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Posted on: Thursday, May 18, 2006

FITNESS PROFILE | KANESA DUNCAN

All on board to stay fit

By [Catherine E. Toth](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

There's a lot of pain associated with paddleboarding.

Body rashes, fatigued limbs, headaches.

But none of that bothers Kanesa Duncan.

"I love the feeling of moving across the water like that," said Duncan, 30, a biology teacher and researcher from Manoa. "I love catching waves when no one else is around. I just love being out in the ocean."

Duncan doesn't just love the sport. She dominates it.

Last August, she won the women's division of the Quiksilveredition Moloka'i to O'ahu Paddleboard Race — considered the world championship of long-distance paddleboard racing — for the fourth time



Kanesa Duncan, 30, is one of the world's top paddleboarders and often hits the ocean off the Outrigger Canoe Club to keep fit.

JOAQUIN SIOPACK | The Honolulu Advertiser

KANESA DUNCAN

Age: 30

Profession: Teacher/researcher at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa

Residence: Manoa

Height: 5-feet-4

Weight: 130 pounds

Stays in shape by: Paddleboarding, paddling, swimming, running, surfing, yoga and physical therapy

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in five years.

And she's already setting her sights on this year's race, set for July 30.

Duncan owns the 32-mile course record, crossing the notoriously dangerous Ka'iwi Channel in 5 hours, 53 minutes, 49 seconds.

She broke the record in 2004 — by 54 minutes.

Here's the impressive part: Duncan only started paddleboarding seven years ago.

"I loved it immediately," she said after borrowing her friend's paddleboard back in 1999, when she moved to Hawai'i from California to attend graduate school at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa. "I love to surf but I hate crowds, so this was perfect. I love being out at the ocean, paddling around Makapu'u and Sandy's. I wouldn't get out there very often if I wasn't paddleboarding."

Paddleboards are streamlined surfboards, at least 12 feet long, designed to ride ocean swells. You power them like surfboards — with your arms. As a sport, paddleboarding has been around for decades, gaining popularity in the '80s.

Lifeguards long used paddleboards as rescue craft, so it's no surprise that lifeguards make up a good portion of the competitive

Fitness goal: To win the Quiksilver edition Moloka'i to O'ahu Paddleboard Race on July 30

Interesting fact: Duncan has studied sharks, but her younger brother, who recently picked up paddleboarding, is terrified of them.

FACTS ABOUT PADDLEBOARDING

- Paddleboards are streamlined surfboards designed to ride ocean swells. They are powered by arm strokes, much like paddling a conventional surfboard.
- There are two racing classes in paddleboarding: stock and unlimited. Stock-class boards are generally 12 feet long with a fixed fin. Unlimited-class boards are 16 feet or longer and are usually equipped with a foot-controlled rudder. Most elite racers use unlimited-class boards. (There is a third class — the 10-6 lifeguard competition class — but Hawai'i doesn't host any events for this class.)
- Today's paddleboards can be equipped with a variety of options, including knee wells, bottle holders and chin rests.
- There are two ways to paddleboard: on your knees or prone.
- The American Red Cross discovered the usefulness and

field.

The competitive paddleboarding community isn't very big, at least not by water-sports standards. About 120 athletes competed in last year's Quiksilveredition Moloka'i to O'ahu Paddleboard Race. And of that number, only two — Duncan and Australia's Hayley Bateup — were women.

So what made Duncan, a competitive swimmer and former lifeguard, want to paddleboard from Moloka'i to O'ahu?

"The same reason why anyone wants to do it," she said, her eyes twinkling. "It's fun."

Gearing up for the start of the summer's paddleboarding season, Duncan trains at least four times a week, mixing longer with shorter runs. Sometimes she'll paddleboard from Hawai'i Kai to Waikiki; other times she starts at Makai Pier in Waimanalo.

A competitive paddler with the Outrigger Canoe Club, Duncan also goes to paddling practice four times a week.

In between all this, she runs, does yoga and works as a teacher and researcher.

Managing her time, she said, is her biggest challenge.

"Absolutely and without a doubt, my roadblock is

lifesaving potential of paddleboards, adopting them as rescue craft in the early 1930s.

- Lifeguards, who train on paddleboards, make up a large part of the competitive field.

- The Quiksilveredition Moloka'i to O'ahu Paddleboard Race, held in the late summer, is considered the world championship of long-distance paddleboarding. Last year about 120 athletes competed in the 32-mile crossing.

- Jamie Mitchell, a 29-year-old lifeguard from Queensland, Australia, holds the men's record. He crossed the Ka'iwi Channel in 4 hours, 56 minutes, 3 seconds in 2004. He's also the four-time reigning world champion.

- Hawai'i's Kanesa Duncan and Australia's Hayley Bateup are the world's top female paddleboarders. Duncan holds the course record of 5 hours, 53 minutes, 49 seconds, which she set in 2004. She's also won the last four of five races.

- On Aug. 18, 2005, Chris Owens of Sunset Beach completed an 89-mile journey across the Kaua'i channel on a paddleboard. It took 22 hours, 6 minutes to complete the crossing. Owens is believed to be only the second person to

time," Duncan said. "I just don't have enough of it."

It didn't help that a shoulder injury sidelined her for months.

In 2000, Duncan was training on her paddleboard with some lifeguards off Makapu'u. She was picked off by a wave and as she tried to hold on to her paddleboard, the force yanked her right shoulder out of its socket.

She dislocated her shoulder again in 2001 and 2005, both times during canoe races.

By this point, there was so much damage Duncan couldn't avoid surgery any longer.

She had the ligaments in her shoulder reattached in October 2005.

For eight weeks, she couldn't do anything active. She had to learn how to write with her left hand. And paddleboarding was out of the question.

"It was so frustrating," she said.

Duncan is still recovering from the surgery, but it hasn't slowed her down.

In fact, she's got a new goal: to race on an unlimited-class board and compete with the guys.

And by all accounts, they should be worried.

"I just don't want to be so far away (from them)," Duncan said, smiling. "You know, in the running."

• • •

Workout habits: As the season approaches, Duncan trains on a paddleboard four to five times a week, mixing shorter with longer runs. Since paddleboard season coincides with paddling season, Duncan also crews in a six-person canoe about four times a week. She runs for 30 to 60 minutes two to three times a week and takes an one-hour yoga class once a week.

When and why I started working out: Duncan, who grew up around the San Francisco Bay Area, started

cross the Kaua'i channel on a paddleboard. Gene Smith was the first, in 1940.

— Catherine E. Toth



Paddleboarder Kanesa Duncan of Manoa heads back to shore in Waikiki. She trains on her paddleboard almost every day.

JOAQUIN SIOPACK | The Honolulu Advertiser

swimming at an early age. Swimming her way through high school and college, she never really got into any other sport but also competed in triathlons. Duncan picked up surfing during college, when she worked as a lifeguard in the Central Coast area. She didn't paddle on a competitive paddleboard until she moved to Hawai'i in 1999 to attend graduate school at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa.

My good foods/bad foods: Veggies and fruits top Duncan's list of good foods, "which is great, because they are so good for you," she said. But she also loves chocolate, snack foods, red wine and beer.

My biggest motivator: Duncan doesn't need much motivation. She actually loves being out there. "I love to be out in the ocean," Duncan said. "My favorite thing is to be paddling downwind when the winds are good. It is an amazing combination of surfing and swimming — and I have always been an endorphin and achievement junkie! I like long distances because of the accomplishment and because of the way it makes my body feel."

What saves my sanity: Being in the water, Duncan said. "You can't really go insane when your training ground is the ocean," Duncan said. "I get to see so much of our island's beauty every day. A lot of times, I'll be stressed before I get in the water, but after a good run, I'm just flying high."

Another sanity-saver: Her training buddies. "It's such a tight group," she said. "We all compete against each other and we're all there to support one another, too."

My next challenge: Duncan would like to compete on an unlimited-class board and compete with the guys.

Advice for those in the same boat: "Set a goal," Duncan said. "An upcoming race or event is the best way to make yourself head outside even on those hectic days. The post-workout endorphins will make up for the work time you missed!"

• • •

GETTING STARTED

Paddleboarding isn't for everyone. But if you enjoy the long paddle out to Pops or Goat Island on a surfboard — or are looking for a workout during those lulls in the surf — this sport might be for you.

- **Choose a board carefully:** Paddleboards are designed to be sleek and fast. Meaning they tend to be tippy and difficult to balance on at first. Practice on a longboard — preferably one longer than 10 feet and thicker than 2 1/2 inches. And save up your money: new paddleboards can cost upwards of \$1,000.

- **Find a partner:** Enlist someone experienced and knowledgeable to show you the correct way to paddleboard and how to steer the craft to catch ocean swells. When you're ready to hit the open ocean, don't go alone.

• **Be safe:** Don't venture out too far — or for too long — until you're comfortable and confident in the ocean. In the beginning, stay close to shore and stay out only as long as you can handle. Remember: an hour one way means another hour back.

• **Cross train:** Know how to swim. It's also one of the best ways to train for paddleboarding because of the similar stroke.

— Catherine E. Toth

Reach Catherine E. Toth at ctoth@honoluluadvertiser.com.

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