



July 24, 2022

### ***WOOHOO! WHAT A RIDE FOR 11<sup>th</sup> GREAT BARRIER REEF OCEAN CHALLENGE***

Host club, Hekili Outriggers, could not have ordered better conditions for the 11<sup>th</sup> Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge, with favourable south-easterly winds kicking in just in time to give 112 paddlers a thrilling and challenging ride from Yorkeys Knob to Four Mile Beach.

After a moving welcome to country by Gavin Singleton from the Yirrganydji tribe and a traditional Polynesian blessing of the fleet, 45 craft set off around Haycock (Scout's Hat) and Double Island, on their way to completing a 45-kilometre course still regarded as one of the most epic downwind runs anywhere in Australia.

Times varied from 3-5 hours according to craft and ability, with paddlers on outrigger canoes, ocean skis and, for the first time at GBROC, a foil ridden by James Casey who earlier this year rode 213kms to claim a world record for hydrofoiling on a paddleboard.

Casey's run yesterday may have seemed a walk in the park by comparison as he smashed out the course in 2:37:59, eclipsing the previous fastest time of 2:48:02 set in 2017 by double ocean ski team of Kiethy Burn and Tommy Woodriffe.

Another GBROC record holder Danny Topfer, from Brisbane Outrigger Canoe Club, who still holds the fastest time on single ski (2:57:02) in 2015, was back in action pairing up on a double ski with local ski veteran Dave Ahmed to take gold and 5<sup>th</sup> overall (3:22:26).

Ahead of them was Todd Boreland from Sydney's Northern Beaches OCC, who achieved an awesome double with line honours for GBROC (3:04:23) and at last weekend's mini G event from Yorkeys to Ellis Beach.

Hot on his heels was Alexander Pawlow (Cairns Ocean Ski Paddlers) completing in 3:07:53 and Damo Staunton (Mollymook OCC) 3:17:02. Cairns ocean ski paddler Julie Stanton (3:47:07) and Coral Sea's Hannah Stokes on OC1 (4:07:29) were the first women to cross.

Hekili's own Andrew Buckley and Morgan Hind showed awesome form on their OC2, finishing in 3:29:09 and veteran Darrell Thoroughgood, competing in a remarkable 11<sup>th</sup> GBROC, was the first OC1 in 3:31:28, averaging just under 13km/hr.

Thoroughgood described it as an 'epic and memorable adventure'.

"The forecast into the event was not looking great with light winds predicted but the weather gods were on our side and provided a nice, solid breeze which kicked in just before the start of the race," he said.

"It got a little bit challenging about the 15km mark when the wind increased and the water got pretty messy. There were still good bumps but it required a lot more skill and agility to link them up.

"Overall, the race pace stayed consistently high with some super quick guys on the ocean skis up front leading the OC2 and OC1 (outrigger) frontrunners.

"James Casey was already out of site on his foil. He's a true legend and it was awesome to witness the display of ocean talent he holds."

For the OC6, or six-man canoes, Brisbane Unlimited open women showed their strength as the only crew to finish the 45km course in the iron division (3:50:41).

The other six OC6 crews battled it out in the changeover division, which involves teams of 10-12 rotating through the moving canoe with the assistance of a support boat.

Mooloolaba open women's crew turned it on to finish in 3:54, just behind Coconuts (Innisfail) open men (3:48:51) and in front of Hekili open mixed, steered by Sue Lockwood, in 4:06:00.

Hekili OCC president Charlie McKillop said the club was stoked to welcome paddlers from Western Australia, Sydney, Darwin and throughout Queensland to far north Queensland.

"Over the past decade GBROC has helped to establish Cairns as an adventure destination for ocean paddlers and in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, the conditions did not disappoint," she said.

"With a new-look sister event, mini G, also turning it on the weekend before, paddlers have had an opportunity to experience two awesome downwind races as well as enjoy a getaway in paradise.

"The positive feedback we have received from visiting paddlers is they will be back and we hope they bring their friends for an even bigger and better week-long event in 2023."

Find full race results on NQ Zone: <http://aocra.com.au/nqzone/newsdetails.php?newsid=75>

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