

GAMEFISHING

By Tony Orton



Early morning and the crews are already at work preparing for the day.

‘SITUATION VACANT’

Wanted: A hard working person who can clean and polish to the highest standards, cook, and entertain guests.

The applicant will also need: some engineering skills; excellent eye, hand and foot coordination; be a strong, strong swimmer; and be prepared to work extremely long hours. Bait catching and rigging skills are necessary.

The successful applicant may need to start immediately and can expect a modest wage, but will travel to some of the world’s most exotic game-fishing locations, with the possibility of winning prize money and wiring the fish of a lifetime. Only hard working, professional people need apply.

So you want to be a ‘mate’?

Game fishing is big business: expensive, multi-million-dollar boats with large selections of expensive rods, reels and tackle, all of which needs to be maintained in ‘as new’ condition.

There are large prize monies and calcuttas at stake, owners’ and captains’ reputations on the line, and your guests’ safety and enjoyment in your hands.

Being a mate on a game boat is a serious profession: practised well, it can turn a bad day of fishing into a trip of a lifetime, which in turn could lead to a tournament win or a bigger tip from your guests/clients at the end of a successful charter.

I know a lot of very good ‘mates’ who work offshore. Some earn more than most engineers, doctors and accountants. They are extremely good at what they do and take fishing to a new level. The only problem

is, you cannot go to school to learn this trade, it has to be learnt on the job. Most jobs are won on word of mouth, experience and, most of all, an honest, can-do, hard working attitude.

As a captain, I get to see a lot of ‘mates/deckhands’, whether fishing on other boats, talking to other captains, or just observing crews working at the docks. Most captains know who their next ‘mate’ will be from this alone. The docks and the fishing world are small places – hard workers certainly stick out, whereas the slackers get tossed out.

If reasonably new to the sport or you want to follow through and make this a paying career choice, here is a list of the skills and attributes I have compiled after talking to other captains, owners and mates.

Wax on, wax off

Fishing is a big part of the job, but

cleaning is even bigger, so attention to detail is important. You’ll need to learn all the products for polishing and cleaning paint, glass, acrylic clears, stainless steel, aluminium, covers and fabrics. Everyone looks at the boat – owner, guests or fellow crews – and a highly polished/cleaned boat indicates a crew who cares about what they do and are.

I once had a young deckhand say to me, “Don’t worry Cap, I’ll look after it like it’s mine!”

My reply to him was, “Like f@&#, you will! You’ll look after it like it’s mine, buddy! Polish it again!”

Everyone has a different interpretation of clean, but too clean is better than not clean enough. The more polish you apply, the easier it is at the end of a long, tiring day of fishing to wash, clean and dry the boat. Many top boats even go to the trouble of waxing all their rods once a week to prevent water spots and sun damage.



Clockwise from left; Captain Bobby McGuiness teaches a new mate wiring techniques; The new mate leaders his first fish, with arms stretched out and pulled off balance, his technique still needs work; Polished boat and team work, and quality tackle are what you need to provide the goods for your anglers.

Tie lots of knots, boatman/woman

There are lots of knots on a fishing boat. They all need to be tied quickly and efficiently – who knows, one of them may just save your or your guests' lives one day. There are certain knots for tying up the boat at the dock, another for tying a fender to a rail, and then there are all the fishing knots for different situations.

Some of the necessary knots for the boat include: bowline, clove-hitch, half-hitch and the sheet bend; fishing knots are as follows: Uni knot, common Snell, Dropper Loop, Double Overhand Loop, Albright, Bimini Twist, Cat's Paw, Lefty's Loop, and the loop-to-loop connection.

Learn which knots to use in the various situations, and tie them quickly and correctly.

Docking smartly

Docking the right way is simple and efficient, but it's teamwork that makes this go smoothly. If it goes wrong, it can get really messy and dangerous. As a mate you need to have lines, fenders and a boat hook ready to go. You'll also need to know which way the wind is blowing and to keep an eye on the current or tide flow. This information is important so you know what lines to get on first to secure the vessel. If unsure, ask the senior mate or captain – every crewmember has an important part to play in docking. On our boat, we always have one floating fender

ready, just in case we need to push off something.

People person

You will spend all day with guests and other crew, so you'll need to be social and outgoing. You'll also need to have eyes in the back of your head while looking out for the safety and wellbeing of your guests. Keep them fed and the refreshments coming. You'll need to be positive in your words, so they listen but are not offended, and you'll need to be funny, but not so you look like a fool. You need to be confident, but don't talk about yourself all day and come across as an egomaniac. Fishing is all about fun, so make sure you come to work with a big smile – if you're happy, your guests will also be happy.

Most guests come to learn something, so be sure to pass on some of your experience as well.

Learn to take wraps, wraps and more wraps

Leadering a big fish is a very dangerous job. There is a huge list of things that can go wrong, but the two that worry me most are a fish landing in the cockpit, or a crewman being pulled over the side and then down.

Learn how to take wraps on the leader from an experienced pro, then practice and practice so it becomes second nature. Practice on small fish such as skipjack or even when bring-

ing the teasers in.

Careful rigger

You can always tell a good mate by his rigging skills, as well as the condition of his lures, hooks, lines and tackle. Check tackle, drag settings and gear daily – they should always be perfect. There is no excuse for a crimp or knot to fail after the amount of time, effort and money spent finding and hooking a game fish. Failure due to a five-cent crimp is gut-wrenching, especially if was a big fish.

Always check lines and leaders for chafing and wear after winding in. Have extra lure-hook rigs, bait-catching setups and live-bait rigs ready to go. Know where they are and have everything in order. Learn how to make good, strong crimps and con-

nections – not too heavy and not too light. Make sure you have thought about all the fishing techniques you use and have everything ready. The last thing a captain wants to do is stop fishing and wait for you to tie up some live-bait rigs because you forgot to rig them up the night before.

Catch bait and rig bait

If you cannot catch bait, then you sure as hell cannot catch big fish. Learn the different techniques of catching bait, and make this as quick and efficient as possible. Also, handle the bait with care to ensure a long life in the tuna tube or bait tank; who knows, it may be the last bait you catch that day and may be required to hook that extra-big marlin. On my boat we take bait fishing very seriously: down-planers, sabikis and





There is no excuse for not having the necessary gear well sorted and tackle rigged properly.

squid/feather lures are always ready to go. We run live and dead baits, so my crew needs to know how to rig a live or dead bait for drifting, trolling or pitch-baiting. Have your needles,

wax line and rigs ready to go.

An organised cockpit is a safe and efficient cockpit

Safety first, fish second. To ensure

this, you need to have good cockpit house-keeping skills: everything has to be in its correct place so you can work quickly and efficiently. We have buckets hanging under our game chair – one for rubbish, and one for lures and hooks when we clear our gear – while our rigging gear is in one spot and laid out so it's easy to find and use. By halfway through the day your guests will know your system, making your job easier and ensuring an easy clean up at day's end.

When you start backing up in a sea, with water washing all over the cockpit floor, the gear really needs to be in the correct place – standing on a 12/0 hook will ruin a perfectly good fishing trip.

Listen, watch and learn – “and drop the ego, amigo”

Everyone wants to be the best, and there are plenty of people who like to tell everyone they are the best, but in my eyes the best fisherman is the one who quietly goes about his or her job, listening to other crews, watching other crews, and always improving his or her skills.

There are so many ways to catch a fish and it would be a shame to

put your ego in the way of such a great opportunity to learn or teach someone else. The great thing about travelling to so many locations is you get to meet and watch so many fishermen – you may only use a small part of what someone says, but it may just improve what you are currently doing. (I always encourage my crew to fish on other boats on their days off or lay days. They come back with new ideas, and often it reassures them they are doing something the correct way, building their confidence.)

A lot of what has been listed can be learnt while fishing on smaller boats or with your mates – or even at home. There are a lot of books on knots/rigs, and the Internet is a great place to learn. Start walking the docks, talking to people and crews – make yourself known, get in there, and work hard.

It may start by helping someone for a season on the weekends for no pay, but someone will always be watching, so give it your best shot.

Dream it!

Live it!

Fish it!



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