

Cairns

TURNS IT ON FOR A WEEK OF GIANTS

The end of October produced exceptional fishing on the Great Barrier Reef north of Cairns. Extremely large black marlin showed up in almost unprecedented numbers, making for a particularly memorable season, as Kelly Dalling Fallon experienced firsthand.

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The region between Cairns and Lizard Island on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is recognised as the best giant black marlin fishing ground in the world, with action from September to December. That reputation was reinforced even further during a period of particularly hot fishing that started in the final week of October this year. Not only did the fishing kick it up a gear, but an unprecedented number of big fish showed up as well.

I’m not talking about monster fish that have never been seen before, but rather a consistent run of big fish over 800lb. This challenged the notion that there are usually more of the smaller black marlin than the really big fish.

With trips on ‘the Reef’ usually averaging between three and seven days, you would normally consider that you’d had a very good trip if you

caught one big fish. However, during this particular week, it was the big fish that appeared in numbers and the smaller fish that were scarce.

BIG FISH ACTION

Veteran skipper Capt Bobby Jones aboard *Iceman*, who is celebrating his 30th season on the Reef this year, says he’s never seen anything like it before. Another veteran skipper with him that week, Capt Peter Wright, and guests from the USA, released an amazing 15 blacks in eight days, including two fish they estimated at 800lb, two at 950lb, and another at more than 1000lb.

Both captains have seen countless big fish over the years and know how to call them. Bobby was quick to point out that while in his opinion this was not “the best season ever” – a quote being thrown around loosely, mainly by





While not all boats shared the same success during that big week in late October, those who found fish during that magical period were rewarded with one of the most consistent runs of huge black marlin ever seen.

those not actually on the Reef – it produced some of the best fishing he’s experienced in the past 10 to 15 years, as well as the best run of big fish that he’s ever seen.

Another long-time skipper, Capt Brad Craft, at the wheel of *Castille III*, initially kept his brilliant run of big fish quiet, not quite believing his luck. With expert angler Frank Sitterle aboard from

San Antonio, they released an amazing nine marlin over 800lb in eight days of fishing, including six marlin he estimated at more than 950lb. On one day during that period, his haul included three giant blacks of 900, 950 and 1000lb!

With a few days off due to a cancellation, Capt Tim Richardson aboard *Tradition* put his US deckies, Justin and Eric, on to their first

Australian black marlin. With just the three crew members onboard, the team released six fish during a great four-day run, all of which were over 700lb.

I witnessed the great fishing myself as part of the crew aboard my husband Capt Luke Fallon’s *Kekoa*. On one occasion I marvelled at the fact that although we only saw three marlin for the day, all

three of them were larger than 800lb. Best of all, we caught two of them!

MASSIVE FISH

Our US angler, Susan, experienced just how hard these big fish can fight on her first day on the Reef, spending more than an hour in the chair fighting one tough and very stubborn 800-pounder. Susan, who had travelled from Washington with husband Art, couldn’t believe her luck when she hooked yet another big fish on her very next strike. Although the tired angler had been hoping for something smaller, and easier, to bring aboard, it wasn’t to be. Capt Luke estimated her second fish at 900lb, equalling her husband’s monster catch the previous day.

Art and Susan are both experienced anglers and have fished with great success all over the world. They also know from experience that it doesn’t always happen, and on one overseas trip they fished five days without a bite. They came to the Great Barrier Reef for the very first time with high expectations, but were quite literally blown away by the quality of the fishing, as well as the size of the fish, later describing it as their best-ever fishing trip.

However, for every big fish caught, as always, there were quite a few lost battles as well. Some crew and anglers are still getting over the loss of some of the particularly special fish. Capt Corey Hard on *Askari* had a couple of big fish encounters during that week, including one monster that was lost at the back of the boat when it threw two flying gaffs and snapped the rope on a third. Although its true size will never be known, Corey says it was extremely large and he will take the memory of that fish with him to the grave.

WHAT A WEEK

For veterans of the Reef, the fishing in that final week of October will remain a highlight for many years to come.

The charter boat *Calypso* had a particularly spectacular week. With Capt Darren ‘Biggles’ Haydon at the wheel they released fish of 300, 400, 600, 650, 750, 950 and 999lb in three days fishing. When Capt Tim Dean returned to the helm they finished the week with six from seven strikes, estimated at 350, 800, 900, 900, 900 and 950lb.

Capt Bill Billson aboard *Viking II* was also having a great run on what he described as his best run of big fish ever, catching seven

grander black marlin by the end of October. On one particular trip he released two fish over 1000lb, as well as an 850 and 300-pounder in just three days of fishing.

Capt Simon Carosi aboard *Afashionado* released six blacks from eight strikes in just two days of fishing. Their marlin were estimated at 150, 300, 300, 850, 900 and 900lb.

BLACKS TURN BLUE

At the end of October the season still had at least another month to run.

Fishing was patchy and slow during early November, but by mid-month some of the fleet found action while searching wide for predators attending the annual lanternfish spawning aggregation. In 600 to 800 fathoms due east of Linden Bank, they discovered an influx of blue marlin along with tuna and some big blacks. Capt Haydon Bell and the team on *Release* caught two solid blues and one black in a single day, while Capt Ross Finlayson and his team on *Top Shot* landed a blue marlin of 838lb for his angler, Rick Benitez.

With some of the boats chartered until early December, there were still a lot more big fish to be recorded. 🐟

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With the peak bite time often occurring in late afternoon, some boats found themselves still battling huge marlin right up until sunset, before ducking through an opening and behind the reef to spend the night.

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