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usually fish four or five rigged baits, one lure and two bridge teasers. The outfits are all 80Ws wound with half a spool of 130-pound Dacron back, spliced to 100-pound test mono on custom, roller guide rods. Capt. Mitch prefers heavy leaders, from 250 on the light side to 600, depending on time of year. Hooks vary from 9/0 to 16/0 to match the size of the baits. We also keep two additional 80Ws ready for use with pitch baits in case we raise more than one blue. This fishing is more straight forward than the way we fish whites, since blues take a bait more aggressively and require less teasing and dropping back.

The baits used seem to be pretty much the same from boat to boat. I use a lot of horse ballyhoo, rigged mackerel and swimming mullet. We've had great success with the new Pakula soft-head trolling lures, Mold Craft Super Chuggers and Chaos Granders as bridge teasers. Lures usually are placed down the middle on the shotgun line. A blue and white Hawaiian Eye over a horse bally is always a consistent blue marlin bait, and then there's the "Pink Thing!"

While there are lots of blues around, especially in the Spring, the Outer Banks is best known for its abundance of white marlin in Summer and Fall. The bait of choice is small ballyhoo, mostly fished naked. When there are sailfish around a lot of the captains throw an Ilander Outrider into the pattern, usually pink with a fresh strip bait or bally under the skirt.

Captain Arch taught me of the importance of quality baits for whites. He orders upwards of 60 cases of ballyhoo in the winter, when the quality is higher. He is meticulous about rigging them, being sure to push out all the poop and clear sack, breaking off the beaks, making clean exit wounds for the hooks and never, ever ripping the belly which causes them to tear and wash out more quickly. He removes the eyes and works the meat loose from around the backbone to be sure that each bait provides a seductive wiggle. Capt. Rom, like

most skippers, prefers to run most of his ballyhoo naked for whites, so a cleanly rigged, natural swimming bait is a must. Occasionally, a skipper will add a Sea Witch or other skirt. Capt. John Bayliss, who runs the Hatteras factory boat HATTERASCAL, says he uses skirts under certain sea conditions to make it easier for him to see the baits more than for the benefit of the fish.

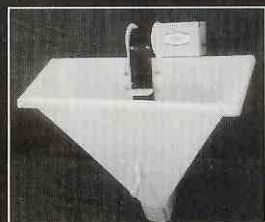
On the CHAPIN, we use spinning rods on flat-lines for whites and the technique works great. The outfits are Penn 9500SS reels on Slammer Stand-up rods with 30-pound line. I use a spider hitch to form a two-foot double line and add a 15-foot section of 80-pound leader with an Albright knot, ending it with a small ball bearing snap swivel. I rig ballyhoo on six-foot leaders of 80- or 100-pound test mono using a Mustad 9175 7/0 hook.

The ballys are run skipping or chin-weighted and rigged with a short piece of monel. Since resistance between the bait and the reel is often the reason whites drop a bait, this system gets more hook-ups because the rod is placed in the holder with the bail open with just a piece of rigging wire holding the line tight against the rod. Once the bait is set in the pattern, I twist the line to form a loop and put the loop in a very lightly set flat-line clip on the transom. When a fish hits the bait, the clip releases the line, the rigging wire straightens out and the bait is on complete free-spool off the spinning reel providing no resistance—i.e. a killer system.

The remainder of the pattern for whites is filled with Shimano TLD25s loaded with 30-pound test. We usually run two baits on the long-riggers, sometimes a pair on the short-riggers, and a long shotgun. We also add a pair of

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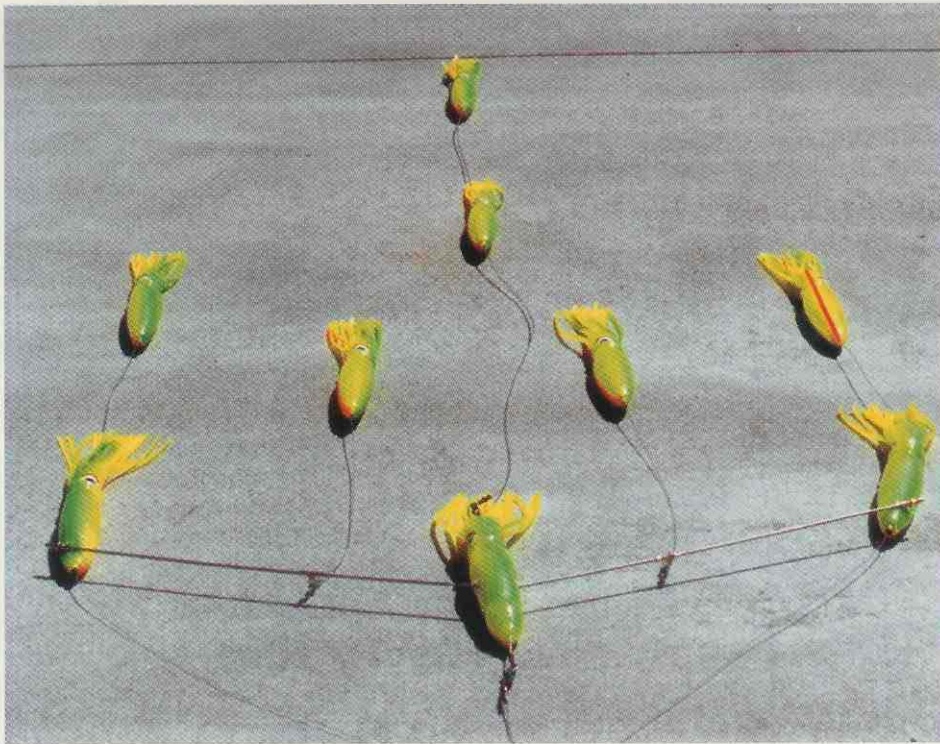
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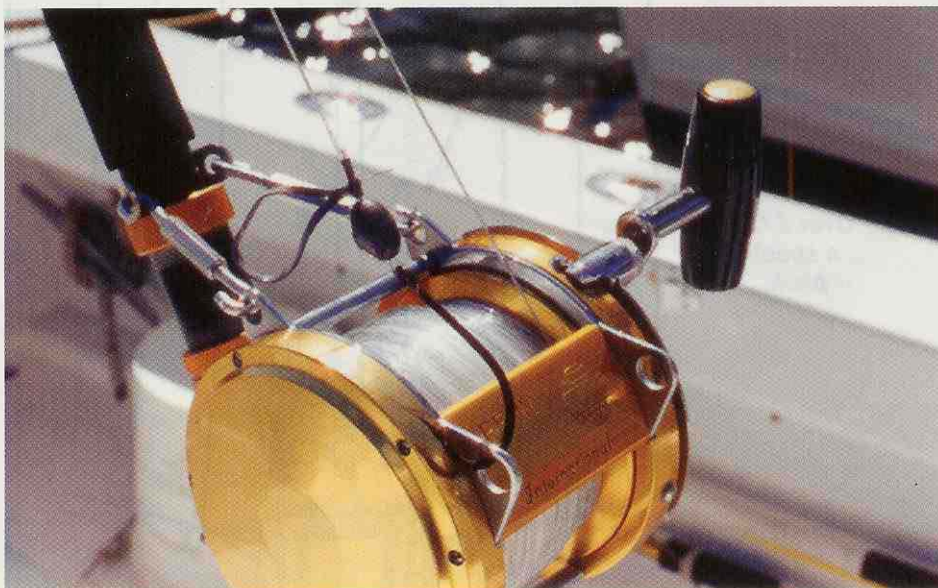
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OUGHTON'S AWESOME BAR: John rigs his own spreader bars for yellowfin using big 13 inch shell squids. The bar runs easily on the surface and draws strikes or attracts the tuna to the rigged baits set around it.

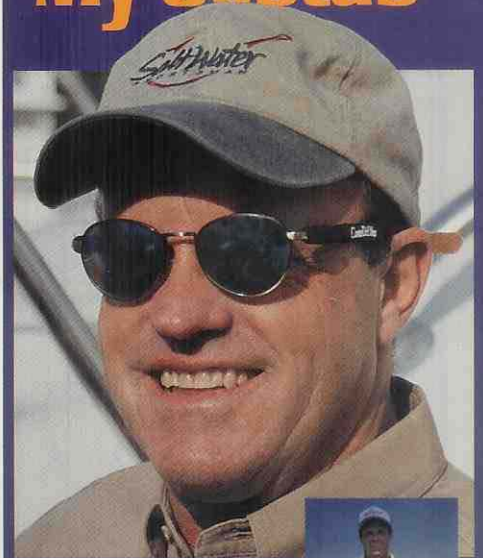
"The Point is a reliable place that often holds yellowfin year-round." He said they are usually found along edges of temperature changes, but they will feed on either the cool or warm side depending on where the bait is holding. Most captains agree when the

water is really clear and calm, tuna become more difficult to troll. Arch "PELICAN" Bracher feels this is a result of their excellent eyesight. Clear water means they can see your leaders, rigging and anything that might look unnatural with your baits and shy



QUICK-CHANGE BALLY RIG: When the yellowfin action is hot, the deckhands use this rubberband rig that let's them re-rig a new ballyhoo in seconds and get the outfit back into the pattern fast.

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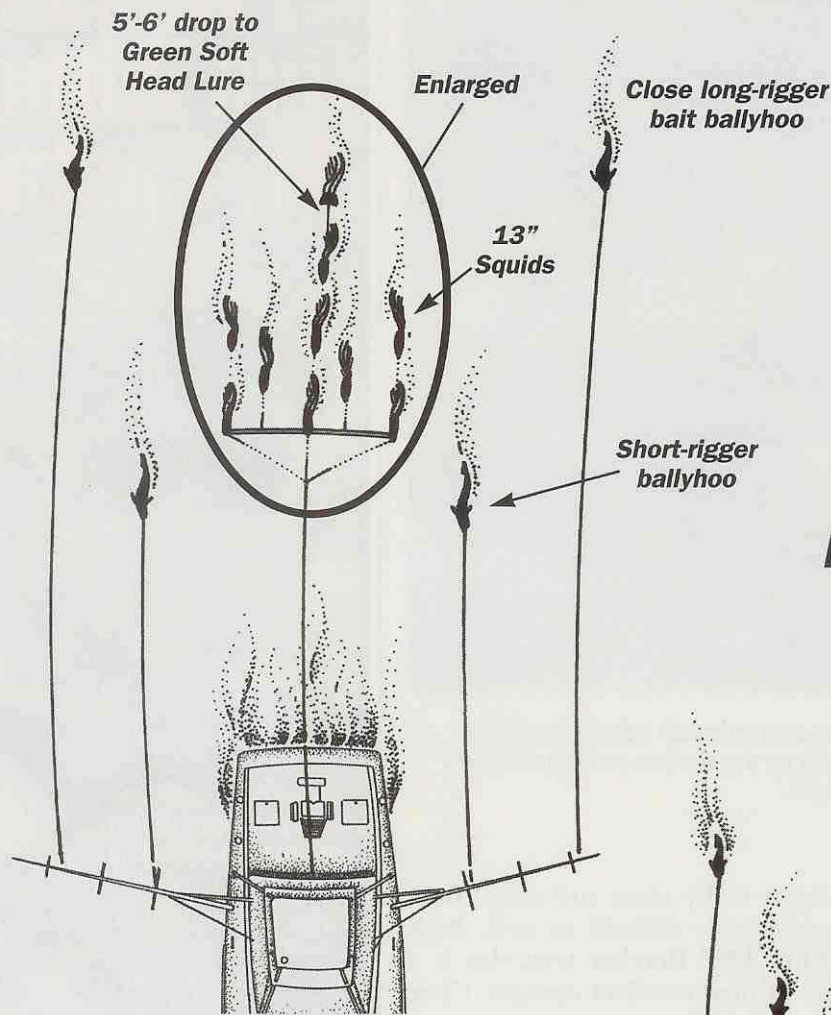
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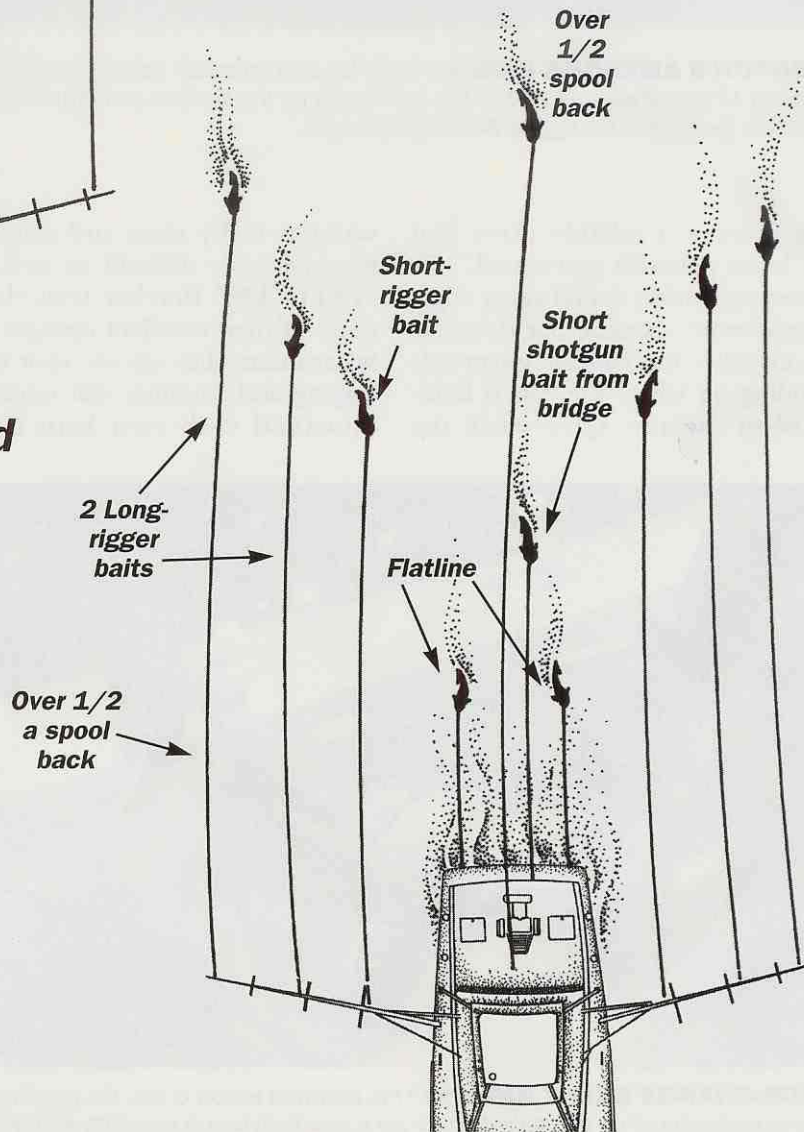


All-Purpose Spreader Bar Spread

The All-Purpose Spreader Bar pattern is used to target yellowfin tuna, but also gets the attention of bigeyes when they're around. The bar not only attracts strikes, but usually brings fish up into the pattern where they frequently split off onto the individual rigged ballyhoo.

The Finicky Tuna Spread puts a lot of rigged ballyhoo baits in a wide-open pattern behind the boat. The four long-rigger and long shotgun baits are set anywhere from a 1/2 spool of line or further back, often well beyond your ability to see them back there.

Large Spread for Finicky Tuna



away. When the surface is rough or the water is slightly off color, it hides irregularities.

Color is very important when trolling tuna. While medium ballyhoo is the preferred bait, they are dressed with a variety of lures including Sea Witch skirts, Outlaws by Hatteras Lure, Ilander Trackers and others. Since flying fish are common in Summer, blue/white is a consistent producer, but there are others. Rich "SUSPENSE" Samuel likes blue or green with a blue head, purple/black or purple/blue with a red head, hot pink or pink/white. Chartreuse with a touch of dark green is productive, too. Both Captain John Canning and I swear by the Outlaw in blue and white as the best producer.

Some days a spreader bar is the only thing that will raise yellowfins. We find that if we troll other baits around bars we get more multiple hook-ups on both the bar and the individual baits. I had been fishing bars on the boats in Jersey for several years, but they use them a little differently here. I found myself in a unique position to experiment with different configurations and eventually put together a spreader bar of my own design. It features a 36-inch metal bar that supports nine high quality, 13-inch squids. The bar uses a bridle system I picked up from Larry Baily on the charter boat FAST LANE, and my own unique method of attaching squids directly to the bar. It floats and never leaves the pattern. Dave Reed, owner of Hatteras Lures, recently started building them for me and plans to offer them as part of his product line this season because they are so productive on tuna, not to mention how well they work as teasers for billfish. Sometime the white marlin just won't leave them alone.

There are times when you get a single shot at yellowfin during a day of trolling. We have a method of quick-changing ballyhoo baits that lets us get the most from a blast of fish. Most charter boat crews, when they get a multiple hook-up of tuna, fight them to the boat, then carefully re-bait each line, reset them in their trolling position and start trolling again. However, if you change a few steps, you can increase the four, five or six

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or soft
head
teaser
with
strip
bait

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hooked
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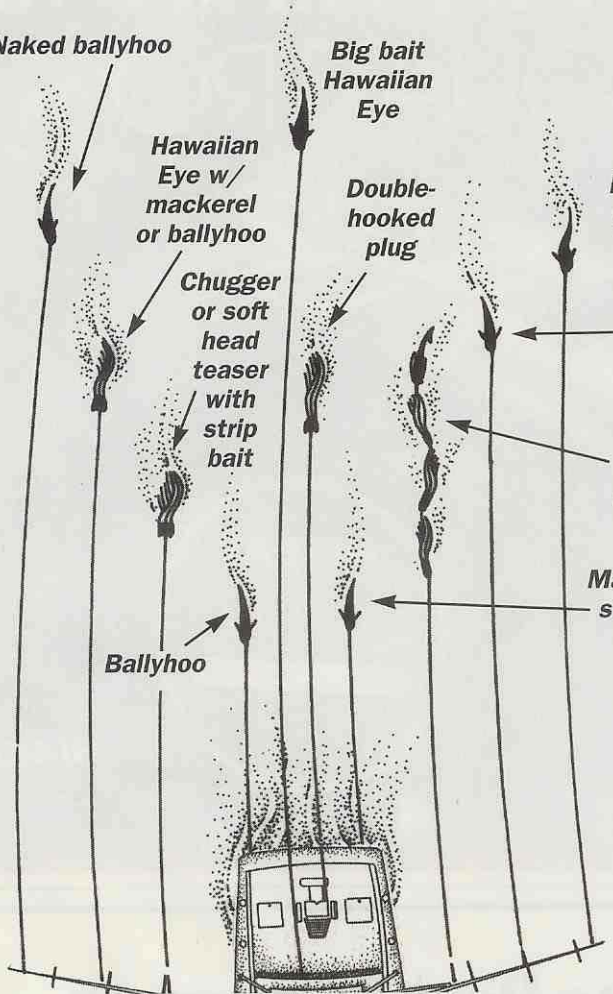
Ballyhoo
Ilander-
Tracker
combo

Naked
ballyhoo

Hawaiian Eye chain
teaser with ballyhoo
or Spanish mackerel

Mackerel or
swimming
mullet

Ballyhoo



All-Purpose Billfish Spread

When the fishing is for a mix of sailfish, white and blue marlin, the All-Purpose Billfish pattern shines. A mix of teaser lures, naked ballyhoo, bally/lure combinations and even a swimming mullet or mackerel, it covers the bases pretty well.

The Billfish Teaser Spread is used for light-tackle bait & switch fishing and for flyfishing billfish. For flyfishing, the pattern is set on the opposite side of the boat from the anglers position in the cockpit, so he or she has a clear field for the back-cast.

Billfish Teaser Spread

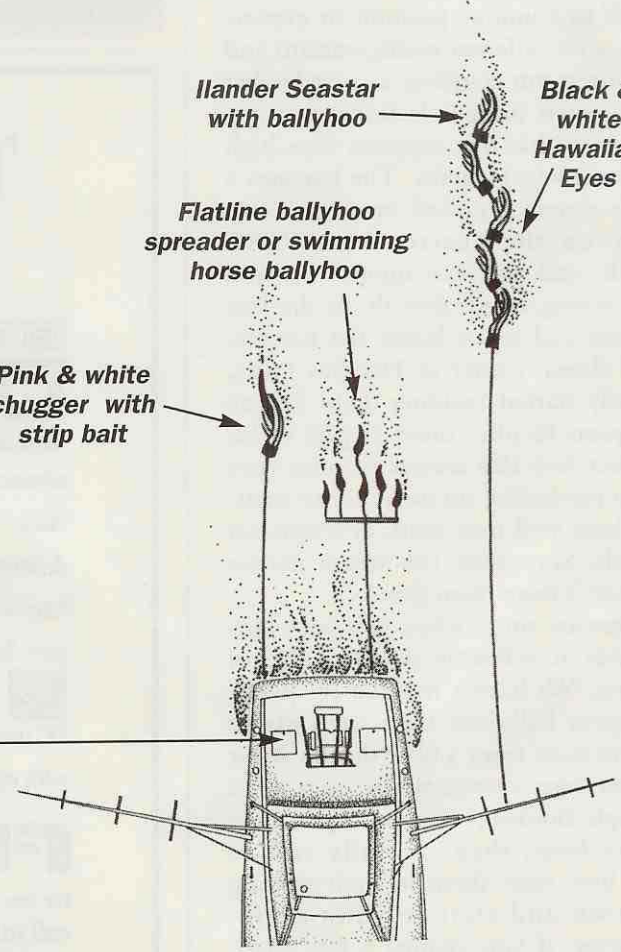
Ilander Seastar
with ballyhoo

Black &
white
Hawaiian
Eyes

Flatline ballyhoo
spreader or swimming
horse ballyhoo

Pink & white
chugger with
strip bait

2 80W's,
2 spinners
or TLD's
with
pitch baits



tuna you hook from the school into 10 or 15 fish in one shot. The key ingredient in this procedure is rigging your ballyhoo baits using rubber bands instead of rigging wire for quick replacement.

Here's how it's done. When you hook up the first few fish, the anglers begin working them toward the transom, but leave them in the water a short distance behind the boat. The skipper puts the boat into a circling pattern, usually dropping the speed down to three or four knots.

As the mate gaffs the first fish and dumps it in the cockpit, he uses the gaff end to pop the hook out of the fish's jaw. He pops the rubber band off the pin on the bait rig, the old ballyhoo head slips off the hook, he grabs another bait (which are already prepped and kept lined up along the covering boards for this occasion), inserts the hook, wraps the head to the pin with the rubber band, snaps off the beak and it goes right back into the water. With just a little practice, the rigging process takes about five seconds and the rod is fishing again. Then the mate goes to the next fish and repeats the process.

When you get this technique working, you can literally catch fish after fish from the school, the ones in the water holding the school close to the boat almost like they were dolphin and the quick gaff and rigging work making it possible to continue to hook fish when fighting the others.

When tuna turn finicky, trolling becomes frustrating. I've learned some tricks that the other captains use at these times. Capt. Bill "FAST LANE" Brown showed me a trick that eliminates the disturbance a swivel creates near the bait, which he feels puts tuna off in clear water. He makes up a special wind-on system that requires rods built with round, ceramic guides instead of rollers. He uses a Sampo BX3RC ball bearing swivel tied to the end of the 80-pound test line he runs on his 50W and 80W reels. Then he ties a 40- to 60-foot length of 100- and 150-pound leader to the other end and ties on his bait rigs. This keeps the swivel away from the bait, and can still be wound onto the reel without difficulty when playing a fish. Another

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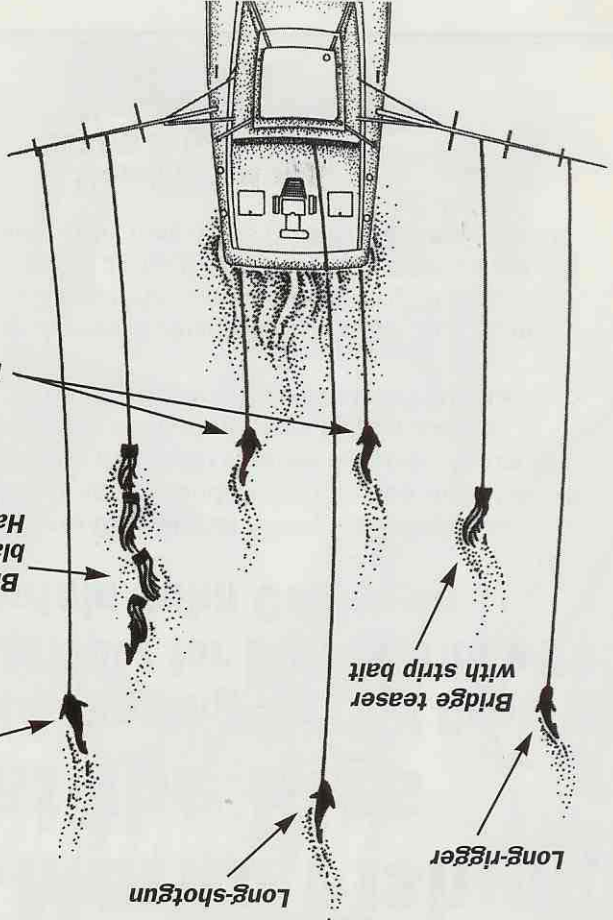
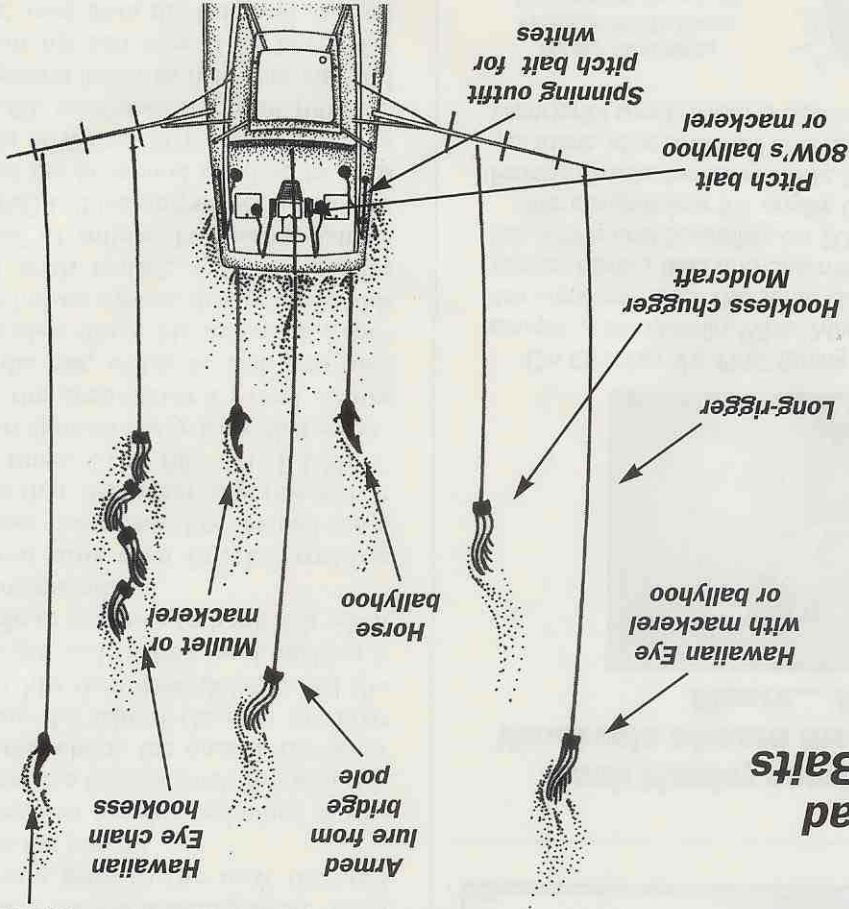


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White Marlin Spread Without Shortrigger Baits

When the whites are thick, especially off Oregon Inlet in the Fall, this White Marlin pattern without shortrigger baits is a consistent producer. Bridge teasers are usually a daisy chain and a rigged strip bait. Pitch baits are usually kept handy, too.



Blue Marlin Spread

Large
rigged
horse bally
or mackerel
naked

North Carolina is often over-looked as a blue marlin hotspot. The Outer Banks produces loads of blues every year and this Blue Marlin pattern is a favorite. It has a mix of rigged Spanish Mackerel, of rigged Spanish Mackerel, ballyhoo, bridge teasers and four pitchbaits kept at the ready to bait & switch.

benefit is if the line at the end of this wind-on gets frayed or nicked, you can trim back a couple feet without hurting its performance.

Sometimes we encounter yellowfin under grass beds, but you can't get near them trolling. That's when Capt. Arch Bracher switches to plugs. He keeps a couple of Penn 9500SS spinning reels loaded with 30-pound test on the new Slammer stand-up spinning rods armed with a Rebel P8303S plug in blue and silver on a short 80-pound leader. The deckhand goes to the bow of the boat and Arch slowly positions him within casting distance of the grass line. The plug is cast near the grass bed, but Arch has the angler just pop it then leave it motionless for five or 10 seconds. Then the angler pops it again. Arch swears that most of the bites come when the plug is just sitting there. He catches a lot of yellowfin this way.

Captain Scott Williams, of the charter boat ESCAPE, showed me how to fish an extra long bait when the tuna are playing hard to get. I'd heard of setting the shotgun bait half a spool back in the pattern, but Scott says he often lets out three-quarters of the line off a 80W, back so far you can't see the bait from the flybridge. I know it sounds crazy, but Scott swears using a light 80- or 100-pound leader and getting the bait really far away from the boat can increase a three or four fish day to an eight fish day.

One last tuna tip I picked up. When a tuna strikes short and misses the bait, grab the rod and jig the bait or lure. There's no need to drop back, just jig it and frequently you'll get the tuna to come back and hook-up.

CAPTAIN, THERE ARE BILLFISH HERE

We encounter blue and white marlin, sailfish and even an occasional Atlantic spearfish fishing off the Outer Banks. Most skippers and mates talk about their boat's "sweet spot." Some say its the right long-rigger, others the left flat-line, others the short-rigger...everyone's got their "super station." For the most part they use similar techniques, give or take a step here or there. With the amazing numbers of billfish encountered here each skipper has had plenty of experience to hone his techniques.

Obviously, it is important to know what to look for when pursuing billfish. Captain Rom on the RELEASE out of Hatteras Harbor feels the best marlin conditions are blue water with very little current, 78- to 80-degree temperatures and some scattered grass alive with bait. Sounds like heaven. In May and June he finds the big blues, 500-pounds and up, in with the dolphin and bonito. This year was no exception. During the middle of May there was a flurry of big blue releases, 18 on one day, that were all between 400 and 800 pounds.

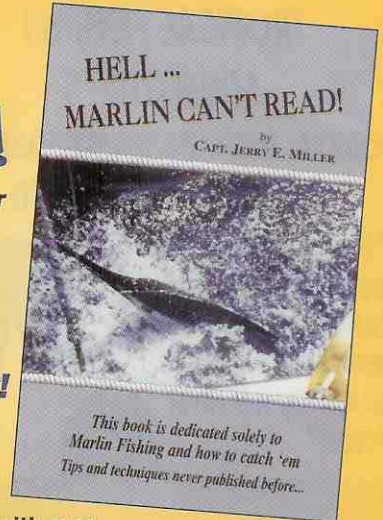
Further up the line when out of Oregon Inlet, Capt. Arch prefers clean, blue water that has pushed off the Gulf Stream. He finds many white marlin in blue-green water or along color breaks where bait often amasses. He likes temperatures in the high 70s, but considers that to be secondary to color and bait.

When targeting big blue marlin, many boats use similar set ups with their own little nuances like teaser arrangements, colors and placement of key baits. On the CHAPIN, we

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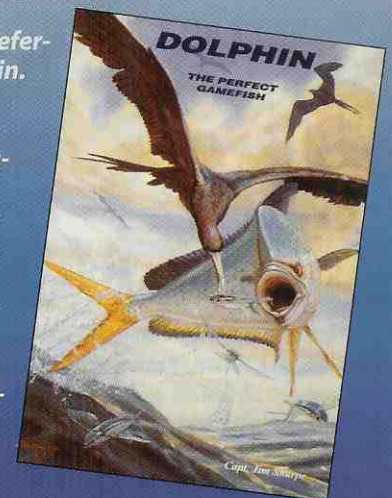
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bridge teasers made up of Hawaiian Eyes, daisy-chained every 15 inches along a main line. An Ilander Sea Star with a horse ballyhoo or mackerel under the skirt finishes the chain. We also use an assortment of colored skirts over strip baits.

This area provides lots of shots at multiple hook-ups on whites and there are ways to increase your chances of hooking two, three or more at once. Capt. Arch is one of the top white marlin skippers and here's how he does it. "When I hook the first fish, I like to turn the boat in the direction of that fish. Then, depending on what it does, I work to keep as many lines on the opposite side of the boat in the water as possible. You'll frequently see another fish or two charging the remaining baits, giving you a chance to drop back to them, too." Just keep in mind, sometimes you can get away with this, and others times the first fish will run back across the transom and you have to clear the lines.

Captain Arch recounted times when he's had up to seven whites in the spread. He always has pitch baits ready on spinning outfits for just such an occurrence and he makes good use of them.

With the variety of billfish we encounter, often several species on the same day, we need an "all purpose" billfish spread to take advantage of the smorgasbord. On the CHAPIN, that generally consists of a mix of 80Ws and 50Ws on custom rods. From one boat to the next it may vary a little, but the basic spread starts with a pair of bridge teasers, two flat-line baits, one small and one large. The short-rigger and long-rigger positions also get one small and one large bait. This puts us in a position to take advantage of either white or blue marlin, which ever shows in the pattern.

It is important to have a couple pitch-baits ready, large and small, for the same reason. We pull this spread a lot during the Summer when boats that are billfishing can be rewarded with a Grand Slam or two, with plenty of extras. While places like Venezuela get a lot of attention for the ability to produce Slams, the Outer Banks does so regularly each year. The billfishing is that good out of Hatteras and Oregon Inlets.

MY LEARNING EXPERIENCE CONTINUES

From my experience fishing in Florida, New Jersey and now the Outer Banks, I believe charter fishing is the most work a captain and mate will ever have to endure! The days are long, the techniques varied and there are so many things that have to be rigged, maintained and at the ready that it can be overwhelming at times. The more prepared you and your boat are, the better the results will be at the end of each day. I certainly am getting everything I bargained for and more in the way of an education, fishing with mates and captains of the highest caliber.

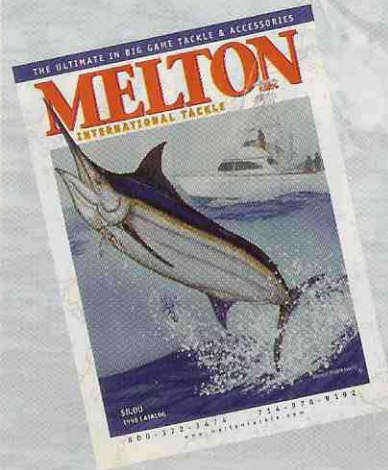
As I said at the beginning, I am here to learn from the experts and have certainly found quite a few. As I continue fishing here, it seems I learn something new every day. I'd like to thank the skippers and mates who have helped me along the way, especially Capt. Mitch, and hope they recognize this article for what it really is, my tribute to them.

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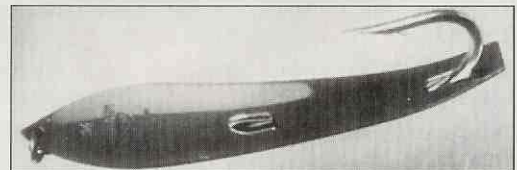
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