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1998 Vic Maui – A Race of Tactics & Camaraderie

By Ron Ogilvy

The big story in the Coopers & Lybrand Victoria to Maui Race was tactics. The route to Maui from Victoria passes through an area frequented in summer by the center of the windless North Pacific High. Sailors must make the best use of all possible information to sail around the high. Too wide a berth and they are sailing wasted miles, but too close and they are out of wind. Results always reflect their tactical choice. The primary sources of weather information are weatherfax and a carefully logged barometer.

Steve Crary on *Midnight Special* has sailed over half a dozen Vic-Maui races and has come close, including winning line honors, but has never won first overall. 1998 was his year. Before the race was halfway over, his chosen course was already established as the optimal route.

The high pressure system was small and far to the northwest at the first start, tempting the sailors to take a rare run straight for Maui, cutting hundreds of miles off the overall distance. However, within 48 hours the neat, simple system had become disorganized, and within another 48 hours, had spread 1500 miles across the northeast Pacific, leaving many sailors in a calm reminiscent of the equatorial doldrums.

Midnight Special, a Santa Cruz 50 and *Renegade*, Dan Sinclair's Andrews 70, who corrected to first and second overall, were in the second start three days after the smaller boats. They had the opportunity to see what was happening and to steer well south to ensure continued breeze.

Charisma, who placed third, was in the first start but managed to stay ahead of the spreading calm.

The fourth place boat, *Maestro*, Dave Shore's 23 year old Newport 41 sailing in Class D placed fourth overall by mere minutes. *Maestro's* tactics were unquestionably the most impressive in the fleet. All of the boats in her class and the class above were swallowed up by the high, yet *Maestro* emerged to cross the finish line 15 hours ahead of the next boat in her class.

The 1998 Coopers and Lybrand Vic-Maui began with over 30 boats assembling in Victoria's Vic-Maui race village. Participating sailboats, race committee and spectator boats all rafted together filling the docks with a backdrop of the majestic Empress Hotel and the impressive provincial legislative buildings. For three days the docks buzzed with a mixture of last minute preparations, excitement, anticipation and merrymaking. All culminating in a dock based sendoff barbecue duly fitting the 30th anniversary of a 2308 mile ocean race. Over 400 people danced and socialized to live music, while sampling genuine Maui Mai Tais aboard one of the many hospitality vessels.

The morning of the start, the fleet was ready, waiting anxiously for the 3pm start. The sailors got away cleanly in winds gusting just beyond 15 knots under broken skies with *Maestro* winning

the best start trophy and leading the pack through Race Rocks. The first start saw the majority of the fleet, 16 boats of which 14 were between 38 and 45 feet, begin a series of closely fought match races across the ocean. Some reported visual contact with other boats most days of their crossing.

This was not to be a record breaking year, with winning boats sailing well south to skirt the high, and others spending 24 to 48 hours becalmed. However, after over 19 days of sailing across the ocean, many boats reported the last 48 hours as some of the most exciting sailing of their lives. The trade winds at the finish were running above average at 20 to 25 knots, with several boats experiencing gusts over 40 knots. The tales of surfing in walls of water consistently poured in to the dockside greeting parties hosted for each arrival by the Lahaina Yacht Club and the Community of Lahaina.