

The 2 Horsepower Marlin

By John 'Afishinado' King



My fishing buddy Bob is enthusiastic about everything, he may not always be positive in his enthusiasm, but you gotta love the fact that he puts it out there. He is one of those guys that we refer to as having 'strong opinions'... about everything! Now Bob is a great fisherman. He has fished and won tournaments ranging from freshwater bass to striped Marlin,

but he had never before fished for the really big money and he knew that I was planning to fish the Bisbee's Black and Blue...the mother of all Marlin tournaments. Bob was determined to be part of the tournament team.



Bob is a persuasive guy when he sets his mind to it, and he had set his mind to fishing the Bisbee's. Mind you, this tournament is big money. The entry fees are \$5,500 and the optional side bets can add another \$18,750 per day to the entry fees. This does not include the cost of the flight, the condo, the boat, the bait, the licenses and the gear. Just gearing up for the Bisbee's is a huge expense. You have to be ready for the big fish if you are planning to fish one of these tournaments. That means 130 pound bent-butt outfits with new line, fresh drag systems, new 500# leaders, new swivels, etc. This is a very specialized sport and it has a hefty price tag.

I consider Bob to be a very successful guy. He has a great job, a wonderful wife and family and basically, he covers the nut by working his butt off in a big time, modern, body shop. He is not, however, a "big money guy"...and neither am I. There lies the rub. Bob wants to fish the Bisbee with me, but I am grubbing the money from my kids college fund and by "selling" slots on my boat to fisherman that do have some bucks. Like I said, Bob can be a very persuasive guy and somehow he convinces me that he would be an asset to our team.

Bob has stuck the steel into some pretty good sized Makos, and he has been behind the reel on a couple of pretty big fish, however, the slot that we needed filled for the Bisbee's was a leader man. Somehow Bob had become convinced that he was to be our "leader man" even though he had never leadered a fish big enough to

require leadering. You have got to put on my shoes here for a second to really get the gist of this story. I had sold slots on my boat to fish the Bisbee's to guys who were putting up serious bucks and now I was in the position of bringing in a new team member to perform a critical function that he had never performed before in his life. Panic would have been a justifiable response, however, I have never found it to be that productive. Since I had spent my professional career in the education business, the only logical thing to do was to teach Bob how to leader...and to do it in a hurry.



Leading up to the tournament, Bob became the leader man for everything that we caught. We had Bob leadering Yellowtail, Albacore and Sea Bass. Bob became an expert at leadering Sheephead, Sandies and Calico. He became very good at leadering Barracuda, a tricky and toothy species that is very unpredictable at boatside. To this day I believe that there is not a better leader man on the Pacific Coast for handling a corn-fed, two-pound Mackerel with an attitude than Bob.

"Gloves on, palms in, half hitch and ease her in" became Bob's mantra. You could hear him muttering it in his sleep between his

characteristically deep and sleep-defying snores on overnight trips. You could hear him muttering it over a 22-ounce porterhouse with a 23 ounce potato and 24 ounces of butter. You could hear him muttering it when he was threading a hook. I believe that I even heard him whistling the rhyme although it could just as easily have been "the farmer in the dell" that he was whistling. From all appearances, Bob was fully into his role.



I believe that I mentioned that I was a bit nervous about the whole thing, and I know that I mentioned that Bob has strong opinions, so when I suggested a training session to Bob (after a couple of Margaritas on the Lido Deck of the Afishinado) his response was predictable..."How you gonna train me to leader big fish while we are at anchor in Avalon harbor at ten o'clock at night? I already know how to leader Calicos!" I cautiously told Bob my plan. We would put a bridle on the dingy and tie it off with some 200 pound test line. His job would be to use his new found skills, "Gloves on, palms in, half hitch and ease her in" to stop the two horsepower motor and pull the dingy (fish) in to the boat. "What?!, There is no way that a dingy with a two horsepower motor could give me any good practice on leadering!" protested Bob. I had

planned for this moment of resistance, so I threw my trump card, “Todd will operate the dingy” I said confidently.

Now to fully understand the impact of this strategy, you need to know a little bit about Todd. Todd is a big guy, about 6’2” and “lanky strong”. But that is not what makes Todd a valuable trump card. Although we have not been able to clinically prove it, we believe that Todd has multiple personalities. We know of “Big Gene the Dancing Machine”, and a few of us have seen “Casey and the Train Wreck”. I have personally met the “Cockpit Strangler” and “First Flag Fred”, so I know this guy could match Sybil on a bad day. Regardless, we all like Todd, and he does give us a sense of variety. He was very interested in becoming ‘the fish’ for the training session, and I saw Bob’s resistance melting away.

We had been fishing one of the local Marlin tournaments that day, and we had just finished one of those great barbeques on the back deck of the boat. Steaks, potatoes and salad (from the bag) with a good amount of bleu cheese dressing. There was a slight breeze but otherwise the only commotion was coming from Luau Larry's as Guitar Gil blasted out his rendition of Rod Stewart’s classic, “Tonight’s The Night”. It looked like a perfect night for a training session.

We proposed to Bob that Todd (or one of his alter-egos) would get into the dingy with the ancient two-horse Yamaha outboard. To make it fair, and to force Bob to concentrate on his leadering, we suggested that Bob use a blindfold.

So far, so good. Bob’s goal would be to reign in the wayward dingy until he had subdued it at the side of the boat. We were careful to make sure that no one planned to gaff Todd or the dingy. The plan seemed flawless.

Todd was a perfect fish as he took off in the dingy and swerved and swayed about in a manner that convinced me that it was Big Gene the Dancin Machine running the dingy and that Todd was just along for the ride. Bob's technique was flawless on the first try..."Gloves on, palms in, half hitch and ease her in" he kept repeating. We were all gaining confidence although I still had some doubts. I suggested to Bob that he would want to bend a bit more at the knees and to "lock in" under the combing to ensure that he stayed with the boat. Of course, Bob had become too confident for any such coaching and he began to explain to me that such a tactic would not be necessary in this practice but that he would surely "lock in" on a real fish.



There are two ways to get to Bob, the only trouble is that you never know which way will work best at the time. He responds well to logic, if it is his, and to blunt force, if you are bigger and badder than he is. I decided to try logic since I was in

no mood for a brawl after eating all that meat. I told Bob that his practice session would be more valuable if he treated it as if it were real world conditions, to which Bob replied that we would never be hitched to a mooring at ten o'clock at night in Avalon with Gene (Todd) spinning about in a dingy tethered to a leader line under "real world conditions". To get the full effect of his response you need to really draw out the "real world conditions" comment with every bit of sarcasm that you can muster, even then you will be at about half the sarcasm that Bob was applying. I knew then that only blunt force would work so I told Gene to put the full Two Horsepower motor into it. Bob seemed ready. A half second later the dingy was pulling and porpoising for all it was worth. Bob was not ready for the “fish to make this move, and he had not “locked in” at the combing. At first he was yanked a bit off balance, but in the flick of the “fishes” tail, I was suddenly looking at the bottom of Bob’s tennis shoes. Time simply seemed to freeze as Bob tetered on the brink of going into the drink.

When time freezes like that it seems that you know everything all at once. I was struck by every small detail. I knew the water temperature, the time, the phase of the moon and I even realized that Bob had my shoes on. Instinctively, I reached out to save my tennis shoes from the inevitable. I knew that there was no way to save Bob as Gene (Todd) was applying the full force of those two horses with a maniacal grin that would make Jack Nicholson jealous. In a flash, Bob was gone.

Gene was now in full control. He did not see Bob go over the gunwale, but he sensed somewhere in his primordial brain that he was winning this bout, and winning is much more fun than being pulled backwards against his will. So, he continued to pour it on while Bob started to plane up with his hand

still hitched to the line. By now I am laughing so hard that I cannot even yell at Gene to stop although Bob was able to make some identifiable sounds between gulps of salt water. Eventually, Todd wrestled the controls from Gene and skied Bob back toward the boat.

I noticed Bob's Roy Orbison style prescription sunglasses are missing as he does his best pregnant seal imitation and struggles onto the swim step. He looks in my direction and mutters, "Gloves on, palms in, lock your knees and ease her in"