



Who hasn't walked into a tackle store, before leaving with less of an idea of what they needed - than when they've entered? The amount of tackle available to the average angler these days is staggering. For a trailerboat angler who is wishing to invest capital into a quality offshore-capable reel it can be a daunting task. Spin or overhead? Star drag or lever drag? What size? And to what extreme do I need to look at? The top of the pops, or an average model?

When it comes to subduing large fish offshore, a lever drag reel is the ultimate weapon of choice in reels. Let's take a look at the evolution of these reels, and try and determine how to sort out the type of reel that best suits YOUR particular needs.

Special report by Aaron Concorde

### Early Days.

Lever drag reels are an extension of the evolution of the big drum game reels that were invented to hold enough line to capture large tuna, sharks and billfish.

Early overhead game reels had no drag at all. A gloved hand was used on the linen line as the sole brake for the angler. Bigger that!

It was dangerous if a reel backlashed and line got caught, tangled or knotted from this, as the line used was typically heavy and would at best do damage to the rod or reel. At worst, it would tangle around an angler's hands and cut or break skin and bones!

At times, the harnessed angler would get pulled over board since the line didn't break. You had to be taking it seriously all the time. Stuff ups could be very bad. There had to be a better way of adding brake pressure. Clutches, drags 'n stuff.

Then came the star drag braking system, which vastly improved angler safety by taking the hands away from a fast revolving spool.

Even though the star drag was a step forward, the overall surface area of a bunch of metal and leather or felt washers crammed into a recess of the main gear still found itself lacking.

The felt or leather would burn up or the punched out metal friction washers would be warped, causing a jerky, snatching sensation as line is pulled from the reel. A jerky drag breaks line easily through the rapid increase then decrease of pressure causing a chattering feeling through the rod and reel. The surface area that a stack of washers gave was not enough to give a smooth reliable brake.

There was to be a revolution on the horizon.

By moving the drag to a recessed part of the reel's spool, it became apparent that the braking surface area would be substantially larger and the surfaces could be machined flat.

Imperfections in the mating surfaces could be abolished with a larger diameter washer set to play with.

Another couple of added advantages came in the ability to preset the drag's tension through a knurled nut on the side plate behind the handle.

For the first time, a reel that was designated to fish 15kg line could maintain a "strike drag" of 5kg, which is a 3rd of the tested strength of the

# The World Of Lever Drag Reels



**M**anufacturers such as Fin-Or have been making large overhead reels since the 1930's.

It was a Fin-Or Tycoon lever drag that caught the 1560lb Black Marlin world record off Peru in 1953; so don't think that these reels are some sort of new invention.

The Penn International single speed reels in their famous gold colour came out in the 1960s, with Penn upgrading to 2 speed gear models in the 1980s.

Shimano introduced their Triton Lever Drag (TLD) series to Australia in 1986, bringing a more affordable lever drag to the masses. Buying a gold Penn International or Fin-Or was a huge investment and reserved for the most ardent followers of game fishing. They are the top shelf Cognac of reels.

Now, in 2007 there is virtually an A

to Z directory of manufacturers who make reels with single and 2 speed capabilities.

Dual drag systems that can offer higher braking pressure in smaller sized reels, and even high speed models for jigging.

What I am saying is that lever drag reels are no longer the domain for thick line, mega fish and weigh 5 or more kilos per reel.

Lever drag reels are no longer the province of the lucky owners who can run to a Bertie 35, and fish from a chair with bent butt game rods.

However, they are the first choice for any situation where a smooth drag, high line capacity and powerful cranking ability are needed for the target species you are after.