



Neil Dunstan:

Careful Of Your Fingers!

A couple of weeks ago I had a look at the weather report for the next couple of days and noticed that it would be excellent weather and tides for the next few days.

A quick phone call to my fishing mate, John to check if he wanted a trip out to catch a few coral trout the following day, soon verified that if I didn't take him with me he would come around and kill me, so I gathered he was up for it (!) so we arranged to meet at my place at Sarina Beach at seven the following morning.

The day turned out to be a beauty, so we decided to take my Quintrex 4.5 dory out as it is very cheap to run with its Tohatsu 30hp 2-stroke motor.

After loading up with ice, bait, some lunch and a couple of soft drinks, we took off for Cullen Island which is about ten n. miles due east of Sarina Inlet. On arrival, the sea was calm and the forecast was for five to ten knot winds, so we decided to head off further out to Knight Island which is about thirteen n. miles further out than Cullen Island.



We arrived there after about an hour and a half of travelling, as I only cruise along in the tinnie at around fifteen knots and we went straight to one of our favourite spots where a strong current runs around a headland and has scoured out a deep channel about sixty feet deep. We usually fish the drop off at this spot and as well as catching resident fish such as coral trout and estuary cod, we also catch quite a few

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pelagic fish passing through.

After setting up (it is sometimes quite difficult to get the anchor in the right spot) we started fishing. I was using my favourite custom made boat rod and John was using his usual

handline made up of a couple of hundred metres of fifty five pound Schneider nylon with a small No. 2 bean sinker above a bloody great 9/0 hook. He always fishes with a whole pilchard threaded onto the 9/0 hook with the head up and uses four heavy finger stalls made up of puncture proof mountain bike tube cut into about two inch pieces.

After half an hour or so we had only caught a few small wire netting cod and some Venus tusk fish and had nothing in the box, so we were thinking about moving when John hooked up on another small wire netting cod. As he was bringing it up near the surface it got hit with a mighty blow by some unknown marauder and the line took off at a furious rate. We both called it for a shark because of its brute strength, and John was having plenty of trouble trying to slow it down. The line was ripping through his fingers at such a rate that if he hadn't used his finger stalls he would have had to let go - and even then, the line was burning the rubbers so badly that they were smoking.

The hand caster on which

the line was mounted was lying on the floor of the boat and the line was whipping off the reel so fast that one loop whipped across my arm as I was standing beside John and cut right into my arm with just the sheer speed at which it was travelling.

At this point I said to John that he 'better stop mucking around with this bloody shark' as he only had about ten coils of line left on the reel so he began to clamp down even harder on the line and finally managed to turn the fish and gain some line.

This tussle then went on for the next ten minutes or so, and as the fish was only just beginning to give way, I suggested that it was definitely not a spanish mackerel as it would have given up the fight a long time ago, so if it was not a shark it could only be a G.T. or something similar.

Another few minutes saw the fish in to about forty feet from the boat when we both called it for a monster spanish mackerel. The fish then spotted the boat and took off on another sizzling run and John gave it back just as much on the old Schnieder

with the finger stalls screeching as the line ran through them and he had to pour water on his fingers to get control again. Eventually it was alongside the boat pretty well bugged, so I leaned over the side and gaffed it behind the head but I was stuck there as I couldn't lift the bloody thing over the side, and had to yell for John to give me a hand - whereupon we managed to get it into the boat together.

John was so worn out that he could hardly hold it up for

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photos so I had to let him rest for a while before taking the pics shown here abouts. The fish was 1.7 metres long and we estimated the weight to be around 65 to 70 pounds or more than thirty two kilos, truly a monster spanish mackerel.

We were amazed that the fish had not bitten through the line, and when we looked closer we found that the fish had grabbed the three pound wire netting cod in the middle and sliced it in two. The head slid up the line to the boat and the body was in the fish's mouth, but because John was using a 9/0 hook it missed the line and the hook swung



around and hooked it in the side of the head making it impossible to get his teeth onto the line: One unlucky fish!

I still marvel at how John was able to subdue this fish on a handline, but he reckoned that he had caught sharks and things twice as big as that on a handline and we have a picture of a black marlin about a hundred kilos or so which he has landed out of his tinnie on a handline when he was a professional coral trout fisherman.

After that effort it was coffee all round and back to the lines for more fishing. However, I said to John that we should go home a bit early - as after he had filleted the fish, the fillets had to be cut in two to fit into an eighty litre icebox which they filled to three quarters full! We skinned the fish when we got home and cut it into steaks which we counted out as over eighty mackerel steaks, enough for plenty of barbeques in the future.

So, I bet not too many people have caught such a monster spanish mackerel on a handline. And would you believe John reckons he would have had it in the boat in half the time, if he'd hooked it on his decent handline.

(No doubt, is there? In the great traditions of the Chud Parker mould, JT is one of the last real fishos! – PW)

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