

SUP racers tear it up in Tahoe

By Peggy Bourland-Madison

With last Friday's fierce thunder and hailstorm, the Race the Lake of the Sky's 8:30am start on Saturday was in question. Happily, by 6am the June 29 the sun was peeking over Heavenly's ridge, glinting light on the calm shores of El Dorado Beach under clear blue skies. The SUP gods had delivered the perfect day.

For centuries the Washoe natives inhabited these waters and called Lake Tahoe the lake of the sky because the blue sky was mirrored in the lake's waters. Last Saturday and Sunday these waters belonged to the SUP riders.

From 30,000 feet the world may appear blue and green, but up close on June 29, Lake Tahoe's South Shore was a montage of color, as more than 300 paddleboards and their riders assembled to test their skills on the 5-mile course.



Hundreds gather at El Dorado Beach for last weekend's stand up paddleboard races. Photo/By Peggy Bourland-Madison

For the uninitiated, SUP (standup paddling) is a relatively new sport that requires an upright human standing on a board to self-propel him or herself through water using a single paddle.

The pros make it look effortless. In fact, it is a high level workout that engages most of the body's muscles with intense cardio demands.

SUP has its roots in the Hawaiian Islands and the surf world, where rivalries exist between SUP surfers and traditional surfers. With its rebel cache, it is reminiscent of the 1980's clash between boarders and traditional downhill skiers.

Saturday's events included the Five Mile Race, where the fastest board and rider finished in less than one hour, the SUP Cross (a sprint event with heats), the Grom (surfer slang for child) Race and the awards ceremony, where etched glass trophies designed by local craftsman and SUP competitor John Thomaselli were presented.

The event categories are timed by length of board, type of board, age, gender, prone style, elite competitor. It is a little confusing. Throngs of volunteer board caddies in neon yellow shirts lined the finish area to move the boards out of the way as the finishers came roaring onto shore before a foot race to the finish on the sand. The accurate timing is accomplished with computer chips attached to the riders' race number and the professional services of event timer Jim Kline.

Adding to the weekend's family vibe, world-renown surf artist Drew Brophy was set up in a tent on the beach to teach kids to draw. Lots of "grom" hands were busy making art with Brophy.

Adding to the Tahoe vibe was local photographer, Jon Paul's signature Tahoe image on the race poster and all the race numbers worn by the competitors.

Dreu Murin of Wake Up Tahoe was on hand as the official

announcer. Alpine County resident and race board innovator and builder Mike Day was there to compete both days. This is a homegrown event that Chris Brackett (CEO of South Tahoe Stand Up Paddle) asked many of his friends to be part of. Brackett's eldest son, Jared, worked tirelessly as the events co-director.

By Sunday the event was finding its groove as the 14.4-mile race to Emerald Bay and back was queuing up for the 8:30 start. More than 100 male and female adventurers from all age groups set out across the water under clear skies and light wind. The boat wakes across the lake would prove to be the big challenge. Spectators on shore watched as the riders disappeared into the distance.

Just 2 hours, 23 minutes later Thomas Maximus from San Clemente arrived at the finish line on an unlimited class board (no length restrictions). Maximus rides for co-event sponsor Riviera Paddlesurf.

For some the race will last more than four hours.

Sunday's other activities included "Best Sweet Move" contest sponsored by Sean Sweet of Sweet Water Wear of Hawaii and the Team Relays. After the awards ceremony a live band entertained everyone on the beach while Danny Chavez from Lake Taco served his famous shrimp tacos.

With participants from as far away as Hawaii and South Carolina, Race the Lake of the Sky is fast becoming the darling of the SUP circuit.

Elite rider E.J. Johnson from San Diego summed up the event for *Lake Tahoe News* in two words – "friggin awesome."