

FISHING ADVENTURE

By SAM MOSSMAN

Taking it to

One of the good things about working at *Fishing News* is travelling the country, meeting different people, checking out their boats and (sometimes) going fishing in them.

It is generally true that characteristics of a fishery tend to affect the characteristics of the boats in a given area. For example, in an area where beach launches are required and the fishing and diving are handy to the coast, smaller pontoon boats are quite popular.

I spent the Christmas break in Hawkes Bay, the area I grew up in and where some of my family still live. For those not familiar with the region, the Bay is a large, shallow sedimentary basin, slowly deepening further offshore. There are a few reefs, mostly inshore, but in general not a great deal of structure. Five to six-metre trailer boats are commonly used, and snapper and gurnard make up a lot of the catch.

The prime honey hole in the region, however, is the Lachlan Ridge and Bank complex which runs, very roughly, in a line between the end of Mahia Peninsula and Cape Kidnappers to the south. It is a big area with depths ranging around 70-100m, and a happy hunting ground for species like groper

(hapuku), tarakihi, trumpeter, blue cod, kingfish and sometimes snapper. Although fishing there is not as fabulous as it once was – it gets a fair bit of commercial and recreational attention – it can still be pretty good.

The drawback is that it is around thirty nautical miles from the nearest port – Napier – over open, exposed water. If the weather cuts up, there is nowhere to hide; you just have to eat it and beat your way home. Consequently, if you want to fish 'The Lachlan' on a regular basis, a big boat that can handle rough conditions and rack up the sea miles is a necessity.

While such craft were a rarity in the region when I was growing up there as a boy, the development of berthage and marina facilities in Napier's Port Ahuriri over the last three decades or so has seen large recreational boats become more common in the region.

One of the bigger recreational boats based in

Napier is a 17m, 17.5-tonne alloy cat that is the personal boat of Wayne McKinley, owner and head honcho of well-known Napier-based boat builder, Senator Boats. The big boat is called, fittingly enough, *Senator*. Several years before, Wayne had shown me over her when in build; then, last year, I had a quick tour of the finished product, sitting in her new berth at the Napier Sailing Club Marina. This time round I was to experience doing what it was built for – a day's fishing at the Lachlan Banks.

The occasion was the Hawkes Bay Sportfishing Club's Opening Day Contest, and snapper, gurnard, groper, tarakihi and kingfish were the main targets. With a crew of eight – skipper Wayne, Peter Evens, Paul Farrel, Jude Wood, Geoff Roser, Matt and son Josh Grace, and me – *Senator* left port at dawn a couple of days after Christmas.

I haven't really kept up with developments at iconic Kiwi company Hamilton Jet, but they are clearly still leading the pack. The big cat was fitted with the

The big Senator proved to be an ideal boat for a trip to Hawkes Bay's Lachlan Banks.



the bank



Medium size groper, like these 10-13kg specimens make wonderful tablefish.



With a full suite of Raymarine electronics, autopilot and twin 365 Hamilton Jets pushing the big boat, the trip out to the Lachlan Banks was a breeze for owner/builder Wayne McKinley.



In 100m on braid line groper can pull a bit – especially when you hook one on your tarakihi rig.



Ledger rigs and slabs of 'couta for bait did the job.

Hamilton Blue Arrow Mouseboat control system, which, amongst other features, has a boat-shaped mouse control for low speed (under eight knots) manoeuvring. Move the mouse and the boat mimics the movement. Very cool – and effective – as I saw when Wayne moved the big craft sideways to a pier in the 'Iron Pot' to load up with ice.

Outside the heads it was grey day and sloppier than anticipated, with about two metres of confused sea, mostly out of the south.

As snapper and gurnard can be found on the sediment bottom in 30-40m depths east of Napier at this time of year, it's a handy fishery and, given the

sloppy conditions, was one that most of the smaller boats were likely to concentrate on. Only one other large craft seemed likely to make the long trip out to the Lachlan area in these conditions to target groper and tarakihi, especially as final weigh-in was at 4:30pm that afternoon.

Even in a boat as big and comfortable as *Senator*, it wasn't a pleasant trip, but at least we were warm and dry in the cat's big main cabin while still averaging about 20 knots. Not many boats could do that in the conditions encountered. But we arrived at last, and Wayne had a good look around on the Raymarine sounder before anchoring us on a likely



Wayne McKinley with a nice Lachlan groper.

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The big cat has a huge amount of cockpit space.

spot in around 90m. There was a heap of fish sign on the sounder and anticipation was high.

The advantages of the huge cockpit were immediately apparent. You could (Wayne apparently has) hold a dance in it, and there was no problem spacing out seven anglers while Wayne cooked up a big breakfast of bacon, eggs and sausages on the BBQ. The stability of the huge cat was a big

advantage in the slop, allowing cooking as well as effective fishing in the cockpit, its area supplemented by the railed boarding platform astern.

The action was on straight away, and groper came aboard regularly, ranging from pups up to prime table specimens of around 15kg. There were plenty of other fish too: tarakihi, blue cod, a trumpeter, ground sharks and barracouta – the last being a

welcome addition to the bait supply. At one stage I tried live-baiting with a small tarakihi and was nailed by a kingfish – unfortunately just a little under the club's accepted minimum of a metre in length. It and another couple of 'rats' were returned.

The groper were obviously on the hunt though. One small sea perch was hooked unnoticed on a heavy rod, and traded up the food chain when a groper took it and was hooked in turn. Also, I boated a groper and when twisting the circle hook out of the corner of its jaw, noticed the head of a fresh sea perch further down its throat – then saw the perch's gills move. I pulled the perch from the groper's mouth, dropped it over the side, and it swam away! There were no hook marks in the perch's mouth, so the groper must have eaten it immediately before taking my bait. I wonder if any of the little guy's mates believed his story when he got home?

It was all good old blood-and-guts-under-the-fingernails bottom fishing. We did use some of Black Magic's flasher rigs for the tarakihi (they caught the odd groper, too) and I once dropped an inchiku jig on a 6kg braid rig, but the resulting kingfish caused a tangle of frightening proportions, so it was back to basics.

Action was steady all day, and by two o'clock we had about 18 groper in the bin, along with 20 or so nice tarakihi and a trumpeter – a decent feed for everyone and a few to weigh for the contest. Apart from a passing container ship, we appeared to have had the Lachlans pretty much to ourselves.

In the event, the trip home was a dream.

COURTESY W

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Conditions had been improving all day and we had a stern sea all the way. I even managed a nap to make up for the early start.

After weighing a few of the better specimens back at the Sport Fishing Club's wharf, the stern's huge work-top was put to good use, with the fish broken down into fillets, heads, frames and throats for those who wanted them, and bait for the crayfish pots. The boys even managed to pick up a few groper and tarakihi prizes that night – a good end for a fishing adventure to the Lachlans in conditions that would not have been possible in a lesser boat than *Senator*. Who says size doesn't count?

A nice groper from the banks; good fighters and top eating.



The boat

Senator is an aluminium catamaran, 17m long with a 5.6m beam. She displaces 17.5 tonnes of water and is powered by twin 365 Hamilton Jet units. She carries 2800 litres of fuel in two tanks, has a maximum speed of 42 knots and cruises at anything up to 35 knots. She carries 400 litres of fresh water and has a 400-litre waste tank capacity.



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