

Bermy Tuna & Albacore Over The Shelf

by Trevor Stow

Ask any fishermen about Bermagui and they will tell you that it is the home of game fishing in southern Australia. They will tell you about marlin and yellowfin tuna, perhaps even huge mako sharks. However, they will rarely mention albacore tuna which seem to be viewed as a poor relation to their more famous cousin.

I can tell you from personal experience that these pocket dynamos are a great little game species and well worth targeting.

On a recent trip to Bermagui we arrived at lunch time to find a 3



One of the most exciting, adrenalin-pumping, back-breaking types of fishing on the Aussie seascape is the yellowfin tuna fishery in the South East corner of New South Wales. During the winter months, Bermagui is definitely 'big tuna city' as the giant yellowfin come in, bringing the albacore with 'em. Our man in the south, Trev Stow, travelled to Bermy for this special report . .

metre sea running and most small boats in port. Two days earlier, a significant low pressure system had formed over the east coast of Australia and the result was a strong southerly wind whipping a seriously big sea to 5 metres and more. The sea was abating and a high pressure system

Right: Now THIS is a serious yellowfin tuna. Would you believe (weep !) it was Duncan's first yellowfin and it tipped the scales at 42 kg.

Facing Page: Classic pic of the albacore's very long pectoral fins. Hard fighters, albacore are terrific to eat ("*the chicken of the sea*") and grow to 45 kg. Mostly caught using 10-15 kg tackle.





was moving in. We expected this would result in light winds for the couple of days of our visit.

We filled in the afternoon checking into our accommodation and getting our gear together. Next morning we headed out to the bait grounds. We fished for half an hour or so, but the live slimy mackerel were hard to come by. We had bought 4 slabs of pilchards for cubing but were hoping for a few livies. As we had a good supply of pilchards and a wide range of lures onboard, we abandoned the quest for livies after an hour or so, as we reasoned that it was not worth while persisting any longer.

We headed offshore to the first drop-off which most anglers refer to as the Continental Shelf. The sea

was still running at 2 metres, but abating, and there was very little wind. The plan of attack was to troll over the Shelf for an hour or so and try and find a school of either yellowfin or albacore. These fish often travel together and when you find one, you find the other.

Working The Lures: We rigged two outfits with Rapala CD18's and two others with Zunker skirts. One in pink and the other in blue. The Rapalas were set close to the transom and the skirts let out 25 m or so. It was not long before we hit a school of albacore, and three of the four rods went off. Fortunately, there were three of us on the boat, and we were able to land all three fish. Hey, this was starting to look very promising!

We decided to change

over to cubes as we had located the fish, and get a berley trail going. We were hoping that a yellowfin or two would be underneath the albacore. But after several hours of cubing, we were disappointed not to touch another fish of any description.

Following a brief discussion, it was decided to rig up the lures again and try and re-locate the school. It did not take long before the lures were going off again. Albies and the odd striped tuna were hammering them. Shane, our driver, was using the "snail trail" on the GPS plotter to advantage. He was monitoring where the strikes were occurring and heading back over the 'hot' areas.

We were running 15 kg and 50 kg outfits. Although not as big as yellowfin,

Duncan (left) and Shane proudly display the beautifully conditioned 42 kg 'fin. It was caught using striped tuna cubes in 240 fathoms.

pound for pound, albies are great fighters. They can be taken on lighter gear but there is always the problem that you may connect up to something larger like a yellowfin, or even a marlin, which would blow you away on light gear.

After an hour of great fun we lost the school and the action was soon over, but we had some nice albies in the boat for the table and we had released many more. We also had two stripies in the boat that would be great cubing bait for the next day's fishing.

The next day broke the pattern. It was the sort of



day offshore fishermen dream about, being fine and clear. Although it was almost winter, the air was warm, and there was little if any wind. The sea was calm and the water temperature was in the mid 18's.

Peerfect!!!

We headed for the famous 12 Mile Reef, and past the first drop-off. There was not visible bird action over the water, nor sign of bait fish in the water. Like the previous day, trolling proved fruitless in the morning, so we began cubing. A lack of livies over the bait grounds prevented us from fishing a slimy under a balloon, but we had the striped tuna from the previous day, a good supply of pilchards and numerous albacore frames. The albie frames made a great trail out of the berley pot.

We cut the stripies into cubes and fed them out the back of the boat. It was not long before we had action. Duncan's rod went off as a fish stripped line. Duncan waited and struck. The fish dived deep and Duncan knew that he did not have an albacore on this time. He called for the gimble.

This was a strong fish and every time Duncan gained line, the fish took some. We put the kidney harness on Duncan when we saw the painful look on his face, as his shoulders were dragged forward and his back strained against the considerable pull of a very active fin, attached to the 24 kg outfit.

After about a quarter of an hour we got a look at the tuna as it began to circle under the boat. Duncan got the double on the reel and moved the lever drag into maximum "hurt". The battle was soon over and we boated Duncan's first yellowfin tuna which dragged the scales down to 42 kg. The beam on Duncan's face was akin to a full moon rising over the horizon.

Following a couple more albacore by Shane and myself, the action went quiet so we decided to follow the snail trail back to where we had started to get action, earlier in the afternoon. Out went the cubes once again and in came the albacore once again, but not for long, as the school soon moved off.

By mid afternoon, we'd had a great day's fishing, so we decided to rig up our trolling lines for a final half an hour or so of fishing. We thought we'd troll part of the way back to port, and with a little luck, could pick up the odd fish as we went.

We were in for quite a pleasant surprise, as we had only trolled a short distance when we again picked up a

school of albacore. We had three rods out the back, running two Zunkers skirts, and one Rapala mackerel pattern. All the rods were going off and we continued to troll after a fish was on, hoping that we would pick up a second or even a third fish before we would stop the boat and bring in the fish. All lures were taken by the albies but the Rapala really proved to be a winner - and it now has the teeth marks to prove it!

Our half hour of fishing turned into a full hour of what proved to be one of the hottest bites that I had seen. The albies ranged up to 12 kgs and although we were catching them on 15 and 24 kg outfits, they proved to be great adversaries. As we has already taken a few albies for the table the previous day, we had great satisfaction releasing them all. Besides, we still had a very nice yellowfin to cut up.

Albacore: They can be caught at almost any time during the year at Bermagui but they normally arrive in numbers from April until June. Usually, if there are albacore around, there are yellowfin tuna around, too. Albacore take all the usual baits that yellowfin take including cubes of WA pilchards, and fresh slimy mackerel which are usually available in good numbers on the bait grounds close to Bermagui Harbour. They will readily take lures and skirts trolled at about 4-6 knots.

Albacore is a great eating fish and often referred to as the "chicken of the sea". Unlike most tuna that has red flesh, albacore has a lovely white flesh. Personally, I like it fresh, although it will freeze, but I find that it soon loses its taste if it is frozen for any length of time. After albacore is caught it should

be bled immediately and put on ice as soon as possible, to retain its flavour.

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