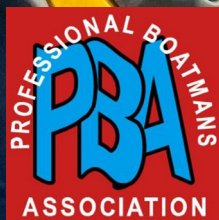


BLUEFIN TUNA TRAINING MODULE

THE THREE DEADLY SINS

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



THE THREE DEADLY SINS

THE TOP THREE CAUSES OF LOST FISH

Since bluefin began their seasonal migrations to our waters around 2016, every year anglers curse their luck and lament 'the one that got away...'

We fish and talk to a lot of others who also fish. What became apparent that in the first 4-5 years of anglers hooking bluefin, there were three consistent reasons why fish were being lost after hook-up.

The 'top three' changed in order over several years, as anglers learnt from their mistakes, but whatever the order, the following will likely remain the main causes of lost fish in coming years as we welcome new entrants to the fishery.

THE ORIGINAL SIN

The first three things you drill into a new angler is that when a fish strikes and runs:

- 1) Don't touch the drag.
- 2) NO, don't touch the drag!
- 3) Don't touch the @&*%@% drag!!!

The first run from a bluefin can be a shocking introduction to bluefin for inexperienced anglers.

Unless you've fished overseas (or for Porbeagles/Thresher in the UK), you have probably never seen anything like the sheer speed and power with which a bluefin strips line from the reel on that first run. 50, 100, 150 yards or more of line streaming from the spool as the ratchet screams.



The instinct of many new anglers, seeing that line steam off at an alarming rate, is to try and stop that first run.

The drag on the fish is already increasing from the mechanics of a smaller diameter spool, and the drag on the line from the water. 99/100, that fish will stop LONG BEFORE you've lost even half of your line, (IF spooled as recommended with at least 800 yards of mainline/top-shot).

But what do new anglers do? They stare in disbelief at the emptying spool for 10-15 seconds, (when they should be clearing other gear), and then the push up the drag lever in an attempt to 'stop the fish'.

Invariably this ends badly, with a suddenly doubled over rod, a look of panic on the angler's face, followed by a sickening 'twang' as something gives and the line goes slack.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Well somehow, that well meaning angler just generated sudden, intense pressure on the line, a crimp, a swivel, a hook, the hookhold... Something that just couldn't absorb that sudden stress.

Bluefin tuna often don't run in a perfectly straight line from the rod tip. You are more likely to have a bow in the line of some magnitude.

So that fish is running at say 20-25mph, and the spool is turning at the same speed.

Our well meaning angler pushes up the drag, the spool is slowing, but that fish is still running at the same speed. All that is happening is that the bow is coming out of that line.

At some point that bow will be pretty much gone, at which stage the spool may be barely giving line but the fish is still running fast.

The angler has moved the drag from say 10-12lbs initially, to the 20lb+ point, but the emptying spool may add 15-20% to that again.

At that point where the line comes tight directly to the fish, there is a sudden increase in pressure on the connection... Something gives.

THE ANSWER?

Don't panic. Watch that emptying reel but focus upon clearing other gear, getting the angler harnessed up or in the chair... ONLY address that reel when it slows, or stops, at which stage, get on it quick, up the drag if required and wind like crazy, (and gun the boat if required) to GET TIGHT to that fish.

In the outside scenario of a fish that just keeps going, (maybe a monster in shallow water), if you are over 50% empty, start to think about following that fish!

The difference between what you see on footage of a strike with an experienced team, and a team of new anglers is night and day.

The former seem to initially ignore that running reel, clearing everything else calmly as a team with everyone knowing their roles. If there are enough bodies, sure someone will stand over it, but just watching. Only when that reel stops/slow does someone jump on it and reel like crazy to get tight.

The newbies? Someone rushes to the running reel on the strike, stands over it staring at the spool, casting scared looks back at the skipper, whilst everyone else runs around like a headless chicken... And then does something stupid. Don't be those guys.

Remember. On a running fish from a strike,

- 1) Don't touch the drag.**
- 2) NO, don't touch the drag!**
- 3) Don't touch the @&*%@% drag!!!**



IT SPAT THE HOOK

This was, in the early days, often the second most common reason for a lost fish....

Of course, bluefin can't 'spit the hook'... It can fall out, or be pulled out...

Bullying a fish (easier done from a rodholder or chair), relying upon brute force CAN pull a hook from a bluefin if you pull hard enough and/or have a poor hookhold. It does seem more common though that fish that come unstuck do so from hooks falling out. Some hooks like large Southern and Tunas, have big barbs and wear big holes.

This may be more prevalent if attached to a large spreader bar or chain that creates drag forces in different directions as the fish changes track.



I have seen a hook literally fall out of a bluefin's jaw on two occasions. One when I was crewing for Jerry Rogers on 'Dreamcatcher', with a fish 10-12 yards from the boat on the surface, when it turned its head towards the boat and the huge stinger hook (on a 48" bar) just fell out of his jaw. The second was just as I liphooked a fish on Dan Margett's boat 'Sowenna' and the hook just fell out of a large hole near the scissors.

THE ANSWER?

Well, you will reduce the incidence of hooks falling out by simply STAYING TIGHT on the fish... Keep the rod LOADED. Use the boat to do so if it turns and runs at you.

(Staying tight on a fish may also reduce the incidence of tail wrapping fish, as will bringing the boat to an angle on the fish if it is running directly away from the angler.)

CUT OFF AND THE CONCLUSIONS



CUT OFF ON THE HULL OR PROPS

This was the third most common reason for lost fish in the early days. Pinwheeling fish in particular, that come up from pretty directly below, can, if you aren't attentive, cut the line on the hull as they turn in under the vessel.

There are a few ways this can be mitigated. If you are undergunned in the rod you are using, you will struggle to direct the fish's head when near the boat. That is easily remedied, use the appropriate gear.

The best way to mitigate this form of loss however is COMMUNICATION and BOAT HANDLING.

The angler/crewman needs to ensure that the skipper/helmsman knows what is going on, where the fish is in relation to the boat. With clear communication, and judicious 'bumping' of the boat away from the fish when required, the line can be kept clear of the hull/props.

Fish being brought towards the boat on or near the surface over the stern can surprise with a sudden rush forward, taking them under the stern. It is not unusual to need a quick burst of speed to keep ahead of the fish. Good comms and boathandling will drastically cut the number of fish lost this way.

CONCLUSION

You CAN mitigate losses to the 'three deadly sins' highlighted above. Learning from your own, (or even better other peoples previous) mistakes is a good policy. In English CHART 2021, 76% of fish hooked were brought boatside. In 2022 this rose to 87%, and in CHART 2023 an impressive 99% of fish hooked were brought boatside. The power of learned and shared experience and knowledge is very evident.

We've highlighted the top three reasons for losses as we noted them in the first 4-5 years of bluefin captures in the SW, but of course there are other reasons for losing fish.

As covered elsewhere, USE ADEQUATE tackle. Go undergunned and you can't apply pressure to bring the fish to heel and coupled with POOR TECHNIQUE (and angler fatigue) you'll end up with mistakes being made, (bad use of the drag or giving the fish slack line for e.g.). Make sure you have GOOD CONNECTIONS, adequate hooks etc...

We have had a very prolific fishery through 2022 and 2023. However, prior to that, it wasn't that unusual to get just 1-2 shots at a fish in a day. The last thing you want to do under those circumstances is lose a fish to avoidable errors....



Produced by the UK Bluefin Tuna Association in partnership with The Angling Trust and the Professional Boatman's Association



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