



Neil Dunstan:

Jesse's Big Day Out

My fishing mate John has a grandson named Jesse who lives in Rockhampton and comes up to visit grandad most school holidays. His main reason is that he absolutely loves fishing and John who doesn't mind soaking a bait or two, makes a special effort to take him out fishing as often as the weather will allow.

He is so keen that he will go every day and some of the nights, if it is on. Quite often if the weather is ok and if I am going out in my boat, Jesse and John will come with me and we have had a number of fun trips out with mostly good results.

During the recent school holidays at Christmas, the weather had been pretty windy and the only trips John and Jesse were able to manage were runs up the creek to catch some bream and set the crab pots with mixed results.

I had not looked at the weather forecast for a few days as I was busy on my Quintrex 4.45 dory with an



ongoing program of small modifications which were beginning to bring the boat up to what I wanted. On the Sunday I got a phone call from John to see if I was going out the following day as the forecast for the day was 5-10 knot variable winds, which means that it was going to be flat calm - but only for the Monday, after which it would revert to the 15-20 knot n/easterly that had been blowing for weeks. I suggested that if he met me at my house at Sarina Beach around seven in the morning I would have everything ready to go for a trip out to the local islands next day. John then asked if it was ok to bring young Jesse. and as he had been with us plenty of times before, I replied "No worries".

Next morning the weather was excellent and when they arrived we went straight down to the ramp and got going. The sea was perfect and I was able to sit the boat on 4,500 revs for the trip out which took a bit over an hour as we were heading for

Elemang Island, which is about twenty nautical miles due east. I was keen to see how the new Suzuki 50 h.p. four stroke would perform with three people on board, a full day's supplies, and ice. The motor only had eight hours on the clock so I was still nursing it along, but she went very well and I was very happy with everything.

Our normal routine when we go to the islands is to get there reasonably early and do some trolling with both hard body lures and sometimes a rigged garfish. Over the years we have worked out where to place our lures so we don't spend much time wandering around over country that doesn't carry the fish we are after. We ran out an RMG Scorpion deep diver as these lures get down the five to eight metres where the spanish mackerel are usually found, and put a Halco Laserpro out on the other side then settled down to see what was around.

The day was perfect with a nice five knot

breeze blowing to keep us cool, as it was the middle of the wet season and the temperature was around thirty degrees with around eighty per cent humidity which is a bit oppressive without the breeze. John usually takes the wheel when we are trailing lures and he works the boat along the ledges where the bait is balled up and also works the shallow coral reefs, where the lures get down to just above the coral to target the coral trout that are sitting under a plate coral waiting for something to come within striking distance. I usually organise the lines and the after deck area ready for any strikes and we usually take turns on the rod, as it is a fair effort when fighting a decent fish on our light gear.

After only about two hundred metres we had a tentative strike on the Scorpion but the fish didn't hook up and I was just about to check the lure to make sure it wasn't seaweed, when off she went with the Abu 7000c screaming like a banshee.

I grabbed the rod and hung on while the fish took off and didn't stop till there was only about fifty metres of line left on the reel of the three hundred and fifty metres originally carried.

John was driving the boat and had to back up at near full throttle to stop the fish spooling me and I noticed that the transom was taking water in the slightly sloppy conditions so I made a mental note to have a look at installing some slop boards or maybe fitting a small well around the motor to allow full throttle backing up on fish, without sinking.

All the time the fish was still heading doggedly out to sea, and there was no way I could gain much line without chasing down the fish with the boat.

Eventually I retrieved enough line to start seriously fighting the fish and was surprised at the strong continuous pull from the fish which indicated that it was not a spanish mackerel as they usually only have one or two really hard runs in them and then submit reasonably easily.

After about ten minutes I was really giving the family jewels a bit of a workout with the rod butt, and decided to get out the new rod bucket which John had given me for my seventieth birthday and this eased the pain considerably.

The upshot of the story is that it took us about forty minutes of pumping and winding then losing line to a dogged run, then chasing the fish down with the boat to start all over again until we finally had it beside the boat. There, in all its glory and still circling

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doggedly, was a monster G.T. which was as big as any I had caught around this island for a long, long time. John managed to get the gaff into the thin tissue of the bottom jaw between the bones and two of us were able to lift it into the boat together without doing it too much damage.

When I tried to set it up for photographs I could not lift it up on my own, so I had to get Jesse to help hold it up and the resultant pictures showed Jessie with a great grin and both struggling to hold the beast up.

The fish was returned to the water quickly and swam away seemingly no worse for the thrill it gave to us, especially Jessie who had never seen such a big fish.

Inspecting the gear before resetting the lines I noticed that rod, which is an old Daiwa short stoker boat rod which cost about twenty bucks many years ago, had the metal tip runner bent back at ninety degrees and the lure had two of the three sets of trebles straightened out with only one hook left in the side of the fish's jaw which was holding it.

Also, the thick polycarbonate bib on the lure which has the line attached to a ring in the middle of the bib was bent around at ninety degrees, which is a bit of a miracle as I found that I needed all my strength and a large pair of pliers to try and get it back where it started from.

Amazingly, the twenty year old ABU 7000 reel was still working perfectly and went on to catch more fish for the day.

After the excitement had died down a little we put the lures out again and tried to get Jesse onto a big one, but even though we managed to hook a couple more fish, which weren't as big but still large, Jesse had some problems keeping the lines tight at all times and was not able to get one to the boat.

For the rest of the day we spent bottom fishing as we needed to get some coral trout and sweetlip for the freezer which was getting down quite a bit due to the long run of bad weather, and in this scenario Jesse was in his element and held his own for the rest of the day.

At the end of the day we had a bit of a bumpy ride home as the seas had got up a bit due to the twenty knot n/easterly which had come in after lunch, but we made it ok, and were able to put some nice fillets in the freezer - but the highlight of the day was to see the look on Jesse's face while trying to lift up a G.T. that weighed over half as much as he did.

- Neil Dunstan.

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