a good sailing experience under varied conditions. It's that nearly always. They wanted it to be a good test of seamanship and amateur navigational sciences. As one of the longer regular sailing races on the books (not counting round-the-world and trans-Atlantic events), it affords that.

But above all they wanted it to be a rewarding yachting experience that would broaden parochial northwest thinking. They scored again.

"We've shown them the Pacific is a delightful ocean to sail on . . . it's the most exciting way to travel to Hawaii," says Innes, a man who has winged the trip like a commuter for many years of his career.

If it's not always tough, it's a rare race when there isn't varied action. Variety is its special spice. Zero-zero fog around the approaches to Juan de Fuca Strait; mill-pond calms in the North Pacific highs; searing 90s of the tropics; 65-knot winds knocking down part of the fleet while others, 15 miles away, are radioing complaints about light air. Trade winds on your quarter; frustrating westerlies on your nose. All the conditions are there. And some of the crew yarns that feed on these extremes have become legend in the race's short history.

Or of how those on *Sea Ray* in 1974 had to learn to eat with fingers and jackknives when one of the crew threw the cutlery overboard with the wash water.

All the adventure or giggle stories about the Maui race pale, however, against the experience of Englishman and author *(Mouse That Roared, Hound of the Sea)* Leonard Wibberley. His boat, a new Morgan 34 called *Cu Na Mara,* was one of the smaller entries in the race of '68. As he tells it in his book, he was steering his boat on a merry charge downwind in the latter stages of the race. It was a boisterous day with lots of cloud and curtains of rain in the tropical sky.

At first the two destroyers looked like big ketches on the horizon making a similar passage to Hawaii. As they came hull up, it was clear they were warships. They seemed to be signalling because Wibberley's crew could see flashes around the superstructure. Thunder, moments later, didn't seem out of keeping with the nature of the weather.

Then there was a geyser of water astern, right in the middle of *Cu Na Mara's* wake. Then another and another. Successive shots seemed to be marching much closer. *Cu Na Mara* was clearly at the receiving end of some inappropriate target practice. Of course, there was a great scrambling for the radio telephone with frantic calls relayed to the Canadian escort, *Laymore.*

Jack Kinney, cook on the *Mary Bower* 30 miles ahead, said the radio description was like something out of a war movie script. "The shells are still coming in. That one was closer. The next will get us."

Then the firing stopped. The two destroyers, the *Isbell* and *Waddell,* moved in fast. The yachtsmen were not privy to the conversation with the gunnery crew. But after a few minutes both ships peeled off in the direction of Hawaii with no exchange of niceties. They went "like a couple of kids who had flung a baseball through somebody's window", Wibberley wrote.

Kinney recalls Wibberley's best radio line. In his stiff-upper-lip, clipped British accent he said: "Thank God it was just American destroyers practising. If they had been in earnest we'd have been sunk by now."

It was all in a day's racing to Maui.