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KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID & COMMON SENSE ISN'T ALL THAT COMMON.

Just the other day one of my rental boats came in and the customer complained that it wouldn't run right. I questioned them to make sure that it really was an engine issue rather than operator error, as is often the case. I eventually determined that the motor did have a problem. It appeared to us that one cylinder was not getting spark or fuel. These are brand new boats and motors so I hoped it was probably something simple.

Because the motors are new, they are completely controlled by electronic systems that magically supply both fuel and spark at the perfect time for optimum combustion. These motors are incredibly smooth, quiet and fuel efficient but the same magical electronic control systems that allow them to be so great also make them a real B**** to work on. We did not have the new computer program and equipment required to troubleshoot the electronic systems, so we began by trying to at least isolate the problem. By stopping fuel flow to each cylinder we determined which one was not working properly and we then set out to determine why. After finding out that the injector was working and finding that there was spark going to the plug, we were baffled as to why the motor would not run right. In desperation we tried switching various magical electronic components from another identical motor (when I say we, I mostly mean that Scott, our in house mechanical witch doctor and all around MacGyver did the work while I stood around asking questions and generally being annoying). Even after all of this, we still had the problem so Scott finally tried switching out the spark plug and at last, the motor ran great. It's frustrating when a \$3 spark plug messes up a brand new \$25,000 boat.

We were embarrassed because we had failed to follow the first law of things mechanical "keep it simple stupid". Every boy from my generation knew that the first thing you do to an engine that is missing is install new spark plugs. Had we used this sage knowledge, we would have saved half a day's labor and also been able to rent the boat out for another day.

On this occasion our renter was right, the boat really did not run right, usually, this is not the case. Often the complaints we get about performance are an attempt to cover up damage from things customers have done to the boat. This was definitely the case when a boat was returned to us with only one blade left on the prop. This was a brand new boat and prop that went out with two big guys on board. When it limped home there were six big guys (way over weight capacity for this particular boat) and they were complaining about the poor performance and fuel use. These guys had actually run the boat out of fuel twice! We immediately checked the prop and found that they had been running it for most of the day with only one of three blades left. They had clearly hit something really hard, yet they denied any knowledge of it. They tried to convince me that something must have simply frightened the missing blades and they ran away on their own or a scuba diving blade burglar stole them. I will never understand how they could have not known that they did extreme damage, although, I think perhaps it could have been alcohol related. We don't allow the operators of our rental boats to consume alcohol, but somehow, I have a gut feeling that these guys broke the rule.

When we have to send out a rescue mission to find one of our boats 50 feet from the water, high and dry on an island because the customers "did not notice" that the tide was going out, I also can't help thinking that the alcohol rule was also ignored. How can anyone just not notice the water going away? The tide drops out slowly; the water doesn't just instantly disappear. We try to make our boats foolproof, but in some cases these days it seems they are building a better fool. We give lots of direction and try our best to help novice boaters safely learn the ropes and most of them do a good job and have a great time. Operation of these simple boats really only requires a little common sense. When we do run into problems it is usually because common sense is really not all that common these days.

You can find Merle at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs at 307 Anclote Rd. (727) 943 8489. Stop in and try one of their great boat or kayak rentals. It's also a great place to store your boat.

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ON THE COVER: A happy angler with the hard fighting Jack Creville caught on a recent outing with our very own, Captain George Hastick. The water and fishing is heating up all over the region; get out there and wet a line!

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ONSHORE - OFFSHORE Magazine

Publisher & CEO
Sal Liggieri
727.359.3471
sal@onshoreoffshore.com

Design & Layout
FISHBONE CREATIVE
Bryan R. Hudson
616.250.0522
fishbonecreate@icloud.com
www.fishbonecreates.com

Cover Photographer
Onshore-Offshore Magazine

Contributing Writers
Captain George Hastick
Captain Sergio Atanes
Captain Justin Searcy
Captain Will Shook
Captain Brent Gaskill
Captain Kyle Kelso
David Mallory
Merle Seamon

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MAY WE KEEP THE MIX GOING!

by Captain George Hastick

May is a spectacular month if you are looking to catch a wide variety of sought after fish species. May will have water temperatures that are typically in the upper 70s to low 80s. What does this mean to us, it is an inviting water temperature for plenty of bait to move up into Tampa Bay which in turn will attract a lot of species of fish and shark. Yes, there has been bait in the bay but now it will be thick

a variety of sharks cruising the flats and range markers looking for a meal.

This will also have the flats full of bait, which will turn on the Snook, Trout, Redfish, Jack Crevalle and maybe even some Flounder in the mix.



Look for Tarpon to be on the bridges and the artificial reefs with juveniles being in some of the backwaters and low oxygen areas where only they are comfortable since they can breathe air straight from the atmosphere, which protects them from predators that can not live long under those conditions.



especially with threadfin hearing bait balls in the bay along with plenty of Scaled Sardines and Pinfish. This recipe will bring in some hefty hitters like Tarpon and Cobia to name a couple. It will also have

Cobia can also be found in many of the same areas as the adult Tarpon, but also keep watching the flats as they will often follow or be right underneath a manatee. The manatee scares bait fish out from the grass as it passes

over it and the cobia will take advantage of this to get a free meal. Both the Tarpon and Cobia love



Scaled Sardines, Threadfin Hearing and pinfish so be ready with a bait to pitch in case you see that dark shadow of a Cobia cruising the flats.



The flats will be loaded with opportunities like shark, Redfish, Snook, Trout and keep an eye open for a school of jacks exploding on bait pods. The sharks will be out on the open flat just cruising looking for a snack. A live bait casted out in front of them or a cut bloody bait usually gets the job done.

Trout at low tide will be at the drop-offs of the flats in 3-5 feet of water and will move onto the flat as the tide rises. A popping cork with a bait underneath is one way to attract them to your bait. Cast out, pop the cork a few times pause, then reel a little and repeat. This is a deadly tactic for them.

Snook and Redfish will hang out in the general vicinity of each other. Whether that is a mangrove tree line or an oyster mound with a trough cut out in front of it from the current. These areas that have tidal movement will move bait and that is what they are waiting for. A well casted Scaled Sardine will usually get the hit. That might be casting under the mangroves or just up tide of an oyster point and letting the current drift your bait to the fish for a natural presentation, that they can't resist. ☑

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years. From novice to professional; Captain George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or email CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.



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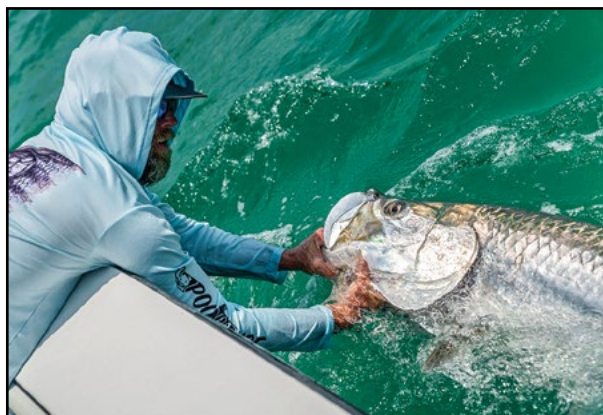
BOCA GRANDE BOUND: A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY, HERITAGE & SILVER KINGS

by Captain Justin Searcy

This May, we're escaping the noise and heading to one of my favorite places: Little Gasparilla Island. Accessible only by boat, there are no cars here. No shops. Just sand paths, salty air, and the sound of water meeting shore. It's a place where time slows down, and every sunrise feels like a gift. From this quiet outpost, in the heart of tarpon country, follow us as we chase silver kings during peak migration in and around the world-famous Boca Grande Pass — a place that's earned its title as the "Tarpon Fishing Capital of the World".

Tarpon have migrated through this area for centuries, but it was in the early 1900s that Boca Grande earned its spot in sportfishing lore. Celebrities, presidents, and legendary anglers have all walked the docks here, and the tradition continues with events like the World's Richest Tarpon Tournament and the Boca Grande Fishing Guides Association Tarpon Cup, where community, competition, and conservation come together.

To kick off the first days of May, I was lucky to get a couple of prime days booked with my buddy



Captain Cory Palmer (@light-tacklesportfishing), — one of the most dialed-in guides in the Boca Grande and Tampa Bay Area. Cory runs a custom 26' Gause — a boat that's earned a reputation among serious anglers as one of the best platforms for tarpon fishing in this region. Built in Tarpon Springs, Florida, the Gause Built Boats are known for their rugged performance, attention to detail, and versatility on both beach and backcountry waters. You'll often recognize them by the signature tarpon etched on the hull — a fitting symbol for a boat born to chase silver. To learn more, check out @gausebuiltboats on Instagram or visit gausebuiltboats.com.

Cory books up quickly during tarpon season, and for good reason. If you're planning a trip and can't grab a spot on his boat, don't worry — we're always happy to help connect you with another top-tier local guide who shares the same passion for the fishery and commitment to conservation.

We'll be working with the conditions — drifting live crabs when the tides line up, throwing swim-baits and other artificials when the

fish are up shallow, and adjusting our gear to match the moment. Whether it's circle hooks and heavy leaders for tarpon or down-sized setups for snook and redfish, we like to come prepared. Before every big trip, we make sure to stock up at my go-to



spot, Boat and Motor Superstores in Palm Harbor, Florida — they've got everything you will need to rig up right.

Tarpon are strictly catch-and-release, and we fish accordingly — appropriate tackle, clean fights, and quick, healthy releases. It's not just about landing a fish — it's about respecting the resource. Conservation is what keeps this fishery thriving, and we're proud to do our part.



Also joining us is another one of my good buddies, Captain Ricky Galante — better known as Captain Rick. He's a commercial fisherman with deep local roots

and Italian heritage, not to mention a former restaurant owner and chef who knows his way around a fillet knife and kitchen like no other. Between Rick's dockside creations at the remote island house and stops at some of Boca Grande's best spots — like The Pink Elephant, Temptation, and South Beach Bar & Grille — there's no doubt we'll be eating well. Make sure to follow along as we explore the island's top cuisine and see what Capt Rick decides to whip up back at basecamp — there's no telling what kind of magic he'll come up with. Supporting local food, businesses, and the people behind them is part of what makes these trips so meaningful.

Also, don't forget to checkout our friends @ThePoon-House, a captain-owned fishing apparel brand based in Ozona, Florida. These guys aren't just selling gear — they're out there running bait and fly charters during tarpon season and living the lifestyle they design for. Their brand says it best: "Destinations and destinies are shaped by how we respond to the call of the water." You can check out their gear and story at thephoonhouse.com.

Experiencing Boca Grande is about more than just chasing fish — it's about celebrating the rich tradition of tar-



pon fishing in Florida, one of the most iconic and historic fisheries in the world. It's about sharing that legacy with others, fostering appreciation for the resource, and doing our part to protect it for the future. That

means supporting the local guides who live it every day, the small businesses that keep the community thriving, and the brands built by those who truly understand the water — all while approaching it with purpose, respect, and heart.

We'll be sharing the full journey on Instagram: @capt_justin_searcy — everything from big fish and dockside moments to the people and places that make Florida fishing what it is. Please give us a follow and come along for the ride. 📸

Captain Justin Searcy
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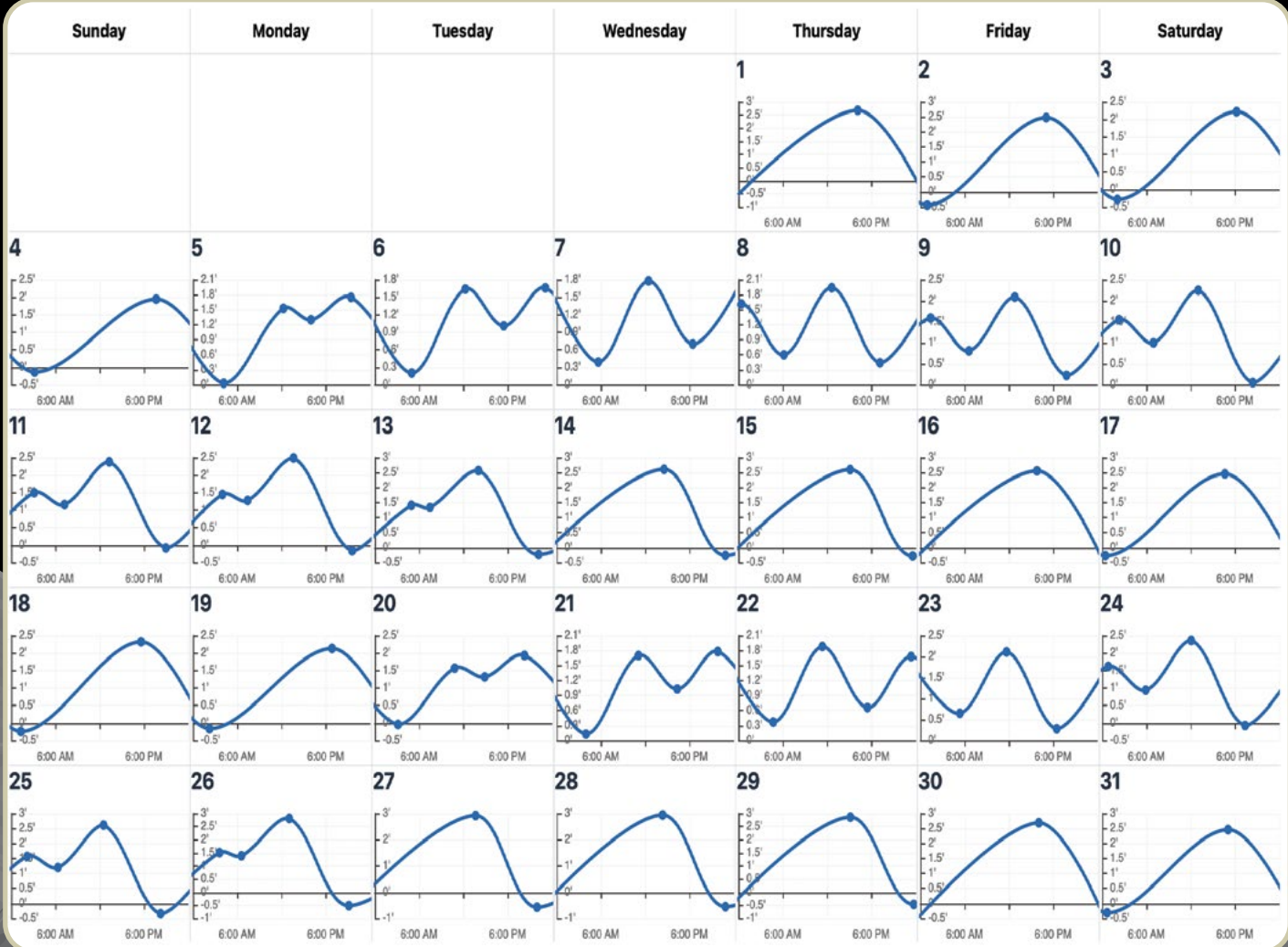
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
+0:51	+0:42	Indian Rocks Beach, ICW

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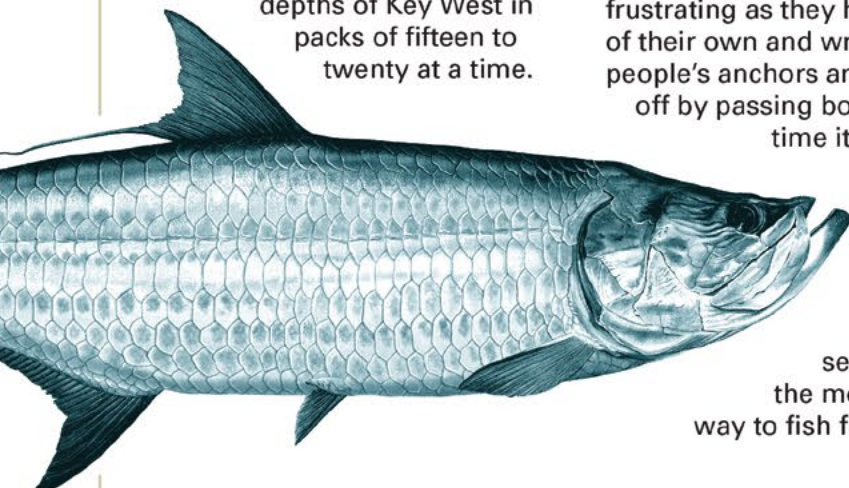
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THE MIGRATION

by Captain Kyle Kelso

May marks the month of the Atlantic tarpon in Key West, otherwise known as the "silver king." There are many different types of tactics to catch these fish as they push through the mouths of bays, deep channels, edges of flats and rock piles. The silver king is the most powerful (pound for pound) sport fish that lurks around the shallow coasts of our hometowns. They are known for making great fights, awesome pictures, great stories and aggravated anglers at times.

The Florida Keys are the first areas that interact with these migratory slob. We get early pushes of these fish around late February, March and April, but the real mayhem doesn't start until May and June. As the tarpon migration comes to a start, the fish start to move in from the South, coming in from offshore in big packs. They congregate in "staging" areas where they seem to form a big line on the surface. These fish seem very comfortable and look as if they're just hanging out and being social like at a big reunion. Eventually they will all shoot off into the shallower depths of Key West in packs of fifteen to twenty at a time.



These fast moving fish will not eat when they are cruising to their destination. Once they get there, it's another story.

The most common places to fish for tarpon in Key West are the deep channels in Key West harbor. These channels hold tons of fish as they are filtering through to the backcountry and eventually the Gulf waters. Fishing for tarpon in the inner harbor of Key West can sometimes be frustrating as they have a mind of their own and wrap you up on people's anchors and/or get cut off by passing boats. If you

time it right, you can get a ton of hookups before it gets busy. Chumming dead bait seems to be the most effective way to fish for tarpon in

Key West harbor, especially if it's windy. Other than dead bait, we use live pinfish, crabs and sometimes live mullet. Using live bait, we drift through the packs of fish we see rolling or mark them on the bottom and send our baits down to them.

Most of the captains in Key West are courteous to one another and will help move out of the way if a hooked up fish is approaching their boat, just so everyone can avoid a tangle. This type of sportsmanship is what it's all about, helping one another get to the fish. Once the tarpon move to the shallower channels throughout the backcountry, you will have the whole area to yourself, as well as more room to fight your fish. Sometimes I am the only boat within miles, which adds to the whole experience. It's nice to be able to enjoy peace and nature while having your own school of tarpon to entice!

As far as tackle goes to wrestle these silver kings, you don't want to be underpowered. These fish range anywhere from sixty to one hundred and fifty pounds. If you know there are some smaller fish around, a 10-25lb rod with a 5-6000 series-spinning reel will do the trick. I usually use a little heavier setup because there are always big fish moving through and you never know when they're going to hit your bait. I go with a 20-60lb rod, which has a fast action tip, yet has the beef in the backbone to hoist one of these pigs boat side. Along with that rod, I use a Quantum Cabo 80PTs reel lined with 30lb Fins XS braid. 30lb test is light to some anglers who fish for tarpon, as most are using 50-60lb tests.

Using a little lighter line will give you much better casting distance and accuracy, as well as having more line on the reel. ANDE fluorocarbon ranging from 30-60lb is what I prefer to use for the leaders. I usually match my leader with the water clarity. As the waters of Key West are often gin clear, however we do get days of a little murkiness so we can get away with some heavier leaders. Lastly, hooks that I'm using are



Owner 5/0 or 6/0 Mutu Light circle hooks. I've had the best hookup ratio with these hooks out of anything that I have tried for tarpon.

There are so many different ways to catch tarpon, which makes it an ongoing adventure. From fly-fishing, live baiting, chumming and sight casting on the flats, you'll find out which style of tarpon fishing you enjoy the most. Tarpon are known for their fight, as well as their beautiful attributes, the way they roll through the water and of course the way they leap out of the water. ■

Captain Kyle Kelso of All Water Charters operates out of Key West, Florida. Call 305-509-2201 or go to www.allwatercharters.com today, to book your very own Key West Tarpon Adventure!

Tarpon TIPS

Captain Will Shook's

**BRIDGES
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& PASSES**

Tarpon, Tarpon, and more Tarpon. Tarpon will be on the mind of most anglers this month and for good reason. It's that time of year when we are graced with the presence of the Silver King. It is time to lay to rest the nightmares from last year's disappointments and look forward to this year's opportunities. There are many different ways and many different areas to target tarpon. We will discuss a few different places and techniques, but keep in mind it's not the only way.



SKYWAY TIPS

The big bridge will be a good place to start. There are several important keys to keep in mind when fishing around the bridge. 1) Be courteous of other anglers fishing. Don't run parallel to the bridge too close to the other boats. 2) Be sure to arm yourself with the correct tackle to land a Tarpon around structure. I fish a Penn Battle 7000 with 50lb Fins braid and 60-80lb Berkley Pro Spec fluorocarbon leader. 3) Have a buoy for your anchor. When you hook a Tarpon around structure you have to act fast so having a buoy tied to your anchor makes it easy to just toss your anchor rope over and fight the fish.

There are a couple of different ways to fish the bridge. You can

drift with the tide or you can anchor up tide and float your baits back. It will depend on the tide, moon phase, and availability of baits on which way works best.

Drifting the bridge can be very productive and you can cover a lot of area to locate fish. You can drift a variety of baits. Live threadfins and



pinfish work great, but live blue or pass crabs seem to work best. The key is to allow your bait to look as natural as possible and drift along with the tide. Motor up tide and position the boat to drift between the pilings. Cast your baits off to the side and allow the bait and your boat to drift with the tide. You want your baits to drift as close to the pilings as possible. Once you have

made it through the pilings, reel up and motor back up tide and drift again. An important key, don't motor back up through the set of pilings you want to drift. Motor around a couple of pilings down from the set you want to drift. Also, be courteous of other anglers drifting and don't motor in their set of pilings.



Another very productive way to fish the big bridge is to anchor up tide, cut bait, and chum the tarpon to you. The key here is to have plenty of bait to chum with. I like to cut bait when there are not a lot of fish around. The idea behind using cut bait is to draw the fish to you. The way to go about this is simple. Create a chum slick with the bait you are cutting. When you have a good chum slick going, float cut bait back and let it drift along with your chum. I like to open the bail and feed the line out as your cut bait drifts and when you see the line peeling off, flip the bait over and fish on.

BEACH TIPS

There are a few different ways to fish the beach. You can sight fish a school of fish working up or down the beach, you can anchor and wait for fish to pass through, or you can anchor and chum tarpon to you. The important thing to remember, no matter how you choose to target these fish, is to be courteous of other anglers.

If you want to sight fish a school working up or down the beach, find out which way the school is moving and try and set up ahead of the school. You can free line a bait or use a float. Either way will work, but it is up to you to figure what the tarpon want that day. Once the school has passed, motor out around the school and try to set up ahead of the school again. If another boat is working the same school, be sure



to go around and not cut the other boat off.

Another great way to fish the beaches is to anchor and chum up the tarpon. The key is to have plenty of chum and make sure there are fish around. It is very simple. Get a pair of scissors and start cutting. Create a chum line and drift baits along with the other baits and you are sure to hook-up.

EGMONT PASS TIPS

Egmont is not the only pass but it is the most popular. Around our new and full moon when the tides get extremely high, pass crabs and blue crabs are flushed out of the back bays and end up at our area passes.



The tarpon are usually preparing to spawn around the moons and are feeding heavily on the crabs. The idea is to drift a crab with the tide and make the bait look as natural as possible. Motor your boat up tide and drift along with the current. When your drift is done, idle back up tide out and around the other boats, and set up for another drift. By doing that, you don't upset other anglers drifting the pass and you won't get a prop full of fishing line. If you are not sure how the drift works, take the time and watch the other boats to see how it is done.

Tarpon fishing can be the most rewarding adventure one day and the most frustrating the next. The key is to be persistent and put the time in to learn the fishery. With a little common sense and courtesy, we can all have a fun and productive year. Good luck landing that fish of your dreams and remember, there's always next year. 🍀

Captain Will Shook is a full-time charter captain, fishing all of Tampa Bay since childhood. To book a tarpon charter, call 813-732-5971 or visit www.TampaFL-FishingCharters.com.

KINGS OF SPRING

by Captain Brent Gaskill

The month of May provides many inshore and offshore fishing opportunities in the Tampa Bay area. Spring migrations bring fish to our waters for a limited time, so local anglers need to take advantage of these opportunities. Kingfish and tarpon, known as the "Silver King", make land-



ing royalty a priority. Kingfish are larger cousins to Spanish mackerel and can be found from our nearshore waters along the beaches to well inside the bay. Tarpon have gained regal status as the number one game fish on the west coast of Florida. The Silver Kings can be found from the beaches to the uppermost regions of Old Tampa Bay.

Targeting either of these kings typically requires specialized tackle and techniques. Over recent years, major changes and improvements have been made in both of these areas. Advancements in tackle have made it much easier for the

average person to successfully catch these regal fish. The art of "cracker casting" with an 8-foot fiberglass rod and 4/0 conventional reel is a thing of the past.

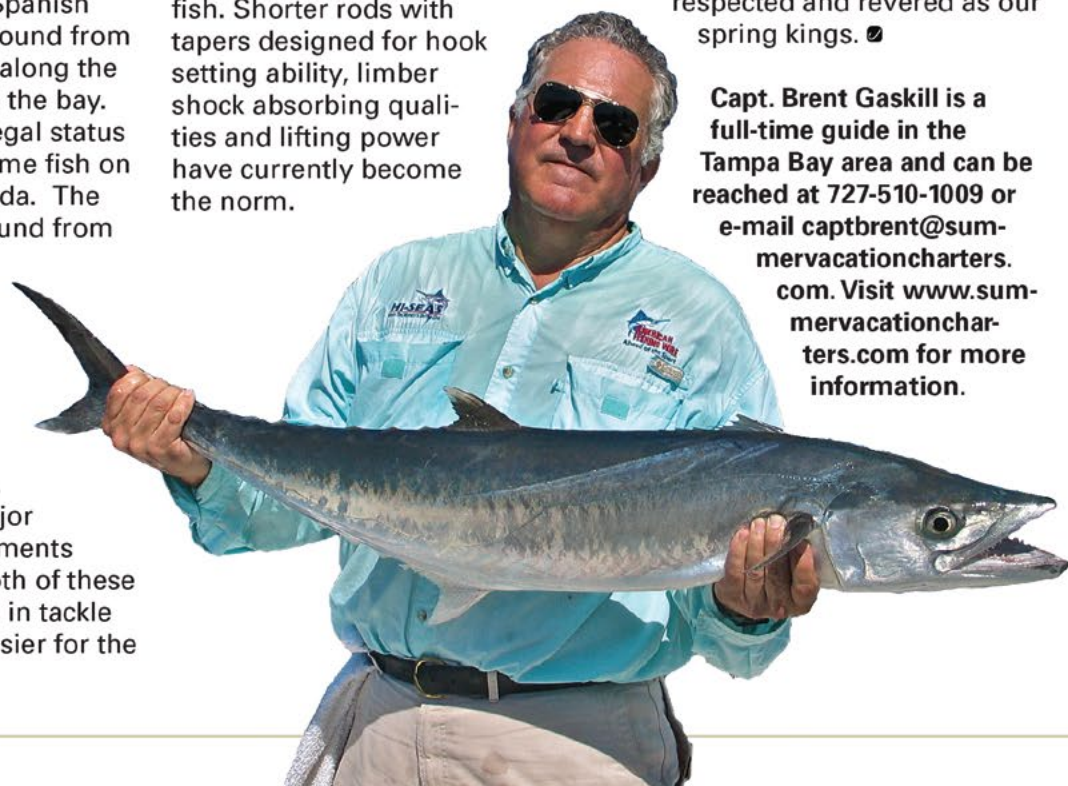
The invention of braided lines has led to a trend toward the use of spinning reels.

Traditionally, monofilament line and conventional reels were preferred for both of these species. The smaller diameter of braided lines has allowed spinning reels to offer more line capacity, which is necessary for both kings. New and improved drag systems have also played a role in the spinning reel's ability to slow fast and strong fish. Shorter rods with tapers designed for hook setting ability, limber shock absorbing qualities and lifting power have currently become the norm.



Overall, fishing has become much easier, thus allowing everyone to get in on the action. Major tournaments with huge sponsorships and media coverage have added to the popularity of fishing for both kingfish and tarpon. Through all of the commercialized coverage and sensationalism, remember that kingfish and tarpon should be respected and revered as our spring kings. 🎣

Capt. Brent Gaskill is a full-time guide in the Tampa Bay area and can be reached at 727-510-1009 or e-mail captbrent@summervacationcharters.com. Visit www.summervacationcharters.com for more information.



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TALES FROM THE OLD GUY

by David Mallory

After several months of not being able to go fishing, Pauline and I were ready to get on the bay and catch some fish with our favorite "Fish Hunter." It was the middle of March, and in Florida, that means Spring and warm weather. We scheduled a trip with Captain George Hastic, which turned out to be a perfect day; we were happy to wear short sleeves and no raincoats.



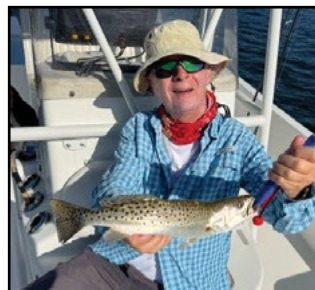
We met at the dock and started out. The captain always does his homework – he had checked the weather, tides and moon to see what to expect. George arrived with a baitwell full of bait, ready for us to go fishing. And, boy, we were ready to go! I don't know for sure, but George often checks out a few spots before he picks us up. I think he did that morning, because our first stop was a Speckled Trout haven! For the first hour, every cast for both of us was a trout, many of them were keepers (15 to 25 inches). We often keep some for a dinner and let the rest go to enjoy another day. We caught our dinner in that first hour.

After a while, Pauline, the "Snook Queen", said she wanted to catch a snook. She announced,

"I want to go over there nearer the shore to catch a snook!" Even though I was in the boat and I prefer red fish, the vote was cast and we were going for snook! (I have to say that I really don't care, but I can't say that out loud.) I think George has a "powerful telescope in the sky" spotting fish because he always knows which direction to go for each variety of fish we want to catch! Sure enough, Pauline caught her snook, but it was too small to keep. Her goal was to catch one she could eat as it was in season. Alas, she did not succeed. Good for the fish, not so good for Pauline.

Our next stop was very shallow because the tide was big and a lot of water had left. George, being the guide he is, felt the fish were feeding in the tide and would stay. He was right! Our first cast was another trout for each of us. My next cast was a pin fish, which doesn't count, and Pauline's bite got away! (It happens.) We did better after that and continued catching more fish. We moved quite a few times, catching fish

at every stop. We got into some lady fish, always fun to catch because they fight so hard, but not good to eat. Pauline caught a red fish which gave her a slam (trout, snook and red fish).



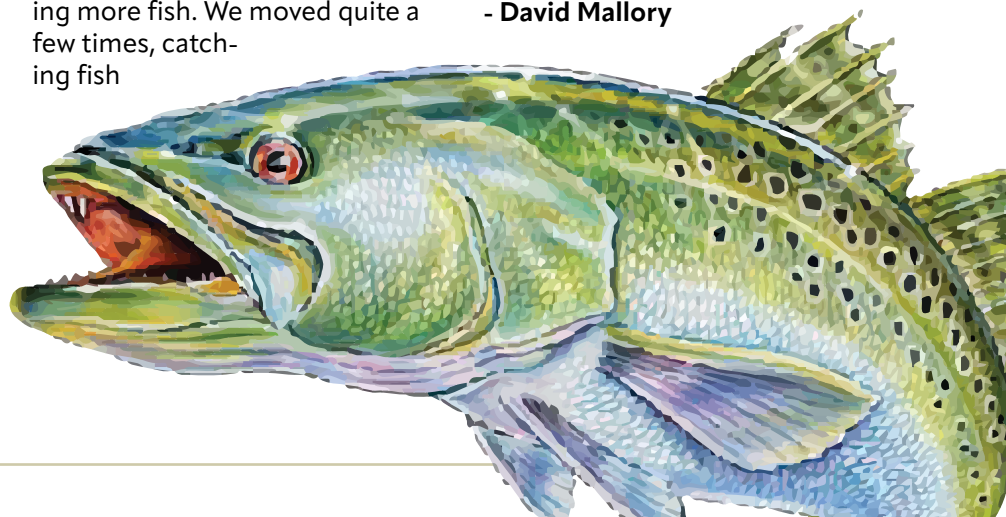
We moved on to catch some huge silver trout and then got into some Spanish mackerel. Boy are they fun to catch,

although they sure can make it difficult to keep on the line. However, our Captain George knows how to handle that situation. I even caught a lonely little black sea bass who thought he was a huge fish. It's always fun to catch a variety. We caught a lot of fish that day, which is one reason I love fishing in this area.

We wrapped up the day with each of us catching another trout after George said, "Last cast". He often says that and then we both catch another fish as usual! It's become a "rule".

It was another great day with Captain George and it was a blessing to finally be able to be out on the water fishing again. 🎣

- David Mallory





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Captain Sergio Atanes

Plenty of Spanish Mackerel action around the bridges, rocks and deep-water channels. Mangrove Snapper bite turns on as baitfish move into the flats and around bridges. Don't overlook Black Drum cause they are a great fighting fish and the smaller sizes are not bad eating. Using heavy spinning tackle and a half dozen Blue Crabs will let you get a shot of landing some of these big bruisers. Snook and reds are on the flats and the early bird will get the big ones on some topwater plugs. One of my favorite options is the MirrOlure Skin Series Finger Mullet. Cut Threadfin or Pinfish soaked on the bottom later in the day will produce big Redfish.



Captain George Hastick

May's water temperatures will be in the high 70s to low 80's which will bring plenty of Mackerel, Mangrove Snapper and Tarpon up into Tampa Bay. These fish will have already moved up into the bay last month, but May will bring a greater concentration of these fish to the area. Look for your larger Tarpon to be on the bridges and reefs and juveniles to be in backwaters, residential canals and power plants. Mangrove Snapper will be on rock piles, reefs and bridges also along with the Mackerel. If inshore, look to the grass flats or along mangroves and oyster bars, and you will find your slam of Redfish, Snook and Trout.

ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, Fishing Adventures Florida, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.

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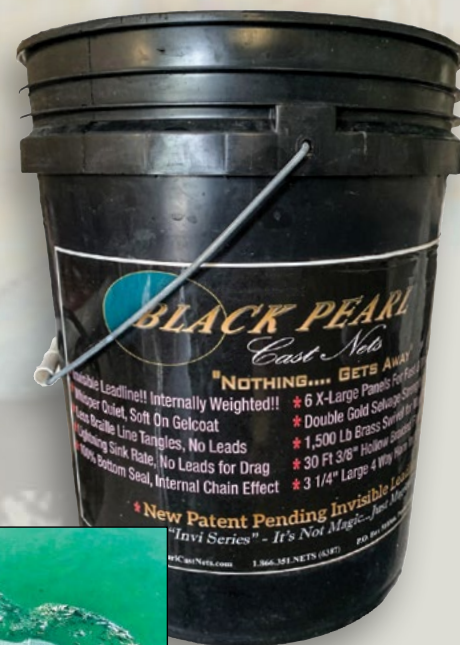
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MAKE MEMORIES, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

by Captain Sergio Atanes

This article recounts my early fishing experiences with my uncle, emphasizing the lessons learned and the joy of fishing.

My uncle Manuel introduced me to fishing at a young age, taking me to Gasparilla Island and teaching me various fishing techniques during the 1950s. We often camped on the shoreline and experienced fishing adventures that shaped my love for the sport. At the age of five, he took me under his wing like an angel and hooked me on the sport of fishing. He was only 18 years old at the time but had already acquired more knowledge about fishing in Tampa Bay than most anglers twice his age. About a year into my adventures with my uncle, he decided to expand the boundaries and that Summer, we started fishing Gasparilla Island.

Back then in the 50s there were no bridges to the island, only a ferryboat service several times a day. I do remember the last ferryboat left at 8:00pm on Friday nights. We missed it several times when the traffic on US 41, then a single lane highway, would back up for miles around Sarasota and we had to spend the night fishing the old railroad bridge that carried supplies to the island (the bridge is still there today and a good fishing spot) until the next ferryboat arrived at 8:00am.

We would camp on the shoreline within sight of the old phosphate pier that extended into Boca Grande Pass. It was a beautiful sight at night with its lights looking more like a great ship from the distance gliding into



the pass. All that is left of the pier now is wooden pilings. Fishing was not allowed on the pier except on weekends. No ships docked and at night the guards would let us fish till daybreak in exchange for some of our catch or sometimes for a bottle of Rum and...boy did we catch fish! Huge Redfish up to 40 inches long, Snook (they were called soap fish in the 50s) were considered trash fish and Grouper, Flounder and Mangrove Snapper were all common catches during the Winter months.

At any given time, you could hook up with a Goliath Grouper, that many times, exceeded two hundred pounds.

We used 3/8 anchor line with 20/0 hook and for sinkers we used old window sash weights with Mullet for bait. The line was lowered to the bottom

towards the end of the pier and tied to the railing. When the railing shook you knew you had a big fish on, and all the guys would slowly walk the beast to the shoreline where it was cleaned and deboned and iced for the trip back home.

During the day, we fished for mackerel, trout and redfish along the shoreline and the island side of the railroad bridge. Part of the learning experience was not only fishing, but camping and cooking our catch. I remember a walkway on both sides of the pier with a conveyor belt that ran through the center.

I don't remember a lot more than that, other than my uncle tied an old anchor line around my waist and the other end was tied to the railing. This gave me enough scope to let me work an area but short enough that if I fell in the water, only my feet would touch. The current then as it is today runs at a good clip through the pass, and I would have been swept into the Gulf forever. If

my mother had ever known or found out some of my many experiences I had with my uncle, it would have ended my fishing career.

In the winter of 1952, Uncle Manuel received an invitation from his uncle (Uncle Sam), then known as the draft board, to spend some time in the Army. My adventures were put on hold until his return, but my love for fishing continues even today.

Locally and currently, the bite is getting good out there. Snook action is hot along the mangroves with the best bites in the early morning using topwater plugs or their favorite summer bait, the live Greenback Sardine. When fishing with live bait, I like to freeline the baits in morning and use a float like the "Four Horsemen", which has a distinct noise, I draws a lot of attention in the afternoon.

Redfish will be roaming the flats, and I suggest cutting Threadfin Sardine and putting them on a 3/0 Kahle hook with a split shot about 3 inches from the hook. Another new technique is using a Yellowtail 1/8 oz 3/0 hook size jig. Pick a spot with salt and pepper bottom (grass with sandy pot-holes) or close to some oyster bars and cast in the general area. Let the baits soak on the bottom; it may take some

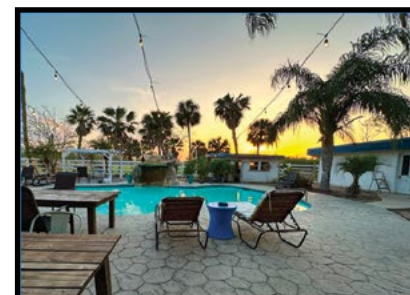
time, but the reds will come and chances are you will catch a bigger fish.

Mackerel will be everywhere. If you have a strong running tide; range markers and artificial reefs are a good place to start. Chumming is the preferred method to get them started and I recommend using a 1/0 XXL J-hook tied to 30-pound fluorocarbon leader at least 30 inches long.

Black Drum can be found under most bridges feeding on cut blue crab. Use a 5000-size reel with medium heavy spinning rod and depending on the current, anywhere from a 1/2 to 1 ounce sinker is recommended.

Mangrove Snapper will be in the same area except they prefer Shrimp or small Greenback Sardines on a 1/0 hook. Look for deep cuts with strong currents, structure that holds bait and what we call "hump areas" where the bottom rises up quickly and has deep drops around them. ▣

Captain Sergio Atanes is the host of Fishing Adventures Florida and Captain Sergio Fishing Chronicles on YouTube, Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Outdoor Action TV and Angling TV. For info call 813-973-7132 or email: atanes@msn.com.



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