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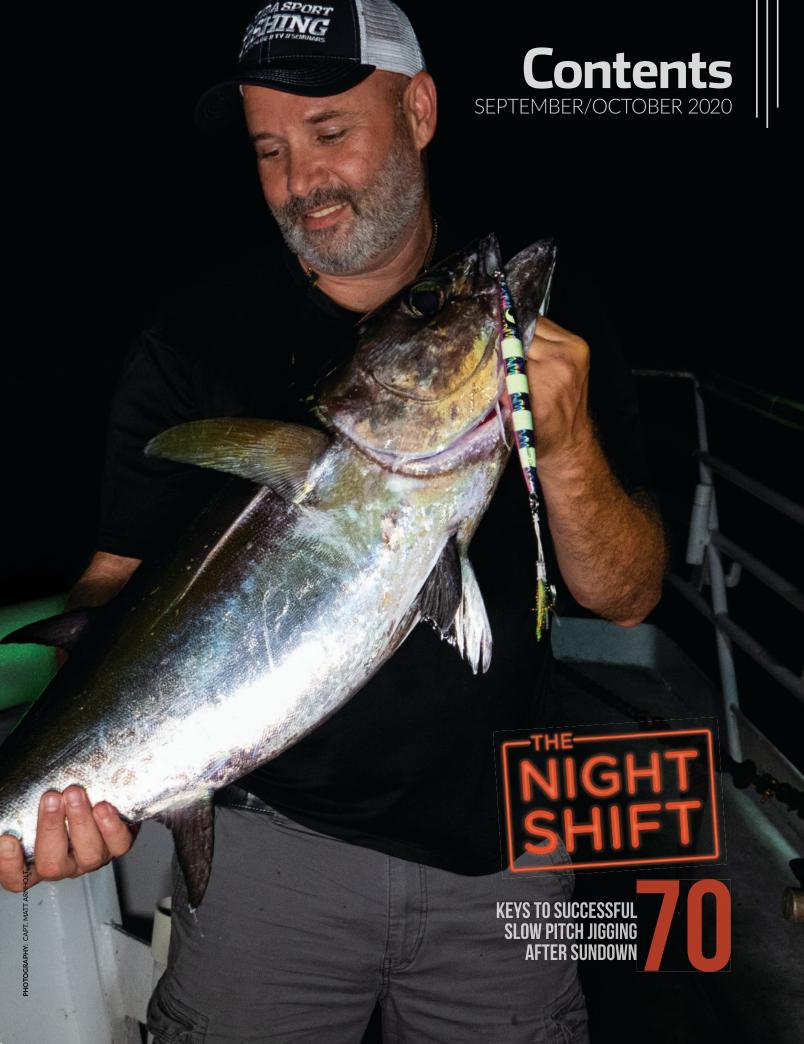
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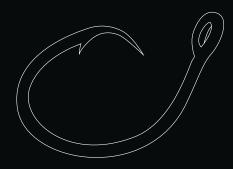
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From The Helm

Reef Fish Rejoice

Atlantic anglers take a huge stride toward increasing survival rates of released reef fish.

▶ WHILE MANY CONSERVATION ISSUES ARE WORTHY of front-andcenter exposure, this one is exceptionally important. Both fish and fishermen everywhere should rejoice because as of July 15, 2020, all vessels, including recreational, commercial and for-hire vessels specifically engaged in fishing for any snapper and/or grouper species (AKA reef fish) are now required to have an operational descending device on board and easily accessible. The law is in full effect in federal waters beyond three nautical miles from shore along the Atlantic coast.

Fish may be released using a fishing rod or handline with a descending device attached to a 16- to 48-ounce weight with enough line capable of returning a fish back to a depth of 50 to 100 feet below the surface.

NOAA Fisheries recommends only using descending devices on fish exhibiting signs of barotrauma, which occurs when reef fish are reeled up from deep water. The rapid change in pressure causes the swim bladder to expand, pushing the fish's entrails out of its mouth and/ or bulging its eyes. While options exist, essentially all descending devices serve the same purpose; returning fish to depth quickly and safely, which recompresses the expanded gas and rapidly reverses the effects of barotrauma.

Snapper and grouper are most susceptible to barotrauma because they live on or near the bottom and, considering that more than half of recreational hook-and-line-caught bottom fish are released, the mandatory use of descending gear

will undoubtedly increase the overall number of released bottom fish that survive.

Perhaps the most notable advantage is descending devices dramatically reduce predation on "floaters," the impaired and helpless fish struggling on the surface that are so often eaten by ruthless seabirds, barracuda and sharks. This is a common sight that leaves frustrated conservationminded anglers scratching their heads as they see their release efforts are in vain.

To ensure maximum survival rate, it is highly recommended that you have a dedicated rod/reel rigged and ready with a descending device and that you always release your unwanted fish as quickly as possible. While crafting your own descending device is not at all complicated,

> the Diamond Fish Saver (diamondfishing.com) is arguably the most effective and simplest on the market with a survival rate of almost 100%. Ess



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Ask The Experts



Conflict Averted

Proper Etiquette on the Flats | STAFF REPORT

▶ I RECENTLY MOVED TO FLORIDA from Missouri, where I was an avid bass fisherman for many years. On my stretch of the river, a hot bite would often occur near a small dam, where crowds of anglers converged gunnel to gunnel and fished simultaneously without issue. I've traded in my bass boat for a flats skiff and now fish the highly-pressured Indian River Lagoon, but it seems that whenever I get remotely close to another vessel poling the shallows I get yelled at and told to leave. What am I doing wrong? — Joseph Shipley

Anywhere you launch your vessel in Florida, there's a good chance you're not alone. The reality is that with so many recreational boaters in the Sunshine State, popular venues can quickly become crowded. As almost any seasoned angler will tell you, fishermen won't take kindly to any newcomers impeding their ability to catch fish.

When fishing the flats, etiquette is an important factor to consider, particularly amid popular venues. If you're in the Florida Keys surrounded by miles and miles of pristine flats and someone has already beat you to the area that you want to fish, you're better off finding a new place

to fish rather than competing for space with another boat. However, in the Indian River Lagoon — where it seems that every promising flat is already occupied when you get there — finding a vacant stretch of seagrass to pole isn't so easy.

Whenever it's possible, you should forego any flat where other anglers are already fishing, giving them a very wide berth when you are running past them. The same goes for anglers who are wading, particularly because you are mobile, and they are not. If it's a spot that you really want to fish, you can always come back later.

If you choose to wait around for the

current occupants to leave, make sure you keep a considerable distance and kill your motor, if possible. Remember, you might just be waiting around, but the anglers on the flat are stalking wary targets that will blow out if they're spooked by any loud noises. That hurts not only their chances at catching fish in that area, but yours, too. Conversely, if you're fishing a flat and you can see another boat off in the distance patiently waiting its turn, make sure you use a push pole or trolling motor to exit the flat and cover some distance in the opposite direction before starting your engine and motoring away.

While respecting your fellow angler, it's also incredibly important to respect the environment around you. Poling across super-skinny water with your outboard trimmed all the way up is one thing, but running through the area under power is something entirely different. Florida's widespread habitats, particularly grass flats, are already threatened a great deal by water quality issues and pollution, while the game fish that rely on these areas endure additional challenges. Motoring through water that's too shallow can destroy seagrass and leave unsightly prop scars that take years to heal.

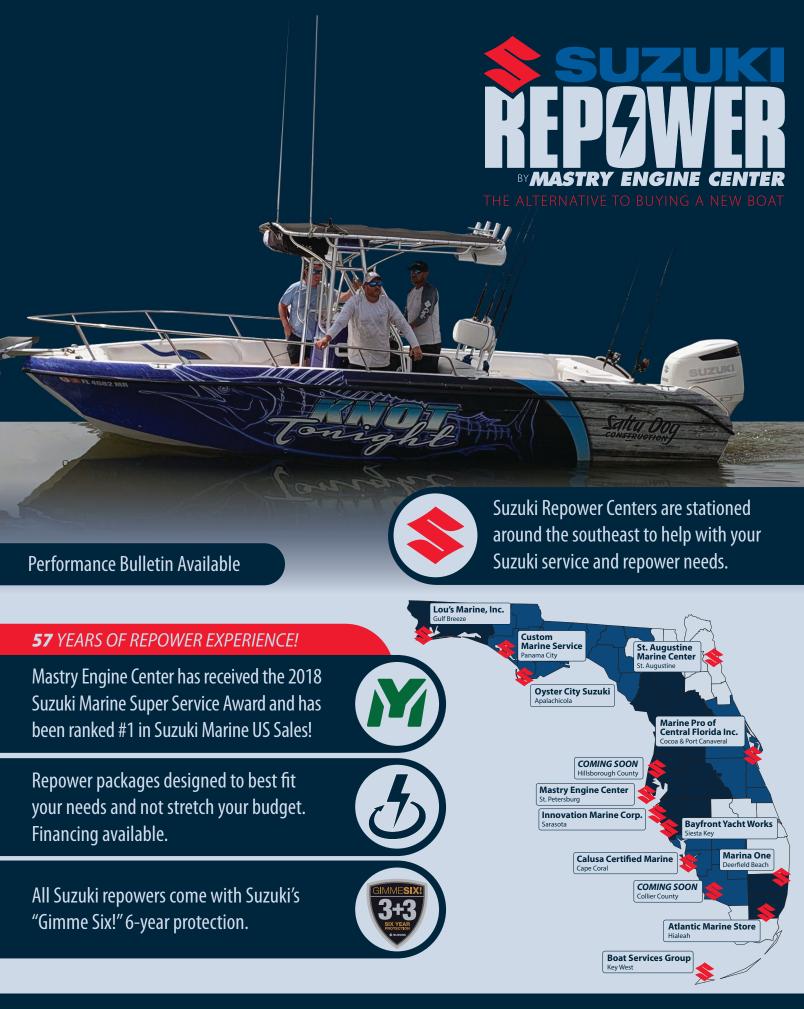
Anglers fishing their home waters generally possess a collective knowledge regarding where they can and can't run safely, but boaters visiting new areas should attain a detailed understanding of the shallows around them before launching. Thankfully, modern electronics give captains crystal-clear mapping that indicates which areas are navigable, and which ones should be approached with extra caution.

As the popularity of shallow water sport fishing skyrockets and more boats are present on the water every day, we must be considerate of one another and our surroundings, understanding local rules wherever we go. If you ever find yourself questioning what the right move should be, always err on the side of caution and don't hesitate to seek out local knowledge.

HAVE A QUESTION?

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Baitfish Profiles



Tax Evasion

A Solution for Keeping Sharks at Bay | STAFF REPORT

▶ LOVE 'EM OR HATE 'EM, there's no denying that throughout much of Florida and The Bahamas, sharks and their sometimes-overwhelming presence have led to countless catches lost among widespread anglers. The reality is that sharks are prolific predators and aggressive feeders that won't think twice about moving in for the kill on a helpless hooked game fish struggling at the end of your line. Until recently, there was really nothing anglers could do when sharks moved in other than simply move to a new area, but a first-of-its-kind shark-repelling chum may turn the odds to your favor against the infamous taxman.

Both anecdotal evidence from anglers and scientific research has shown that, in certain cases, sharks are deterred by the scent of a dead shark. As a result, for centuries anglers have been known to hang dead sharks from their boats to keep the taxman away and successfully procure the fish they hook. However, despite great controversy and outrage over the number of sharks still killed every day around the world, in today's largely conservation-friendly climate here in the United States anglers would be immediately

condemned and punished if they were to use a shark carcass to deter other sharks.

Furthermore, shark feeding and diving tourist traps both in Florida and more drastically in The Bahamas have conditioned these predators to associate the sound of a boat engine with food. As a result, parking your vessel in certain venues within these areas attracts the abundance of nearby sharks right to your boat, ready to feed. Additionally, relentless angling pressure in certain locations around the state has conditioned sharks to cling tight

to wrecks, reefs and popular areas where they know they can find an easy meal at the end of someone's line on an almost daily basis. For years now, recreational and commercial anglers alike have had to play cat and mouse to keep their catches to themselves without being taxed, but there is a potential simple solution backed by experienced anglers with proven results.

SharkTec (sharktecdefense.com) is a product backed by experienced charter and commercial fishermen who won't leave the dock without it, and is designed to deter sharks without actually killing any to do so. Sold in the form of chum, this unique solution boasts 15 years of academic research, four years of product development and two years of real-world field testing by everyday anglers who rely on our fisheries to earn a living. Approved not only by the anglers who use it every trip, but also by marine biologists and organic chemists, SharkTec is eco-friendly and proven to reduce shark by-catch. More specifically, this means that anglers fishing in shark-heavy waters would potentially lose less terminal tackle, fewer lures and, more importantly, lose fewer fish. The time-release polymer combines naturally-occurring enzymes with a foodbased binding matrix, using certain active molecules from decaying shark tissue.

While anglers in certain regions are more susceptible to shark problems than others, many members of the massive sport fishing community, inshore or offshore, have struggled to keep prized catches away from sharks. Unfortunately, plenty of us have horror stories of long, drawnout battles with the fish of a lifetime that

20



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ended with heartbreak to the jaws of one of these voracious cartilaginous carnivores.

SharkTec is very easy to use, though there are a few things anglers must keep in mind before deploying this state-ofthe-art shark repellant. First, users should cut the block into the desired size, using only what they'll need. Determining the right amount of the material to deploy within a certain situation might take a fair amount of trial and error, though users should be aware of the different factors that affect the chum. Warm weather generally causes the material to disperse at a more rapid rate, therefore warranting a larger amount to be deployed for an extended effect. Additionally, anglers fishing the edge of the Gulf Stream in southeast Florida face a particularly severe shark problem. Given the swiftness of the northerly current, SharkTec will disperse very rapidly in this region.

Along with the repellant itself, Shark-Tec provides a small wire chum cage to be purchased separately for smaller portions of the material, while a more traditional chum bag is better suited for situations in which the chum will disperse more rapidly. The specific application in which the chum is being used is also an important factor to consider. When bottom fishing near structure, SharkTec recommends that anglers use a separate outfit to drop the material to the bottom, where it will be more effective at keeping sharks away from your hooked fish. Conversely, if you are drifting with baits at the surface, then simply letting the chum hang from the boat like a traditional chum bag is the better solution. Anglers who choose to anchor their vessels need not only to be mindful of the current's speed, but also its direction in relation to where they want to fish. In these scenarios, it's best to anchor upcurrent of the area you want to fish and let the chum disperse with the current, along with your baits, into the strike zone.

Finding, fooling and ultimately landing trophy game fish is a challenge in itself, but throwing aggressive sharks into the mix makes things exponentially more difficult. Being successful in your angling pursuits requires a willingness to not cut any corners and do everything in your power to stack the odds in your favor. Fortunately, SharkTec's Shark Repelling Chum is an inexpensive, easyto-use and totally harmless step toward more productive days on the water.

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Rigging Station

Clean Break

Tying the Perfect Haywire Twist | STAFF REPORT

▶ EARLY ON THERE WERE A FEW MILESTONES that every angler climbing the ranks had to master. Throwing a cast net was high on the list and, once we perfected tying knots in monofilament, attention was turned to mastering the haywire twist. Proven for years and relied upon by many, single strand wire continues to be a solid option for anglers targeting a variety of toothy predators, and the classic haywire twist is the only method of crafting tooth-proof rigs.

Though there are many exciting attributes of the newest titanium wire. which was introduced to seemingly replace single strand, tried-and-true coffee-colored wire is inexpensive and highly resistant to bite-throughs. However, single strand wire does kink easily, and you'll probably only be able to catch one fish per rig. Still, for many resourceful anglers it's the way to go. Traditional 304 stainless steel leader delivers proven performance and manufacturers haven't given up hope with the newest single strands created with higher nickel content to further enhance durability and corrosion resistance. While the question of new school vs. old school is one that will never be put to rest, confidence is the key ingredient to your continued angling success.

Whether creating an end loop or attaching terminal tackle, the only method used here is a haywire twist. While it is simple to learn, it's also easy to tie incorrectly and one of our biggest pet peeves is improperly tied haywires with loose twists. For many, problems start early and it's the very first twist that will dictate the entire haywire. To ensure your haywire twist won't slip and fail under tension, it's imperative you create a synchronized twisting motion of the two wires instead of wrapping one around the other. Start by forming a loop by crossing the tag end over the standing line at a

45-degree angle. While grasping the loop with your fingers, twist the two wires six times, ensuring they are even and tightly wrapped. To complete the haywire, make four barrel wraps by crossing the tag end perpendicular to the standing line. Though you could trim the wire with clippers, breaking the wire by bending it over itself will leave you with a clean and smooth edge. With practice, you will be able to tie a haywire in seconds in anything from #4 to #15 wire, though with anything heavier you might need



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to make the twists with a pair of pliers.

When crafting a kingfish rig for drifting or slow trolling live baits, start with a 24-inch section of #4 wire and attach a ball bearing swivel with a haywire twist. On the other end, attach an inline J hook, with hook size depending on bait size. Next, cut a length of #4 wire for your stinger and attach a 4/0 3x treble hook with another haywire twist. Because kingfish often slash the tail-end of their adversaries, and the full-load of your fight may rely solely on your treble, it's best to use a heavier gauge wire for the stinger component. Attach the stinger rig to the lead hook-eye.

Single strand wire has been around for a long time and has helped many anglers subdue countless tournament-winning king mackerel. It's versatile and extremely easy to tie with a simple haywire twist, unlike titanium which requires a crimp or knot. When executed properly, a haywire twist results in a connection that's stronger than the breaking strength of the wire itself. During an epic battle, you can be sure that your haywire will be the last element to fail. Conversely, improperly crimped connections are susceptible to slippage or breakage.

As developing tackle and gear infiltrates the market, it remains consistent that connections from mainline to leader and hook are the most critical components to successful sport fishing. Much effort is focused on stealth and finesse presentation, yet for anglers chasing predators with jaws lined with sharp

teeth, the stealth afforded by monofilament and fluorocarbon is excluded as it will only result in lost tackle and opportunities wasted. Game fish like wahoo, mackerel and sharks can destroy inferior tackle with ease and it's critical anglers apply rigging techniques that comprise a bite-proof leader system aptly presented for the situation at hand.

When tournament-winning king-fish are in the line of sight is it more effective to rig with titanium or single strand stainless wire leader? That's the \$100,000 question and, in reality, they both provide inherent advantages and disadvantages. You may second-guess your approach when a smoker king bites through your wire but remember the importance of confidence.









Pro's Tip



Pedal Down

Precision Kayak Trolling | NOEL VICK

► WE'VE ALL WATCHED TOURNAMENT ANGLERS

carefully dissect a body of water inching along with an electric trolling motor. But one thing you don't see are bass boats pulling baits. Cardinal sin? Many believe so, and trolling is indeed not allowed in most tournaments. But for the rest of us, it is perfectly legal and highly effective.

Not to say that you should troll a lake's entire perimeter as your main plan of attack, but in an effort to maximize time on the water it provides a great way to fish your way from spot to spot and discover new frontiers. This is particularly true for bass fishermen portaging pedal-drive kayaks. Turn in an instant, go into reverse, coast with the wind or quickly speed up the troll.

For every species and condition, there is a style of trolling and a selection of gear that fits the bill. Hardbaits – crankbaits, stickbaits, wakebaits and lipless baits – are the de facto choice for kayak anglers. The wide array of sizes and depth ranges available surely accommodate all conceivable fish-holding levels of the water column. Surely, you can blind troll or cover spans

between structure as monitored with GPS mapping, but to truly refine the troll, depth and fish-finding electronics are a must. My Hobie Pro Angler 14 (hobie.com) is outfitted with a 9-inch Raymarine Axiom (raymarine.com). This screen size is ideal for unstrained viewing and the definition from the unit's four available sonar channels, including RealVision 3D, is spellbinding.

For suspended fish, tie on a crankbait that rides slightly above midway through the water column, basing specific selection on a lure's maximum running depth. Mark the top of the school as you come through and choose a bait that rides just above their snouts. It's no secret that fish, especially suspended bass, rise to the occasion. Driving a lure through the center of the school can disturb them.

Your next consideration is gear. Employing the right tools is vital, particularly the rod. Choose nothing shorter than 7-feet, and longer is even better. The added length yields three advantages. Firstly, it lays lures further port and or starboard from the boat, which is important on turns so line doesn't wrap back around on vertically stored rods and other gear in the back of the boat. Secondly, after you get hooked up, you need a solid 7-feet to dance a fish around the bow. Lastly, for the most part, longer rods have more give in the tip section. This is especially important upon first impact. If too stiff, fish can tear away, especially at higher trolling speeds.

By far, my favorite trolling rods for bass are St. Croix's Mojo Glass series. Featuring the company's exclusive integrated Poly Curve mandrel technology and constructed of 100 percent linear S-glass, these moderate-action rods set effortlessly and automatically on the troll, sweeping with the strike and yielding the right amount of resistance to snare and hold fish.

Glass rods are especially effective when paired with braided line. I spool exclusively with Daiwa's J-Braid x8 in 30-pound test, an affordable and clean reeling line. Narrow-diameter braids better slice the water to achieve





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maximum diving depth. To that, braid doesn't arc like monofilament or fluorocarbon, which diminish connectivity between you and the fish, decreasing hook-setting power and eliminating the ability to see the lure's action as telegraphed by the rod tip.

Completing the connection to the bait, I tie in a 2- to 3-foot section of fluorocarbon leader material, finishing with a snap. The fluorocarbon leader bestows invisibility, keeping the fish's attention on the lure. Certainly, you can tie the leader directly to



the bait, but with the likelihood of frequent bait changes, snaps accelerate the process. And, in my opinion, snaps maximize lure action.

When it comes to kayak trolling, I like to place the lure a minimum of 150 feet behind the boat. This helps the lure achieve its deepest dive and improves your odds when fish are wary in exceptionally clear water. Something else to consider regarding stated lure depth curves is that the fullest depth as rated on lure packaging and manufacturer websites are generally based

For big bass hunting along shorelines, the classic wobble of a diving crankbait has proven to be irresistible.



on casting with monofilament line. Inherently, because of their narrower diameter and subsequent reduced water resistance, braids bust the curve and plunge deeper, often substantially.

To that point, I physically test running depths and categorize my tackle box as such. Testing means taking a bait with a reported running depth and comparing it to reality. For example, with your electronics, mark a span of water in 15 feet. Troll a lure labeled with a maximum depth of 15 feet, and betting odds say it'll knock bottom. So, continue trolling deeper and deeper until you clear the bottom. That is the lure's true running depth for this application.

Proper trolling speed can be determined quite simply as well. For my exploits, 1.5 to 2.5 MPH is the established range. The exact speed can be further refined and dictated by how fish react. Faster also means driving the bait slightly deeper.

That brings me to specific lure selection. A great starter kit includes Rapala's DT (Dive's To) Series. Not only do they catch bass, but the clever collection was also designed for easy choosing. The DT-16, for example, is rated to reach 16 feet. Now I can tell you a DT-16 easily achieves 20 feet when trolled with the above-mentioned equipment. Again, supporting the notion of testing running depths in real time. My personal stash includes several other brands and the LIVETARGET Shad crankbait is a verified bass destroyer. Available in two-sizes, the anatomically spot-on crankbait is often my go-to choice. Bagley's precision-balanced, balsa-built Sunny B and Shallow Sunny B are true-running fish catchers as well. Bandit 200 and 300 series round out my essential collection.

Although largemouth-centric, the essentials of the prescribed techniques translate to many fresh and saltwater species, only requiring the refinement of equipment and lure selection.



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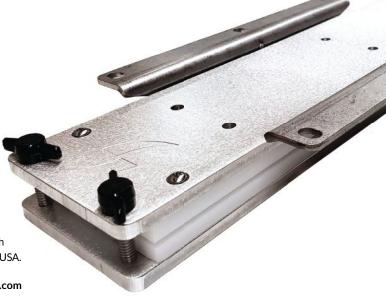
Gear Guide

ShuttleSlide SS-9-HD

Whether it's their innovation, creativity or dependable performance, ShuttleSlide's quick release retractable trolling motor mounts are crafted with precision to easily and safely slide your motor inboard, past the rub rail. By eliminating typical trolling motor overhang, ShuttleSlide's heavy duty mounts provide protection for your motor during transport, launching/loading, docking and storage. Four standard models offer 7 to 9 inches of retraction with customization accommodating up to 18 inches of inboard travel. Made in the USA.

- ▶ 15.25"x3.5"
- ► Lifetime Warranty

shuttleslide.com \$229.99





SPRO Zebra Glow Power Bucktail

SPRO has long been a household name among worldwide anglers thanks to bulletproof terminal tackle and an array of reliable gear, but the new Zebra Glow Power Bucktail takes the innovation a step further. SPRO's addition of a unique Zebra Glow pattern to the time-tested bucktail jig is sure to evoke savage strikes from aggressive predators with a natural gliding action that accurately resembles fleeing prey. Using ample amounts of bucktail hair, 3D contours on the jighead and glow material in the skirt, this jig will keep catching fish as long as you can keep casting.

- ▶ 8/0 Gamakatsu O'Shaughnessy hook
- Available in 4 sizes

spro.com \$10.99-\$13.50

Gamakatsu Treble SP Medium Heavy Hypershield Hook

Gamakatsu has anglers on all bodies of water covered with a mas-

sive selection of sharp, durable hooks. Among the latest additions to the large collection is the Treble SP Medium Heavy Hypershield Hook, providing added strength and durability to crankbaits. Along with the hook's noted strength thanks to the manufacturer's Tournament Grade Wire, its Hypershield corrosion-resistant properties are also appreciated by widespread anglers who truly put their tackle to the test. Hook replacement is quick and easy with Gamakatsu's Magic Eye, allowing users to make a hook change in seconds.

- ▶ 4, 5 or 6 packs
- Available in 6 sizes

gamakatsu.com \$8.29-\$9.49



Nautical Design Inc. Rocket Launcher

The perfect work station for serious offshore anglers, Nautical Design's new rocket launcher delivers 2-in-1 value with a 40-gallon livewell or multi-tier tackle cabinet. This versatile product also allows buyers to customize the prep area and amount of rod holders included. Situated up against the transom of your vessel, this do-it-all rocket launcher truly maximizes cockpit space by keeping everything you need in an easily-accessible location. Additionally, it can be installed on an existing rocket launcher or fighting chair's deck plate.

- ▶ Durable fiberglass construction
- Custom gelcoat colors available

nauticaldesigninc.com MSRP: N/A

Gear Guide

Daiwa Dark Water

Designed with Florida fishermen in mind, Daiwa's new line of Dark Water rods includes species-specific blanks with a total of 21 options in the collection. HVF rod-building technology results in a lighter blank while maintaining a soft tip and powerful backbone. Additionally, the slight parabolic bend allows anglers to put a great deal of heat on stubborn game fish without damaging the rod. Backed by a 5-year limited warranty, these rods are built with high-quality components including Fuji Backstop reel seats, carbon fiber slick butts and comfortable EVA grips. Excellent options for competitive kingfish and sailfish teams.

- ▶ Spinning and conventional options available
- Hook keeper included

daiwa.com Starting at \$179.99



Diamond Fishing Fish Saver

With descending devices now required for anglers when releasing bottom fish, Diamond has come through with the all new Fish Saver. This release device is simple, easy to use and extremely effective with no moving parts or triggers. Barotrauma is common when bottom fishing, but the Fish Saver allows anglers to quickly return their unwanted quarry to the seafloor. With a barbless hook and a design that allows a weight to attach easily, the fish lunges through the water column, compressing the trapped air and reversing the effects of barotrauma. Additionally, the rapid descent runs water through the fish's gills and revives it on the way down.

- ▶ Elongated barbless upside-down hook
- Works on multiple fish simultaneously

diamondfishing.com \$25.99

FSF Gear Multi Function Pliers

Reliable pliers are necessary tools for anglers in all pursuits, particularly when it comes to jig fishing. Florida Sport Fishing's allnew Technique-Specific Multi Function Stainless Steel Split Ring/Fishing Pliers offer excellent value, with long-lasting durability thanks to a Teflon-coated, corrosion-resistant 430 forged stainless steel exterior. Furthermore, comfort is guaranteed with non-slip contoured grips. Their value as split ring pliers stands on its own, but this versatile tool also provides crimping capabilities, replaceable cutters and a convenient knot-cinching feature. Lanyard and sheath included.

▶ 148 grams

▶ 7.3"x3"

fsfgear.com \$21.00

Native Salt Baits Original Salt Clam

Bait is a key consideration in any fishery, and Native Salt makes it easy for anglers to simply grab a bag and go fishing with the Original Salt Clam. Thanks to a proprietary salt blend, these clams are guaranteed to stay fresh indefinitely when kept refrigerated, and even maintain freshness when left in a hot car for weeks! The resealable bag makes it convenient for anglers to simply store what they don't use for another day. Pompano, redfish, permit and more are all noted clam-eaters, and Native Salt provides anglers with one of the simplest and most effective methods of presenting these proven baits.

5 oz. package

► Heavy-duty resealable bag

nativesaltbaits.com \$10.99



33



Choosing the Best Outboard for your Skiff

STAFF REPORT





► FOR MANY YEARS, INSHORE ANGLERS RELIED ON CARBURETED TWO-STROKE OUTBOARDS, mainly because of their power-to-weight ratios, fewer moving parts and impressive torque at low RPM. They were simple powerhouses that anglers preferred over the up-and-coming computerized four-strokes just hitting stride. While many top pros and weekend warriors still prefer to race around with a two-stroke on the transom, when compared to modern four-strokes the differences in performance, emission and weight are ever so slight due to rapidly increasing technologies adopted by leading outboard manufacturers.

wo- and four-stroke outboards utilize many of the same principles, yet they feature very different engineering and mechanics, which results in inherent advantages, disadvantages and limitations. Avid flats fishermen who are proponents of two-strokes claim multiple benefits, including advantages in hole shot, easy servicing, lightweight attributes and increased top end speed, but times are changing. With Evinrude recently collapsing to COVID-19, the two-stroke is in fact a dying breed. The newest middleweight powerhouses combine quiet efficiency and clean operation, while also offering tremendous hole shot, unrivaled mid-range punch and excellent top speed not common to four-strokes of years past.

Choosing the ideal motor for an inshore vessel is among the most important considerations to ensure optimum performance and the process for finding

that perfect fit, while sometimes painstaking, is well worth the time and effort. Considering it will most likely be your only means of propulsion, it's in your best interest to make an educated purchasing decision. More so than any other vessel category, technical poling skiffs designed to draft inches demand perfect balance to float and run shallow.

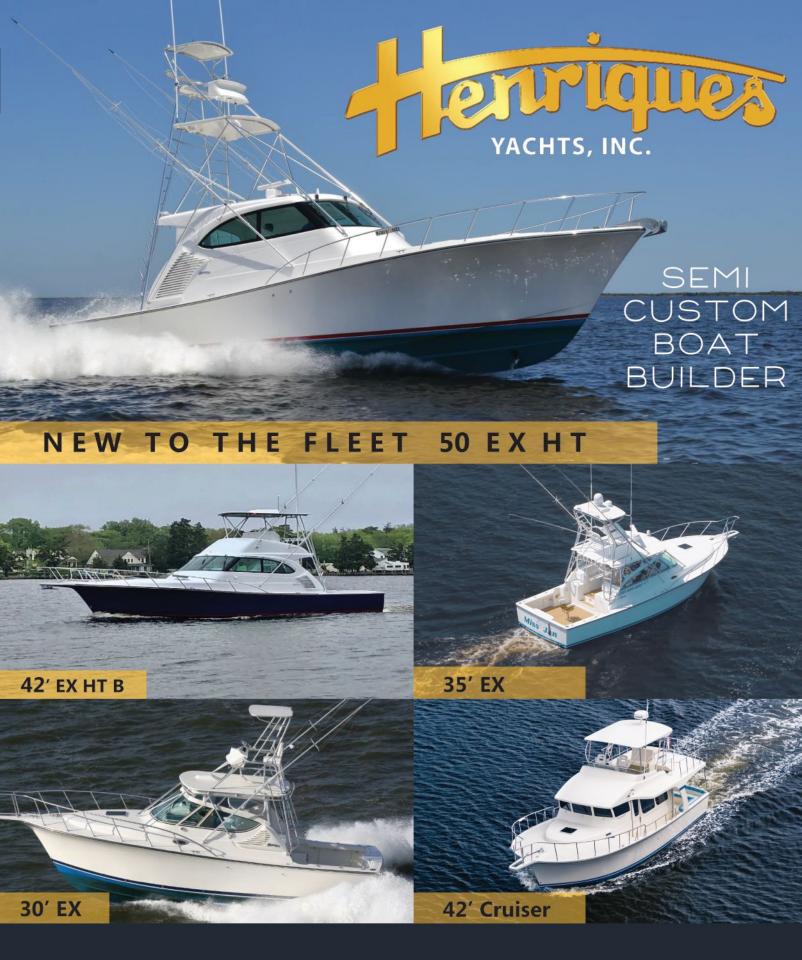
As fishermen, we have our own needs depending on the venues fished and explored, which vary greatly within the state, as well as the applications used to target specific species in their respective domains. The poling skiff has long been a staple among Florida's widespread inshore fishing community, and this iconic, yet simple, platform is still very much prevalent in shallow water fisheries statewide and beyond.

For most diehard anglers who look to hop atop the poling platform once they reach the shallows, weight is a huge concern. The lower end of the optimum range for a 17-foot skiff sits somewhere between 50 and 70 HP, but with the right prop you can harness the power of every horse. For many fishermen, the ability to shed some weight and float even ¾ of an inch shallower provides significant benefits.

With various engine manufacturers producing reliable mid-range outboards with different specifications and ratings, choosing the appropriate power for a bay boat, flats skiff or bass boat can be challenging. Each manufacturer brings its own unique benefits to the table, leaving anglers to decide what's best for their needs. Ultimately, you need to be the one who decides which outboard is the right fit for your boat. As a buyer, it's important to watch out for sales tactics that push a particular brand for the wrong reasons. Word of mouth and social media are powerful tools, but you need to be able to extract information objectively and apply it to your unique situation.







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Made in the USA



Power-Up

Suzuki's (suzukimarine.com) mid-range outboards are seen with regularity throughout inshore venues across the state. Long praised by shallow water anglers for their reliability and longevity, Suzuki continues to innovate and develop outboards that are highly desirable across coastal communities worldwide. Among the various models available, the In-Line 4 series offers an impressive collection of mid-range motors starting with the DF60A, weighing just 229 pounds. The DF70A packs more of a punch with an additional 10 HP, but the 114-pound increase in weight is something certain shallow water anglers might want to avoid. With either option, owners can expect impressive fuel efficiency with the engine's proven 3-cylinder design, thanks to Suzuki's Lean Burn Control System, which predicts fuel needs according to operating conditions and affords anglers an expanded range amid the backcountry.





Power-Up

Mercury (mercurymarine.com) has the perfect engine for any vessel, and the all-new Mercury Racing 60R (mercuryracing.com) is the ideal option for the technical skiff operator. Weighing in at 268 pounds, this powerhouse achieves 6300 rpm at wide open throttle to increase hole shot and allow for a wider range of suitable propellers. While the outboard's impressive hole shot translates to excellent acceleration across the board, flats aficionados have a greater appreciation for this particular attribute, as it allows them to get their platforms on plane amid mere inches of water before any damage can be done to the delicate substrate. Another important advantage provided by the 60R is its 4.25-inch diameter, high-thrust gearcase that handles a greater prop-blade area than a standard gearcase, providing more lift and improved handling at higher speeds.

MERCURY

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World Cat has raised the bar with superior finish work and attention to detail, ensuring unparalleled performance in a package the most discerning boater will appreciate.



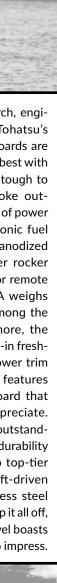
Power-Up

Thanks to dedicated research, engineering and development, Tohatsu's (tohatsu.com) mid-range outboards are situated among the industry's best with long-lasting durability that is tough to beat. The MFS60A four-stroke outboard is a perfect combination of power and efficiency utilizing electronic fuel injection, dual intake valves, anodized pistons and a modified roller rocker arm. Available in either tiller or remote control models, the MFS60A weighs an impressive 217 pounds, among the lowest in its class. Furthermore, the 21-amp alternator output, built-in freshwater flushing system and power trim and tilt are just a few of the features provided by this sleek outboard that owners will undoubtedly appreciate. In addition to the MFS60A's outstanding fuel economy, long-term durability is also a guarantee thanks to top-tier components like the camshaft-driven trochoid oil pump and stainless steel water pump housing liner. To top it all off, this affordable mid-range marvel boasts a sleek new look that is sure to impress.

> it's never a bad idea to take a sea-trial and get a feel not only for the engine itself, but associated factors like throttles, steering and noise output. While online reviews and feedback from existing owners is certainly valuable, experience on the water is the best indication of an engine's aptitude. Maintenance

0

is something that can't be overlooked either, and prospective owners need to consider the requirements for keeping their outboards functioning flawlessly. With so many reputable options in today's mid-range market, you can bet that the perfect power option for your unique craft is out there.



Engine selection is one of the most

important steps of the boat ownership

process. Whether you're re-powering

an existing platform or deciding which

option will grace the transom of a brand-

new boat, it's imperative that you take all

aspects of mid-range outboard perfor-

mance into consideration. Additionally,



See who and what's out there. Receive both Class A and B signals from other AIS-equipped vessels and base stations, all while your own dynamic information is being transmitted.

Plug-and-play with NMEA 2000™ connections to tie in with your existing network of safety equipment: gps plotter, radar or Icom VHF radios. Truly, a safety at sea solution.

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- > USB Connectivity
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- > Same Size as the MA-500TR



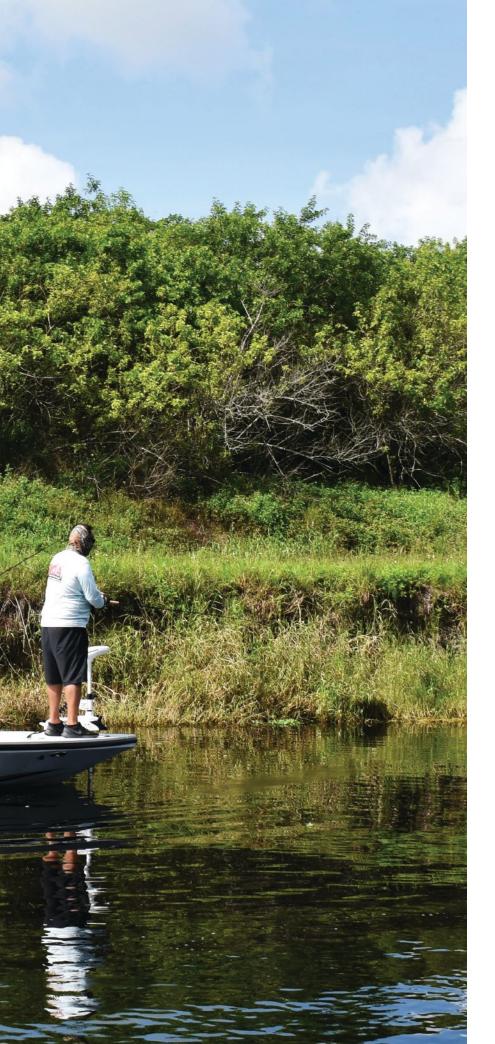
Select between navigation and night mode screens



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CRISSCROSSING THROUGHOUT THE SOUTHERN HALF OF FLORIDA

are over 2.000 miles of freshwater canals that flow in most directions, except north. A few originate in Central Florida and their prevalence increases further south throughout Okeechobee County and the Everglades until reaching the Keys. While canals serve to connect navigational waterbodies in most lakes, the primary function of Florida canals is to provide drainage by diverting large volumes of rainwater in an effort to prevent flooding within developed areas. While these narrow, channelized waterbodies may appear as an endless analogous challenge for locating largemouth bass, the good news is that, with its minimal variance in bottom topography, identifying zones that will produce fish isn't as difficult as one may think.

nown as the land of exotics, the balmy tropical canals of South Florida offer a wealth of peacock bass and clown knife action year-round. But what isn't well known is that within these channelized convevances is some of the best largemouth bass fishing in the state. The Palm Beach County Chain of Lakes, beginning in West Palm and running south through lakes Clarke, Osborne, Eden and Ida near Delrav Beach, is a 30 mile stretch of nutrient-rich water that produces plenty of lunker-sized largemouth despite its diverse population of exotics. Bisected by hundreds of residential canals with miles of Water Management District-maintained inflows, the chain's lake bottom contains a deep linear trough called the West Palm Beach Canal that spans north and south throughout. Spoil deposits left from the waterway's construction have formed bottom undulations attracting largemouth during late summer and fall when baitfish populations are high. Unlike a natural watershed, these urban canals require continuous oversight. This is why you will



sporadically encounter pump stations, culverts and locks to assist in adjusting the flow when deemed necessary.

"The largemouth in the main lake system generally prefer grass lines, mud bottoms, deep holes and heavily vegetated areas," explained Captain Ed Zyak of D.O.A. Lures, while casting his brand's purple and black 7-inch worm along the high bank of a connecting canal to the chain. "But during times when the locks and spillways from Lake Okeechobee are open, there can be a lot of water movement in these canals and fish will be concentrated close to where the flow converges with the main lake channel."

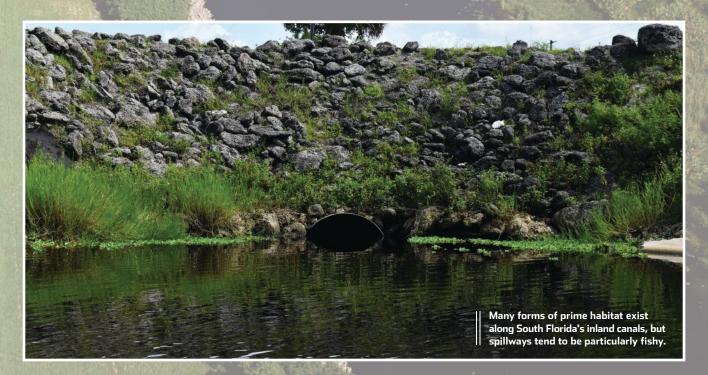
The network of South Florida canals found throughout St. Lucie, Martin, Palm Beach and Broward counties encompass hundreds of linear miles and are designed for drainage and flood control with near vertical sidewalls. Inorganic manmade structures like riprap, galvanized culvert crossings and shore-stabilizing structures

are the first points to look for when cruising canals either by boat or on foot. Riprap is a term used for the material consisting of rocks and boulders placed on shorelines to prevent erosion and provide stabilization, generally around discharge pipes. With time, the large rocks and material placed along the canal slide down the side slope and spread around the base at the bottom of the canal. Shakey head jigs, Ned rigs and drop shotting are almost a guarantee for structure-oriented bass hanging in these areas as vegetative growth is usually limited.

Other prime locations for attracting forage and predators alike are where a mix of current, overhangs, culverts, docks and inflows occur. Washout areas, where a confluence of incoming water from summer storm discharges mixes with canals, create slightly deeper pockets of cooler water that generally contain higher DO (dissolved oxygen) levels in contrast to the sometimes-stagnant water within many channels not moving large volumes. Texas-rigged worms and

subsurface twitchbaits will produce, especially where vegetation meets flowing water. These zones can sometimes be minimal in size but, once located, contribute to slightly higher levels of DO. Any natural cover found in a canal, whether littoral zone grasses such as maiden cane or bulrush or floating plants like hyacinths and topped-out hydrilla, will often produce fish, particularly when discovered between miles of bare bank channels.

One of the biggest secrets about canal fishing is how many early season professional bass tournaments have been won by targeting these areas. Touring Pros Shaw Grigsby, Harris Chain native John Cox and Rich Howes have all shared in the success of targeting canals, especially during the early part of the year. "On the Harris chain during winter and early spring, bass move off the main lake body and up into the canals to spawn," Howes said. In the tropical climate of South Florida, the largemouth spawn begins as early as December, but within the subtropical conditions of Central Florida, it starts closer to



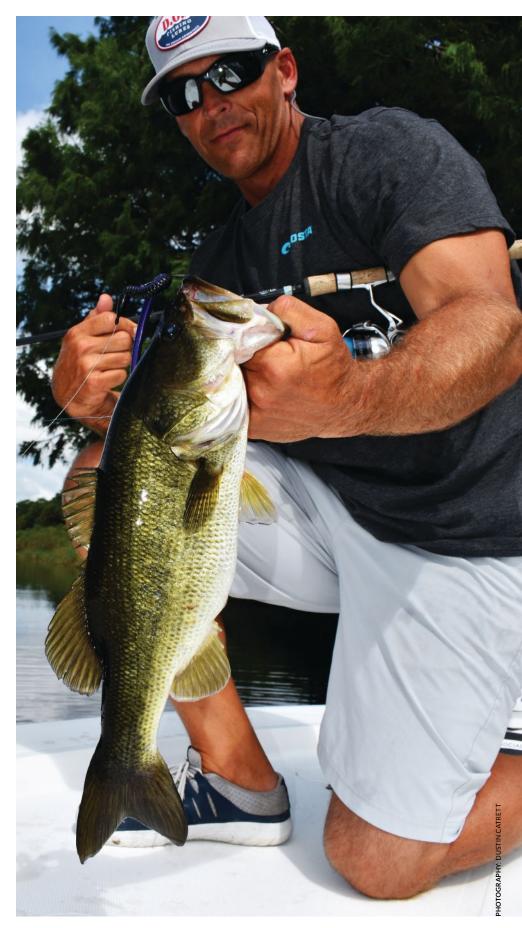




January. During the prespawn, egg-heavy females and males alike migrate into the protected canals and coves away from the windblown points of the main lake to begin fanning nests in preparation to spawn.

"These fish will bed all along the shallow edge of the canals, but you'll find a higher concentration of beds anywhere there is access to deeper water," Howes explained. The Haines Creek canal connecting Lake Eustis to Lake Griffin is where Grigsby found success, winning the Bassmaster Elite Series Sunshine Showdown back in 2011, by connecting with a few heavy prespawn females. Just to the north of this canal on the northwest side of Lake Eustis are several more residential canals hydrologically connected to the Lake's famous Gator Hole that's produced the majority of its giant bass for more than the last decade. The 200-foot-deep sinkhole located within a natural canal is surrounded by an expansive grass flat that's inundated in stump fields and holds a very high density of bass. Mastering the seasonal patterns and techniques for canal fishing can pay dividends within the Harris Chain, particularly due to the large number of navigational waterways connecting each of the seven lakes. The established largemouth pattern that begins with the spawn cycle in the canals during the prespawn phase usually begins around the first full moon in January, depending on the year, after which the fish move out to the main lake bodies.

Key spots to target are the Ninth Street canals in the Dead River on Big Lake Harris and the long clear channel of the Apopka Beauclair Canal system located near the southwestern shore of Lake Beauclair, where for the last five years large-scale water restoration efforts have been underway, resulting in cleaner, clear water that during the winter months offers spectacular sight fishing for bedding bass.



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- · 24v in to 12v out · 12v in to 36v out
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What it Takes to Bag Monster Mackerel

STAFF REPORT

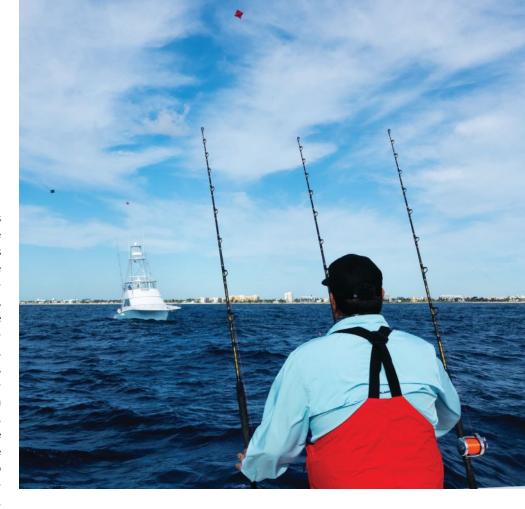
▶ FLORIDA'S WIDESPREAD BLUE WATER ANGLERS have a variety of pelagic predators to target, from sailfish in the southeast region to yellowfin tuna in the far reaches of the Gulf of Mexico and many more. However, king mackerel continue to be perhaps the most frequently pursued game fish throughout the state's offshore domains. So much so that several very high-paying tournament trails have been created, featuring elite captains and crews from the Sunshine State and beyond. Given the statewide abundance of these fish and their often-aggressive feeding behavior, many weekend warriors can venture a few miles offshore and manage a few bites. However, it takes a heightened level of skill and experiese to consistently bag the biggest and baddest kingfish of them all.

round Florida, kingfish tactics vary greatly and while there are many proven methods anglers trust to catch these fish, it's important to know the differences among them. More importantly, anglers need to understand where and when to employ certain methods to achieve success in this fishery.

Out of Hillsboro Inlet, our home port, kingfish maintain a year-round presence, receiving relentless pressure from the growing community of local anglers. Seasonal weather patterns influence important factors like water temperature and prevalent forage, so it's important to adjust your approach according to the conditions presented to you by Mother Nature.

At any time of year, trolling can be an incredibly effective technique for many of the pelagic species in the area, particularly kingfish. However, "trolling" can mean many different things and there are multiple methods to the madness. Traditional spreads of surface-running baits and lures like ballyhoo, chuggers and feathers have historically been able to deliver their fair share of king mackerel bites, but that can't be your only approach. It's never a bad idea to cover multiple levels of the water column while dragging hooked enticements, and kings are notorious for slamming offerings below the surface.

There are several ways to get your baits and lures deeper in the water, including trolling leads and wire main line on bent-butt rods, but planers are perhaps the simplest, most effective and most popular means of sub-surface presentations. Available in a range of sizes, these flat metal plates feature built-in weights that plunge beneath the surface and maintain their depth as the trolling vessel stays in motion. Various tackle manufacturers across the industry offer planers, but we've found that Old Salty planers are the best in



the business. With the planer attached to the main line and a shock leader of 80 to 100 feet of monofilament attached to the other side of the planer, a bite will trip the vertically running plate. This alerts anglers to the action and allows them to fight the hooked fish with minimal resistance.

Planer fishing is a time-tested approach that won't go out of style anytime soon, but to bag the biggest kings, top-tier tournament teams won't leave the dock without live bait. The ability to literally match the hatch will get you a long way in almost any fishery, but large mackerel are uniquely adept hunters capable of blistering bursts of speed. Furthermore, their powerful jaws lined with razor-sharp teeth allow them to make quick work of larger prey items, including various tuna, jack and even smaller mackerel species. With this in mind, know that acquiring live bait is a good place to start, but the manner in which you present those baits is of significant importance as well.

Here in South Florida, kite fishing is a go-to tactic that is incredibly effective on a variety of species. Tournament teams and weekend warriors alike deploy live baits under kites throughout the winter and spring to capitalize on the world-class sail-fish migration taking place annually on the edge of the Gulf Stream. But what many local anglers don't realize is that kite fishing is effective year-round, even when the southbound sails are long gone. Windless summer days often deter fishermen from flying kites, but it's worth your while to fill a balloon with helium to get your kites up in the air, as presenting a spread of live baits struggling at the surface rings the proverbial dinner bell for nearby kings.

Conversely, there are times when



54

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presenting baits deeper in the water column is the key to success. This happens often during the warmest months of the year, when surging water temperatures keep predators hunting at cooler depths. It's not uncommon for anglers to encounter a hot surface bite beneath the kites early in the morning before the heat sets in, and then again just before sunset when things cool down again. However, during the middle of the day, downriggers provide an effective means of deploying live baits at specific depths. Attaching a sinker to your main line before the leader will also allow you to send baits deeper, but the swinging lead could present problems when attempting to land a stubborn smoker. Additionally, many downriggers allow anglers to choose exactly how deep their bait will be set, while anglers using weights are forced to make an educated guess. Whether kite fishing or deploying downriggers, it's never a bad idea to set a few flat lines to maximize your chances of connecting with a king.

Anytime you specifically target kingfish with live bait, rigging with bite-proof wire leader is essential. Historically, anglers have trusted coffee-colored stainless wire that is easy to use and can be rigged in seconds by mastering the simple haywire twist. While stainless is still a popular choice given its affordability and ease of use, the most recent trend among top tournament teams is titanium wire. Whether we're fishing a tournament or simply trying to put a few smokers on ice, we trust American Fishing Wire (afwfishing.com) Titanium Tooth Proof, Single Strand Leader Wire in 40 lb. Titanium is stealthier and more flexible than stainless and while that presents benefits once baits have been deployed, the rigging process is a bit more involved. Instead of performing a traditional haywire twist, anglers need to use the corresponding sleeves to crimp their rigs. In our case, we use AFW's Size #2 Single Barrel Sleeves to secure a 12- to 18-inch section of wire to a small barrel swivel at one end, and the hook at the other.

To do this, simply run the wire through the top end of the sleeve, loop it around and run it back through the bottom end, then run the remaining tag end down the top end of the sleeve one more time, finishing with a firm squeeze of your crimping tool.

in the process is determining hook size, and that determination should be based on the size of your bait. Baitfish options for kingfish run the gamut and include goggle eye, blue runner, speedo, threadfin herring and pilchard. For something as small as a pilchard, a 5/0 hook is ideal, while we bump it up to 7/0 for goggle eye. We use either VMC's (rapala.com/vmc) 9299 Octopus Hooks, which are offset and feature a longer shank, or 7265

One of the last steps

O'Shaughnessy Live Bait Hook, featuring a shorter shank and in-line design. A single J hook is usually sufficient when kite fishing, because anglers are afforded the opportunity to drop their baits back to the fish when they bite, allowing them to fully eat the bait before setting the hook. On flat lines and downriggers, however, stinger rigs comprising an added treble hook on a small strand of wire ensure that short-striking kings are hooked, with the front J hook piercing the bait's nose and the stinger treble in the top of the back.

Regardless of tactic, your chances of success are significantly enhanced with healthy baits that emit vibrations through the water, driving nearby kings crazy. If your baits seem sluggish or worn out, there's a good chance they won't get bit. Otherwise, flawless rigging and bulletproof tackle should round out your approach. The king mackerel is undoubtedly one of Florida's most popular game fish, pursued by



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countless anglers. However, only a select few have dialed in their tactics to consistently land the true giants. Thankfully, with proper preparation and a keen understanding of prevalent conditions, monster mackerel can become a reality for you, too.

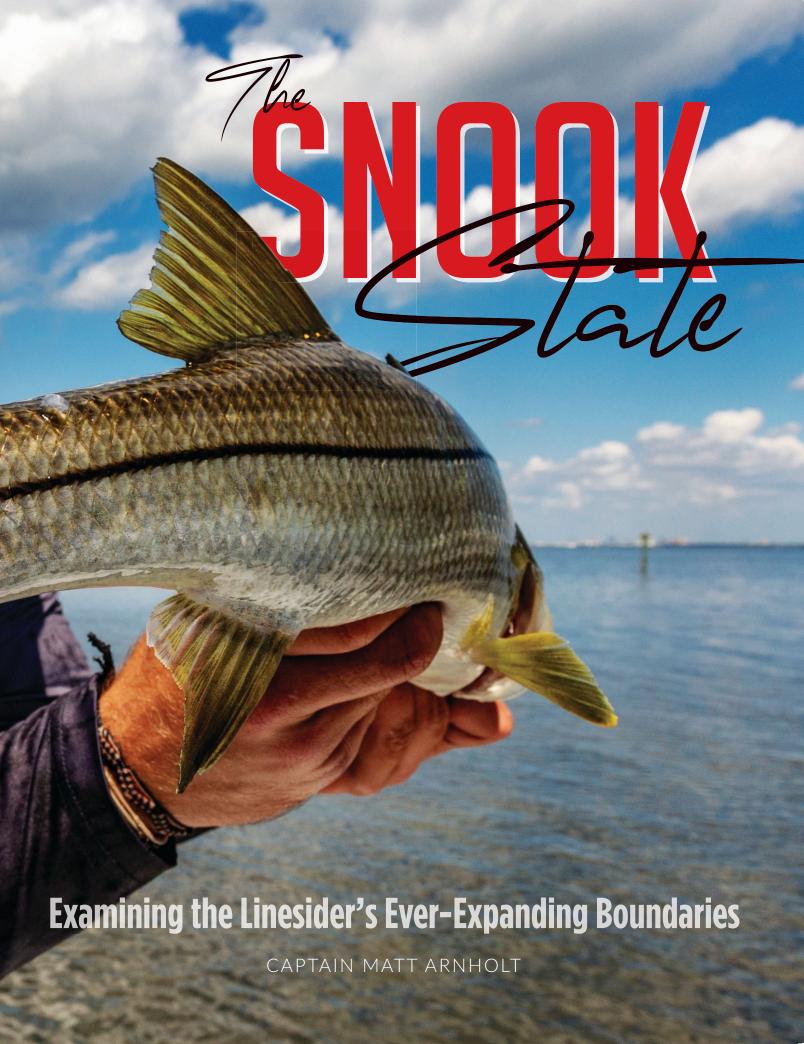
THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM

To capitalize on the early morning bite when the largest kings that lead their respective packs are the first to feed, today's tournament teams rely on three, four and sometimes even more top-tier outboards to achieve incredible speeds of up to 70 to 80 miles per hour, and even faster in some cases. This speed advantage is a huge benefit in competitive kingfish tournaments that feature "Bimini" starts, in which all participating vessels gather near the host inlet and disperse to the fishing grounds once the tournament has officially begun. The ability to reach these speeds also allows teams to maximize their fishing time before weigh-in, pushing it until the very last minute. For the weekend warrior in a small, single-outboard center console who's not fishing competitively, it pays to sacrifice a few hours of sleep to reach the fishing grounds before the crowds of boaters arrive.









► SNOOK ARE UNDOUBTEDLY REGARDED AS PREMIERE INSHORE

GAME FISH across many regions of the Sunshine State and beyond, as passionate anglers pursue these electrifying targets with incredible fervor. However, these fish have become a hot topic of conversation among many in the world of sport fishing for reasons other than their quality as top-tier sport fish. Regardless, snook have continued to amuse inshore enthusiasts across many of the alluring shallow-water venues and habitats Florida has to offer, challenging pursuers to find, fool and land these keen predators. Perhaps more wide-ranging than the "where" is the "how" when it comes to linesiders, as anglers virtually statewide have dialed in an impressive variety of tactics used to get tight.

ommonly referred to as "soap fish" by anglers many years ago, the snook was considered a trash fish to a degree due to the soapy flavor of its flesh. However, once it was discovered that these unappetizing fillets quickly became delicacies by simply removing the skin, people changed their collective opinion toward this fish. In today's angling landscape, snook is one of the most sought-after game fish species in Florida thanks to its fantastic table fare and equally satisfying appeal as a sporty light tackle escale fat snook (Centropomus mexicanus). game fish. While there was a time when anglers believed snook were largely limited to the southern half of the state because of their noted intolerance for colder water temperatures, it seems their boundaries are slowly expanding, allowing more anglers to get in on the action.

Several different snook species roam Florida's shallows, but common snook (Centropomus undecimalis) grow the largest and are more regularly caught than the other species. While all snook species display similar general characteristics including coloration and the distinct black horizontal line spanning the length of the fish, the common snook can be distinguished by its more prominently sloping forehead and protruding lower jaw. Other snook species that occur in Florida include swordspine snook (Centropomus enciferus), tarpon snook (Centropomus pectinatus), smallscale fat snook (Centropomus parallelus) and larg-

Perhaps the big snook capital of the world, southeast Florida boasts an incredible fishery with regard not only to the size potential of the fish caught, but also in abundance. While it can still be a challenge to put together a successful day of snook fishing in this region, given the pressure put on these fish by area anglers, the coastline spanning Biscayne Bay to Sebastian Inlet possesses all of the

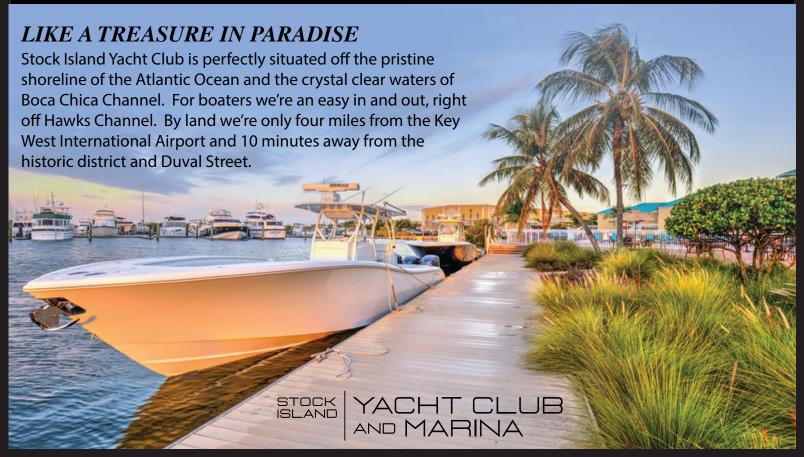
While spinning gear is the top choice for many anglers, don't discount the ability of a delicately-placed fly to prevent spooking wary snook.

60



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necessary components, including ideal water temperatures, plentiful prey and a host of habitats where these fish thrive. Certainly, prevailing weather conditions and time of year are huge influences on snook fishing and behavior, as linesiders continuously transition from mangrove shorelines, to beaches, to bridges, to deep area inlets and beyond. The key to cracking the code certainly involves finding the fish, but then anglers must read the conditions and present their offerings to accurately mimic the forage species that snook happen to be feeding on in that particular situation. This need to match the conditions largely applies to snook fisheries around the state, but this region is unique in its requirements.

While snook remain present in the region year-round, the changing of seasons prompts these fish not only to bounce around from one form of habitat to the next, but also to alter their feeding

behavior. During the summer months, southeast Florida snook can be found along area beaches as they spawn. To fuel their annual spawn, these fish hunt aggressively along the shoreline, where anglers can successfully connect with trophy linesiders using a variety of different methods. Because snook along the shore aren't clinging tight to any significant structure and the water is generally clear, it's recommended that anglers scale back their tackle to light spinning gear spooled with braided line and completed with 20 to 30 lb. fluorocarbon leader material. Whether you're tossing a small baitfish imitation in the suds or soaking a live pilchard on a small circle hook, stealth is the name of the game in this pursuit. Furthermore, you'll want to walk the shoreline early in the morning or just before sunset, when beach crowds and sweltering heat won't hinder your efforts.

This steady beachfront action usually lasts well into the fall season, particularly during the coming months, when the annual mullet migration makes its way down the coast and snook await prime feeding opportunities amid the sandy shallows. Anglers can also find huge numbers of snook concentrated near area inlets and bridges, where rapid current funnel forage throughout each tide cycle. Live croaker, mullet and pilchard rarely go ignored when there are snook present in these venues.

Conversely, in the wintertime, snook seek refuge from cooler water temperatures in stained area backwaters that retain heat from the sun. While snook must still feed throughout the winter to survive, it's important to understand that these fish are sensitive to colder water and, as a result, are more lethargic in their predatory behavior. During the coolest months of the year, anglers



are better off working lures very slowly, as snook won't willingly expend a great deal of energy to track down a fast-moving target. Large swimbaits like the Stretch 9" from Spooltek (abandofanglers.com) are deadly effective this time of year, while the venerable flarehawk jig is never a bad option either.

Further south in the Florida Keys, trophy inshore targets like tarpon, bonefish and permit receive most of the attention from visiting and resident anglers alike, but snook occur along the historic island chain as well. However, clear water and substantial fishing pressure make these fish very wary and, although they can be caught with relative consistency, it is a difficult fishery to master and many of the inshore elite throughout the Keys prefer to pursue a grand slam on the flats.

However, within nearby Everglades National Park, snook is a staple

...walk the shoreline early in the morning or just before sunset...

year-round target for visiting anglers. Whether you begin your journey into the park from Flamingo, nearly 100 miles southwest of metropolitan Miami, or from the Keys by running north across Florida Bay, light tackle fishing in this remote stretch of shallows is second to none by many statewide standards. Along with redfish, seatrout, tarpon and many more trophy game fish, snook roam the widespread habitat within the park, which consists of lush mangroves, grass flats, backcountry creeks and pristine shorelines. Similar to populations

in other areas, ENP snook continuously search for a blend of comfortable water temperature, plentiful forage and ideal ambush points. During the summer, these fish take to open water shorelines where they spawn, gorging on baitfish. Here, 3- to 4-inch paddletail and splittail soft plastics pinned to jigheads work well, as does a live pilchard.

When air and water temperatures dip, snook invade the winding creeks within the unique Everglades terrain where the water is warmer and mangroves present logical areas for these fish to stage and pounce on unsuspecting prey. Large live shrimp will undoubtedly get you connected within these venues, though swift currents warrant the use of a jighead or splitshot to get your offering down to the fish.

Around the tip of the mainland up to southwest Florida, world-class snook fishing persists, albeit with a



legendary bodies of water like Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor, both known for producing trophy snook throughout the year. Like their counterparts around the state, Gulf Coast snook seek warmer water throughout the cooler months, riding out Florida's mild winter in the many residential canals within the region. During the day, docks and seawalls provide cover for snook; but at night, bright dock lights attract an abundance of forage, including shrimp and small baitfish. While you may see smaller snook silhouettes popping baits in the light, jumbo linesiders stalk their prey just beyond the shadow line. Casting a large live pinfish in the dark areas just outside the light range often elicits a strike, while artificial enthusiasts prefer slow-rolling big swimbaits near the bottom to get thumped.

As seasonal weather patterns shift, these fish, too, transition from their winter domains to open water along the shorelines of the Gulf Coast's many miles of beachfront shallows. However, this fishery is largely limited to early

morning and evening windows. During the heat of the day when the sun is shining brightest, focus your efforts on mangrove spoil islands and structures that provide shade, as snook

look to escape the heat. Tossing a topwater plug underneath overhanging mangroves is a good way not only to locate these fish, but also to experience one of the most explosive PHOTOGRAPHY: 7 SEAS MEDIA GROI











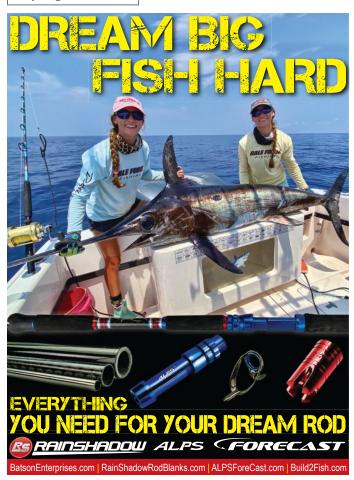


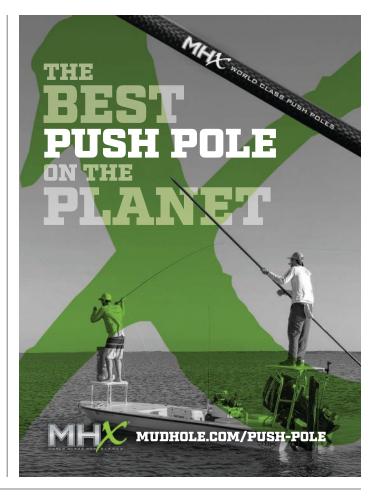
common snook in Florida. Though they have been known to range further north outside of their traditional geographical parameters, encounters and catches north of Florida's Nature Coast in the Gulf of Mexico and Cape Canaveral on the Atlantic side are growing exponentially. This expansion of snook populations can

ing and thriving in their new homes.

Many anglers throughout the Sunshine State recall the abnormally cold winter that took place in 2010, particularly referring to the resulting snook die-off. These fish generally prefer water temperatures ranging from 70 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, but many of the state's shallow water in many cases, have also become more prevalent as demonstrated by their expanded range. While this rebound is certainly a positive development regarding the overall health of this treasured fishery, it's imperative that anglers adhere to current regulations and release their caught snook carefully.









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THE SHIT SHITS

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SLOW PITCH JIGGING AFTER SUNDOWN

CAPTAIN MATT ARNHOLT



BY NOW, MANY AVID ANGLERS ARE WELL AWARE of the incredibly versatile and effective pursuit that is slow pitch jigging. If not, then it's in your best interest to familiarize yourself with the tactic, given its proven ability to ignite a hot bite in a notably wide range of offshore venues at nearly every level of the water column, particularly here in the Sunshine State. In fact, just out of our home port of Hillsboro Inlet on the southeast coast we've caught dozens of different game fish species including wahoo, blackfin tuna, sailfish and even swordfish, not to mention the smorgasbord of tasty bottom dwellers that have hit the ice thanks to our magic metals. But while slow pitch jiggers statewide and beyond have effectively demonstrated just how deadly this technique can be during the day, nighttime exploits provide opportunities of their own.



ight fishing is nothing new, as skilled anglers all over the world have become keenly aware of game fish feeding habits under the cover of darkness. Certainly, not every game fish out there is a viable nighttime target, but many of our most sought-after quarry remain active in some capacity from sunset to sunrise, some more than others. While it's not uncommon to see the inshore elite pursuing tarpon and snook in the wee hours of the morning or commercial captains at the swordfish grounds under the stars, few have ventured into the night with the sole purpose of slow pitch jigging.

Over the years, our readers and television viewers have seen us document our successful ventures to Pulley Ridge in the remote stretches of the Gulf of Mexico aboard the legendary Yankee Capts (yankeecapts.com), always returning to the dock with an impressive haul. Success in this fishery was once dictated by fresh bait and traditional bottom fishing tackle consisting of stout conventional outfits. However, in the last few years, we've witnessed a shift in tactics, with slow pitch jigging becoming perhaps the most popular technique. It began with one or two anglers every trip who spent the majority of their time at the rail slow pitch jigging, and recently its effectiveness in this particular venue became more common knowledge. Now, you can bet that almost every angler to step onto this legendary headboat, and others, has at least one slow pitch setup in their arsenal. While fishing natural bait on traditional tackle is still a winning formula, slow pitch jigging seems to be the new pursuit of choice for dedicated party boat anglers on multi-day trips toward the horizon.

"After countless hours spent at the rail compiling valuable experience, I've proven that snapper and grouper will readily clobber jigs under the



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cover of darkness. But success is often driven by more than just time of day, meaning that current, structure and an abundance of forage in the area is usually what drives an explosive jig bite, day or night," says Captain Mike Genoun, host of Florida Sport Fishing Television. Multiple episodes in the last few seasons have certainly supported this claim, with some of our most impressive mutton snapper, as well as red, black and scamp grouper, coming in the middle of the night while other anglers are snoring in their bunks.

As Captain Mike highlighted, the action can be hot at any hour of the day at Pulley Ridge. But the nighttime jig bite tends to be particularly intriguing. However, many anglers remain under the impression that fishing natural bait under the cover of darkness is superior to slow pitch jigging given the added scent appeal. Natural bait is certainly capable of outfishing slow pitch jigs in certain scenarios any time of day, but don't underestimate the ability of a properly presented slow pitch jig in the dark. This is the case not necessarily because of the glow emitted by

many of today's most popular jigs, but mainly because the targets we seek are skilled predators that are more than capable of devouring the baitfish, squid and more roaming the water column at night. Therefore, a slow pitch jig that resembles fleeing or injured prey emits vibrations that elicit explosive reaction strikes from nearby game fish. Choosing a jig that features plenty of glow can be advantageous at night, though there are more important factors to consider including profile, weight and shape of the jig that should be matched to prevalent conditions.

Benny Ortiz (instagram.com/mrben-nyortiz) was one of the earliest adopters of the technique in our region and, over the last few years, has become an authority on slow pitch jigging. Having fished both the highly pressured waters of southeast Florida as well as the relatively untouched fishing grounds at Pulley Ridge and beyond, Ortiz has a lot of valuable insight to offer regarding nighttime jigging in a variety of venues.

"Regarding technique, you really shouldn't be doing anything different at night versus during the day. If







...success is often driven by more than just time of day...

conditions like current and prevalent forage happen to change after dark then you should adjust your presentation accordingly as you would any time of day, but nightfall alone shouldn't cause you to completely shift gears," Ortiz explains. It should be noted that wherever he's fishing, Ortiz is predominantly targeting demersal species that live and feed near the bottom, most often snapper, grouper and tilefish. "Most places I fish, particularly at Pulley Ridge, blackfin tuna are common by-catch, showing greater prevalence at night given their adeptness at hunting in the dark," Ortiz says. "And while I like to keep one or two for spicy tuna rolls, these fish don't freeze well and I'm more interested in the bottom feeders."

That said, blackfin tuna are worthy adversaries and highly prized by many anglers of all skill levels. Furthermore, it is worth noting that these fish do, in fact, hunt effectively in the dark, making them excellent targets between sunset and sunrise. However, in Benny's years of experience and dedication to the craft that is slow pitch jigging, anecdotal evidence has continuously indicated that while snapper and grouper will certainly

pounce on a properly presented slow pitch jig at any hour of the night, the bottom bite has a tendency to slow down or at least become noticeably less consistent in the dark. "The only instance I can think of, besides the hot nighttime tuna bite, when things heat up after dark is when we fish the Tortugas," he says. "There, I've caught nice yellowtail snapper on small, 100to 150-gram jigs in the dark. However, as is often the case at that particular venue, sharks can be a major issue."

"Aboard the Yankee Capts when we embark on exciting, yet exhausting multi-day adventures to remote fishing grounds, sleep is not a priority but it is necessary to grab a few hours here and there," he explains. "So when most passengers are hesitant to go down to their bunks given the hot tuna bite with multiple 20-plus-pound butterballs hitting the deck at once, I forego the frenzy so that I am able to capitalize on the hot bottom bite that almost always occurs right at sunrise when the demersals really wake up and become active. The same goes for sunset, when these fish tend to feed aggressively as nightfall sets in. And although the midday sun can be brutal amid the remote Gulf of Mexico, the daytime bite can be just as hot and you won't catch any fish





by lounging in the air conditioning."

Benny remains one of the most experienced and knowledgeable slow pitch jiggers - not only in the United States but also around the world but his observations don't necessarily mean you should forego nighttime slow pitch opportunities altogether. As many of you have seen in the last few seasons of Florida Sport Fishing TV when we've done nothing but jig on our Yankee Capts adventures, we've had our fair share of success at night not only with tuna, but also with monster mutton snapper as well as red, black and scamp grouper.

We've learned that while these predators may become less active at night, they are still opportunistic feeders. Instead of raising the rod tip high to achieve a more pronounced pitch on the jig, these less-active fish respond more positively to shorter movements of the rod tip, causing less vertical movement of the jig. Additionally, while we would normally crank the reel handle a full

turn with each pitch of the jig, quarter or half turns are more suitable at night. The goal is to keep the jig closer to the seafloor as long as possible. Demersals in the daytime, particularly at sunrise and sunset, won't hesitate to venture several feet up in the water column to chase down a jig resembling fleeing prey. However, when these fish are less active, it seems they aren't as willing to burn through as much energy to feed.

To address the debate on whether glow provides jiggers with an advantage, there are multiple schools of

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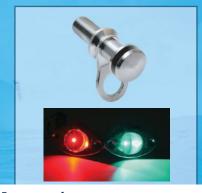
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RIG IT RIGHT

Tackle is important in any angling application, but slow pitch jigging, in particular, requires an entire system and having the proper gear perfectly rigged is essential. Keep in mind, too, that different scenarios require different outfits and terminal tackle. In a variety of venues from South Florida to Pulley Ridge, we trust our FSF Technique-Specific Slow Pitch Jigging Rods (fsfgear. com) paired with Daiwa Saltiga 20HA and 30HA star drag reels (daiwa.com), 30 lb. Diamond Braid and 30 to 50 lb. Diamond Presentation fluorocarbon leader (diamondfishing.com) connected to the main line by an Alberto or FG Knot, though you should tie the knot you feel most comfortable with and ensure it passes through your rod guides with ease. By the same token, many different knots can be used to tie your jig on, though we recommend the simple, yet strong, improved clinch knot. While these are our preferences, there are plenty of other capable options in rods, reels, braided lines and leader materials from a variety of reputable manufacturers that will get the job done. The size of your assist hooks, split rings and solid rings should depend on the size of the jig you're using, as hooks should not overlap when fully extended. Don't forget your split ring pliers!

anglers have been successful including as much glow as they possibly can around the clock, while others, including Benny Ortiz, see it as far less of an influential factor. "The reality is that baitfish don't glow. Squid and some other prey items certainly possess bioluminescent characteristics, but

amount of light some Jigs Will produce, Ortiz says. Glow doesn't necessarily deter demersal predators, but if your jig is particularly hot one night, it's likely because of the action you are imparting on the metal, not because of the glow.

However, blackfin tuna are also worth mentioning in this regard as well. These aggressive pelagic predators, especially the ones out in the remote reaches of the Gulf of Mexico that receive far less pressure than local populations, will track down and strike almost any offering that emits erratic motion or flash. Therefore, given the blackfin's keen

eyesight, dropping a jig with substantial glow will often get you bit before the jig hits the bottom. If you're targeting tuna specifically, remember to charge your jig for a few seconds under a bright light to maximize the emitted glow on every drop.

It's certainly in our best collective interest as anglers to draw on the advice of experts, as well as our own experiences out on the water, but we must also remain mindful that every scenario is different. What worked one night may not work the next, and it's important to stay openminded in your approach and make sure you're prepared for a variety of scenarios that could take place. Knowledge and preparation are keys to success in any fishery, but you won't know how successful a nighttime slow pitch jigging expedition will be until you get out and give it a shot.

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than the overwhelming



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Boat Preview PARKER BOATS 2600 SH



PARKER IS A MANUFACTURER THAT PRIDES ITSELF ON STRENGTH,

simplicity and seaworthiness, and the new 2600 SH more than exemplifies those qualities. Built to be a multi-faceted family fishing vessel, this coastal hybrid provides impressive versatility with a proudly overbuilt hull as well as a comfortable, angler-oriented layout.

Parker has been producing reliable platforms for over half a century. As shown by the new 2600 SH and the manufacturer's entire line of vessels, the skilled team struck an ideal balance between modern boat building techniques and time-tested tradition. Built meticulously with quality materials, each vessel delivers reliability and performance, while luxurious upholstery and stylish appointments raise the bar even higher. Owners can also count on stainless steel, thru-bolted deck hardware.

With a large 69"x102" bow casting platform, additional raised casting space in the aft, low gunnels and a draft of only 15 inches, this craft is optimized for 360-degree fishability in the shallows. However, its wide 9'6" beam yields stability that allows owners to venture offshore on occasion. The 2600 SH also comes standard with a Yamaha F300 outboard and digital electronic controls, as well as a 97-gallon fuel tank that provides excellent range.

Parker clearly placed an emphasis on fishability in the design of the 2600 SH. Large port and starboard livewells are available in the stern, while an additional livewell can be added in the forward step. Rod holders are present on the hardtop, along and

below the gunnels and on the side of the console. However, additional rod and tackle storage is also abundant on this boat, with port and starboard compartments that accommodate rods up to seven feet in length and contain protective reel pads. Below deck, a spacious 148-quart fishbox provides plenty of room for a heavy haul.

Along with ideal functionality when fishing, the 2600 SH also provides a refreshing level of comfort, luxury and style. The fiberglass hardtop with grab rails and leaning post both come standard with white powder coating, and the leaning post also offers a slide-out cooler and folding footrests. Seating at the helm is made comfortable thanks to custom upholstery and backrests, and a glove box with integrated footrests and mat pads. Passengers will also enjoy a folding, bench style seat in the stern. Coaming bolsters are also present to make standing inside the vessel more comfortable, particularly when fighting fish. Cup holders, speakers, ample storage and a retractable boarding ladder round out the impressive list of standard features. A refreshing step away from the cookie-cutter bay boat design, Parker's 2600 SH an angler's dream. ESE





SPECS	
L.O.A	29'10"
Beam	9'6"
Draft	15"
Fuel Capacity	97 gal.
Weight	5,073 lbs.
Max HP	400
Website	parkerboats.com



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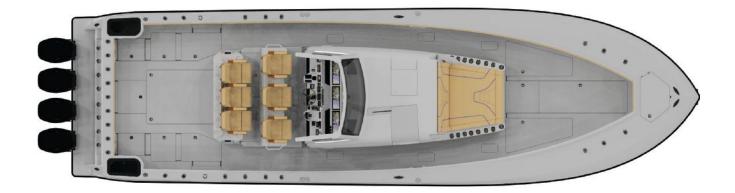
	SC125	HD140	MD100
Spinning Reels	V	V	V
Bait Casters	V	V	~
Conventional Reels	Penn 70 or equiv max & wide reels	Unlimited	Penn 30 or equiv max
Fly Reels	V	~	V
Line Test Maximum	120 lbs	Unlimited	80 lbs



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SEAVEE BOATS 450Z



▶ AMID THE CROWDED CENTER CONSOLE MARKET loaded with toptier sport fishing platforms, SeaVee and its wide-ranging line of performance boats continues to set the standard. The latest addition to the line-up is the all-new 450Z, the newest example of the legendary manufacturer's dedication to innovation.

It all starts with SeaVee's state-of-theart manufacturing process in which the hull, deck, liner and console are created using vacuum assisted resin transfer infusion (VARTM). This proven unibody construction process yields an extremely light laminate that ultimately translates to a boat that is practically indestructible. Handling is also significantly enhanced during highspeed turns, which produce opposing concentrated pressure on the speed-rails that keep the craft tracking in the right direction without sacrificing speed or efficiency. The platform features a fixed running trim angle as a result of multiple lifting bodies, while the intelligent weight distribution arrangement provides maximum hull lift with minimal resistance to help combat rough conditions. The boat's meticulous design and careful construction result in reliable performance throughout a broader range of speeds than traditional stepped-hull center consoles.

At the helm, the oversized dash accommodates a wide range of electronics packages that include multiple large displays and additional accessories to aid in navigation, fishability and total vessel control. Furthermore, prospective owners can

choose to adorn this area with triple captain's chairs or a bench-style leaning post, with second row seating also available.

The spacious cabin can be accessed on the side of the console, where passengers remain comfortable with air conditioning while they enjoy various the amenities available. These include the galley complete with a microwave oven, refrigerator, food prep area and countertop with a stainless steel sink, in addition to a convertible settee with a hi/lo table. The head compartment features an electrically-operated toilet, vanity, sink and shower.

As far as fishing is concerned, the versatile 450Z gives anglers access to any offshore pursuit. An open deck layout is integral to a center console, and this 45-footer does not disappoint in that regard with 10 feet of aft cockpit space and complete 360° fishability, with all the rod holders you'll ever need. 150-and 100-gallon fishboxes are available below deck at the bow with additional twin 100-gallon fishboxes in the aft. The cockpit also features four 40-gallon livewells with two in the transom deck corners and two below deck. In typical fashion, SeaVee has once again achieved an ideal blend of fishability, comfort and performance in the all-new 450Z.





SPECS	
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Max HP	unlimited
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Numbers Game

Choosing Between 3- and 4-Blade Propellers | STAFF REPORT

► THE BOATING INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE HAS BENEFITED

from a great deal of innovation over the years, but propulsion in particular remains one of the most important aspects of overall performance. And with countless engine components undergoing constant advancement to achieve maximum potential, top-of-the-line propellers have come a long way as well. Among the many factors to consider when selecting the right propeller for your engine and vessel, there is still a level of uncertainty regarding 3- and 4-blade props.

Analyzing the differences between 3and 4-blade propellers is still a hot topic within the boating community, but the debate has certainly shifted in recent years. There was once a time when the popular claim was that 4-blade props could not propel a vessel to the same speeds as 3 blades, but certainly offered other advantages worthy of careful consideration. The reality is that 4-blade propellers were initially designed and built not for speed, but for more reliable boat handling. The idea is that the addition of a fourth blade displaces more water, while providing more lift and grip in comparison to the traditional 3-blade variety. Ultimately, this enhancement in boat handling translates

to better fuel efficiency, hole shot, ability to plane at low speeds and much more. In short, 4-blade propellers were introduced to improve overall vessel performance, despite the slight sacrifice in speed.

Inherently, 4-blade propellers add drag, given the greater surface area spinning through the water. Therefore, an engine would have to achieve greater horsepower to spin a 4-blade prop at the same RPM as a 3-blade prop. To help offset this discrepancy, manufacturers have regularly decreased the pitch on 4-blade propellers. Ultimately, it's this change in pitch, or the distance a propeller would move forward in one revolution, that causes any slowdown.

However, it should be noted that while 4-blade propellers can't power a vessel to the same top speeds as a 3-blade prop, the reality is that with today's top choices, the difference in speed is usually negligible. Certainly, tournament anglers aboard large center consoles with thousands of dollars on the line may feel the need to opt for every additional mile per hour they can get. On the other hand, captains fishing

the flats on small skiffs would value

the ability to more quickly pop up on plane amid the shallows. But, in most cases, recreational mariners will get better overall performance and added thrust out of their boats by equipping them with 4-blade props. In fact, because of the inherent advantages of 4 blades, certain propeller manufacturers have begun producing 3-blade props with larger blades, resulting in the same overall surface area as a comparable 4-blade.

"Which is better?" remains the simple question from many prospective consumers regarding the differences between these two propeller types, but it isn't as simple as it seems and there really is no right answer across the board. Certainly, the advantages of one over the other are well documented, but making the right decision depends entirely on the application. Furthermore, every boat is unique and seasoned captains often have their preferences one way or the other based on years of experience, as they are able to detect the often-subtle nuances from one product to the next.

Despite the claims that 4-blade props offer greater overall performance than 3-blade alternatives, why is it that most outboards on the market today are still equipped with 3-blade propellers? Many modern outboards can certainly be retrofitted with 4-blade props, but 3 blades largely remain the industry standard. The general conclusion is that 3-blade propellers generally offer an ideal compromise among all of the relevant factors associated with propeller performance. Remember that although the theoretical





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gains that come with 4 blades are tempting, improvement in performance regarding lift, acceleration and efficiency could also translate to diminished performance in certain areas, like top speed.

Ventilation is also an important factor to keep in mind. This is when other parts of the equation like hull design come to the forefront, as certain stepped hulls cause propellers to operate in aerated water. 4-blade props are better suited to offset these ventilation issues because the added blade offers more overall grip. 3-blade propellers have been known to lose their grip on certain stepped hull boats because of the resulting ventilation.

Ultimately, the prop you should be

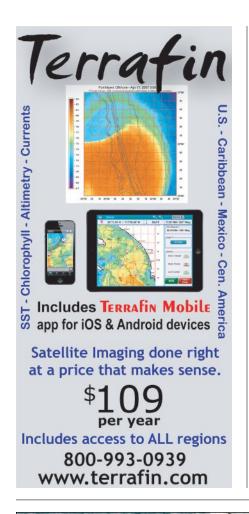
using is the one that best suits your particular boat and motor. The 3-blade vs. 4-blade argument is not as cut and dry as some may think, and many factors must be considered. Comparing one propeller to another as standalone components can lead you down a frustrating road to nowhere, as the engine and vessel type have a significant influence on overall performance. Additionally, vessels that are running strong with 3-blade props won't necessarily get a bump in performance from 4 blades, and vice versa.

While many 4-blade propellers do, in fact, offer better performance than 3 blades under certain circumstances, it could potentially still be the wrong choice

for your boat. Therefore, it's important that boaters do a bit of diligent research before making a propeller change, rather than simply dropping a significant chunk of change on what you might think is the best option. Furthermore, consulting industry professionals, as well as your engine and boat manufacturers, will generally point you in the right direction when you need a new prop. While it's individual importance is often overlooked, the right propeller is an integral aspect to your boat's overall performance. There are plenty of reliable 3-blade and 4-blade options available to widespread boaters, but finding the perfect fit isn't always as simple as it seems. ESS















Battery Backup

Selecting Electronic Visual Distress Signals | STAFF REPORT

▶ WHEN IT COMES TO BOATING, emergency safety equipment is something you hope you never need to use. However, although they are seldom needed, the items that comprise your vessel's emergency gear can't be overlooked. Unfortunately, many boaters are unwilling to spend more than the bare minimum on their safety supplies, which can prove to be a costly mistake when disaster strikes. Fortunately, modern mariners are given a large selection of electronic visual distress signals from a variety of trusted manufacturers to all but ensure that they are quickly found and rescued if need be.

In the event of an emergency, your first priority should be achieving a quick, safe rescue. For that to happen there are certain items that absolutely must be present aboard your vessel; however, going above and beyond the basic requirements can have a significant impact on the outcome of an unfortunate situation. Flares are required by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), but it's in your best interest to supplement these requirements with Electronic Visual Distress Signals (EVDS). This somewhat broad category of safety equipment can be further classified into more specific sections.

Alert signals are designed to draw attention to an emergency, notifying potential rescuers that something is wrong. Many

boaters default to flares of different varieties, some more effective than others. Although flares can be reliable and certainly draw attention to the situation, they have a shelf life of 42 months from the date they are manufactured and are also prone to malfunction. Exposure to the elements can also hinder a flare's ability to do its job, particularly if it is not stored properly. This is a common issue among recreational boaters, who have a tendency to throw their safety supplies into a storage compartment, which not only negates easy accessibility with everything that gets piled on top of it over time, but also can cause items corrode or deteriorate at an accelerated rate.

Regarding time of day, EVDS are only

applicable between sunset and sunrise and must be accompanied by a 3'x3' orange flag with a black square and ball. Additionally, any EVDS used in place of flares for nighttime emergencies must be USCG approved. This is why flares should be kept on board in addition to EVDS, as they can be used at all hours of the day. However, EVDS have their own benefits over flares: There is generally no expiration date to worry about, and they are also far safer to operate, including by minors, safer for the environment, battery-powered, buoyant and visible within a range of more than 10 nautical miles in many cases.

Despite the advantages associated



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with EVDS, boaters must also consider that the batteries within these devices are susceptible to corrosion and leakage, and they are generally more expensive than flares. Remember that EVDS have long shelf lives only if they are taken care of and maintained properly. It's important that boaters regularly check to make sure their EVDS are functioning properly, keep spare batteries on board at all times, and keep everything sealed away in a waterproof bag or hard case.

ACR (acrartex.com) is a noted leader in the industry, manufacturing top-tier safety equipment for any style of boating. While it's their personal locator beacons and EPIRBs that are given much of the attention from consumers, ACR also offers a collection of EVDS worthy of consideration. At a reasonable \$24.99, the C-Light H20 is a simple, reliable water-activated personal distress light with powerful 20-lumen LED output and enhanced with increased operating life greater than 30 hours. USCG/SOLAS-approved, the device comes in a compact package with an impact-resistant case and is powered by just two AA batteries. Additionally, it comes with a convenient Velcro strap and

PFD clip for flexible mounting options. Various strobe and manually-activated options are also available from ACR.

Another renowned leader in the field, Orion (orionsignals.com) offers its own array of EVDS options that are USCG/ SOLAS approved. Within the selection, the venerable Floating Locator Electronic SOS Beacon Kit is a one stop shop for emergency situations at night. Powered by D batteries, the device packs a serious punch, emitting light visible for three miles. Furthermore, the product itself features a high-visibility orange color and is also equipped with SOLAS-grade reflective tape. Easy to use, the device comes packed in a reusable storage container with a durable flag for daytime use. While a quick rescue is the goal, this product delivers more than 50 hours of continuous operation. Finally, multiple mounting and deployment options make it a simple, yet effective emergency tool.

Sirius Signal (siriussignal.com) has its own multitude of potentially life-saving EVDS, each offering its own unique benefits. Though its price tag at \$299.95 is a bit higher than some competing products, the all-new C-1002 Two-Color eVDSD

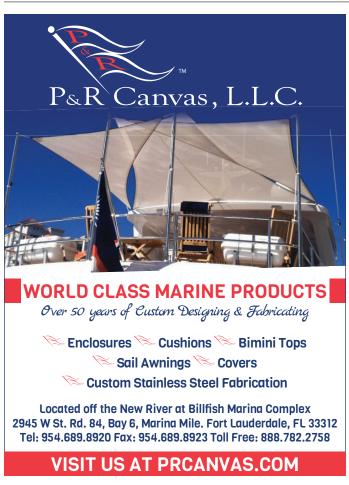
Distress Light provides users with exceptional performance and peace of mind. Built with 13 LEDs, the device exceeds USCG requirements and is loaded with features. Infrared SOS signal, Bluetooth connectivity to contact emergency services and included batteries, as well as red/orange and cyan color patterns, certainly justify the cost. For boaters on tighter budgets, the C-1003 One-Color eVDSD Distress Light is available at \$89.95 and offers similar reliability with a powerful white light despite fewer features.

Although the aforementioned options can legally replace pyrotechnic flares at night, you can never be too careful or prepared. Therefore, it's never a bad idea to have multiple options on board when lives are on the line. Traditional flares and smoke signals are still very effective in drawing necessary attention to emergency situations, but modern technology allows the industry's top manufacturers to offer small electronic visual distress signals that are easy to use and store for long-term accessibility. Amid the exhaustive list of necessary safety equipment every boater needs, EVDS is certainly not something to overlook.











Marine Electronics

ICOM MA-510TR

A longtime leader in marine electronics, ICOM is at it again with the MA-510TR Class B AIS Transponder. With its wide-ranging capabilities, the device delivers simpler navigation and enhances risk management. Innovative features include individual DSC calling, NMEA 2000 and NMEA 0183/-HS connectivity, USB connectivity, a collision alarm function and much more. Furthermore, several convenient mounting options are available as well as a manufacturer-supplied GPS antenna. Designed to enhance safety on the water, the MA-510TR can guide users to a specific waypoint or AIS target, while the man overboard (MOB) feature records the vessel's exact waypoint to aid in rescue efforts.

▶ 4.3" high-resolution color TFT display

▶ 12V and 24V compatible

icomamerica.com \$899.99





Nite Track

Marine

A product that quite literally gives vessel operators the ability to see in the dark, Nite Track's Marine night vision camera is a game-changer. Whether you begin your adventure before dawn or are returning home after sunset, this camera delivers clear resolution to your vessel's MFD. Additionally, there are several simple installation options as well as compatibility with displays from a variety of manufacturers. The camera comes with a weldless aluminum mount, a module that features an infrared illuminator, 25 feet of cable and an optional switch panel. Not only does the camera allow users to see other vessels in the distance, but it also makes small objects floating on the surface clearly visible.

- ▶ 437.664 pixels
- Available in black or white

gonitetrack.com \$4,199.00

Marine Electronics

Fusion Apollo WB670

A household name among boaters when it comes to marine speaker systems, Fusion has expanded its impressive collection of innovative products with the Apollo WB670 premium hideaway system. Designed to save space, the compact unit includes many of Fusion's trademark features, such as Digital Signal Processing Technology, enhanced PartyBus-Network capabilities, Wi-Fi audio streaming and TV connectivity. Full-range audio at every volume level is made possible by calculated loudness curves optimized for the human ear. Furthermore, acoustically-designed Fusion speaker profiles allow users to achieve optimal custom audio for every area on the boat. Customizing your onboard audio experience is now simpler than ever before.

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Livorsi

Hydraulic Billet Trim Tabs

Trusted by many of the world's top boat manufacturers, Livorsi's Hydraulic Billet Trim Tabs are relied upon by many for total vessel control. These simple, yet incredibly effective tabs are CNC-machined from billet aluminum with no casting, which lends itself to long-lasting durability and performance. As many modern boaters include underwater lights on their platforms, Livorsi allows vessel owners to kill two birds with one stone thanks to optional 4- or 6-inch red, white, blue or green LEDs included on the actual trim tabs. Corrosion is a frustrating factor when it comes to trim tabs, or any components kept in an unforgiving saltwater environment, but Livorsi effectively combats this issue with five anodes for total protection.

- Available in 12 sizes
- ▶ For use on 20- to 50-foot boats

livorsi.com Starting at \$2,990.00

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Scheduled to take place Oct. 16 and 17 out of the legendary Stuart Sailfish Club, the 35th Lady Angler "SaltWater Sisters" Fishing Tournament is an event you won't want to miss. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has placed a great deal of uncertainty on the tournament's regularly scheduled events, but the fishing will take place. While much of the tournament certainly is centered around fantastic offshore fishing off the coast of Martin County, the real purpose of the event is to raise breast cancer awareness and generate proceeds to "Friends In Pink." Sailfish, dolphin, kingfish, wahoo, grouper and snapper are all eligible in this tournament, with multiple winners across different categories. Whether you are interested in fishing the event or would simply like to get involved for a great cause, visit *stuartsailfishclub.com* to see how you can join in on the fun.



Hosted by the beloved Plantation on Crystal River, the annual Redfish Classic Tournament will take place this year on Oct. 24. Besides world-class fishing, the goals of this family-friendly tournament are to promote conservation, and to educate and encourage more anglers to get out on the water. Redfish remain the crown jewel of the tournament, but target species also include seatrout and grouper. Each team's two largest redfish, along with their largest gag, red or black grouper, is brought to the scales for exciting weigh-ins, while trout are photographed and released. Along with these categories, the Youth Division and Ladies Division are up for grabs, offering prizes and bragging rights of their own. Aside from the fun-filled event, anglers and their families enjoy the incredible host venue to its fullest. To learn more about the Plantation Redfish Classic and how you can get involved, visit plantationoncrystalriver.com.

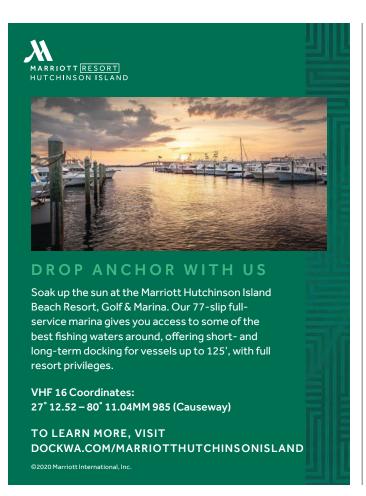


One of three legs in the legendary Redbone Celebrity Tournament Series, the S.L.A.M. is a formidable challenge for skilled flats anglers, set to take place Sept. 11-13 out of Key West. The Florida Keys Grand Slam, consisting of bonefish, permit and tarpon, represents the event's target species, with bait, artificial and fly categories. In last year's exciting event, a total of 100 bonefish, 24 tarpon and 10 permit were caught and released. Guided by Captain Justin Rea, Cal Collier Jr. of Atlanta, Georgia tallied 14 bonefish, 2 tarpon and a permit, all on fly, to earn the title of Grand Champion Angler. Additional winners included Ryan Rea as Junior Grand Champion, Loren Rea as Grand Champion Lady Angler and former Denver Bronco Mark Cooper as Celebrity Grand Champion Angler. Check out *redbone.org* for more information.



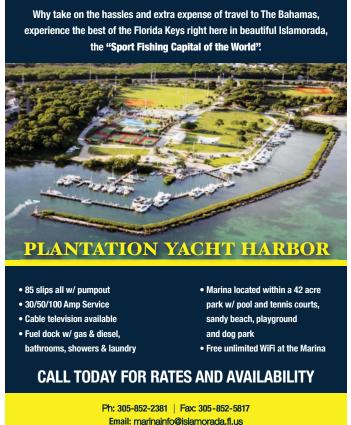
Since their appearance in South Florida waters decades ago, invasive lionfish have spread around the state, causing significant damage to their surrounding ecosystems. In the Florida Keys and the extensive and widespread coral reef habitat around the beloved island chain, native species have been adversely affected, but locals are fighting back. REEF's dedication to combatting the lionfish invasion has been long-standing, as demonstrated by the annual Upper Keys Lionfish Derby. In its 11th year, the derby will take place the weekend of Sept. 13 and will give participants the opportunity to work together toward removing lionfish from local waters. Furthermore, lionfish are delicious and there are no limits on these invaders, so this is a great opportunity to get out and harvest fresh fish as you benefit the environment. Don't hesitate to visit *reef.org* to reserve your spot in this exciting event!











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raveling anglers heading south of the border to Latin America's coastal nations have come to expect insane blue water fishing, and, over the years, the varied venues and variety of species haven't disappointed. Throw in a dose of exotic roosterfish or the possibility of tackle-crushing cubera snapper and you have the foreign destinations where fabled fishing dreams really do come true.

However, unbeknownst to many Florida fishermen who have incredible tarpon fishing in their own backyard, Central America hosts some of the most exciting and varied inshore opportunities that exist anywhere. The only caveat for traveling anglers is making sure to head south with realistic expectations of what awaits.

Tarpon are travelers. Just like the many anglers around the world who pursue them, the mighty silver king possesses an innate curiosity to explore beyond the next horizon. Flats anglers are well aware of these annual migrations in the Florida Keys, and many are familiar with the excitement of watching a lead fish push onto a patch of white sand trailed by a mass of other dark silver slabs. Such migrations take tarpon across vast sections of the tropical Atlantic, crossing many international borders and, in some cases, even entering new oceans as they have via the Panama Canal. There is one tarpon migration, however, that is perhaps unique by global standards, and it takes place deep in the lowland tropical rainforests of northern Costa Rica.

Each year thousands of adult tarpon migrate south along the western Caribbean from as far north as Florida. Ancestral memory prompts some of these majestic giants to remain in Costa Rica's coastal waters while others continue to journey some 250 miles up Nicaragua's Río San Juan to Costa Rica's Jungle Tarpon Reserve. At the time of the tar-





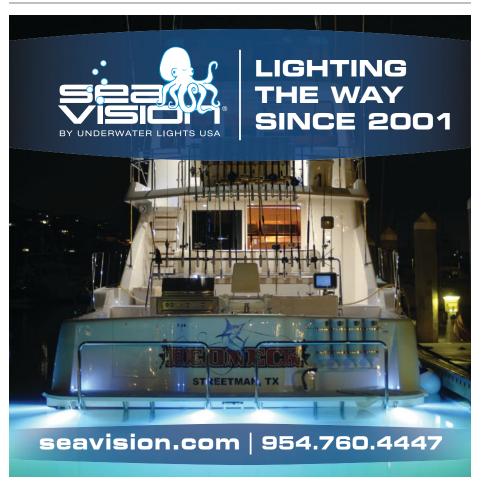
We've timed our arrival to intercept these migrating silver kings...



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pon's arrival, seasonal rains flood the immense lagoons making up the reserve to create an inland sea surrounded by volcanoes and rife with other primeval creatures like tropical garfish, sawfish and freshwater bull sharks. This collection of archaic predators is here to harass the numerous species of baitfish swept into the lagoons by the heavy annual deluge.

We've timed our arrival to intercept these migrating silver kings and, as luck would have it, the persistent rain that followed us from capital city San Jose has slowly started to ease as we climb aboard the river skiff, 12-weight fly rods at the ready. A heavy mist hangs over the towering trees as we journey at a methodical pace deeper and deeper into a wilderness that still is home to fierce creatures like the jaguar as well as countless creepy crawlies that will kill you in an instant. The entire scene seems to

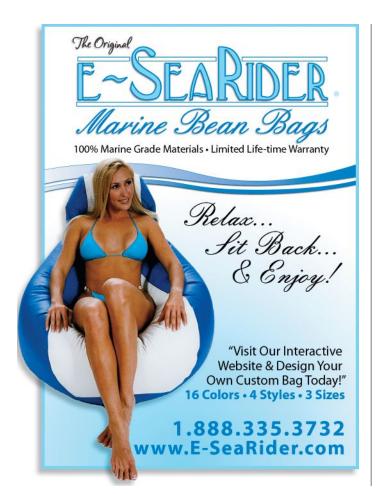
have transformed into something reminiscent of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" novel, and we are suddenly intrepid explorers on a quest for an encounter with a beast from another time.

Our captain carefully eases back on the tiller as we reach a series of intersecting creeks coming into the main river, indicating that this is the spot. The anchor digs into the soft muddy bottom, causing the boat to swing into a seam about 50 feet from where black water from a small creek is swirling into the main river's coppery water. A myriad of rainforest creatures express themselves in the lush habitat around us as we scan the gladiator ring and revise coiled fly line. Nothing is more awe-inspiring than the howler monkey troops roaring at one another in unison across the river. Suddenly, a giant tarpon breeches fully out of the water in an attempt to eat a footlong tropical gar skipping frantically to escape, and a primordial sense of "we are not alone" creeps over the boat. Needless to say, we are in the right place.

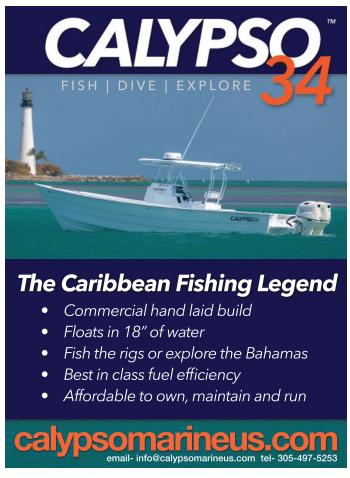
With nervous anticipation, we wait for the right moment to present our fly. Every couple of minutes, the surface of the river opens as a triple-digit tarpon slurps a fleeing baitfish as it flushes out of the jungle creek. The plan is to hit the fish coming up in singles, doubles and triples on the nose as they feed, and as yet another aggressive topwater take ensues, a large orange fly stripped across the crater disappears into the cavernous mouth of a giant tarpon.

Time stands still as the fish discovers her mistake and, with a few powerful hooksets, an abrupt realization leads to furious reaction as 6-plus feet of tarpon and water spray through the air and down river. Unlike bright ocean fish, the











101

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For adventurous fly-fishermen, landing a silver king in the jungles of Costa Rica certainly belongs on the bucket list.

jungle tarpon have gone through a transformation to match the tannic waters, and watching such a golden-yellow beast gone airborne framed against the verdant foliage is truly an awesome encounter with the wild, to say the least.

The chase is on. Anchor dropped, we begin to gain line back on the reel. The idea of control is a fleeting concept, however, and all we can do is hold on and hope for the best. Using the boat to steer the beast away from branches and undercut banks, we do what we can to stay connected, jump after catastrophic jump coupled with the fish digging broadside to hold with the river's mighty current. Finally, we reach a stalemate several bends downriver in a slower pool, and a systematic battle of inches brings the yelping and yelling crew to muted tones of pensive tension. While the fly looks to be well positioned, the hook seems impossibly

small now in comparison to the mighty fish's head, and the 20 lb. class tippet just doesn't provide the confidence needed given the immense weight and power.

Time seems to move in slow motion, but finally, with a tiring fish floating boat-side, we opt to go for a grab. With the river totally over its banks, there are no beaches normally used to land such heavyweights. When two hands finally connect to the tarpon's lower

mandible, both angler and captain go plunging into the neck-deep weeds to cradle and release the fish. This act is known locally as the "jungle plunge," and many anglers will brave life and limb to get in the water with their quarry for a moment of intimate connection, eye to eye. These waters are also home to countless crocodilians, and while the suburban spectacled caiman are far from dangerous, we keep watch for overzeal-



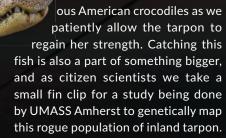








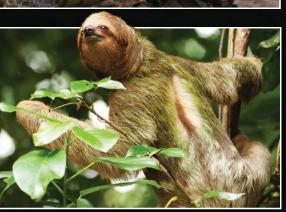




All the while, other tarpon in our fish's migratory school have resumed to diligently hunt, lined up in a chain of flashing gold and silver along the riverbanks. An electricity suddenly shimmers down her side indicating she is ready and, as a massive tail pushes our fish back into the turbid water and out of sight, a distant aquatic explosion indicates only one thing – time to do it again.

The Jungle Tarpon Reserve has

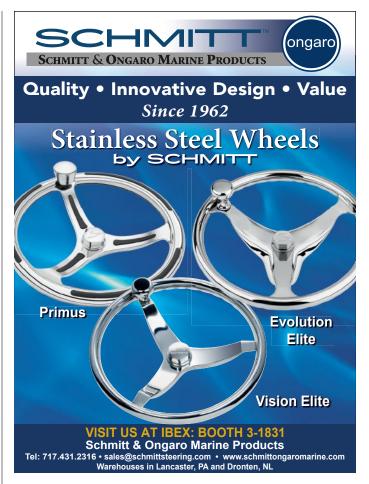
recently emerged as an example of how a fishery can be managed in the right way, working together with the local community to promote sustainable rural tourism as well as responsible angling. The idea behind the project is to involve as many families as possible, allowing all to benefit from the advent of visiting international fly anglers. Guides have been molded out of ranchers, and simple food and accommodations provide an authentic taste of an old, forgotten Costa Rica. Most importantly, catch-and-release practices are a top priority for captains and anglers alike, ensuring that the annual tarpon migration to these rich waters will endure for many generations to come.

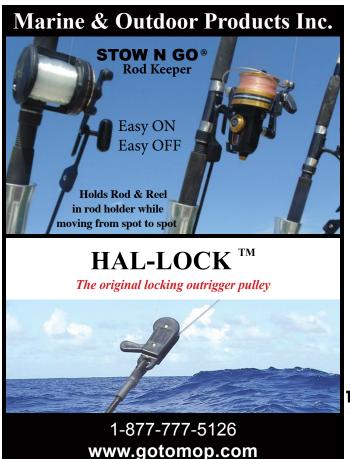








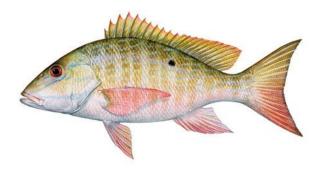




SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

TARPON || WHITE MARLIN || BLACK DRUM || SILVER MULLET || RED GROUPER || AFRICAN POMPANO ATLANTIC CROAKER || SHORTFIN MAKO SHARK || COBIA || JOLTHEAD PORGY || SNOOK || GULF FLOUNDER BLACKFIN TUNA || BROADBILL SWORDFISH || GAG GROUPER || LANE SNAPPER || BLUEFISH || ALFONSINO GOLDEN TILEFISH || WAHOO || GREATER AMBERJACK || WHITING || ATLANTIC SAILFISH || BANK SEA BASS

STAFF REPORT



Lutjanus analis

MUTTON SNAPPER

FROM FRESHWATER TO SALTWATER, grass flats to the Gulf Stream, Florida's diverse and widely accessible aquatic ecosystems sufficiently support the stake of the *Fishing Capital of the World*. Comprising more than 7,700 lakes, 10,550 miles of rivers and 2,276 miles of tidal shoreline, no other state or nation can boast the extensive habitat, number of days fished by anglers, revenue generated and the many IGFA records held. With such incredible diversity of native and non-native forage and predator fish, we're setting out to learn more about the species that make the Sunshine State an angler's paradise.

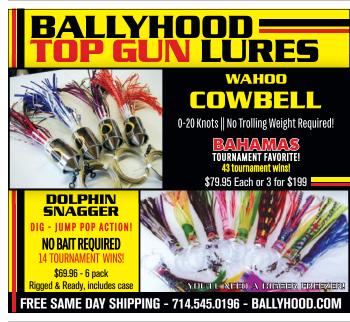


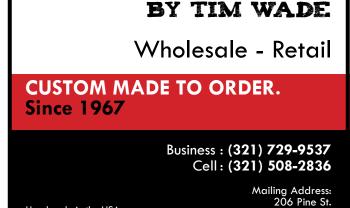












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Mutton Snapper

Lutjanus analis



Feeding

Capable of consuming a variety of prey including small finfish, crustaceans and mollusks, mutton snapper are prolific predators wherever they roam. Jaws lined with small, sharp teeth in conjunction with a V-shaped vomerine tooth patch allow these fish to maintain a firm grasp of their prey until it is ultimately swallowed. Additionally, mutton snapper are capable of consuming prey with hard exoskeletons like crabs and spiny lobster.



Daily Bag Limit

5 per person within 10 snapper aggregate; open year-round (statewide including federal waters).



Minimum Size Limit

18" total length (statewide including federal waters).



Preferred Water Temperature

78 - 85 degrees Fahrenheit



Predators

Like many other snapper species, mutton are most susceptible to predation at the early stages of their life cycle before reaching the top of their growth potential. However, even mature specimens can fall victim to sharks, barracuda and other large predatory game fish.



Food Value

Snapper species in general are largely considered excellent table fare, but mutton is particularly regarded within the upper echelon of bottom-dwelling delicacies in the region. While its mild flavor is similar to that of the popular American red snapper, mutton snapper possess slightly firmer flesh that still yields a flaky texture when cooked. Fresh mutton fillets excel with a variety of different preparation methods from chilled in a refreshing ceviche to piping hot out of a frying pan, and are always excellent candidates for fish tacos.





Fishing Methods

Mutton snapper can be caught using a variety of different methods, largely dependent upon prevalent conditions. Anglers most often associate these fish with reefs and wrecks where they are targeted with conventional bottom fishing tackle and natural bait, including live pilchard, threadfin herring and pinfish, as well as fresh ballyhoo plugs and cut goggle eye or speedo. However, these fish can also be caught with relative consistency on slow pitch jigging gear, which is particularly effective in deeper water from 250 to 300 feet where it is difficult to drop a live bait to the bottom. In shallower water, sometimes just a few feet deep, mutton snapper adjust their behavior to fit in with the terrain and feed more regularly on crabs and shrimp. In these venues, anglers can dial down their tackle to lighter spinning gear and simply free-line their baits in the current, using plenty of ground chum. Wherever these fish are targeted. they are usually very wary and often require stealthy presentations consisting of long 20 to 30 lb. fluorocarbon leader, small circle hooks

and just enough lead to hold bottom.



Hot-Spots

While any vibrant stretch of reef near the southeast Florida coast, southern Gulf of Mexico, The Bahamas and throughout the coastal Caribbean is a likely venue to hold mutton snapper, there are certain locales within these parameters that are particularly productive. For Floridians, the Florida Keys offer the best opportunities at these fish within state waters along Atlantic patch reefs, while nearby in The Bahamas the impressive reef system yields similar positive results. West of Key West, the Dry Tortugas are famous mutton snapper stomping grounds, consistently producing trophy fish nearing the 30-pound mark Further out into the Gulf of Mexico Pulley Ridge offers miles of healthy plate coral where a myriad of trophy bottom fish, including massive mutton snapper, receive very little pressure from anglers and are therefore more cooperative. Here, anglers can get away with using more substantial terminal tackle including heavier leader and larger hooks, though a stealthy approach is still recommended when targeting mutton snapper specifically.



Range

Occurring only in the western Atlantic, the mutton snapper's distribution is designated as Massachusetts to Brazil including the Gulf of Mexico, but these fish are most common in Florida's most southern latitudes as well as The Bahamas and throughout the Caribbean Sea. Despite the documented range of the species, these fish are rarely encountered north of the southeast Florida coast.



Coloring

Though many aspects of their coloration vary based on the terrain they inhabit, mutton snapper often possess dark, olive green backs and upper sides that transition to lighter pink or red at the belly including red fins below the lateral line. Additionally, these fish feature thin blue stripes below their eyes that follow the contour of their gill covers, as well as a dark spot on their sides near the caudal fin above the lateral line.



FLORIDA SPORT FISHING SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020



Similar Species

The family Lutjanidae includes a massive variety of snapper species, many of which displaying very similar characteristics that are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Mutton snapper, however, possess certain unique physical traits that set them apart from other closely related species. Perhaps the most similar to mutton snapper in appearance is the lane snapper (Lutjanus synagris), though the lane snapper does not grow nearly as large and features a rounded yellow anal fin as opposed to the mutton snapper's pointed red anal fin.





Conservation Status

According to the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species, mutton snapper is Near Threatened with a decreasing population of mature individuals. Regulations for these fish recently changed from a 16-inch total length minimum size limit to 18 inches in Florida to help preserve the population in our waters. Studies have shown that mutton snapper reach sexual maturity at roughly three years of age and 18 inches in length, allowing them to spawn before being legally harvested under the Sunshine State's latest rules. However, these fish display relatively slow growth rates and continue to face threats from heavy fishing pressure.



Size

In Florida, anglers encounter mutton snapper at almost every stage of their life cycles from juveniles barely weighing a pound to mature fish pushing 20 pounds or more. However, given the widespread angling pressure in our waters, double-digit fish are becoming increasingly harder to find and fool. While 25 pounds is generally regarded as the max growth potential for these fish, the Florida state record captured in the Dry Tortugas weighed in at just over 30 pounds.



Citrus & Herb Roasted Snapper

CAPTAIN MIKE GENOUN

▶ EVERY DELICIOUS MEAL STARTS with ultra-fresh ingredients, and this stunning presentation is no exception. Furthermore, the simplicity of roasting fish highlights the star of the show, with little to disguise its delicate deep-sea flavor. Even better for seafood connoisseurs are the limitless variations here.

When roasting whole fish, always set aside ample time to prepare the main ingredient accordingly, concluding with a thorough rinsing and patting dry before seasoning. Be sure to score the sides of the fish with a sharp fillet knife to ensure even cooking and the deep penetration of flavor. Brush the entire fish, inside and out, with olive oil before packing the cavity with citrus, fresh herbs and a few garlic cloves. I paired this fresh queen snapper with lemon, thyme and rosemary but the potential combinations are endless.

The next step involves generously seasoning the fish with sea salt, coarse ground black pepper and garlic powder before sprinkling with a heavy dose of our very own Florida Sport Fishing Seafood Seasoning & Zesty Rub. Feel free to experiment here, too, as a heavy dusting of five-spice powder will lead your taste buds down an Asian route, while the aroma of dry oregano roasting will transform your kitchen into a Sicilian bistro. Wherever you choose to go on your culinary tour, roast (don't broil) the fish in a preheated oven set at 425°F for 20 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 140°F. Remove from oven, drizzle with fresh lemon or lime juice before transferring to a serving platter and serve immediately with your choice of accouterments. Simple really can be superb.

PREP TIME 15 min.

COOK TIME 20 min.

TOTAL TIME 35 min.

TOOLS

- ▶ Fillet knife
- ▶ Cutting board
- ▶ Foil-lined roasting pan
- ▶ Basting brush

FISH SUBSTITUTIONS

- ▶ Red snapper
- ▶ Drum
- ► Tilefish
- ► Grouper

HERB & CITRUS SUGGESTIONS

- ▶ Lemon & Basil
- ▶ Lemon & Dill
- ► Lime & Cilantro
- ▶ Lime & Mint
- ► Grapefruit & Rosemary
- ► Orange & Thyme
- ► Tangerine & Tarragon



Fishy Stories



Beginner's Luck

Fortune Always Favors the Newbie | TIMOTHY SAUNDERS

▶ REGARDLESS OF HOW SKILLED A FISHERMAN you are – or at least you think you are – this pastime has a way of humbling even the best of the best. But, when the stars align and the bite is on, we seem to forget about the bad days and that's what keeps us coming back. I'm no pro and I still have a lot to learn, but I consider myself a pretty good angler. Well, I did, until my last long-range expedition into the expansive Gulf of Mexico.

To say I simply "look forward" to my annual trip 100-plus miles into the Gulf is a severe understatement. In the weeks leading up to the yearly summertime adventure, you can bet I'll be getting very little work done. Please don't tell my boss! When I'm not online buying coolers, tackle, and the season's hottest (and most expensive) gear, I'm likely sitting back in my comfy desk chair, daydreaming of what my upcoming days on the water will entail. Will the bite be on fire? Is the weather going to be nice? Am I going to get along with the other anglers on board? These are all questions that race through my mind prior to departure. Let's just say the night before the trip usually involves very little sleep. It's also worth noting that my wife loves this

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trip, too. Not because she goes with me – in fact she hates fishing – but because our kids are spending the summer with the inlaws and she gets the house all to herself.

This past trip was a little different. I'm not a great planner, so when my grandfather called me a few months prior to the fishing trip asking if that particular weekend was a good time to visit, I confirmed without checking my calendar. I didn't discover the conflict in timing until a few weeks before the trip, but I was lucky enough to snag a last-minute reservation for him on the boat. At this point, I was even more excited about the prospect of sharing the experience with my grandpa.

Although he's approaching 80, gramps is young at heart and still an avid an-

gler who was delighted to hear he'd be spending the weekend fishing. The only problem, though, was that he hails from the Midwest and can certainly work a crankbait for lunker largemouth, but he didn't have the slightest clue about bottom fishing for snapper and grouper.

After a long steam out to the fishing grounds, I was beyond excited to get to the rail and drop a bait. However, I didn't want to leave grandpa to fend for himself, so I took a few minutes to set him up with a few fresh rigs and walk him through the process. Soon enough, anglers all around were swinging fish into the boat left and right, yet I was still helping grandpa get set up. By the time he was ready to go, we had drifted over the spot and the bite had shut down - neither of us having any fish to our names. To add insult to injury, grandpa sat down on the bench and immediately yelled a four-letter word that I shouldn't repeat. I investigated the commotion only to find a heavy-gauge 6/0 circle hook piercing his keister! Thankfully, he's a tough guy with a great attitude and he kept his spirits up.

The next day, after missing a few bites, grandpa started to get the hang of it and was able to land three respectable mutton snapper. Finally, I could start fishing myself and I took my spot on the other side of the boat, where I managed a decent haul. At the end of the day, I peeked into the fishbox and noticed countless trophy snapper and grouper with the No. 36 tagged to their gill plates. Surprised and jealous, I shouted "Who the heck is angler No. 36?"

With a hook still embedded in his ass, my 78-year-old grandpa responded with a smirk, "That would be me, junior; now quit your whining and go grab me a beer!"

Clearly, fish really don't care how much money you spend on tackle, technology and fancy performance apparel, or how good you think you are. I guess it's better to be lucky than good!

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