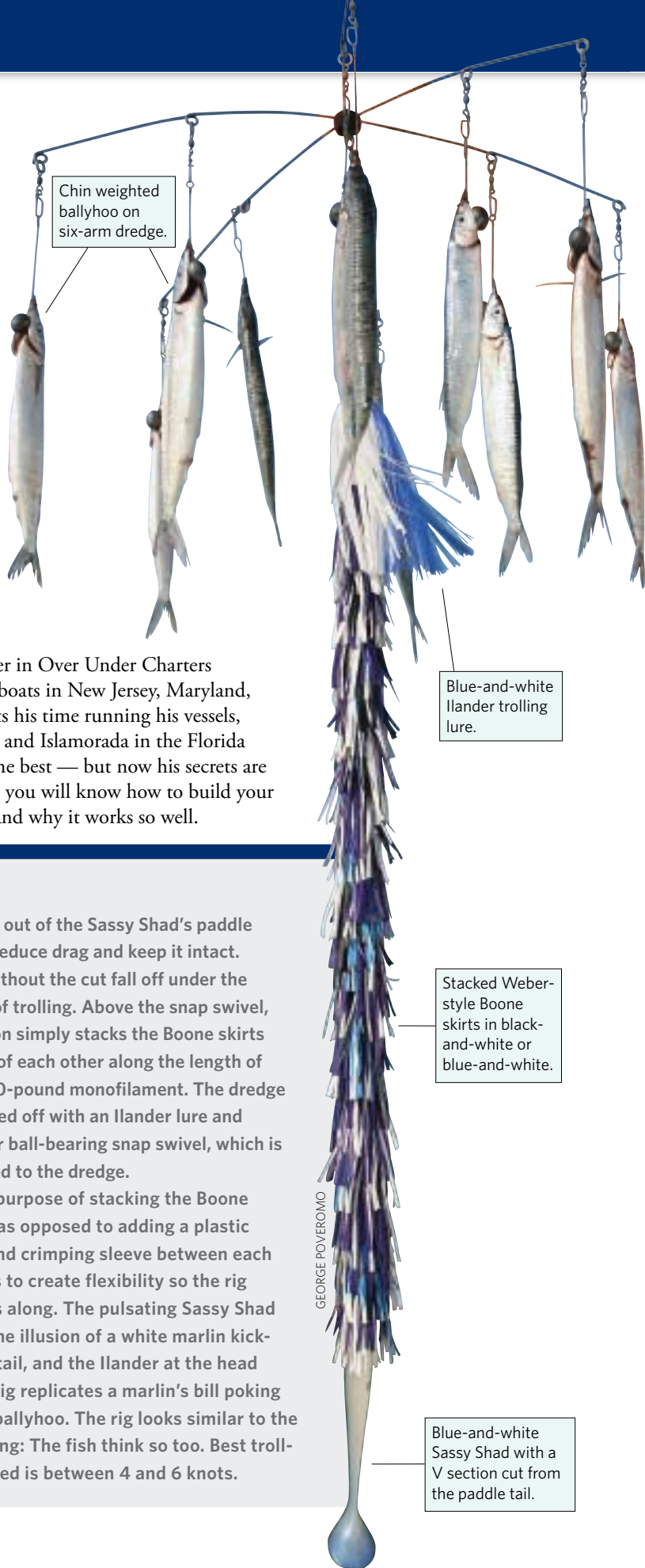


White Marlin Teasers

Fabricate a fake to stack the odds in your favor. **BY GEORGE POVEROMO**

CAPT. JOHN OUGHTON is a prospector. And like the gold-hungry Wild Westers of the 1800s, Oughton also seeks a precious commodity. However, his mines are the canyons off the mid-Atlantic and South Jersey coasts, and he seeks white gold — as in white marlin.

Oughton is a longtime offshore-trolling veteran and partner in Over Under Charters (overundercharters.com), a big-game charter operation with boats in New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, Islamorada and the Bahamas. Oughton splits his time running his vessels, *Pretty Work* and *That's Right*, between Ocean City, Maryland, and Islamorada in the Florida Keys. When it comes to catching white marlin, he's among the best — but now his secrets are out. Read this column closely and, by the time you are done, you will know how to build your very own white marlin teaser, when to use it, how to troll it and why it works so well.



Chin weighted ballyhoo on six-arm dredge.

Blue-and-white Ilander trolling lure.

Stacked Weber-style Boone skirts in black-and-white or blue-and-white.

Blue-and-white Sassy Shad with a V section cut from the paddle tail.

Build a White

THE IMITATION WHITE MARLIN is rigged behind a six-arm dredge. Each arm of the dredge carries two ballyhoo, each rigged with single-strand wire and a 1-ounce lead. In all, there are 12 ballyhoo on the dredge. Based on seas and currents, a 16- to 48-ounce trolling sinker rides in front of the dredge. In the center of the dredge and a few inches behind the ballyhoo is the imitation white marlin.

Oughton builds the marlin decoy on a 3- to 4-foot length of 400-pound monofilament. The main ingredient is numerous packs of Weber-style Boone skirts. Oughton prefers the black-and-white skirts to best mimic the coloration of a white marlin. However, blue-and-white are good substitutes, and for those seeking to attract dolphin, green-and-yellow skirts are excellent.

At the bitter end of the heavy mono, Oughton ties a snap swivel and attaches the snap through the head of a plain Sassy Shad. He cuts a V

section out of the Sassy Shad's paddle tail to reduce drag and keep it intact. Tails without the cut fall off under the rigors of trolling. Above the snap swivel, Oughton simply stacks the Boone skirts on top of each other along the length of the 400-pound monofilament. The dredge is capped off with an Ilander lure and another ball-bearing snap swivel, which is fastened to the dredge.

The purpose of stacking the Boone skirts, as opposed to adding a plastic bead and crimping sleeve between each skirt, is to create flexibility so the rig slithers along. The pulsating Sassy Shad gives the illusion of a white marlin kicking its tail, and the Ilander at the head of the rig replicates a marlin's bill poking at the ballyhoo. The rig looks similar to the real thing: The fish think so too. Best trolling speed is between 4 and 6 knots.

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Faux Feeder

COMPARED TO THE VARIOUS TEASERS (such as dredges, daisy chains and spreader bars) used to attract white marlin, the teaser and tactic that Oughton has hit on better piques billfish interest when the fishing is just OK and not great. When white marlin are not traveling in large pods and have been forced deep by fishing pressure, Oughton will concentrate along rips and dispatch a dredge teaser that looks just like a white marlin. The goal is to trick white marlin into thinking that one of their own is moving in to feed on a ball of bait, provoke their natural feeding instincts and get them to join the party, at which point Oughton and crew can get some hooks into them.

“This white marlin clone was originally shown to me by Capt. Anthony Frascatore, my deckhand,” says Oughton. “It gives other whites a reason to come into the spread. When a pod of whites feeds, the fish take turns. One is allowed to eat, then it gets back in line as another fish moves in to feed. The illusion of that fake white marlin stalking a school of ballyhoo prompts other whites to rise to it but hold off to the side, awaiting their turn to feed. It’s eerie to see these fish come in on this dredge. They never come in from behind but rather stay off to the side. Then we free-spool a ballyhoo bait off to the side of the dredge, and it gets picked off by one of the real white marlin. It’s a deadly tactic.”

Run a Shill

AGAIN, THIS TACTIC IS FOR WHEN fish are scattered and under pressure. Oughton targets the rips, which he believes always hold a few fish. What’s more, there’s enough moving water in the rips to get the fish excited, which is crucial on calm days. When he’s working a rip with the white marlin dredge, he also “prospect” at the same time by free spooling a rigged ballyhoo off the side of the dredge. Oughton lowers the rod tip to the water prior to free spooling, to keep the ballyhoo at the same place in the water column as the dredge, and lets the bait drift back as far as 100 yards. This creates the illusion of



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JOIN THE CROWD: The fake white marlin teaser tricks the real thing into thinking it’s joining a feeding frenzy.

an injured ballyhoo drifting back from the pod that the imitation white marlin is working over. The real whites could be following the teaser anywhere from 10 feet back of the dredge to well behind the entire bait spread. Once the bait is 100 yards back, he retrieves it and repeats the process. He keeps this up as long he is

working the rip. This is called prospecting because one never knows when a white marlin might be eyeballing the spread. “You’re free spooling, and all of a sudden, the line speeds up, and you know a fish has it,” says Oughton. “You let it run a bit, advance the drag and, since we’re using circle hooks, just lift the rod tip to set the hook. This pickup could happen at any point during the prospecting stage.”

This tactic has proven its worth in the canyons off the mid-Atlantic and South Jersey. It also should produce wherever white marlin roam. In addition, as mentioned earlier, a similar setup would work extremely well on dolphin just by using green-and-yellow Boone skirts for the decoy body.

The next time you set your sights on a specific big game species, try swimming a clone behind a dredge. Who knows? On any particular day, you just may become the Pied Piper of the Canyons. ~

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