

Refitting The 'Cheetah'



So . . . you want to get into big-game fishing and the budget doesn't run to a new Rivera Offshore Express - what do you do? Well, for a hell of a lot less you could follow the example of a keen Brisbane couple, and start fitting out a Powercat 2600 for the job . . . Aaron Concord reports

Special 3-Part Series By F&B's Fishing Editor, Aaron Concord

This story follows the first instalment of the refit of Loche and Nicole Ahtong's 2600 Power Cat Sports Cabriolet into a serious offshore fishing machine. My mission is to help Loche turn a multi-purpose rig into a real heavy tackle fishing platform, with the necessary additions or modifications to the cockpit and helm/rigging area that would make it possible to fish for sport and game fish on tackle as high as stand-up game gear to 37kg class tackle.

At the same time, we had to ensure they retained the ability to turn the cat into a weekender, for Nicole and Loche (pictured) to spend quality time at places like the Tangalooma Wrecks at Moreton Island.

Keeping this versatility is important, but so is the vessel's ability to do the fishing side of things properly, since heavy tackle game fishing is unforgiving on all of the ancillary equipment.

Where we had gotten to was an uncertainty with what rod holder positions we could manage or fit, as well as the outrigger bases, poles and rigging kits.

To recap, I organized to have "Cheetah" call by the Reelax factory, so we could brainstorm with George Rehua, the head-honcho of Reelax Enterprises, about what could be fitted where.

George himself is a mad-keen light and heavy tackle fisherman, so it seemed natural to talk to someone who is heavily involved in this field and actually has a business making the gear we were after.

In the previous talks with George, he felt that looking at the boat was going to be necessary, to be certain of what rigger bases and poles would be needed to make sure there would be no gear failure while fishing the heavy 37kg class gear we were intending to use for black, blue and striped marlin.

Factory Meeting

After the introductions, it was down to business, showing Loche the various rigger bases, poles and

holders in the Reelax show room.

We needed a place to start so I picked the rod holders just to show him the various pipe thicknesses available.

With all of the holders being made from stainless steel and looking fairly similar, it may bamboozle a new player as to what is the bare necessity in strength needed, though Reelax make it easier with either standard or heavy duty holders on offer. As we planned to fish 37kg gear, the heavy-duty holders were the only way to go.

The next step was to be aware of the various angles that the tube and gimble pins can be arranged at.

This may be a tad heavy to read, though it is an important addition to this story so boat owners understand some of the variances we needed to consider.

The angle of the tube is either vertical or at 45 degrees to the holder flange.

This allows bent or straight butt rods to be set at an angle that helps minimize rigger line drop back and rod clearance between rigger and flat lines when fishing.

The 45 degree holder allows a better angle for straight and bent butt rods to troll lures or baits from the tip, without pulling the close in lures or baits out of the drink in rougher weather. They can be used for outrigger or flat line positions.

The vertical holders can be bought

with the gimble pin set at 90 degrees or at 30 degrees. Most rods for sport and game fishing have a cross-cut slot which is known as the gimble.

Once in a holder with a gimble pin, it helps lock the rod into the angle you want it to sit at, so the rod doesn't flail around in the holder, and the line doesn't rub all over the wrong parts of the tip, especially a roller tip.

Since we were having trouble with the rigger positions, we looked at the flat lines first.

The vessel had two angled rod holders already in these positions, so we pulled them out to make sure the coaming had plenty of strength AND that we could honestly get through the back cushions to use a backing plate or washers to through-bolt the new, heavy duty, 45 degree holders in their place.

The hole diameter needs to be larger, so a slight routing out would need to be done to make them fit.

Luckily, we could access the underside of the holders (though not as easily as we would like) to attach the necessary reinforcement.

Using a holder with the tube set at 45 degrees, either straight or bent butt rods can be trolled from these, though as we found out, the bent butt rods would be only 10, maybe 15 degrees off the water.

This means a couple of things. Firstly, skirted lures would need to be big to get them to smoke along and

