



From left, Dan Firth, Bob Mc Laughlin, Lyall Reedy, Rob Smith, John Papilli and Carl Sheehan competing at Takapuna. Not pictured but in the support boat are Dave Haughin, Guy Phillips and Todd Jago waiting for the next change.



From left, Andy, Daniel and Dave, the Air New Zealand contingent of Dogfish.

PADDLE TO VICTORY

Three Christchurch engineers are proud to be part of Dogfish – one of the best outrigger canoeing teams in New Zealand.

They are rated as one of the best waka ama teams in the country and it's a title they have worked hard to achieve.

Christchurch engineers Dave Haughin and Daniel Firth are members of Te Awahaku Outrigger Canoeing Club and their team is called 'Dogfish'. Their team manager Andy McIntyre is also an Air New Zealand engineer in Christchurch.

Dogfish has been together for five years and in the past 18 months they have been really making their mark on the national circuit. Last April they won the national marathon champs and in January they won the national sprint champs (1,500m).

Their most recent competition was the Takapuna Cup, a 42km changeover race around Rangitoto Island, where they received a commendable third place – but it was a disappointing result for the team who dropped from first to third after a series of mishaps.

"A changeover race consists of nine paddlers, six in the canoe at a time, while the three others are in the support boat," says Dave. "At given times or distances a water change is performed. Three guys jump from

the support boat and as the canoe approaches they grab hold and pull themselves in as three other guys bail out of the canoe. A good team has this change process down to a fine art.

"We were a bit upset with our result at Takapuna, because our support boat broke down after the first 40-minute mark which meant we couldn't make two vital changes so we dropped from joint first place to third. From there we battled to pull the top two boats in and we finished one-and-a-half minutes behind the second place-getter."

With that disappointment behind them, the team are firmly focused on their next goal – the World Sprint Champs, held in Sacramento in the US in August.

"We are one second off the world record time over 1,500m and because of this we have been invited to trial as a team to represent New Zealand. We have a training camp mid-May in Hamilton, so we as a team have to perform to a qualifying time to make the final selection."

They are also aiming to compete in the Molokai 74k ocean Marathon, an elite international changeover race held in Hawaii. The team participated in this event last year, finishing 23rd of 111 teams in a time of 5 hours 31 minutes. They are confident they can finish in the top 10 this time.

"Our ultimate goal is to win a gold medal at the World Sprint Champs and to follow it up with a top 10 finish in the Hawaiian Molokai marathon. We are a very competitive and driven team and once we set goals we give 100 percent to achieve them."

He isn't kidding. The team trains five times a week on the water, usually in the evenings after work. "We work our training around our family and work commitments. As individuals we also do three gym sessions a week and either two runs ranging from 5 to 10km or swim sessions twice a week. We also do pool sessions once a week as a team when we get closer to a marathon event, hoisting ourselves in and out of the pool to recreate a changeover routine"

Dave says the team is a close-knit bunch. "We often have small arguments after training on how things went – right or wrong – but this never gets in the way of the team spirit and camaraderie. To us a great team is made from being determined and having the will and passion to succeed. When we feel the chips are down we know we can rally and pull together to finish strongly."

Dave says the long intense hours put in on the water are a big reason for their success. "Like any sport, honour comes from hard work, commitment and dedication. All the guys in the team not only have this attitude to the sport but it becomes the norm in their family and work life."

Andy's role as team manager is to organise most of the team's events. He takes an active role in the training sessions and is also a paddler in one of the local Master teams.

What's waka ama?

Waka ama is a sport that has a big cross section of participants, ranging from social fun paddlers through to up-and-comers and the serious athletes at the top end.

The 'number six' man in the canoe is the steersman and his job is to keep the canoe going in the right direction using his paddle as a rudder while still paddling with the other five guys. The rest of the team have specific jobs in the canoe ranging from stroke to assistant steersman.

You can also race single-man canoes in sprints and marathons. Daniel is ranked number six in New Zealand in the single sprints, which is a great achievement.

It's an amateur sport so it's really important to find sponsors. "Last year Engineering and Marketing assisted the team when they competed in Hawaii, which was a huge help" says Dave. "Outrigger canoeing has a huge following in the Hawaiian Islands and due to Air New Zealand picking up the Hawaiian Air Engineering contract this was a great way for Engineering to show their visibility of our company's logo. Marketing division backed this up by helping the team get to the event."

Anyone interested in trying Outrigger Canoeing should check out www.wakaama.co.nz