

Barra Tracka Sportsfishing

I'd like to report on a recent outing I had with John Massey from Barra Tracka Sportfishing.

John Massey is justifiably proud of his brand new 6 metre Barra Tracka, a superbly built Cairns Custom Craft sport-fishing vessel. This vessel is ideally suited to cruising our tidal rivers, estuaries and near-shore blue water fishing environments and along with John's many years of experience will help put you in touch with the big ones.



He had promised to take me out in her for months now and a good run of fine weather finally forced his hand. So it was at 6.30 am last Thursday that John pulled up and off we went to the boat ramp. It was great, I didn't have to bring a thing – John provided all the tackle, bait, light refreshments, tea & coffee, soft drink a scrumptious smorgasbord lunch.

The boat glided off the trailer into the calm waters of Smiths Creek and we were soon heading out through the harbour entrance leads. It was almost a perfect day, hardly a cloud in the sky, calm seas and a light 10-knot breeze blowing across the bow.

John eased back on the throttle and we neared the last lead, idled close to the poles to check the bait situation on the sounder and dropped down a few bait jigs. These are usually dynamite on the bait schools that hang around any offshore structure but try as hard as we could we just did not get a sniff. Oh well, we had other options so off we skipped to the "secret spot".

The further out we travelled the calmer the seas became (not that they were rough in the first place) but we reckoned it was blowing a gentle 6-8 knots by the time we pulled back and searched the bottom for his first mark. Just like clockwork the baitfish showed up on the sounder, the lures went over the stern and we started a tight trolling pattern over the structure. A quality mack tuna of 8 kg's gave me a solid work out (we keep it for bait) trolled up on a red and white Halco Laser Pro along with a couple of mates. Things were looking good.

The metal jigs went over the side and we started to crank as fast as we could. I was using a new blue and white Laser while John stuck to the locally made Bumpa-Bar – can you believe it, first drop, I was crunched by a good spotted mackerel and had to work to bring it to the boat on 8kg tackle. We landed another three before deciding to try some strip baits on the bottom rig, a Shimano TLD 20 loaded with 40lb braid (more on this latter).

No sooner had I hit the bottom than all sorts of nibbles and bumps were easily sensed through the string – but they seemed to be just small nuisance fish and I had difficulty deciding on when to strike. But the next tug came up hard on a solid fish. I pumped and wound, gained some line and lost a lot more as the quality fish bolted along the ocean floor.

After a few minutes stand off I managed to raise the ante and had the fish rising in the water column – we had colour at last and she was a beauty. A magnificent 8kg big mouth nannygai, its crimson colours glowing in the early morning sun as John hauled her over the side. They are such brilliant looking fish and arguably one of the very best on the chew as well.



I landed a few smaller models, dropped an even bigger one just in sight of the boat and then it all went a bit quiet. Time to motor to the next mark so up anchor and away. When we arrived another guide (Tim from Eco Sportfisher) was jigging the wreck and had already landed a few quality fish, spaniards and bludger trevally among them. We decided to give him some room so popped the lures over the side and trolled around for about 15 minutes to no avail.

OK, let's head off, have some lunch and head over to "secret spot no 3" said John – who was I to argue.

While anchored up we were reminded very graphically of what a wonderful part of the world, and how diverse and full of life, the Great Barrier Reef off of Cairns really is. Hungry tuna crashed bait schools on the surface, a 3-metre hammerhead shark swam around the stern and a big turtle glided by. And to top it off a large freighter passed between us and Green Island and riding playfully in its bow wave were a pod of dolphins. To see them spring from the bow, summersault into the air and back again into the sparkling blue water was just fabulous.

Their interaction with man made things is a pleasure to behold and makes you think that there may be hope for us all to live in harmony yet!

The next stop was the icing on the cake – I managed to deck another dozen big mouth with four of them topping the 8-10 kg mark, John landed a few trevally on the jigs and it was time for an early trip home.

Now for a tip about that braid – the feel it gives you is fabulous, every tap and bump is transmitted up the line to the angler's senses and the hook ups are solid and appear secure. But during the fight on big quality fish the hook is often shaken free. A sudden surge, a quick change of direction and the fish is gone – there is no stretch or give like quality mono and I lost about five big mouth due to its unforgiving / low stretch nature. I must admit however that after backing off the drag by about one third I managed to keep most of the big ones on but then I had to combat the very real danger of loosing the fish to the bottom structure before turning their heads. I know a lot of guides / skippers have gone back to quality mono for their bottom fishing for this very reason. Think about it!



One last treasured moment was still in store for us however. As we readied for the trip home (ie. me still fishing and John cleaning.....the luxuries of being a pampered guest) we noticed some surface action over the bow. Up came the anchor, over went the jigs and John idled towards the feeding fish. At first we thought they were more tuna but their coordinated attack on the balled up baitfish had us mystified. In unison a half dozen metre long black shapes would crash the surface, all parallel to each other and heading in the same direction.

John was retrieving his gold Bumpa-Bar when a 2.5 metre sailfish suddenly materialised behind his lure and just hung there about 15 ft from the boat – now that would have been a great catch – a prime lit up sail on a 6 kg spinning tackle.

Can't wait to be invited out again!!!