

THE CROWN WIELDER

RANDY RARICK ON WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN THE VANS TRIPLE CROWN. BY LUKE KENNEDY

As fans we take surf contests for granted. We know at least once a month we'll be able to log on or switch to Fuel TV for a live dose of our favourite surfers duking it out in singlets. Seldom do we spare a thought for the ringmasters who must dance to the fickle beat of swell patterns, handle the theatrics of highly-strung pros and satisfy the expectations of sponsors. Spend a little time around the contest sites in Hawaii and you'll notice a robust, ashen-haired figure who commands respect with the steely glint in his eye.

Randy Rarick has been running contests in Hawaii for over three decades. A year abroad studying commercial law and accounting in Australia in his youth was as he put it, "enough to put me off school forever" and he returned to Hawaii. With surfing in the midst of its leap of faith into a fully-fledged professional sport, Randy fell naturally into a role as a contest administrator. He was involved with the inaugural Triple Crown in 1983 and eventually took over from Fred Hemmings in the '80s as the event's director. More than twenty years later he still holds the title of Vans Triple Crown contest director and has several other surfing accolades to his name. Tracks caught up with him recently to discuss a lifetime in the Hawaiian hot seat.

Why is the Triple Crown so important to professional surfing's competitive framework?

I think you have to consider that originally, due to politics, the Triple Crown was set up as a counter to the ASP, as the original event producer, Fred Hemmings wanted to award the title to the best competitive surfer over the winter season in Hawaii and he felt this surfer was more important than the winner of the small wave dominated, early ASP tour. While this had validity in the early days, it has evolved into the prestigious title that it has become today and has now been embraced and integrated into the ASP system. Next to the World Title, the Triple Crown title is probably just as important and to some even more so!

How important is it to have an understanding of, and respect for the Hawaiian culture when you are the contest director?

What you have to realise is that I grew up in Hawaii as a "Haole Hawaiian". It's a tough position to be in, as I am not pure blooded Hawaiian, but I grew up here, have my roots here and subsequently have my motivation and desire to represent Hawaii. As

such, I'm not "Hawaiian" by blood, but as Momi Keaulana said, "my heart is Hawaiian". So, I am very cognisant of the Hawaiian culture and what Hawaii has contributed to the world of surfing. Surfing is "Hawaii's gift to the world of sport" and that is something that we should never forget!

Is it difficult to be the middle-man in situations that directly affect local and international surfers. E.G. The number of local surfers granted entry into the Pipe Masters?

Ha ha! Without question! Try balance the desires of the locals, who could care less about the politics, the ASP, the World Tour and only care about the next wave that they catch at Pipeline! What a lot of them don't realise or have no clue about, is that the whole world is watching what happens on the North Shore and whether they like it or not, it is the standard by which contemporary surfing is judged. Both good and bad.

Which event stands out for you as the best in memory?

After 35 years of running events on the North Shore, they tend to blur a bit as to what is the best. I think you have to break it down to 'eras', as contemporary surfing is constantly changing and the new crew always feels the old guard is in need of change. For me the '70s were great with Lopez and Rory Russell and the locals shitting on Larry Blair. The growth of pro surfing throughout the late '70s was great with the accent of Mark Richards. Dane Kealoha was my personal favourite of the time. Simon Anderson's introduction of the "Thruster" was a game changer and everyone had to play catch up. Tom Carroll was and in my opinion, still is the best goofy-footer on the North Shore, with Derek Ho a close second. When the "New School" including Kelly, Shane Dorian and that whole crew first came on the scene it was an exciting time. The shift away from Sunset to Backdoor/Pipeline in that era redefined a whole new approach. The Irons era, and now, quite honestly, I think things are wide open with the new judging criteria and a whole flock of new younger guys leading the charge.

What's the toughest situation you have been in? For example this year how hard was it to tell Sunny Garcia he had missed his heat and there would be no special considerations made for him?

Once again, over the past 35 years, I've had so many instances like Sunny's that I have had to deal with. Jeff Crawford with a crushed skull in the '70s, a near riot with Buttons and the crew, the Water Patrol dropping in and dinging Shaun

Tomson's board, Beaver Massefeller and Chris Lundy having to be evacuated by Helicopter, Shaun Briley paddling out and chasing the Brazilians, Corry Lopez dropping in during the "Expression Sessions", potential boycott's by the locals and it goes on and on. You just have to learn to deal with it and move on.

How do you keep a level head when dealing with a competitor who has flown off the handle?

Luckily I have a really mellow attitude! But really, after 35 years, you come to the conclusion that it is really only a surf contest and not something life changing. While it means a lot to the participants at the time, in the end, most competitors can be persuaded to walk away, take a deep breath and realise that life will go on!

Do you think a competitive surfer's career is complete without a Triple Crown to their name?

Realistically, to prove your worth amongst your peers is what it's all about. Back in the '80s, after the start of the ASP, there were a number of "World Champions", who never won on the North Shore and as such, to this day, they are not regarded as highly as those who did well in Hawaii. I think for your reputation and your legacy, it is important to do well on the North Shore and if you can win a Triple Crown title it puts the exclamation on your record.

Would you like to see at least one of the other events like Sunset granted World Tour status again?

Yes and No. Yes from a point of view that I think it makes a complete surfer to be able to tame Sunset. An example in point is that Kelly has never won here and I personally don't think he will be the complete surfer until he has a Sunset Title under his belt. On the other hand, by it being a 6-Star Qualifying event, the local surfers get a chance to strut their stuff and show that they can beat the best in the world. Guys like Marcus Hickman, Pancho Sullivan, Makua Rothman, can really exhibit local talent. But, at the same time, someone like Parko can show that with talent, style and grace, you can conquer Sunset.

How well do you have to know each individual break in the Triple Crown as the contest director?

Even though I just turned 60, I still surf the North Shore each day. Sunset is my home break and I often say that if I would go out and surf it, then I'm ready to send the contestants out to compete. I don't surf Pipeline anymore, simply because I'm

CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: QUINTESSENTIAL RARICK, MICROPHONE OVER THE SHOULDER AND A BOARD IN HAND. A LIFETIME DEVOTED TO THE SURF INDUSTRY HAS ENABLED RANDY TO PRESERVE HIS LOVE FOR RIDING WAVES. // RANDY SHOWING CASUAL APLOMB AT SUNSET. // RANDY IN TRIPLE CROWN DIRECTOR MODE ALONGSIDE GERRY LOPEZ, WHO SURFED IN AN EXHIBITION SESSION AT LAST YEAR'S PIPE MASTERS. SWILLY





TOM CARROLL PULLING THE TURN OF THE CENTURY DURING THE FINAL OF THE 1991 PIPE MASTERS. THE VICTORY AT PIPE ENABLED HIM TO ALSO CLAIM THE 1991 TRIPLE CROWN. JOLI

a regular foot and it's too darn crowded. I just won the "Grand Masters" division at the annual HIO event at Haleiwa, so I'm confident I can make a decision as to what is a good competition day and one we should walk away from. So, to answer your question, I know the three Triple Crown venues better than anyone!

The Triple-Crown often decides who qualifies and who wins World Titles. Does that excite you and does the responsibility weigh heavily?

I don't consider it a weight, but more a privilege. As mentioned above, a lot of people, especially here in Hawaii, consider the Triple Crown title to mean more than the World Title. If someone wins the Triple Crown, and then the World Title, then I think it solidifies their place in history as the best competitive surfer of that particular season and the end of the year. For me, I take personal pride in awarding the Crown to the most deserving surfer!

Is there one surfer who stands out for you as the ultimate Triple Crown performer? Therefore the surfer who is most competent in a broad range of Hawaiian waves?

I think you have to break it down to 'eras', as each one has been different. The Ho brothers dominated the '80s. I personally liked Gary Elkerton due to his dominance at Sunset during the late '80s and early '90s. Kelly made his mark as he began his World Title runs. Probably the most dominant has been Sunny Garcia, for his ability to adapt to all three venues very well, even though he never won at Pipeline. In recent times, Andy Iron's mastery of the North Shore is clear as he's won at all three venues. Of course, Joel Parkinson has been just so smooth in the past few seasons, that he made it almost look

too easy. So, I don't think there has been an overall "best", but just who has been the most "on", during the contemporary time.

What's the funniest incident you've seen go down?

None of it's been funny. These guys all take this way too seriously!

Ha ha. Okay then, the heaviest incident?

The Massefeller/Lundy year, when we had to stop the contest due to injuries. The early '80s when we had the Billabong Pro at Waimea and one of the Brazilian competitors got washed into the shorebreak and almost drowned. The couple years at Sunset during the World Cup when the surf came up and it turned into Victory at Sea and it was all we could do to get the competitors back to the beach! There have been a number of incidents and they have all been heavy!

How long were you a competitor for?

During the '60s I was an avid amateur competitor and won the Hawaii State Surfing Championships when I was 17. I went on to compete in the early fledging pro events, such as the Duke Kahanamoku Classic and the Smirnoff Pro and I wanted to pursue a career in pro surfing, but set that aside to travel the world in the early/mid '70s and in doing so have covered over 170 countries over the course of my career.

Any final comments?

Surfing has been good to me. As mentioned above, I have a passion for travelling and over the last 40 years have covered over 170 countries and surfed in nearly 70 of them. I have done just about everything you can do in surfing, from shaping boards (12,000+), run surf shops, shown surf movies, run surf travel groups, conducted surf contests in South

Africa, Europe, Japan, South America, and a variety of other countries. Done colour commentating for TV and various surf events, run Vintage Surf Auctions and been asked to do just about every thing you can possibly imagine that has to do with surfing. Most people know me as the Director of the Triple Crown of Surfing and that is what I do during the months of November and December, but the rest of the year I pursue all forms of various surf involvements. I consider myself a "Surfing Entrepreneur"!

In closing, life has been good! I could have chosen a variety of life paths that would have brought me much better financial return, more visibility, more stature and maybe more notoriety. But, in the end, I love what I do, still surf Sunset Beach on a daily basis and hope the legacy that I leave behind is one people will one day respect and admire! Mahalo and Aloha,

"TOM CARROLL WAS, AND IN MY OPINION, STILL IS THE BEST GOOFY-FOOTER ON THE NORTH SHORE, WITH DEREK HO A CLOSE SECOND."