

TAHITI-MOOREA SAILING RENDEZVOUS —

If you're going to throw a big party, the odds of making it a truly memorable experience will increase dramatically if you stage it at a spectacular venue. With that in mind, it's no surprise that the seventh annual Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendezvous, held June 22-24, was a great success. After all, its three days of events took place on the waterfront of French Polynesia's capital, Papeete; in the palm-fringed anchorage of Moorea's majestic Opunohu Bay; and in the dark-blue channel between the two.

As regular readers know, the Rendezvous has two main goals: First, to celebrate the successful 3,000-mile crossings of fleet members who jumped off from various points along

the west coast of the Americas — a trip we like to call the Pacific Puddle Jump. And second, to introduce them to highly revered elements of Polynesian culture in music, dance, sport and cuisine. Sailors have been voyaging west to these islands for generations, but before the creation of the Rendezvous they never received a welcome quite like this.

After learning about the event during our Puddle Jump send-off parties

in Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico and Balboa, Panama last winter, many of the 50 boatloads of cruisers who showed up in Papeete had made special efforts to arrive on time — and for laid-back cruisers, arriving *anywhere* on a particular date is a rarity.

As fleet members filed into the Tahiti Tourism visitors' center to check in Friday afternoon, many renewed friendships that had been established in anchorage

thousands of miles away, while others met face-to-face for the first time, having chatted previously via HF radio while in the middle



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of the ocean.

On hand to greet them with souvenir tank tops and swag bags was our longtime partner Stephanie Betz, who dreamed up the Rendezvous concept years ago. In addition to her staff of young Tahitians, folks from Tahiti Tourism (a major sponsor) were on hand, wearing bright flower-print shirts and dresses. Staffers from an NGO explained their environmental concerns, while several New Zealanders described the marine services available in Whangarei

Left: 'Gypsea Heart' plows through big swells on the way to Moorea. Spread: Beneath sacred Mount Rotui, the Killer Rose team (foreground) strokes to victory in the semi-finals.



and Opua — two of the most popular end-of-season stopping places for the majority of westbound sailors.

For us, having flown out rather than sailed, it was a vicarious thrill to hear all the crossing anecdotes: One skipper swore he had such stable conditions that he'd stayed on the same tack for nine days and had barely adjusted a thing. But another got caught in such an enormous system of black squalls and lightning while trying to cross the ITCZ (Intertropical Convergence Zone) that he eventually did

an about-face and headed north for a day or two, just to get some rest. Meanwhile, boats that had left the same Mexican port a week or so earlier had a textbook crossing, with wind all the way and minimal squall action. Our favorite crossing story, though, was from Mark McClellan and Anne MacDonald of

They take great pride in their centuries-old cultural traditions.

the Idaho-based Deerfoot 50 *Blue Rodeo*. Although it had been nearly two months since they'd stopped at uninhabited San Benedicto Island, roughly 300 miles off the Mexican mainland, they were still giddy with excitement when they explained how they'd ridden on the back of a playful, 20-ft-wide manta ray. (We'll share many more crossing tales in our Puddle Jump Recap article next month.)

Tahitians are spiritual people, who — even in this age of Wi-Fi Internet, global television, and changing values elsewhere — take great pride in their centuries-old cultural traditions. So it was fitting that the evening's entertainment began with a heartfelt blessing of the fleet by a local chieftain, followed by a live music and dance show. You know you're in Tahiti when young girls in

grass skirts gyrate their hips from side to side so fast that you'd swear they were aided by unseen electric motors, while their shirtless, hard-bodied male partners knock their knees together in



The steady cadence of hardwood drums at the starting line reminded competitors that this was no ordinary yacht race.

double-time, to the pulsing cadence of hardwood drums and ukuleles.

A three-sample tasting of white and rose wines made on the coral atolls of the Tuamotus (branded Vin de Tahiti) definitely added to the festive mood.

After the reception, some fleet members took in the eye-popping elegance of the Miss Tahiti contest — *ooh la la!* — while others enjoyed inexpensive meals from food trucks (*roulettes*) on the waterfront, alongside local islanders. The ahi brochettes and sashimi were sublime.

When we arrived in Papeete a couple of days before the event, the

A tasting of Tuamotu-made wines, a blessing from a local chieftain, and a high-energy dance show started things off with style.



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weather forecast didn't look good. Tropical rainstorms with occasional strong winds were predicted throughout the weekend. But luckily the prognosticators were only half right. Saturday morning dawned with clear skies, but plenty of wind for a spirited crossing to Moorea (about 16 miles).

At the skipper's meeting the previous afternoon there seemed to be a universal sigh of relief when we emphasized that

this was to be a low-pressure *rally*, not a *race*. And sure enough, when our friends Didier and Thierry from the Tahiti Sailing Federation sounded the starting horn, only two boats were anywhere near the start line — the Bradford family's San Francisco-based Cal 43 *Convivia* and the New Zealand-based Farr 44 *Cuttyhunk*, owned by Irene Hayward and Chris Platt.

The rest of the fleet eventually got headed in the right direction, though, with the catamarans, naturally, leading the way. It proved to be a rough and rowdy crossing, with lumpy seas and 20-28 knots of breeze. Line honors went to Colin Dykstra's Toronto-based Atlantic 55 cat *Segue*, followed by the first monohull, Matt and Jean Findlay's Southampton-



ALL PHOTOS LATITUDE / ANDY EXCEPT AS NOTED

JULIE TURPIN

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based Beneteau 57 *Superted V*.

That afternoon competitors swapped crossing tales over rum punch — made with island-grown tropical fruit — and soaked in the beauty of the craggy, volcano-formed mountains that tower over the bay and the lush, tropical lowlands that surround the turquoise lagoon where the fleet was anchored. As we often say, in

many parts of these islands the views are so stunningly beautiful it's tough to decide which way to point your camera.

Sundays at the Rendezvous are always dedicated to traditional Polynesian sports. Throughout the day, cruisers got to test their strength and agility by

weight-lifting massive stones (few were successful); racing through the palm grove carrying staffs laden with stalks of bananas (the ancient fruit carrier's race); husking, then carving the meat out of coconuts; and pulling on a hawser in the apparently universal contest we call tug of war.

As in years past, though, the biggest thrills for contestants and onlookers alike were during the six-person outrig-

Clockwise from upper left: An all-girl team revs up to race; Rani learns to weave palm fronds; Victoria gets a dance lesson; Yoshi runs the fruit carrier's race; Bill and ShantiAnna sample Polynesian cuisine; lovely Moorea ladies show us how it's done; fleet members gather for Friday's festivities; Leanne prepares to tack aboard 'Red Sky'; 'Charisma' crosses the line in a near photo-finish with 'Cest la Vie'; furling the 'Condessa's' genoa.



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ger canoe races. With two or more cruising boats providing paddlers for each of sixteen teams, a round-robin elimination was detailed on the notice board. (Tahitian paddlers filled in the bow and stern positions, so the canoes didn't end up in Fiji.)

Sprints of roughly 150 yards were run throughout the morning. Later, after a break for a bountiful Polynesian *Maa* luncheon — which included fish, chicken, pork, and a variety of local fruits and veggies — it was time for the semis, then the finals.

We learned an important lesson during that final two-boat race: Even though this was all just for fun, we really should have declared some *rules* beforehand! As the two teams paddled side-by-side in a frenzied rush toward the finish line, team Killer Rose (with crew from Colorado-based *The Rose* and Washington-based *Orcinus* aboard) were beginning to extend their small lead when all of a sud-



It's a beautiful thing to see age-old cultural traditions handed down from generation to generation.

den a crewman (who shall remain nameless) from the competing team — what was it, Hunkywater? — grabbed hold of Killer Rose's outrigger and used his grip to catapult his boat into the lead. The Tahitian observers rolled their eyes and laughed, then confirmed, "No, of course that's not allowed." But in the spirit of keeping things loose and uncomplicated we let the victory stand, albeit with an

asterisk.

That afternoon during the final dance show the visiting cruisers got another up-close look at this age-old Polynesian art form, and were given a chance to swing their own hips as well.

At the prize giving, our partner Stephanie thanked all who attended for making the effort, and they responded by cheering her and her team for their hard work in organizing it. As a memento of the weekend, each boat was given a finely polished clam shell with the Rendezvous' distinctive logo etched into it. Representing *Latitude 38*, this writer closed by saying, "These shells make a nice souvenir, but I think you'll agree that the best prize is simply being here in this beautiful place. No doubt you all know dozens of sailors who would love to be in your shoes right now!"

— **latitude/andy**