



TECH BULLETIN

CALIFORNIA

SPOON FISHING

THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COAST

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.



BY RONNIE KOVACH

Ronnie is the founder and owner of Ronnie Kovach's Outdoor Enterprises, Inc. including: "Fishing Expeditions TV"; Radio Fishing University KRLA 870, Los Angeles; FX Radio; FX apparel; angling books and publications as well as a comprehensive fresh and saltwater seminar series. He has written five best selling books on bass, trout and saltwater fishing and has over 500 articles and columns published in outdoor magazines including Bassmaster, Bassin', Western Outdoors, Pacific Fisherman, South Coast Sportfishing, Marlin, In-Fisherman, and Big Game Journal & Saltwater Sportsman.

Metal spoons are some of the most versatile but underrated lures in the southern California saltwater angler's tackle box. Spoons are an all-season lure. They will catch everything from pelagic species such as bonito, barracuda, yellowtail and even tuna, to bottom dwellers, including almost every kind of rockfish, halibut and ling cod.

Spoons are relatively simple to use once you understand their basic design and application.

TYPES OF SALTWATER SPOONS

Luhr Jensen manufactures the most comprehensive line of saltwater spoons in the industry. These can be divided into two basic shapes: (1) wide-bodied

wobblers, and (2) narrow, slab-shaped spoons.

WIDE-BODIED MODELS

These spoons are larger versions of popular models often seen in western trout circles. The spoon most widely used for marine conditions is the ever-popular *Krocodile*[®]. Spoons of this design feature a fairly wide metal body which wobbles from side-to-side on the retrieve. This type also has terrific fluttering action, mimicking a wounded baitfish as it slowly sinks.

Other wide-bodied spoons marketed by Luhr Jensen that are suitable for southern California saltwater fishing include the *Diamond King*[™] and *Cast Champ*[™] (formerly *Mr. Champ*[®])

SLAB-SIDED MODELS

These spoons are characterized by their narrow bodies and sleek appearance. Models such as the *Crippled Herring*[®] and *Deep Stinger*[™] have little wind resistance and can be cast great distances. Slab-shaped spoons are designed to sink quickly and bounce off the bottom. However, they may also prove to be deadly as surface lures.

Let's look at the major gamefish species found off the southern California coast and how to catch them using famous Luhr Jensen spoons.

BASS

Calico and sand bass comprise an integral component of the yearly catch for sportfishing fleets in southern California. Both of these saltwater species will readily attack a shiny spoon. In the colder months, both calicos and "sandies" will be situated near the bottom structure at 60- to 90-ft. depths.

One of the best ways to reach them is with a slab-sided spoon vertically "yo-yoed" off the bottom. The trick is to make good bottom contact. Depending on wind and current, fish either a *Deep Stinger*[™] or a *Crippled Herring*[®] spoon in 1- to 3-ounce models. Watch for a sudden slack in the line as bass suspended off the bottom may strike the spoon as it is sinking.

SALT WATER SPOONS



Crippled Herring[®]



Krocodile[®]



Diamond King[™]



Cast Champ[™]



Deep Stinger[™]

Once on the bottom, use an exaggerated lift-and-drop sequence, raising and lowering your rod tip from the 3 o'clock to the 12 o'clock position. The object is to make the spoon literally "jump" off the bottom, then flutter back down imitating a dying squid, anchovy, mackerel or sardine.

For bass, use the *Deep Stinger*[™] in Luhr Jensen's #0172 Pearl/Blue Back, #0173 Pearl/Green Back or #0023 Nickel/Neon Green Stripe patterns.

In the *Crippled Herring*[®] series, the #0306 Nickel/Neon Blue Stripe and #0307 Nickel/Neon Green Stripe finishes are great for calico and sand bass.

As water temperatures warm up, switch to a subsurface cast-and-wind retrieve with a *Krocodile*[®] spoon. Depending on the size of the bass in the school, select from 5/8- to 2 1/4-oz.

models. Remember however, "big" spoons catch big fish!" Occasionally, pause during the retrieve to let the **Kroc**[®] lazily flutter down a few feet. Always be prepared for a sudden jolt as a bigger "bull" calico or sand bass will literally "inhale" this lure on the sink.

Time-proven colors for this style of saltwater bassin' are #0013 *Chrome*, #0466 *Chrome/Blue Mackerel*, #0467 *Chrome/Green Mackerel* and #0150 *Chrome/Silver Prism-Lite*[®]. The **Kroc**[®] is available in all of these finishes.

BARRACUDA

Veteran saltwater buffs in southern California have known for years that big 'cuda love a shiny spoon! Although a lot of smaller barracuda may be caught on live bait, the trophy 7- to 10-lb. "logs" are frequently taken by accomplished spoon anglers.

In the early spring, the barriers can stack up on the bottom all the way down to 120 feet. These fish will be semi-lethargic, but they will eat if a lure is placed right in front of them. Here a heavier 1 1/2- to 3-ounce spoon yo-yoed off the bottom can be deadly. The **Deep Stinger**[™], **Cast Champ**[™] and **Crippled Herring**[®] are perfect for deep water 'cuda. In addition to the patterns recommended for bass, try a **Deep Stinger**[™] in solid #0085 *White* or #0171 *Pearl/Pink Back* patterns. Barracuda are notoriously fond of white and pearl finishes.

Similarly, fish a **Crippled Herring**[®] in the #0172 *Pearl/Fluorescent Blue Back* color. This particular pattern should always be a staple in the serious 'cuda angler's arsenal.

When the barriers are up near the surface, it's hard to find a lure better than the **Kroc**[®]. The basic patterns used for saltwater bass are also perfect for barracuda. But 'cuda will also go crazy over other, more esoteric finishes in the series and these are worth adding to your spoon inventory. The #0034 *Hammered Brass/Fire Stripe* has long been a local favorite, along with the #0305 *Chrome/Flo Red Stripe*.

You also want to switch to the **Kroc**[®] with the optional single hook instead of the traditional treble. This spoon is a lot easier to remove from a toothy customer such as the barracuda.

BONITO

These powerful little members of the tuna family are readily taken on shiny spoons. "Bonies" in deep water will jump on a **Crippled Herring**[®] or **Deep Stinger**[™] yo-yoed off the bottom. These models in some variation of a chrome finish will perform admirably. Scale down in size, however, from 3/4- to 2-ounces with them.

When bonito are on the surface feed-

ing on schools of anchovies, start throwing those **Kroc**[®]. A 5/8- to 1 1/2-oz. **Kroc**[®] thrown on a light baitcasting or spinning outfit makes a potent combination. Here again, almost any finish in the series will be effective as long as it has some trace of chrome in it.

YELLOWTAIL

These fish are some of the most prized gamefish sought along the southern California and Baja coastlines. There are times, particularly when the "yellows" are feeding near the surface, that they will attack a spoon. With most specimens in the 12- to 25-lb. range, don't hesitate to throw a larger 3 1/4- to 5-oz. **Kroc**[®] on schools of boiling yellowtail. Be careful not to reel in too fast. A steady retrieve that keeps the spoon from spinning is best. The #0466 *Chrome/Blue Mackerel*, #0467 *Chrome/Green Mackerel* and #0150 *Chrome/Silver Prism-Lite*[®] finishes are favorites.

Keep in mind, the farther south you venture into Mexican waters, the larger **Kroc**[®] are preferred by big, hungry yellowtail!

Furthermore, don't overlook slow-trolling these big spoons to locate schools of "breezing" yellows. Throttle down the boat speed to a few knots and slow-troll **Krocs**[®] in yellowtail territory. The big spoons will look like errant mackerels or sardines -- prime morsels for hungry yellows!

TUNA

Yes, tuna will definitely nail a spoon on the outer banks! As the boat slides to a stop, quickly fire off a cast with either a **Kroc**[®], **Deep Stinger**[™] or **Crippled Herring**[®] spoon. Lure color isn't overly critical in this situation when fishing "the slide". Any of these Luhr Jensen spoons in a variation of a chrome finish will work fine. As the spoon sinks away from the boat, charging yellowfin, bluefin or albacore tuna may intercept it. If you don't get a bite after the spoon has sunk to roughly 90 to 150 feet, start a steady retrieve back to the surface. This drop-back technique works for albacore as well as yellow and bluefin tuna!

The offshore strike can be vicious on these lures with tuna in the 10 to 35 pound range. After you catch one on "the slide", continue to free-cast the spoons, fishing them fairly deep for the schooling tuna. Some of the larger specimens caught on a tuna trip are invariably taken by an accomplished angler fishing lures such as these spoons, on "the slide".

BOTTOM FISH

Halibut, ling cod and the myriad of shallow water rockfish found off south-

ern California are eager biters when it comes to the shiny spoon. As we mentioned with saltwater bass fishing, bottom contact will be essential when vertical spoonin' for these bottom dwellers.

The heavier 1 1/2- to 4-oz. models of **Deep Stinger**[™], **Cast Champ**[™] and **Crippled Herring**[®] spoons are excellent for this type of bottom-bouncin'. As you fish these spoons below 120 foot depths, color becomes less important to the fish. The key again, is to make solid bottom contact, keeping the spoon in the deep strike zone.

There's a special trick that's worth noting when it comes to deep water spoonin' like this. It sometimes helps to pin a strip of cut mackerel or dead squid onto one of the points of the spoon's treble hook. This adds a lot of "flavor", giving the spoon a more lifelike scent. At these greater depths, the fish rely more on smell than sight and color.

ALL SEASON SPOONS!

As you can see, Luhr Jensen spoons are truly multi-specie, all season lures. Carry an array of these various models in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors with you when fishing southern California's coastal waters. When other anglers are struggling with live bait, try these spoons! More fish and larger "jackpot" contenders are always a possibility when you start using them in the Southland.

Also remember, never add any fresh or strip bait to any of these great spoons when you are targeting surface-feeding gamefish. All are designed to provide the best action when fished "bare". Use bait "trailers" primarily when spoonin' for bottomfish, to add "flavor".

SHARP HOOKS PAY

One of the easiest things you can do to improve your fishing success is to maintain super-sharp hooks on your lures at all times. A fine-toothed file such as Luhr Jensen's **Sharp Hook File**[™] is the absolute best hook sharpening tool available. Hold the file parallel to the hook point, and with gently, one-way strokes, remove a small amount of metal on at least two sides to obtain a sticky-sharp point with a knife-like cutting edge.

Sharp Hook Files[™] come in 4-1/4" and 5-1/2" models with tang, unbreakable plastic handle or with a rubber tubing lanyard attached.

Ronnie Kovach's Fishing Expeditions
can be reached by calling
714-375-9888
or by writing
P. O. Box 3118,
Huntington Beach, CA 92605-3118.