

“SARASOTA FISHING REPORT”

by Chase Klinesteker



Captain Jack Ryan with nice Sheepshead

On Tuesday **February 20, 2007** I went fishing in the **Gulf of Mexico** out of **Sarasota, Florida** with **Captain Jack Ryan**. It was a **memorable trip**, but it **didn't** seem to **start out that way**. The **3 previous days** were the **coldest so far this year in the area** with **two frosts**, **highs below 60 degrees**, and a **storm with winds up to 43 mph**. My desire was to get out and **try walking Spoonplugs on the structures and reefs in the Gulf**, but the **weather did not** seem to be **cooperating**. Captain Jack is the only professional fishing guide I know that **regularly uses Spoonplugs** to catch fish for his clients. He has **over 30 years of experience**, **gives seminars**, and has an **excellent reputation among his peers**. At one time he had invited Buck Perry to join him in fishing the area, but it didn't work out. A few years back, Sandra and I **had fished with him** and we caught several species of saltwater fish trolling 500s and 400s **in shallow Sarasota Bay**. As we headed out, I was **cautioned** that we **likely would not be fishing the Gulf due to the weather**, so we **started trolling** for Ladyfish spotted surfacing adjacent to the channels **in the bay**. **No fish** were caught there, which seemed to **reflect the severe cold front, sunny skies, and shallow water conditions**. The **weather seemed to be improving with calm wind and warming temperatures**. Captain Jack then said we could go out and **fish the Gulf** if I wanted, and I **jumped at the chance**.

The boat was a very comfortable 19 foot fiberglass open boat with a center console and canopy. **A 250hp 4 stroke motor** got us up on plane quickly and **cruised at 35 mph**. This was important since **it was 8 miles to the open Gulf** and we went out about **12 miles**. The Gulf in this area has a **very gradual depth increase**. At **12 miles out** we were still only in **40 feet of water**. Captain Jack had **5 or 6 manmade reefs** he wanted to fish which were **fairly small rock piles dumped out there in the past**. They were from **30-60 feet in**

diameter, stuck up above the bottom **2-5 feet**, and were **covered** with scattered **short weeds**. Where the weeds didn't grow, the bottom is **hard sand**, and a **walking lure worked surprisingly well**. One "reef" was a **120 foot long sunken barge**. He uses both **Loran and GPS to locate them** in this vast expanse. We began trolling the **first reef in 21 feet of water** with rocks and weeds to 19 feet. The rods available were **7 foot medium heavy Saint Croix spinning rods** with high quality spinning reels spooled with **15 pound Power-Pro line**. Starting the trolling with a **#700 Spoonplug on straight line passes across the reef**, I was somewhat **skeptical** as to how these tools would handle a larger bottom walking lure, but they **did fairly well**. The longer rods were **more tiring** than a Spoonplugging rod due to the greater leverage, and the **thin line did not allow as exact depth control as with No-Bo line** and its greater diameter. This second factor became more prominent as we fished deeper water, with the **lure continuing to walk the bottom even when a large amount of line was taken in**. Estimating **line length** was also a **challenge** without a level wind. **Despite all this**, we managed to **fish 5 structures** in the Gulf. The **deepest reef was in 40 feet** of water and we worked the bottom there with an **800 Spoonplug and very long lines**. Yes, **I did lose one #800 on the rocks**, and we hung weeds several times, but **that is structure fishing**, and more accurate depth control could have lessened even that.

Unfortunately, the **severe weather change** had left the **fish extremely inactive** and a **walking lure would not trigger strikes**, so **Captain Jack brought out the live bait**, 4-6 inch **shrimp**. These were fished on a **good sized hook** and a **1 ounce sliding sinker** lowered to the bottom. **Precise anchoring** of the boat was **critical**, and he would make several passes over the reef watching the depth sounder to determine the exact spot. Once determined, he would **drop a marker where he wanted the boat to be** when anchored, then go back and anchor. This is exactly **what Terry O'Malley recommends** when we anchor. In this manner **we caught several nice fish on live bait**, including **sheepshead and mangrove snapper**. Buck Perry mentions in his book (pg 129) that he classifies lures into 2 groups 1) **Live Bait**, and 2) **Artificials**, and that **each has a role** to play in fishing. Both may be necessary at certain times and under certain conditions.

Captain Jack Ryan is a successful fishing guide because he **knows the structure where he fishes**, and he **understands the importance of depth and speed in lure presentation**. Anyone visiting the Sarasota area might want to contact him for offshore or Sarasota Bay trips. His website is: seadogfishing.com.



Moving around Sarasota Bay