

Bluewater Fishing For Dummies . . .

(or, How To Put Fish On The Table Without Selling The Farm!)



Until recently I was not that much into fishing. In my childhood I had gone along with dad in our all purpose runabout to catch a few whiting in Spencers Gulf and I spent much time jigging squid for bait from a local jetty.

Occasionally I spearfished, posing little threat to local fish stocks and I used to collect abalone, feed the flesh to the seagulls (shock horror) and sell the shell to the local kiosk to make into souvenirs for day trippers near our beach house. So marine hunting and gathering was not totally foreign to me but neither was it anything approaching a way of life.

When Rob and I took to the cruising life for 10 years it was natural for us to think about supplementing our diet with fish caught along the way.

Re-introducing Don Gilchrist, our fave FNQ orthodontist, a well known cruising yachtsman of the round-the-world-kind, who swallowed the anchor a few years ago - and then discovered he still couldn't live without boating. Ironically, he started out as a powerboat nut, before deciding he wanted to see the world - and now he's come back to a life of toothy critters (at sea and on shore) with a much modified Haines Signature 2250.

In this 'hands on, no bs' report about fishing for pelagics (where ever you are) Don makes the case for less \$\$\$ in whacko tackle - and more fish on the table.

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Having come from South Australia and arriving at our new home in Cairns I went along to Jack Erskine's shop and explained that I wanted a lure to catch local fish cruising along the FNQ coast.

"Mackerel is what you are after", he said, "and this is what will do the job." He presented me with an enormous, to my eyes, Rapala Magnum deep-diver.

"Actually," I said "I was thinking about catching something this size rather than something capable of eating it."

He humoured my southern ignorance and told me how to rig a basic trolling set-up to be dragged behind our yacht "Stylopora". Which we dutifully did and began to have early success.

At the end of our 7 year circumnavigation we were

accomplished cruising fisherfolk. Except for the Med we rarely had to drag a lure more than half a day to entice mackerel, mahi mahi, wahoo or tuna to commit suicide on our simple gear, we provided ourselves with as much fish as we wanted without difficulty. For those of you into coastal cruising at up to 10 knots I'll outline the rig but that is not the guts of this story.

After 10 years dining on the finest seafood there is (ie. REALLY fresh) we swallowed the anchor and for 5 years must have been among very few Far North Queenslanders who neither owned nor aspired to own a boat. I couldn't keep it up, eventually the salt in my veins corroded my resolve and we found ourselves owners of a very well used Haines Signature 2250L that had been extensively used for light tackle game fishing and she became "Bandwagon IV" (B4).

(See Don's two comprehensive B-4 reports in the SEA Library DIY section PW)

When I began tentatively chatting to the local fishos I felt markedly inferior.

They talked about this knot or that, leaders and traces, Wog-heads and ballyhoo, down-riggers and aquaplanes and I didn't have the faintest idea what they were all going on about. But we had stuff like rod holders, bait boards and outriggers on B4 and eventually we decided to dip out toes into the water and see what nibbled them.

We began with gear so elementary that I dared not be seen in possession of it by the locals lest I be laying myself open to excessive humiliation - but for all its simplicity, it worked pretty steadily getting prime fish from the ocean to the freezer, so if you want to get into a bit of blue-water fishing for pelagics and are too embarrassed to advertise your

ignorance to your local piscatorial *cognoscenti*, what follows is how mugs like you and me can go fishing for mackerel, *et al*, with a good chance of some success. And which will at least get you started on the right track without wasting too much dough on dud gear that can't grow with your interest and abilities.

The fishos can't see you klutzing around out there, generally making a fool of yourself but if you come back to the ramp with a few decent fish it will do wonders for your confidence and nothing gives you street cred like a couple of 10-15kg spanish

boating fun, a good feed of fish and enough success to feed his enthusiasm and knowledge base. But remember it's only a start, where you go after is up to you.

Getting Started

To have success trolling, you need to cover some water. I consider 4 lines fished simultaneously pretty basic. Perhaps you can get by with only 2 but more is desirable and I'll go with 4.

You will need 4 overhead rigs. There are many starter packages around at any decent fishing shop

and reasonably priced. The staff will be helpful and willing to assist you to spend your money. I am a believer in supporting your local specialist fishing shop and I find any minor price penalty more than offset by range, advice and quality than at the impersonal supermarkets.

I began with my original Shakespeare Sigma overhead, added 2 Penn overhead star drag starter combos,



Armed with some good advice from Erskine's Tackle Shop in Cairns, Don quickly appreciated the advantages of the lever drag system of the Shimano TLDs compared to his original 'star' drag Penn Senators.

mackerel.

Once started your enthusiasm may end up making you a local legend but never forget your humble beginnings and view with sympathetic understanding the tyre-kicker admiring your rig and catch, with a few comments that demonstrate his inexperience but also his boundless enthusiasm.

B4 came with 2 rod holders per side, collapsible Wilson outriggers (un-rigged) and a very good bait board (currently in deep storage) but this story is about trolling for pelagics not bottom fishing. We will probably get into a bit of that in time but for now, first things first.

I'm sure any fishos reading this will splutter at my gross over-simplifications but this is not for them. Rather it is for the neophyte who wants to have some family

and as a bit of a treat and for variety, a roller tip rod with a Shimano TLD20.

If I was starting again I would go all Shimano TLD as I find lever drag so much more user friendly than star drag, it's worth the extra cost up front. TLDs are a classy reel, easy to use and maintain, and reasonably priced.

There are several manufacturers of quality gear and even more of dodgy stuff but I am only going to mention brands that I actually used so fans of venerable brands like Abu, Daiwa, Okuma etc., still your outrage.

I got 2 x 10-15 kg medium action boat rods 5'9" long with plain Fuji guides and 2 x 15-25kg fast action boat rods with Fuji guides and roller tips, all with gimbal bases. Spool all of the reels with 24kg monofilament of varying colours and stay away