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TUNA AFTER DARK

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OWNIN the G NIGHT

By Captain Matt Baryshyan



We get asked all the time, "When do you sleep out there?"

My normal and truthful answer is that I don't. I rest, take a cat nap, but sleep? I can sleep all I want when I get in! When you are canyon fishing, the night is just as productive a fishing opportunity as the daytime if you are prepared with a game plan that covers a range of techniques and species that will make your canyon investment pay off.

NIGHT HOURS

On a single overnighiter, 10 out of our 22-hour trip is spent in darkness. If we troll the afternoon and again the next morning we are dividing half of our lines in the water between day and night.

The double overnighiter has 20 hours of night fishing at the minimum, and more as we start fishing in the fall. There are too many night time hours on a canyon trip to waste on a half-hearted effort!

We have all been guilty of giving night fishing a token effort. Between losing most of the crew to Morpheus, the goddess of sleep, and the rest to the old three dead stick baits and a chumming process that has three pieces of butterfish doled over the side like a weak morphine drip, no one should be surprised if they have a paltry catch to show for come morning.

On AMANDA LEE, when we are at the grounds day or night our boat is at a high stage of activity and more importantly,

readiness. We work the night shift with the same amount of energy and intensity that we do during the day.

A soft commitment to fishing the night bite will always result in an incidental catch if you are lucky and more often than not the big "goose egg." When you see a canyon boat unloading her high-hook catch or read a post of a boat that fully limited out while the rest of the fleet had a quiet weekend, you can be assured that they worked night and day to put that catch together.

The following is our multi-mode night fishing game plan that we hope will put you and your crew into a fish induced coma when you get back to the dock. Then you can sleep all you want!



Slow-trolling our night bars produced this beautiful tuna.

ON THE BALL, ANCHORED, DRIFTING or NIGHT TROLL NO, YES, YES, YES

When we prepare to night fish at the canyon, rushing to find a ball is the last thing on our minds. My first priority is to find the bait and the fish and if we were successful in catching up to the tuna on the troll in the late afternoon, we are going to hang in the area where we caught our fish. If it is calm out we will most likely run up from our last trolling set and begin a nice long drift.

If there is a sea running less than a third of our beam we will drift with a chute rigged short to our breast cleat to keep the boat steady beam to the sea.

Anything more than a sea over four feet, we will anchor up once we have found the bait and the fish and we do this by slow trolling our Night Bars.

This lure is a traditional trolling bar with in-line light stick holders dispersed inside the shell squids giving the lure a bio-luminescent look that is deadly. We run two bars

70 feet back with our underwater lights on, lighting up the wake. While we are looking for the bait and fish, with this system, we are actually fishing. The strike is always unexpected in the dark, and we get some weird looks from the other boats as we troll by them, but it really gets us located on the fish and once we have found a good concentration of them and the bait, we anchor up for the night.

DROPPING THE HOOK

On AMANDA LEE we carry a little less than a mile of anchor line that has 45 feet of chain attached to the best cheap anchor we can find. The line is carried on the bow in baskets 600 feet in each and the remainder down in the anchor locker. We can easily anchor with this system in up to 800 feet of water. The best part is that we will be anchoring on the fish not hooked up to a ball where we hope the fish are and where we hope all night that the lobsterman is not in the neighborhood. There is nothing worse than being in the middle of a

hot bite with a good sea running when you suddenly have to get off the ball because the landlord showed up. I lobstered my way through college and have a healthy respect for the lobstering trade. It is tough, brutish work and while my little boat may not have an affect on the man's gear, the guy in the 54 Bertram next to me is going to ruin that lobsterman's set and thoroughly piss him off for the rest of us. Now when I see him coming while I am happily working a fish, I take great comfort in that I am my own man out there and those fish under my keel are AMANDA LEE fish!

A FEW TIPS ON ANCHORING

1. Do not use a windlass. Even a free-drop will not be able to drop down with the control that is needed to be just the right speed and vertical enough for you to get caught.
2. Send one or two men up to the bow with flotation suspenders on, no excuses, and a third man in the cockpit with a PFD and a throw line watching. If you don't have the third man just send one man forward keeping one aft watching with the PDE.
3. Make sure the anchor is facing with the flukes pointed towards the bow then drop the anchor carefully over straight down. I say this only because I have been on enough boats out there that in haste, a fouled anchor is set out and no one can understand why you can't hold bottom. You as the captain have to make sure the boat is kept stationary at this time not being forward of the anchor line or sliding back. When the anchor reaches the bot-

tom, let the boat set slowly being careful not to let her get beam to the sea or you will never catch. Remember, take your time and work slowly.

4. You now need to let at least one and a half times the amount of line that you just set over the side so it will take at least the same amount of time that it did for you to drop the anchor to the bottom initially.

5. You will be down to the last third of your line when you will feel a solid hook-up with the anchor.

Again, work methodically, snug her up and you should be home for the night. Trust me, it feels great being on your own gear for the night and not trespassing on someone else's! Oh and lastly, CHAIN,

CHAIN, CHAIN! We use 45 feet of chain on our anchor and it is the key to keeping the anchor caught in that great a depth.

CREATING AN EVENT A FORK LIFT OF BAIT

Our bait order for a single overnigher consists of the following; four flats of butterfish, two flats of herring and two flats of sardines. We also carry at least eight large trolling squids, two cans of mackerel chum to get the baitfish and squid around the boat to jump start the slick, and at least 40 pounds of flash whether it is spearing or peanut bunker and most of the time we are taking at least a couple hundred pounds of peanut bunker that we net before the trip, and that's for a single overnigher!

Am I certifiable? Maybe, but I'm

not crazy enough to think that three little chunks of butterfish doled over the side occasionally is going to be enough to attract, let alone hold, a school of yellowfin tuna! Our underwater lights are strong and create a wide enough arc that the bait and squid stay with us and provide a live element to our slick all night. Yellowfin tuna, unlike the bluefin who feed in an echelon are swarm, frenzy feeders, and trust me, no self respecting swarm of yellowfin gets excited with three pieces of butterfish. We throw 10 to 15 chunks over at a time, and we mix it up with a scoop of peanut bunker mixed in. With a gallon of water in a bucket, we spray it over the side to make a rain bait sound. We even use underwater calls made from coconut hulls that we saw on the Discovery

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Channel to give our total presentation the sound of a school of fish being frenzied. Once we hook up, we double the chumming quantity and frequency: basically going into a frenzy ourselves so the fish stay with us until we fill our limit. You can never have too much bait and you will never over feed a yellowfin tuna. Create an event of sight, sound, scent, and plenty of food then prepare to get busy!

TACKLE

We have a full cadre of committed chunking and jigging tackle rigged and ready to go into the water when we transition from the troll to the chunk. We keep our trolling rods set up for trolling and our chunking rods set up for chunking. Because we set up this way we save at least 30 minutes of transition time from the troll to the chunk and from the chunk to the

troll. Having the extra rods never hurts especially when you are 100 miles at sea with no tackle shops. Just have a place to safely stow them out of the way. Having the trolling and chunking rods committed really is a great thing when you make the change from night to day or day to night fishing. Just one less thing to do when that sixth Red Bull hasn't kicked in yet. Our rods are a combination of Seeker and Reddington E glass hybrid standup rods which means they are 6 1/2' which gives us the ability to keep the lines out of the screws when chunking. We use Penn 50 TW and the new Shimano two speed TLD 50's that we really like for chunking because they are lighter than the Penn. For line we have been really impressed with the Berkley Big Game Ocean Blue 80-pound test which is very soft and strong and not horribly expensive. I

can spool two 50 TW'S for \$34.00, less than the cost of one 50 yard spool of fluorocarbon. What can I say! Despite the opinions of my crew, I'm not cheap, just a cautious shopper when it comes to buying the best gear I can for my boat without going broke in the process.

ENERGIZE ME

We always have a hot, large thermos of Costa Rican coffee that we stock up on when we are down there. This rich brew would have even kept Rip Van Winkle up if he had a cup. We have a big basket of energy bars, Snickers and a cooler of Red Bulls. Obsessed? Maybe, but I can go to the best spas in the world and sleep to my heart's content for the couple grand that we spend going to the canyon. In the end, sleeping on a small boat in the middle of the Atlantic with the biggest baddest fish in the ocean

just a few feet under my keel seems to me to be a terrible waste of time!

SETTING THE TABLE

Ok, the hooks down and now we are ready to punch in on the night shift. The first thing that we do after we put a mackerel chum bag over to jump start the slick is to set out our sword rigs. We use our Chunkin Trolley that consists of a trolley line that has two release clips on it and the rig goes from the cockpit to our pulpit via a pulley arrangement. With this rig we are able to spread out our baits safely utilizing the entire length of the boat without ourselves having to go to the bow at night to do it.

We rig our sword baits as follows: We use a traditional three fathom rig just like the longliners use with a 200-pound test Lindgren Pitman Prime Line High Stretch, high abrasion resistance leader with stainless crimps and loop protectors made up with a Lindgren Pitman 9/0 black Korean offset sword hook. We bait this rig with an extra large ilex squid that has an in-line light stick rigged in the mantle of the squid.

We stitch the holder to the leader so the hook placement is mid range down the tentacles. The activated glow stick inside the squid works beautifully giving the dead bait a live bio-luminescent look. We also rig a Lindgren Pitman Diamond light six feet down from the swivel or 10 feet ahead of the bait.

The Diamond lights are great. They are water activated and have a 250-hour-life. When you are finished fishing with them just rinse



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The chunk and trolley allows us to safely space our lines so we can fish six bait lines on our 28-foot boat.

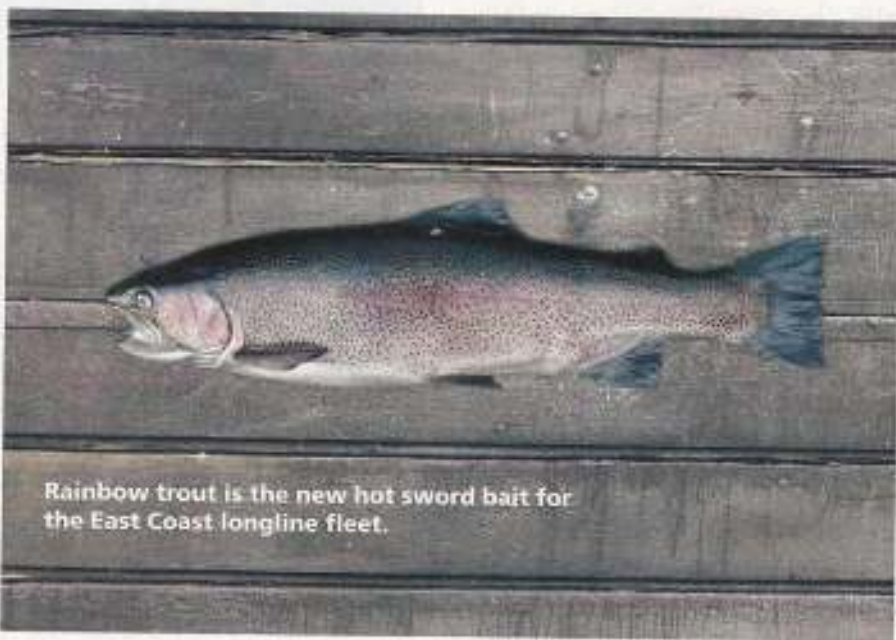


them with fresh water and dry them off. They will deactivate and be ready for the next night of fishing. The battery operated lanterns are \$50.00 and at that price it really hurts when you lose one. The Diamond lights, in my opinion, are every bit as good and they are only \$11.00 a piece. The 250-hour life is enough for a season of night fishing in the canyon for most of us. I bought eight of them so for less than the price of two lanterns I am well stocked in the light department. Hint on colors: Purple is the new green!

This leader is weighted according to the conditions and our first rig is lowered to our deepest set of 300 feet and is tied off at that depth to a helium quality fluorescent balloon that we drop a two inch activated light stick into. We blow up the balloon and tie it off snugly at the depth we want. The light stick inside brightly lights up the bal-

loon and it is set out from the boat roughly 100 feet. The running line is clipped onto the release clip of the trolley and sent 12 feet up towards the bow. Our next sword bait is a large brine prepared rainbow trout that is tandem hook rigged with a hook through the bottom of the jaw up through the top of the nostril and the second

hook is on a 240-pound test hard wire leader that is haywire twisted off the eye of the first hook and run along the flank of the trout where it is stitched in two places, once under the throatlatch and the second through the eye of the hook under the belly of the trout. Ok, now you can all say it at once—TROUT?



Rainbow trout is the new hot sword bait for the East Coast longline fleet.

That's right, TROUT. My son, Matthew is my mate and an aquaculture student at URI. During one of his aquaculture field classes he visited a large trout raising operation near his school. He asked one of the managers who were their biggest customers. He replied without hesitation. If it wasn't for the longliners they would be in financial trouble. Needless to say, brined rainbow trout is now a popular menu item on the

AMANDA LEE.

You learn something new every day. It's a real pleasure for a father to actually learn from his son the different fish behaviors and commercial fishing methods. My son tells me that the sustainability of the world's oceans is in trouble. They will fail to be a viable source of food within the next 20 years. A combination of open water aquaculture and enforceable, borderless management with every nation seriously buying into a workable, practical plan is the only answer. Sorry for the digression, but there is a reason why we are going fur-

ther and further to catch the fish that we are obsessed with—and it is not our addiction to diesel fumes!

Anyway, back to the trout! The trout is placed at 190 feet or what we try to do is get that bait at least 80 feet below the thermocline. This bait is also lanterned, dropped and tied off to another lit balloon of a different color and sent out away from the boat 80 feet where it is clipped to the second release clip. Then the entire works of the two sword rigs are sent out to the bow completely rigged and fishing properly totally away from our working and jigging lines. We put the two sword rods up on the tower reeled up tight to the clips with a 7-pound drag setting depending on whether we are drifting or anchored.

On a calm night I love to sit up there looking at the stars, watching the lines and the activity in the cockpit. Occasionally, we will put one of these lines out as a shark line with a 12-foot 240-pound test wire leader baited

with a whole mahi or bluefish and the hook tipped with a large illex squid.

We then prepare our tuna lines which consists of two dead-stick rods baited with a live squid that we catch or a nice sardine or butterfish that we send down to just above the thermocline or set to the depth of the bait and fish readings that we see on our machine. We then set up two more bait rods that are lightly weighted with rubber core sinkers and worked up and down and out with our chum. We position one man between the working lines and he is kept busy chumming and working the lines.

Lastly, we have two light roller jigging rods rigged with 80-pound test braid that are spooled on Saltstest reels with a top shot of 30 feet of 80-pound test fluorocarbon. On our two jigging rods we have crimped to the fluoro our new TGT Tuna Luna lures which is an anchoveta shaped jig, and a squid shaped jig that are both rigged tandem hook style. The lures are unique in that they have a chamber in the middle of the lure that you load with a light stick.

We work the lures slowly yo-yo style or left in the holders. The squid lure is white with a red hoochie skirt that masks the hooks and is lit with a pink, yellow or green light stick. We christened the prototype lure last year and had our best night of tuna fishing catching 16 fish on the jig and only two on the bait. This year we are hoping for a much better season and can't wait to give these lures a real work out.

When our night system is put into

Our new Tuna Luna lures with inline light stick chambers were the most effective means of catching tuna at night for us last year.



motion it gives new meaning to the word fishing machine. There is a maximum effort going on that is in stark contrast to the passive incidental style of fishing that we all have been guilty surrendering to after a full day of trolling and running hard. I'm not saying that this hardcore aggressive game plan is for everyone, but for us it works.

So there you have it: sword rigs, dead stick rigs, working bait rigs, Tuna Luna jigs with light chambers being worked up and down. All this and chum being poured over the side like a dragger with a hole in his net. We will catch whatever is out there with this method because there is enough of an event going on around our boat. Our crew is working and we are confident enough in our process that we will get the fish started and more importantly that we will hold them. The difference between having a flurry of runs and a loaded boat come morning is the crew's ability to keep baits in the water and not to lose any fish as a lost fish often takes the swarm with him, and once again you need to have a constant very heavy hand on the chum ladle.

Too much? Life is never too much, and at the end of our days we will be regretting that it was not enough. Certainly, not having enough time to sleep will never be what you wished you had more of.

The next time you go to your fish market and see an out of stock sign on the rainbow trout tank, it's only us on the AMANDA LEE scoring some swordfish bait! We'll see you out there and hope you and your crew OWN THE NIGHT! 🐟

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MATT BARYSHYAN

Captain Matt Baryshyan has been fishing Offshore since 1976. His bluewater adventures have taken him from Wedgeport, Nova Scotia to Costa Rica, but there is nothing like the rich canyon waters off the East Coast when it comes to the big in big game fishing for Captain Matt and the crew of the AMANDA LEE. Capt. Matt has written two books; *Snow Boat and Canyon!* The log of the AMANDA LEE as well as numerous fishing articles. Capt Matt owns and operates Amanda Lee Sport Fishing Adventures llc.

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