

CAIRNS BLACK MARLIN SEASON 2008

Update # 1 : 23rd September 2008



30th black marlin season on the reef

Get ready for the big 30th marlin season for Captain Laurie Wright.

Our top crew, again for this year, are: Dave Cassar and Jarad "Dingo" Boshammer.

Please read the current article on Captain Laurie Wright that was in Bluewater Boats and Sportfishing magazine's 69 issue

Update # 2 : 1st October 2008

Team Accurate putting their reels to the test

The start of the 2008 black marlin season and we are putting the Accurate ATD 130 reels to their pre-season test. Joining us this week are the boys from Accurate, the twins, David and Doug Nilsen and their sales manager, Ben Secret.

After some good Aussie hospitality and a brief stay on the farm on the Atherton Tablelands, the guys were ready to leave the rainforest and get out onto the Great Barrier Reef. Captain Laurie Wright headed *Ningaloo* straight towards Linden Bank, which produced some great afternoon action. They caught 3 from 3, with all the action happening on the swimming scad bait. Doug caught the first black estimated at 150 pounds, Ben released the next fish of approx 350 pounds and David out did them all with the last fish of the day of approx 400 pounds.

With the night spent anchored in behind Opal Reef, I am sure there were some re-captions of the days events over a couple of quiet rum and cokes. A great day, what a way to start the season.

Day 2 and the boys put the accurate jigging gear into action on the reef, producing several edible size coral trout and a good trial for the Accurate jigging reels. With the wind picking up to a blustery 20 knots, after the near perfect condition of the previous day, today only produced one down sea tailing fish and no lookers at the baits.....Tonight they have moved further north and are at St Crispin Reef.

Day 3 and the majority of the fleet worked their way north, getting geared up for the Lizard Island Black Marlin Classic which commences with the tournament briefing on Saturday Oct 4th. The down sea troll in the 20 knot south easterlies produced several sightings of fish tailing down seas. *Ningaloo* saw several fish, but only managed to get a bite out of one black and did not get the hooks to stick.

Here is the photo of some of Day one action. *Photo courtesy of Kelly Dalling*



Update # 3 : 8th October 2008
Shaka

Australian Fishing Expeditions in conjunction with Cableas Outfitters organised an expedition for Donald Nuckel to the Great Barrier Reef for the 2008 marlin season.

With the marlin hard to come by, it's great when persistence (and hard work) pays off. With the professional crew on board *Shaka*, the second trip for Donald Nuckel paid off today with his first fish - a real performer taken with a live bait tuna between Day and Hicks Reef. If you look closely, you'll see the circle hook set from the outside in. A little luck doesn't hurt...

Joining Donald on his Aussie adventure is Kiwi Matt Wallis who runs Minaret Outfitters, which is New Zealand's premier hunting operation and also hunts exotic species all over the world. This was his first trip to the GBR and the crew on *Shaka* were pleased to be able to hook him up to his first black marlin. This one turned up literally seconds before they called it quits on the last day of the trip - better late than never!

Photo courtesy of John Hendry



Update # 4 : 6th October 2008

The Kilborn father and son action

After a spectacular and scenic helicopter ride from Kanga Adventures Kuranda property to Cooktown, Vince and Douglas Kilborn and buddy Steve Cumbie joined *Ningaloo* and our mothership *The Boss* in Cooktown.

After a bit of a late start to the days fishing, the gang seemed to have the lower section of the Ribbon Reefs to themselves, due to most of the marlin fleet being situated at the top end with the start of the Lizard Island tournament. Vince caught the 1st fish for the day with a feisty 200 pound black at Lena Reef. But not to be out done, Douglas put the pressure on with a 450 pound black at # 2 Ribbon Reef.

The second day and again *Ningaloo* was amongst the action, getting 2 bites out of the 3 fish they had up to the baits and catching a fiery little black for Steve. From other reports, the fishing has been very slow for the 32 boats participating in the tournament.

After a wide spread dispersal of the tournament boats on Day 3, Capt Laurie decided to stay at Lena which produced another 2 fish for the day. After jumping the first fish off (estimated at 250 pounds) they managed to hook the 2nd one on the Accurate Twin spin 30 pound outfit. After a very exciting down sea chase and lots of aerobic action at the back of the boat, they tagged a released this little rat, estimated at 175 pounds. However with the winds predicted to pick up to 20-30 knots in the next few days, lets hope they get to see a few more big fish moving in.

Day 4 and the accurate reels were really getting a good work out. Early in the morning they tested the Accurate twin spins on a 60 pound mackerel whilst bottom jigging. Later in the afternoon they had 2 bites out of little fish and they managed to catch one again on the Accurate spinning rod.

The last day of the charter and they are still picking away at the small blacks with a 200 pounder for Douglas. A great time was had by all with Dave and the crew on *The Boss* making sure that everyone was spoilt on the Great Barrier Reef.



Update # 5 : 16th October 2008

Dr Hedley returns

Tony Hedley and Tiff Simmons are back on the GBR at the exact same week as last year to try to repeat the fabulous fishing they experienced in 2007. Tony caught the biggest fish of his 10 years on the reef, which Laurie estimated to be well over 1100 pounds (sorry Laurie just told me that the fish last year was estimated at 1100 lb not 1300 as I earlier quoted). This year the middle ribbons seems to be where the action is with *Ningaloo* releasing one fish each for Tony and Tiff out of 3 bites. Whilst close by *Allure* caught 4 and *Top Shot* caught 3. Amongst the fleet a few big fish have been released or lost at the boat, but everyone is waiting for the big fish influx.

With the winds increasing to 20 knots, this was exactly what was needed to get the big fish moving. *Ningaloo* saw 2 tailers with one being a very big fish. They took a look at the bait but faded off, much to the disappointment of everyone on board. Later in the afternoon they tagged and released a 400 pounder at #5 reef for Tiff and got some great photos of the fish all lit up at the back of the boat. Also in the middle ribbons, John Hendry owner of *Shaka* released this nice fish estimated at 800 pounds and saw 2 other "really nice fish".

Day 3 and the weather is atrocious. Blustery conditions with rain squalls still produced a 450 pound black for Tony from 2 bites at # 5 Ribbon reef.

Day 4 was actually worse than yesterday....blustery 30 knots, rain squalls, everything wet, including captain and crew, and no fish. Capt Laurie decided on a down sea troll to # 9 ribbon reef as there were some reports of big fish at the top end.

Day 5 and the only fish of the day crashed the long tail tuna bait at # 10 ribbon reef. After a quick 10 minute fight and lots of aerobic jumps at the back of the boat, this 850 pounder was released after a feisty 10 minute fight. This is *Ningaloo's* first big fish for the season and a prelude of what is to come.

How different one day can be from the next.....day 6 of the charter saw the return of the rain squalls and a strengthening 20 knot south easterly wind. To make it worse they saw no fish.....they will be moving south again for the last day of the trip and a change over in Cooktown. Hopefully the marlin pods are back in the middle ribbons.....

Well Laurie tried very hard all day to duplicate the fishing of 2007 for Dr Hedley and find him a BIG fish. But to no avail. At least the weather was a little kinder and they had some sunshine. *The Boss and Ninagloo* are in Cooktown for a day off and back out on Saturday with a new charter.

Thanks Tony and Tiff for all the great time fishing together over the past 10 years, and good luck with the Black and Blue tournament.



Update # 6 : 24th October 2008

Australian Exploration

After 2 years in the making, Ed Hawn and wife Rebecca, joined by friends Ronnie and Cindy Kuhn and Bryan and Shannon Gulley, have set aside 18 days for experiencing Far North Queensland. They will be fishing the GBR for a week, touring the outback and then relaxing on an exclusive Island resort.

The pilot on our Cooktown charter flight thrilled our guests with a fabulous scenic flight over Port Douglas and then out to sea, where all on board were able to clearly see sharks and manta rays swimming on the reef. A quick rendezvous with all the gang in Cooktown, the ladies opting for a more comfortable ride out to the reef on *The Boss* and the guys heading north with Laurie on *Ningaloo*. Within the first hour of fishing they hooked into a feisty black at # 8 ribbon reef, being Ed's first ever black marlin tagged and released.

Being a day for 1st's, fishing on board *Shaka*, Ed Vander Kruk also caught his first ever black marlin at #4 ribbon reef, in the trying 30 knots winds and 3 metre seas. And then the next day Ed decided a big fish was the order and released an 850lber. The weather reports are predicting the same conditions for the next few days.....testing even the seasoned fisherman.

Day 2 and the topic of conversation amongst the entire fleet is WHEN is the weather going to drop back. *Ningaloo* only managed to jump a fish off at #10 ribbon reef in "very trying conditions". I am sure Dingo and Dave have the outrigger pegs to the max...just trying to keep their baits in the riggers.

Day 3 and a 300 black dragged them close into the reef and after a 10 minute interlude decided enough fun and spat them back the hooks. It is really strange to be the 20th of October and to find *Ningaloo* the only gameboat fishing #10 ribbon reef. Most boats have opted to go south where the weather conditions are a little kinder (5 knots).

Day 4 and the marlin and weather are testing everyone's patience. Early in the day they jumped a 350 lber off and then pulled the hooks on a 500 pound black....that's fishing.....

Day 5 and lady luck was definitely on their side. The women decided to take the challenge and have a day on *Ningaloo*. Relaxing at Lizard Island on *The Boss* had been very enjoyable, but they were ready for a fishing fix. On the way out to the edge, the girls managed to replenish the stocks of scaly mackerel that the barracuda had diminished over the last couple of days, and everyone enjoyed a morning snorkel at the cod hole.

The day continued to improved, with the weather coming down to a bearable 18 knots, and the fish turning up. Bryan released a 500 pound black and they hooked up to a very big fish at the opening at the top of #10 ribbon reef. After a spectacular bite, which the anglers and crew all witnessed, and given plenty of time to digest the big bait, everyone thought they had the big one on. The big girl decide she was very hungry and took off after the second bait and swam straight towards the boat. Only to be able to dislodge the hook and swim away for another feed. A couple of other big fish were also seen and released at the top end of the ribbons.

Day 6 and the girls decided to try their lady luck again and join the guys on the reef for the days fishing. Only one bite, but a good one for Ronnie producing a 650 pound black. Lots of aerial jumps, especially on the wire which lead to our crewman Dave having to dump the leader, Laurie doing some amazing manoeuvres with *Ningaloo* and putting the 47 foot O'Brien to the test of black marlin fishing. They managed to get the leader back and place a tag in this healthy fish. Pretty good in testy conditionsAGAIN..... as the winds picked up to 30 knots in the afternoon.....is it ever going to stop blowing?

Well not yet anyway. Even in these adverse conditions, on the last day of the charter, Rebecca managed to tag and release her 1st black marlin, being approximately 250 pounds. Into Cooktown tonight for the change over of charters on Saturday morning and all this gang are off on their second leg of their Australian Adventure, exploring the outback.



Update # 7 : 31st October 2008

Ireland v England

Returning for another stint on the reef are long time friends, Gary Douglas and John Gill. After the Cooktown changeover, Laurie headed *Ningaloo* out to the middle Ribbons where reports of a few big fish had been released there the day before. Word had spread fast as a large majority of the fleet had the same idea. A good day, with a reprieve in the weather, and a fish each for Gary and John at number 2 ribbon reef, but no big Jules.

Day 2 was for the girls, with Jan releasing a 175 pound black, her first ever billfish and her first ever fish, and another small black for Mary. A good starting platform for the big fish to come.

Day 3 and petite little Mary Harkin from Dublin showed her English counterparts the strength and finesse of the Irish. After a power packed 20 minute fight and some fantastic jumps on the wire (cannot wait to get the photos) Mary caught her 900 pounder. *Ningaloo* fished the bottom end of # 2 ribbon reef all day and had 4 bites and released a small black for Gary and the big fish for Mary.

Day 4 on # 2 reef could only be described as pandemonium and mayhem. All though there were no big billfish, there was certainly plenty of action to be had. *Ningaloo* spent the day dodging sharks and gameboats in the pursuit of black marlin and managed to release 3 from 8 bites. Obviously plenty of fish showing up in the middle ribbons. Gary spent an enjoyable 15 minutes chasing a feisty black on our spinning rod outfit and managed to get a tag into this fish.....tonnes of fun.

Day 5 and plenty of boats at # 2 and 3 ribbon reefs, fishing for *Ningaloo* was very slow until the late bite. At 5.30 pm Gary hooked a nice fish and had a challenging fight for 20 minutes and released this 750 # black.

The big fish are definitely here in the middle ribbons. Day 6 of the charter and after a text book hook up, John settled into the chair for his battle, but somehow managed to pulled the hooks on a very big fish. Damn! Gary being next up in the chair, opted to try to catch the little marlin that came in and looked at the baits on the Accurate spinning reel. And succeeded. Late in the afternoon another big fish turned up on the bonito bait and John fought this big girl for an hour and a quarter before something (unknown) chaffed through the leader and gave the fish a chance to swim away. The fish was down deep pin wheeling and it could of been another fish or maybe a shark, but nothing showed up on Capt Laurie's sounder.

The last day of the charter and the big fish are still prevalent. John Gill released his best fish for the charter (saving the best till last) a very close to the mark, 950 pounder. Also everyone on board *Ningaloo* got to see a very BIG fish come up to the baits, but big jules could not be enticed to eat.

A great fishing expedition had by all, and another great season on the GBR for Gary Douglas and John Gill.

Photo courtesy of Jeff



Update # 8 : 9th November 2008

Texas terrors

Dan Allen and Peggy Hughes and I arrived in Cooktown to be met by Laurie at the airport, a quick unload onto the mothership *The Boss* and we are ready to head out to # 3 ribbon reef on *Ningaloo*.

On our first day fishing we only saw one marlin tailing down sea, which had a look at the baits and drifted off into the depths. Had a mighty tussle with a shark whilst trying to catch a nice yellow fin tuna for sashimi, but thank goodness the shark managed to chew through the mono wind on leader right at the boat. Nice release.

Nov 2nd saw a bit more action with 4 bites. We only managing to keep the hooks in the last bite of the day, and this produced a fiery 350 pound black for Dan. The fish was hooked firmly in the corner of the mouth and became very active at the back of the boat when Dingo grabbed the wire. One of the earlier bites was from a little fish, estimated at 120 pound, so Dan dropped back a bait on the twin spin 30 and switched baits. He fed the bait perfectly to this little fish, the hook up was fabulous to watch and the fish went ballistic about 15 metres from the transom. However after some jumping and twisting he released the bait and hook and swam off, so no tag in for *Ningaloo*. It is Monday and Dan and Peggy opted for a dive on one of the bommie behind number 5 ribbon reef. With the weather finally coming down to a "comfortable" 15 knots, we headed out to the edge. Had a great day in the middle ribbons, seeing 5 fish and getting bites out of 4 of them. The fish of the day was the late afternoon bite out of a nice 650 pounder. She was a tough fish and gave Dan a good 40 minute work out in the chair. Dave did a great job on the wire and we tagged and released this fish with enough light for the quick run home behind the reef to our mothership "The Boss". Cocktail hour with the sun setting is the most enjoyable part of the day.

Day 4 and the weather just keeps on getting better....must of brought it with me.... we had a leisurely morning snorkel at the back of # 5 ribbon reef. After some reports of big fish up north, we trolled lures north to cover some ground, so that we could get a good way up the ribbon reefs. Switched back to bait fishing at the bottom of #10 reef. Had 3 bites and caught 2 blacks, both fish were hooked in the corner of the mouth on circle hooks and produced a good fight. The cockpit was a buzz with cameras and we all got some great snaps.

Whilst sitting around the dining room table and discussing the 24 years that Dan and Peggy have been fishing the Great Barrier Reef, we realised that Dan has fished on every boat that Laurie has operated. Although he did not fish every year, he did get to fish with Laurie on the "Hooker", "Balek", "Iona", "Reel Ripe" and of course "Ningaloo". He has had some great boats, great fishing and great anglers in his 30 years of fishing the reef. On Wednesday we fish our way along number 10 ribbon, working the favourite spots. Beautiful water and fabulous weather (10 knots). We caught several 20 kg yellowfin tuna at heartbreak and it all looked good for black marlin fishing. We had 2 bites late in the afternoon, but could not managed to keep hooks in either of the fish.....always tomorrow.

Day 6 and we had a wonderful dive / snorkel at dynamite pass. Whilst trolling through the pass at the top of #10 ribbon reef we had a small 40 pound sailfish trying to eat the swimming bait, just as we were putting out the baits. Did not even have time to have the switch and bait rig ready on the 30 # accurate twin spin outfit. Next we had a tiny 100 pound black come up on the big bait and attempt to eat this bait. All within the first 5 minutes of fishing. The rest of the day was very slow, except for the late bite, which produced a nice 250 pound black that was very active on the wire for Dingo. A healthy tag and release.

The last day of the charter and we worked our way south to the middle ribbons after a fantastic snorkel on #8 ribbon reef. We found patches of dirty water off some of the reefs and Capt Laurie worked wide to find some clean water. Finally found great deep indigo blue water off #6 and spent the afternoon there. Everything looked perfect again, lots of yellow fin tuna but no marlin. We had to finish the day at 4pm to get back into Cooktown for our charter flight. A great time on the GBR, but as all ways, it went by too fast. We look forward to rendezvousing with Dan Allen and Peggy again in March when we head for Port Stephens to fish for stripeys with Captain Tim Dean on the *Calypso*.



Update # 9 : 10th November 2008

Shaka teams up with Australian Fishing Expeditions

Canadian Craig Moffat and his mate, Eben Stovel, are on their first expedition to the Cairns region in search of the renowned black marlin fishing. Fishing on board *Shaka* with John, Jarad, CP and Ant for 4 days, here are the reports coming in from the boat.

Day 1 and we got one fish today for Craig Moffat (1st black marlin) on Linden Bank and almost got the bait back as well.

Day 2 and another day on the bank and another marlin for Craig Moffat (1-1-1). This 400lb-er came in lit up and trucking at 100 miles an hour, swam right past the scad and the rainbow runner on the shotgun and crashed the big bait (one of two traded with Reel Chase for ice – both of which have resulted in marlin, need any more ice Jim?). Craig had a serious fight on his hands this time but handled it well. The fish was tagged and released in great shape.

Update # 10 : 27th November 2008

Tim Choate

Joining us for the next 3 weeks is Tim Choate.....well known in the marlin fishing industry for his tireless work in conservation and was one of the founding members of the Billfish Foundation. Tim has fished with Laurie for many years and joining him this week is Kent Janer and Henrik De Laval from Sweden.

After the changeover in Cooktown on Nov 8th, Capt Law decided to take *Ningaloo* and *The Boss* back up to No Name Reef. Conditions looked perfect for marlin fishing, with indigo clear blue water, but the black marlin decided not to show. Day 2 of the charter only produced one small fish, but the team were unable to keep the hooks in. Reports up and down the 150 nm edge of the Cairns black marlin fishing grounds were patchy, with some boats being luckier than others catching 2-3 a day and others seeing nothing.

Day 3 and plenty of action on all pelagic species, bonitos, scaly mackerel, wahoo, GT's and yellow fin tunas. Had a 150 # black nearly to the boat before pulling hooks and another small marlin jumped off earlier in the flight and only had one other looker at the big bait. Seems like the small fish are congregating in groups, waiting for the big girls to show?????

Day 4 and plenty of action with 3 bites, but just could not keep the hooks in any of these fish. Day 5 and they finally set some hooks.....after jumping a sailfish earlier in the day, Henrik finally tagged and released his 1st black marlin. The reason I haven't been reporting is because there is nothing to report. The last 2 days of Kent and Henrik's charter were slow....to say none the least.

Joining Tim this week is Brazzakka, Bill McLeod and Craig Smith....now how many lies are going to be told????

The reason for no reports, again is because there has been nothing to report. They have covered ground from St Crispin to #10, sighted a few but no hook ups. They even resorted to trolling lures out wide in search of the marlin pods and then decided that a red emperor bottom fishing expedition would be more productive than marlin fishing.

But things are about to change, John Phillips and Jeff to Chef arrived on Chamois Free and Brazzakka arrived at #3 ribbon reef, dressed in a BATMAN suit.....the fun has begun.

Joining Tim this week is Catarina Zanaga. Hot sultry weather, calm seas, lots of bait, however the fishing has remained slow. Laurie took Ningaloo out wide on the advice of the longliners of congregations of marlin offshore. Plenty of tuna, pilot whales and a whale shark, but the marlin are still alluding them. Trolling back into the outer barrier reef and they managed to hook up to small black for Tim and a 400 lber for Catarina on 50 pound test line. After a 45 minute fight on the lighter line and they managed to loose the fish....

Great time had on the reef (even though they experienced very slow fishing) and many tales and reminiscing.....but then again fisherman are very good at that.



Update # 11 : 28th November 2008

Cairns Game Fishing Hall of Fame

For those of you in the fishing industry whom have not read the latest "Bluewater Boats and Sportfishing" magazine, or heard it on the dock telegraph, Capt Laurie Wright and Capt Laurie Woodbridge were this year inducted to the Cairns Game Fishing Hall Of Fame.

We had a wonderful night on Friday for the presentation dinner at the Cairns ShangriLa Hotel and hosted by the Cairns Professional Game Fishing Association. With approximately 120 guests present, as well as past inductees, the nights entertainment and fishing tales were all enjoyed along with some great archival footage (put together by Mark Louez of WIN television especially for the occasion). A great night!

CONGRATULATIONS CAPT LAURIE WRIGHT.....WELL DESERVED.



Update # 12 : 4th December 2008

Along way from Philadelphia

Joining us this week, all the way from Philadelphia, are Mark and Donna Stevens and son John and wife Breezy. After a day off to recoup from the Hall of Fame celebrations *Ningaloo and the Boss* headed out of the Cairns leads, bound for Linden Bank. With slick calm seas and plenty of thunderstorm activity, the atmospherics were highly charged. A great first day of charter, releasing a 900 pounder for John and having another marlin bite.....the best action the crew have seen in a couple of weeks.....plenty of yellow fin tuna action also.....so things are looking up.

Fishing close by, Capt John Phillips on the *Chamois Free* released another nice marlin estimated at 600 pounds.....well done guys.

Day 2 and the action was a little slower with just one bite out of a small black.

Day 3 produced squally rain showers in the morning and a lot more action than the previous day. Heaps of yellow fin tuna, bonito and bait schools working. With 2 bites out of marlin, Mark set the hooks into a small black and tagged and released this healthy fish after a action packed fight.

Day 4 and another action packed day with tones of yellow fin tuna and lots of bait. Mark had 2 bites and set the hooks into another small fish which put on some great aerial displays for the cameras.

Day 5 and again lots of bait and tunas on the Bank. The team managed to release another black this time for John. Final day of the charter and *Ningaloo and The Boss* headed back to town after a great marlin season.

