



WIND'S UP FOR RECORD FIELD IN DOWNWIND PADDLING EVENT

NEARLY 100 craft and 185 paddlers will get the ride of their life on Saturday when the Hekili Outrigger Canoe Club hosts the first of two, awesome downwind races over consecutive weekends.

This Saturday's MINI G course, from Yorkeys Knob to Ellis Beach, is designed to be a 'step up' for less experienced paddlers, and a welcome 'warm up' for competitors in next weekend's 45km Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge (GBROC), which is one of Australia's longest iron ocean races.

AO Ozone R2 MINI G Downwinder is included in the Australian Outriggers Downwinder Series with a chance for competitors to share in a \$20,000 prize pool.

Hekili OCC president Ross Watson says for the first time, more paddlers will compete in Mini G than the GBROC, confirming it as a premier, ocean paddling event in its own right.

"For paddlers coming from elsewhere it's a tantalising combination – warm tropical waters and excellent downwind conditions set against our picturesque, far northern coastline," Mr Watson said.

"This is the biggest line-up we've had on the start line since 2014 so it just shows how keen paddlers are to challenge themselves on arguably one of the toughest ocean race courses in Australia."

The *AO Ozone R2 MINI G* gives novice paddlers their first taste of downwind action while more experienced paddlers will be looking for speed, whereas GBROC next Saturday will be a test of endurance with the 45km course expected to take between 3 to 5 hours depending on conditions.

Wearing orange in memory of 'Topsy'

Every competitor this year will be wearing a distinctive, bright orange GBROC race rashie specially designed as a tribute to a giant of the outrigger and ski paddling community, Danny 'Topsy' Topfer.

Danny won line honours in his first GBROC in 2015 and has been coming back ever since, not only to race but also encouraging other paddlers and facilitating their participation by transporting craft to the far north from his home base in Brisbane.

"Hekili OCC will never forget the logistical support and encouragement Danny Topfer has given to our event over many years. He will be dearly missed on the start line but the sea of bright orange

will be a symbol of the competitive spirit and sportsmanship for which Topy will always be remembered in our sport and region,” Watson said.

Last stop for Aussie crews on road to Samoa

It’s also an important final hit-out for Australian crews, including many far north Queensland representatives, heading to the World Marathon Titles in Samoa in August.

The MINI G field will feature a combined Aussie U19-16 crew including Mission Beach young guns Charlotte Sharpe, Angie Andreson, Azariah and Eliana Wigley-Gill, while at the other end of the spectrum is the Platinum Master Women (70 years +) with Hekili’s own Pauline Greer in the mix.

Ski paddlers will be out in force led by David Ahmed (Cairns) and Alex Pawlow (Daintree), who’ll be defending his dual crown after claiming gold in both mini G and GBROC 2022.

Olympic gold medallist and multiple world champion Clint Robinson is also rumoured to be in the hunt, while based in Port Douglas for the week hosting his own paddling camp.

Race starts 11.30am, with safety briefing and blessing of the fleet from 10.30am at northern end of Sim’s Esplanade, Yorkeys Knob. Spectators and media representatives are welcome to attend and soak up the atmosphere of one of the biggest fields and best conditions since in almost a decade.

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CAPTIONS:

1. Danny ‘Topy’ Topfer teams up with Dave Ahmed in GBROC 2022
2. Pauline Greer (seat 1) strokes for Hekili’s Golden Master Women’s crew in Mini G last year – this year she’ll join a Platinum Master Women’s crew on the road to the World Marathon Titles in Samoa
3. Hekili’s mixed changeover crew on the way to Port Douglas in the 45km Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge in 2022