



TACKLE AND TACTICS FOR TEASING WAHOO

Field Editor **Graeme Field** does battle with the razor-toothed speedster of the ocean – wahoo, and discusses tackle and techniques for the species.

They came out of nowhere – razor-toothed, blue-striped torpedoes. One moment the teasers were contentedly splashing and gurgling in the wake as the boat cut a mesmerising path through the greasy smooth surface of the sea, and the next complete pandemonium broke out as a school of aggressive wahoo slashed into the teasers and daisy chain, turning the sea into a mass of boils and explosions as they tried to obliterate the carefully prepared attractor baits. They came up fast and without warning, but we had expected nothing less from these ferocious fish, and in an instant everyone on board had burst into action. The boat was slammed into neutral, teasers were cranked in at top speed and the daisy chain jerked and wiggled in an attempt to keep the frenzied fish in tight to the boat.

Amidst the flurry of activity, a fly line somehow managed to whistle between the rods and people, and a fly was launched off the stern of the boat into the melee of attacking fish. As the fly swung just beyond the last lure in the daisy chain, it came exploding out of the water, firmly clenched between the smiling scissor-like jaws of a flying wahoo. The cast had been perfect. The fly, a lone straggler behind the ordered line of the daisy chain, was pounced on immediately. As is often the case with hot wahoo, the fish became airborne after a spectacular strike, indicative of their speed and aggres-

siveness. Loose line was barely cleared as the hooked fish raced off across the surface at top speed, the reel singing sweetly against the pull of the fish. Wahoo are one of the fastest gamefish in the sea, and aren't afraid to use every ounce of that searing pace as they tear backwards and forwards across the surface. Sometimes they double back and change direction so fast that spray from the rooster tailing line as it cuts through the surface, is the only indication of the direction the fish is heading. This one was no different, and the long scorching runs interspersed with jarring head shakes drew delighted shouts from the angler as the fish used all its power and speed to try and rid itself of the fly.

By now the boat had come to a standstill and, as the wake cleared, the dark shapes of more wahoo were visible. They circled around beneath the boat, inquisitively eyeing us as they contemplated the strange craft in the water. As quickly as they launch an attack, wahoo can calm down and lose interest and, although they sometimes hang around, they seldom hit a fly after the excitement of the first wave. Nevertheless, a second rod was grabbed and more casts were made at the fish circling the boat. A few half-hearted follows ensued before it was clear that we wouldn't be getting a double hookup this time round, and instead we settled down to watch the rest of the fight that was still taking place on the other side of the boat.

After a number of powerful high speed runs, the fish rapidly began to tire, and soon the frantic splashing alongside the transom signalled the end of the fight as the glowing purple-blue fish was tailed and lifted into the boat. Steering well clear of those dangerous jaws, photos were quickly shot, fly removed and within a minute the fish was swimming away slowly, tired but unharmed after its brief encounter with mankind.

It was while we were searching for sailfish that we first started to tease in wahoo and yellowfin tuna as schools of these fish would hit the teasers. Our immediate reaction was to reel the teasers away as quickly as possible to prevent the strip baits from being ripped to pieces by their sharp teeth. However, it didn't take long for us to realise that the wahoo would often follow the teasers in and stay interested for long enough to get a shot at them with the fly rod. We began using the same tactics for yellowfin tuna with just as much success, and things rapidly developed until we were regularly catching both these speedsters on fly.

TEASING SETUP

There is one fundamental difference between teasing wahoo (or tuna) and teasing sailfish – and that is speed: the speed of the strike, the speed at which they lose interest and the speed required of the crew and anglers to ensure a hookup. When teasing sailfish, one generally has a fair amount of time in which to see the fish coming, entice it to get it “hot,” and to coax it in close enough to the boat to give the angler a decent shot at the fish with the fly rod. This generally enables the use of two teasers and allows the crew to set at least one of the teasers far back in the wake, as the sailfish can be brought in from quite a way out if teased correctly.

With wahoo and tuna this is impossible, as the fish come up fast with little or no warning and, before the teasers are halfway back to the boat, the fish have either disappeared, or destroyed the baits and lost interest.





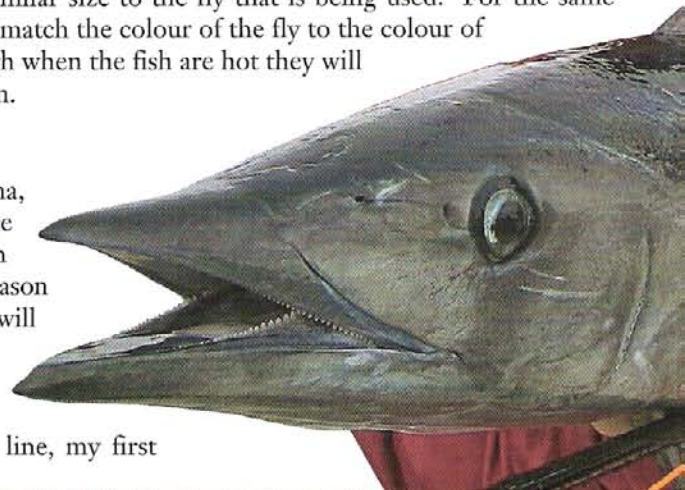
Therefore, the first tactical change we make when targeting wahoo and tuna is to shorten the daisy chain until it is lying right in the wake between the engines, and bring the teasers in short – usually 45ft behind the boat and right on the edge of the wake. This serves two purposes: the fish will be in casting distance as soon as they appear, and the shorter teaser lines can be reeled in and cleared from the casting zone immediately. Next, we position the teaser crew on the opposite side of the boat to the fly angler so that the fly angler can make a cast without waiting for crew to move out of the way. Sailfish can be “switched” from one teaser to another to give the fly angler the best possible shot at the fish, and crew have time to clear lines and themselves in preparation of a cast being made. With wahoo and tuna there is no such luxury – the cast needs to be made immediately and everyone needs to be out of the way well in advance, so positioning of lines and crew is important.

THE TEASERS

We generally prefer smaller teasers and favour the soft skirts with a moulded resin head. These are rigged with belly-shines (strip baits) from bonito or small kawakawa, using heavy braided wire rigged in a loop to which the top of the belly-shine is stitched. A good quality snap swivel is attached to the top end of the wire trace to enable quick changes. We have tried using lures with no belly-shines, but our success rate dropped dramatically. Preferred colours are a combination of purple, pink and blue – especially in overcast weather. In bright sunlight, teasers in green, chartreuse and yellow also work well. We keep the belly-shines small and sleek as they ride better in the wake and are of similar size to the fly that is being used. For the same reason, we try as often as possible to match the colour of the fly to the colour of the teasers that we are using, although when the fish are hot they will often eat anything you throw at them.

FLY TACKLE

When teasing up wahoo and tuna, there is always a very realistic chance of a sailfish or really big tuna, or even a marlin being raised, and for this reason I favour using a 14-wt rod. A 12-wt will suffice if wahoo are your only target as they are clean fighters and tend to stay up near the surface. I rig my rod with a 400 - 600 grain sinking line, my first



Above left: The author with an 18lb yellowfin caught on fly that was attracted to the boat while searching for sailfish.

Above middle: This tandem hook pattern makes a killer wahoo fly.

choice being a 15-wt Scientific Anglers billfish taper. This is a great line to handle and cast, and has the added advantage of being bright orange in colour, allowing you to see exactly where your fly is at all times. I overload my rod by one weight because of the short amount of line I am casting.

Terminal tackle consists of a fairly short leader of around 7ft in length, and is made up of a 50lb mono butt section, class tippet of 20lb, and 12 inches of 100lb piano wire to which the fly is attached using a Haywire Twist. For tuna, the wire can be replaced with 80lb fluorocarbon or mono. Bimini Twists add extra shock absorption and superior knot strength to the class tippet. The class tippet is essential to create a controllable weak link in your leader – especially when there is a chance of hooking tuna, as they will always sound when hooked and sometimes have to be popped off when they cannot be lifted.

The flies we have found to be most successful are big Flashy Profile-type baitfish patterns, tied on 6/0 Gamakatsu SL12 hooks using bucktail and Supreme Hair. I prefer a tandem-hook rig, but some anglers prefer a single-hook fly – use whatever you are more comfortable with. I always incorporate big eyes and lots of flash into my flies. My first choice would be purple and white, followed by pink and white, then blue and white. Keep a few flies in chartreuse, yellow and green for those sunny days when nothing else is working.

When waiting for a shot at wahoo, I like to keep 45 - 60ft of line stripped off my reel into a bucket on the deck. I leave a tiny bit of water in the bucket so that the coils of line “stick” to the bottom of the bucket. Too much water and the line will slosh around and tangle. I hold the fly in my left hand, rod in my casting hand and leave as much line out of the rod tip as I can control. Always keep checking your line as it can tangle in the bucket or can blow around your rod tip.

THE PROCEDURE

Troll the teasers slightly faster than you would for sailfish – usually 6 - 7 knots. Everyone must be ready and know the prearranged plan for a strike. The second the fish hit the teasers, three things must happen simultaneously. The boat must be put into neutral, the teasers must be cranked in and the fly angler must toss his fly into the wake and let the momentum of the boat pull a few more feet of line from the rod – this allows the rod to be loaded instantly. As soon as the rod is loaded, the cast must be made – normally at an angle across and away from the stern – allowing the fly to swing across the remnants of the wake just behind the daisy chain as the boat slows. This is when most strikes occur, so be ready!

Wahoo and tuna both tend to do the same thing: they hit the baits once, disappear for a few seconds, then hit them again. They very seldom strike three times, so the trick to successfully hooking both species is to have your fly in the zone at the moment that they come back for the second attack. If nothing happens, then begin stripping the fly back as fast as you can, as this will often trigger a strike if the fish are hanging around. I usually make a couple more casts and retrieves just to be sure, and then we put the boat into gear and start trolling again. It is always a good idea to backtrack and go over the same area again as the fish may still be in the vicinity. Ideally, have a bucket of live bait (such as scads, halfbeaks or anchovies) onboard and as soon as the fish hit the teasers and the boat stops, throw a couple of handfuls of the live bait overboard. This will keep the fish in feeding mode and close to the boat, allowing the angler more time to make a cast to a hungry fish. This is definitely the most successful method of catching wahoo, and often results in a double hookup. If I can leave you with one bit of advice – get that fly in the water! Every time a fish strikes, stop the boat and make a cast – you will be amazed at how many hookups you get. Teasing wahoo is not as slick and smooth as teasing sailfish. It is chaotic and messy at times, but hell, it’s fun when you get it right!



Above right: To catch wahoo on fly (as with billfish) takes great team effort, but the results are well worth it.