

## CAPT. MICHAEL POTTS ON GIANT BLUEFIN TUNA

Montauk Pt., New York



*Born and raised in Montauk, NY, this 38-year old skipper had his first encounter with a giant at the tender age of 10. By his early teenage years, Mike was a regular "extra" on board the family boat "BLUEFIN" and by his mid-teens, a charter boat mate when school was out of session. At 18, Mike already had his own skipper's license. After returning to Montauk from college with a degree in biology in 1978, he began to work full-time as a skipper and mate aboard the "BLUEFIN IV," finally purchasing the 41-foot, custom-built charter vessel from his dad and uncle in 1984. The rest, as they say, is history.*

*With "a few dozen" 700-lb.+ bluefin already to his credit, plus monsters of 924 and 912 lbs., Capt. Mike is well qualified to speak on the art of catching giant tuna. Here he shares his expertise, offering several tips that could be the difference between a make or break season for you and your crew.*

**L**ike most charter skippers, I'm a part-time tuna fisherman. I get to go after these whoppers when I can find clientele that's willing to do so. Still, my crew and I have been lucky enough to get in on the action now and then. Over the years I

figure I've had a few dozen giants in the 700-lb. class, none in the 800-lb. class, but two that topped 900 lbs. I've also had at least a half-dozen 1,000-pounders on the line but somehow, somehow, fate has intervened on behalf of these monsters. I guess any fish that's grown that big, deserves to have a little luck on it's side. To date, my best season overall was, I think, 1983 when we decked 24 fish and released at least 10 others. After the season closed, we had a pair of three fish days while playing catch and release. That was some year. The late Greg Beecher, who fished giant tuna almost exclusively and authored "Fish The Chair," was top dog that season with 39. 1993 was a fine year in it's own right, it gave up my biggest tuna to date.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the "BLUEFIN IV," this boat is truly unique. Custom-built in Greenport, Long Island, by Ray Chichi back in 1970, it features 1-1/4" Honduran mahogany all around. The powerbase is a GM built 6V92 TAB Diesel that provides a top running speed of 14.5 knots. While the boat handles well in any type of water, it's especially well suited to tuna fishing as the hull design lets it sit calmly on the surface. It's a steady boat and very comfortable.

While I could go on for hours, or pages as the case may be, I know space here is limited so I'll just touch on a couple of general areas I think anglers should emphasize if besting a giant bluefin is the end goal. Let's start with tackle - it has to be the

finest you can afford. For giants, I like all Gold Penn 130's and Diawa "Unlimited Class" rods. Because my stern width is a relatively wide 13-1/2' (I can fit eight or so cod-fishermen easily across the back), I prefer to use long rods. On my boat at least, a longer rod makes it easier to keep the line clear while hooked-up. This frees the mate to tend to other tasks during the heat of battle. It's one less thing to worry about.

To this point, things are pretty much standard fare, but you might find my line selection a bit different. I use several layers of dacron topped off by a mono header as follows. Fill each reel to the half-way point with 130-lb. test dacron, splice in 150- to 180-lb. dacron to cover the next quarter and splice that to a length of 200-lb. dacron. This last segment of dacron is then attached to 100 yards of Jinkai mono. The mono can vary from 175 lbs. to 300 lbs. I have reels set up with 175, 200, 250 and 300 lb. mono heads.

There are two great advantages to using this dacron/mono line setup. First off, it's the last 100 yards of line that sees the majority of stress when fighting a big fish. After any hook-up with a giant that stays on the line long enough to give a good account of itself, I change that mono header - regardless of whether or not the fish is actually landed. I'll also cut back on the header by about 15' or so after working a smaller fish, or if I find any nicks, rough spots or fraying. By cutting back or changing the header, I ensure that each giant is pretty much fought on fresh line. I'm sure you'll

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agree, swapping headers is preferable to a complete re-spooling. Second, having several outfits with different strength mono headers ready to go means that I can quickly adjust line strength or thickness to match the mood of the fish on any particular day - and it's possible to tie straight to the hook without using a swivel. My dad used this dacron/mono system way back when, and it still works today.

Speaking of hooks, I have two

favorites: the 7698B ring - eye Mustad for bait fishing with the mono headers, and the needle - eye version of the same hook for trolling or use with wire line. The size of the hooks I use varies based on the size of the fish expected and the baits being used. Having a choice, I like to fish with a 10/0 or 11/0, but I'll drop down as far as an 8/0 if using small butterfish. This much is certain, no matter how big the hook, it has to be sharp - nasty sharp.

When a fish picks up one of my hooks, there's no chance it's getting away due to poor penetration.

As far as trolling and chumming are concerned, it's no secret that the former is the quickest route to action in the early season while the latter holds greater potential once the water begins to warm in late July or early August. For either application, I like to use fresh bait. Although I know that some anglers have had luck trolling rigged squids, plastic squids

Tip of the Butterfish Hole (the "B" of Block Channel on your chart), 6&8 (14600/43800), the Tuna Bank (14500/43800), sometimes at the Mudhole east of Block Island, or at Sharks Ledge. It's true you'll have a lot of competition at these places, but at least the fish are likely to show here at some point.

The other way to find out where the fish are is to listen for information from friends, commercial boats, or other news sources. Never turn away information of any type. Process it all. Listen to everyone, to every tip. Absorb it. Some information you'll use as is, some you'll use to expend on other ideas or information you possess, some you'll never use, but never let it slip by without due thought. If you let it, a little nugget of information might rattle around in the back of your mind for days, weeks or even years before you have the opportunity to put it to use. As long as it's never fully discarded, though, it holds the potential to be of value. The 924-lb. giant I took last season was the direct result of a tip from a friend. I had to sit on that tip for several days before I had the chance to act on it and gamble on a new spot. Listening paid off handsomely in this case. Try to hook up with a few friends or regulars on the water. It always helps to have more than one set of ears and eyes. Just remember, if you take information, you've got to supply it as well.

There's one other tip I'd like to offer, I'm sure you've heard before but it really bears repeating: Be adaptive. Don't be afraid to make a change, especially if you see or mark fish but aren't getting any interest. Switch lines, baits, depths. Go from a floating bait to a sinking one, or vice

versa. Try anything, you never know what might work.

Someone recently asked me if catching those 900 lbers. were the most thrilling days I've ever had on the water. To tell you the truth, they were great, but there are two instances that can top even these. You see, a 900 lber. feels heavier at the end of the line than does a 700 lber., but the fight follows the same logic and pattern. More exciting are when things don't turn out exactly as planned. One time, we underestimated the size and power of a swordfish that we baited on top. We battled that one on 80-lb. tackle and it came up purple and real mad. It screamed line off the reel and bucked and dodged. In the end, we

won and boated the 371 pounder, but that was surely the toughest fish I've ever had to deal with. Another time, at Nomans, we simultaneously hooked-up with two giants. We could have passed one off to another boat but the customer, an experienced offshore fisherman, said "Let's go for it!" And we did. It took about 35 minutes to whip the first fish, a 550-pound brute, while the second fish circled the boat. Twenty minutes later, we had the second one, a 724-pounder, to the stern. Talk about excitement! Two on at once, lines zinging off the reels - thankfully in opposite directions. The whole thing was just totally unpredictable and that's what made the experience so great. ■

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