

“OCEAN SPOONPLUGGING”

By Chase Klinesteker



Grouper

On **February 21, 2012** while on vacation in **Sarasota Florida**, Bob Dykhouse and I took a **chartered fishing trip** out in the Gulf with **Captain Jack Ryan**. We left from CBs' Marina on Siesta Key and traveled 7 miles to get out to the Gulf of Mexico. "Captain Jack" is **no ordinary charterboat captain**. He has been a **Spoonplugger for many years**, a past member of "Spoonpluggers of America", and is devoted to Buck Perrys' guidelines for fishing success, mentioning them in many of his **fishing seminars**. Much of his outstanding reputation has been gathered from **trolling 500s' and 400s' in shallow Sarasota Bay and catching many gamefish species** with them. He **knows the bay structure very well**. This time, however, **I requested we go fishing in the Gulf**. Although we only **fished 2 structures** on this 6 hour charter, **he has hundreds of them on his GPS**. I asked him **how he got that many**, and he explained that in the past, he and his son **went scuba diving in the Gulf** out of Sarasota every weekend for about 15 years **to map and pinpoint every one**. Wow, if that isn't the dedication of a real Spoonplugger, nothing is!

The **day started** with a fairly good breeze blowing off the land, sunny skies, and a 20 degrees temperature drop from the day before (to 51 degrees), a **classic cold front situation**. The **first spot** we stopped at was a **breakline and bottom change structure in 31 feet of water, about 2 ½ miles out**. If the wave height

increased as we fished, we planned to return to Sarasota Bay and fish the shallows. Captain Jacks' **boat is a 25 foot Mako, fiberglass, open, center console rig with a 250 horse Yamaha**. It is **fast and seaworthy**, but the open Gulf can be treacherous, so we played it cautiously. After pinpointing the structure, we **anchored and fished live bait (3-5 inch shrimp)** under the boat with **medium weight spinning outfits, circle hooks, and ¼ to ½ ounce slip sinkers**. It is **the law that circle hooks be used on live bait** when fishing the Gulf. (Before some of you Spoonpluggers begin wondering, just re-read Buck Perrys' material on live bait and cold fronts in the "Green Book"!) The line used was **15 pound braid and a section of 25 pound mono leader**. This allowed for exciting action, but could have been heftier for **some of the fish we hooked but never saw**. The **action was pretty well continuous**, and, as the wind and waves subsided, **Captain Jack recommended that we go another 5 ½ miles out to a second spot**. This structure was **in 42 feet of water** and consisted of **man-made reef balls and dumped remains of old culverts**. He uses a **floating marker to pinpoint the structure**, then goes **upwind and drops anchor, releasing enough rope to accurately position** the boat over the reef for fishing. **I remember being taught to do this** for a casting position by **Terry O'Malley several years ago**. Within seconds we were **again getting bites and landing fish!** In the vast expanse of the Gulf, **this would not be possible without a GPS, Captain Jacks' Spoonplugging knowledge, and his extensive structure research**.

As for the **results, we landed around 60 fish**, with **4 or 5 times as many "bites"** as fish landed. The most incredible part was that **we landed 14 species of saltwater fish that morning**, a real educational experience! They included **Spanish Mackerel, King Mackerel, Key West Grunt, Southern Flounder, Sheepshead, Lizzardfish, Spottail Pinfish, Red Grouper, Gag Grouper, Sting Ray, Porgy, Puffer, Sand Perch, and Triggerfish**. The **largest fish landed was a sting ray about 3 feet long**, although we all lost large fish that we could not bring up. The stingray was released masterfully by Captain Jack using a **wire hook remover designed for circlehooks without even touching the fish** (you don't want to tail-land these guys!). We kept mostly **sheepshead and flounder for some filets** and returned the rest to the water. A couple of nice Groupers were caught, but their season was closed. The **puffers** were the most **interesting**. They would **gulp in air** to become **2-3 times their normal size**, but, like a balloon, **when thrown back, would release all that air before they hit the water!** I enjoy casting **bladebaits**, and asked if it was OK if I use some that I had brought along. Captain Jack was open to that and **set me up with an appropriate spinning rod**. A couple of years ago, I had tried them in the Gulf with little results when bait was producing. **This time both bait and bladebaits produced**. They almost were tagged as a **"Lizzardfish lure"** (a skinny, ugly, inedible bottomfish) until they **started catching other species also by increasing the speed** and keeping them off the bottom more. Just **another reminder to always check your depths and speeds!**

This turned out to be **one of the most enjoyable and educational saltwater fishing trips I have ever had**. Captain Jack returned us to CBs' Marina and fileted out the fish we kept to take home. I mentioned that **he might want to look into using the larger Spoonplugs on the troll out in the ocean**. They can be very effective tools to get better speed and depth control for larger fish in deeper water. Also, **using them with 3-way rigs can bring other lures deeper**. Besides that, **the new large JB-1 and JB-2 lures would be ideal for better sized fish and extreme depths that are found in the ocean**. Captain Jack sounded interested in these concepts and will look into them and report back later. If you are ever in the Sarasota, Florida area and are looking for a great charter experience, **contact him** at 941-922-7672 or check on his website at: **seadogfishing.com**.