

Using Small Boat Technology to Compete with the Big Boys

By John F. King

A couple of years ago Team Afishinado was entered in the Catalina Classic, the biggest marlin tournament off the Southern California Coast. The fish had been hanging out behind Catalina Island near a spot referred to as the 499 Spot. This location was about 19 miles off the East End of Catalina Island, a very doable run for almost any boat entered in the tournament...unless the weather kicked up. And boy did it kick up. We fought a steep and choppy sea all day. This made finding fish very difficult since the primary tasks on that day had become hanging on and keeping the boat out of the trough.



Still, there were a number of fish caught that day and most of the fish were caught on the larger 50 foot plus boats. You might guess that this was due to the fact that the bigger boats could handle the conditions better than us smaller guys, and I am sure that was part of the equation. However, the bigger advantage was their ability to see the bait balls and the fish using their highly sophisticated and very expensive scanning sonar. I made the decision to research my options for adding such technology to my 36' Afishinado.

I found a couple of options, the Wesmar and the Furuno, however, both required that I cut a large 6" to 8" hole in the hull, and they both required a good bit of engine room space for the vertical lift. More importantly, both were priced way out of my range. Fortunately, I ran into Interphase Technologies at a boat show and found a solution in

their TwinScope forward scanning sonar. It did not take long for the investment in this technology to pay off.



Fish: MARLIN Date: 9/19/05
Boat: Afishinado
Captain: John King
Angler: Steve Spina
Weight: 198 Time: _____
Gaffer: _____

I again entered Team Afishinado in the 2005 Catalina Classic. The conditions were very different on day one. The seas were calm and the fish were being spotted on the West ridge of the 181 Spot. The fleet was working the area pretty hard and there were a number of boats getting bit. Unfortunately it seemed as though the fish were biting everyone but us! We continued to pound the area but were unsuccessful. I had earlier planned to scope out the 289 spot since it had been holding a few fish earlier in the season so we made the tough decision to leave the zone and find our own fish.

The water was looking pretty green as we came into the 289 bank, however, we were spotting a number of huge bait balls. There were too many to stop and soak baits on and we were running out of time for the first day of the tournament. I had learned from other anglers that the marlin frequently split the bait schools as they feed, so I began to use my TwinScope to choose the bait balls that looked “split” on the screen. It was getting late and we were tacking back and forth in search of the most promising bait balls.

At 4:30 in the afternoon, just 30 minutes before lines out, we came across a good spot of bait that had “the look”. As I tacked to port to drop the jigs a bit in the column the port rigger popped and immediately a very nice looking marlin cleared the water with our mean joe green electronic acoustic lure in his mouth. “That is a whopper,” I yelled to my little three man crew, “clear the lines and let’s get that thing on the boat!” After 24 minutes I had the bill of the fish in my hands and we were carefully measuring the fish. We do not kill a fish unless we are sure that it is a contender and this fish was measuring out to be a winner.



At the scales the fish weighed out at 198 lbs., good enough to take day one and win my team some serious money. Even better, the conditions deteriorated the next day which allowed our fish to take day two and gave my team \$135,000 in prize money. We were no longer a little boat with a disadvantage as we were declared the winner of the 2005 Catalina Classic.