



Bob's World

By Bob Davis

Spring Is Here!

Spring fever is a fascinating phenomenon. While young men turn their fancy to what it is they turn their fancy to in spring – and I can almost remember what that was – older guys like me turn our minds to far more interesting things like boats and fishing and preparing for the summer campaign.

Hey, out on the water we can wear our daggy old fishing shorts and those new long sleeved fishing shirts that have 30+ sun protection, and breathe, instead of wearing our thick winter sweaters and long-johns! Winter fishing in four layers of clothing has certain downsides.

Alas, beautiful spring also has some black sides. Did you ever have one of those days when you're convinced you must have been born an idiot and failed to grow out of it despite your best efforts? Well I had a beaut, in early spring! Part of the joy of having a boat – any boat – is to fiddle about with it. It can consume many happy hours. I needed to replace the push-pull steering cable in my faithful old boat, and well, I'd done several before, so of course I know how to do that..! How hard can it be, eh? And indeed it isn't difficult at all, if your head isn't wandering off somewhere in cloud cuckoo land.

There are just two holes in the side of a typical steering box, one where the cable goes in, and one where the end comes out. Yeah, you guessed it! I was so full of myself after getting the job done that I didn't even realise I'd done it the wrong way around – until the next time I dropped her into the water and very quickly discovered the error of my ways. I turned the wheel to go to port, and she went to starboard. Thank heavens there were no other boats or hard objects near me! I couldn't

believe I'd done it. Worse, I couldn't believe I hadn't checked it to be sure it was done properly. Too cock sure of myself! You can just imagine the look on my first mate's face can't you? Oh dear! How embarrassing! There's an important message here, even for experienced boat people: when you do your maintenance, and replace any vital bits, check it, check it again, test it – and test it again before you hit the water.

Unfortunately my spring idiot day didn't end there! It's only a ten minute drive to the ramp from my place. We'd cleaned the soft Bimini top, and it was still up, but I figured it would be perfectly okay to leave it up for such a short run from home to the ramp. Oh yes, it survived the run there, and the (very) quick outing on the water, but on the home run on the highway a stitch or two in one of the seams gave, and within minutes it was a shredded flapping nightmare, endangering others on the road. I had sadly underestimated the ravages of time and sun on the fabric and seams. I pulled over, climbed up on the boat, tidied up the disaster, tied bits down, and headed for home. I don't think I need to spell out the messages from that one, do I? My first mate said very little at all for some hours. She obviously

thought I'd completely lost it, and was probably contemplating my committal. But it all could have been worse, you know? Nobody died....

The good news is that I haven't had another 'Spring Idiot Day' since that one. In fact, spring has been pretty good. The transition time to new fishing seasons, and particularly spring, is buying time. Yes, spring is time to use the plastic card. Every decent chandlery and tackle shop had "specials" running for Fathers' Day. As well, a lot of the big distributors had pre-season packages and some of them (not necessarily all), on a close look, were actually pretty good value.

I'm very keen for the first mate to graduate up from threadline reels to small overhead reels for casting. When I made that move in the early seventies, a fellow Canberra angler suggested that I first buy a cheap little spin-casting reel, those strange little hybrids that still have the spool axle pointing down the rod like a threadline, but have a closed face, are mounted overhead, and are operated with a thumb button. He reckoned it would help in my transition to casting control with the thumb, on single handed pistol grip rods. In hindsight it was excellent advice, and I had some fun flicking

Handsome LFB entering Ulladulla Harbour on the NSW South Coast reminds us this is a very busy commercial port, as well as a vital recreational boating region.



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little spinners around after trout. By the time I bought my first baitcaster, an ABU 5000 I think it was, I really was ready for it. I decided I'd try the same learning process with the first mate.

When I bought my spin-caster, all those years ago, it was a cheap one, and it was pretty ordinary. No bearings, the gears were cast alloy, and the drag system was absolute rubbish - a fact quickly learned the very first time I hooked a bream on it. The first mate got the benefit of that experience. She is now proud owner of a much better quality reel than my old Spincaster was - an ABU 476 Spincast reel that has three bearings, uses what ABU Garcia claim to be "the world's strongest Spincast drag", has roller surfaces on the line pickup lugs and features instant anti-reverse. Popped onto one of my favourite old baitcaster rods, it is actually a delight to cast with! The proverbial rock ape could make a half decent cast with this thing. On her very first lesson, using a rubber practice plug (which you used to get in the good old days, whenever you bought a baitcaster - but not nowadays!) The first mate did a whole lot better than that - she was casting better with this outfit within minutes than with her small threadline rig.

Now that surprised me - and really interested me. Off she went by herself to the nearby river, into the top of Conjola, and returned in due course with her first chopper tailor! Too easy.

I confess to now having more than an idle interest in wondering how useful this reel might be for a bit of serious fishing work - and it is about to get some. I doubt that such reels can compete with modern threadlines. Let alone good baitcasters or their larger overhead geared reel cousins, for solid workouts on real powerhouse species, because of their inherent weaknesses - relatively small line capacity, and the potential line stress and heat-point of a low diameter right-angle line pickup roller. However, their ease of use for any learner makes them an absolute standout as a learning tool.

I suspect they might very adequately fill a general tool role for the occasional angler who chases stuff like flathead and bream and whiting. More on this in future.

As I often do when I'm near one, I recently ducked into K-Mart to raid their tackle shelves. It makes me wonder how small local tackle retailers can stay in business, if they happen to be located within a shopping trip drive of competition from the likes of K-Mart. Their size and purchasing power mean that little shops can't compete on price. Nor do they just focus on 'cheap' brands. They stock some good

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quality stuff, at good prices, alongside their economy ranges. For example, on my last sojourn into K-Mart I found a swag of different sizes and types of Mustad hooks on clearance - I bought boxes of them! Couldn't believe my luck! Also bought a lot of what I call the "staples" - sinkers, mono for leader line, stock swivels - that type of thing.

I figure that very few tackle shops rely on sales of these "staples" to survive. Rather, they stock them, of course, because people always need them - usually in small numbers, a packet of swivels, or a little packet of hooks - but it's the staples that get customers into the shop, where they might buy other higher priced gear. So I don't mind buying staples from places like K-Mart, stocking up for the coming season.

However - I happen to have a very strong view that all of us need to

support our local tackle shops, and the smaller the centre you live in, the more important that becomes. So, even if it costs me a little bit more, I'll go to a real fishing tackle store for my other important stuff, and I'll support my local businesses by directing the bigger bits of my boating and fishing expenditure to them. Why? Because tackle shop owners, and their staff are a key part of our game - they're an integral part of what we do.

Customers like you and me talk to them all the time. Apart from the fact that most of them are super keen anglers, they're closest to the best fishing news sources - us! And that makes them an info goldmine. They know, day to day, what's being caught, on what, where and how. They know the lures that are working. They know the gear that can take a hiding. Yes, do yourself and every other angler a big favour - get to know them and support your local tackle shop.

By the time this gets to print, I'll have been using the new fish finder and GPS gear in my halfcab for a couple of months. I've needed to upgrade for quite some time. I was persuaded to do it in spring because of some good pre-season deals from distributors. As is always the case, it takes a little time to get to know how to use new electronic gear properly in a boat. I'll write about it when I've figured it all out.

Oh, and the twelve footer now sports a hand-me-down but functional sounder. I want to be able to see where the holes and channels are in Conjola, and in other lakes and estuaries, to get a bit more insight to those fish that evaded me so often through the winter!

In parting, a serious complaint: you know those plastic packets that soft plastic lure bodies are sold in? Too many people are throwing those packets overboard! Ditto bait bags! To all those doing this, do us all a big favour - Stop it! Take your rubbish home with you and dispose of it properly and thoughtfully . . . please!

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