

# Fishing Aboard



Tuna on the line

Our fishing equipment has really evolved thanks to a lot of reading and help from friends who knew a lot more about fishing than we did. Our first thought was that we would trail a really heavy line – maybe 200 lb. test – and use the winch to crank in anything we caught. We weren't into fishing as a sport, but rather as a means to gather food. That approach had two big flaws. The most significant problem was that we very rarely caught anything. I think it was probably due to the line being so large and visible, and having no give. Unless we were very lucky, a fish hitting it would have the line snatched right back out of its mouth. We tried adding a shock cord, but it didn't seem to help a lot. The other problem was that on the rare occasion we caught anything, cranking it in using the winch ended up with a big pile of tangled line that took hours to sort out.

We sought out the experts to help improve our act. Marcie's brother-in-law, Kerry, who is quite an accomplished fisherman, was a great resource as were our friends, Ken & Joanne on the m/v Rusty Bucket. "The Cruiser's Handbook to Fishing" (Bannerot), which is a fabulous resource on any type of fish we might encounter, was almost too much info at first and a bit intimidating. It was sort of like wanting to learn the four or five basic knots a cruiser really needs and buying the "Ashley Book of Knots" with its 3000+ knots. As an aside, I have both books and

enjoy each immensely, but a ten-page booklet addressed to the specific info I needed on either subject would have been better primers.



Penn 115 Senator



Ugly Stick Big Water Conventional

So what do we use? Our offshore equipment is rather modest, as we aren't interested in landing huge pelagic fish. If the fish is more than about 25 pounds, we can't eat or freeze it all, so we will reluctantly let it go. This often means losing the lure as well. The reel that has served our needs is a Penn 115 Senator. You can probably get it at WalMart or on the internet for less, but the West Marine price in my old catalog is \$179. Our rod is a simple Shakespeare Ugly Stick, medium weight for \$60. To hold it in place, I use a homemade PVC rod holder that I lash to the stern rail. Having lost one rod overboard, I now secure it to the boat using some  $\frac{1}{4}$ " line and a carabiner.



Cedar Plug



Rapala Magnum



Squid in various colors

We use 50 lb. test monofilament, as much as the reel will hold. This is attached to a swivel and a 36" wire leader. Knots work okay to attach the leader, but I feel better about using crimp connectors. Then I have an assortment of lures that attach to the leader. My favorite is a simple cedar plug – we have caught more tuna and dorado using it than any other. I also like Rapala Countdown Magnums in various colors, as well as several octopus skirts in various colors. The cedar plugs and octopi work best if the boat speed is above 5 knots. The Rapala works best below 5 knots. Tuna seem to like grey and silver lures, dorado seem to prefer the bright colors (except they all seem to like the reddish cedar plug).

I know what setting on my reel corresponds to 25 pounds of drag. When we start trolling, I set the drag to the minimum I can that prevents the lure from pulling line out at the current boat speed. When we get a hit, I set the drag to 25 pounds, then slow the boat down. Leaving it 25 pounds assures we never part the line. If it is a small fish, usually bringing in the jib is enough, otherwise we drop the main as well – a bit of a drag when going downwind.

We have a gaff hook, but prefer to just grab the last few feet of line (after donning some gloves) and swing the fish aboard (another reason for preferring smaller fish).

You will want a soft sided bag to keep it all in, plus a few other miscellaneous items like a fish scale to see how big the fish really is, a filleting knife, a nail clipper to cut line, a file to

sharpen hooks, extra hooks and maybe an ice pick to dispatch the poor guy. We also bought some nice gloves that are impervious to most sharp things such as the fillet knives and the more benign fish teeth, and a good fish identifier. All told, I think I could replace all the gear I actually use for \$300-\$350.

As to trolling with the dinghy, we don't do much of that. When we were in the Carib, we occasionally used a hand line over the side in an anchorage, and caught a number of grouper and snapper (after asking the locals whether ciguatera was a problem). In the Pacific, we don't expect



Jelly was always ready to help

to do much reef fishing with the prevalence of ciguatera. I do have a smaller spinning reel, but have rarely used it.

We are by no means experts on the topic, but we usually catch enough to keep us happy. Marcie usually counts on us fresh-catching at least 30% of our "meat" when planning provisions for passages.

Follow-up Q's:

Q. What fatality rate do you experience for lures between something big forcing you to cut the line, catching on flotsam, wear/tear? Does one buy one extra of each lure...or are we talking many of each? And for that matter, do the lures that are bright colored dangly things (made of rubbery material - the Magnums? Octopi skirts?) survive more than one or two hits?



A. As a guess, I'd say I lose a lure to 1 out of 6 fish, lose 3 out of 6 fish but retain the lure, and successfully catch 2 out of 6. (Some of the fish are lost intentionally – if we know a fish is too big, we slow the boat and give it all the slack it wants in the hopes it will toss the hook.) For us, a fish a week while passaging is sufficient, which translates to 10-12 fish a year. So I guess we lose 5-6 lures a year – seems a little high actually. Our friends who have a fast 54 footer, lose a lot more, but they routinely hook large fish including billfish. Maybe their fast trolling speed attracts more big fish. While it is not unusual to hook flotsam, we rarely lose the lure.

The Rapalas and cedar plugs are very rugged. I have some very scarred, battle hardened veterans that are still doing great. The octopus lures are the soft plastic and don't make it through too many hits. The nice thing is that the head and hook are reusable, and after it starts looking a bit ravaged, it is easy to replace only the skirt. We left Chile with 4 cedar plugs, 5 Rapalas, 4 Octopus heads and maybe 15 skirts in various colors. To go with these, we have a box of replacement hooks. The hooks rust quickly, as they are intended to do, and need frequent replacement. I also have probably 20-25 other lures I've collected over the years which were tried once or twice and weren't successful. They all had rave reviews from someone and look like they ought to work, so maybe it was the time and place rather than the lure.

[Q. You mentioned crimp connectors. I can imagine them for steel leader but do you mean there are also such a thing for the monofilament line side?](#)

A. I bought a large spool (1000 feet) of 50# monofilament from an Ecuadorian commercial fisherman's supply very inexpensively which will probably last years. It will completely fill my reel three times. The crimp terminals come in either black or silver, and in different sizes to match your line size. I use a standard electrical terminal crimper to crimp them and they have worked well on my monofilament. As to the number of leaders to buy – maybe 10 or 15.

[Q. And those gloves you describe, do they have somewhat of a 'chain mail' finish, a woven-like texture and perhaps silver in color? I noticed some of them in the BJ fishing department and wondered if they really did work "just like on TV" or whether the folks who bought those also were buying fishing vests and ball caps with their favorite game fish sewn on its bill.](#)

A. The gloves you describe sound similar to the pair Marcie bought for me in Ecuador for around \$3. Mine are bright orange and have what looks like 200# monofilament woven into them. If I am persistent, I can cut into them with my filleting knife, but it resists the occasional knife slip and Dorado tooth, and gives me a better grip on the fishing line. Without them, I rarely make it through the filleting process without mingling a little of my own blood with the fish's. The ones you describe may very well be superior.

[Q. Based on what you said, perhaps it would be better not to buy the Bannerot book?](#)

A. I think I unintentionally misled you regarding the Bannerot book. I use mine frequently and would include it in a list of recommended books for the ship's library, if the budget and space allows. It is full of great reference material and I use it frequently. I guess what I meant was if I had used it for defining my basic fishing needs, I would have concluded that I needed much more gear than I actually use, and might have even talked myself out of buying anything after seeing how much this stuff costs.

I just reread his sections on basic gear for trolling and they are very good. They emphasize that you can do fine with minimal gear, but when you look at their checklist of offshore trolling gear, it isn't easy to separate what you need for the minimalist approach and what would be nice to have. In fact, after rereading parts of the book, I find myself asking how I have gotten by without one of those ... all this time. I guess if I were in your position, I would get the book, read the appropriate sections, compare their world of knowledge to David's "catch 12 small fish a year" plan, and put together my own gear list.