

Rigged and ready for battle, Miami's Top-Vee heads off in search of productive wahoo grounds.



WARP-SPEED WAHOO

THE LATEST OBSESSION IN THE MAKING...

PHOTOGRAPHY: ENDLESSIMAGERY.COM

Statewide, the unforgettable results that come with high-speed wahoo trolling are typically the same - periods of anticipation highlighted by bursts of blistering strikes. Nevertheless, one thing is for certain, two or three drag-screaming wahoo in a row will quickly satisfy any blue-water angler's expectations - that's a guarantee!

For Florida anglers, wahoo represent the pinnacle of offshore excitement. Sure, dol-

phin are tasty, blackfin tuna pull hard and sailfish lead our pelagic plethora in acrobatic abilities, but when it comes to sheer velocity, wahoo swim alone! For decades, anglers in-the-know have been taking these ferocious fighters by means of a variety of tactics; live bait fishing...slow-trolling...kite-fishing...all are effective and all continue to account for respectable numbers of these highly-prized game fish year after year. Recently, advancements in technology have permitted wahoo

enthusiasts to effectively target these super-fast speedsters at ridiculous trolling speeds once thought impossible. Forget 12, 14 or even 16-knots, how about 20-knots plus! You heard right; 20-knots plus!

To cash in on this adrenaline-filled fishery, understanding the tips, tricks, tackle and techniques employed during these insanely fast pursuits will surely help put more trophy 'hoo in the box!

■ BY CAPTAIN MIKE GENOUN



» **GET TO KNOW 'HOO**

In case your offshore career just got underway, here is a brief introduction to the target species. Wahoo are found worldwide in both tropical and subtropical seas. The missile-like fish's blistering speed and top-quality table fare distinguish it as a prize catch for anglers of all skill levels. Shaped like a deadly torpedo, a wahoo's elongated body is covered with small, barely visible scales for minimal resistance. For a few extra mph when they need it most, wahoo tuck their peck and dorsal fins into perfectly streamlined indentations. Most don't know this, but wahoo also have the supernatural ability to exude a unique slime coat that makes their body extra slippery during sudden bursts of aggression.

Propulsion for this magnificent hunter is generated by a powerful tail fin gyrating back and forth at unimaginable speeds. Close cousins to the king mackerel, wahoo are camouflaged in a mythical-like striped pattern highlighted by iridescent hues of silver and blue, which quickly fade to a pale bluish gray at death. From above or below, these silent hunters magically melt into their surroundings, leaving unsuspecting prey no chance of escaping their deadly attacks.

Armed with razor sharp dentures, wahoo are killing machines.

The business end of a wahoo is equipped with large upper and lower incisors lined with closely positioned dentures as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel. While little is still known about their characteristics, it is believed growth is rapid. Under ideal conditions, gaining close to two-pounds per month for a maturing speci-

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When the bite is on, the results can be more than impressive.

men is not unheard of and definitely not hard to believe, especially for such a specialized hunter capable of racing through dense ocean depths at I-95 speeds.

Typically, wahoo are not a schooling fish. They tend to be solitary hunters, although they may occur in loose congregations patrolling the same forage-rich strike zones. Their diet consists primarily of bonito, juvenile tuna, mackerel, dolphinfish and squid. However, a hungry wahoo will not hesitate chasing down and devouring just about anything that is unfortunate enough to swim in its field of view.

» **HIGH SPEED WHAT**

The debate still continues over the true definition of “high-speed” trolling, as one man's “fast” may be another's “slow.” One thing that we know for certain is that you can't outrun a full-grown 'hoo. They're simply too fast. For the sake of this application, anything less than 14 to 16-knots and consider yourself searching for dolphin. To truly enjoy the benefits of ultra high-speed wahoo trolling, get the boat up on plane and push the guage up to 20-knots. Trust me, if you put in the time; you, too, will become a believer! Some may try and convince you that troll-



“ Some may try and convince you that trolling for any pelagic at such a high rate of speed is at best a futile attempt at offshore success. They would be incorrect.

ing for any pelagic at such a high rate of speed is ludicrous and nothing more than a waste of precious fuel. They would be incorrect.

One of the advantages of trolling at cruising speed is that you can relocate between promising areas that are relatively close in a short period of time without having to retrieve your spread. An additional benefit is the tremendous amount of productive water you can cover. In only a few hours of fishing, you can effectively troll your lures for over 60-miles! Taking this fact into consideration, it stands to reason that the more promising territory you pull your baits through, the more likely you are to cross paths with the targeted species and thus, the more strikes you will potentially experience. Also, speed is clearly an enticement for wahoo, as these fish thrive on tuna and bonito, some of the fastest fish in the sea. Any consistently successful wahoo angler will tell you wahoo enjoy a good chase. Lets also not forget that when 'hoos smash a lure trolled at such high speed, a solid hook set is fairly certain - a positive factor for a fishery that is not about catch and release, but rather about catch and kill!

» **WAHOO WHERE**

Regardless where your search pattern lies, a number of factors remain the same. Structure is key. Distinct ledges...drop-offs...just about any irregularity lying below 100 to 300-feet of clean, nutrient-rich blue-water that attracts bait; will attract wahoo, too. Fifty miles off the First Coast, even a minimal drop-off from 180-foot to 200-foot is a significant wahoo-magnet in



It pays to prepare for the elements when targeting wintertime 'hoo.

How big do wahoo grow? Just ask the crew aboard Zephyros.

an otherwise gently sloping region. Fortunately for warp-speed wackos residing in the southeast stretch of the state through the prolific Florida Keys, promising grounds mean a short run of only a few miles. For Gulf Coast gurus the story is not the same, as a significant amount of fuel may need to be sacrificed in order to reach pay dirt.

Temperature breaks...current rips...floating debris...the presence of bait-fish...working birds...all are signs that can lead to warp-speed success and should not be overlooked.

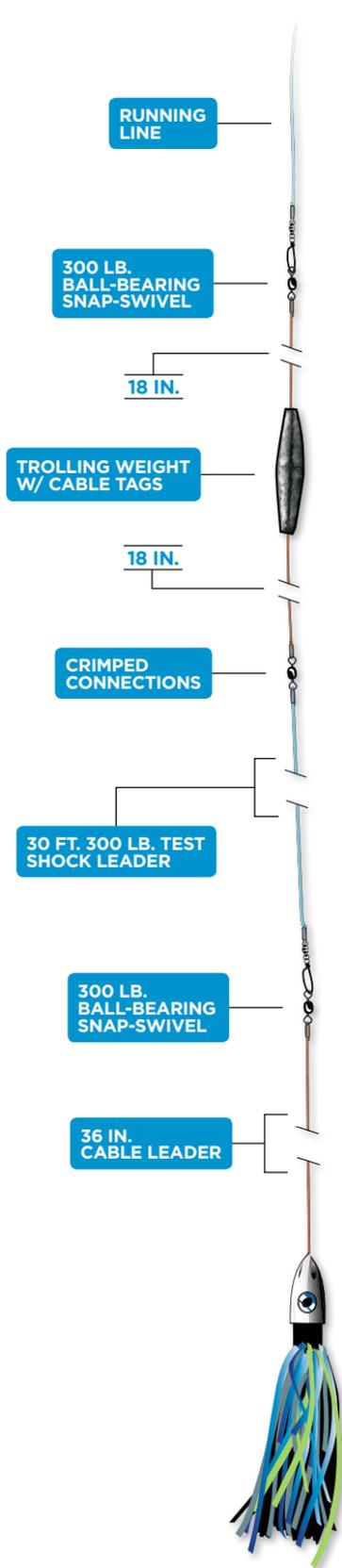
» **WHEN TO PUT THE PEDAL TO THE METAL**

While wahoo are caught during every month of the year, the season many of us highly anticipate generally peaks just a week or two before Thanksgiving and runs strong through the tail end of March. Unfortunately, this same time frame coincides with the strongest winds of the year (hurricane season aside), and can create treacherous conditions best left to super-size sportos. However, windows of opportunity do open, allowing small to mid-size open-fisherman an equal opportunity to safely and effectively cash in on the chaotic wintertime action.

» **TACKLE HOW**

Appropriate gear for this fishery does not come easy, and is certainly not for the faint of heart. For starters, stout aluminum-

PHOTOGRAPHY: (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT) WOLFEN.COM (3), ENDLESSIMAGERY.COM



“ A 32 or 48 oz. Banchee can effectively be pulled at 20-plus knots without the addition of a trolling lead.

The Banchee's open-face provides little resistance.

butt rods are a must! I prefer Profile's line of offshore trolling sticks because they are assembled with Stuart® components that are built to withstand the stresses associated with such extreme fishing. A 50-pound ballistic missile racing due west with its turbo charger engaged while your twin outboard powered center-console is boogying east at 20-mph does, in fact, create a significant amount of tension. Add a 32 oz. bullet and three-pounds of trolling-lead between you and your fleeing quarry and it is easy to understand why this is no place for 20lb. class tackle.

As far as reels are concerned, line capacity must be in excess of 500-yards and the reel must be equipped with a reliable drag system capable of slamming the brakes on a runaway freight train. Two-speed reels are nice, but not necessary. Back in the day, Senator 6/0s were all we fished and they held up nicely. When it comes to line, fresh 80lb. monofilament will outperform its braided counterpart in this application. Reason being; monofilament stretches and acts as a giant shock absorber which helps prevent pulled hooks.

Rig It Right

Crimp 80lb. test running line to a heavy-duty ball-bearing 300lb. snap swivel. This is where your torpedo-shaped trolling weight is attached. You will often see 18 to 24-inches of cable on either side of a trolling weight. This is to prevent cutoffs from toothy wahoo, which are notorious for mistaking the lead for an escaping meal. It's happened to all of us and it will happen to you.

Talking terminal tackle, this is certainly no place to skimp. Once an aggressive wahoo strikes, any weak links in your connections will undoubtedly come back to haunt you. Knots are a no-no. Rather all connections should be properly crimped in order to avoid tackle failure. This measure will surely result in more fish in the box.

Don't forget that once a wahoo is hooked up and line is melting off your reel as your clicker is screaming, even repositioning a loaded trolling outfit from a rod holder to a fighting belt comes with its own set of challenges. Add in a rocking boat and an inexperienced angler, and you will quickly realize that seriously targeting big wahoo is not child's play. A safety line tethering your gear to the boat isn't an option, but a mandatory measure toward preventing the loss of an expensive trolling outfit.

Warp-speed wahoo fishing is strictly a lure game, as natural baits quickly wash out at such high trolling speeds. Logic will tell you that any skirted trolling lure that you pull through the water at such high velocity must have a conical or bullet shaped head to cut through the resistance. While

From the trailing end of the trolling lead, a 300lb. test monofilament shock leader, roughly 30-feet in length is crimped on and again finished off with a second heavy-duty ball-bearing snap swivel. This is where your lure with its cable leader are attached. I prefer 36-inches of 400lb. multi-strand cable, though some guys prefer more. Any less and you are asking for trouble.

this fact may be true, options do exist. Ballyhood Lures based in Santa Ana, California, is one particular manufacturer who has taken high-speed wahoo trolling to a whole new level with the introduction of the Banchee. I have caught numerous fish on this lure, so I believe in it! Water pours through the Banchee, rather than around it. Its open-face provides virtually no resistance and keeps the lure tracking in the strike zone at ridiculously high speeds. A 32 or 48 oz. Banchee can effectively be pulled at 20-plus knots without the addition of a trolling lead. For an added level of enticement, the Banchee's cylindrical head emits an "Eat Me" rattle that can be homed-in on from a mile away. Regardless which lures you choose to pull, one thing is for sure; your offerings must be heavy and specifically designed for the rigors of high-speed wahoo trolling, otherwise the fakes will skip across the surface. Ideally, the idea is to mimic a fleeing bonito or juvenile

crews devote the first two or three hours of light to high-speeding and then switch off in search of other species. One thing to consider is that records and rumors both indicate that a greater number of these magnificent fish fall victim to anglers' efforts during the first hour or two after sunrise. However make no mistake; these highly specialized predators kill from dawn to dusk. Get out there and give warp-speed wahoo trolling a try. If at first you don't succeed, don't give up. Good things come to those who put in the time. FSF



“ ...it is a common misconception that heavy high-speed lures track 15 or 20-feet below the surface.

skipjack swimming for its life just below the trailing end of your boat's white water. I point this out because it is a common misconception that heavy high-speed lures track 15 or 20-feet below the surface. Negative! At 20-knots, even with the addition of a trolling weight, your lures are swimming no more than a foot or two below.

» **SPREAD TO SUCCESS**

Unlike typical trolling spreads consisting of six, eight or ten lines, warp-speed wahoo trolling is better suited for no more than three or four lures staggered at different lengths. To get you started, I recommend something fairly easy like 200-foot, 300-foot, 400-foot, etc. You can adjust depending on prevailing conditions.

» **CONCLUSION**

Considering everything involved, it's obvious that super high-speed wahoo fishing isn't for everyone. If I have wet your appetite then prepare to burn more fuel than you normally would when trolling. To keep expenses minimal,

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