

Lake Tinaroo, North Queensland

This article was written by Jason Swan from the Got One Fishing & Outdoor Leisure Store (www.gotone.com.au) here in Cairns, and is re-produced with the kind permission of Queensland Fishing Monthly. The photos are courtesy of Jason as well.



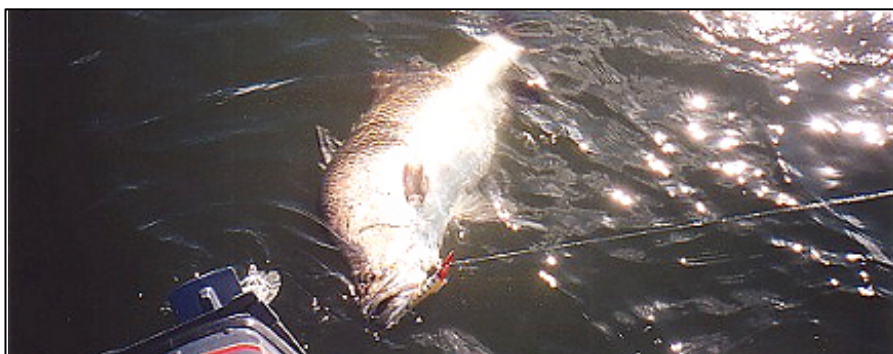
BEFORE I begin, I wish to point out I'm in no way an expert on Tinaroo barra. Plenty of fisherman have caught more fish, bigger fish and their knowledge would far surpass mine on this issue. What I wish to do is pass on a few pointers and theories from certain experiences I've had in the dam in the hope the novice fisherman who hasn't caught a barramundi will at least have a little more knowledge on how to get started.

For the few years I lived on the lake I heard many stories about how Tinnaro barra don't fight, how there's not really any fish in there, how they taste like crap etc. Well they were right about the taste, but everything else is way off the mark.

As usual the people who compare and criticise the fighting qualities of freshwater barra as opposed to saltwater barra are the clowns who have never caught a Tinaroo barra. The first experience I had with these monsters was live baiting up the Barron Arm two years ago by myself when suddenly I had the lightest tap on my line and down the float went. The fish took off and I knew I was in big trouble on 20 pound mono.

The bloke fishing about 20 metres away was yelling out instructions and encouragement when it suddenly jumped in front of him and he said (modified) "jeeppers that's a big fish". Then he actually pulled up his anchor, came over and told me to jump aboard and we gave chase. Funny, I don't ever remember jumping into somebody else's boat in the Inlet to fight a fish. To me something was missing. Sitting out all night staring at a float, being forced to use 100 pound plus hand lines in the hope to skull drag a big fish in just wasn't for me. I tried luring which has always been my hobby but still I couldn't seem to get it right. Then two years ago I went to see the Tinaroo seminar Neil Schultz did at the Cairns Boat Show and it was if everything he said turned to gold, as almost immediately using his advice I was among the fish.

The single best month for Tinaroo barra is November, followed in order of December, January, February and March. September is still freezing early morning and night and early October isn't much better. November is when the humidity is rising and storms are brewing which puts the Tinaroo barra on the move. This is certainly the best time to cast or troll lures.



A good trick is to watch the weather station and if they forecast afternoon, evening or early morning storms, then be out there before they hit as this is prime time. (Although this puts more people off than on). Ninety-nine per cent of people will say the best time is late afternoon and evening and this has always been true in the past. However, I believe the tide has turned and the best time to catch these fish is from dawn to about 9am. This is simply because as Tinaroo has become so popular at dusk it is nothing to be sharing fishing spots with five other boats plus ski boats zipping about everywhere. Sure, people are still catching fish, but do yourself a favour and take a day off in the middle of the week and be out there at crackers and see what a difference it makes.

I won't be able to give specifics of where to fish for fear of upsetting too many people, but areas to start are the Barron arm, the rocky Barron mouth, Mazlin Creek the rocky areas off the dam wall, Barrabideen, the Sailing Club and the weed beds directly opposite to the right. There are a swag of other spots, but these spots are consistent and for one reason or another all attract big fish.

When exploring these areas for likely spots remember that during the heat of the day most of the barra have taken shelter in

the deep or under lily pad areas and are much harder to catch. About half of the barra I have caught in Tinaroo have screamed back out into the deep once hooked and the other half have done the opposite and screamed straight back into the lily pads, obviously to take shelter at their snag. During the hours of dawn and dusk the barra come up from the deep and out from hiding to patrol the fringe of the lily pads or weed in search of food. A lot of anglers are fishing with deeper lures in Tinaroo with great success, but what I look for in a likely spot is relative shallow water such as 2.5m to 3.5m deep where there are plenty of lily pads and or thick weed.

This, accompanied by deep water in the near vicinity, is for sure a certain barra spot at dawn and dusk.

Like all fish, barra have been caught in Tinaroo at all phases of the moon, but if you want to greatly increase your chances here are a few tips. The experts will tell you that five days before the full moon and up until the full moon is the best time to fish. I agree this is a great time, but my fishing diary paints a different picture.

As I was fishing Tinaroo most nights for six months, I can say I had more strikes and hook ups the first and second day after the full moon than any other phase. Why? Don't know. The best day I've had at Tinaroo was the day after the full moon in January this year. The second best was the day after the Barra Bash last year which was also the day after the full moon.

I snuck out and there wasn't a soul on the water after the Bash, but the fish were really on the bite. Also, I've had good results the first few days after the new moon. Some people think a lure is a lure, and especially colour doesn't matter that much.

I believe the single most important ingredient for success at Tinaroo is the lure and colour selection. Everybody has their own selection and favourite and I'm no different. There is no point at all in combining the moon with the best time and place if the lure being used is not appropriate.

I made such a mistake when I started hooking barra at Tinaroo in which I was using a Killalure River Rat 12 plus trolling in 3.5m of water. Although I was having plenty of strikes, my landing of the fish was very very low. I thought I was clever choosing a lure that was hitting the bottom every couple of metres, but not hooking up on snags (these lures are good for that) but as barra feed forward and up the strikes were often as the lure was exciting the fish, but the hooks were not finding the mark and more fish were lost than boated.

This is when I changed to the 8 plus Barra Bait by Killalure. It gets right down in front of the fish's face in 2.5m to 3.5m of water and the barra were able to get a better strike at the lure and the hook ups and landings were noticeably increased.

I promised myself I wouldn't write a story about Tinaroo until I proved I could catch a 50lb barra in Tinaroo on a lure. This happened on Monday, October 2, at 8.30am in quite cold conditions (contradicts half the story so far). This magical fish was trolled up on a Tinaroo lure made locally by Laurie Peterson.

Now, I wouldn't know Laurie if he was standing next to me, but I want to shake the hand and buy a beer to the man who made the lure that caught me my first 50 pound barra. For many years I wanted to join the 50 pound club and it was everything I had hoped.

In this instance perseverance paid off. My fishing mate, Trevor Spry, and myself trolled the same area from 6am till 7.45am without luck until we decided to stop and cast for another 20 minutes. By now the sun was fully up and I thought the trip was over, but we had one last troll over the same stretch. We both changed our lures from his Classic Barra model and my Barra Bait 8 plus to Tinaroo lures.

Trevor's being the "old faithful" deep diving blue model and myself the silver side, fluro yellow/green back model with a red head (colour 012 for interested people). His lure went off on the first troll and we were both excited as a nice barra took to the air and went on some powerful runs before finally being boated. His barra was relatively small for Tinaroo at one metre long and 11kg. We trolled for another 10 minutes when suddenly my lure was hit hard and I was on.

In hindsight I thought the fish was quite small as it didn't run at first and only showed its mouth twice trying to dislodge the lure. Things changed in seconds as this fish headed for deep water and after the first run of around 50 metres I knew it was big, really big. I was helpless to do anything but watch as the line peeled out before again it surfaced and made a gigantic swirl far away.

At this stage I thought it would be smart to follow it slowly out into deep water away from the edge. After 20 minutes my legs were jelly as I realised this could finally be the one, (I've lost three others previously over the 50 mark and they all straightened the trebles) but as the fight ended and the fish was below the boat the monster was thrashing its head every which way trying to get away.

There was rising panic welling inside as this fish was trying its all to straighten the hooks and I nearly stuffed it wanting to



bring it up too fast. It wasn't until it was guided safely into the net that I noticed the trebles were in the best place in the soft tough area under the mouth and I finally breathed a sigh of relief and let out some serious "You Beauties." The reason I love Tinaroo lures so much is they are built tough, tow from the bib and have a great tight action that is easily visible through the rod tip at all times, which is an advantage when detecting if the lure is fouled with weed or not.

Also they don't create a lot of resistance in the water like a lot of other lures, so when a big Tinaroo barra hits it, its a feeling like no other. It's like trolling a feather than a freight train hitting it going the other way.

It is also one of the few good barra lures on the market with a metal bib which is great if the bottom is rocky or is up and down and the lure is constantly ploughing into the bottom.



I have seen nearly every lure and colour on the market catch Tinaroo barra, but again I'm interested in giving people who haven't caught a big barra the opportunity to maybe increase their chance by telling what works for me. I'm sure that at periods of dawn and dusk when the sunlight is fading that darker lures work better. Lures with a lot of black on them work and here's why: Fish at this time of day don't see colour, rather when down on the bottom they see shapes contrasting against the lighter sky. A darker lure casts a better shadow than a lighter one and therefore a fish will strike because it can see a shape moving through the water. At this time the only lure I use is the red head and black model lure from Tinaroo lures.

On a full moon when the sky is quite bright you can use these lures right up into the evening with good results, but it is really a non event in the period of new moon. When fishing after the sun is up or from 4pm to dusk in the afternoon there is only one colour lure to use in my opinion. After using all sorts of colours and styles in the beginning and coming up empty, I stumbled by accident on a River Rat colour #55. It was a silver lure with a red head and a fluoro green streak down its back. This is when I started getting amazing results.

There was something about this lure and I thought it was the action, but then I wondered if it was the colour. To prove my point I ordered in this colour in a 8 plus Barra Bait which swam four feet shallower and then after the first time using it I knew I was on a winner as the barra were climbing all over it. I didn't stop there to prove my point. I found a Tinaroo lure in this exact colour.

The Tinaroo lure swam just a touch deeper at 10 feet and in 3.5m of water this was perfect as it lightly touched the bottom every 10m or so. The other benefit was the Barra Baits tend to lose its paint easily where the Tinaroo Lures barely show up a scratch. I used this colour Tinaroo Lure for the first time in the Inlet and upon watching it swim through the water I came in to work the next day and said it was going to catch me a Tinaroo barra, but I had no idea at the time just how big.

For information sake I know how popular Vipers are and they also make a great copy of this colour. I shouldn't even try to analyse why this colour works and just use it, but I will.

Half of the bait fish in Tinaroo are silver in the form of boney bream and stripeys etc and the other half are green in the form of mouth almighties. So when a barra sees this hybrid silver glowing green back mouth almighty swimming past its face I'm sure it cannot resist and must have a taste. I mean it makes sense. How many Elton John, blue, pink or purple bait fish live in Tinaroo?

These are only a few tips that have worked for me and you can make up your own mind to find what works for you. Below I have made a list of a few things that have happened to me in Tinaroo so far.

1. I have caught approximately 50 per cent of my barras in Tinaroo on Killalure Barra Baits and River Rats and 50 per cent of my barras on Tinaroo Lures.

2. A Got One customer who had never fished Tinaroo before came in, asked for advice, left with the 8 plus Barra Bait and came in the next day with a photo of a 45lb barra.
3. Trevor Spry and myself were trolling January this year a day after the full moon. He was using the 8 plus Barra Bait in the exact same colour as above, but it had a blue back whereas mine was the green back. We had around 10 solid hits where the fish came out of the water for the afternoon except I had around eight hits and he had two. We were trolling the exact same way and place, but the green back proved more successful. Some of the barras were enormous and although it was our best trip so far not a single fish was landed. One of those things.
4. Brendon Cheung, a mate of mine, was whinging there was no barra in Tinaroo, so I took him out for the first time and upon using the green back 8 plus Barra Bait trolled close to the edge of lillies, he scored a huge 45lb barra on his first trip.
5. Damien Candeloro from Got One went to Tinaroo with Lumpy Milson recently and cast for six hours in the same spot when he finally (after trying everything else invented for some reason) put on the 8 plus green back Barra Bait I recommended and I kid you not, first cast and the lure didn't make it back to the boat before being monstered.
6. Fourteen-year-old Steven Misener, from Atherton, had never caught a barra before and had bought a plain silver Viper (deleted colour, but available at Got One Cairns) and wanted to try it out. At 7.30am on Tuesday, October 2, 2001 I took him out and he was about 10 casts in when this huge barra inhaled his lure and he landed a 40 pounder right in front of me. Great Effort.
7. I used the silver side, yellowy/greeny back deep diving old faithful lure from Tinaroo Lures for the first time and boated a 50 plus pound barra which convinces me now this is the colour for Tinaroo. This fish, along with Steven Misener's fish, are both currently on display at Got One Cairns.
8. I fought the above barra for 20 minutes from start to finish, but previously I have fought a barra in Tinaroo hooked on the 12 plus River Rat colour #55 on the same tackle for over 40 minutes before all the trebles straightened just under the boat. I didn't even get a glimpse. How big that fish was still haunts me to this day.

Cheers,

Jason Swan

Got One Fishing & Outdoor Leisure Store Cairns

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