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SCORING SILVER

Expert Mulloway Tricks & Tips

DESTINATIONS

Gippsland, VIC
Top End Run Off

SALMON IN THE SUDS

Surf Luring Basics

HOW TO

Troll The Estuaries
Chase Pelagics

THINK OUTSIDE THE SNAG

Late Season
Bass Tactics

APRIL 2020

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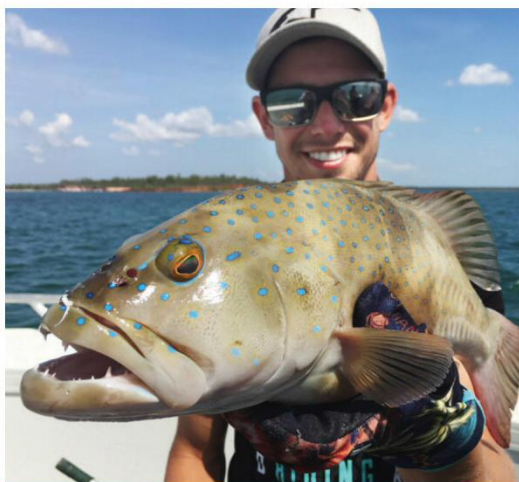
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◀ Casey Stoner with one of several brightly-marked bar-cheek coral trout from Seven Spirit Bay.



◀ Paul Worstling visited Seven Spirit Bay and reckoned: "Truly outstanding fishing in a remote paradise... clearly great for fishos and just perfect for couples."

► Geoff Doig with one of many barra he caught during his stay at Seven Spirit Bay. "Fabulous in every department... the fishing was incredible in the creeks and offshore."



"The Barra Lodge was a great way to spend time with my son. 100-plus bluewater pelagics in the morning and 30-odd barra in the afternoon... hard to beat." *Bill Young*



"An outstanding fishing experience. I took my father to the Arnhem Land Barra Lodge for his 80th birthday. The staff couldn't do enough...he will remember this trip for the rest of his life." *Clynton Bartholomeusz*



"Absolutely the best trip I have ever been on. All the Barra Lodge staff were excellent and in particular the fishing guides went the extra distance to ensure we were spoilt with fish." *Michael Day*

"Shane (bald one), Merv and Bob would like to thank you for a great trip. All the staff were great, Barra Lodge accommodation fantastic, and experience unforgettable... especially 80 barra in one day by the 3 of us." *Shane Ryland*



"An amazing trip of a lifetime... fishing at Seven Spirit was awesome. We caught some pretty good barra and more than 20 in one session. Greg and I also had a first catching mackerel and it was a heap of fun. A great family trip in paradise." *Melanie Harris*



"I never realised that a place as awesome as Seven Spirit Bay could exist in such a remote location. The fishing action was non-stop - amazing. I'm bringing my sons back for sure." *Paul Eather*



"The staff and guides made our trip memorable and our accommodation was great. The fishing, sharks, crocs, storms, camaraderie made our Barra trip outstanding. Thank you so much guys, we had a BALL." *Michael Southcott*

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For further information on Seven Spirit Bay Wilderness Lodge or Arnhem Land Barramundi Lodge

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Location

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March / April 2020

October / November 2020

Fishing

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Above: Seven Spirit Bay sportfishers are at home both on the bluewater and in the creeks.

Left: Seven Spirit overlooks Coral Bay in Port Essington and can only be reached by private charter flight or by water.

Spoil yourself in air-conditioned luxury cabin accommodation.

Arnhem Land Barramundi Lodge

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Following the complete refurbishment of the iconic Arnhem Land Barramundi Lodge, professionally-guided fishing tours only take place during the Top End's two peak seasons.

Fish The Runoff

(March / April 2020)

The Barra Lodge will again be open solely for fishing from 1 March until 30 April 2020, coinciding with the Top End's fabulous Run-off barra fishing.

Fish The Build-Up

(October / November 2020)

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GREAT BOATS THAT MAKE GREAT DAYS

MAIN FEATURE:
Inside this month's
edition, self
confessed mul-
loway tragic,
Dave Rae, shares
some jewie catch-
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Sometimes a new
approach is needed when
targeting heavily-fished
areas, as Joe discovers.

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COVER: The obsession
with chasing mul-
loway is real. Inside
this issue Dave Rae
dives head first into
his obsession chasing
silver slabs on hard
bodies, while Greeny
provides some clues
for chasing jewies
offshore.

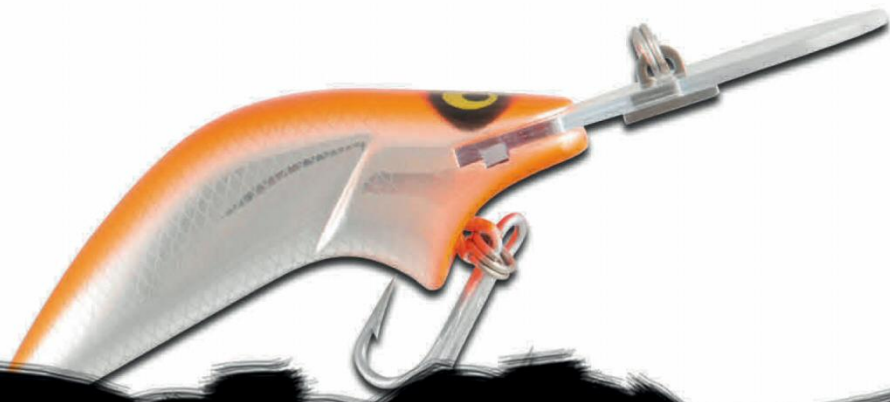
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FIRE AND FLOODS



By Scott Thomas

IT was a bitter sweet end to Australia's bushfire crisis. No sooner were the flames extinguished, the floods began, and it wasn't long before we started hearing reports of major fish kills. Bushfire devastated areas were most susceptible, with ash and topsoil washed into the river systems creating serious problems for native fish. It was widespread from the South and North Coasts of NSW to inland waterways and impoundments.

Some of the worst fish kills happened west of the Great Dividing Range with similar floods occurring. The difference was many of these western rivers weren't fire affected. There was no ash. So what or who was to blame?

The problems in our rivers, particularly the Murray Darling, run much deeper. And while droughts, fire and pouring rain are natural, this problem is very much man made and getting much worse. The list of problems, causes and possible solutions is exhaustive.

One hard hit area is the stretch above and below Burrendong Dam on the Macquarie River. Broken promises from the NSW Government to install fishways along the river didn't help the cause; neither did the lack of critical riparian zones along the river. When a prolonged drought breaks, the bare paddocks wash soil and all sorts of nasty chemicals into the rivers.

The mis-use and allocation of water is a catastrophic problem in our rivers. The controversial Macquarie Pipeline was installed a few years back as an "emergency measure" to pump water and divert it to the township of Orange. The original proposal would only allow pumping when the river reached a "trigger point"

of 108 megalitres per day, that's a reasonable flow. However, earlier this year the NSW Government announced its Critical Needs Water legislation. This would bypass important environmental measures and pave the way for misuse of water through unsustainable water allocation. Who knows what sort of back door political deals were done to get this over the line, although I do suspect Government didn't have the public's best interest at heart.

According to the *Central West Daily*, this allowed the pump to operate 56 days last year. The new trigger point almost triples that at 148 days per year. This river, like many out west, is a fragile system and needs protection, as do the tough fighting native fish who call these rivers home.

It's about time we stop calling our struggling waterways and diminishing fish stocks a natural occurrence.

HEAD TO THE COAST

As our rivers recover, now is a good time to pack the bags, hook up the boat, and head to a coastal village affected by fires. Parts of the NSW South Coast, along with other areas around the country, have been left deserted. The fishing is still red hot and it's a great opportunity to give something back by supporting a community and having a great time fishing.

Stay tuned to the *Fisho* website for a list of archived articles featuring some of the areas in question to help you plan a trip and catch a few fish along the way.

See you out there. ●

Scott Thomas

Scott Thomas
Editor – Fishing World

Fishless nights are forgotten when fish of this calibre are landed.





THE GREAT ONES

The obsession with chasing slab sided mullet is serious, and according to Dave, there's no cure.

By Dave Rae

For those of us who fish temperate waters, mullet are a prize catch usually made at great effort. Night is the most productive period to fish and patience is a must. But be warned, the chance of addiction is rife and as numbers increase, the addiction is not satiated, but rather grows exponentially. Cure is hard and cold turkey, a nightmare! Mullet men and women develop a single minded obsession to the point where all other fish species lose their appeal. Each big fish creates its own memory ... but never like the first one.

Reportedly, "mullet" is an indigenous word meaning "the greatest ones", and it fits perfectly. Whilst, "jewfish" is a shorter version of "jewfish" which originated in days past when the oversized ear bones (otoliths) of mullet were collected for use as jewellery. Whatever you call them, there is a code to be cracked and the opportunity to catch quite a number of fish over time. Multi mullet trips whilst not a regular event, do occur and most experienced anglers have experienced the odd mind-blowing adventure. That said, and it can't be stressed enough, that mullet stocks have been decimated over the last few decades and anglers should minimise the fish they kill for the table. CPR is the way to go: Catch, Photograph, Release.

One such code-cracker is Yamba's Bait and Tackle come moonlight lure-maker Mike Leavy. He bought the shop in 2008 and being a lure collector and user, was intrigued by the oversized Bill's Bugs lures on his wall. A few questions thrown Bill Clarke's way when reordering and similarly with Shimano's Terry Dumphy, gave him a start and over time (and some initial losses) his compilation of jew diary entries started to reveal patterns. When I asked Mick about his PB's he replied with 30.2 and 30.8 kg and his best session was seven hooked, five landed and the smallest kept (16 kg) in only one hour!!!

My jew journey was similar but has two chapters. The first involved casting into floodwater on the northern side of Broken Bay, NSW. As mullet were pushed out of the Hawkesbury and Brisbane waters. I threw 125g homemade "chair leg" lures and 8" weighted pink squids. I gleaned

clues from the crew and started tagging along and pestering those in the know. It took a long time to land a fish and it was a mission to drive 4WD tracks and make decent hikes to get to the spots, only to continually miss out or lose fish. Fish five was the game changer and was the first of four hooked that afternoon. With the monkey off my back I relaxed and landed a few more in that flood. Chapter two is completely different, a move up onto the north coast meant break walls annual mullet runs. Again, a similar start involving pulled hooks and cut line, but this time it didn't take so long to crack. The presence of mullet is a major key to catching fish from our break walls and if you can work out the movement of mullet in your river, you will be on the way to cracking the code. Whilst there are fish around most of the year, it's the mullet run that I focus on.

THERE'S MULLET AND THERE'S MULLET

There are three main species of temperate water mullet: sea (bully), sand (lano) and flat tail mullet. We know that mullet target aggregations of mullet schools as they move down estuaries and out to sea to spawn, so keying into mullet movements is the most important thing. Apart from floodwater and very rough conditions that bring swell inside river mouths, mullet usually towards the mouth under cover of darkness. They hold up in various parts of river entrances according to conditions and the layout of their river. My experience has shown that mullet do not like to remain still when the wind blows straight into your face unless there is a mitigating factor to overcome their apparent dislike of wind. Eddies created by kinks in break wall design are one thing they like as are submerged boulders sitting off the wall. A regular supply of mullet is the other. My favourite spot is a combination of two rivers meeting and then flowing through a channel pinched quite narrowly by a sandbank. The water flows hard, but a large number of mullet have no other option than to use this channel, hence the mulletway lie in wait!

After spawning, mullet swim north and re-enter another estuary if they get past the commercial beach haulers, which in my mind is a sustainable fishery by the way. Anzac Day is held as the start of the "mullet run" and whilst it should be somewhere close, it seems to be the first cold westerly winds that are the actual determiners. In my experience, the larger bully mullet schools, although the most obvious and largest in terms of biomass and number, do not attract mullet as much as the smaller schools of lano and flat tail mullet. I say this simply because I've made 1000s of casts at bull mullet without result. However, it can be a completely different story when the smaller mullet are on the go. Recognising feeding mullet is child's play because they know nothing about subtlety when excited, boofing the surface with gusto and making the mullet skitter and jump when hunting from below. The presence of waterbirds paddling across the area is another good sign, they usually arrive before the mullet do, so if there are birds, stay put and keep casting. Whilst I've caught quite a few on the "blind", it seems they are early arrivals as mullet usually appear within a short time... but not always! I'd much rather be retrieving a lure through or around the edge of a panicked mullet school.

Hard-gut mullet are another consideration. Hard guts are lesser known than the spawning schools, but it makes sense that juvenile pre-spawn fish would make practice runs in order to prepare for a true spawning run when they are sexually mature. These are juvenile mullet that can school at any time of the year but are more common in Jan/Feb. Whilst they may or may not leave the estuary, the hard-gut schools are enough to draw mulletway.



ABOVE: Huge mulletway like this one caught after dark makes the addiction worthwhile!

RIGHT: A mullet colour hard body fooled this fish.

OPPOSITE: Find the mullet and find the fish!



“It took a long time to land a fish and it was a mission to drive 4WD tracks and make decent hikes to get to the spots, only to continually miss out or lose fish.”



GEAR

Fishing for mullet along break walls is not a sports fishing activity and I think light gear is folly. It's not that mullet fight unfairly or that they will run for hundreds of metres, it's about the structure they live on or in. If there's one submerged boulder lying on the bottom, wide of the wall, then that's where you fish. The boulder will rub through your line during retrieves and fish are likely to be left trailing line after rubbing you through during the fight.

The two lines of thought are to use 60-80 lb braid with a 5 m + mono trace of 50-70 lb mono trace. The other is to run a thin but abrasion resistant 50 lb mono straight through. My local wall is thin on structure laying off the wall, so with the main danger coming from the rocks at

my feet, I opt for braid. Other walls are not so friendly, so 50 lb mono is popular. Mick thinks that 0.60 mm is the maximum mono diameter you should use, although the most popular line used on the Clarence River is 50 lb River to Sea which is so abrasion resistant and castable, its diameter of 0.63 mm is overlooked. I've seen this blue line on lots of big reels, so it must be good, but unless you pay the big bucks for a massive spool, Yamba Bait and tackle is the only place I know where you can get your spool filled at a reasonable cost.

Longer rods are necessary to keep line off the rocks when a fish runs along the wall. Whilst I use a heavier outfit than many, I like to be able to pull a big fish up when I need to. My rod is a Daiwa Saltist Hyper 962HHS which is rated to

60 lb and 2.9 m in length. My reel is a Daiwa BG 6500, which is tough, sealed and has coped with the battering that can occur when fishing in the break wall environment. It's not so expensive that I have a fit should it slide along the rocks! To be clear about Daiwa, whilst I do get my stuff at a cheaper rate, I prefer to use it and would buy it off the shelf if I needed to. That said, there'll be plenty of good stuff available from other manufacturers if Daiwa is not your cup of tea. Mick prefers a lighter outfit, using a Daiwa Sea Jigger 325H, which is longer at 3.2 m and lighter, rated to a max line strength of 15 kg. His reel is top class, a 5000 Saltiga. The advantage of the lighter and longer rod is that Mick can hold it out by the butt to keep line clear of the wall should a fish look like rubbing line against the rocks.



LEFT: Match the hatch!

THE FIGHT

Once hooked, big mulloway make a decent first run, and in my experience, with the tide and close to the wall. I use a firm drag initially so I can bang the hooks home a few times once I'm sure they are heading away from me. Then I ease up in case they run my braid across structure. Jew are notorious for grabbing a lure with all the indications they are hooked only to have it come free when they turn and face the angler. They

rarely put line on the rocks but if the line is close, I point my rod towards the middle of the river and try to get as far out on the wall as I can ...which is dicey with a crook knee. After the first run they usually turn out into the middle of the river where they can be smoothly pumped back up stream, with a zigzag run or two. If possible, I stay put and let them swim past, upon which I load the drag again and pump them to my feet. With the aim of releasing these fish, I'll try to hold them in the water to plier out the hooks, or If I'm after a quick pic, which is usually a fail as I fish solo, I'll slip a small gaff through the lower jaw and lift them into a shallow pool.

long handled "Boga" grips are better at the job by the way.

LURES

There's no shortage of large (15 cm +) shallow diving hardbodies to choose from. There are also some fantastic boutique lures on the market. Given that the Clarence supports such a vibrant fishery, it's no surprise that some great boutique lures are made in the region. My favourites include the Leavey 'Jew Lure', Croaker's "Jewie Jewels" and Bill's Bugs. Colour wise, white is my favourite, but as Mike points out, it's important to change colours regularly, and a fish on the first cast of a new lure is common. A good lure will have a wide and the slow retrieve rates required and enough weight to cast well.

IN CLOSING

There you have it, a good lot of info to get you going, without spilling the code, which I've omitted intentionally. Firstly, and primarily, stocks of large mulloway have declined, and I don't want to enable kill and cook anglers to kill multiple fish ... sure, keep one each season, but I think it's wrong to keep killing them. Further, there's no greater joy than working out a species through hard work and careful observation. But finally, my code for my river, might not apply to other rivers. ●



Department of
Primary Industries

Where do my fishing licence fees go?

Funds raised from the NSW recreational fishing licence are placed into special trusts, and spent on projects to improve recreational fishing.

Committees of anglers provide recommendations on expenditure from the trusts:

- Fish stocking
- Artificial reefs
- Fish aggregating devices (FADs)
- Recreational fishing havens
- Fishing facilities e.g. fishing platforms and fish cleaning tables
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- Gamefish tagging
- Get Hooked...it's fun to fish, primary schools education
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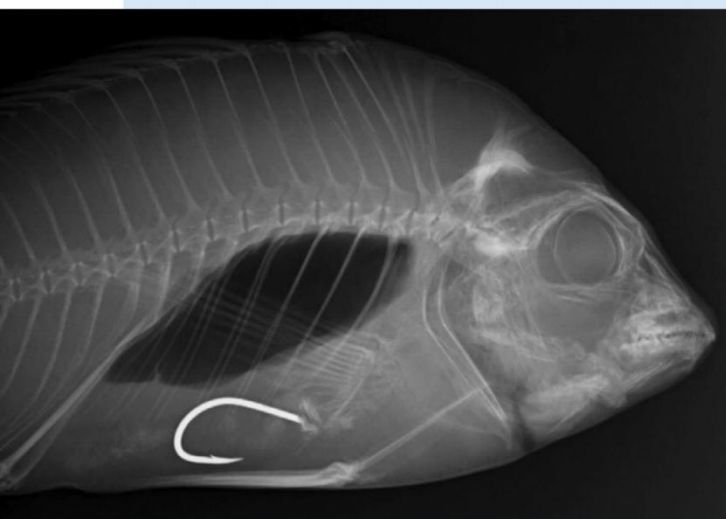
ONLINE THIS MONTH

FISH FACTS:

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE LINE PARTS?

HAVE you ever wondered what happens to those fishing lures or hooks that are left in fish after they break off? Perhaps you've caught an undersized fish while bait fishing and it swallowed the hook right down, forcing you to leave the hook in it as you cut the line prior to release.

● **By Dr Ben Diggles**



ENVIRONMENT:

THE "QUIET AUSTRALIAN" FISHER

MANY parts of our lives these days seem to be controlled by pollsters and samplers. We get rung up asked for our decision intentions on who we're going to vote for or what we like to buy

● **By John Newbery**



A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

"I pledge to visit a fire affected town with my Empty Esky".

This timely media campaign really has struck a chord with Australians and the wider world over the past few harrowing months. The "Bring an Empty Esky" campaign is aimed at supporting the fire-impacted communities that need our collective help. Anglers are such steadfast benefactors to Australians in need; as a community we do great things for so many worthy causes and have so for a long time.

As one of the "Bring an Esky" founders, Eleanor Ballieu said: "We are encouraging everyone to grab an empty esky, do a road or sea trip, and head into an area impacted by the bushfires when it's safe to do so, and really shock the locals. Fill that esky with everything local – beer, food, bait, whatever you want".

Over more than 50 years, *Fishing World* has developed a strong relationship with readers, advertisers and so many communities around the nation. It is difficult to articulate our broad reach and the gratitude we have towards our audience - Australia's core recreational fishing and boating community. Our friends in the



Southern Highlands of NSW, the NSW North and South Coasts, through Gippsland in Victoria, The Snowy Mountains, Noosa Hinterland, Canberra/ACT, Adelaide Hills and Blue Mountains need our collective assistance.

This is the time to visit one of these stunning fishing regions which have been so greatly impacted by the 2019/20 bushfire crisis. Your smile and your support are needed now like never before. Every coffee, sandwich, dinner, litre of fuel and accommodation night you book will help these communities get back on track.

So get a group of mates together, load the fishing tackle and hitch up the boat, grab those empty eskies and make a weekend of it!

See you out on the water!

● **By Chris Yu, Publisher**

NATIONAL 4X4 OUTDOORS SHOW, FISHING & BOATING EXPO BRISBANE

FOR nearly three decades the National 4x4 Outdoors Show, Fishing & Boating Expo has been Brisbane's leading event for the 4WD industry and fans of the Australian outdoors. There are thousands of bargains and brands on sale with industry experts on hand to give the best advice and deals for your 4x4, camping, fishing, boating and outdoor adventures.

Don't miss the adrenaline pumping entertainment on the Action Arena thanks to Australia's no. 1 stunt man, Matt Mingay and his Hot Wheels Team. Get off the beaten track, on the proving ground, where visitors can experience 4wding on a variety of simulated surfaces. Test drive the latest in 4WDs, meet and greet with your favourite outdoors personality, sit in on one of several stage shows and taste test the many delicacies being prepared in our outback cooking demonstrations.

Dates are 27-29 March, 2020. ●



More info at 4x4show.com.au/brisbane/



Zing Xtreme v2

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INTRODUCING the next generation to the fishing lifestyle is one of the key goals of NSW DPI’s “Get Hooked ... It’s Fun to Fish” education program.

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Every year about 6000 kids from 100 schools across the state are introduced to salt and freshwater fishing activities. Key aspects of the program include information on catch and release skills, development of a basic understanding of marine and aquatic environments, the importance of sustainability and safe and responsible fishing behaviours.

The program includes class lessons and a practical workshop where the kids get an opportunity to get out on the water and hopefully hook up on a few fish!

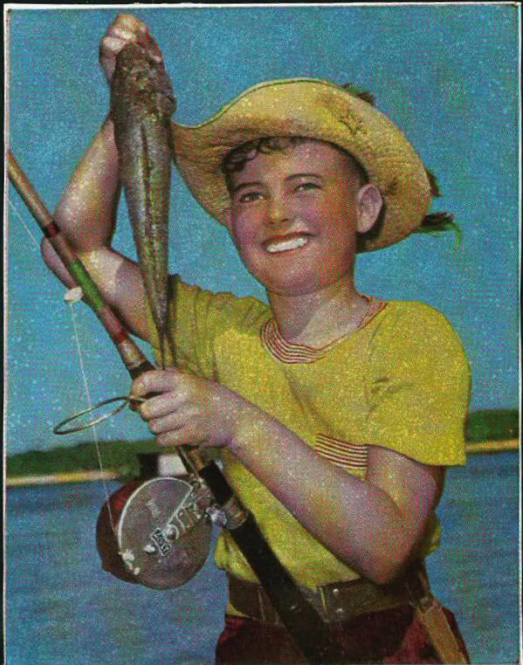


If you are a teacher and you want to register your school for Get Hooked... It’s Fun to Fish schools program, drop us a line by sending an email to gethooked.fisheries@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

You can find out more information, including details on how the Get Hooked ...

It’s Fun To Fish program has been aligned to the Australian Curriculum and meets syllabus outcomes across all Key Learning Areas by searching for “Get Hooked” at dpi.nsw.gov.au.

Get Hooked ... It’s Fun To Fish is a great example of your fishing fees at work! ●



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ALVEY REELS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

ICONIC Queensland reel manufacturer Alvey Reels is celebrating its 100th year of operation.

Back in July 2017, the company announced on Facebook it would be shutting down at the end of October that year, a result of negative economic influences.

That post went viral and sparked an influx of orders from loyal Alvey customers, allowing the fishing business to stay open a little while longer to meet demand.

Fast forward two years and Alvey is now celebrating its centennial with a video of the brand’s journey and long history with Australian fishing.

Alvey has also received mainstream media attention reaching the 100 year milestone, with a segment on Channel Seven’s popular Sunrise morning show. ●

WIN!

Fishing World and Berkley are giving one lucky winner each month the chance to win a handful of new Berkley Shimma Fork Tail lures. To be in the draw, simply head over to our Facebook page and enter our Berkley Shimma Photo of The Month Competition. Winners will be announced on Facebook each month. Good luck!



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WHAT'S NEW

Fisho highlights the latest tackle, gear and accessories.



PENN FATHOM 11

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The HT-100 Versa Drag is one of the smoothest and most reliable on the market and with 6 sealed stainless steel ball bearings, this reel is built to last.

More info at pennfishing.com.au

SHIMANO SALTIE RODS

THE new Saltie rod series has been designed and developed for Australia's northern species.

Built tough, the Saltie range includes two spin and four baitcast models with varying actions to suit a range of lure fishing styles.

Traditional 5'8" and 6' baitcast rods popular for barramundi are complemented by longer 6'4" and 7' models, designed for casting large soft plastics and swimbaits.

Saltie blanks are made with Shimano's TC4 layered graphite construction, which is highly durable and enables great lure action and control. The TC4 construction also reduces rod twist, increases sensitivity and feel, and offers impressive power and fighting performance in a lightweight package.

The Saltie range features a durable matte green finish, custom shaped premium grade cork grips and Fuji K guides with Alconite inserts. A larger diameter guide train has also been used to accommodate the use of thick leader, which is often required to wrestle big fish out of structure.

Shimano says, the Saltie range is designed for your next northern adventure.

More info at shimanofish.com.au

RAPALA LAUNCHES X-RAP HAKU

GET more fish in the net with the all-new Rapala X-Rap Haku, featuring Rapala's proprietary 3R System Titanium Release Rig with VMC Coastal Black hooks.

The 3R System, when clipped into place under the belly of the X-Rap Haku, rests snugly in the lure's belly groove out of the way and protected from weeds and other obstacles. At hookset, the hook rig will partially release from the body, allowing a direct contact to the fish, from line to hook, removing the lure from the fish's mouth which helps to reduce leverage that could be used by the fish to break free.

The 3R System also makes removing the VMC hooks from the fish easier, as the body of the lure is no longer in the way when unhooking your catch.

The X-Rap Haku can be fished with different presentations and it is simple to use. Varied actions can be achieved by either twitching the rod or by imparting a stop-&-go retrieve with your reel.

Twitching the rod will create a faster turning side-to-side action, while a stop & go retrieve allows for longer a gliding presentation. A fast burn in between the stops will send the X-Rap Haku fleeing from prey, mimicking a frantic baitfish trying to escape.

The durable rig is built with 100 lbs titanium wire and features a solid connector ring, heavy-duty split rings and premium VMC® Coastal Black round bend treble hooks.

More info at rapala.com



SAMAKI FLASH V2

THE Samaki Flash is built around a lead filled body with a tough resin coating.

These realistic lures are best described as sinking stickbaits, hugely popular in the Japanese market.

The Flash body has no seams or joins and is built to withstand hard hits from sharp teeth while the 6X strong hooks will handle the toughest species.

Samaki says the Flash is perfect for spinning from the beach, rocks, boat or trolling and even jigging.

Available in 35 and 55gram versions.

More info at samaki.com.au



REVIEW

MUCK BOOTS CHORE

WITH a change of season just around the corner and much of Australia experiencing torrential rain and floods, now is the perfect time to share my thoughts on a new pair of boots.

I once thought "gum boots" were uncomfortable and impractical for fishing. And I was probably right. That's because

the old style of cheap plastic boot were unsuitable for walking longer distances, made your feet cold in winter and were slippery on wet river stones or boat ramps. The alternative was spending a few more dollars and buying a higher end product designed for sailing. These were okay on the boat, but not so great for shore based fishing, in the mud, or around slippery boat ramps.

Thankfully these days we have more choice and probably the best option for an all-round all-weather boot is from The Original Muck Boot Company. Muck Boots have a solid reputation amongst fishos and hunters in the US and have a range of boots suitable for wearing in all weather conditions. These boots have had years of refining in tough, cold environments. They're tough boots, they're warm and very comfortable for long days shore based fishing. The outer soles are also less slippery than cheaper boots and incredibly grippy in the mud or wet grass.

The Chore model I've been wearing features a steel cap, which may be an overkill for fishing, but makes for a versatile boot for working around the yard, or if you're a tradesman, on the worksite. They also feature a steel shank for additional arch support and are triple reinforced in the toe area and quadruple reinforced in the heel area. They're obviously tough and very supportive boots!

The boots also feature a stretchy neoprene upper making them easy to get on and off and more flexible while kneeling down and walking around. The 5mm neoprene is also fully waterproof and keeps your feet and legs nice and toasty.

The boot itself is made from tough rubber material and feels very solid with all the reinforcement mentioned above.

The boots feel reasonably heavy, although light enough when they're on your feet.

With more rain expected and the cooler months ahead, I can see the Chore boots from Muck being a useful addition to my fishing arsenal while boating and shore based fishing.

More info at facebook.com/muckbootco/



● By Scott Thomas

BRAND
NEW

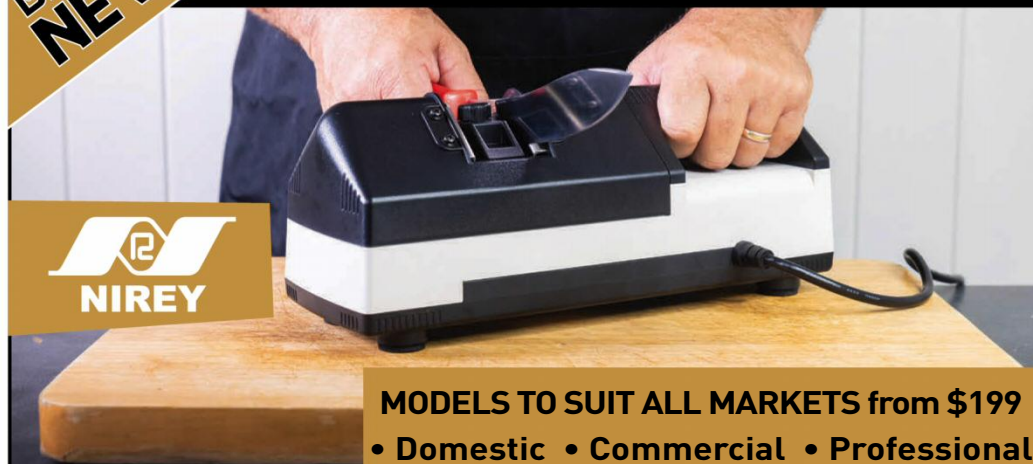
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TT DELUXE ZMAN BAIT BINDER

ZMAN says soft plastics are best stored in their original packets and the TT Deluxe ZMan Bait Binders feature extra heavy duty rings designed to fit the pre-punched, reinforced holes located in the bottom corners of ZMan packets. Other features include larger, heavy duty zips, carry handle, water resistant, durable material and an internal pocket for storing a jighead tray, leader and snips.

Available in Small (single) that holds about 10 packets of ZMan 3" MinnowZ (more packets in less bulky models) and Large (double) that is designed to hold around 20 packets of ZMan 3" MinnowZ

(more packets in less bulky models). By clipping your ZMan packets straight into the binder, there is no need for clear plastic sleeves to hold the packets and take up space in the binder, it is quicker and easier to access plastics and there is no need to remove the plastics from the binder, where they can then be misplaced or blown into the water.

Available in Small (single) – SRP: \$19.95 and Large (double). Check out the TT Duluxe ZMan Bait Binders at your local ZMan dealer. **More info at tackletactics.com.au**



VIRTUOUS DUAL DRAG

Product	Description
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014VRTSW5000	Reel ATC Virtuous SW 5000
014VRTSW8000	Reel ATC Virtuous SW 8000
014VRTSW10000	Reel ATC Virtuous SW 10000
014VRTSW3000H	Reel ATC Virtuous SW 3000H
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XRMAG30	30' / 9.0m	16cm	72g	Slow Rising
XRMAG40	40' / 12.0m	20cm	97g	Slow Rising

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WET SEASON RUN OFF

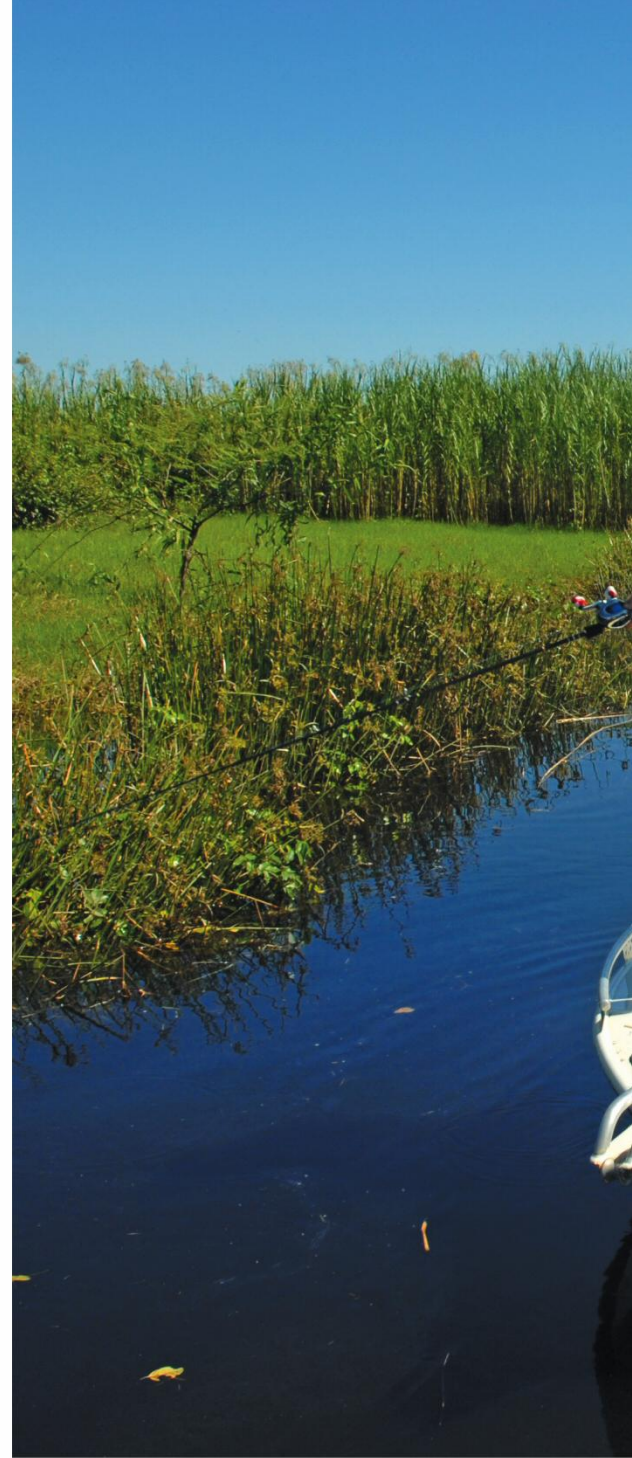
The wet season run off is the best opportunity to tangle with a big barra in the Top End.

— ● —
By David Green



The run off is the Top End's most popular season for barra.





In northern Australia there are only two seasons, the wet and the dry. Each year barramundi fishermen across the country cross their fingers hoping for sustained heavy rains in the north. These rains are the life blood of all the coastal ecosystems, in exactly the same way that rain is to farmers, native animals and vegetation. In the Northern Territory in the 2018/19 wet season the rains never came in a sustained way. While some rivers had a run off of sorts, in general it was a miserable wet season in most of the catchments, and the fishing was very poor. I've never seen the Daly River in such poor condition. When the rains don't come, the fish don't either. I've fished this river for many years. In seasons where the wet season run off is long and sustained and the floodplains fill, there is a myriad of life, and catches of 20 to 40 barra in a day are quite common. Last year I fished for 8 days and never caught a legal sized fish. Hopefully this season will see the monsoon drop deep over the top end and bring long and sustained rain to the parched catchments.

Fishing the wet season run off is generally the most productive time of year to catch wild barramundi in both North Queensland and the Northern Territory. When fresh water floods the coastal plains it spawns a myriad of life, from rainbow fish, scat and cherabin through to worms and a host of other food items that barramundi love to eat. As the water drops off the flood plains at the end of the wet season,

small feeder creeks and larger tributaries flow back into the main river carrying a wide range of food. Barramundi are opportunistic predators that take advantage of this situation and feed aggressively around the many creeks and runoffs that flow back into the main river. In a good season the run off period may last a few months, in a poor wet season it may all be over in a week. When the feeder creeks stop flowing the fish move away looking for other food sources.

“On big tides large barramundi use the tide to move up river chasing baby barra and mullet and even when the water is filthy the fishing can be excellent.”

In general the best time to fish the run off period is between late March and mid-May, although this does vary somewhat each season. If you go too early the entire river may still be in flood and access can be difficult. If you go too late the creeks will have dried up and the fish will have moved on. I have been fortunate to fish some of the big rivers of the Northern Territory for a period of a few months through the entire run off period and watched the

transition from the end of the wet season through to the first part of the dry season. In the first week of these trips all the creeks were flowing and we caught most of our fish by moving from creek to creek and casting into the tannin stained run off. When you are faced with a plethora of creeks to fish, there are a few easy clues you can use to find the most productive run off drains. Never ignore white birds actively feeding near a creek mouth. They are after exactly the same food as the barra are chasing. If you see a lot of crocodiles on the banks or in the water near a creek mouth don't be scared! It means there are generally plenty of barra and catfish in the area, and the bigger more dominant crocs often hold on the best creeks. No creek is too small, in fact some of the smallest run offs actually carry the most food as it tends to be a lot more concentrated as the water levels fall and all the baitfish have to leave the floodplain and evacuate into the main river. As the transition period progresses

and the river heights drop creeks start to stop flowing, and the number of options you have reduces. The run off, however, replenishes the entire river system with food, and over the next few weeks the barramundi move out onto the rock bars and snags adjacent to the creek mouths to feed in more open water. At this time trolling is often very productive and casting big soft plastics over rock bars can produce some great fish.



OPPOSITE: An average run off silver-sided barra.

LEFT: Casting to weedbeds and structure.

BELOW: A leaping barra on a hard body.



During the transition period there are often late bursts of rain, and while this may replenish some of the creeks the 'second run off' from a previously dry creek is often unproductive as most of the food the barra are chasing has already left the floodplain. If the main river level rises it can produce instant lock jaw in the local barra population. Falling river levels are productive, rising river levels can be extremely tough to fish, particularly if the water is dirty from big tides and flood water hitting dry mud banks. If the river level is rising, try going up the feeder creeks as far as you can venture. Some famous feeder creeks include Magella Creek on the East Alligator River, Nourlangie Creek on the South Alligator River and Elizabeth Creek and Clear Creek on the Daly River. If you can get upstream into the tannin water away from a rising main river you will still catch good fish after a decent wet season.

In the wet season run off you will catch barramundi from small rats around 40cm up to metre long monsters and beyond. Targeting the bigger fish generally requires a change in tactics. While you will catch big barra casting smaller lures around creek mouths, the bigger fish often hold on the closest big snag or rock bar to the feeder creek, even if it is on the other side of the river. Big barramundi are highly cannibalistic, and if a feeder creek holds a lot of juvenile barra the big fish are usually holding close by. You can pick the size of the barra in an area by the noise they make when they feed, a characteristic popping sound known by most anglers as a 'boof'. Small barra make a distinct 'pop', whereas

larger fish make a distinct loud sound that is sharp and unmistakeable and can be heard from hundreds of metres away. Big barra like to feed on mullet and baby barramundi and to chase big fish I find bigger lures more effective. Larger minnows, big soft plastics and swim baits are all effective if you are targeting bigger fish. When there are large numbers of juvenile barramundi in the system a lot of them will be 'boofed' by larger fish but escape. These injured fish, often partly scaled, tend to swim in the surface layers and often attract eagles. If you see eagles flying over the river looking into the water, there will generally be some big barra in attendance. These subtle clues can lead you to catch trophy fish in the middle of the river.

Another great tactic in the runoff period is to troll the spring tides when the mullet run up the river. On big tides large barramundi use the tide to move up river chasing baby barra and mullet and even when the water is filthy the fishing can be excellent. Trolling large mullet shaped minnows such as big bombers, Stradas and Reidy's Big Ass B52's on the run in tide can be very productive and is the best way I know to consistently catch metre long barramundi in the big tidal rivers. Using side imaging greatly helps in locating the bait and the fish. In productive years there are often big schools of mullet in the middle of the river and regular huge 'boofs'. Trolling with the tide at a reasonable speed is the commonly used tactic. It is important to know the running depths of your lures, and change them when you turn around to troll into the current as they will

run a lot shallower. I like to use medium sized threadline outfits for this type of fishing and surprisingly find I get a better hook-up rate when trolling from the rod holders using a long and fairly soft rod. The hits can be explosive!

For most fishing in the run off period you can use a standard barra bait caster outfit full of 20 to 30 pound braid. I generally use 40 to 60 pound fluorocarbon leader and mix my lure types between soft plastics, soft vibes and medium running hard bodies. When casting to drains suspending hard bodies can be very effective, particularly if there is a distinct colour change between the tannin water flowing out of the creek and the muddier water of the main river. Good lures to suspend include the Killalure Flatz Rat and the Jackall Squirrel. These lures can be pulled down to their running depth and left sit still for 20 or 30 seconds before beginning a slow, twitching retrieve. They are often hit as they sit still in the water on the edge of the colour change.

Soft vibes such as the Zerek Fish Trap have been excellent lures to use in the run off period and are deadly in creek mouths. It takes a bit of practice to master soft vibes when it comes to barramundi as they suck the lure in and spit it back out in a mere fraction of a second. The downside of soft vibes is that they are very snag prone. The new weedless Fish Trap can be a big help in this regard. When using soft vibes I like to carefully map out the area I am casting to using my side imaging and the fabulous new Garmin Panoptics. What we look for is a



ABOVE: With good rainfall comes quality fishing for barra during this season.

relatively clear passage through the snags that we call a “run way”. If you can map this out it will give you a clear slot in which you can work your lures without fouling up. This careful planning has helped us greatly when fishing tournaments over the past few years. We’ve noticed that barramundi often use the same clear channels when they move into a creek mouth on the tide, and it is often the case that you persist with casting down the same channel until the fish move through.

Soft plastics come in a wide range of styles and colours and nearly all of them will catch barra under the right conditions. One of my ‘go to’ soft lures is the Gulp 4 inch minnow in chartreuse and white fished on a ¼ ounce 3/0 jig head. This little lure has caught me hundreds of barra over the years and often gets bites when conditions are tough. Fished slowly with little hops close to the bottom is

generally quite productive. Bigger plastics up to 30cm long are a great lure to use when targeting big cannibalistic fish, and it pays to carry a wide range of sizes, colours and appropriate jig heads.

Hard bodied lures have been the mainstay of barramundi fishing for many decades in the run off period. Two of the most popular lures in the Northern Territory are the Classic Barra and the Halco Scorpion. These mullet shaped lures come in a range of depths and colours and are a ‘must have’ in your tackle box if you are venturing north. Some of the older style lures such as the famous Nilsmaster Invincible still hold their own at times. For trolling the Halco Poltergeist is another extremely useful lure. Regardless of the lures you use, it is important to carry high quality spare hooks and rings. Barramundi are extremely tough on hooks and rigs and their explosive mouths can bend the strongest trebles.

Fishing the wet season run off period in the big rivers of northern Australia is a highlight on many anglers’ calendars. Hopefully this season will be a good one with a decent amount of rain that will see the rivers spring back to life and the big barra return in numbers. ●

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ON SALE NOW!

West Gippsland has a few hidden gems like this stream.

WEST GIPPSLAND GETAWAY

Victoria's West Gippsland region has
many freshwater fishing opportunities
within easy reach of Melbourne.

— ● —
By Martin Auldist

MY wife and I moved to West Gippsland, Victoria, in 2002. After spending seven years in New Zealand it was finally time to come home and, if I wanted to continue my career in the dairy industry, West Gippsland was where it was at.

I didn't really appreciate it at time but, as well as being perfect for dairy cows, West Gippsland was also a perfect place to settle for someone keen on fishing. For starters there are boat ramps into both Western Port and Port Phillip less than an hour's drive to the west, while the fish-rich coastlines of South and East Gippsland aren't very much further down the highway.

For me, though, it is the freshwater angling opportunities of the region that beckon most strongly. At the risk of attracting too much competition, I'd like to tell you a bit about what the area has offer the freshwater angler.

WHERE?

West Gippsland starts pretty much as soon as the eastern suburbs of Melbourne give way to the green pasture of the dairy and beef farms that predominate in this region. That's getting further and further out these days, but at the

moment is probably around Pakenham. Then, to my mind, West Gippsland stretches east down the Latrobe Valley to around Moe. To the north, West Gippsland is bounded quite markedly by the Great Dividing Range, while the Strzelecki Ranges provide a similarly clear demarcation of the southern boundary. In other words, West Gippsland is within easy reach of Melbourne-based anglers even for a day trip, with the closest streams being within 90-minutes' drive of the southern capital.

THE WATERWAYS

So far as trout fishing waters are concerned, the jewel in West Gippsland's crown is the Latrobe River. It is the largest river in these parts and is one of the waterways that can provide anglers with a better class of fish. Tributaries of the tannin-stained Latrobe include the Loch and the Toorong rivers, which are equally productive although the fish are usually not as large. The Tarago River is another of West Gippsland's great fishing streams and, if you were a betting man, you'd back this relatively small stream to cough up the biggest trout in the region. The fishing in the Tarago is good both above and



below the Tarago Reservoir, but the reservoir itself is closed to fishing. Other noteworthy streams in West Gippsland include the Bunyip River to the west, the West and East branches of the Tanjil River on the southern slopes of Mount Baw Baw, and Tyers River to the east. There are other streams, too, that I will leave to the reader to discover for themselves, suffice to say that almost every stream in these parts is bound to contain trout.

What is common to the rivers and streams of West Gippsland is that, for the most part, they flow through a mixture of open farmland and dense but extremely picturesque native eucalypt forest. In places there are cleared areas to fish from on to at least one side, and access is good from road crossings, public reserves and picnic areas, or through private property with permission.

Besides streams and rivers, the region is dotted with dams and small lakes while, at Willow Grove, the Blue Rock Reservoir provides a Mecca for Melbourne-based anglers chasing big brown trout and Australian bass. This unique waterway deserves an article all of its own and is not covered here but the smaller farm dams all around provide angling opportunities for a variety of species.

SPECIES

By far the most popular target species in the rivers of West Gippsland is the brown trout. Be aware, though, these are not exactly trophy trout waters. According to my youngest son Billy, an expert angler in local waters, a stream trout of 50 cm in length could be considered a trophy. There

“If you were a betting man, you’d back this relatively small stream to cough up the biggest trout in the region.”

are also rainbow trout in most of the streams that grow to a good size.

Other introduced species that attract the attention of local anglers include redfin, which are surprisingly abundant, especially if you can find a creek or dam that is not commonly fished. It’s Billy’s goal to catch a 50 cm model, which is not out of the question, but his current local PB is 45 cm. There are also big European carp that can be targeted on light gear in

shallow water and provide terrific sport despite their pest status.

The river blackfish is the main native species that can be realistically targeted in West Gippsland streams and these endearing fish are said to grow much larger here than north of the Great Divide. Gippsland crayfish are also common and can be legally targeted at certain times of the year.

WHEN?

The main factor to consider when planning a fishing trip to West Gippsland is that the season for river trout in Victoria is closed between the end of the Queen’s Birthday long weekend in June and the first Saturday in September each year. You can still target blackfish and introduced species during the winter period, but the fishing is generally slower in these colder months. If I were to pick a time to visit West Gippsland for an angling expedition, I would choose any time between October and the end of April.

TECHNIQUES

The most special thing about West Gippsland trout is the spectacular scenery you are likely to be standing in when you hook one. In other ways



FACT BOX

DID YOU KNOW?

According to scientists from the Victorian Fisheries Authority both brown and rainbow trout reach maturity and are able to spawn at around three years of age. In Victoria, spawning of brown trout occurs mostly during autumn and winter, often following a flood and typically in small tributaries with gravel beds. Rainbow trout generally spawn slightly later, in winter and early spring. The spawning strategy of both species is to produce a lot of eggs (around 1500 per kg of body weight), which is a good strategy for hazardous environments in which few fingerlings survive, or unpopulated waters into which fish can rapidly expand. This strategy has seen salmonids become one of the most successful species in the world. In Victoria, surveys have shown that both species range in size from 200 g or less up to a maximum of 5 to 6 kg, depending on the location and the abundance of food.

OPPOSITE: The tannin colour streams offer great fishing for trout.

BELOW: A solid trout for these streams.

BOTTOM: This area is great for taking the family fishing.

they are similar to trout everywhere and will respond well to all the same techniques as trout in other regions. I guess the thing to remember is that most of the streams in West Gippsland are small and shallow, so smaller offerings presented on finesse gear are the order of the day. The best way to present them is to hop in the water and wade slowly upstream, casting ahead of yourself as you go. Clearly a good set of waders is advantageous in these cold waterways.

Billy prefers to cast small hard-bodied lures or spinners: he nominates his three favourites as a 4 cm Rapala X-Rap in Brown Trout colour, a green Mepps Thunder Bug bladed spinner in size 0, and a Daiwa jointed Dr Minnow in Yamame pattern. Anything similar will achieve similar results. He casts these on 8 lb braided line with a metre or so of 8 lb fluorocarbon leader.

Soft plastics also work extremely well in West Gippsland. I really love Berkley's 3-inch Power Minnow in Emerald Shiner colour on as light a jig-head as you can buy. Cast them upstream and bounce them back towards you and you're sure of attracting the attention of any trout nearby.

Flyfishing, of course, also accounts for its fair share of trout in these parts. I have caught many trout on small, high-floating dry flies such as a Royal Wulff, Elk Hair Caddis or Red Tags cast





ABOVE: A typical Gippsland river trout.

upstream into the bubbling rapids and floated back towards you. Small nymphs work well too, as they do elsewhere. My 5-weight rod is perfect for these streams...or at least it was until my wife and my dog conspired to jam it in the front door and break it in two places.

Lastly, there is bait. Or, more specifically, worms. When all else fails, Billy's go to technique is to cast an unweighted earthworm pinned on a small hook upstream and drift it back towards him. I can't think of a time when this technique hasn't produced the goods. Worms are also the prime bait for blackfish, especially in the deeper slower pools at night, and are highly effective on redfin (as are all off the abovementioned lures).

SLEEPING OVER

Although West Gippsland is close enough for a day trip from Melbourne, I'm willing to bet that a day may not be enough in these pristine and productive waters...and especially for those travelling from further afield. Happily, if that's the case, there are a number of accommodation options in the region, including some great free camping spots right on the rivers and numerous caravan parks adjacent to the main towns. There

FACT BOX

LOCAL TACKLE STORES

- Warragul BCF, 5/1 Burke St, Warragul VIC 3820, ph 5618 9710
- Allways Angling, 1/29 Church St, Traralgon VIC 3844, ph 5174 8544
- Noojee Bush Goods, 11 Henty St, Noojee VIC 3833, ph 0488 451 850
- In Season Hunting and Fishing, 2/12 June Crt, Warragul VIC 3820, ph 5623 1944

are also motels available in the major towns of Warragul and Drouin, and pub accommodation in the smaller settlements such as Neerim South and Noojee. There are also supermarkets, mechanics and medical assistance available in all these towns and fishing shops in some of them (notably Warragul).

So, what are you waiting for? West Gippsland provides a scenic and productive freshwater fishery within easy reach of Melbourne. Why not plan a visit soon? You won't be disappointed. ●

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A SPIN IN THE SURF

Aussie salmon are a fantastic sportfish and spinning the beaches for these tough fighters is a popular pastime in the country's southern half.

By Jamie Crawford

Tyler Crawford with a nice salmon from the surf during a sunny winter day.

There aren't many inshore sportfish offering the same level of accessibility as Australian salmon. As a recreational species they tick a lot of boxes; only being lessened by their table qualities. They jump, fight hard, are found in good numbers and hit lures with absolute aggression. Their considerable appetite and drive to feed ensures that when fish are found, they will typically eat.

Salmon are often the first basic "sportfish" that many fishos encounter in the southern half of our country. Targeting salmon in the surf was my first step away from smaller bread & butter species when I was a kid, and I dare say they have been a stepping-stone for plenty of other fishos around our country. This is especially so in locales such as southern WA, throughout SA and Victoria, where the species is most abundant.

We have two separate species of Australian salmon in our waters; the Eastern Australian salmon (*Arripis trutta*) is found from the QLD / NSW border south to Port Philip Bay and including Tasmania. This species is the smaller of the two, reaching a maximum of 6kg, but mainly caught in the 0.5 – 2kg range. The Western Australian salmon (*Arripis truttaceus*) is found from Kalbarri in WA through to Lakes entrance in Victoria and including South Australia. This species reaches a maximum of 10kg but is generally caught in the 1 – 4kg size range.

Salmon are distributed right throughout our inshore coastal environments including bays, inlets, rivers and around near-shore islands. But in my opinion, chasing them in the surf on lures is as exciting as salmon fishing gets. Casting metal lures into the surf is how I started my salmon fishing quest when I was growing up, and it's still my preferred way of connecting to a few bullets in the surf. It's an active and very visual form of fishing, and generally combines plenty of exercise with bursts of mayhem. Spotting a school of black-back salmon in the suds, firing a cast next to the school, and then cranking your lure until it stops in a shower of spray is very cool.

WA would have to be the mecca of spinning for salmon in the surf, with the annual salmon run in autumn drawing plenty of fishos to Western Australia's southern beaches. Stretches of sand from Margaret River right around the southern coast to Bremer Bay sees the bulk of the schooling action, with plenty of big fish around the 4 to 5kg mark caught regularly. Salmon of this caliber are a fantastic sportfish, especially in the surf.

In SA we have some great surf beaches in our western waters and down the west coast of the Eyre Peninsula to Port Lincoln. Winter time is the prime time for the bigger schools of salmon along these beaches, but smaller pockets of fish can be found year-round. South Australia's eastern beaches also produce plenty of salmon for the surf fisho, but a lot of these beaches tend to suit bait fishing more than spinning.

As you push into Victoria, the availability of salmon starts to taper off somewhat, and the

species shifts from the larger western species to the smaller eastern variety. For the surf fisho, Victoria's 90 Mile beach is one of the better surf beaches for spinning action. Down in Tasmania, the east coast beaches produce a few small to medium salmon when spinning off the sand.

New South Wales has some good salmon fishing for the spin fisho too; especially from the southern beaches starting at Merimbula and extending up to Port Kembla. There are plenty of lovely surf beaches along this stretch of coast.

Down here in SA it's been encouraging to see consistent numbers of salmon over the past several years. We're seeing reliable numbers of schools, especially throughout our western waters, with plenty of schools of fish up in the 3 – 4kg bracket.

However, even when schools are present, they may not always be accessible. The weather and sea conditions will dictate how productive the fishing will be. Onshore winds will make it near-on impossible to spot a school of salmon holding along an inshore gutter and will make it very hard to lay a decent cast.

Similarly big swell will churn a surf beach into a foaming washing machine, and will push schools of

"This makes spinning for salmon viable for anyone, provided they are competent in casting and can achieve a reasonable distance."

salmon behind the back breakers and out of casting range. Heavy seas will also stir the inshore water and bring in clumps of floating weed. Spinning in the surf is hard enough, let alone with adverse conditions.

When chasing salmon in the surf, ideally we're looking for offshore winds at our back, or light winds. Small to medium swell is ideal, together with a big tide. Bright sunny conditions will make it easier to visually spot schools of salmon holding within inshore gutters or troughs of water. There are never any guarantees in fishing, but if we have the above conditions, then we're in with a good chance of at least spotting a patch or fish or two.

I still get excited when I climb atop a sand dune and see a black mass of fish sitting within casting range down the beach. It's usually a quick dash to



get to the school before they move outside of casting range. It is quite surprising how mobile a school of salmon in the surf can be. Sometimes they will hold in a gutter for hours – especially if they are being herded by predators – while other times a school may only be within casting distance for a few minutes before pushing behind the rear breakers.

Spinning the surf with lures is quite different than bait fishing. When bait fishing you tend to lock yourself into one gutter for the session. You'll generally set up a berley trail and continually cast baits into the gutter until some fish move through. Don't get me wrong, fishing with bait is still a very effective way of fishing a surf beach and you get some good bycatch when using bait. But if you're into visual fishing and feeling that direct strike and hook-up, then spinning with lures is the better option.

You get a fair bit of exercise when scouting a surf beach for schools of salmon. If tackling the beach by foot, I will start at one end of the beach – usually as the tide starts to build – and will walk along the beach from gutter to gutter. If you spot a school of salmon then it's game-on. Otherwise I will lay half a dozen casts into each gutter or parallel trough of water before walking further. If there are salmon in the gutter, you will know within a couple of casts.

Once I fire out a cast, I'll wait a couple of seconds before beginning the retrieve. You want a fairly quick retrieve to keep the lure in the upper column. If I can't see any fish and I'm just blind-casting, I'll often pause mid-retrieve to let the lure gain a bit more depth, before cranking again.

One of the great things about salmon is they are naturally aggressive so you don't need to impart any fancy action on the lure – just crank it past the fish. This makes spinning for salmon viable for anyone, provided they are competent in casting and can achieve a reasonable distance.

Rather than pin-point accuracy, spinning for salmon in the surf is more about repetitive distance. Schools of salmon quite often sit a fair distance from the shoreline, and even some of the better gutters can be set a reasonable distance from the beach, making longer casts imperative.

Casting action and rod selection are the first factors people consider for distance, but lure selection is critical too. Some of the better casting slugs are designed weight-forward to assist with casting distance. They may only make 5 or 10m of difference, but sometimes those additional few metres will be the difference in reaching the school, or missing them completely.

Some of the better casting lures for this style of fishing includes the Halco Outcast, Shimano Coltsniper, Spanyid Raider and Lazer Lures to

name just a few. There are plenty of effective metal lures on the market to choose from. Weights of 40 to 60g are perfect for salmon in the surf. One thing we do with our salmon spinning lures is to remove the treble, and exchange for either a single inline or assist hook around the 1/0 to 3/0 size. This makes it a lot easier for de-hooking salmon prior to release, and also safer on the angler.

Salmon are masters at jumping and throwing hooks too, and having a single does help this to a degree... but they still manage to throw lures with regularity. When a salmon takes to the air just try to keep the pressure on, try not to give them any slack line.

As I'm walking along the beach, if there is a higher vantage point like a sand dune or headland, I'll scale up to get a better view. This may allow you to scan the remainder of the beach without actually having to walk the whole distance. If you cannot spot any visual schools of salmon or any likely water, it will allow you to decide whether or not to make the trek.

Walking through soft sand isn't easy – in fact it's darn hard work, especially if you're wearing waders in winter. Don't run into the trap of walking too far in that quest to reach the next gutter... and then the next. Remember you'll need to do that same distance on the return trek too.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Lightweight spin outfits in the 4 to 8kg size together with 40 to 60g lures are ideal for salmon in the surf.

Salmon fight all the way to the shoreline.

Casting to a good school of salmon holding in a near shore gutter.

If you're allowed to drive along the beach, then working your way along the beach by 4WD is obviously a much quicker option. We have quite a few surf beaches in SA where we can venture onto the sand and drive the whole length. This lets you move along the beach until a school is found, but I find I don't work the beach as methodically as I do when tackling the beach by foot. If you have a 4WD you tend to keep moving rather than laying casts into every pocket of water.

If you do find a seething mass of fish within casting distance, try to get into them straight away, as they can move surprisingly quick.

Sometimes we'll catch and release several fish from a school, but they'll be hooked and landed over a few hundred metres as the school pushes down the beach. Keep on the move to follow the fish.

Because spinning the surf for salmon is quite straightforward, you don't need a mountain of gear to enjoy this action. You don't need any bait, and if you're catching and releasing you needn't pack an esky or ice either. What you will need is a handful of lures, some pliers for unhooking fish,

Fighting a big salmon in the surf.



waders if you are fishing in winter, waist belt or backpack, and a surf rod and reel of your choice.

For this style of fishing – repeatedly casting 40 to 60 gram metal lures – a lightweight spin outfit of between 9 to 11ft is perfect. While heavier and longer surf rods will better-suit bait fishing, having a lighter outfit for spinning means you'll be able to cast all day and not get fatigued like you would using a heavier, more cumbersome outfit. A lighter spin outfit also maximises the sporting qualities of our salmon, and with

by-catch almost non-existent, you shouldn't get blown away by any larger species.

Some great rods on the market for this style of fishing includes the Shimano Maikuro Light Surf 10'6" at 4 – 7kg, the Daiwa Aird X 902 9'0" at 5 – 9kg and the Abu Veritas 922H 9'2" at 6 – 10kg. Using these lighter rods for spinning offers a whole lot of fun. In the reel department, a 4000 or 5000 size spin reel is ideal. I run 20lb braid on my surf spinning reel, which I think it perfect for casting distance in the surf. Going any heavier will start to compromise distance.

On my 20lb braid I run a two metre length of 30lb shock leader, either hard mono or fluorocarbon is fine. Slim leader knots such as the FG knot is ideal for casting through the guides. Other items to take with you includes a bottle of water and sun protection.

Spinning the surf is a whole lot of fun, especially when the sun is out and the fish are playing. Seeing a pack of lit-up salmon competing against each other to hit your lure is pretty exciting. Salmon are a cool fish, whether you chase salmon for sport, bait or food. ●

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Your fishing licence fees at work on kingfish



Recreational fishing licence fees have funded a two-year study into Victorian kingfish that's revealing a few secrets about their movement, genetics and spawning habits.

A 65cm kingfish carrying a satellite tag was released off Lady Julia Percy Island, near Port Fairy, on 5 April 2017 and swam south to the continental slope before reaching King Island on 19 May. It then headed east to the islands off Wilsons Promontory in late May, after which time the tag automatically released in June off Flinders Island.

During its 69-day marathon swim, this kingfish travelled 1000km or about 14.5km per day on average. It reached a maximum depth of 70m, experienced temperatures

between 14.5 and 17 degrees and when in Bass Strait, only swam in surface waters of 12m or less.

Fisheries scientists analysed gonads from 452 fish frames donated by fishers and oxygen isotopes in kingfish otoliths (ear bones). They found no evidence of kingfish spawning off Victoria's coast.

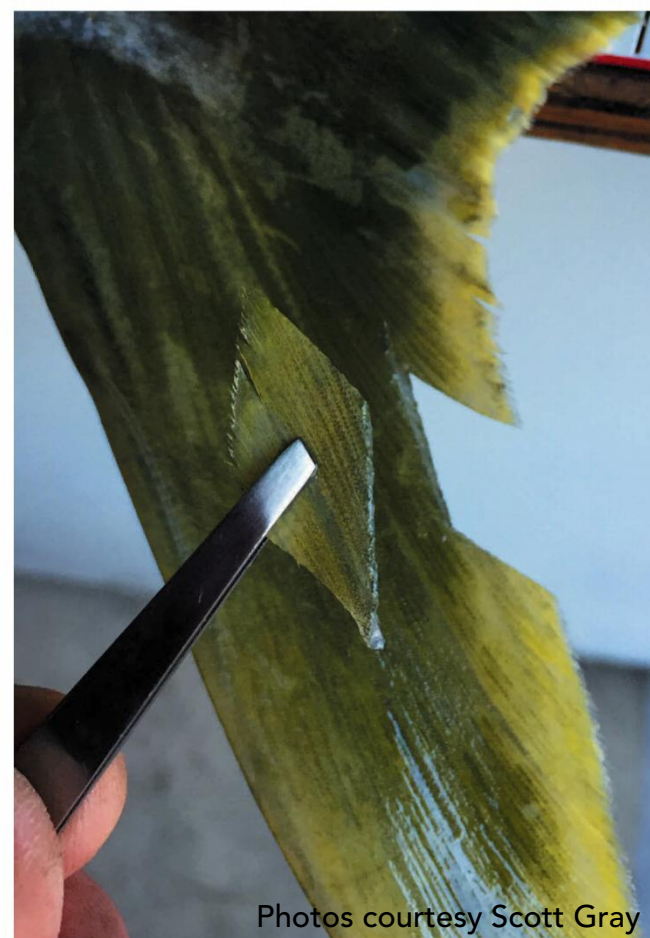
This supports the notion that kingfish caught in Victoria are fish that started their lives in warmer waters, most likely along the eastern seaboard of NSW.

Scientists also collected DNA from fin and muscle samples of 168 kingfish captured by recreational fishers along the Victorian coast.

Samples were also provided from NSW Fisheries and the University of Tasmania.

Genetic analysis supported by other evidence such as similar growth rates, reproductive traits and movement patterns of yellowtail kingfish suggest a single stock across south-eastern Australian waters.

To learn more visit
www.vfa.vic.gov.au/kingfishreport



Photos courtesy Scott Gray



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OFFSHORE MULLOWAY

Greeny reveals the best techniques for chasing offshore mullo way.



Good catches of mullo way are possible with the right bait and techniques.



By David Green

MULLOWAY, more commonly known as jewfish, are a popular target species throughout most of southern Australia. Most of the recreational fishing effort takes place off the rocks, in the estuaries or on the beaches. These highly mobile fish are often not easy to catch, and even the best mullo way anglers often put in long hours on the water in order to be successful. They can be caught on lures and baits, and are more active after dark when they often move long distances to chase baitfish.

On the offshore grounds, usually in depths between 10 and 40 metres, mullo way often hold up in caves, wrecks or under ledges in large schools in daylight hours. Once the sun sets the schools move away from cover, sometimes moving inshore towards the mouths of estuaries or onto the beach

gutters. Mullo way take advantage of schooling fish, particularly mullet. In my local waters large schools of sea and tiger mullet move into the estuary entrances in winter, and at this time mullo way are usually in close attendance. Out on the reef, once the sun sets, the fish usually start to bite. The key is to have the best live bait you can get and fish it a few metres off the bottom.

A good mullo way spot generally has ledges, caves and areas for the fish to hide. Sunken wrecks are always worth a look, particularly if the fish can actually get inside the wreck. There is a sunken trawler located in a bit over 20 metres of water just off the Jumpinpin Bar. It is sitting flat on the bottom and one of the back hatches is open. Schools of big mullo way often spend the day in the hold of the trawler, emerging to feed and then returning to safety. This spot is also commonly productive in daylight hours. I've found that once you locate a good offshore spot that holds mullo way it generally keeps producing

fish year after year. While a good sounder will give you plenty of clues, no sounder shows you caves and ledges very well. The fish seem to need something they can get under, and when you find such a spot it will generally reward you.

While lures can be effective at times, the best way to fish the offshore reefs is with a weighted live bait suspended a few metres off the bottom. Mullo way can be very fussy when it comes to live bait, and my favourite baits are pike, large slimy mackerel and tailer. Yellowtail are also effective at times. I generally head offshore a few hours before dark and take my time to catch plenty of big active live baits. Don't be afraid to use big baits, a half kilo tailer is a great bait and resists attack from smaller fish such as teraglin. Mullo way seem to have a passion for pike! These baits are not very active but have a distinct smell. If you put a few baits out including one pike the mullo way nearly always eat the pike first. Sometimes we catch our pike first in the estuary before heading offshore.

Dead baits such as pilchards can also be effective. There is a type of pilchard with a very large eye that we commonly catch on bait jigs when trying to catch slimy mackerel, and these make fantastic mullet bait when used fresh. Tailer fillets are another great mullet bait and mullet are also good at times on the offshore grounds. I often put out a pilchard or fillet bait targeting snapper while I am waiting for a mullet to eat a live bait, and over the years I've caught plenty of good mullet on dead baits.

When using live baits the rig is important. I like to use circle hooks and bridle my bait to the hook using a bait needle from a short braid loop. The circle hook is attached to about a metre of 40 pound fluorocarbon leader connected to a swivel, and a large ball sinker sits on the swivel. The main line is generally 15 kilo mono. Bridle rigging the bait gives the advantage of keeping the bait active and uninhibited by the hook. The large sinker prevents the bait from swimming away from the

“Sunken wrecks are always worth a look, particularly if the fish can actually get inside the wreck.”

predator. I fish this rig in strike drag from a rod holder that allows the rod to be at a flat angle to the water. Once the sun sets the action usually isn't too far away. By watching the rod tip you can monitor the action of the bait. When the tip starts to rattle and twitch a predator is usually close to the bait. Mullet can be hesitant biters, seemingly playing with the bait. The circle hook has a number of advantages here. When the rod pulls down and the circle hook bites in to the corner of the fish's jaw the hook up is generally solid, but if the hook misses and the fish removes the bait it has not been pricked by the hook. This means you can often rig another bait, drop it

down, and catch the fish you just missed.

I don't pick up the rod until the reel is crackling drag and the rod is loaded. The fish have quite a distinctive fight with plenty of head shakes. As the line is quite vertical the fish is being pulled towards the surface right from the start. This seems to stop the fish from making long runs, and generally a 10 to 15 kilo is at the boat in a couple of minutes. These fish are highly vulnerable to barotrauma and they often hit the surface with their expanded swim bladder coming out the mouth. As such these fish should not be released. With a bag limit of 2 fish over 75cm per angler in Queensland (I fish in NSW) it is often very easy to reach your limit quickly.

I love eating mullet in a wide variety of recipes. While catching them on offshore reefs isn't the most sporting way of chasing mullet, it is fun and very efficient. The numbers of mullet found off the Gold Coast seems to be increasing and in the coming cooler months they should provide some great fishing. ●



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ESTUARY TROLLING TECHNIQUES

Trolling bibbed hard bodies in the estuaries is a deadly, yet underrated technique.



With Mark Williams

ONE of the most underrated and under-utilised techniques for estuarine lure fishers is slow

trolling bibbed hard bodies and I don't really understand why as it's so effective. Possibly, it's due to the rise in popularity of tournaments that have adopted the US largemouth bass style casting only competition rules. One of the hot beds of estuary lure trolling in Australia is South East Queensland where the art of trolling for dusky flathead has been refined and developed to a high level by local anglers that compete in the famed Gold Coast Flathead Classic including Fisho regulars David Green and Rob Payne who always finish highly in this prestigious tournament.

The truth of the matter is that the estuarine lure trolling techniques that have been so highly refined in South East Queensland by Fisho's David Green, Rob Payne and other local anglers will work in estuaries all around the country; you just need to adjust the basic method to suit the conditions on your local waterways. I've been lure trolling on my home waters of Lake Macquarie for many years, primarily because I mostly fish from a Hobie kayak which means

we've had to fish a range of depths to find consistent action, with the added bonus that by trolling deeper areas we're actually getting plenty of jewfish action on the bibbed hard bodies.

On my local waterway I can be trolling depths ranging from two to ten metres so I've needed to put together a collection of suitable bibbed trolling lures to accommodate the range of depth variations that can be encountered in a day's fishing. Until recently I've relied heavily on the Mann's Stretch series of lures that have been such fantastic long time big flathead and jewfish producers for me and came in models with depth ranges from two to ten metres, perfect for my local waterway. However, about the only place I can find these great lures now is on the second hand lure pages on social media. However, that dire situation has been solved by the coming of the Samaki Redic range of bibbed hard bodies that were released at the AFTA trade show last year which has models encompassing depths from one metre deep shallow flats trolling right through to eight metre plus deep divers. The vibrant fish attracting action of these new lures has been producing outstanding results and they are ideally suited for slow estuary trolling from my Hobie Compass kayak. The Samaki Redic hard bodies come in a wide

range of fish attracting finishes to cover every scenario you could encounter from crystal clear water requiring super realistic finishes to dirty water conditions where bold primary colours are needed to draw a strike. The finishes of these latest generation hard bodies really leave the basic

old finishes of my Mann's Stretch's for dead to be honest.

Estuary lure trolling is a surprisingly active form of fishing as the best results will be achieved if you're working the lure while moving along. Basically, the idea is to sweep the rod tip forward which sees the lure dart along the bottom, then drop the rod tip back which allows the lure to pause and rise briefly before the process is repeated. Another critical side benefit of this technique is that it usually sheds any weed that the lure has picked up, particularly when flats trolling. This is one area that I've found the Samaki Redic really shines,



it seems to shed weed much more effectively than other hard bodies I've used before, a major plus when estuary trolling I can assure you.

I usually troll two rods in the estuaries from my Hobie kayak, as a rule I run two lures of the same type, but in different colours, so I can have them swimming at their optimum trolling speed. If you put two different brands out I often find that one will be swimming perfectly and the other will be not quite right. It's vital when trolling for flathead that the lure is making regular contact with the bottom, it's such a critical strike trigger. I use the C-Map Genesis mapping on my Lowrance HDS Live plotter screen to follow bottom contours that keep my lures working in their optimum depth range. Jewfish trolling is a bit different and doesn't require the lure to be hitting the bottom, but I still like to keep them swimming within a metre of the bottom where possible.

“Basically, the idea is to sweep the rod tip forward which sees the lure dart along the bottom.”

I'm always travelling at a speed ideally suited to lure trolling, so it's really been a no-brainer to have a lure out the back at all times to maximise my chances of catching fish. One of my best fishing mates Mick Aubrey has been competing in the Gold Coast Flathead Classic for many years and has applied the lessons learnt there on our home waters of Lake Macquarie with consistently good results too. The waters where the Gold Coast Flathead Classic are held each year offer large expanses of shallow flats and much of the flathead trolling is done in these areas. Our local estuary system doesn't have anywhere near the amount of shallow flats so

BELOW LEFT: Experienced estuary lure troller Mick Aubrey with a nice bream taken on the new Samaki Redic 80mm hard body.

BELOW RIGHT: Mark caught this big Lake Macquarie croc in the first hour of trolling the new Samaki Redic hard bodies from his Hobie kayak.



As far as rigging goes for trolling when chasing jewfish in the deeper water I fish heavier gear using 10kg GSP braid main line and 10kg fluorocarbon leader. For shallow water trolling for flathead I'll use lighter, softer rods to try and keep the hooks in the fish. Typically, I'll run a 10lb fluorocarbon leader with a short bite tippet of 20lb fluorocarbon just in case the lure gets taken deeply by a monster croc. I also like to use Bill Norman Speed Clips on bibbed hard bodies as some other brands of snap clips are very awkward, if not impossible to get onto the recessed tow points that feature on many modern hard bodies.

I really enjoy trolling bibbed hard bodies from Hobie Compass kayak, it's super stealthy and I can maintain an optimum lure speed for hours quite easily. ●

Technical editor Mark Williams is a highly experienced angler who writes regularly for Fisho.



THE JURRASIC ERA

Bob builds a budget 10-15Kg tough trolling or live bait rod, perfect for a beginner.



With Bob Russo

WHEN speaking to Ross van Enckevort to order some more rod building epoxy, he just happened to mention a new shipment of Jurassic blanks came in and was unpacking them when I called. For those who aren't aware, Ross is the owner of The RodWorks in South Australia.

"Jurassic"... just the name of the blanks had me salivating. When I asked what type of graphite the blanks made from, to my surprise he told me they were carbon composite with a carbon ribbon spiralled down the outside for added hoop strength.

Ross mentioned the blanks were good sellers in South Australia and many of the bottom bouncing brigade used them. Curiosity got the better of me and I asked Ross if I could have a look at one.

I was gob smacked once I opened the rod tube and saw the wall thickness in the business end of the blank was close to 4mm.

First thoughts were these will weigh a ton. To my surprise, the blank was far from heavy and yet it had the feel of a blank that would have some serious stopping power on a big fish.

SPECIFICATIONS

BLANK: 5'9" JURASSIC S198

COST: \$94: 95

GUIDES: HBSG Fuji SiC

SIZES: 20,16,12,12,10,10

TIP: Size #16 roller Tip

REEL SEAT: Fuji DPSH size 26

FORE & REAR GRIP: 350mm long or 14" with a 15mm inside diameter. This needed to be reamed out to suit its position on the blank. Rear Grip was a Slick Butt 270mm or 10". I opted for a Slick Butt for better wear and tear and ease of getting in and out of boat rod holders when trolling.

GIMBAL: BCGC - S #22

I've always said that fishing is personal thing and I could not see myself building a bottom bouncing rod with the blank but what I did envisage was trimming the blank down to between 5 and 6 feet and making it up as an affordable entry style trolling come live-bait rod for the bloke just starting out. Being a carbon composite these blanks are virtually indestructible. The cost of some graphite blanks these days is prohibitive. At a cost of around \$94 this makes for a great rod for someone just starting out.

"I was gob smacked once I opened the rod tube and saw the wall thickness in the business end of the blank."

At 7 feet or 210cm long, I knew it would need to be trimmed but by how much was the question? Talk about a kid with a new toy.

THE BUILD

I trimmed 100mm off the tip first but after loading it up took another 85mm off being a total of 185mm off the tip. After more loading and measuring, I took 155 mm off the butt, making a total length of 175 cm or 5'9".

THE BIND

The guides were bound in A grade black with gold trims and double over bound in C grade black. A thin coat of Thread-Master epoxy followed two more coats saw the rods finish sparkle.

In front of the fore grip I did a red, gold and black marble to set off the bindings.

For retail enquiries for the Jurassic Blanks, call Ross at The Rod Works on 08 8395 0755 or 0418104265.

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ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS PALATSIDES



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THINK OUTSIDE THE SNAG

Sometimes a fresh approach is needed when targeting heavily-fished areas, as Joe discovers.

By Joe Brennan

By the time summer rolls around, we freshwater anglers are getting starry-eyed and listless. Thoughts drift to buzzing cicadas and roiling waters at the bottom of a gravel race; and a dingy eddy inviting a well-presented lure. There in the shadows might lurk a bright-eyed, brassy flanked predator ready to scoff the first thing silly enough to come into range.

As the days lengthen and the seasonal chorus of common koels, dollarbirds and cuckoos suddenly springs from every thicket, the call to go bass fishing must be answered!

It was just that way as my mate Kieran and I wended towards a river valley. We were exploring new water; and when it comes to the Manning River, well, bass anglers get a bit light-headed.

Our tyres rolled onto river cobbles well after dark. Perhaps because of the prolonged dry, the night's activity was subtle. The rippling calls of stony-creek frogs were absent and only the quiet murmur of the river filled the space.

We walked mid-channel over the bridge and switched on our head torches. As the rude beams cut through the night, dark shapes flitted to more secure locations – the bass were here. For now, though, we left them undisturbed and cooked a feed over fire. The primeval bellows of a koala accompanied us to sleep.

With first light filtering from the east, we slipped into the canoe to see what might be found. One of the first casts, working a Heddon Zara Puppy through an eddy adjacent to the main current, was assaulted by a decent sized fish. Unluckily the hooks didn't stick and the rest of the morning left us empty handed.

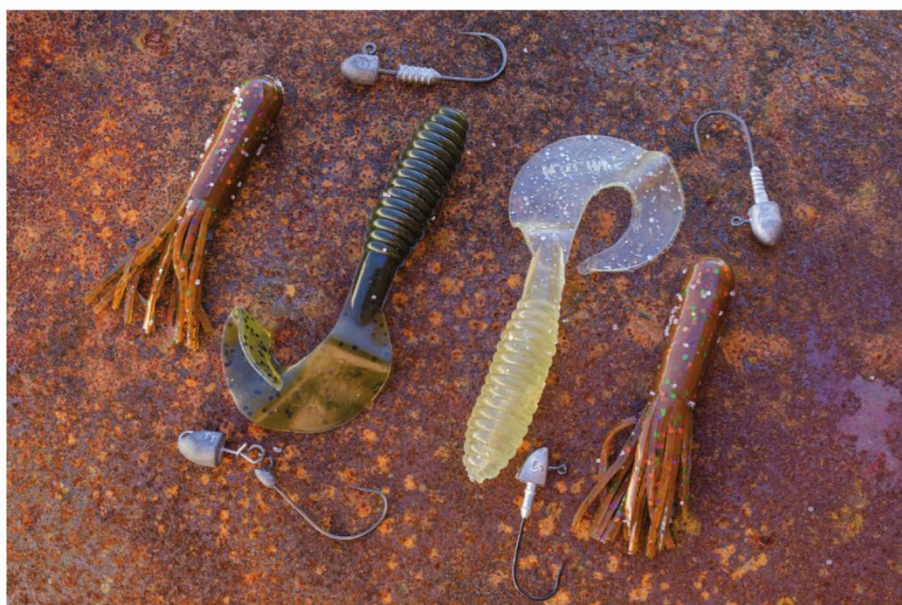
This wasn't unexpected considering we were fishing the most accessible pool in the area. Well-worn vehicle tracks gouged their way along the cobble flat and we knew we were some of many that had wet a line in this roadside pool.

As the sun began to climb, we boiled the billy and threw our gear into the canoe to embark on the real trip – a paddle upstream into more remote waters and an overnight camp in the bass country.





The Manning River
doesn't disappoint
when it comes to
quality bass.



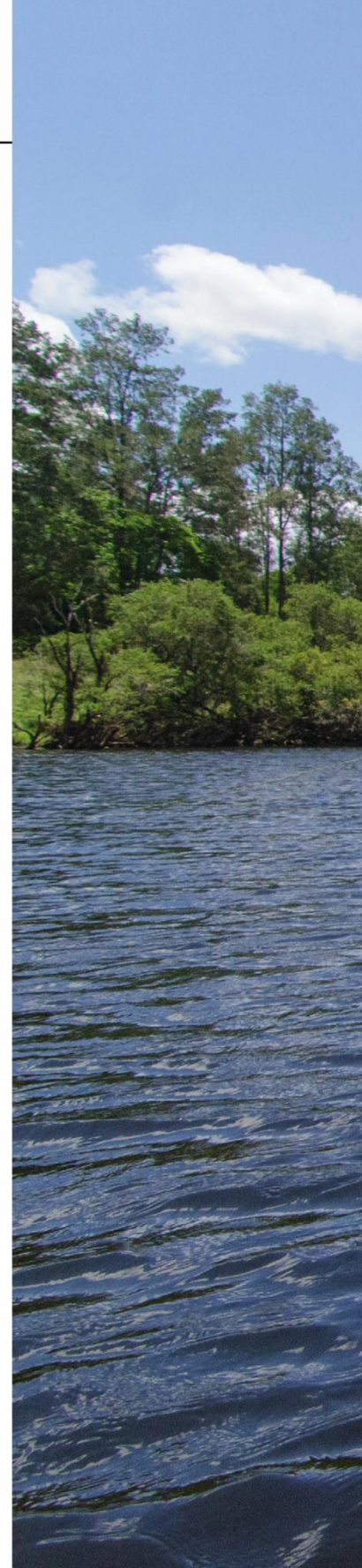
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Keep it simple – a couple of plastics and jigheads to choose from is usually enough.

Tube plastics are odd-looking things, but they are cracking crayfish impersonators.

Canoes and kayaks present many possibilities on larger rivers where bank-bashing only scratches the surface.

A cracking 40+ centimetre Manning bass deserves gentle handling.



THE MUDDLING MANNING

The first portage we came to was just what we'd hoped for. Long and awkward enough to pose a nuisance to day-trippers; and upstream of the access point, perhaps less visited by those preferring to paddle with the current. Emerging from the scrub and dumping packs and canoe, we overlooked a wide, deep pool with a shady bank. There had to be fish here! The morning's skunk stuck with us, though, and we worked through the shady pockets and snags without sign of a bass.

We were manoeuvring up the next series of riffles when a bloke poked his head out of the scrub to check we hadn't raided his campsite. A bass country favourite; I've noticed that the thicker the scrub, the stranger the encounters! A yarn clarified that we were just chasing scale and he shared some insight. He attributed his success to black Jackall TN60s, which he slowly retrieved over the weed beds growing in the main river channel.

I felt silly for being side-tracked by prominent bankside structure. It's not uncommon for fish to be out in deeper water; particularly as the summer heat builds. When it's warm and bright, and if the river allows, bass will move deeper to find cooler water. Out there, they'll take up residence around what's

available – the open bottom, holes and weed beds.

We weren't carrying Jackalls but could still play on the underlying theme of the story. I'm a fan of soft plastic grubs for bass and was carrying some 100mm Kalin's Lunker Grubs – large bodied plastics with a tail that waves with the slightest movement – and I hoped that the dark Watermelon colour would maximise their underwater presence. A single jig hook made sense to me for working weed beds anyway.

We reached the next pool around midday, feeling unnerved but ignoring the shady cover of bankside bottlebrush. Instead, we lathered up with sunscreen and drifted into the open, throwing long casts ahead of us.

It didn't take long to chase away the worry. A bulky bronze fish sidled out of the depths, examining the grub but dashing away at sight of the canoe. More follows were enticed by slowing the retrieve. The taps started coming – these fish were tentative. Dropping down another gear, we threw in some pauses to the roll. In the end, when I felt a bump, I just stopped. The line didn't sink so something was holding the plastic up. Then the braid began to slowly move, and I reeled onto the fish. Wham!

Working out the depth of the weed beds through trial and error, we established a pattern of counting the plastics down and bringing them back just above the shadowy lair of big, healthy bass – and the afternoon turned it on. There weren't many rod-wrenching strikes, and whenever we tried to set a hook we came up empty-handed, but it was a lot of fun playing with the taps and watching for the line to react.

CRACKING THE OPEN WATER CODE

Fishing open water during daylight hours isn't the first thing that comes to mind on a bass river. I'm as liable as anyone to get caught up with accurate casts and gentle retrieves through cover I can see – that's how bass fishing "should" be done after all.

This will always turn up the odd fish, and in smaller waterways it's the only habitat available; but on bigger rivers and at certain times of the season, deeper water can be productive. As spring progresses and fish are on the move upstream, they tend to accumulate in staging areas in the main channel. During the heat of summer, this deeper water also provides refuge from the warming shallows.

Lots of bass waters run clear and promote the growth of aquatic vegetation as deep as sunlight can



“Rather than being cemented to snags, bass are pretty mobile and make use of all of habitat within their river system; dependent on environmental conditions and availability of prey.”

penetrate. The resultant greenery turns into prime summer habitat for bass and the creatures they hunt.

In many cases, the weed beds that sprawl over the river's bed are apparent from the surface as darker patches or hints of trailing fronds, if they aren't fully visible. I like a canoe that's stable enough to stand in, but even an elevated seat gains valuable centimetres to improve vision. Good polarised sunglasses finish off the spotter's attire and allow the angler to pinpoint areas to cast to. Keep an eye out for holes and edges in the beds as these are great ambush points. Tickling the tops of the weeds will also bring fish out from underneath.

A SOFT APPROACH

A selection of soft plastics and variously weighted jig heads makes a versatile arsenal. I used to stick to smaller sizes for all of my bass lures, but have found larger presentations to account for bigger fish and spectacular attacks. The latter isn't always the case – but working big lures runs my anticipation at a constant high.

Grubs are some of the most action-packed plastics. Models with oversized, soft tails wiggle and pulse with the slightest movement. During ultra-slow retrieves this gives a great illusion of life

and the bass definitely seem to like it. Some of my favourites are the Berkley Powerbait Nemesis and the afore-mentioned Kalin's plastics.

When working lures over deeper weed beds, a countdown method is handy. Letting the plastic fall progressively deeper on subsequent casts soon determines where the sweet spot is. I sporadically test how deep the lure can get so as to keep in touch with any changes in the river bed. Where there are patches of open bottom, lures can be left to get all the way down.

Bass are all about the slow retrieve. From leaving surface lures to drift on their own accord, to hopping stop-start spinnerbait retrieves, these fish appreciate time to investigate. I keep my jig heads under four grams, going as light as possible while still getting the tail to swim on the sink. Retrieve styles and speeds are always dictated by the fish. Changing pace should be the first test before switching lures.

Sometimes, the fish meet ultra-gentle retrieves with matching delicacy in their takes. Fishing crayfish imitations in clear water, I've watched bass staring and bumping them for ages – I assume trying to work out where dangerous claws might be. Feeling light taps through the line isn't

necessarily a sign to strike and it's all too easy to pull the plastic away from the fish which is investigating or sucking the tail experimentally. At times like these I'll wait to feel some weight on the line; or see it moving off; before coming up tight in a firm but controlled strike.

EXPLORE THE OPEN

Fishing the open water of large river pools can be the answer when the bankside pocket-water isn't producing. Rather than being cemented to snags, bass are pretty mobile and make use of all of habitat within their river system; dependent on environmental conditions and availability of prey.

A paddle-powered craft not only gets the angler into quieter waters; it'll make entire pools fishable where bank-bashing is restricted, and provide a fairly stealthy approach in open areas where fish might be spooky.

In a lot of cases, the open water habitat is more likely to be overlooked or only sporadically fished than the “prime” looking spots in a pool, so there's more chance of putting a lure in front of a bass that hasn't already seen an entire tackle box swim past. In waters that see more fishing pressure, this can be a winning approach. ●

PELAGIC MADNESS

Nothing gets the blood pumping more than chasing fast moving topwater pelagics on lure and fly.



ABOVE: Chasing schools of pelagics is addictive business!



With Greg Finney

I'VE spent most of my life casting lures at pelagic fish. It all started when I was about 15, throwing small metals and lead slugs at frigate mackerel off the Whale Beach headlands on Sydney's northern beaches. We fished ABU 6500 baitcasters with 4 and 6lb mono line back then which was pretty self-defeating. They didn't cast as far as a threadline and they weren't fast enough in retrieve speed. We also hooked the odd bonito, salmon and rat kingfish while waiting for our livebaits to be eaten. I was hooked after that with tossing metal at pelagics. In the 80's we spent many a day throwing small lures at frigate mackerel but we chased them as livebaits for marlin and yellowfin tuna off Devil's Gorge and The Tubes.

When we graduated to boat fishing we found that we could find and follow schools of feeding pelagics. We enjoyed some great fun chasing mack tuna and the odd longtail up at Port Stephens on small chromed hex lures and threadline gear. I still have memories of chasing schools of big mack tuna up and down that bay and estuary system in a 12 foot tinnie in 20 knots plus of wind in the late '70s. I remember I had matched 4 and 6kg threadline sticks back then with Shakespeare 2400 threadlines.

After that, it was throwing lures and flies at salmon, bonito, mack tuna and kingfish in Jervis Bay. Slowly over many years, we refined our boat driving, casting, techniques and lure selections to a point where we were getting good results and hooking a lot of fish. In all of that time, 30 years I'd guess, I was obsessed with finding fish on top and throwing lures and flies at them. Over that time the tackle improved from fibreglass rods and mono line to carbon fibre rods, braid line and fluorocarbon leaders. What a huge difference that made being able to cast further and feel every lure tackle or miss.

After all of these years I'm still obsessed with casting lures at pelagics feeding on top. It was one of the reasons why I moved to

Hervey Bay. We've got no shortage of pelagics here and I'm out there whenever I get the chance, throwing metal, poppers, plastics and flies at them. One thing I like about chasing pelagics is that it's a very visual form of our sport. To see solid mack tuna and longtails to 15 kilo smashing bait on top is like a shot adrenalin for me. To get close enough and within casting range is as visual and exciting as fishing can get for me. To get a cast in there and have it eaten on the retrieve is something I'll never get tired of.

To be successful at this game you need to understand how pelagics feed, what they're feeding on and their pattern. It's not something you learn in a week, or even a season. You need to understand that there are schools of bait in the water that the pelagics are feeding on. You have two options. Spot fish up on top feeding on the bait from splashes and birds working or hang around the bait and wait for the pelagics to find it.

"The birds are your eyes in the sky. I spend more time watching the birds than I do watching fish on top."

Chasing fish on top can be very productive but also frustrating. You can spend a lot of time racing all over the water and chasing every bust up only for the fish to go down and move before you get within casting distance. Sitting with bait while fish bust up 200 metres away is a big test of your resolve but being in the middle of it when the fish find the bait under the boat is as good as it gets.

The birds are your eyes in the sky. I spend more time watching the birds than I do watching fish on top. The birds will, most times, be right on top of bait or fish looking for that bait. Stay close to them and you'll

have fish within casting distance sooner than later. We've hooked hundreds of tuna by casting under birds in flight and not even hovering over feeding fish. We've also hooked a lot of fish by sitting on bait and casting lures around it. It helps to know what the bait is. How big and the colour because matching it

closely is often the key to success.

One problem we have up here in Hervey Bay is sharks. They are an absolute nightmare at times and over summer it's not unusual to lose more than half the tuna you hook to them. If you find a school of feeding tuna with no sharks consider yourself lucky and make the most of it. If you're getting fish taken by sharks move away to another school and hope they're not there as well. The shark problem seems to be getting worse as seasons go by and I really have no solution.

Pelagics are great fun! It's visual fishing and non-stop. Get out and try it! ●

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TIPS FOR ALL SKILL LEVELS

Fishing is an activity where you're always learning, regardless of skill level.



ABOVE: Big squid are prevalent in the winter months.



With Sami Omari

WHENEVER I'm at a barbecue or function the discussion almost always turns to fishing. Anyone with a passing interest in fishing usually shares stories of their angling adventures with many tales of the one that got away. The savvy anglers listen intently, asking a variety of probing questions in order to glean a few tips which might help improve their catch. There are many variables to contend when out on the water and fishing is an activity where you're always learning something new. Whether you're a novice or an experienced angler, the following pointers should give you ideas on how to improve your catch.

FOCUS ON A FEW KEY BAITS OR LURES

Developing an understanding of what your target species eats and consequently what type of bait or lures works is a pretty good tip to start with. The bulk of my fish are caught on a handful of lures that have proven themselves over a period of time. Taking too many different baits or lures can create unnecessary distraction; if you have too many choices you'll spend more time fidgeting with your tackle box and swapping baits or lures when the fishing is tough. Baits and lures that work consistently and can be relied upon should be what you focus on in the first instance and once you've figured out how to catch a few fish consistently and which baits and lures work you can then start experimenting and add a few more into the line-up.

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR TARGET SPECIES EATS?

Understanding what your target species eats is of utmost importance if you want to enjoy constant success on the water. Figuring out what they're eating isn't too hard if you plan on taking a few for the table because you can check out their stomach contents to confirm their diet. Fish of all varieties like some form of cover such as reef, rock, tree stumps, kelp or weed. In their chosen habitat a number of different food sources will be available; if you shine a light on the water at night you might see the glowing eyes of prawns in the area, a reef might hold pilchards or other small baitfish while turning over a few rocks might expose crabs in the salt or certain types of bugs in the fresh. Finding the local food source give you a

guide of the size and markings of the baits and lures you should be using.

KEEP A DETAILED LOG AND RECORD OF YOUR OUTINGS

I can't stress enough how useful keeping a record of my fishing outings over the past 15-20 years has been. I take plenty of photos and index them with key words noting the species, location plus any other useful identifiers. If I'm focussing on a particular fish over a couple of seasons, I'll keep detailed records of each trip noting the general fishing conditions, activity levels, any interesting observations and the time of each meaningful catch. Over time you'll capture a significant amount of data that can be examined for patterns; fish are beasts of habit and once you crack a pattern you'll enjoy much more constant success. A few interesting observations have been the prevalence of big dolphin fish when fishing for marlin early in the game fishing season, big squid in winter due to spawning and growth patterns and an increased

prevalence of daytime mullet downstream and inshore off Sydney in late summer.

LEARN WHERE THE FISH ARE

There's no point fishing water that doesn't usually hold feeding predatory fish. Fish will generally have preferred places they rest or hunt in depending on the time of day, stage of tide, season, water temperature and underwater topography of the area you are fishing. Most fish seek out some type of cover for rest and ambush. They may be channels or holes out of the current, a reef or rocky point that attracts a food source or an aerated bubble trail in a stream that provides cover from above and acts as conveyor for hapless insects that have fallen into the water. Studying marine charts, studying the area you're fishing at different stages of the tide or finding a high vantage point and observing the water will soon give you ideas on where the fish might congregate. Before long you'll be able to look at a body of water or a marine chart and quickly figure out where the optimal spots to target.

ALWAYS HAVE HOPE!

It's easy to become demoralised and give up if you're not catching fish. Another great tip is to always be optimistic and expect to catch a fish on the next cast. I've lost count of the number of times fishing with group of mates on a slow day where motivation levels start to decline and fishing rods are put down in favour of phones other distractions then from out of nowhere one of the keen anglers finds some "luck" and hooks a decent fish. You make your own luck on the water and persistence definitely pays off. The old adage that you don't catch fish sitting at home nor do you catch them if you're not fishing holds true and I've caught plenty good fish after lengthy periods of inactivity. Never lose hope because the fish of a lifetime could come on the very next cast! ●

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Both techniques are effective for chasing marlin.



With Chris Cleaver

IS TROLLING LURES OR USING LIVE BAIT BEST FOR MARLIN? Ricky E-mail

A Both techniques can be productive for chasing marlin and it's always good to know more ways to catch your target as this will make you a better fisho overall. There are also other techniques like skip baiting and switch baiting but commonly the two techniques you have mentioned seemed to be the preferred ways to find a marlin. Blue marlin fishing is predominantly done trolling as it's done over the continental shelf and covering vast amounts of water is the key. Striped marlin can be found in similar areas to the blue marlin but tend to prefer the continental shelf line into around 60 fathoms water depth, so trolling is another good way to find them. However in areas of slimy mackerel and cowanyoung congregations on the inside of the continental shelf live baiting with circle hooks is the most effective way to target these fish. Black marlin can be found along with the striped marlin around these bait congregations and also inshore areas with good bait to even near the rocks at places like Jarvis Bay. Personally I prefer live baiting around large bait schools as marlin need to eat and at the right time of year they should not be too far from a good food source. A circle hook rigged live bait is rarely passed up and provides excellent hook up, something that can let lure trolling down as the hook up rate to land ratio can be quite poor.

WHAT BAIT IS BEST FOR MULLOWAY? Eugene E-mail

A Mulloway can be very opportunistic feeders and almost anything that fits in their mouth can be a meal, then at other times they can be very selective about the next meal. Many times I found what worked one time cannot even get a bite the next time in the very same spot yet both times were successful outings and fish caught. Sometimes I feel certain species of fish can be akin to humans, we eat different meals most evenings and when we are not so hungry there will always be something that we will eat. In the case of mullet a certain bait will seem to illicit a take from a when they seem in a less than ravenous mood. Squid especially fresh is one of the best baits and accounts for many mullet, Live or freshly caught yellowtail butterflied or a fillet is another top bait and I would rate these two as must use baits for mullet. Other baits you could try are live or cut baits of mullet, slimy mackerel, whiting and salmon. Key is to try a variety of baits and find what works best in your area or on a particular outing. Good luck!

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH STRONG WIND WHEN SOFT PLASTIC FISHING IN A BOAT? Hank E-mail

A Wind for the most part has always been the bane of fishos, even more so when trying to fish lures like soft plastics. In some cases wind can be your friend. Freshwater dams with barramundi, Murray cod and trout wind-blown banks can provide some exceptional fishing with these predators patrolling for baitfish and crustaceans displaced by the wave action. That aside it can be very frustrating trying to work a lightly weighted plastic in windy conditions, especially if it's a cross wind. There are a few tips that can help alleviate the wind issue. First of all try

positioning the boat and casting so the wind is at your back; this greatly reduces the winds effect when working the lure and aids in casting distance. Another helpful hint if you cannot have the wind at your back is to work the lure with the rod tip low to the water, that way the line is not being blown around as it's all in the water. While going heavier in jig head can be counterproductive so can being too light and the lure being dragged along by the wind in your line, so upsizing the weight can be another trick for better contact to the lure. Lastly without trying some or all of the above is to look for more sheltered areas to fish like rock walls, bays and small creeks that offer some reprieve from the conditions.

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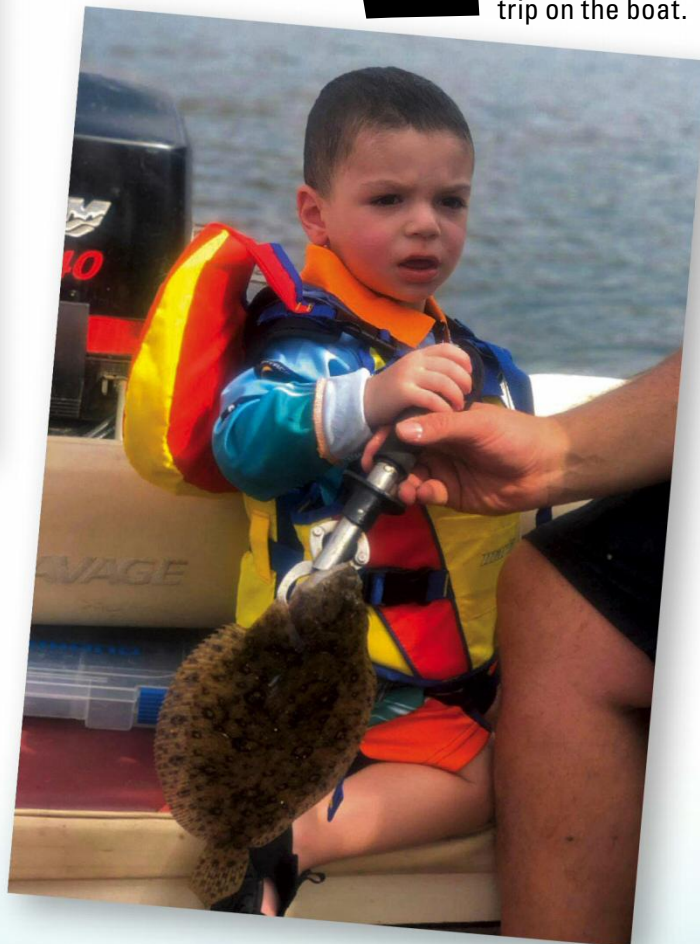
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1 Lailani Halliday, seven-years-old, caught this nice bream in the Shoalhaven River, NSW.



2 Two-year-old Sam with his first flounder on his first trip on the boat.

3 Four-year-old Dashiell with a 65cm flattie from Narabeen in Sydney.



4 Archie Halliday, six-years-old, caught his 63cm PB flatty 63cm in St Georges Basin, NSW.



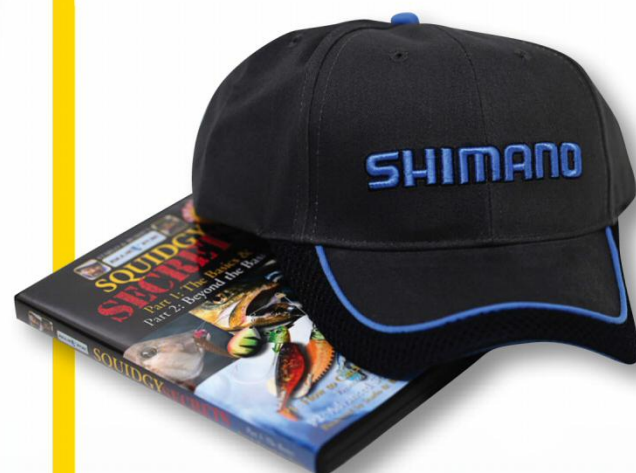
5 Dylan Bagshaw, four-years-old, caught & released his first Murray cod in the Murrumbidgee River, NSW.

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AUTUMN'S BOUNTY

The arrival of autumn and change of seasons brings new fishing opportunities and familiar species.



By Dave Rae

WHAT the arrival of Autumn heralds for anglers varies according to location. We live in a big land with tropical waters north of the Tropic of Capricorn to degrees of temperate waters below the Tropic, with diverse fish and crustacean populations occurring throughout. However species composition, being driven by water temperature and hence the availability of prey species, is not static but varies in response to the seasonal currents sweeping through our coastal waters.

Technically, March is the start of autumn, at least on paper, however, given that Feb is typically one of the hottest and most humid months, April

seems to be the start of autumn as far as marine life is concerned. March lacks the hot bite of summer, but April is the month where conditions change. The offshore water whilst remaining warm, starts to cool, night's cool off and winds tend to calm. By the end of April, Autumn is entrenched, and the winter species begin trickling in.

During autumn, the east coast sees schools of mackerel and long tail tuna in the north and with luck juvenile black marlin close to shore. By late April, some of the winter species such as snapper, tailor, mullet and bream and blackfish appear, and the crabs start to hibernate or move offshore. Offshore winds replace the endless on-shores of summer, fading as the day warms, resulting in calm seas, which are just perfect conditions for offshore fishing,

particularly out wide. Further south the water cools faster and these winter species arrive earlier.

Moving north into the Top End, autumn corresponds with the transition of wet-season run-off and the dry season. With the run-off being THE prime (big) barra season, a late run-off makes April a great time to head north if the roads are dry enough to travel on. By May the Dry should have kicked in with SE winds and blue skies becoming the norm. As the water clears, bait schools move inshore, and the predators follow. Big mackerel, GT's, golden trevally mix it with longtail tuna, cobia and queenfish near the surface and black jew, golden snapper, coral trout and emperor species congregate over reef. Barra fishermen need not despair as the clearer tidal waters of large estuaries still hold decent fish, (although the fishing might be slower).

Western Australia is so damn big that the full gambit of options is available depending on where you go. The above applies up north and similar fishing occurs down south, with the addition of WA Dhufish and possibly giant tailor of course. So do some big Km's and knock yourself out!

Coming around into South Australia, autumn heralds the start of offshore fishing as constant onshore winds fall away to calm days. Bluefin tuna are found varying distances from the coast and island and deep-water reefs give up some barrel-sized samson and kingfish. Strict legislation may help the snapper recover. Surf beaches hold Australian snapper and blue-spot flathead whilst mullet are always a possibility. And if the Murray Mouth ever floods again, there's always the possibility of a dream multi-mullet session on lures ... if a Bronzy doesn't steal them, or your legs, on the walk back to shore through the surf!

Autumn in Victoria brings calmer weather and good fishing. Pinkie snapper, bream, squid, garfish and mullet arrive in inshore waters whilst some very large fish hang wider. Mullet and large snapper are more likely as autumn progresses.

Whilst Tasmania is most well-known for trout fishing (which can be extraordinary in Autumn), there is great saltwater fishing as well. Garfish are the prime autumn species but that's not to say you'll miss out on Australian salmon, extra-large bream, flathead, gummy shark and trevally. Whilst autumn seas can be full-on, larger vessels will be offshore plying the currents for tuna and striped marlin when they can.

In my neck of the woods, autumn means two things: mackerel and mullet. Anglers have plenty of mackerel warning because they are first caught on the Gold Coast, then in Shark Bay, Iluka. They then bypass Coffs Harbour to South West Rocks before gliding to us on the East Coast Current. Within days, mono wire, and bait jigs disappear of shelves and dusty boats appear on the water. Slow trolled slimies, live bait float fishos and energetic swimbaits congregate over known mackerel reefs and mayhem ensues.

Whilst I love mackerel, I love big mullet more ... 'nuf said! ●

Longtails are great fun and turn up each year around autumn and late summer on the NSW North Coast.



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COVER: The Flats Rat is a custom built shallow water flats boat designed and built in Queensland's Hervey Bay. IMAGE: Greg Finney

REVIEWED

Flats Rat Skiff

Greg reviews a unique aluminium flats boat, custom built in Queensland's Hervey Bay.

.....
BY GREG FINNEY
.....

We don't test a lot of flats skiffs here at Fisho. They are usually considered specialised fishing boats but very well suited to many forms of flats and estuary fishing. Many people think flats fishing is only available in northern Australia but there are estuary flats right throughout NSW and Queensland. I did a lot of flats fishing in southern NSW when I lived there but a flats skiff is also very well suited to estuary and impoundment fishing which makes them extremely versatile. Before I get started on this boat test I think a quick overview of flats fishing is probably a good idea so we all understand what it involves and how it works.

Flats fishing was pioneered in the southern areas of the USA half a century ago. The Florida Keys were instrumental in the development of flats fishing and purpose built flats boats. Many years ago, keen flats anglers realised that the average fishing boat was not designed to fish in shallow water. The draft was too deep, there was nowhere to stand or cast and spotting fish was difficult due to the low decks. They began building boats specifically designed to fish the shallow flats. The design criteria for a good flats boat developed into - A shallow draft. A large forward casting deck to fish from. A low profile so not affected by wind. A poling platform above the outboard motor. Minimum weight for easy manoeuvrability. A small centre console with the minimum of add-ons. Side rod holders or lockers for 9 foot fly rods. Basic tackle storage hatches so the decks are completely clear of obstructions. A 6 metre graphite pole and brackets to hold it.



The Flats rat is easily pushed around in shallow water from the poling platform.



Flats fishing is usually on fly but you can fish plastics, diving lures and poppers on threadline tackle. The purest version of flats fishing involves fly fishing in water depths from 30 to 100cm and polaroiding fish. The fish are sight cast from the front casting deck while the guide or deckie moves the boat around with a pole from the platform above the motor. Both angler and guide are positioned as high as possible so spotting fish is easier.

In northern Australia there are numerous flats with fish including golden trevally, queenfish, tusk fish, permit and GTs. We don't have the exceptional flats fishing for bonefish, permit and tarpon of Florida or Belize but the flats, fish and opportunities are there for some spectacular fishing. There are many guides in northern Australia who specialise in flats fishing and they are always well booked because flats fishing is so addictive and rewarding. There are thousands of flats on the entire east coast of Australia that offer

exceptional fishing. Those in NSW hold flathead, bream and whiting.

Most Australian flats boats are US imports from Florida and made in fibreglass. A decade ago, when the Ozzie dollar was strong you could import a new or used US flats boat at a good price. You can't do that now with the Aussie dollar at 0.69USD so the options are quite limited. The odd boat comes up for sale now and then but if you want a new, custom built, flats boat your options are very limited unless you have an open budget. You also need to understand that a flats boat is not a multi-purpose or compromise vessel. They are 100 per cent fishing. There are no comfortable seats and there is no shade. Storage is very limited and they don't particularly like rough water or chop. This is not the type of boat that doubles as a family weekender or all round fishing boat.

Billy Moore lives in Hervey Bay where there are some excellent flats fishing opportunities.

Billy is a flats tragic. He loves working a flat and spotting fish or putting friends onto fish. He's owned US flats boats over the past 10 years but recently he decided he wanted to build a new flats boat for his particular circumstances and fishing. Billy's background is tool making, R&D, along with 3D design and printing so he had a good head start to design such a boat. He's also a damn good flats fisherman and knew exactly what was required so that ticked another box.

The options were to buy an old hull and do it up, make a mould and pour a new hull in fibreglass or design and build a boat from scratch in aluminium. He chose the latter which was a brave move if you ask me. It took months of computer design in conjunction with a naval architect to come up with a model. Several 3D models were printed and simulated water tested before he was happy with the shape and specifications. Once that was completed, it was a case of ordering the cut aluminium sheets and extrusions and putting it all together in a Hervey Bay factory. Many had doubts that an aluminium flats boat would work. Others questioned the viability and quality of getting an aluminium boat built in Hervey Bay. Well, Billy proved them all wrong and is now the proud

"There are many guides in northern Australia who specialise in flats fishing and they are always well booked because flats fishing is so addictive and rewarding."



owner of an absolutely amazing custom built aluminium flats boat.

Flats Rat as it's called, is a flats boat in the purest form. It's 5.08 metres long and 2.01 metres wide. The bare aluminium hull is 500kg and made from 4mm marine grade aluminium plate. This boat was designed and built to Billy's exacting specifications and you can tell a lot of thought and hard work went into its making. Out on the water it excels itself. For a flats boat and low profile centre console it's surprisingly dry and rides well. On the flats it is poetry in motion. With a 250mm draft it goes into very skinny water which is exactly what is required. One big advantage of the aluminium hull is that if you do bottom out on rocks or coral it's not the end of the world. It's very quiet, is easy to pole and a dream to cast and fish from. That huge casting deck has been my happy place on many occasions over the past few months and Billy has been kind enough to pole and spot fish for me.

OK let's do a run over Flats Rat from bow to stern. There is no bow sprit or anchor well. Billy runs a 55 pound Minn Kota up front but this can be removed at any time if required. A lot of our fishing has been with Billy or myself poling and spotting but in deeper water or for impoundment fishing the electric allows both anglers to cast and



ABOVE: Hervey Bay is an ideal spot for a shallow draft flats boat, although they have applications for serious shallow water fishos anywhere.

LEFT: The simple console holds just the essentials without taking up valuable space.

OPPOSITE: The Flats Rat is able to handle shallow water while under way and while fishing.



fish. The casting platform is big and fitted with flush mount fittings to be as obstruction free as possible. It's covered in grey and white camouflage EVASOL which is very comfortable on a hot day. The camo EVASOL runs the entire length of the top sides. On the port side there is a 40mm foam extrusion to keep fly lines from dropping over the side. Under the casting deck are two large storage hatches with lockable lids fitted.

Down each side Billy has fitted horizontal rod storage for six rods with tubes running into and under the casting deck for four fly rods. These are well out of harm's way under 350mm gunwales that can be walked on which is important when using \$1300 fly rods. There is a 6 metre graphite pole fitted on the starboard side. The centre console is a study in minimalist design and is made out of 40mm powder coated aluminium tube. It has an EVASOL covered seat and back rest in the front and storage all the way underneath. There is a Hummingbird Helix 10 sounder mounted on a RAM bracket on top and the bare necessities of throttle, gauge and switches. Billy fitted a Yeti dry bag to hold phones and keys, etc. which is a very handy inclusion. Another nice touch is colour matched foam on each side of the console to hold used flies and a spool of leader material.

The floor is covered in grey EVASOL for comfort and grip. There another large hatch in the stern under the poling platform for emergency/safety equipment and a bilge pump. Billy also runs a large MFC fly box with an adhesive magnet which keeps it close handy and out of the way at the same time. The poling platform sits high and proud on the stern and has



ABOVE: Fly fishing the Hervey Bay flats .

LEFT: The bow has plenty of space for an electric trolling motor.

EVASOL covered steps for easy access. It gives superb vision and is the perfect place to pole or run the electric from. There is a 45 litre Yeti esky in Flats Rat and this can be located under the console, used as a seat or a casting platform up front for extra height if required. Its colour matched in Seafoam Green with the FishWreck custom wrap down each side and some fittings.

On the stern Billy fitted a 40 horse Suzuki but the boat is rated to a 60HP max. The 40 is more than enough to get to the flats and runs from a 25 litre portable tank strapped in the port forward hatch. There is also positive buoyancy foam installed under the floor and throughout the boat. The build quality and attention to detail is obvious everywhere you look.

Out on the water Flats Rat is very manoeuvrable and mobile. The 40 horse Suzuki pushed it along at 23 knots. Just before this review went to print, Billy upgraded to a 60hp Suzuki.

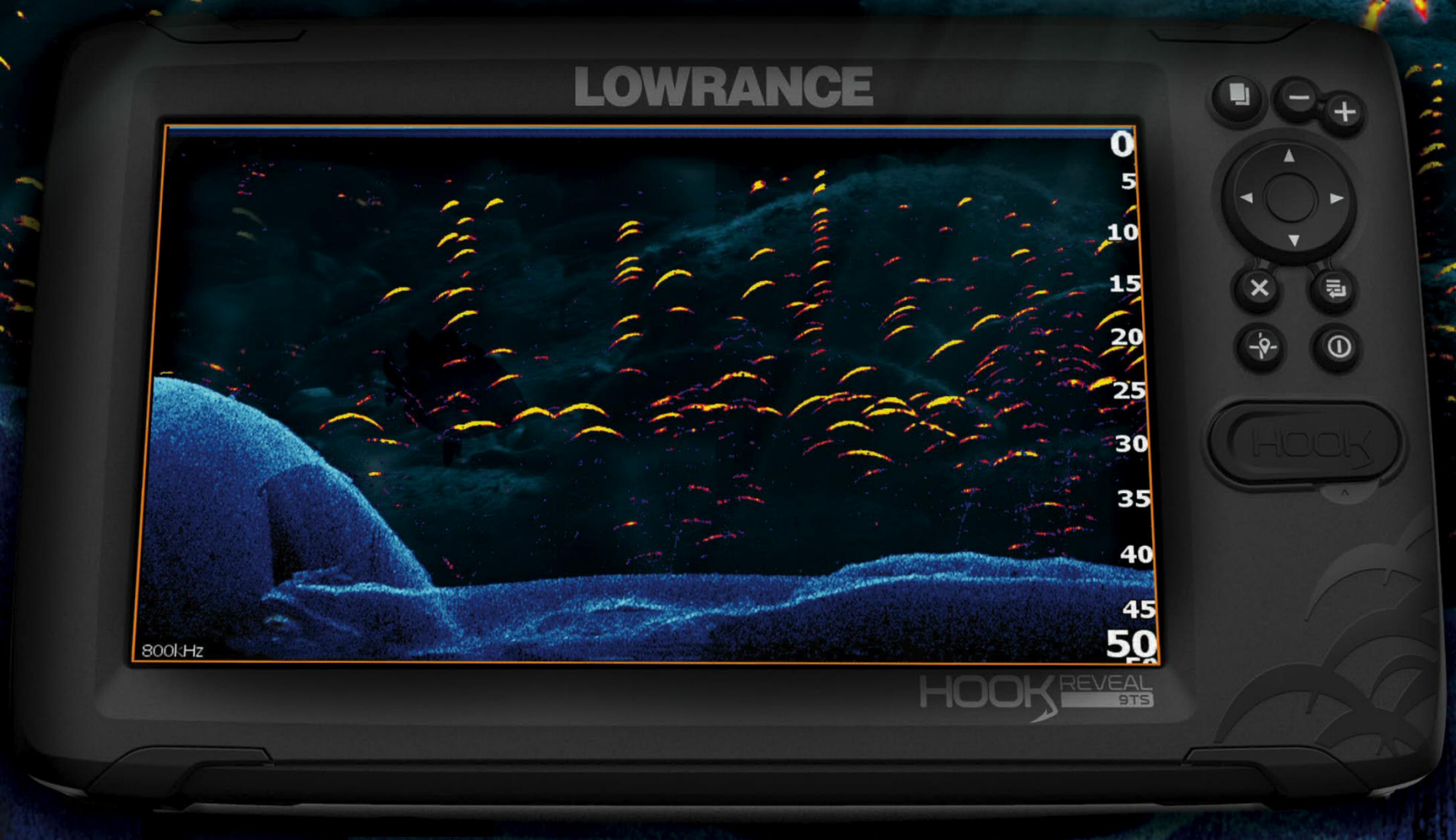
The new engine has a cruising speed of 18 knots @4500 RPM and WOT 27 knots @5800 RPM. The minimalist seating and console work fine for travelling. Fishing from Flats Rat has been an education for me. My Bonito 560 has a lot more storage so I take a heap of gear. The minimalist approach of flats fishing sees me take one or two fly rods and a medium sized dry bag with fly boxes, leader, sunscreen and water. There is no net and all fish are tailed. The elimination of clutter and crap has been a big eye opener for me and made me rethink my approach recently. ■

Billy is looking at going into production with Flats Rat and is interested in hearing from anyone who would like to discuss prices and availability. If you're looking for a serious aluminium flats skiff and estuary/impoundment boat that's custom built in Hervey Bay I could think of worse things to do. He can be contacted at: billy.moore4@bigpond.com

LOWRANCE

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HOOK REVEAL





ELECTRONICS

Power Play

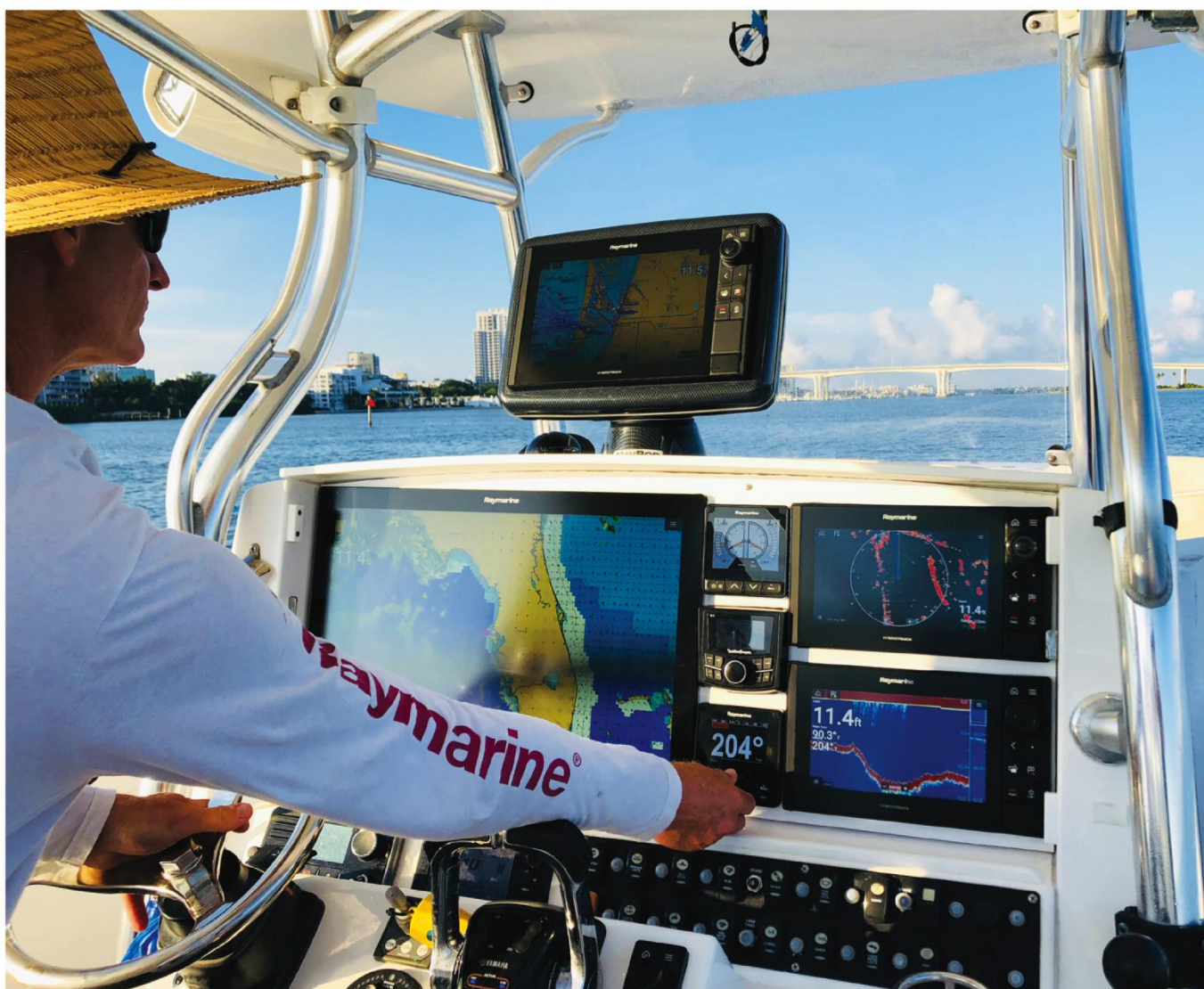
Hate running out of power before you're ready to call it a day? New lithium-ion battery systems are changing the face of fishing, and in a very positive way.

BY CRAIG RITCHIE

We all know the story. You've been on the water since dawn, fighting the wind for hours, and now finally you've located some active fish. And right on cue, just when you really need to hold the boat in place, your electric motor starts losing power. Or the downriggers slow to a crawl. Or your brand-new side-scan unit starts giving sketchy readings because it's not getting the juice it needs.

The heart of any modern fishing boat is its power system because, to put it bluntly, without power nothing else works. Sonar, GPS, radar, radios, downriggers, electric motors, lights, baitwell pumps, temperature

Lithium-ion are smaller, lighter and far more potent than traditional lead acid cells.



"As Boeing is finding out with its 737 Max airliner, there are only so many ways you can update old tech before it's time to move on."

The evidence can be seen below the deck of any modern boat. Where fishing boats were once almost universally powered by simple 12-volt systems, today 24-volt systems are standard, and 36-volt systems are becoming more common. Yet even those are sometimes challenged to keep everything humming as it should.

Little wonder then that serious anglers are among the champions of new lithium-ion battery systems coming to market. Smaller, lighter and far more potent than traditional lead acid cells, lithium-ion batteries are revolutionizing fishing boat systems just as they have revolutionized everything else, from campers to mobile phones.

Power To Burn

For years fishos have relied on deep-cycle Absorbent Glass Mat (AGM) batteries to power electric accessories. While AGM represented a clear improvement over older technology gel batteries when it first came to market, it is still an incremental update to an old technology. As Boeing is finding out with its 737 Max airliner, there are only so many ways you can update old tech before it's time to move on.

Lithium-ion batteries, by comparison, are next-generation batteries that outperform traditional AGM cells in a number of important ways, starting with far longer run times. Donald Hasler, strategic account manager for battery manufacturer Xantrex, notes that the maximum discharge for a traditional lead acid battery is to a point that's around 50 percent of its total capacity. In other words, your 900-amp battery is really only good to about 450 amps before it's done. Drawing it down beyond that level can significantly shorten the battery's life, says Hasler, and will likely void the manufacturer's warranty.

By comparison, a lithium-ion battery can be run all the way to a zero percent state of charge consistently and without harm. "The fact you can access all of the battery's capacity gives it a substantially greater run time, enabling lithium-ion batteries to power loads for far longer than traditional cells can," he says. "In practical use, swapping out a lead acid battery for a lithium-ion battery of the exact same rating will give you approximately twice as much run time before you run out of power."

That's a huge benefit, because you haven't increased the number of batteries or the amount of space they take up.

gauges – nothing. As we continue adding more and more high-tech goodies to our rigs, we are ever more reliant on a steady flow of power to make it all work.

Our ever-increasing demands for power put unprecedented demands on marine electrical systems. Although individual products may be increasingly energy efficient, we keep adding more and more of them onboard, and we always intend to run them all at once. So whether they draw power continuously like our radios and MFDs, or suck it up in surges the way electric motors or downriggers do, the net result is the same – the demand for electrical power is enormous, and incessant.



Longer Life Cycles

Another significant advantage of lithium-ion batteries is their substantially longer life cycle. Where a traditional AGM battery might deliver anywhere up to 500 charging cycles before it needs to be replaced, a comparable lithium-ion battery can last through somewhere around 3,500 charging cycles before it gives up the ghost.

“The stat that’s used, and that’s commonly accepted, is that a lithium-ion battery has a lifespan that’s about seven times the number of charge cycles as an AGM battery,” says Dave Maryanov, marketing manager for Power Products, the manufacturer of Mastervolt batteries and chargers. Instead of replacing a worn-out AGM battery after two years of hard use, he says, fishos can run a lithium-ion cell for 10 years or more before thinking about replacing it. “That’s more than just a significant cost savings,” says Maryanov. “It’s a huge convenience as well, since it eliminates what for many anglers is a chore they wind up doing far too often.”

What’s more, it means less hazardous material going into landfill. Instead of sending perhaps five batteries to the dump over a decade of hard fishing, anglers using lithium-ion cells need to dispose of only one. That’s a lot less crap going into the environment, and something we can all feel good about.

Steady Power

Voltage stability is still another area where lithium-ion batteries set a new standard in power management, by delivering a consistent 12.1 volts all the way through the entire cycle of the battery.

One of the problems with traditional AGM lead acid batteries is that as their power level draws down, they lose the ability to provide a steady 12.1 volts – it may drop to 11.9 volts or 11.6 volts, and that can play havoc with

sensitive electronics. Fluctuating voltage levels definitely interfere with things like fishfinders, and virtually guarantee that you’re not getting all the performance out of that high-end side-scan job that you paid top dollar for.

The dirty little secret is that most AGM cells can only deliver full voltage through the top 20 to 25 percent of their charge. It’s enough of a problem with a downrigger or an electric motor, where you’ll begin to see less torque. But when dealing with more sophisticated gear like a high-end MFD or a radar set, it’s a much bigger problem in that not only do you not get proper performance, but you could ultimately damage sensitive internal components. In practical terms, it means that at a minimum you’re only going to get peak performance for the first two or three hours of the day; from then on, performance declines as power levels drop. That’s not something that anyone wants to hear when they’re miles from shore and relying on the GPS to get them back home. “By comparison a lithium-ion battery gives you full performance down to only about 15% of its charge,” says Maryanov. “Performance-wise, lithium-ion gives you maximum performance for a much longer time than an AGM.”

Size Matters

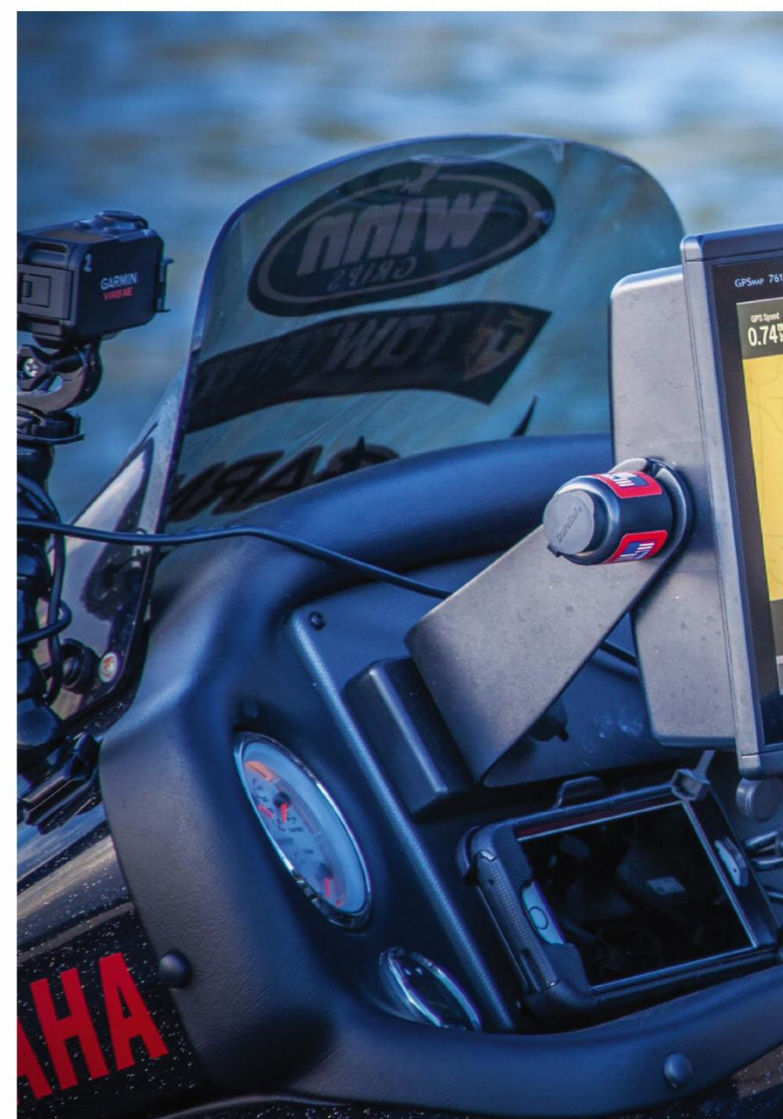
Weight is always a concern on a boat, and that’s still another area where lithium-ion shines. “Where a Group 31 AGM battery has 102 amp hours, a similar lithium-ion battery has a capacity of around 400 amp hours, so it’s roughly four times more capacity in a unit with the same physical size and weight,” says Maryanov.

That represents a huge amount of weight and space savings in an average fishing boat – space that could instead be used for stowing tackle and gear. “That more compact footprint is a big advantage for lithium-ion,” says Xantrex’s

Donald Hasler. “Lithium-Ion batteries are significantly smaller and lighter than deep-cycle AGM batteries of comparable power.”

Get Smart

As if being smaller, lighter, higher in usable capacity and longer-lasting aren’t enough of an advantage, lithium-ion batteries are also smarter than AGM cells. What that means is that unlike your current batteries, these guys can actually communicate with other equipment on the boat.



This brings tremendous convenience. For example, connecting the battery to the boat's onboard NEMA network means you can now easily monitor its condition and what your charger is doing at any given time, whether you're at the helm peeking at your MFD, up on the bow monitoring a secondary screen, or sitting at home taking a glance at your smartphone. Want to check to see if you're recharged after that long day on the water? There's no need to walk down to the boat and peek under the hatch. Just pull it up on your phone or a tablet.

That's a particularly attractive benefit if you happen to rig your boat with a solar panel or two, which is a great way to keep a steady trickle charge on the battery at all times. Solar panels are great for offsetting so-called parasitic loads, meaning the power draw of electrical devices that are on all the time. Even with only five or six hours of sunlight, a pair of 100-watt solar panels can generate from 60 to 72 amp hours' worth of power per day. That's more than enough to power the fishfinder, the GPS and the live well pumps all day, with plenty of leftover power to spare.

So What's The Catch?

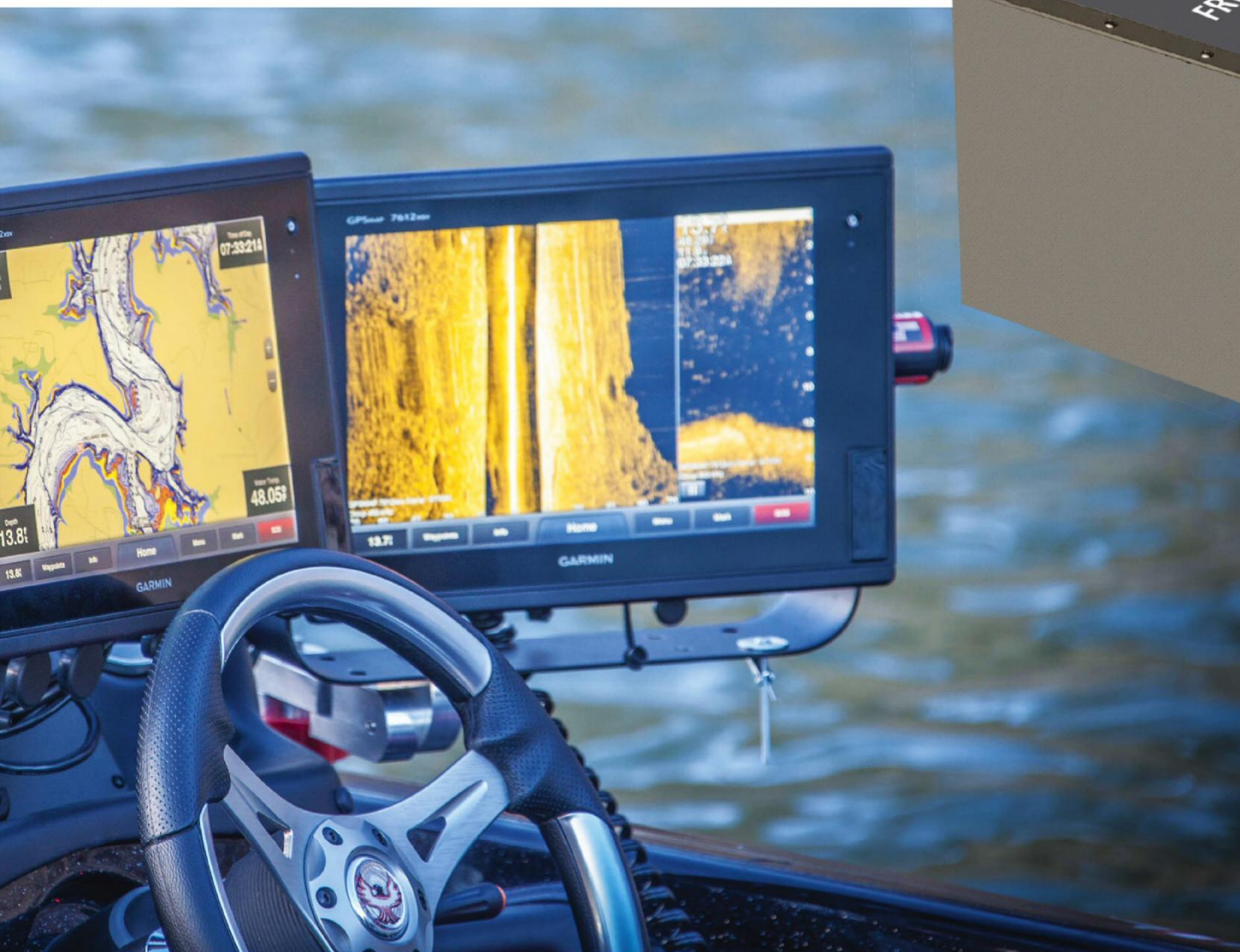
Lithium-ion batteries are new technology that deliver far superior performance to old-school lead acid cells. They give anglers far greater run times, and they have a much, much longer life span so they don't need to be replaced anywhere near as often – something that's not only more convenient and less expensive, but better for the environment as well. Beyond that, they're smaller and lighter

than lead acid, and they deliver the steady voltage that modern electronics require all the way through their charge cycle. So what's the catch?

In a word, it's cost. For the moment at least, lithium-ion batteries are a lot more expensive than old-style lead acid batteries are. The hope is that this higher cost will come down as more batteries make their way into the market. Even so, if you fish a lot they're still attractive, even with the premium price tag.

"Over the life of the battery there is still a cost savings given that lithium-ion batteries last on average seven times as long as AGM cells do," says Dave Maryanov. "And, through that time they provide far better performance by delivering about double the capacity and stable power output, while being smaller and lighter than the batteries they replace. You're paying more up front, but if you put the hours in on the water there is still a definite savings in the long run."

It's a good bet that the cost of lithium-ion batteries will drop as they come into wider use. But the benefits they provide are strong enough that a growing number of cruising boaters and serious fishos are still looking hard at making the switch right now. The prospect of eliminating battery headaches and never worrying about running out of juice again is an enticing proposition for anyone who spends a lot of time on the water. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Solar charging systems are becoming more commonly used; A Xantrex Lithium-ion battery; Boats are becoming very power hungry!; The line up of Mastervolt lithium-ion batteries.



FIRST LOOK

On the Hook

Lowrance's latest Hook Reveal sounders are designed to be easy to use and share features with high end units.

BY MICK FLETORIDIS

Navico, parent company for Lowrance, recently supplied a new Hook Reveal sounder unit to check out. Not having used a Hook on my boat before I did some research to see how it differed from previous generations, and my current sounder, the Elite ti2. It turns out the new Hook Reveal shares some state of the art features of the higher end ti2 (and HDS Live etc.), notably Structure Scan technology comprising Down and Sidescan and Fish Reveal.

The test unit I received is a 9" model which is the biggest in a range that also includes 5" and 7" models; the 5" Hook Reveal comes with a 50/200khz transducer for Low/High CHIRP sonar and Downscan imaging; the 7" is available with a choice of three transducers including Splitshot (High CHIRP, Downscan) and Tripleshot (High CHIRP, Downscan and Sidescan); the 9" is available with either 50/200khz or Tripleshot transducers. All units feature Auto-Tuned sonar for ease of use and come with pre-loaded Aus/NZ C-Map coastal mapping. There's also Genesis Live which allows users to compile detail on new waters by physically mapping them and recording bottom contours, structure and other features which are overlaid onto pre-loaded charts. This information can also be shared amongst other users.

Installing the new Hook Reveal was as easy as it gets. While a similar overall size to the Elite ti2's Active Imaging 3-in-1 transducer the supplied Tripleshot transducer and mount is noticeably lighter, perhaps making it well suited for smaller boats and kayaks. While the head unit can be flush mounted, in the case of my Hornet or similar sized tinnies around 4m it was installed on a RAM mount using the supplied U-bracket and fitted to

the starboard gunwale for viewing from right around the boat. Once connected to 12 volts the transducer and power cables plug straight into the unit, unlike units such as the Elite ti2 which feature connecting plugs that twist and lock into place.

Push the power button and the Hook Reveal fires up fast. On first look its colourful display is very crisp and detailed. On a day with cloudy skies it was easy to view through polarised lenses – Lowrance says the unit features its SolarMax display for better viewing in any conditions, and it seems to work.

Those familiar with Lowrance's Pages button will navigate the Hook Reveal's menu fairly easily. While there's no touch screen like higher end units – I still found myself swiping regularly – familiarising yourself with the control buttons is reasonably simple; after the Elite ti2 the Hook Reveal's Menu/Enter button for selecting various options took some getting used to. That said, via Pages it's easy as ever to select Chart, Sonar, Downscan, Sidescan or split screen versions of these and make up custom display combinations to suit your preference.

On the water it was difficult to see the Hook Reveal as an entry level unit in Lowrance's current lineup, highlighting how far this technology has come recently. The 9" screen is the biggest ever on my little Quinnie and with the clarity the display delivers it was hard not to be impressed. Of course, Lowrance markets the new Hook around the company's unique Fish Reveal technology, as available on its higher specced and more expensive units. The exciting thing about Fish Reveal is that it does what its name suggests: separate target fish from bottom structure, weed etc. and make them easy to see. Via the Downscan display Fish Reveal highlights fish in a contrasting colour to the bottom so they really stand out. On the first outing Fisho's Scott Thomas and I tried the unit in its default setting of blue green Downscan display with Fish Reveal highlighting targets in a neon orange – they were hard to miss – or users can customise the display for better target separation or personal taste via a range of colour palettes within Fish Reveal, Down, Sidescan and Sonar displays. Or you can just turn the unit on and let it choose.

Experienced fishos or newbies alike looking for an easy to use feature packed sounder at a good price might want to check out the new Hook Reveal. They're priced from \$529.99 RRP for a 5" model up to \$999RRP for the 9" unit shown here. ■

More at lowrance.com.au/en-au/hook-reveal/



MAIN: The Hook Reveal makes an ideal feature-packed fishfinder for a tinny or kayak.

LEFT: The clarity on the Hook reveal is impressive.

Boating Bits



Inox's new look

INOX has announced the release of its new branding. Changes have been made to the logo and product packaging to give the overall brand a facelift. Innox hopes you will enjoy meeting the new and improved look of a distinctive label with the same trustworthy quality you know and love. Keep your eyes open for the new products in store.

You will start to see the new branded products hitting the marketplace now, with more products to come over the next few months.

Innox is an Australian owned and operated company, which has been manufacturing products for over 30 years. The company prides itself on sourcing locally produced materials and packaging to create leading products.

More info at www.inoxmx.com



Quintrex releases new Top Ender Pro

QUINTREX says its premium open boat just got better with the release of the Quintrex Top Ender Pro. The Top Ender Pro is offered in seven sizes, the 430, 450, 481, 500, 520, 540 have max capacities of 5 people and the 590 has a max capacity of 6 people.

Designed to meet Australian Marine requirements, Top Ender Pro has horsepower ratings of 60hp, 75hp, 90hp, 90hp, 115hp, 140hp and 150hp respectively.

Maintaining tradition, the new Top Ender Pro will feature the current Blade Hull with a new and improved flared bow. The stretch formed aluminium side sheets have more curve that will run further down the length of the boat to deflect more spray away from its passengers.

The range introduced a 430 Top Ender Pro, a smaller more versatile boat never seen before.

This vessel will have the same pod transom as other models while being more compact.

Quintrex is able to offer advantages to customers because of its stretch forming capabilities.

To give fishos the most fishable space, the Top Ender Pro range will be equipped in a side-console configuration.

For the fanatic fisho, the Top Ender Pro has heaps of underfloor storage for all kinds of tackle, eskys and the catch.

In the front casting platform, customers can chose to have the standard storage or opt for a livewell to make it a true tournament sports fishing boat.

The Top Ender Pro comes standard with features such as a marine VHF radio, rear ladder, 4 rod holders, 3 seats and a 5 year warranty.

Taking this one step further, the Top Ender Pro can have options added such as a burley bucket, cutting board, twin battery system for electric motors, lockable rod storage and upgraded seats.

More info at www.quintrex.com.au

Raymarine Axiom MFD now compatible with CZone

THE Raymarine Axiom multifunction display (MFD) line is now compatible with CZone digital control and monitoring systems. The collaboration enables boat builders and system integrators to deliver custom CZone digital switching solutions with graphical interfaces controlled through Raymarine's line Axiom MFDs.

CZone digital switching simplifies the installation of boat electrical systems through the replacement of complicated and cumbersome traditional switch and fuse panels with networked digital switch interfaces, providing ultimate control of onboard electrical systems. When integrated with the Axiom MFD, the CZone system offers control of

many different types of onboard electrical devices, including lighting and climate control.

Raymarine will offer CZone and Raymarine customers a customised graphical interface solution that allows boat builders and system integrators to create highly customised graphical CZone control pages that integrate seamlessly with Axiom's LightHouse 3 dashboard app. CZone integration for Raymarine Axiom MFDs is available now.

More info at www.raymarine.com.au





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*T&Cs apply for full warranty information, visit suzukimarine.com.au

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