

After a successful light-tackle season on baby black marlin along the north Queensland coast, hopes were high for a repeat bonanza in the heavy-tackle season off Cairns.

And it started with a bang! By September 26th, 2008, while many boats were still sorting out their tackle, Capt Bill Billson on *Viking II* was already into double figures. And some of the early fish were big.

Capt Tim Dean, at the helm of *Calypso*, steered angler Gary Holt to one of the biggest fish he's seen in years. They were fishing at Linden Bank on one of *Calypso's* first trips of the season.

On October 9th, Capt Kim Anderson took *Flying Fisher I* out for its maiden charter, christening it with a fish (caught at Linden Bank) for angler Jill Gardis that was well over the 1000lb mark. Just a few days later, at the top end of the reef on No.10 Ribbon, Capt Peter B Wright, on *Sea Baby IV*, also recorded his first grander of the season – one he estimated in the 1200lb range – for angler Matt O'Brien.

Onboard *Tradition*, Capt Tim Richardson's regular client Lydie Fayard took home the Champion Female Angler award at the Lizard Island Tournament with seven fish for the week, including two outside tournament hours.

Capt Darren 'Biggles' Haydon on *Allure* also reported some solid early fishing. While releasing some noteworthy fish on 60kg tackle, he recorded two outstanding catches for clients fishing with 24kg. An 880-pounder was caught by Billy Boyle and another of 882lb by Candace Meyer.

Candace's fish would have taken the women's world record, but after fighting it well into dark the boat knocked its tail fin, leaving the slightest damage, which would, unfortunately, rule it ineligible.

### GBR – GRANDER BARRIER REEF

As October progressed, the fishing slowed and skippers struggled to find the main body of fish. But there were also moments of brilliance that reminded us all why the Great Barrier Reef fishery is like no other place on earth – and why many anglers make the journey back year after year.



A sunset over the ocean with a wooden mast in the foreground. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The mast is dark and silhouetted against the bright sky. The water is a deep blue with whitecaps.

# *The 2008* Cairns giant black marlin *season*

To catch a black marlin of over 1000lb, there is nowhere in the world anywhere near as good as the stretch of outer reef between Cairns and Lizard Island. Kelly Dalling was there for the 2008 season and reports on how it all went down for the professional fleet.

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Capt Bill Billson continued his great run. On one of his more notable trips, 11 fish were caught in seven days, including five over 750lb. And, if you fished with Capt Craig 'Sparrow' Denham aboard *Square Bear* any time in 2008, chances are you had a trip well worth remembering.

No matter where he fished, Sparrow seemed to find them – by the end of November he had recorded 14 fish over 800lb.

Capt Chris 'Sharky' Miles, running *Mauna Kea* during 2008, was another skipper who had the numbers on his side. Meanwhile, on the original *Iona*, Capt Corey Hard was also consistently producing results for his clients.

Capt Dave Pemberton on *Kanahoe* spent his time along the middle Ribbon reefs, pulling off several nice fish. And Capt Hayden Bell on *Release* weighed a fish that went 1060lb – even after a sizeable chunk was eaten by sharks!

Capt Ross Finlayson on *Top Shot* told me a story of a client hard on his luck, who turned it around when the very first bite, on his very first trip marlin fishing, netted him a fish that dreams are made of. It was estimated to be in excess of 1100lb.

Capt Tom Francis and the team on *Ultimate Lady* didn't arrive on

the reef until late October, but made up for it with a grander black for owner Fred Lewis within a week of their grander blue (see Newslines on page 22).

### **BIG FISH HITS AND MISSES**

After another lull, the second week of November kicked into gear with a run of larger fish. But it wasn't all happy endings.

Capt Luke Fallon, aboard *Kekoa*, steered angler Jason Hessett to his first Cairns black marlin on day one (a warm-up in the 200lb range). Then, two days later, Jason put his newly acquired chair skills to the test in a mammoth seven-hour battle with a fish that Luke had waited 20 years for the opportunity to catch!

Hooking up at just after 2pm, the battle continued well into the dark. It ended in heartbreak just after 9pm when the leader snapped.

Capt Trent Vischer may regret handing over the wheel to *Iona II* owner Adam Jordan while he was laid-up in hospital. Before they left, he gave Adam strict instructions on where to fish. Adam did and came up with the goods, pulling several big fish, including one over the grander mark from the 'bus stop' – a detached pinnacle of reef at the bottom of Linden Bank. This

obviously proves that if you stop long enough at the 'bus stop', one will come along!

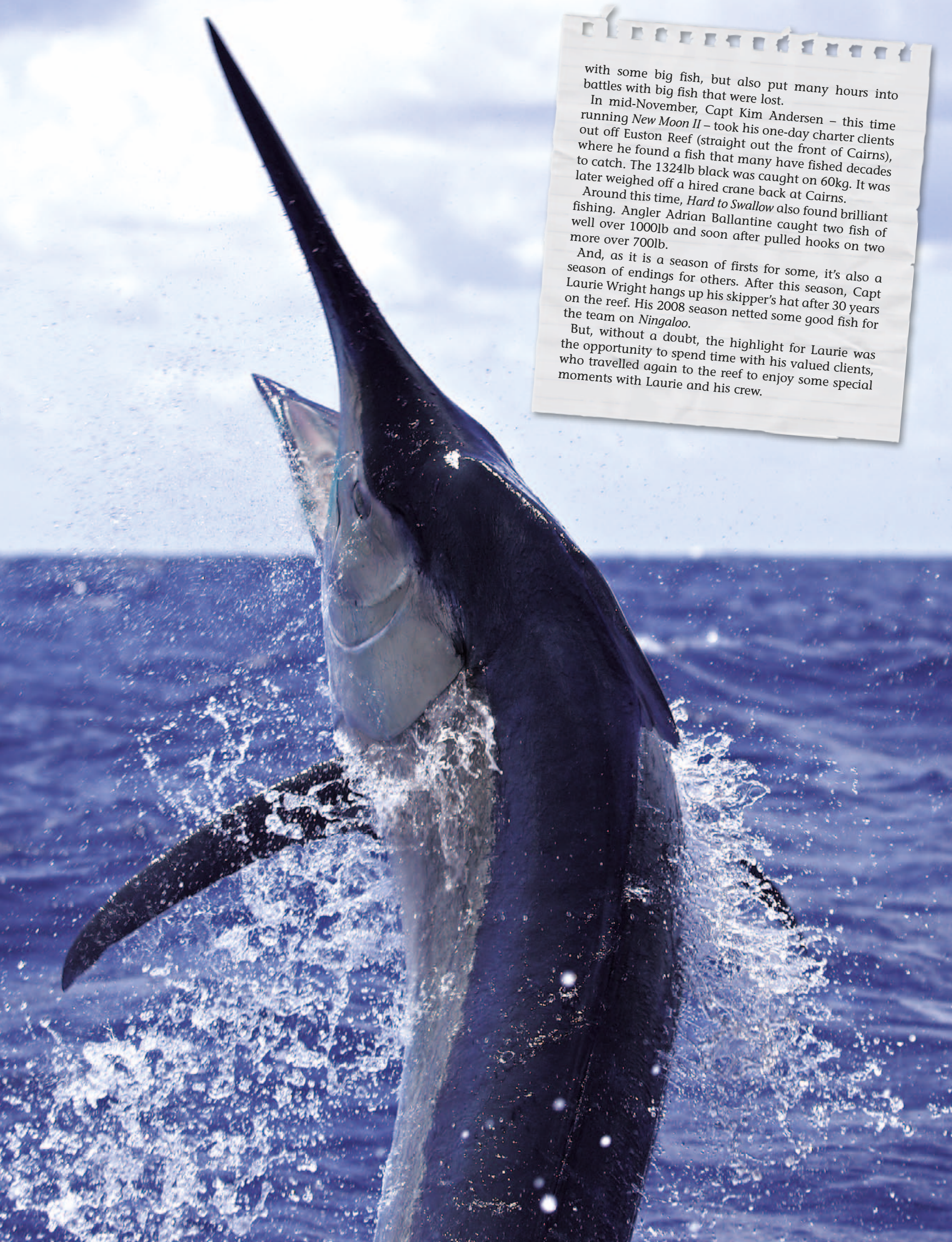
Capt Pete Roots on *Little Audrey* recounted some of his highlights, including a fish that jumped into the cockpit – only missing the angler by centimetres!

TowCam designer John Faulkner also wished he had his camera gear set up when he battled his first Cairns black marlin, onboard *Mistress*, with Capt Allan 'Tiger' Geale. His fish was around 800lb.

Capt Jim Dalling on *Reel Chase* did run his TowCam gear for the entire season and was rewarded with some spectacular bites from big fish – now captured in amazing quality on DVD. We're looking forward to watching the compilation!

Capt Jarad Weir on *Shaka* had plenty to say about the difficulty of getting good bait this season, but he can also happily report that they were able to get a marlin for every angler – and they still had a freezer full of bait left over!

Capt Ian Walker skippered his newly purchased and renamed *Phantom* (previously *Fascination III*) for his first season on the reef, and put in the hard yards. Capt Scott Nelson, skippering the brand-new Black Watch 40 *Watchdog* for its first season, christened the boat



with some big fish, but also put many hours into battles with big fish that were lost.

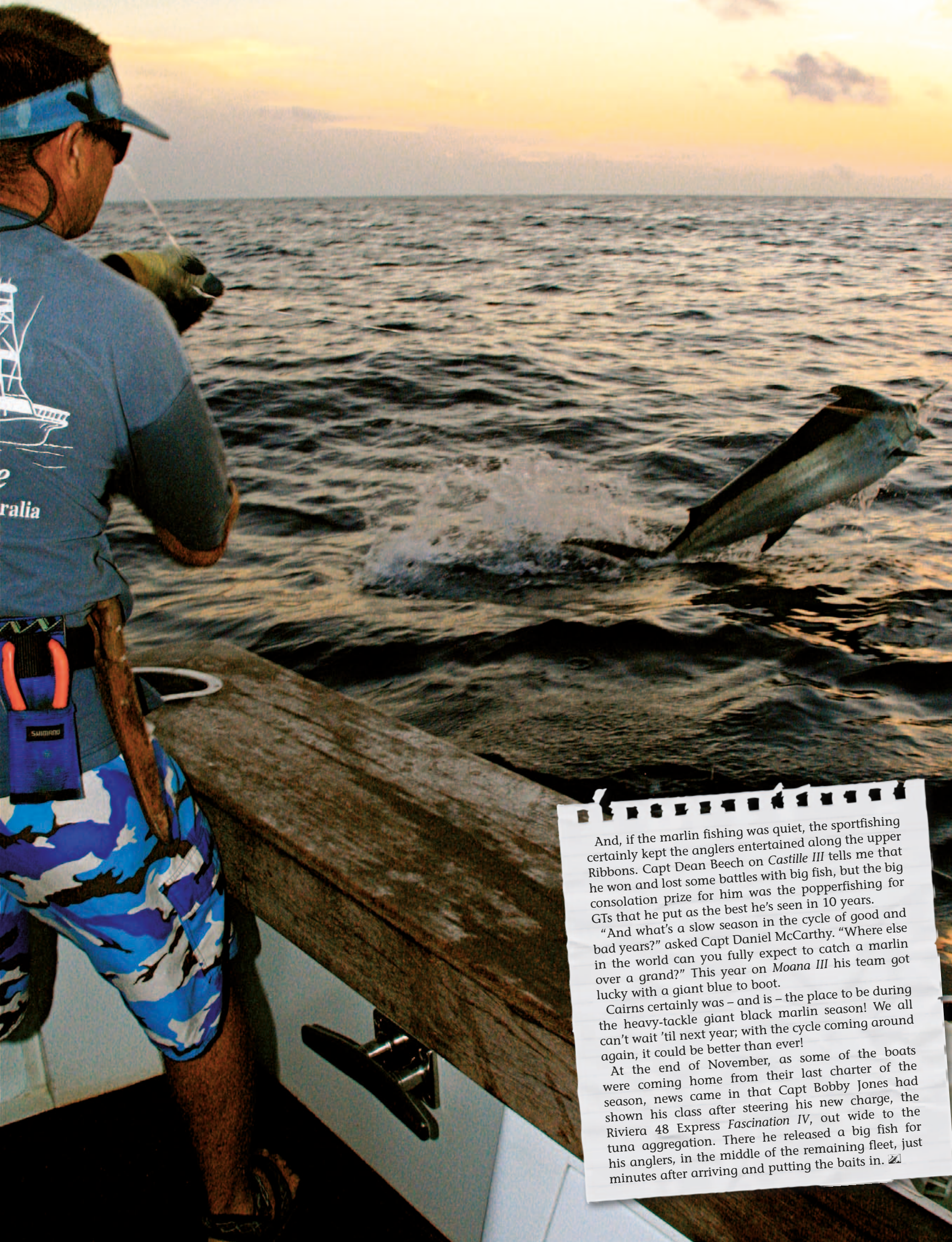
In mid-November, Capt Kim Andersen – this time running *New Moon II* – took his one-day charter clients out off Euston Reef (straight out the front of Cairns), where he found a fish that many have fished decades to catch. The 1324lb black was caught on 60kg. It was later weighed off a hired crane back at Cairns.

Around this time, *Hard to Swallow* also found brilliant fishing. Angler Adrian Ballantine caught two fish of well over 1000lb and soon after pulled hooks on two more over 700lb.

And, as it is a season of firsts for some, it's also a season of endings for others. After this season, Capt Laurie Wright hangs up his skipper's hat after 30 years on the reef. His 2008 season netted some good fish for the team on *Ningaloo*.

But, without a doubt, the highlight for Laurie was the opportunity to spend time with his valued clients, who travelled again to the reef to enjoy some special moments with Laurie and his crew.





And, if the marlin fishing was quiet, the sportfishing certainly kept the anglers entertained along the upper Ribbons. Capt Dean Beech on *Castille III* tells me that he won and lost some battles with big fish, but the big consolation prize for him was the popperfishing for GTs that he put as the best he's seen in 10 years.

"And what's a slow season in the cycle of good and bad years?" asked Capt Daniel McCarthy. "Where else in the world can you fully expect to catch a marlin over a grand?" This year on *Moana III* his team got lucky with a giant blue to boot.

Cairns certainly was – and is – the place to be during the heavy-tackle giant black marlin season! We all can't wait 'til next year; with the cycle coming around again, it could be better than ever!

At the end of November, as some of the boats were coming home from their last charter of the season, news came in that Capt Bobby Jones had shown his class after steering his new charge, the Riviera 48 Express *Fascination IV*, out wide to the tuna aggregation. There he released a big fish for his anglers, in the middle of the remaining fleet, just minutes after arriving and putting the baits in. 🎣