

BLUEFIN TUNA TRAINING MODULE LINES AND CONNECTIONS



PRODUCED BY THE UKBFTA
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ANGLING TRUST AND THE PBA



MONO AND BRAID

MAINLINES

Most skippers fishing for bluefin in the English CHART program spool their multipliers with a 'braid' of some kind (note not all 'braid' is the same), topped off with a topshot of heavy monofilament.

There may be some still spooling monofilament throughout, but there are just a few advantages and a number of disadvantages to that approach. We'll touch on those below.

Firstly though, a quick note on 'braid'. The original braid was 'dacron', (actually a trade name for the polymer it is made of). Advances in 'braid tech' have given us 'super braids', which can be made from variety of brands of material. Spectra and Dyneema are two examples of 'solid' braids with slightly different characteristics. There is also 'hollow-core' braid available from several manufacturers which has several advantages.

What you want from your braid depends upon whether you are fishing a conventional multiplier, trolling, bait fishing etc, or throwing a popper/stick bait from a fixed spool reel.

So what are the pros and cons of each?

MONOFILAMENT

It is (relatively) cheap vs most 'braid'. It has good abrasion resistance, is easy to connect via knots many anglers know well, and can be crimped well with a little skill.

The stretch in 'mono' can be a positive, providing some cushion in the fight), or a negative, (less 'feel' for what the fish is doing and once stretched under pressure from a big fish it can lose significant strength which you may not notice until it is too late, see leaders/topshots below).

One of the biggest disadvantages of mono versus 'braid'



is its much larger diameter lb for lb. As we set out in our article on 'reels for bluefin', you really want to have at least 750/800 yards of line on your reel if possible.

If spooling up with 750/800 yards of 80-100lb mono all through, you will need to fish an 80W reel at minimum as a 50W just will not have the capacity.

BRAID

It is expensive vs mono, and does require specialist knots and loop forming skills. The modern braids do not degrade like the originals and will last many years with care and attention. They are actually more resistant to UV damage than mono.

The lack of stretch gives greater 'feel' BUT little/no 'cushion' (cue a mono topshot.) Poor abrasion resistance can be a real downside on hulls late in the fight, (cue a mono topshot again.)

One of the biggest advantages of 'braid' is its much lower diameter lb for lb than mono. You can fit up to twice the equivalent b/s 'braid' on a given reel than mono. As per our article on reels, this gives real advantages in angler efficiency during a drawn out fight with a large bluefin. This allows us to use quality 50W multipliers rather than heavier gear. Our article on 'stand-up' shows what can be achieved with this gear versus the huge rods and reels of old.

The lack of stretch and abrasion resistance of braid is countered by attaching a 'topshot' of mono to the top of the spooled braid. In the case of a multiplier fishing the troll or baits, this is typically 100-150 yards of 150-200lbs mono.

In the case of a fixed spool for popping/jigging it may just about a rod length but the typical popping rods provide more 'cushion' anyhow than a 'short stand-up stick' used in the former techniques.

What braid?

Many experienced UK skippers have moved over to 'hollow-core' from the 'solid' multi strand braids on their multipliers. 'H/C' has a number of advantages in how you can make line to line 'connections'.

Brands, Momoi Gen 3 Hollow Core and 'Jerry Brown Line one' are probably the widest used in the UK currently, although Berkley and Power Pro also produce H/C in 100+ b/s and 500yd+ spools

SPOOLING AND CONNECTIONS

SPOOLING A REEL

It is important to fill your reel correctly when initially spooling your mainline. It should be done evenly and under pressure. Line spooled too loosely may, when put under pressure from a big fish, 'cut through' the loosely spooled coils and embed itself in the line deeper in the spool.

This will at the very least interrupt to smooth exit of line as a fish runs, and in the worst case may stick such that it increase resistance to the point that line/connections/hookhold may fail.



It is good practise to spool under pressure, but. If you compress the line too much on the reel then you may create another problem. In the event of fishing a 'way way back', (maybe 150+ yards behind the boat), or a fish that pulls a hook at distance, (several hundred yards), without the benefit of retrieving that line under significant pressure, it may not all fit back on the reel. Embarrassing to say the least.

There are a number of tackle retailers who offer spooling with specialist machines which you may want to do when initially setting up.

Note that you may wish to initially spool up with a short length of mono before attaching your braided mainline. It may help reduce the chance of slippage of your mainline around the spool under pressure.

It provides a compressable 'cushion' to protect the spool when the braid is retrieved under huge pressure.

To 'pad out' an 80W or larger reel where otherwise you might be filling several thousand yards of expensive braid, most of which never gets to see the light of day.

CONNECTIONS

Monofilament/fluorocarbon:

If we touched upon all of your favourite knots we would be here forever.

Re mono, a couple you may not be familiar with already and want to perfect are the palomar and the bimini twist, there are plenty of YouTube videos to learn them from and some of your go to (3 turn clinch knots for e.g.) will be of use.

There are some cheap tools to help you tie knots in heavy mono.

Regarding mono, we are often working with 100lb+ line and for those of us who are rubbish at knots anyhow, fortunately the use of crimps really comes into its own with these heavier b/s lines.

Again there are a lot of online resources showing how to crimp but here are a few basics.

- Use aluminium crimps designed for mono/fluoro. Get a range of sizes and manufacturers. Not all '150lb crimps', or '150lb mono' have the same internal and external diameters. You want a really snug fit, but that doesn't shave mono off and is near impossible to thread.
- Use purpose designed quality crimping tools, NOT a handy pair of pliers.
- Get a feel for what the 'right amount of crimp' is, both by feel and by look. You may be crimping dozens of different size connections on a rolling boat in a day and may not have the benefit of a preset crimping tool for all sizes.
- Crimp, test, crimp, test.... You can get that 'feel' only by crimping, observing and testing.... Testing is pulling until it gives.... If it slips, it's too little crimp. If it breaks inside or on the very edge of the crimp, it's too much. If the line breaks elsewhere, that's just right.
- DO NOT crimp right up to the edge of the crimp, this may crush and weaken the line where it exits.
- A good crimp will not slip, but some anglers like to 'mushroom' the end of the line before adjusting and crimping, to 'stop it slipping. This is done with flame but be careful not to weaken the line by burning it. Most fluoro won't mushroom or at least not as well as mono by the way.

BRAID, TOPSHOTS AND PROTECTORS

Braid

Part of the reason many skippers use hollow-core over solid braids is the ease of connection.... Solid braids require knots that many UK anglers may not be that proficient at. Uni knots, grinders (back to back uni knots), 'crazy alberto', FG, improved FG etc...

The palomar and bimini twist mentioned above are adaptable to solid braids too (and hollow-core) so are good ones to perfect.

Hollow-core braid uses its hollow characteristic to create some really strong connections, but they do require a few bits of kit and some skills.

The top three uses and advantages are:

- You can splice lengths of it together seamlessly with pretty much 100% strength. This allows you to 'top up' lengths of line if damaged/cut off.
- You can serve mono inside of the hollow-core to connect top shots for example, that are seamless and glide through rings and rollers.
- You can form knotless loops which via loop-to-loop ('cat's-paw') connections allow easily attached and detached topshots etc....



You will need some specialist needles to make some of these, (see Da-ho needle kits), and some practice, but it really is a skill worth perfecting. Again there are many good videos online showing how to perfect these.

Topshots

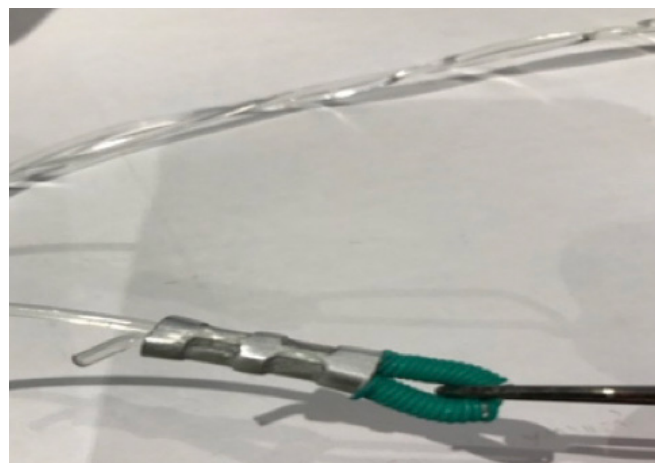
It's worth noting that you can buy some ready made. Mo-moi do a range of b/s and colour single looped 100 yard topshots. Basil at BHP tackle makes the 'ferrari' of looped topshots, customisable for b/s, brand of line, length, colour of loops etc etc, as well as selling Jerry Brown 'line one' Hollow-core, probably the benchmark for such lines....

Protectors:

In your tackle you will have a number of connections to swivels, shackles and hooks that see looped mono/fluoro connection to a metal surface. Very tight loops on a swivel or hook eye MAY hold up to the pressure, friction and heat of a bluefin tuna fight, but loose loops certainly won't. You really should look at some form of loop protection for those connections.



You can buy spring loops of various sizes or surgical tubing. Do NOT mistake shrink wrap for protection. We have seen it all... Some images below show the good, the bad and the ugly....



LEADERS AND STRETCH

Leaders:

The range of fishing techniques available in the English CRRF mean you could be using 8-12ft 150lb topshots direct to poppers/stickbaits, 10-15ft of 200lb fluorocarbon on circle hooks to livebaits, or 6-10ft of 300-500lb mono on trolled singles, daisy chains or spreader bar stingers. Each will require different line characteristics.

Supple fluorocarbon for livebaits and spooky bluefin, (some are more so than others like Yo-zuri for e.g.), 'extra hard' mono for big spreader bar stingers. The key is buy the very best you can afford, take time on your connections, and inspect/replace it regularly.



Stretch:

Mono and fluoro under pressure will stretch. This can be a good thing, providing some cushion. We have found that whilst anglers often check topshots and leaders for abrasion and knicks, they don't monitor this as closely for excessive stretch.

Leaders (or the last 50ft of a topshot) may become stretched to the point that the b/s could be halved or more. What to look for? An opaque, 'milky' to the line, and a loss of 'spring'.

Some of us are so obsessive about our lines we dump leaders after 1-2 fish, (more so lighter fluoro than a 500lb mono stinger). Is it REALLY necessary? Maybe not, but we don't ever have to second guess ourselves that we COULD have avoided that lost fish by new leaders.

Summary.

Your lines and connections are vital elements in your contact with your fish. Compromise here and a big bluefin will certainly find your weak spot. Buy the best, learn the techniques for connections etc.

The 'go to' for many operators in the English bluefin fishery (for stand-up) has become.

50W with a short mono backing, 700/800 yards of 100lb hollow core, a 100 yard 100-150lb mono topshot.

Or an 80W with backing, circa 1000 yards of 200lb hollow core, and a 100 yard 100-150lb mono topshot. 130s fished out of a chair or rodholder may have something similar to the 80W (with more backing?), but with 130's we do see more skippers opting for monofilament throughout given the lack of capacity constraints on these big reels.

Learn good knots/crimps, buy the very best swivels and 'use protection' on your loops.

This is an area where you do have control over an important element of the whole process of targeting and bringing boatside large bluefin. Don't let being cheap or lazy cost you a fish.



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