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Sailboarder plans Kauai-Calif. trek

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LIHUE — James "Jay" Skaggs, 29, plans to start off today on what he calls an "outrageous passage" — from Kauai to California on a sailboard.

Skaggs, born in Honolulu, learned to sailboard five years ago, and although he hasn't made any long passages, he is reasonably confident.

"These crossings are not new to windsurfers. Two people have crossed the Atlantic. I say I'll be lucky to make it, but I'll give it a good attempt," he said.

Friends have talked to the Coast Guard and "they didn't think it was a particularly good idea, to be sure," he said.

Skaggs figures to make as little as 30 and as much as 130 miles per day. Depending on the winds, he figures the passage could take 30 to 45 days.

He is to be escorted by a sailboat, which will carry most of his food and which will handle navigational chores. He said he'll carry three days of rations in a pack on his back, and another seven days strapped to the board. Included will be close to 5 gallons of water that he figures should last him 10 days if he gets out of touch with the sailboat.

He'll also carry a walkie-talkie for short-range communication with the boat, and a beeper with about a 250-mile range, which the yacht can use to home in on him if they get separated.

His board is a stock 12-foot oceangoing sailboard. He'll carry three sails — 70 square feet, 60 and 40, the last for heavy wind. He and friends have fabricated a stabilizing system that hooks up like outriggers, making the board stable enough to sleep on.

Skaggs said he's slept on it a couple of times, but it's not something he particularly likes to do. He hopes to be in close enough touch with the sailboat that he can pull up next to it and spend nights sleeping aboard. He also plans to take his breakfasts and dinners aboard the yacht.

Skaggs is six feet tall and weighs 145 pounds. He'll wear a wetsuit, sunglasses, sun visor and sunscreen. He figures he's in good enough shape to sail for 10 hours a day on good days.

Yesterday, he went out sailboarding for six hours "to keep that real edge on the fitness."

Will fitness be enough in the stormy mid-Pacific in mid-winter?

"The whole thing depends on Mother Nature's whims and fancies out in the ocean," Skaggs said.