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# *Latitude 38*

MID-PACIFIC CONVERGENCE —

TAHITI-MOOREA SAILING RENDEZVOUS

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# MID-PACIFIC CONVERGENCE

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Historians tell us that when the first Europeans arrived in the Tahitian isles during the late 1700s, the islanders showered them with all sorts of gifts from their bountiful land including fresh fruits, vegetables, pigs and fowl. Many early chroniclers of that era enthusiastically reported that, in addition, beautiful young *vahines* (local women) welcomed the ocean-weary explorers by offering their love freely. These days the warm welcome that sailors get isn't quite that astounding, but it's impres-

sive nonetheless — especially for those whose arrival coincides with the Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous.

This annual three-day event (June 24-26 this year) was created by *Latitude 38* and our Tahitian partners with two primary purposes: First, as a point of convergence where Pacific Puddle Jumpers — voyagers whose passages to the islands originated at one of many points along the west coast of the Americas — could meet one another face to face, celebrate their safe arrivals and

swap tales. And second, to give these newly arrived sailors a rich Polynesian welcome by introducing them to highly revered cultural traditions in music, dance, sport and cuisine.

This year's event began Friday afternoon in French Polynesia's capital, Papeete, Tahiti, with a colorful reception at the town hall (*Mairie de Papeete*), courtesy of the mayor. While we conducted mini-interviews for next month's PPJ Recap article, some sailors got reacquainted with former cruising buddies,

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*Spread: The crew of the Seattle-based Pretorien 35 'Piko' — whose first names are both Lauren — doublehand across the finish line at Moorea's majestic Opunohu Bay. Insets: A visiting sailor gets a lesson in Tahitian dance as musicians set the rhythm.*

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while others joined a group of student 'ambassadors' who'd come to teach the cruisers how to create fragrant flower leis and headdresses from freshly picked blossoms and palm fronds.

Several co-sponsors from Whangarei and Opua, New Zealand, had flown in to showcase the North Island's yacht services and the region's cruising possibilities. Their exhibit tables were popular, as most of the fleet would soon be heading that way. But no one was more in

demand than Cindy Dittrich of the local yacht agency CMA-CGM. She'd attained hero status for working tirelessly to obtain bond exemptions, clearance in and out, and duty-free fuel for the majority of the fleet. Dozens of her clients were eager to give her their thanks, not to mention a few heartfelt hugs. (We hope

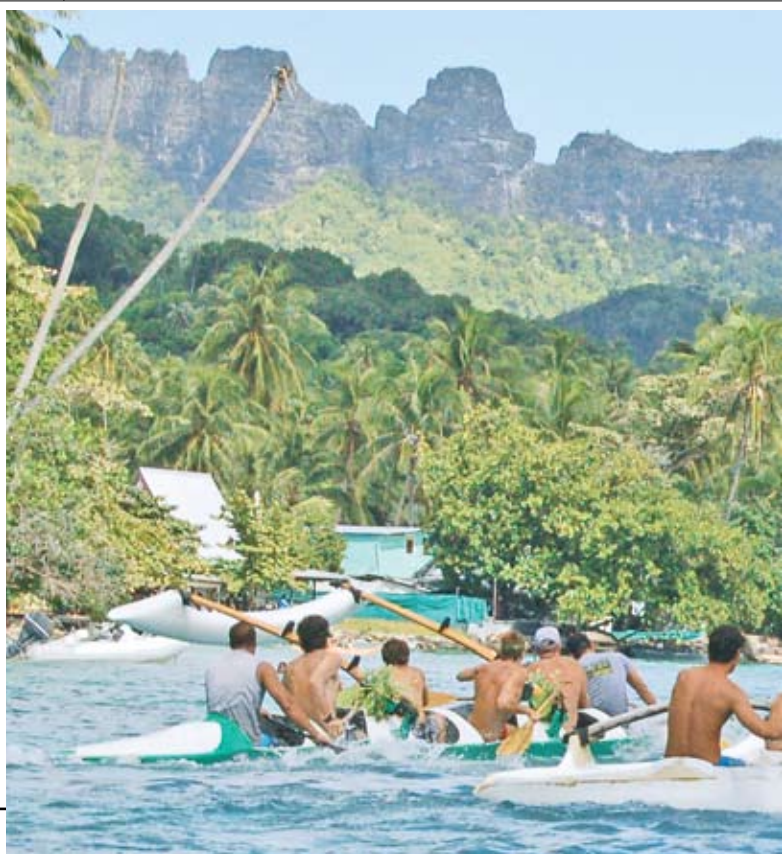
to offer a similar package to next year's fleet.)

A chorus of local dignitaries welcomed fleet members to their islands, followed by a Polynesian chieftain who blessed them in Tahitian, bidding them fair winds for Saturday's rally to Moorea's spectacular Opunohu Bay.

*The pictures tell the story. Clockwise from upper left: Jubilant winners of an early heat; a smooth crossing aboard 'Whatcha Gonna Do'; a fabulous show in downtown Papeete; the fruit carrier's race; cruisers strut their stuff; "Oops, we're goin' down!"; a war-like pose; stringing headdresses.*



JULIE TURPIN



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ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY EXCEPT AS NOTED

After a few celebratory rum punches, the entire congregation followed a troupe of Tahitian drummers to the waterfront plaza to take in a sensational dance show and sample affordable local cuisine from the many mobile *roulettes* staged there.

Over the years we've seen a wide range of wind conditions during the

16-mile crossing to Moorea. But this year was truly odd. The shortest course turned out *not* to be the fastest, as the rhumbline was peppered with patches of light air that led many boats to give up on sailing and kick on their engines. Meanwhile, several miles to leeward, boats were reporting 20 knots of steady breeze. As a result, several boats that had been all but written off finished strong, crossing the line at the entrance

to Opunohu under spinnaker as local drummers serenaded them with age-old cadences. Of the 37 starters, only 9 sailed the whole way: The swift local cat *Makatea* took line honors followed by the B.C.-based Meander 40 *Ceilydh*, the Washington-based MacGregor 65 *Braveheart*, and the San Francisco-based Beneteau First 38s5 *Sudden Stops Necessary*.

In addition to those who'd sailed over en masse, another 20 cruising boats



BRUCE POWELL / CALOUI



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were already in the anchorage when we arrived, swelling the Rendezvous fleet to around 60 boats.

During a shoreside cocktail party that afternoon, local dancers and musicians gave the fleet another alluring dose of traditional Polynesian entertainment. As always, the question on everyone's mind was, "How the heck do those girls gyrate their hips so fast?"

One element of Polynesian culture that every cruiser becomes aware of shortly after arriving is the pervasive passion for outrigger canoeing. On any afternoon, in every lagoon of the Society Islands you can find sun-bronzed paddlers pushing themselves to hit faster and faster speeds — and they love to race against passing sailboats.

Having a chance to sample this exhilarating national pastime in six-person canoes is a highlight of every Rendezvous, and this year everyone wanted to take a crack at it — even the kids. Twenty-seven teams formed to enter a series of round-robin eliminations,



**Thanks to Bob Callaway of 'Braveheart', Jennifer Martindale fulfilled her lifelong goal of sailing across the South Pacific.**

many with paddlers from several different boats, and goofy names like This Side Up, Fogetaboutit and the Flying Spaghetti Monsters. To insure that the precious hulls didn't veer off to Fiji, accomplished Tahitian paddlers sat in the

front and rear seats.

Meanwhile, several Tahitian athletes demonstrated other traditional sporting contests on the beach such as weight-lifting giant stones, coconut husking, and the ancient fruit carrier's race — a footrace where contestants carry a wooden pole with stalks of bananas at each end. Competitors quickly found out it's much harder than it looks.

As the canoeing heats distilled down to a final race, the finish times of each 200-yard sprint got faster and faster. The neophytes seemed to be getting the hang of it, and there hadn't been a capsize all day — except once, post-race, when a crew was trying to disembark.

The final race was a crowd pleaser, with the Reef Runners barely trailing the Flying Spaghetti Monsters as they approached the finish buoy in a frenzy of aggressive paddling. As we looked through our camera lens to grab the perfect finish-line image, we could hardly believe our eyes. The Monsters somehow managed to capsize an instant after their bow crossed the line. With an uproar from the crowd, a huge contro-

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versy ensued: Did they win, or does the whole boat have to cross the line? Naturally, everyone had an opinion. But in the end the much-amused head of the local canoe federation ruled that the race had ended the instant that the Monsters' bow crossed the line. They were so excited, you'd think they'd just won an Olympic event.

After everyone caught their breath, a traditional Tahitian *maa* lunch was served that included *poisson cru* (a *ceviche*-like preparation of fresh fish), roast pork, taro, yams, fruits and more.

**A** final elaborate music and dance show followed, in which a couple dozen cruisers participated, putting their agility to the test. Few, if any, of the visitors could understand the lyrics, but the sweet ukulele melodies and lilting vocals were evocative of deep emotions, reinforced by wonderfully sensuous



***With a little help from their Tahitian friends, the Flying Spaghetti Monsters — from four different boats — were victorious despite capsizing.***

dance moves.

At the awards ceremony, the event's primary organizer, Stephanie Betz, gave prizes to the game winners, and every boat received a polished mother-of-

pearl shell with the event logo etched into it.

But as we noted at the time, you only needed to look at the lush greenery of the surrounding volcanic peaks and the gin-clear waters of the anchorage to know that the best prize was having the privilege of spending time in such a breathtaking place.

"Enjoy it!" we advised. "Because there are millions of sailors all over the world who would love to trade places with you right now."

— **latitude/andy**

*One of our goals in putting on the Rendezvous each year (with help from Tahiti Tourisme and other partners) is to demonstrate to the government that cruisers are a small but important part of the territory's tourism market. So if you plan to migrate west next year, please plan to attend the 2012 event, slated for June 29 to July 1. Check out [www.pacificpuddlejump.com](http://www.pacificpuddlejump.com) for other details about the 2012 rally.*