

Born Again . . .

Downriggers!

Downriggers, as most readers are aware, have been around since fishermen started using centrepin fishing reels, and many an Alvey 925 has been converted for the task. Recently though, they've enjoyed a remarkable resurgence in popularity, due in part to braid line and new techniques combining fish finder readings with downrigger bait placement . . . with pin point accuracy. In this special report, **Andrew Hestelow** explains how it all comes together.

Many years ago I was fishing for barramundi on Bathurst Island, in the Northern Territory. My guide for the week, Brett, didn't have much formal education, but was wise to the ways of fish.

He had been brought up on a mackerel boat based in Wyndham, and had packed thousands of hours of fishing into his young life. Each morning, Brett and I would leave before dawn to fish for Spanish mackerel around the rocky headlands just offshore.

The mackerel came on the bite at first light, and disappeared about an hour after sunup. One day, I asked Brett why these big predators were so predictable, as regards their main feeding times.



Brett opened his tackle box and picked up a long minnow lure to explain. "Andy, all bait fish, no matter what type, have something in common: a dark back, blue, black or green. And a light coloured underside - silver, white, or cream. The sea birds that hunt them from the air look down from above, and find it hard to distinguish the dark backs from the dark coloured water.

"The big fish that hunt them from below look up and find it hard to distinguish their silver bellies from the bright light above.

"It's only at dawn and dusk, when the sun is at an acute angle to the water, that light reflects off the side of the bait fish, making hunting them easier. And dawn is usually better than dusk because the seas

Below Left: Fishing the Great Lakes in America for giant salmon (pictured) was the catalyst for the development of the new downrigger fishing techniques - but fishos like Andrew Hestelow came home wondering why it wouldn't work on our local species - especially kingfish.

Here: Classic set-up, trolling at approx 2.0-2.5 kn (max) with livebait - this is a deadly technique to use anywhere there is structure and baitfish activity, let alone wider out on the ocean schools around peaks, reefs and canyons.

(Note the clever depth counter on the 'rigger's boom to ensure the accurate running depth of the bait(s). Needless to say, this all takes a bit of practice to get sorted, and a very skilled crew to run tandem downriggers. Most crews are content to run 'one down and two up' as this usually generates more than enough pandemonium when the strikes occur.)

