



Saltwater Spinning Tackle the Freshwater Way?

By: Ramon J. Ross

LAST summer I visited an old fishing buddy in Newport News Virginia, and told him about the fun I'd been having spinning in salt water.

"Think it would work around here?" he asked. "Public bass water is scarce in these parts now, and I'm about ready to try saltwater fishing."

"Sure it will work," I said. "The James River, the York River, the Back River, and Chesapeake Bay are supposed to have lots of fish, and if there are lots of fish, spinning is bound to get some of them."

"What about tackle?" he asked. "All I have is a fresh-water outfit."

"That's all you need," I assured him. "I don't have any salt-water spinning tackle either."

That afternoon we drove to a spot on the Back River where my bass fishing friend had arranged to borrow a skiff. We putted out to the channel, anchored and began casting bucktails. Fifteen minutes of casting did not produce a strike, but this didn't worry us, as we were not familiar with the water and realized that we'd have to seek out the fish.

With this in mind, we pulled up the anchor and allowed the boat to drift with the tide as we continued casting. Suddenly my friend let out a whoop, and as

I turned to see what he had, I, too, got a strike. Presently we each landed a 12-inch bluefish. These little blues broke the ice, and we had no more waits between strikes.

By sundown we had boated a mixed bag of blues, weakfish, and croakers, along with a couple of sea bass, a flounder, and a nice striped bass—all on our fresh-water spinning tackle.

Salt-water spinning tackle is not fully standardized as yet, for the sport is still in rather early stages of development. Bill Upperman, the bucktail man of Atlantic City, New Jersey—and, incidentally, one of the outstanding authorities on salt-water fishing in Jersey—has this to say about salt-water spinning in his neck of the woods:

"Last year was the start of a number of the surf-casting fraternity taking up spinning. Spinning proved so successful in taking striped bass along the New Jersey beaches that the ranks of spinning anglers multiplied all during the summer. When there were no stripers around, spin casters tried their gear on other species—and with unusual success, as compared to other angling methods used by other fishermen.

"At the start of last season the tackle that these new spinning converts used was most unorthodox. Rods were in the 6- to 8-ounce class, and braided lines up to 18-pound test were used. In spite of this heavy gear they were successful in taking many more stripers than the lad with the surf stick.

"The main reason for the heavy gear was the striper. He is a mean fighter, with feeding stations around rocks, old pilings, or mussel bottoms. Around any of these spots he can usually manage to cut 4- to 6-pound monofilament line. For that reason the Jersey boys went in for 18-pound terminal tackle. With their set-up drags, it wasn't long before plenty of their rods were being snapped off. Gradually they toned down on both terminal tackle and weight of the rod. They found that the lighter rod could cast lighter lures, and in consequence they could entice more fish.

"Striped bass are moody fish, as far as feeding habits are concerned. They will sometimes go for three or four days without feeding, as their digestive process is slow. During these fasts they will play with small live bait and

occasionally take a small snack. That is where spinning comes in. With the light tackle it is possible to use the lighter, smaller lures to take these fish.

"Spinning has made better anglers out of a lot of Jersey lads. They began to discover that they were more successful by keeping their lures deep and going down for their fish. They started taking flounders— big ones—and found that the flounder is really a game fish on the right kind of tackle. Weakfish also made an appearance in their bags, as did blues. This year will see a vast development in salt-water spinning here in Jersey. The spinning addict will take more fish than the lad with the surf equipment and the average spinning angler will always out-catch the average plug rod man."

Bill Upperman's remarks about salt-water spinning in New Jersey apply in essence to the other Middle Atlantic States. The striped bass is popularity king of the inshore saltwater fish in these areas, and the primary efforts in spinning here have been directed toward the striper. There has been a gradual trend to lighter tackle and smaller lures and more and more salt-water fish have been "discovered" by to spin fisherman and as newcomer to the spinning game have learned that light spinning gear is capable of handling large fish.

While there are a number of spinning rods and reels made especially for salt-water fishing, most of them are larger and heavier than necessary. I feel that spinning tackles any tackle—for salt water should be light enough to give sport with the average fish encountered, not heave enough for the biggest fish in the sea.

Indeed, fresh-water type equipment—if the hardware is corrosion proof—will give more pleasure per fish than heavy spinning gear and will pay additional dividends in numbers and variety of fish caught. The inherent lightness of spinning tackle is directly responsible for its success, and it is foolish to sacrifice this for power which may never be needed anyway. You'll find a light spinning outfit is much more versatile.

A hollow glass rod, about 6 1/2 feet long and weighing 4 to 4 1/2 ounces is best for all around use. The rod should have some backbone, for the buggy-whip rod action is useless for salt-water spinning. The trend these days is toward fast tip action with stiffness in the lower part of the rod. This

arrangement provides power where it is needed without sacrificing ability to cast light lures.

The guides and ferrules should be corrosion-resistant material, preferably chrome-plated stainless steel.

Many spin casters like a screw locking reel seat on their salt-water spinning rods, as the plain cork handle with reel bands is said sometimes to allow the reel to work loose during a long fight. Personally, I have never experienced this alleged shortcoming, even in battles lasting more than an hour, but there is no question that a screw-locking reel seat is more positive than reel bands.

The spinning reel for salt-water use should be selected with care. Many reels which give good service in fresh water simply will not stand the combined onslaught of salt-water corrosion and salt-water fish. Fortunately, manufacturers, both domestic and foreign, have recognized the need for ruggedness and corrosion resistance in spinning reels, and most of the latest models hold up fairly well.

Special attention should be given to the pick-up and line-roller mechanism. The pick-up bail or finger (either style is satisfactory) should be of stainless steel or monel. The "roller," which may or may not actually roll, will wear a line at a terrific rate if it becomes worn or corroded. It must, therefore, be hard enough to resist grooving as well as faster than a small one on a given ratio. Most spinning reel makers state the length of line retrieved per revolution of the handle, and this figure should be 22 inches or greater for salt-water fishing. My own favorite, a standard fresh-water size reel, zips line in at the rate of 30 inches per turn of the handle.

Be sure that the spinning reel you choose for salt-water use has a smooth, dependable drag, because you're certainly going to need it. The drag nut should tighten gradually, so that slight adjustments may be made without danger of applying too much or too little tension. A reel offering at least two full turns of the wing nut from free to locked spool will allow fine adjustments of the drag, even with a fish on. An anti-reverse lock is an absolute necessity and practically all makes now have this feature.

Spools must be strong enough to stand the crushing pressure of elastic monofilament nylon lines. I have seen two plastic spools split when rugged

salt-water fish were being worked in after long runs. Aluminum and stainless steel spools seem to have what it takes.

Don't be afraid to use plenty of oil and grease on a spinning reel, especially in salt water. Liberal lubrication will not slow a spinning reel down one bit but will greatly reduce salt-water damage.

To my way of thinking there is nothing to compare with monofilament nylon for spinning lines. Monofilament nylon wears much longer and casts better than braided lines of equal strength. It is practically invisible in the water. It does not become soggy and stick to itself, even after many hours of continuous casting in sticky salt water.

Probably the most useful size monofilament nylon for salt water is five-pound test. The average reel will hold about 200 yards of this size, and in the best grades will cast lures as light as 1/10 ounce satisfactorily and handle lures as heavy as 1/2 ounce with safety. Do not make the mistake of trying to use too heavy a line, for doing so would defeat the very purpose of spinning.

For fishing around pilings, oyster beds, mangroves, and the like, carry an extra spool with 7- or 8-pound line on - it. But stick to 5-pound test or smaller when there is room to let your fish run. For large salt-water spinning reels and big 6- to 8-ounce rods, lines of 8- to 12-pound test can be used to cast fairly large lures, but such tackle will not take nearly so many fish as the light, freshwater size gear.

On the Atlantic Coast, every area from Maine to Florida has its share of salt-water fish for the spin fisherman. Pollack, bluefish, and stripers range to the northernmost points, weakfish and flounders join the blues and stripers in southern New England and Long Island, and from Virginia south, anything might happen.

The Gulf States offer wonderful opportunities for the spin-caster to try his gear on channel bass, spotted weakfish, and jacks. Washington, Oregon, and California salty waters harbor many game species, including the striper, the various rock and kelp basses, and the famous corbina. All of these fish are vulnerable to spinning tackle and lures, and in addition to the principal species mentioned, every area provides a variety of lesser species to furnish spice for the salt-water spinning game.

Salt-water spinning will be a revelation to fishermen trying it for the first time. Nearly all salt-water fish will strike artificial spinning lures, and many of them actually seem to prefer spinning lures to natural bait. By using the lures and tactics described in part one of this article, anyone can catch many kinds of salt-water fish. The key lure is the small, weighted blacktail. Sink it deep to open the door to a vast volume of new and fantastic adventures in fishing.