

How good a crewmember are you?

Do you own a boat, or are you fishing on a boat as crew?

Here are a few of the things skippers talk about at the bar amongst themselves when they're rolling their eyes skywards and grumbling about the latest crop of new crew. Of course, you've got to take that with a grain of salt – skippers are a bit like farmers.... there's always something that isn't right, and on those occasions where everything else is good, they'll complain about the weather anyway! Mostly, game fishing skippers are happy to have even brand new crew, because it isn't hard to pick this game up, and new crew actually means that they can teach them to do things "their" way.

These are just small number of the myriad things that need to be running through a skipper's head as the day progresses, and if you're the perfect crewmember, you'll soon enough be doing them all before the skipper has to remind you about them.

Of course, this is the stuff that professional deckies are paid to know intimately and to do without prompting every time the boat is out on the water, and at the marina before departure and after return. It goes without saying of course that it all takes time to acquire this knowledge, and you're not expected to rock up with it all at your fingertips the first time you step on a new boat.

However, there's no difference between the knowledge required of a professional deckie and that gradually accumulated by a good amateur angler who fishes as crew on a game boat in a club like ours.

As noted, nobody's expected to know all of this when they first start game fishing, but learning it all comes from watching and asking those who do. The only real crime is having to be told more than once, and losing a fish because you didn't do something you'd already been shown how and when to accomplish.

And girls... here comes the sexist bit... If you've got a figure like Elle Macpherson, you're available every time there's a weather window and a hot bite, and you can confidently trace a fish in a rocking boat and not complain about breaking a manicured nail, then there probably isn't a game fishing skipper in this solar system who wouldn't marry you.... tomorrow!

While this sport has just one aim at its focal point – catching a marlin – there's a lot more to crewing on a game boat than just grabbing the noisy rod and hauling in a fish...

For example...

- On the way out to the fishing grounds in the morning, do you pull out the hot lures that you know the skipper wants to use (...and if you don't know, ask) and spend the time on the run out from the harbour checking the security of the rig, the trace, and even more importantly, giving those hook points a touch up with the hook file or wetstone?

This latter point is very important at the best of times, but in striped marlin season, unless there's a lot of bait and a gameplan for the day where you're going to start straight into live baiting, the chances are that you'll be throwing a few striped marlin lures out the back to start with while you troll around looking for the live-baiting action. Striped marlin are so fussy when it comes to the way they tentatively play around with lures, that it's almost impossible to have too sharp a point to the hook if you want to maximise your hookup chances when the stripes are being typically picky.

- Do you remember to put the safety lines back on reels after they've been moved about the cockpit?
- Do you wind the lure in to check the condition of the leader, the hookset shackle if there is one, as well as the hook points and their alignment after an unsuccessful strike?
- Do you check the state of each wind-on when you wind the lines in at the end of the day?
- Do you throw out a set of clothes every year because they're covered in anti-fouling and fibreglass polish?
- Can you tie a reliable double in a hurry, let alone on a rolling deck in the rain?
- Can you re-rig a line with a new wind-on leader?
- Can you splice up a new trace and/or hookset on a lure?
- Can you get a slimy mackerel or bonito or striped tuna rigged up such that it will last for an hour as a skip bait?
- Can you bridle up a live bait and have it on a leader ready to toss out there in just 30 seconds if a big bait ball ahead of the boat suddenly explodes?
- Are you usually the first to see a rubber band snap or a tag loop pull out of its clip?
- Do you notice (before the skipper) the slack line from a rigger surreptitiously wrap itself around the tip of the corner rod in a tight turn or a stiff breeze?
- Have you got a recreational boating license to cover the insurance legalities required to take over from the skipper if he needs a break?
- Can you quickly check and reset the drag when some new guy accidentally hits the drag knob? Do you know where the drag scales are stored on the boat?
- Do you help to bag up all the rubbish and carry it back to the marina bin at the end of the day?

- Do you know exactly where the skipper likes the corner lures to run?
- Do you know what drag you'll get two or three notches back from full strike?
- Can you rig the drop-backs used when skip baiting?
- Are you usually asleep in the bunk or on the floor when the "Marlin!" yell goes out or the reel goes off, or are you the guy who is usually first to see the fish and do the yelling?
- Do you always know what the latest forecast says, what time the tide changes, and which boat is sched boat when you arrive at the marina in the morning?
- How many yards of line has the marlin usually taken by the time you and your fellow crew get the rods cleared?
- When was the last time the skipper got testy because he had to remind you for the third time in a row about something trivial you forgot to do?
- Is the boat cleaned and washed, the rods and reels washed, dried and stowed, the lures washed and bagged, and the gear cleaned and stowed by the time the skipper has done the logbooks and cleaned the flybridge at the end of the day?
- Can you tie a rubber band on the line correctly, without having the mono slip through it on a bite?
- Do you remember to put the fenders in the right place before the boat lines up to enter the pen or come alongside the fuel wharf? And do you remember to bring them in when leaving port?
- Do you remember to put the brag flags on the outrigger at the end of the day?
- Do you remember to push the drags to sunset when washing the rods and reels down, then back it off again once the reels have been dried (and put the clicker on to prevent a bird's nest)?
- Do you remember to wash the transom (on diesel powered boats)?
- If the skipper were struck dumb at the beginning of the day, would you be able to do everything when it was required without him having to write you notes or use sign language?
- Is your fishing licence current?
- Do you have to be told to do something, or does it happen before the skipper has to remind you or request it?

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Finally...

- Do you know the difference between God and a game boat skipper?
.....God doesn't think he's a game boat skipper!