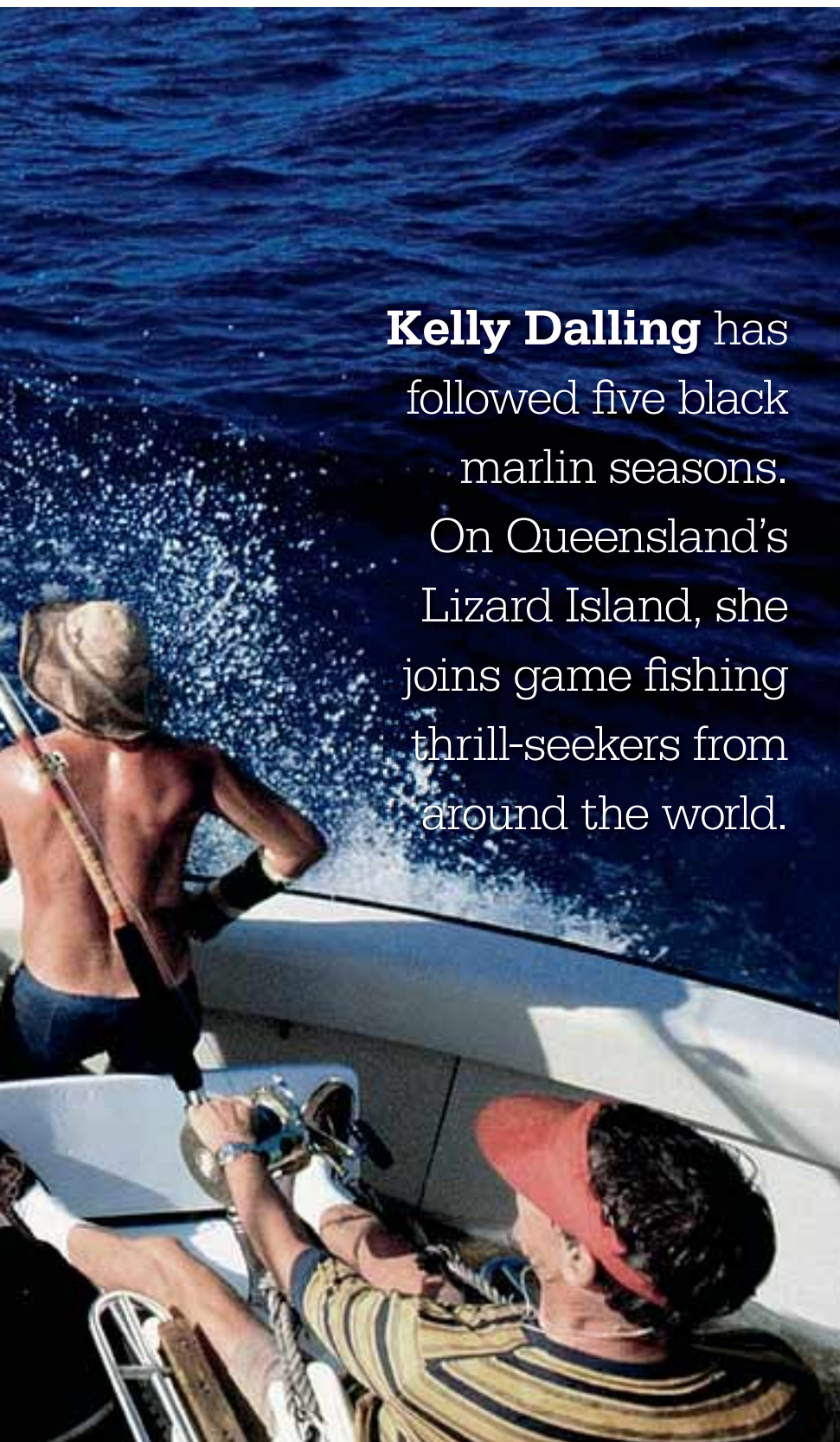


A high-action photograph taken from the perspective of someone on a boat. In the foreground, a person with long hair, wearing a white t-shirt and white gloves, is leaning over the side of the boat, reaching out with both hands towards a large, dark, pointed object (the marlin's snout) that is breaching the water. The water is a deep blue with white foam and splashes around the point of contact. The background shows the vast expanse of the ocean under a clear sky.

AIR Adventure

THE HOT SEAT
In marlin season
on the Great
Barrier Reef the
fighting chair is
where the action
is unless, of
course, you swim
with the fishes.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHOTOLIBRARY.COM



Kelly Dalling has followed five black marlin seasons. On Queensland's Lizard Island, she joins game fishing thrill-seekers from around the world.

BACK IN

THE LINE ROSE SLOWLY and steadily and then the surface of the ocean bulged ahead of the boat and the fish came out. He came out unendingly and water poured from his sides. He was bright in the sun and his head and back were dark purple and in the sun the stripes on his sides showed wide and a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose his full length from the water and then re-entered it, smoothly, like a diver and the old man saw the great scythe-blade of his tail go under and THE LINE COMMENCED TO RACE OUT.

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA, ERNEST HEMINGWAY

LIZARD ISLAND
Headquarters for those intrepid hunters of the mighty black marlin (right); a marlin bursts from the deep (below right).



DAY 1 OF THE SHELL COVE 23RD LIZARD ISLAND BLACK MARLIN CLASSIC. It has been a long day, the weather not particularly friendly, though Parke Berolzheimer and his team on the custom-built 47ft game-fishing vessel *Castille III* don't complain. They've caught and released the first marlin of the tournament. Captain Dean Beech, a Lizard Island veteran, trains his keen eye over the 20lb mackerel he is trolling 30m behind the boat. Suddenly he sees a flash of colour. His shout diverts Berolzheimer's attention to the fish, which has launched at the bait. It's a big one, a mighty 1000lb female black marlin.

Berolzheimer strikes the fish to set the hook and then manoeuvres himself and the 130lb line-class rod and reel outfit to the fighting chair in the centre of the cockpit. Locking on his harness, he braces against the rocking of the boat and the weight of the rod and reel. The reel screams as the line runs out. The fish jumps out of the water ➤



This highly mobile to cross the entire

several times in a “greyhounding” motion away from the boat. Berolzheimer locks his knees, using his full bodyweight to hold on. He regains line using his body’s motion in the chair as well as the boat, expertly handled by Beech.

And so it goes for 45 minutes, a seesaw battle between angler and fish. The marlin takes line and Berolzheimer painstakingly regains it. The big fish swims effortlessly as the boat follows and the American strains to slow her down. They are careful not to tire her out too much: the aim is to release her in the best possible condition.

She is now alongside, and a crewman makes the tag shot. A 10-foot pole with a needle-like tip is used to insert a tag into the flank of the fish, piercing the skin with a small barb. The tag has an identification number – information about the fish will be returned to the Department of Primary Industries, which administers the Australian tagging program. Another crewman cuts her loose. Berolzheimer can see the orange tag below the dorsal as she swims away.

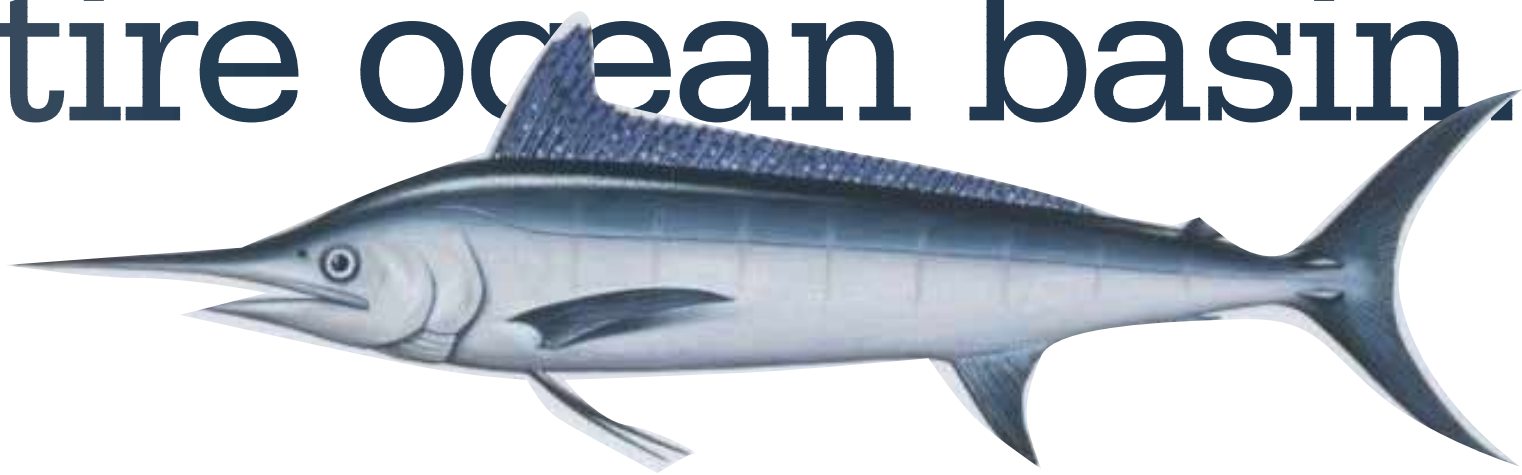
It’s over and the angler savours the moment. This is why he comes back to Lizard Island again and again.

EVERY YEAR IN September giant black marlin return to the warm waters of the Great Barrier Reef – the biggest of them females (sorry, Mr Hemingway) more than 13 feet long and over 454kg (1000lbs). They come from all over the Pacific to spawn, attracting smaller male fish (up to 170kg/350lb) and a posse of international anglers.

Black marlin are the least common of all marlin species, according to leading billfish authority Dr Julian Pepperell. The Cairns/Lizard Island vicinity is one few places where they are found in numbers. Since the first black marlin was tagged off Cairns in 1968 by Bob Dyer (host of the 1957-71 TV quiz show *Pick-A-Box*), more than 40,000 have been tagged off eastern Australia, at least half on the Great Barrier Reef. Tagging has shown this highly mobile fish is capable of crossing the entire ocean basin.

The Shell Cove Lizard Island Black Marlin Classic is one of the last bastions of gentlemanly sport, where prize money is not a consideration. Anglers compete for the thrill of the contest between man and fish. Game fishing is one

bile fish is able tire ocean basin.



of the most exciting and exhausting sports on offer. The battle is a rollercoaster of emotion – excitement, anxiety, fear and jubilation. While it is a physical battle – through the rod and harness a 1000lb marlin can be pulling against the angler up to the maximum breaking strain of the 130lb line – modern tackle and game equipment aids the angler significantly and at the end of the fight with a big fish a novice angler is more likely to collapse from the emotion than the physicality of the fight.

OCTOBER 2009: 27 boats, their crew and 72 anglers have gathered for the tournament. I have arrived as part of the crew on the charter boat *Reel Chase*, to cook, host, photograph and file daily fishing reports. We have skirted the beautiful Ribbon Reefs north of Cairns, its long stretches of reef with small occasional openings. The current comes from the north, bringing with it schools of tuna, mackerel and plenty of other pelagic baitfish. The water temperature is a cooperative 26 degrees. Many anglers have travelled far to

be here – from the US, Japan, Canada, Russia, the UK and New Zealand as well as every state of Australia. Parke Berolzheimer, 46, CEO and president of US company Duraflame has been fishing the Great Barrier Reef for 16 years and calls Lizard Island his favourite place in the world. Although he regularly fishes other marlin hotspots and despite having already released several grander class fish (fish weighing in excess of 1000lb), Berolzheimer insists that he'll return to Lizard Island until he either "runs out of money or dies".

Berolzheimer stays at the Lizard Island Resort. The island is a relatively short 19km, 30-minute run from the outer edge of the reef at the northern-most tip of the tournament's fishing grounds.

Andrei Grigoriev, 38, head of operations of the Benetton Group in Russia, is fishing in his fifth tournament. He first visited in 2003 to fish (outside the competition) and fell in love with the region. In 2004, his teammate caught the last fish to be weighed on the Lizard Island gantry: 1068lbs (484.4kg), although it took Grigoriev another year ➤



PLENTY OF FISH IN THE SEA

Moana awaiting a nibble (above); the reel deal (far right); fish out of water (right).



before he caught one for himself. In 2005, in a tournament pre-fish, he caught and weighed his first black marlin— a massive 1051lbs (476.7kg).

In 2006, the tournament became tag-and-release only, meaning no fish are deliberately killed and weighed. Even before 2006 most were released. In 2005, when anglers still had the option to weigh a fish to score points for the tournament, none was weighed. Unless it is a special trophy fish, most anglers prefer to see them go free, with weight estimated by length and girth.

Grigoriev chooses to live and fish on board the 47-foot *Moana III*, with Captain Daniel McCarthy. The boat anchors overnight in the lee of the reef, usually less than 10 minutes from where competitors have been fishing. As the Russian explains, living aboard gives you the freedom to fish anywhere along the reef. “There is nothing like waking

up with the sun rising over the nothingness to the east, going for a snorkel in the morning and then sharing a beer or two with your tired crew at the end of the day’s fishing and chatting into the late hours. All this week you live with nature, ocean and your team, becoming one family.”

As the captains, crew and anglers converge on Lizard Island’s Marlin Bar for the first night’s briefing, the atmosphere is heavy with anticipation. Rumours and pre-fishing stories abound. Just three days ago, five grander class marlin were released in a single day near Number 10 Ribbon Reef. There hasn’t been such a great day’s fishing recorded in several years.

The main feature of the Marlin Bar is the full mount of a 1194lb black marlin. In October 1986, Australian angler Bob Connellan returned to Lizard Island for his second season and with current Lizard Island Game Fish Club

president and tournament director Bob Lowe on board the *Ardesea*, caught and weighed this fish, his first “grander”. Lowe gaffed the fish. The acclaimed Cairns taxidermist, the late Ian Pike, flew straight to the island to make the mould. Only a month later, Connellan caught an even bigger fish (1291lb) that he also decided to mount. He donated the first to the Marlin Bar, where it has hung ever since.

Competitors won’t be gathering together like this for the next seven days, until presentation night. With the fishing grounds stretching over 100 nautical miles (185km) of reef, the boats will be spread far and wide, each captain keen to find the best fishing for his team.

GRIGORIEV AND his team are not on the scoreboard until day two of the competition, but he is not disappointed: he knows it is only a matter of time and luck. He enjoys the slow trolling that may go on for hours or even days without a strike. He particularly enjoys the bite, the moment of uncertainty and then confirmation it’s the right species.

Grigoriev describes the battle as not just a duel of angler and fish, but of the crew as well. Each fish is different. Maybe it will be a slow and lazy fish, staying on the surface, head shaking and no jumps while the boat sneaks up on it for a tag shot. Other fish run berserk, seemingly more airborne than in the water. Or perhaps it will go deep, just pulling, without a glimpse.

The first minutes are adrenaline-powered for Grigoriev, too. He hopes that the fish stays hooked before settling in for the fight. It does, and after a short fight is tagged and released in good condition, a good size, about 500lbs. Grigoriev settles back down to wait for the next bite.

IN 1966, CAPTAIN George Bransford and angler Richard Obach landed the first 1000lb black marlin in these waters. Almost overnight, a charter industry was created. By the early 1970s more than 90 per cent of all 1000lb-class black marlin (the Holy Grail of angling) came from this region. Celebrities who have fished here include Lee Marvin, Ernest Borgnine, Jimmy Carter,

Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman, Charlie Sheen, David Hasselhoff and Ayrton Senna. The Lizard Island Game Fish Club began in 1986.

Nine of the 72 anglers in this tournament are women. Although the sport is male-dominated, female anglers have made magnificent big-fish catches. Some say the heaviest all-tackle marlin record should belong to Kimberly Wiss, who weighed a 1525lb black marlin (35lb shy of Alfred C Glassell Jr’s record): more than 150lbs of squid came out of her fish’s mouth when it was hung to be weighed.

Competitors in the Classic have two accommodation options; in the resort or aboard a fishing vessel, charter boat or mothership. In 2008, Lizard Island Resort was voted Top Hotel in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific in the 13th *Travel & Leisure* World’s Best Award. According to Bob Lowe, “Game-fishermen put this place on the map, and through the tournament, with the cooperation of Lizard Island Resort, we’re continuing to do so.”

By the completion of the tournament there have been 255 strikes and 186 hook-ups for 125 black marlin tagged and released. Six were in the 1000-1200lb class; 14 were between 800-1000lb. Lowe called it one of the best results in years, cementing the Lizard Island Black Marlin Classic’s position as the world’s premier heavy-tackle black marlin tournament.

The champion boat for 2009 is *Mauna Kea*, skippered by Chris “Sharky” Miles, who has won three of the past five tournaments. His team releases 11 black marlin for the week, all for first-time Lizard Island angler Daryl Mosley from Brisbane, who takes home the trophy and tackle prize. Runner-up champion angler is Mike Dobbins from the Gold Coast. Dobbins is also a Classic regular who brings his own 60ft Hatteras *Hattitude* each year. Champion Lady Angler was won by another novice, Karen Weaver on *Maitai*, who released two marlin.

It’s been a long, hard week of spectacular action. Berolzheimer and Grigoriev will be back in 2010. The anticipation has already begun. ❖

24th Lizard Island Black Marlin Classic, October 16-23, 2010. www.lizardislandgfc.asn.au