

Angler: Bryce Francis

Species: Diamond Trevally

Lure: ZMan 3.75" StreakZ

Jighead: TT Lures HeadlockZ HD

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MinnowZ Magic

By Jeff Wilton





Jeff with a nice jack on the New Penny colour.

For pretty much any fishing application ZMan 3" MinnowZ will produce fish. They are my 'go-to' plastic and their versatility still surprises me, both fresh and saltwater fish can't resist a well presented MinnowZ!

The fact that you could be up a saltwater tidal creek lobbing them into snags rigged weedless on ChinlockZ SWS TT jigheads (Snagless Weight System) and smacking mangrove jacks and barramundi in the morning, then out in the bluewater dropping them into 30+ metres on 3/4 – 1oz TT HeadlockZ HD jigheads for nannygai and fingermark for lunch. Then, as the sun was setting, you could be stealthily flicking them into undercut banks on silly string up in the fresh for sooties and JPs.

Yep, I can easily say that if I was only allowed to use one plastic for the rest of my life it would be a ZMan 3" MinnowZ. On the following pages are a few situations where I test the MinnowZ almost daily here in NQ.



Creek Bashing Minnowz Style

The tide started to just creep out of the mangroves and the snags were beginning to show themselves. The baitfish seemed to be getting nervous and I couldn't help but smile as I witnessed a school of herring swimming for their lives before a crater appeared and one disappeared. Arriving at my destination I cut the motor and deployed the electric, silence except for the whining of the mozzies... BOOF... and I scrambled to grab my rod! Rigged and ready to go was a ZMan 3" MinnowZ in Pearl colour, rigged on a 1/8oz 3/0 TT HeadlockZ HD jighead.

Casting the MinnowZ into the edge of the snag and letting it slowly sink, whilst slightly twitching the rod tip, my concentration was solely on the loose line. I started the retrieve when I thought the plastic was getting close to the bottom, a slow wind with a pause and a twitch of the rod is all that is needed. It didn't take long and on the pause the braid came up tight and I was on. An extremely hard hit and power lunge told me it was a mangrove jack and I only just turned it away from its home...



Jacks love MinnowZ.



Being a typical ZMan plastic (10X Tough) after unhooking and releasing the fish it was ready to go into battle again. The next few casts went unnoticed so I decided a change of tactics was needed, the fish were obviously hanging very deep in the structure. As they didn't want to come out and play it was time to get that MinnowZ right into the thick of things. TT SnakelockZ jigheads are designed so that your plastic can be rigged 'snagless' which allows you to literally throw it right into the structure... HANG ON! MinnowZ sit perfectly on the 3/0 SnakelockZ and as it was shallow with not much current I wanted a light weight so that the plastic would slowly sink into the strike zone. I chose a 1/8oz head and my confidence soared.

With adrenalin pumping, I felt my heart rate increase when I made my next cast. My body was poised and every muscle was tensed as I knew what was about to happen as the plastic landed deep in the snag and started slowly sinking into the dark depths. I swear I saw the entire snag shake as the rod got near ripped out of my hands. All I could do was strike hard, thumb the spool and use the rod to attempt to persuade the fish to swim out the right way. It didn't, and the fight lasted only a second or two but that's how close quarter snag bashing goes.

As the tide had continued to drop out over the last hour there were some very fishy drains starting to appear. These drains carry all sorts of edible goodies and warm water out of the mangroves and are well known feeding areas for barra. The next MinnowZ was rigged on a standard 1/4oz 3/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead and I couldn't wait to lob it into the mouth of any drain I could find.



Jeff with a skinny water barra on a weedless rigged MinnowZ.



Barra time!

Staying a distance off the drain I made a long cast and watched the plastic land right up in the shallows. With a slow roll it started making its way back to the boat. BOOF! I heard the underwater explosion before the rod even registered the hit and on the strike a solid chrome barra leapt for the sky. The thing I love about ZMan MinnowZ the most is their versatility, change the style of jighead and you have a new way of presenting your MinnowZ to the fish.



Trevally can't resist a MinnowZ in the creeks or offshore.



MinnowZ in the BluewaterZ

We were fishing over a wreck in 30 metres of water and the sounder was showing some awesome DROP NOW activity. But try as we might we were struggling to get any interest from the fish that were clearly there. It was one of those middle of the day and slack tide scenarios and the fish were not switched on in the slightest.

It was time for a game changer and out came the MinnowZ and some 1/2oz HeadlockZ. I also took the time to drop my leader size down to give me optimal chances to get the bite. Covering the MinnowZ with 'Inshore Saltwater' scented Pro-Cure, my confidence was sky high as I watched the little MinnowZ disappear into the depths. After reaching the bottom all that was needed was a slow lift off the bottom and as it dropped back down it was clobbered. The culprit was a large mouth nannygai and the next dozen drops produced the same result, mixed with various trevally species. The small size of the 3' MinnowZ is irresistible to bluewater fish, even when they are shut down. The jelly bean effect - even if you are not hungry you would still eat a jellybean if it was put in front of you, and fish are no different.

Swimming the Minnowz in the SweetwaterZ

Trekking through the tropical jungle, we emerged into the creek and it looked really fishy. The first pool was pretty straight forward, with the odd tree and rock, but had plenty of depth. This situation called for the MinnowZ to be rigged on a light (1/8oz) TT HeadlockZ as I could cast it to the top of the pool and let it sink into the depths on the retrieve.

No sooner had it disappeared from sight the rod registered a solid hit and I was on. The culprit was a solid sooty grunter and they know how to fight. After pulling a few more sooties from this stretch we wandered around the bend and another pool was found. This had overhanging trees and snags everywhere and it wasn't deep but seemed the perfect spot for a jungle perch to be hiding.



The tropical jungle and the species that inhabit it.



For this scenario the minnowz was rigged on a 3/0 ChinlockZ jighead. This is a snagless and very natural looking presentation. The MinnowZ landed softly and with a very slow and twitchy retrieve it bumped its way over and around the snags. Half way down the pool a pack of JPs appeared out of nowhere and raced each other to smash the plastic right in front of me. The creek played out like this for the next kilometre until we reached a wide deep pool fringed with weed and lily pads. This pool screamed barra but getting a lure presented to them would be difficult. The trusty TT SnakelockZ was rigged and lobbed into the mess of weed and lilies. A quick, high retrieve had the MinnowZ swimming nicely and not gathering much weed and as it neared the edge it was inhaled with a loud BOOF and all hell broke loose. With plenty of patience and fancy rod work a lovely golden, sweetwater barra was subdued at my feet.

So there you have it. ZMan 3" Minnowz are just deadly in all situations. Matching them with the appropriate TT jighead means you can swim them anywhere. The fish don't really stand a chance. Hang on!



Jeff with a golden barra from a deeper pool loaded with weed and lilies.

A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a blue patterned skirt, a black cap, and sunglasses is fishing on a boat. They are holding a fishing rod that is bent, indicating a catch. The background shows a vast expanse of blue water under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

BACK TO BARRALODGE

By Shaun Taylor

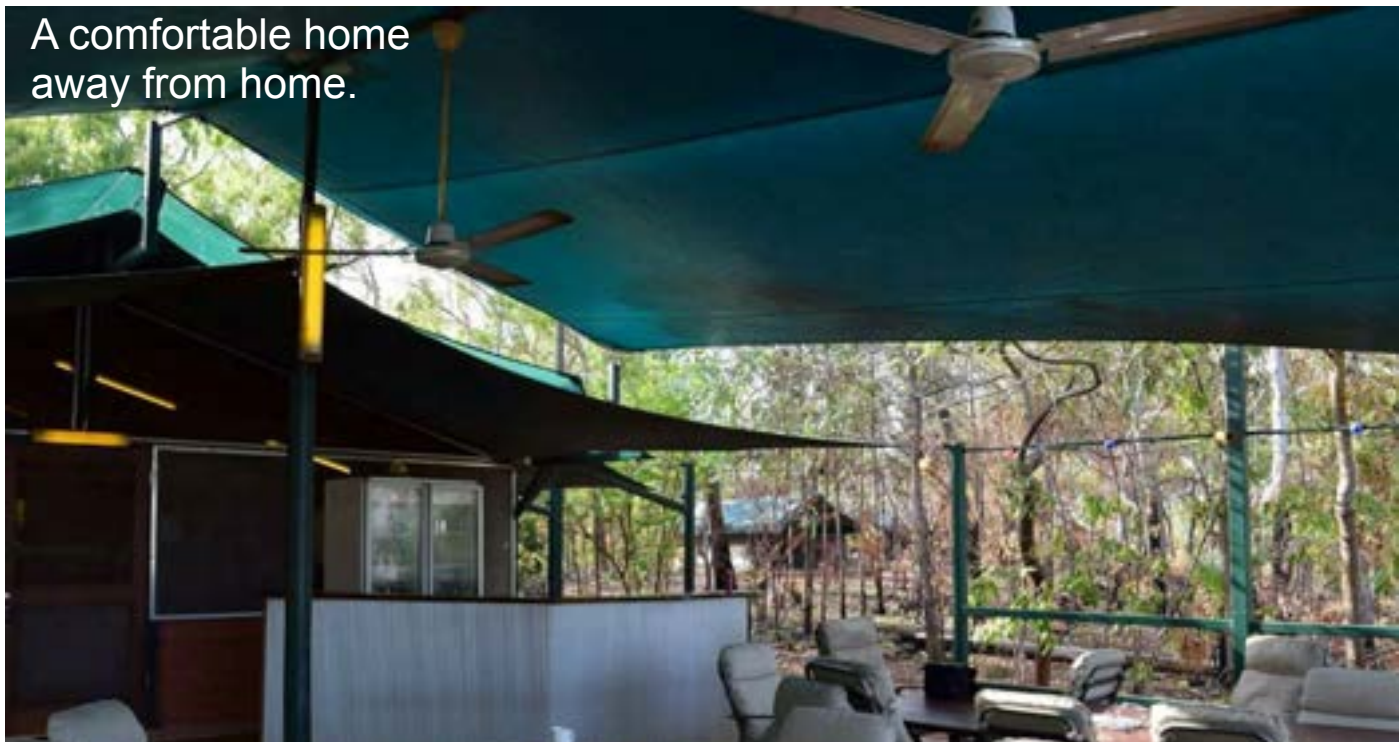
One of the best things about working for Barralodge for a long period of time is that occasionally I get to take a mate or two up there to show them the awesomeness that abounds in both the fishing and the country. Even experienced fishos are often blown away with the place, but when it is what you would call novices, (sometimes referred to as 'gumbys') well it really is an eye opener.

My latest trip was probably one of my most enjoyable, not because of the barra going nuts, far from it, as the tides weren't ideal and because of this it was going to restrict our entry and exit times to systems that I wanted to fish. No, it was because I was taking three barra newbies, who happen to make up our work car pool and have become my best mates over the last four years.

It also helps that they are three of the maddest buggers you would ever meet, and I was sure there was going to be many laughs and hopefully some good fish. Now I don't have to hold back with these blokes and to say they were average fisherman would be insulting average fisherman everywhere!

For instance Mark 'Burner' Raeburn often told me that the surest way to fail on any fishing trip was to make sure he was on board! He reckons he couldn't get a bite at Seaworld. I had previously got him a small black marlin on his first trip out in my Scout and I think this had made him think that maybe he wasn't doomed to a life of donuts, indeed he was first to commit to the Barralodge trip and I assured him if he went fishless at Barralodge it was time to buy some golf clubs!

A comfortable home
away from home.



Although it wasn't prime barra tides they still made an appearance.



Big John Coulston and Pauly Lindeman were of a similar skill level, so I made sure in the lead up to the trip that they at least got the basics of casting down, for as they were to discover with barra especially, the difference between getting a bite and being in the trees or too far off the snags is minimal.

We used various techniques in the creeks, with my old favourite 'go-to' ZMan 3" MinnowZ and 4" Diezel MinnowZ working well. I matched them to the awesome new TT Lures SnakelockZ system (especially amongst the snags). The boys picked up the method of 'walking' their plastics through the snags pretty quickly, and the weedless qualities of this setup gave some leniency when errant casts ended up in the jungle.

None of the boys wanted to win the 'Don Burke' award, awarded to the angler who spent most time in the trees, so this was extra incentive to improve their casting skills. Big John took the points in the creeks, probably because he had been on one trip with me previously, knew what to expect and also had done the most practice at home.



The barra weren't monsters but were well received.

Sexy Mullet, Rootbeer Gold and Gold Rush all worked well, but alas most of our barra were smaller models, with the metre plus models eluding us. Still, the numbers made up for it and Pauly and Burner caught more fish in the one day than they had in their whole lives.

Luckily the wind gods smiled favourably on us as I had hoped, allowing us to do some offshore work to make up for the limited 'prime time' barra shots we were going to get. This was all new to the boys and I loved this, as often anglers come to this area totally focussed on barra and miss out on the awesome pelagic and bottom fish action.



The boys honed their casting skills on the barra.

Queenies were soon to become a favourite and with good-sized fish in numbers, this made for a baptism of fire for the 'car pool crew'. Almost every fish landed was a new species for the boys and it read like a who's who of tropical sportfish. Queenies, Spanish macks, longtails, GT's, brassys, coral trout, blue bone, threadies and big blue salmon, tricky snapper, fingermark, various cod, etc., etc.

I mostly fished the boys on ZMan 5" Scented Jerk ShadZ and Scented PaddlerZ, due to their versatility and attraction to a wide array of species. Coconut Ice Glow, Sexy Mullet and my old favourite Redbone Glow were our best colours, matched up to 3/4oz TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jigheads in 5/0 and 6/0 size.



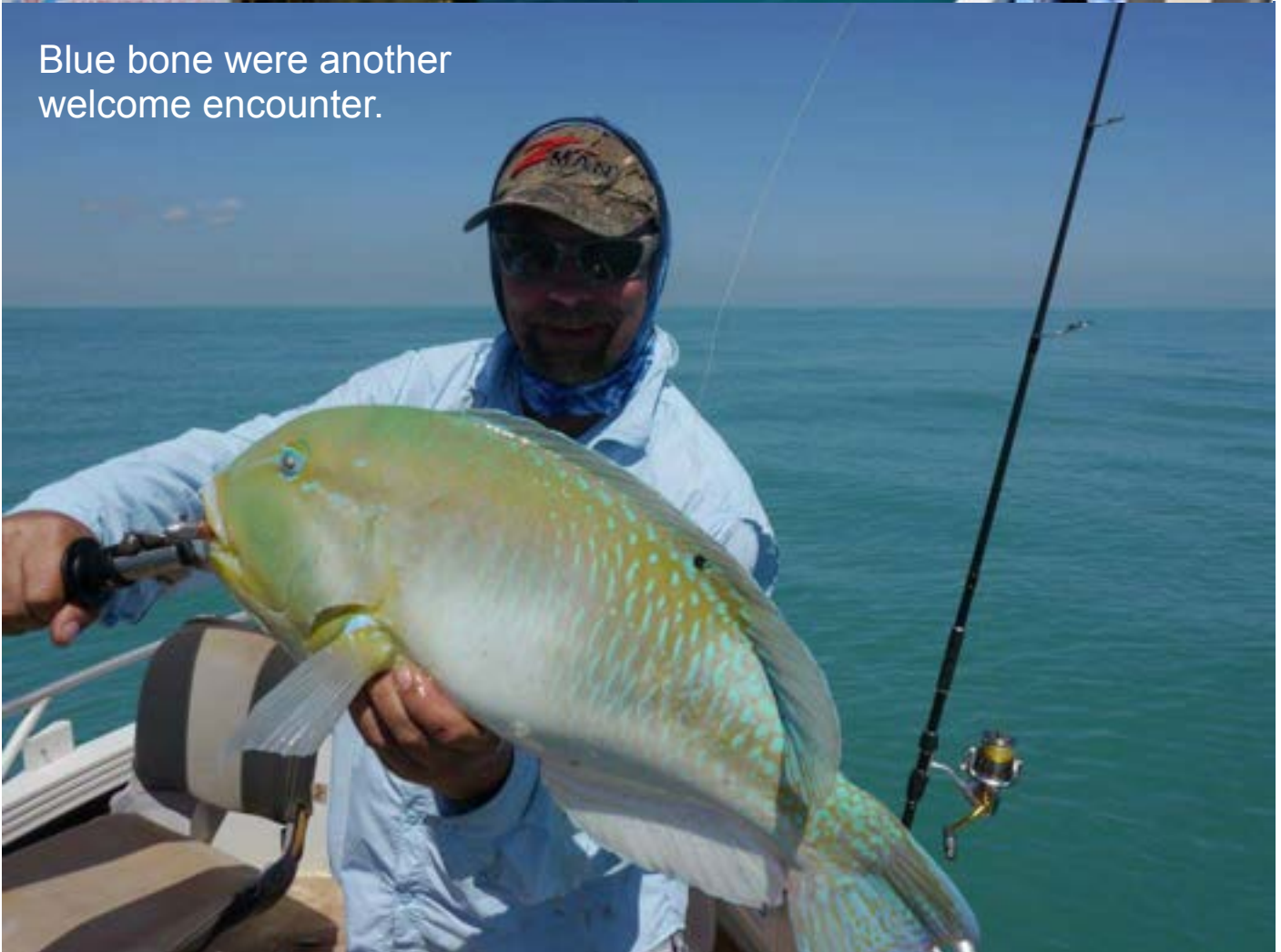
Queenies, trevally, Spanish macks, cobia and more kept the boys busy.



Burner quickly became the blue bone specialist, after nailing several nice specimens and these were destined for the skilled hands of the lodge chef. As well as catching new species I was keen for the boys to sample some of the eating qualities of these northern species, blue bone and golden snapper in particular.



Blue bone were another welcome encounter.

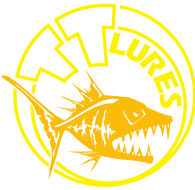


As I mentioned earlier, these characters are ratbags and some of the practical jokes and stunts that followed just can't be printed here! The boys were lucky to experience an extra aspect to the trip, as lodge owner Alex had asked me to deliver a Landcruiser back to Darwin, so instead of flying out it was a six hour drive through Arnhemland and Kakadu, and crossing the famous Cahills crossing before hitting the bitumen. It is my favourite drive anywhere, with awesome scenery and river crossings, wildlife and quite a few fishing options as well, with billabongs and freshwater streams hiding away down the many side tracks. Needless to say, it is a trip we will all remember until the end of our days, but hopefully we will repeat it sometime soon.

Shaun Taylor



BACK TO BARRALODGE



Rigging Guide

ZMan Soft Plastics - Choosing a TT HeadlockZ Jighead

This rigging guide is designed to assist you when matching a ZMan soft plastic and TT Lures HeadlockZ jighead. The HeadlockZ grub keeper has been designed to lock on the 10X Tough, yet super-soft and realistic, ZMan ElaZtech soft plastic, cast after cast, fish after fish!

ZMan Soft Plastic	HeadlockZ Jighead
2" CrusteaZ	2, 1
2" GrubZ	2, 1
2.5" GrubZ	2, 1, 1/0
2.5" Slim SwimZ	2, 1, 1/0
3" Scented PogyZ	2/0, 3/0,
3" MinnowZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
3" Scented ShrimpZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
3" Scented CrabZ	3/0, 4/0, 5/0
3.5" GrubZ	2/0, 3/0
3.75" StreakZ	1/0, 2/0
4" StreakZ Curly TailZ	2/0, 3/0, 4/0
4" Finesse ShadZ	1/0, 2/0
4" DieZel MinnowZ	3/0, 4/0, 5/0
4" Scented PaddlerZ	3/0, 4/0
4" SwimmerZ	4/0, 5/0
4" Scented ShrimpZ	4/0, 5/0, 6/0
4" CrawdadZ	3/0, 4/0
4" Hard Leg FrogZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
4" Pop FrogZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
4" Pop ShadZ	3/0 ChinlockZ
4.5" RaZor ShadZ	3/0, 4/0
5" Pop ShadZ	6/0 ChinlockZ
5" GrubZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Scented PaddlerZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Grass KickerZ	5/0, 6/0
5" StreakZ	4/0, 5/0
5" Scented Jerk ShadZ	4/0, 5/0
6" SwimmerZ	5/0, 6/0, 7/0, 8/0
6" Pop FrogZ	8/0 ChinlockZ
7" Scented Jerk ShadZ	7/0, 8/0
8" StreakZ XL	7/0, 8/0
8" Mag SwimZ	8/0
9" GrubZ	6/0, 7/0, 8/0
10" HeroZ	8/0

ZMan Soft Plastics

- 10X Tough - better stands up to pickers and toothies, more fish per lure.
- Super-soft realistic feel - maximum action and fish keep biting!
- Buoyant - rig to fish topwater to deep.
- Buoyant - Tail up action attracts fish and triggers Strikes.

TT HeadlockZ Finesse

- Built on a fine gauge, Japanese hook for the ultimate penetration with light lines and light drag settings.
- Unique 'head lock' grub keeper.

TT HeadlockZ HD Jighead

- Built on a brutally strong, chemically sharpened Mustad black nickel hook.
- Unique 'head lock' grub keeper.

Caring for your ZMan

- Store ZMan in their original packets - they may react with other plastics.
- Avoid storing lures in extreme heat for maximum life.

Estuary Pelagics



By Bryce Francis

Over the last few months I have been using the ZMan StreakZ and in particular the 3.75" size. I like to get the StreakZ moving quite quickly for pelagic species such as trevally, tailor and queenfish, or work them slower for fish like tarpon, grunter and flathead. The new TT Lures DemonZ jigheads are a perfect match for the ZMan 3.75" StreakZ, with a 5/0 TT HeadlockZ HD preferred for the larger 5" StreakZ. If the bait is small the 3.75" can also be cut down to around 3" to match the bait size. Always use some Mullet Pro-Cure Super Gel in the belly slot when the bite is tough.

The gear that I normally use is a 1-4kg rod of around 7' with a 1000 size reel, loaded with 6-8lb braid and 4-8lb leader. This will be fine in most cases but when targeting tailor off the beaches, throwing the ZMan 5" StreakZ on 3/4oz jigheads, a slightly longer and heavier rod is needed, in which case I use a 3-6kg rod at 7'8" and a 3000 size reel with 10-15lb braid and 15-20lb leader.



Trevally are my favourite species. They are aggressive and sometimes will eat anything, while at other times they are so fussy and you can go through every lure you have in an attempt to find out what will work. There are six main species of trevally that inhabit the SEQ river systems; GT's, tealeaf, bigeye, golden, diamond and cale cale.

Like most fish, trevally will hang in areas that hold a lot of bait, such as rock bars, current and colour lines, marinas, river mouths, flats and at night around lights shining into the water. The GT's, bigeye and tealeaf trevally will bust up bait on the surface, especially early morning and late afternoon. The diamond, cale cale and golden trevally will sometimes sit just underneath the bust ups and feed on whatever drifts down. In this situation throw past the school and a full speed retrieve through them, just under the surface, is good for the GT's, bigeye and tealeaf, or you can sink the StreakZ down and hop it along the bottom for golden, cale cale or diamond trevally.



Speed it up for GTs, big eyes and tea leaf.



Slow down for golden, diamond & cale cale.



Golden



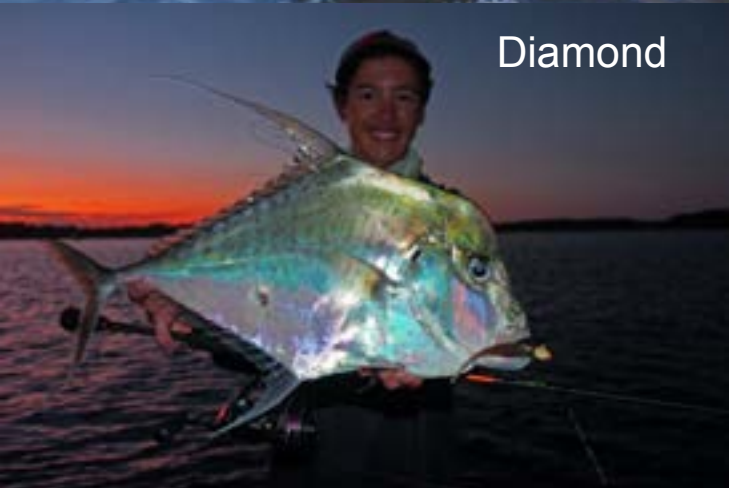
Big eye



Cale cale



Diamond



In other situations, where the trevally are sitting on or close to the bottom, I normally use a 3.75" StreakZ rigged on a 1/4oz or 3/8oz TT DemonZ jighead. The retrieve is three to six aggressive hops, that get the lure darting from side to side on the way up, then allow it to sink back to the bottom. I will normally have another rod rigged up with a 3.75" StreakZ on a 1/6oz DemonZ, so that I can also use a less aggressive retrieve with two to four small hops and then keep the lure close to the bottom. I find that the more aggressive option normally works better.

If you notice that they are feeding on larger baitfish, such as gar or mullet, try a 5" StreakZ in Bubble Gum colour, rigged on a 3/8oz 5/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead. My favourite colours in the 3.75" StreakZ are Baby Bass, Watermelon Red and Bloodworm rigged on the DemonZ jigheads.



Tailor love plastics as do salmon in southern waters.



Tailor are very similar to trevally as in what type of areas they like, what they eat and are just as aggressive. They love to eat the larger profiled lures and this is where the ZMan 5" StreakZ works best. Tailor are normally found schooling up in current lines, river mouths, deep channels and rock bars harassing baitfish. When they are like this a 3.75" StreakZ on a 3/8 DemonZ or a 5" StreakZ rigged on a 3/8 5/0 HeadlockZ HD sunk down to the bottom and given 5 or 6 large hops and repeated works really well. If they are busting up on the surface they will often be mixed in with trevally so the full speed retrieve using a 5" Bubble Gum coloured StreakZ works best.

Another great way to target tailor is off the beach in deep surf gutters or on the flats. Just look for bait balls within casting distance and cast around them. A 5" StreakZ in Bubble Gum colour rigged on a 3/4oz 5/0 HeadlockZ HD is the go and using a constant retrieve so the lure darts from side to side all the way back to the bank.

Queenfish hang in the same areas as tailor and trevally, hunting baitfish. They love lures worked at speed and also love pink colours. Once you have found a school of queenfish use a 3.75" StreakZ in Coconut Ice Glow or Opening Night colour or a 5" StreakZ in Bubble Gum colour and let the lure sink to the bottom then full speed it for around 5 to 10m, before allowing it to sink back to the bottom and continue this to the boat.

A fun way to target queenfish is on the flats. Sight cast them if the water is clear enough or find the bait balls. A lot of the time they will be feeding on garfish so a 5" StreakZ matches gar perfectly. A 3/8oz 5/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead on a Bubble Gum coloured StreakZ is a good place to start. Cast towards the school, let the lure sink to the bottom and then use a constant retrieve back to the boat or a full speed retrieve just under the surface works really well. Often when you are bringing a queeny back towards the boat a few more will be trying to steal the lure out of its mouth, so if you are fishing with someone else be ready to get another lure in there.

If you are keen on getting stuck into a few trevally, queenfish and tailor, grab a few packs of StreakZ and have a go in your local estuary!

Queenfish are powerful, fast and love to get airborne.



Unfinished Business...

Barra Dreaming



By Dave Brace

As an avid barramundi angler, whether targeting them in the rusty water or within the sweetwater creeks and rivers of central and north Queensland, there is never a week that goes by whereby Dave's not thinking of his next northbound adventure. However it is within the stocked barramundi impoundments of this same region where he feels most comfortable in targeting these majestic and iconic Australian natives. It is here where he revels in battles between his ability and these chrome plated, belligerent fish. Just recently Dave attended to some unfinished business at Lake Kinchant, landing the lifelong dream of a barramundi measuring 130cm in length.

Spending time on these barra impoundments is very minimal these days, organising four or five trips per year, although when Lake Monduran and Lake Awoonga were in their prime, prior to the floods of 2011, barramundi fishing exploits were almost on a fortnightly basis. It is very encouraging though that these two premier lakes are definitely recovering with every season that passes, with some fantastic fish being caught recently from both lakes thanks to the hard work and dedication of the fish stocking groups who manage these fisheries.

Is your first 130cm barra
cruising amongst that weed?



Barra on a ZMan 6"
SwimmerZ in Red
Shad colour.



It's been just over a decade now since I first started fishing for these fish within these landlocked environments, whereby many trials and tribulations have been experienced, however these times are equally shared with

moments of jubilation. One thing is for certain though, I have never stopped learning and will continue to learn and uncover their mysterious behaviours. More so these days I am spending more time targeting these fish from the seat of my kayak. This is for a couple of reasons, one being the stealthy approach that only these vessels can provide. The other reason is the challenge of subduing these brutes on a totally different level, which sets equality for fish and angler. Some battles you lose and some you win.

Last year, in December 2014, I came face to face on numerous occasions, eye balling fish at the end of my line in excess of 120cm in length. However, time and time again the fish gained the upper hand and I was sent home with my tail between my legs. I estimated that some of these fish were well beyond 130cm and it was only time before I headed back up there again to regain some faith in my ability to land one of these monsters.

All was not lost during that unforgettable trip, ecstatic to land a 120cm fish in open water. Not my biggest barra that I had caught, but a very exceptional fish all the same, capturing the encounter on my Contour HD camera. In this short video I explain how I target these fish throughout the dense aquatic weed that grows prolifically during the warmer months and lays flat on top of the water. I also explain what lures and equipment I use, including a short tutorial of what techniques I utilised to catch this feisty fish amongst this particular structure.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vEX4ec1YnA>

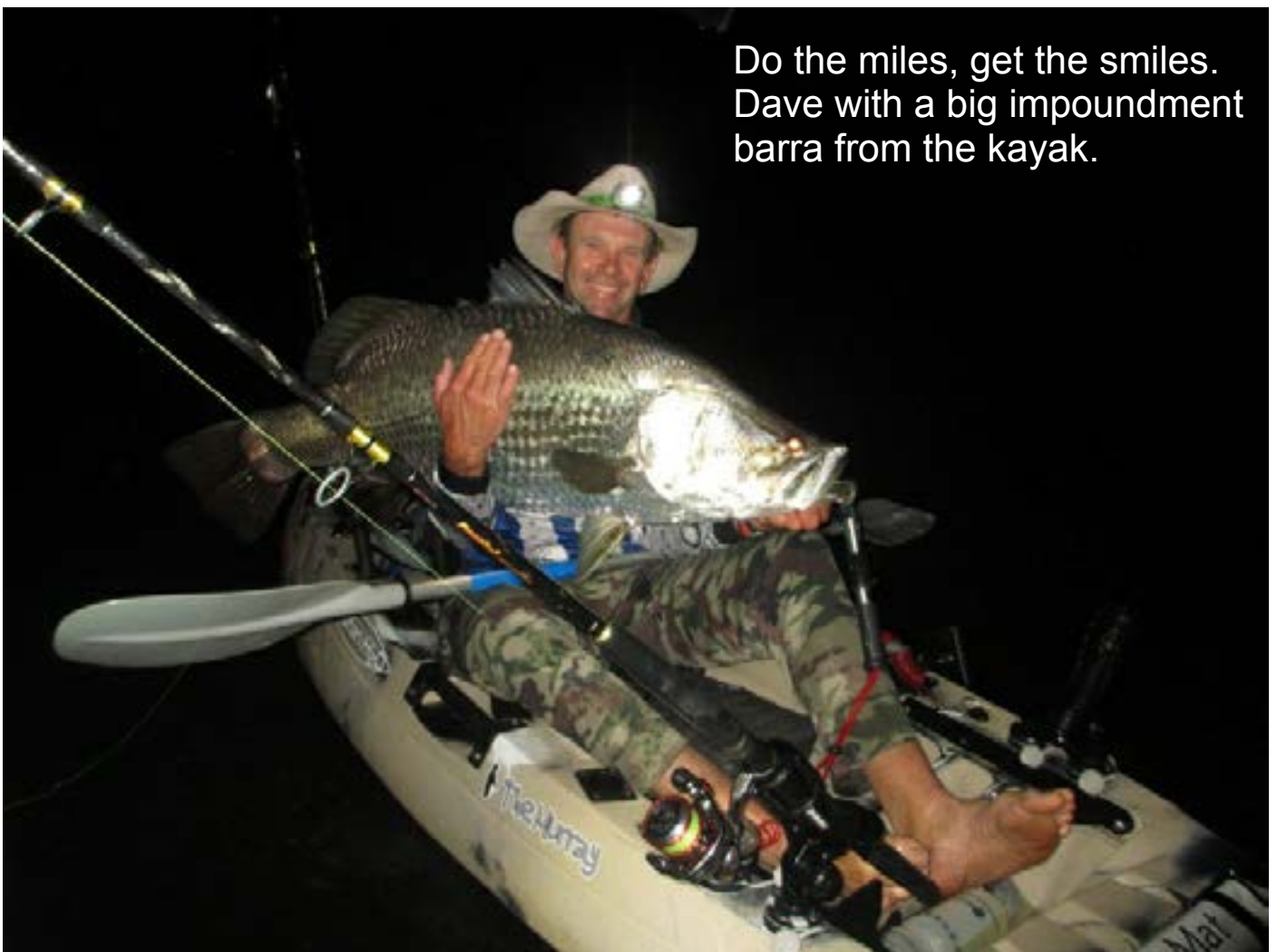
For every barramundi angler, catching a fish over that magic one metre milestone is a goal that they would like to achieve. An ambition that is very achievable for enthusiastic anglers. Once this goal is reached, objectives are reassessed and set accordingly, usually in 5cm increment increases in size. The bigger the goal the harder it becomes to reach these targets, often with lengthy periods in between. Dreams and aspirations are achieved by setting goals, bucket loads of dedication, determination and a will to succeed. Obviously experience is a factor when achieving these goals, but the astute anglers who are willing to spend time on the water will soon see patterns emerge of where and when to target these fish.



So when I was invited to join a group of great mates on another northbound trip, I couldn't resist preparing for the expedition weeks in advance, vigilantly observing the dropping water levels of the lake and the weather leading up to the event. Expressing my objectives for this trip, lures were selected carefully for every occasion. My Okuma RTX Pro reels were spooled with new Platypus Platinum Plus braid, making sure to tie every knot with precision. All of my senses told me it was my time to achieve something that I have only dreamed about. With positive thoughts generating positive actions I was riding high, however I was daunted knowing what I had to do to achieve my target... spending relentless hours on the water. Personal competitiveness is what motivates me to succeed, which is explained in issue #30 of Tackle Tactics Fishing Magazine 'Onwards & Upwards'; I was prepared both mentally and physically.

During this trip I had hooked up to approximately 45 barramundi, landing 90% of the fish, with many being over that magic metre mark. Continually fuelling my body throughout the day, for every stroke of the paddle was paramount, running on about three hours sleep per day, fishing the night time bite and resting up during the heat of the day. Rain was definitely not a deterrent either. I was sitting in my kayak at 2:30am on one particular morning during a storm, with my feet embedded in a weed bed either side of my kayak to hold me in place, while the wind and rain pelted down, arms crossed and head forward with my Akubra wearing the brunt, similar to the cattle beside me on the bank trying to seek shelter. The wind was enough to blow a dog off a chain but between the squalls I witnessed active barramundi feeding in small pockets of water between the weed beds, their red eyes sheening a reflection from my head lamp. This was enough to keep me very interested. After a couple of nights, observing, analysing and taking mental notes, a pattern emerged and soon enough selective bite periods were targeted with great results, predominantly fishing moon set leading up to the full moon.

Do the miles, get the smiles.
Dave with a big impoundment
barra from the kayak.



TT Lures SnakelockZ jigheads were a key to fishing the weed.



My lures of choice were ZMan 6" SwimmerZ rigged on a 1/4oz TT Lures 8/0 SnakelockZ jighead and smeared with Garlic Plus Pro-Cure Super Gel scent. The colours of the SwimmerZ that I had most success on throughout this expedition ranged from Pearl and Golden Boy to Red Shad and Houdini, however I had a very special preference for the Smokey Shad colour, which represented the baitfish quite noticeable that were swimming throughout the weed during daylight hours. The type of terrain and structure I was fishing was in open water, above pockets of weed, in two metres or less of water, however I knew that the bigger fish were to come in tighter, more condensed weed structure.

On the water at three o'clock, I had already landed a few fish in quick concession, waiting for the sun to rise to warm my core. It was still dark; glancing at my watch noticing it had just turned 4:30am as I began to troll my lure, stealthily and closely behind my kayak, up a very small creek about seventy-five metres in length and no more than ten metres wide at the mouth. As I approached a rise of submerged weed mid-stream in the creek, I instinctively had a strong gut feeling that there was a fish on the other side waiting in an ambush mode. I took three strong paddles and glided stealthily over the weed, waiting in anticipation for my lure to reach the strike zone.

Smokey Shad was
Dave's go-to colour
on this trip.



Right on cue, my rod tip ripped back and loaded up alerting me of a fish strike. I immediately took another three strong paddles up this skinny creek to set the hooks, prior to lifting the rod from the rod holder and vividly hearing the fish jump as I did, instantly knowing it was a good fish from the splash it made on re-entry. Yet to set my eyes on the beast, I knew I had to keep this fish on a very short lead. The kayak was immediately ripped around towards the fish, which was still uncontrollably jumping as I fought gallantly with low rod angles. Remarkably I kept very calm and collected, trying to wear and tire the fish, turning its head every time it approached the weed edges of this narrow creek and using the paddle to my advantage, switching the rod in either hand to do so, steering the fish up the creek.

Now within close proximity, it launched again within arm's reach and it was only then I got my first glance at the enormity of this particular fish as it breached the surface on a couple of occasions, using its large caudal fin to displace as much water as it possibly could to evade capture. Swimming under the kayak time and time again there was little I could do but hang on and steer the kayak as best I could, back paddling when time allowed to give me the upper hand on this aggressive fish. At times I noticed my rod bent around the kayak with every guide knocking the side, line stretched tight and I was hoping it wouldn't fray on any attachments.

By now I knew the lure was embedded deep within the fish's mouth and after an intense five minute battle I was confident, yet concerned, about the 60lb Platypus Game Leader rubbing on its raspy, armour plated jaw line. I was hoping that it would just hold up for a few more passes yakside, prior to subduing the fish and claiming victory over this spirited barramundi. It wasn't until I had the lip grips in its mouth that reality kicked in as a shot of adrenaline found its way through my body. I couldn't believe it; I was in total awe of the incredible size of this fish, as my hands shook profusely.



Securely on the lip grips and Dave had achieved his goal... 130cm barra.

These thoughts soon turned to the welfare of this fish and I immediately rang two mates, Aaran Denschel and Dean Mather, who were fishing nearby in their boat. They assisted me in swimming the fish for a healthy release, but not before a few photos were taken and a quick measure on a brag mat in the water to capture this memorable occasion. It was fantastic to see this incredible barramundi swim away strongly and to share this moment with two mates who also got to witness such a fish. Absolutely bewildered after the event, I sat there retying a new leader for almost an hour, taking it all in and glancing at the calmness of the water which was now like a mirror as the sun rose over the horizon, giving light to a brand new day.

Never give up on your dreams!!!

Bracey...

Dream achieved... what's your fishing dream and how can you make it happen?



US Adventures Pt. 2

Rigs to Redfish



By Justin Willmer

In the last issue of the Tackle Tactics Fishing Magazine, part one of our US Adventures, we visited the ICAST tackle trade show and hit the water in search of a redfish with Cajun Fishing Adventures. Our day two plans in Louisiana were to roll south to The Mexican Gulf Fishing Company to tangle with a few tuna around the oil rigs, followed by half a day back in the Louisiana marshland chasing redfish, before it was back on the long haul flight to Australia and a mad preparation for Australia's AFTA trade show, complete with new products from the US show.

Venice Marina, 'The Fishing Capital of the World', looked like a scene from a movie... shrimp boats, timber boardwalks and jetties, plenty of game boats, floating accommodation that you could tie your boat up to when finished for the day and plenty of colourful characters. Daniel, Gareth and I were to meet Captain Kevin Beach at the marina to board his boat 'Pale Horse' and head out into the Mexican Gulf to target tuna around the many FADs that litter the gulf in the form of oil rigs.





Pale Horse, an impressive rig.

When I caught the first glimpse of 'Pale Horse' it blew me away... a 37' Freeman Cat, with three 300HP motors! We slow cruised out of the Mississippi River and then hit the throttle and rocketed into the Mexican Gulf, passing oil rigs, skirting a storm, tunes cranked and enjoying our comfortable ride from vinyl bean bags on the back floor of the boat.

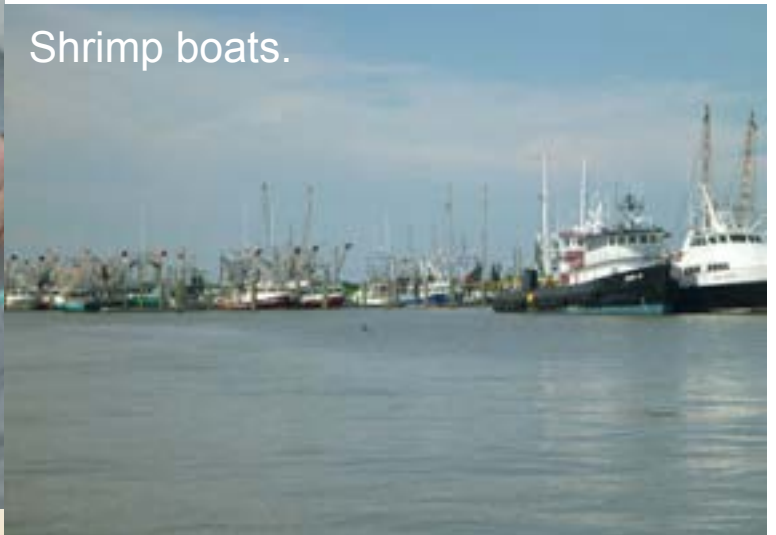


Bean bags took the bumps out.

The first stop was an oil rig and then a floating weed mat to gather live baits... big live baits that I would have been happy catching on light spin gear! There were plenty of dolphinfish hanging around the weed mat, but the boat is geared up for big fish, so we didn't have anything light enough to throw small plastics. Luckily, or I could have easily become distracted.



Shrimp boats.

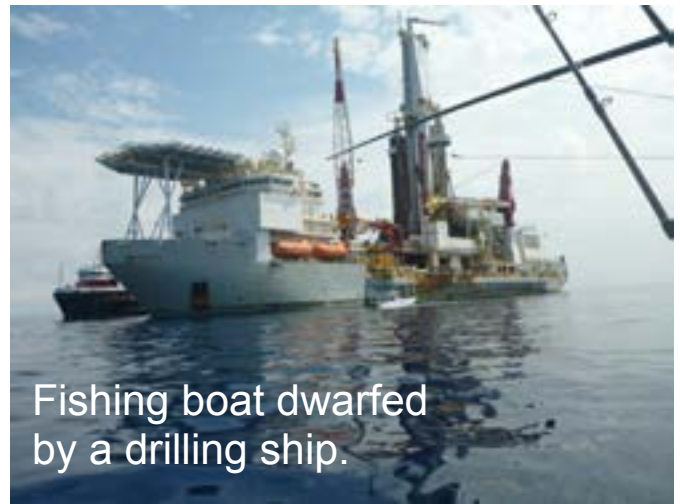


Gareth fishing the weed mat.



We arrived at our first spot, live baits were put out on a slow troll, anglers nominated as 'on strike' and then within minutes the rods were bent, reels screaming and two at a time we were doing battle with 20-30kg blackfin tuna, along with the odd yellowfin, dolphinfish and shark. It was non-stop tuna action for an hour or so and after three nice blackfin, a new species for me, I tapped out due to only being flathead fit! This was a third new species in two days and I was absolutely stoked. Add to that the boat, professional and friendly crew, incredible location and the fishing and I understand where the 'Fishing Capital of the World' sentiment came from.

We left the fish biting, deployed even larger live baits, including smaller tuna we had caught and it was time to search for a billfish or monster tuna. I took this opportunity to swim the new ZMan 10" HeroZ and test how they rigged and swam on a TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jighead. I would be casting them on a 20000 Stella, loaded with heavy braid and a wind on leader, so I opted for a 3oz 8/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead and selected a Nuked Pilchard Glow 10" HeroZ. A couple of test casts and the action of the HeroZ on a jighead was awesome! On the drop it snaked as it swam down and at speed it looked alive as it snaked through the water. Time to wait for a few tuna to blow up while we trolled the big livies.



Fishing boat dwarfed by a drilling ship.



Daniel hooked up to a tuna.



Gareth on a dolphinfish.



We saw some big fish on the sounder and a couple of blow ups in the distance the size of small cars... there were some seriously big tuna in these waters and after our workouts on blackfin for the morning I'm not sure that anyone was keen for those big baits to go off. A couple of baits did get taken and we lost a rig to something big... but we left the barrel there for your trip over. More dolphinfish were landed, along with a shark on a ZMan 5" StreakZ in Bubble Gum that one of the boys trolled out the back. To minimise the damage to the fish almost all fish were cut off with scissors at the side of the boat, leaving enough tag so that they could still feed effectively and the hook would soon perish.

I did get a chance at the yellowfin and when a few popped up around the boat I lobbed a cast out and cranked it back at speed. Second cast, fish on and a little yellowfin was soon in the boat for a photo and release. A few casts later and I was on again with another yellowfin caught and released. This was an exciting test for the HeroZ and HeadlockZ combo, with the fish having no problem finding the hook on the big plastic. It gave us great confidence in this plastic in these early stages and it has since gone on to produce GTs and other trevally species, tuna, cobia, kingfish and more in Australian waters. The TT Lures HeadlockZ HD jigheads have also been successfully released in the U.S. and are now available at many of the major fishing tackle stores.



Daniel on!



Gareth hooked up!



HeroZ & HeadlockZ tuna.



Our own porpoise show.

It was a great day aboard Pale Horse, with an excellent crew and plenty of fish. The backdrop is amazing, with a run out of the Mississippi River, ships drilling wells, oil rigs, wildlife, big fish and it is an experience that I would recommend to anyone who gets the opportunity. Back at the marina it was time for a coldie and the one blackfin tuna that we kept was cleaned for sashimi that night.

www.mgfishing.com

Right - Anglers get a photo with their catch.



Sashimi for dinner.



Back at the marina and time for a coldie on the verandah.



Back in the Bayou

After a feed of sashimi and a big day on the blue there was no problem finding sleep, especially knowing that we would awake to a few hours chasing redfish before returning on a long haul flight to my home flathead waters. I wanted to make the most of my few hours in the marsh, absorb the smells, sounds, sights and take the time to appreciate the redfish as I didn't know if or when the opportunity to target them would come again.

We rolled out of the Cajun Fishing Adventures Lodge, flats boat on the back, plenty of TT Lures and ZMan gear in the hatches and an itchy casting finger, launched, shot across the big river and were swallowed up by the marsh. I rigged a ZMan 3" MinnowZ in the new Golden Boy colour on a TT Lures 1/4oz HeadlockZ HD jighead and before long had landed three largemouth bass from channels that ran through the weed. I was having a ball and had watched two of these fish eat the lure, with another just missing as it raced out from cover.

Gareth had rigged a ZMan 4" SwimmerZ in Sexy Mullet colour on a TT Lures SnakelockZ weedless jighead and was landing some nice redfish, along with Daniel and our guide Ross. Throughout the morning we spotted and cast to bow waves, edges and sighted fish, landing plenty of redfish, along with a few spotted seatrout, juvenile ladyfish (giant herring) and largemouth bass. I had changed to the 3" MinnowZ in Chartreuse Glow that had been so successful for me on day one and it was again producing, rigged on a 1/4oz 3/0 HeadlockZ HD jighead.

Bring it on!



Golden Boy largemouth.



SnakelockZ redfish.



Our few hours flew by and it was soon time to head for home... but not before everyone declaring one more bank... as fishos do. As we cruised into the final section of bank I was greeted by a sight I had seen in magazines many times over, a tail protruding from the water and moving slowly, the signature tail dot of a redfish clearly visible. I really wanted to finish the trip on a high and land this fish that I had spotted feeding, head down a sloping bank and tail in the air.

I cast to the right of the fish and almost on the bank, hopped the MinnowZ a couple of times and swam it past the fish... no reaction and the boat was slowly moving away down the bank. Second cast into the same spot, hop, hop, roll and this time the fish sensed the lure, lit up and pounced, inhaling the plastic, exploding on the surface and then heading into deeper water. After a stubborn fight the fish was in the net and as I held it for a photo you couldn't wipe the smile off my face. This was the perfect end to my U.S. adventure; sight casting a tailing redfish and watching it eat my plastic.

Thanks to Cajun Fishing Adventures, Mexican Gulf Fishing Company and the team from ZMan Fishing Products, I'm sure that the time spent on the water fishing, testing gear, discussing lure designs, colours and new products will see plenty of new products born that will put bends into the rods of not only anglers in Australia and America, but throughout the angling world. Fish on!



A dream finish to an incredible adventure.



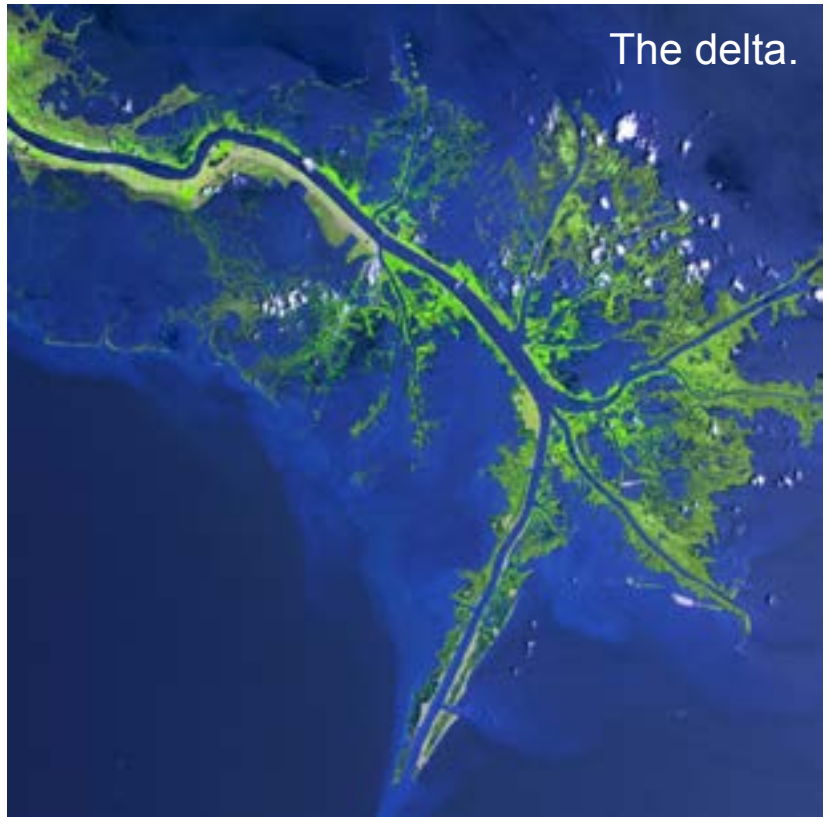
A Catch up with
Ray Stansberry
from
**Cajun Fishing
ADVENTURES**

25 words or less on your background and love of fishing?

Growing up in Oklahoma, I cut my teeth on freshwater fishing for bass, catfish & panfish. Once I moved to Florida (for 20 years), I really got introduced to inshore saltwater and sight-fishing in a major way. During that time, I fished professionally on the ESPN Redfish Cup, FLW & IFA Redfish Tours, before moving to Louisiana to manage and market Cajun Fishing Adventures since 2010.

25 words or less on the lodge and what it offers anglers?

Cajun Fishing Adventures is a full-service, inclusive fishing & hunting lodge that opened in 1980. We offer guided inshore, light-tackle fishing the massive, lower Mississippi River Delta, which represents nearly 35% of the total U.S. Wetlands.



The delta.



The lodge.

The lodge is well set up to handle groups of fishos and hunters.



What species are on offer and why do anglers love to target these species?

Saltwater species include Redfish, Speckled Trout, Black Drum, Flounder, & Jack Crevalle. Each species have their unique fans, some for sheer sportfishing excitement and other species for their tablefare.

Freshwater species include Largemouth Bass, Blue & Channel Catfish. These fish are found in more freshwater areas that are not influenced by the saltwater estuary areas.

How far do anglers travel to visit the lodge and fish these waters?

We average around 6,000 customers travelling from 46 U.S. states and 11 foreign countries.



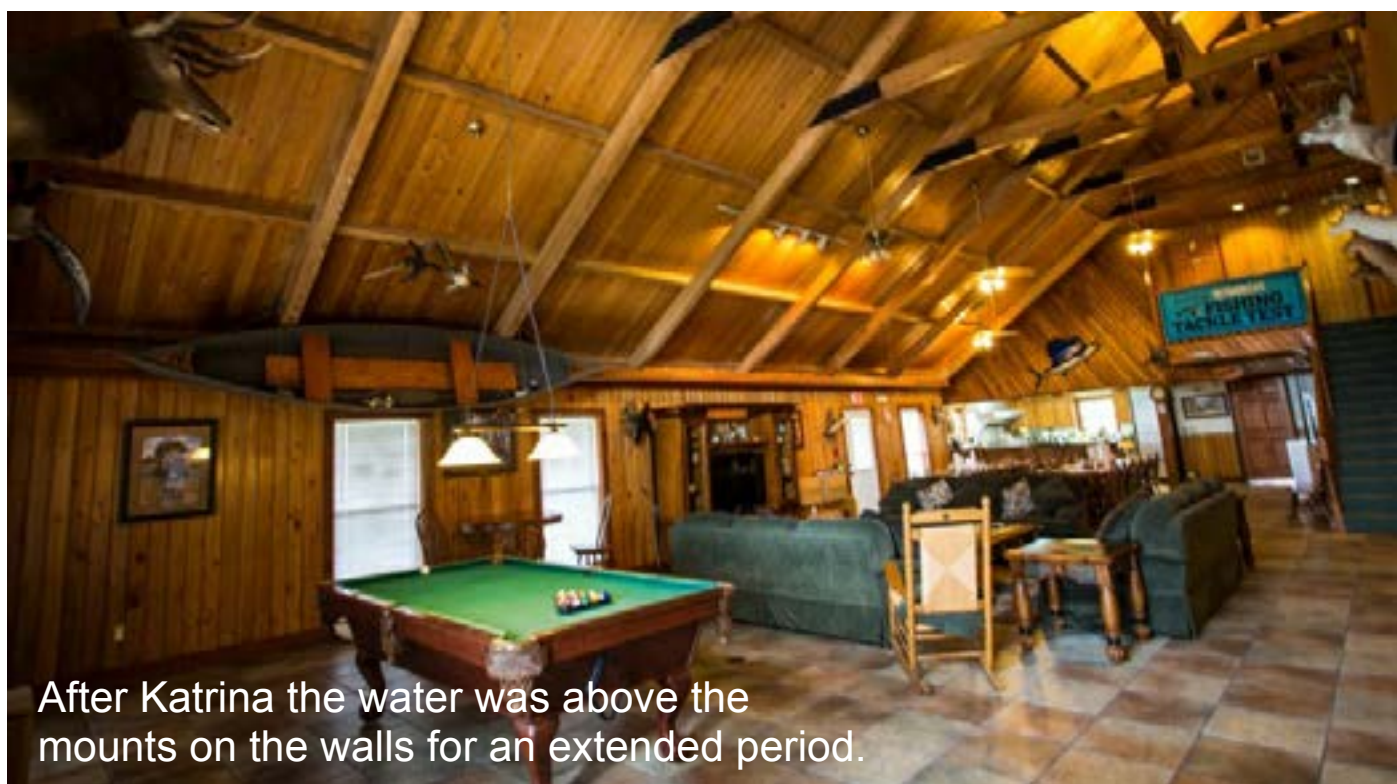
For many in Australia when we think of the region one of the first things that come to mind is Hurricane Katrina. We are so far away in terms of geography, so I don't feel that we understand the true impact that it had on the region. How did it impact the lodge, fishing, guides and has the community recovered?

Katrina made landfall right at the front door of our lodge. At landfall, 62 feet of storm surge completely submerged our building structures with 24 feet of water inside our lodges for several hours. The water event occurring prior to the wind event, allowed the water to actually shroud and protect the structures from the most severe winds that blew over anything exposed.

Once the storm passed, water remained between the levees for nearly 6 weeks. There was no lodge electrical power for 8 ½ months. The entire location was excavated, cleaned out, rewired and completely rebuilt with generator power. Once power was restored, the lodge was open for business and had customers the very next day.

Any advice for anglers visiting the lodge in terms of what to pack?

It all depends on the timing of your travel as far as what weight apparel to pack. Pack attire for all weather/seasonal situations, which includes rain gear. Also pack sunscreen, polarized sunglasses, bug repellent, etc. The fishing guides have all of the equipment needed for your time on the water.



After Katrina the water was above the mounts on the walls for an extended period.



I'm sure the lodge keeps you busy, do you manage to find time to get out and chase a few yourself? What are your favourite 5 species and why?

In order...

- 1.) *Snook of any size. Much like your Barramundi, just add the big black lateral line. It's the only fish I have the patience to blind-cast to. I can sight-fish them around man-made structure or on flats.*
- 2.) *Juvenile Tarpon – up to 50 pounds. Every hook-up is “a fireworks show with fins.” My personal best is 176 pounds on a 10-weight fly rod, but I prefer the babies!*
- 3.) *Redfish, no matter where I find them. They love shallow water and are excellent sight-fishing targets. Great fish on fly or conventional tackle, year-round.*
- 4.) *Tripletail Grouper. They are found inshore and nearshore around the southeast U.S. and like to orient to floating grass lines, channel or buoy markers, as well as any floating debris. They can be easily sight-fished and are INCREDIBLE tablefare.*
- 5.) *(TIE) Bonefish & Trophy Speckled Trout. Both species are “off the chart” wary of predators. If you see them, they probably have already seen you first. Very difficult to sight-fish, but incredibly rewarding to sight and catch. But that's where the comparisons end. Bonefish are finned missiles once hooked. Speckled Trout (over 10 pounds), are slower, but have very delicate mouths and can come unbuttoned easily during a flight.*



What species / locations are on your fishing bucket list?

More of the above, anywhere I can find them.

The only other bucket list fish would be the Roosterfish, being sight-fished off of a beach in Baja, caught on fly.

What's one piece of advice that you have been given about fishing that you still carry with you today?

Always be open-minded. Never stop learning. A wise man once told me that "if you're green, you grow... if you're ripe, you rot." I think this works in fishing as well as everyday life.

Thanks for your time, anything you would like to add?

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