

## Fishing techniques for 50lb Tuna by Tim Foote



This is based on a recent tuna trip I took catching 50lb Blue Fin Tuna and it is meant for those new to fishing larger tuna. You will want to pull out your best gear and get it set up properly with fresh line. I used an Accurate Boss Magnum single speed 4.8 to 1, which looks like a 30lb test type reel but is very powerful. It held up well. I was able to get my fish up faster than many of the other anglers on the boat. Many of them had lighter gear, such as Daiwa Sealines and even a couple small Penn reels and some lost fish after pulling on them for a long time due to the cheap gear. After a long period of pulling, the hook can wear a hole in the fish's mouth and fall out.

If you are going to pay \$300 to go on a tuna trip, you should at least invest \$180 for a decent reel. One guy had a Shimano Torium 20 which you can get for less than \$180 and he managed fine. If you have any two speed reels, you definitely want to use those first. It is a good idea to have two backup rigs as well. Make one of those a 40lb rig. The fish were a little line shy and you have an edge on catching the fish with a 30lb outfit but you will get bit on 40lb as well. The sardines were large, so I used a 3/0 hook. The crew told us to use 2/0 J-hooks, but I ignored them and did fine with the 3/0. No one used circle hooks. Based on the captain's recommendation, I butt hooked the sardine rather than nose hooking it and it worked well. One disadvantage with a butt hooked sardine is that you won't catch any fish when you reel the sardine back in. Ringed hooks don't give you any advantage using this method and are harder to grasp for butt hooking the sardine.

**Reel setup:** I was using 30lb test which was old line and a 30lb fluorocarbon four foot leader. After catching three fish, I lost a fish probably due to one or a combination of the following: 1. I was using old line that I hadn't changed out before the trip. 2. The fish was probably very large. 3. I hadn't reset my drag after the last fish. Apparently the drag tightens down on its own after you pull in a large fish. The Captain had also found a nick in my line which I thought I had cut off but maybe I wasn't careful enough. If your fish drags your line under the boat at all, definitely recheck it carefully before throwing out again. Always check your leader every time after catching a fish and cut off any chaffed parts which are usually near the hook. You can keep cutting your fluorocarbon leader down to about two and a half feet and it will still work. Use a Uni to Uni knot to attach the lines together.

It is also a good idea to put some 50 to 65lb spectra (braided line) backing on your reel to get more length and keep you from getting spooled. Spectra has a much thinner diameter than mono for the same pound test rating. Put a piece of electrician's tape on your spool arbor before tying on the spectra or else it will spin on the spool. Grab the line using a leather glove and put plenty of tension on the line while winding it on the spool. Put 50 to 100 yards of mono top shot above the spectra and then a four foot fluorocarbon leader at the end. Spectra is expensive, but it lasts forever. You will only have to change the mono top shot each season which will save you some money. Some people used straight spectra with a four foot fluorocarbon leader. In that case you want to back your drag off a little bit because there is no stretch with the spectra. Note that tangles can be very difficult to deal with if you use straight spectra.

**Pole size:** The captain criticized me for using a pole with a 20 to 50lb rating because the tip is a little flimsy. A stronger tip gives you more leverage on the big fish. I am going to get a 7ft 30 to 60lb rated pole for next time. Use 6 to 7 foot poles.

**Some fishing basics:** When you first get the bait in the water wait a few seconds and it will start running. Point the pole horizontally so the bait can run freely. Keep the reel out of gear with your thumb lightly on the spool and let the bait run as far as it can. That thumb always needs to be near the spool or you will get a back lash. If the bait stops running, bring it in and get another one. Sometimes the bait will pause and run a little more. I caught two of my fish after soaking the bait for a while, so be patient. If the bait has run 2/3rds of the line out of your spool, you better bring it in. Otherwise, you

won't have enough back-up line if you get a fish and it makes a run. Be sure to wind your line back and forth tightly on the spool while bringing it in, holding the line and your pole with your left hand and pinching the line between your forefinger and thumb.

You will know that you are on a fish when your reel starts speeding up very fast. Keep your thumb lightly on the spool, count to five, lift-up on the pole a bit to create resistance and then put the reel in gear. Don't yank the pole up in the air or you may pull the hook out of the fish's mouth.

You have a 50lb fish on with 30lb line which has stretched a bit from the pulling fish. That line could break at any time, so you need to use careful movements. The fish is now in control and if it wants to take line, let it do so keeping the rod up for resistance. When the fish stops taking line, reel in immediately. Any pauses by you, gives the fish an opportunity to throw the hook out of its mouth. The fish may be swimming toward you, so you will have to reel fast to bring up the slack in the line. After some back and forth with the fish it will get nearer to the boat but it will be deeper in the water.

The experts advise using short arm pumps to get the fish up. I still use longer pulls on the rod, but very carefully trying to sense the resistance that the fish is putting on the line. Dramatic movements will lose a fish. Wind quickly as you drop the rod back down for another pull. The line is very taut or tight when the fish is near the boat. Resist the temptation to tighten your drag down. The fish might want to run again when it sees the boat. Let it do so while still holding the pole up. Don't pinch the line to the pole for resistance. After the fish calms down, you might get away with pinching the line down to the pole while slowly pulling up on the rod but you have to be ready to let go of the line if the fish starts to run again.

When you see the fish coming up near the boat yell out "color." A deck hand will come by with a gaff and start to give you instructions. The fish will start to swim in circles. The fish might move sideways along the boat, upon which you will follow it. Don't try to pull the fish in at an angle, keep it in front of you at all times. If the fish starts to swim under the boat, the deck hand will, hopefully, grab your rod and move the fish to one of the corners of the boat to get it out from underneath. Follow him and he will hand the pole back to you once he clears the fish from under the boat. You may notice that the guy on your right is also on a fish. Stay away from him if you can or else your tightened lines may cross and then break. If his fish is further out and his line at a wider angle from the boat than yours, you can safely go under him and vice versa. When the fish gets near the top it will usually go horizontal with the surface of the water. The deck hand will then gaff it. Sometimes the first try at gaffing the fish won't work and the fish will dive. Stay calm and bring it back up. Make sure not to pull the head of the fish out of the water. Keep at it and good luck to you.