

30th Anniversary Golden Lure 2014.

Fishing the tournament on *Optional Xtras*

After missing last year's Golden Lure for various reasons - the first one in about 10 years - I was keen to get to the 30th Anniversary Tournament.

Not knowing my roster until shortly before, I was unsure how many days I could actually fish, but after a bit of shuffling I managed to get the first three days, and then at the last minute after a bit more trading, I arranged the final Sunday off, so was guaranteed the whole tournament.

I headed down to Port Macquarie after grabbing a trolley load of sports drinks from Dan Murphy's – it had occurred to me that with a few other Solitary Islands boats in attendance, there would probably be a shortage of liquid supplies around the marina precinct at Port.

I was going to fish the tournament on "Optional Xtras", and went straight to the marina to meet owner Judd and the other crew. They'd been busy - I saw new slimey tubes being installed, deck lights and the top sounder/gps/radar screen all being worked on. The latter caused me some concern, but it turned out that the top and the bottom were just being swapped to see if the water temperature could be fixed as it was reading -11.1 degrees (it didn't).

Some of the other crew arrived during all this. Chris and Alex had come up from Port Stephens and Dobbo from Beechwood. After a couple of beers we headed up to the briefing and caught up with plenty of people you only see at Tournaments up and down the coast over the years.

Soon the briefing and Calcutta were done and we were ready to have a big day fishing the following day.

Waking up on the first Saturday of fishing, my head was a little sore, I think it had something to do with home made Cointreau. We pulled out of the marina and milled around waiting for the sail past to start. There was the obligatory water bomb exchanged between vessels with Care Factor and Bear trading blows, with one direct hit straight into the cabin of Bear.

We completed the sail past with a few hundred people on the Lady Nelson Wharf and break wall. The weather was looking great and seas slight.

After taking the advice of Aquatica Research we headed toward the Plumber Canyons. As start fishing commenced we were in warm, blue/purple water that looked fishy. We trolled this area all morning with no result which was very frustrating as there was plenty of blues being tagged and captured there. After lunch we finally got a looker on the rigger but that's all it did - look and swim away.

Shotgun hooked up about half a mile from us and the radio chatter was constant all day. Late afternoon we finally had something hit the shotgun lure and take some line. Judd wanted to back up on his first Marlin in his new 34ft Albermarle and jumped up in the bridge while I went down on the deck. He screamed at everyone to clear the deck, and meanwhile Dobbo was winding like a mad man trying to keep tight line on the fish. It didn't jump and within a few seconds a Barracuda was at the back of the boat. We pulled it in and got the hooks out to its usual lovely smell. We also gave Judd grief about backing up on a Barracuda.

That was it for the day... it seemed like everyone else had either hooked, tagged or captured a marlin or two except for us.

After a much more sedate night of pizza and a couple of beers, we looked at the weather which was again looking sensational, and checked sea surface and Aquatica Research before deciding that Plumber Canyons was the place to again head in the morning.

We trolled and trolled this area and again the radio was busy with reports of little blacks at South West Rocks and Blues being tagged, captured and lost. After spending the morning up there and only marking a bit of bait we headed back to a familiar hunting ground on the ridge. There was boats getting fish here and we marked patchy bait but again nothing.

Two days of Marlin fishing for nothing, which was very frustrating, as the blue marlin bite was hot!

Returning to the Marina and driving past all the boats and people at the weigh station with no flags flying was very disappointing to say the least. We washed the boat and I headed back home Sunday night as I was working Monday nightshift.

On the way home I re-played the past two days in my head, searching for answers. We were using lures that we always use in the same positions. I put it down to two things, bad luck and a new boat.

Analysing the new boat option I thought about boat speed and lure position. In hindsight our boat speed may have been a little high and thus not producing clear enough windows in the wash for lures to sit in. Secondly - and this goes hand in hand with boat speed - was lure position possibly a bit close? Yes, I know the boat is the biggest lure.

Heading down at 3am on Thursday morning I visualised a better day and where I wanted to run the lures. I looked at Aquatica Research and saw that Tom had said the current was pushing into the Port Macquarie FAD and this was the most easterly point of the current. We left Port a little later than we wanted to and it so happened that we were at the FAD by start fishing. We ran a few small lures around the FAD and got two dolphin fish tagged to finally get on the board. I told the crew that we were going to troll from here out to the shelf. A few blank looks and I said "trust me I

have some good info.” We put out bigger lures and headed east. The boat speed was about a knot slower and with the lure pattern set a little further back, they looked better than the first weekend in the water. Just 20 minutes later, about halfway between the FAD and the shelf, we hooked a very cranky Blue Marlin. Alex was on the rod and it was his first time battling a marlin. Judd was again keen to back up on his first marlin and started to do so prior to the deck being cleared. He then ran over the long rigger lure. The fish was going ballistic and did the usual Blue dance of running away from the boat, running wide to the side trying to overtake the boat, then diving deep. In the mayhem of trying to keep tight line the tag pole came out of the rod holder and hit the water. I marked it with a Man over Board and thought if we had a short fight we could find it again as there was little wind and not too much current. Short fight...? Yeah right!

After backing down on the fish and water going everywhere, it was a stalemate. After the first hour of getting 20 metres and losing 30 metres I thought it was a really stubborn fish because when it jumped it only looked about 80-90kg, and we had him on 15kg line.

As the hours – yes, hours - went by, I was starting to believe this fish may have been bigger than I thought. Then I asked Alex if he was still getting head shakes and he said he was, so it hadn't died... maybe tail wrapped?

We had tried to plane it up as it was straight up and down. We had some success with this and got some line back, after nearly being spooled three times and seeing the bottom of the spool. As we approached the four-hour mark, I advised Judd that if we went into the sea and into low ratio we could winch it up as it was probably dead or tail wrapped.

As the fourth hour ticked by, we finally got a look at the fish. I hit it with the tag pole and saw it was tail wrapped. We freed it and swum it for a while then let it go - we finally had the monkey off our back.

It may have weighed, but it was touch and go, so we went on the side of caution. We were only a mile from where we hooked up but the first tag pole was long gone.

After a bit of discussion it was decided that tag and release was out of our reach as the leading boats by this stage had 6 or 7 tagged blacks, a shark or two, and a few yellowfin tuna.

We decided that a big Blue on light line would put us in with half a chance so the 8's and 10's took centre stage. As both fish had taken blue/purple lures, we ran a pattern of four of these colours and another colour to make up the 5-lure pattern, with various head shapes.

We trolled north for about an hour and then a Blue of around 130-150kg crashed the shotgun. The little Tiagra 16 was screaming its head off. We cleared the deck in super quick time as we knew the first two minutes of a Blue Marlin fight make or

break you. Again this fish ran away from the boat then tried to overtake us. There was a mile of loose line in the water with Chris winding madly. Judd drove the boat away from the fish as fast as he could to get tight line. The fish then charged the boat and before anyone knew it was under the boat and we broke it off. It was the funniest, most intense 30 seconds of the whole tournament. The speed of this fish was amazing and had he not gone under that boat who knows what might have been...?

We set the spread again and marked good bait but didn't get another fish for the day. There was plenty of fish around for that third day, which was also the full moon.

Day Four, and Friday dawned to great weather again, and it was decided that as yesterday had worked we'd do exactly the same thing. We fished the FAD for five Dolphin Fish, then headed east to where we got fish the day before. We heard Bear on the radio saying they were returning on one motor as they had a major electrical problem. It was a shame for them as they had already tagged a few fish and could have had a top four finish.

There was a small amount of bait and I marked a Marlin deep but couldn't get it to come up. We trolled and trolled the same area for nothing, then we pushed north, also for nothing.

The last day was pretty quiet on the Blue Marlin scene, but a few Black Marlin were tagged at South West Rocks. Pheel the Bite had a Blue on for 15 minutes on 24kg that then died on them. They did weigh it but I'm not sure of the weight.

We stopped at the FAD to grab a few fish for dinner and headed back over the bar. We filled the boat and were amazed that we averaged 180 -190 litres a day for Tournament fishing, which was pretty good given that I didn't muck around getting us out in the mornings and back in the afternoons, all at over 22 knots.

A good mate, Simon Eakin of AB Lures left us an esky on the wharf upon our return. It contained several blue swimmers and muddies. It was hard not to cook them straight away and not wash the boat. Chris had to go back to Port Stephens so more crab for us. We resisted the temptation and washed and packed up the boat, then Alex cooked the crabs. We ate and drank like kings. There was crab shell all over the back deck. We were pretty stuffed so we went to bed about 11pm full of crabs and beer.

We'd been trying to work out who had won tag and release and capture. We were fairly sure Sea Baby IV had won capture with 3 Marlin 35055.10 points but not too sure about Tag and Release. We really wanted Mark Brown from Rarely In to win. He was fishing with his kids and a mate and was leaving really early and coming home late after running to South West Rocks and back each day. He put his kids on all the fish, and was just standing back being a proud dad. He has fished the Golden Lure on and off for years and is a really top bloke. His previous boat was also a

trailer boat (but smaller) and he goes out in some wild conditions and fishes hard. After speaking to him, it turned out that a win wasn't to be - they ended up third on 100012, behind That's Gold 112500 and Team Simrad 105031. Mark's daughter Ebony won champion Junior angler, and his son Connor Brown was runner up Junior. I missed the presentation but apparently Brownie's speech about fishing with his kids brought a standing ovation.

After waking up the next morning about 5.30am to the sounds Long Time Dead's stereo – it had been on all night – I hosed the crab shells off the deck much to the excitement of the resident marina bream, and headed home to see the family on Saturday morning.

My thanks to the crew of Optional Xtras, and the PMGFC Committee and volunteers for a great Tournament. The shirts and stubby holders this year are awesome.

Full Results on Port Macquarie Game Fishing Club's Facebook page.