

TAHITI-MOOREA SAILING RENDEZ-VOUS —

If you've never experienced the cruising lifestyle, you might find it hard to believe that one of the most challenging things for a cruising sailor to do is show up at a particular place on a specific date. Knowing that, we were extremely pleased when nearly 70 boatloads of international cruisers turned up in Tahiti on June 19 to participate in the 10th annual Tahiti-Moorea Sailing Rendez-vous — an event in which *Latitude 38* has always played a major role.

Since the beginning, the Rendez-vous has followed a recipe that would be very hard to top: Gather together sailors from many nations and place them within the lush, tropical islands of French Polynesia. Entertain them with sensual dances and island melodies that have

been passed down through generations, coax them into racing interisland aboard their floating homes, let them sample the thrill of outrigger canoe racing through a turquoise lagoon, and invite them to feast on traditional Polynesian cuisine. With all this and more, it's no wonder that many who attend the Tahiti-Moorea Rendez-vous consider it to be a highlight of their South Pacific travels.

As sailors from a wide variety of homeports gathered Friday afternoon at the Tahiti Tourisme complex on Papeete's downtown quay, we had a chance to catch up with some whom we'd met early last spring at our Pacific Puddle



Dutchman Pieter Bokhoven and his daughter pushed 'Suluk' hard during the 15-mile race from Papeete to Moorea.

Jump Sendoff Parties in Puerto Vallarta and Panama. We also met many others for the first time who had heard about the Rendez-vous from fellow cruisers while heading west with the Puddle Jump migration. One thing they all seemed to have in common was a sort



INSET JULIE TURPIN



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of glow or radiance. A wide-eyed cruiser theorized that this subtle yet distinctive look reflects the inner peace that comes from living the relatively carefree cruising lifestyle, coupled with the pride of accomplishment gained from having

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successfully sailed nonstop across at least 3,000 miles of open ocean.

As we often explain, the dual purpose of the Rendez-vous is to celebrate the fleet's safe arrival in the islands, while introducing its members to long-revered Polynesian cultural traditions.

After our French-Tahitian partner Stephanie Betz gave a thorough chart briefing about the next day's rally/race to Moorea, she shared many useful details about interisland cruising through Tahiti's Leeward Islands,

For at least a decade, Stephanie, ourselves and others have been trying to convince government officials that cruisers are an important part of Tahiti's overall tourism market, because they are the only visitors who spend money in the small towns and villages of Tahiti's outer islands, as well as in the remote isles of the Marquesas and Tuamotus. Also, most cruisers are genuinely interested in spending quality time with local islanders, wherever they go.

Our efforts finally seem to be paying off, as both visa and boat-stay policies have loosened up somewhat in recent years, and an impressive cadre of dignitaries turned up to welcome the Rendez-vous fleet. Among them were Minister of Tourism Jean Christophe Bouissou, Tahiti Tourisme's CEO Paul Sloan, Tahitian Sailing Federation President Thierry Hars, and three mayors from distant Marquesan islands. Sloan's comment drew a chuckle: "We're lucky enough to live in a picture

After the welcoming comments, fleet members were offered a sampling of wines made on the coral atolls of the Tuamotus — one of five archipelagos that make up the vast territory of French

Polynesia. A local chief-tain conducted a blessing ceremony for skippers and their crews, then the thundering cadence of hardwood drums began, and a troupe of elaborately costumed dancers gave many fleet members their first look at one of Polynesia's most prized traditions.

On Friday night weather predictions were conflicting for the next day's 15-mile sail to Moorea. But as one skipper said, "Hey, whatever. We're sailors; we'll deal with whatever we get."

The next morning as we hailed the fleet via VHF to clarify the starting line, set just outside Papeete Harbor, the breeze was light and fluky. But before we'd finished our brief explanation, it had piped up suddenly to 18, then 20, then 23 knots. We were going to have a booming reach to Cook's Bay, Moorea,



Traditional sports enthusiast Jordan Temairia shows one of the handmade 'vaca' canoes he made as prizes.



Left: When it comes to eye-popping beauty, few anchorages can compare with Cook's Bay, Moorea. Toward the end of the weekend, Rendez-vousers struck a jubilant pose on the lawn of the Club Bali Hai.

where most of the fleet would be heading after the Rendez-vous weekend.

postcard. But no post card image of a tropical island paradise would be complete without a sailboat passing in the distance."

after all.

As we've been told often in past years, when you've just spent several months sailing alone on the open ocean, as well as during interisland passages, it's a real novelty to find yourself in the middle of a sizeable fleet, all aiming for the

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same destination. Most crews weren't accomplished racers, but many found themselves getting caught up in the competitive spirit of the moment. With a laugh, Philip Bragg of the Tasmania-bound Catalina 42 *Angela* said, "I guess we were pushing her a bit too hard. We were overrunning the whole fleet and were up to about third, when we heard a mighty r-i-i-p, and the jib parted from one side to the other."

The first to finish probably had the largest crew, although seven of them

were kids: The Tzortzis family, aboard the San Francisco-based Lagoon 470 cat *Family Circus*, always appears to be having big fun. Next came Patrick Whetter's UK-based Nautitech 47 cat *Shine of Exeter*, then three monohulls in

quick succession: Perry Peters' Marina del Rey-based J/120 *Felicita*, Craig and Karene White's RI-based Oyster 56 *Il Sogno*, and Neils and Margret Hendriks' Dutch-flagged Voogd 48 *Unwind*, which had begun her cruise in South Africa.

The pictures tell the story. Top row, left to right: 'Dream Catcher' with competitors in hot pursuit; 'Family Circus' was first to finish; Jordan and his protégés show how it's done; Barry of 'Iolani' samples coconut water; Rick of 'SeaKey' perfects his husking technique. Middle row: Dean of 'Imoogi' and Dana of 'Journey' sample local cuisine; the junior fruit-carrier's race; the victorious Kiwi paddlers (plus a photobomber). Bottom row: Who needs pilates when you dance all day; pre-race paddling instruction; a sprint to the finish; Amaia of 'Family Circus' scrapes out coconut, Tahitian-style.



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Ashore that night at the Club Bali Hai — our base of operations for the remainder of the Rendez-vous — crews racapped the crossing and shared cruising tales over complimentary cocktails. After dinner an ultra-high-energy group of dancers and musicians put on a riveting show.

Sunday at the Rendez-vous is always dedicated to a sampling of tradi-

tional Polynesian sports. Two heavily tattooed islanders from the Faaroa Sports and Cultural Association demonstrated the age-old method of husking a coconut, cracking its nut cleanly in two halves, then scraping out the 'meat' with a special tool. A contest followed to see who could do it fastest.

Nearby, two young Tahitians gave a weight-lifting demo using huge, rounded stones — it's all in the technique, our instructors explained. Next came the

fruit-carrier's race, a relay where runners have to shoulder a long staff with a stalk of bananas at each end. At the same time, several local ladies who were perched along the edge of Bali Hai's vast lawn were teaching curious cruisers how to make flower leis, and weave hats or headbands from palm thatch.

Meanwhile, down on the beach a giant yet instantly likeable Tahitian named Mako was organizing outrigger canoe races — the highlight of the day's events. With accomplished Tahitian paddlers in



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the front and rear seats of each sleek, fiberglass canoe, teams of cruisers manned the four middle paddling positions during a round-robin series of races.

As spectators cheered them on from shore, each team stroked ferociously toward the finish line as though their lives depended on it. The scene was truly idyllic, as if conjured up in an improbable daydream: Framed by craggy, volcanic peaks, the five colorful canoes glided across the turquoise lagoon manned by sailors of all ages, from all over the world. After much huffing and puffing, whooping and laughter, a team of determined Kiwis reigned victorious. Longtime cosponsors of the event, they fly up each year to share info about North Island marine services, but they'd never before won the races — in fact, last year they capsized!

Before the traditional "ma'a" lunch was served, Mako detailed the menu. "You know, 500 years ago we used to eat white people," he said with a laugh, "but they were too high in cholesterol." But these days, he explained, Polynesian



Wearing his official Rendez-vous tank top, fisherman-turned-photo boat driver August gave us a wild ride en route to Moorea.

cuisine includes roast pork, *mahi-mahi*, a delicious ceviche-like dish called *poisson cru*, yams, taro, rice and fresh pineapple — all of which was laid out in a grand buffet.

After lunch there was another super-charged dance show that included an instructional session for the sailors,

although they looked about as comfortable as fish out of water, while attempting to swivel their hips and knock their knees together in rapid succession. But it was all great fun.

At the awards ceremony, top prizes included miniature hand-carved double-hulled canoes and polished, iridescent clam shells etched with the event's distinctive logo. But we like to think that all who made the effort to attend were winners. And we think most would agree that the experience of cruising French Polynesia and other South Pacific destinations under sail is the best 'prize' most sailors could ever hope for.

— **latitude/andy**

Tentative dates for next year's Rendez-vous are June 18-20. For updates see www.pacificpuddlejumps.com and www.tahiti-moorea-sailing-rdv.com.

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