



MINI G FIRES UP AND SETS SCENE FOR BIG 'G' THIS WEEKEND

Paddlers came from across Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia for one of the country's best ocean races and conditions for the *AO Ozone Mini G Downwinder* didn't disappoint – with more to come this weekend in the 12th Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge.

A 15-knot South-Easterly wind propelled 185 paddlers from Yorkeys Knob beach to Ellis Beach, with the extra incentive of earning points in the Australian Outrigger Ozone Downwind Series.

Young gun Cooper Rolfe from Mission Beach was the first single craft to complete the 18km course in 1:29:31 with Dylan Nicholson from host club Hekili hot on his heels (1:32:49), finishing second in Open Men's division and Jerry Turvey (Coral Sea) third in 1:35:20.

Golden Master Men's Jeff Rainsford from Outrigger Australia showed his experience to finish in 1:34; while Master Men's division was a close battle between Hekili's Beal Beal (1:35:27) and Jarrod Taylor (1:36:33), competing in his first solo Mini G. Beal will be aiming to make it a double when he backs up for the 45km race on Saturday, before representing the Cook Islands at the World Marathon Titles in Samoa next month.

Australian champion V1 paddlers Matt Abbott, from Coconuts (1:34:17) is also on his way to Samoa and was in a class of his own in the rudderless va'a, or canoe, division.

In a hotly-contested ocean ski division, Alexander Pawlow (1:21:45) from Cairns Ocean Ski Paddlers won the local derby ahead of Brett Mesner (1:27:19) and Adam Beale (1:27:58). The only craft in front was the fast-finishing SUP Foil paddlers Tim Fitzsimmons and Craig Campbell, who took less than 40 minutes!

Coconuts Open Men's crew never wavered on the way to winning OC6 gold (1:29:24) and outrigger line honours, with veteran steerer Adrian Darveniza and stroke Greg Lyell guiding a determined crew of young Papuan New Guineans.

Cairns pairing Cameron Duffy & Anthea Ooloff (1:24:25) took out the double ski; while Hekili Outrigger's Andrew Buckley and Morgan Hind backed up their recent 5-hour Molokai crossing with a more leisurely 1:32:06 to take OC2 Master men's gold ahead of Master Mixed winners Jenny Madden and Mick Seay from Port Hacking.

It was an emotional outing for Brisbane Outrigger champion Robyn Saultry, who defended her 2022 Senior Master women's title after crossing in 1:42:17, just holding off Mission Beach's Kathy White (1:42:31) and Clare James (1:44:15). Last year, she had her partner, veteran ski and outrigger champion and coach Danny 'Topyy' Topfer by her side. But his untimely death in March rocked the entire paddling community.

Danny won line honours in his first GBROC in 2015 and was a huge supporter, not only racing but also encouraging other paddlers to be involved by transporting craft to the far north from Brisbane.



Saultry said while her grief at losing her life partner and soul mate was immense, coming back to Cairns to paddle in waters they both loved kept him with her.

"My thanks to all the committee and paddlers of Hekili for the warm support for me and race shirt tribute to Danny at this year's events.

"Danny loved coming up every year, so much so that we had this trip booked by January."

Hekili OCC president Ross Watson said the sea of orange race shirts at Mini G and the upcoming GBROC was a fitting tribute to an inspirational paddler who had done so much to support others.

"Hekili OCC will never forget the logistical support and encouragement Danny Topfer has given to our event for many years and the competitive spirit and sportsmanship for which Topyy will always be remembered in our sport and region," Watson said.

The *AO Ozone R2 MINI G* was a taste of more downwind action to come on Saturday when the *12th Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge* kicks off on Saturday, with the 45km course between Yorkeys Knob beach and Port Douglas a test of skill and endurance.

Race starts 9.30am, with safety briefing and blessing of the fleet from 9am at northern end of Sim's Esplanade, Yorkeys Knob. Spectators and media representatives are welcome to attend.

Media contact: Charlie McKillop 0406 699 506 or Ross Watson 0459 819 647

****HIGH QUALITY RACE VISION AVAILABLE AND INTERVIEWS ON REQUEST****

PHOTO CAPTIONS – please credit Justyna Polanska:

1. Members of the platinum master women's crew on the way to Mini G downwind gold and representing Australia at the World Marathon Titles in Samoa next month (Carol Compton, Pauline Greer, Sandra Kennedy, Geraldine Mckelson. Cornelia Rotaru, Ruth Dennis)
2. Matt Abbott shows his skill steering the rudderless va'a (canoe) to take V1 gold.
3. Hekili Outriggers' Morgan Hind and Andrew Buckley get it done in 18km Mini G course and will back up for the Big G (45km) this Saturday
4. A bumpy landing at Ellis Beach in an otherwise smooth ride for winning OC6 crew from Coconuts, steered by Adrian Darveniza.
5. All smiles for Mission Beach young guns in their last outing before taking on the World Marathon Titles in Samoa – a combined 19U and 16U crew consisting of Angelica Andreson, Alani England, Charlotte Sharpe and siblings Azaria, Eliana and Tallara Wigley-Gill.
6. Cairns ocean ski paddler Adam Beale, fresh from Molokai crossing in Hawaii, pushes to the finish line at Mini G.
7. OC6 crews head off from Yorkeys Knob for an 18km ride to Ellis Beach.
8. A record field of 99 craft and 185 paddlers hit the water for the 18km Mini G Downwinder.