



DROPSHOTS RODS HANDLE MEANEST KINGIES

BY CAPTAIN ASPARAGUS

I have been playing with several newish products over the last year or so, and now that the summer's fishing is pretty much over, I thought I would quickly run through some of the more prominent items I have come to admire.

I know I have already covered both the soft plastic and long jig side of things in recent issues, so I will not spend too much time going over these particularly interesting fields. Instead I will look at changes in my own attitudes to some of the more traditional tackle items we all use and abuse (if you treat your gear like I do, that is) every day.

I guess the first and most noticeable upgrade or modification to my tackle collection has been my developing love affair with a relatively new range of fishing rods, called Dropshot rods, made by Berkley. I have probably mentioned them elsewhere before, but in case I haven't, these are one sweet range of rods.

My first Dropshots were the heavyweights of the range, the 15-30kg boppers. When you first see them it's hard to believe such skinny wee poles could possibly handle such heavy duty work, as we are all used to standard "broomstick-type" rods, with heavy-duty roller tips and eyes etc for lines like 24kg and so on.

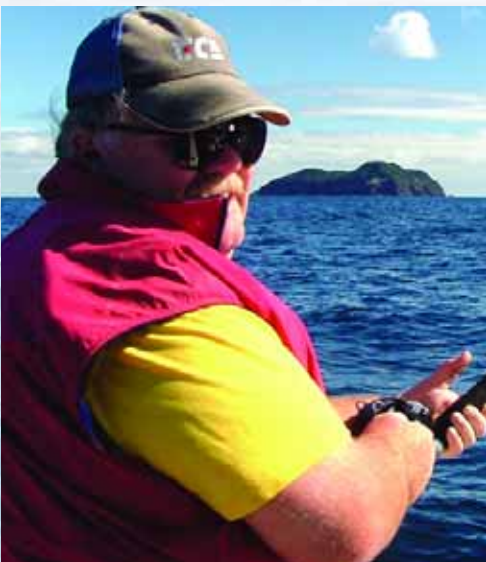
These Berkley Dropshots, however, are the scrawniest little sticks of things, and you'd swear they'd snap at a half-decent sneeze, but brother, I am here to tell ya that it ain't so.

These 15-30kg rods truly are more than able to handle such loads as demanded by the meanest hapuku. This last year I have really thrashed these rods on kingies weighing up to 35kg (80lb), hapuku and bass to 25kg and a swag of other, smaller fish.

How do they perform? In a word, magnificently. The big deal with these rods is that the rod-blank folds away to such a degree that when fully loaded up, you are just nailing the fish with a really short lever, giving you a ton more power in the lift action of the rod.

Even more importantly in some ways,

RIGHT: My new favourite baby, a Berkley Dropshot rod, an Abu t-4500 reel and 20lb Fireline, and a fish on a Gulp! 4in Pogy soft plastic lure



The Berkley Dropshot rod loaded to the max and loving it. The fish is an 80lb kingfish

with the tip section folded away so much, no matter how much the fish thrashes away, it can never get any slack line for itself to flip a hook out - something very important to consider when using non-stretch braid lines. These rods have been developed for use with lines such as these.

Once I had become sufficiently satisfied that these incredibly light rods were strong enough to handle real fish, I was happy to branch out a little into the rest of the range. As I mentioned in last issue's column, these rods, with Gulp! soft plastic lures, proved to be extremely sensitive for really light spin fishing up estuaries for small snapper, yet plenty powerful for use on light string.

The really light stuff was good, the really heavy rods were superb, so I had to try the mid-weight range. Enter my newest favourite baby, the 6-10kg Dropshot.

This rod is, as its siblings have proven to be, superb. Extremely light in weight, it is a pleasure to use this rod all day, yet it has a sufficiently grunty middle to really control a fish. I have matched it with a sweet little Abu T-4500 spin reel and 20lb Fireline to use as my open-water soft plastic set, and as it showed me recently fishing in the Colville Channel, it is a real little fish-slayer.

So, how much do I like these Dropshot rods? I now have 10 of them... that is a pretty fair endorsement of the product, I'd have to say!

The next item I have reconsidered my position on is the reels I use. I have always been a fan of the good ol' Penn Senator 9/0 and 6/0 reels (or the Daiwa Sealine 900H or 600H, which are equally as good). For handling kingies and hapuku, our usual recreational big daddies, they are now and have always been superb, reliable reels.

I have a couple of them I love, but I just don't use 'em at all any more, because I have finally accepted the advantages of smaller, equally capable reels when loaded with braid.

Smaller reels, such as the Penn 10LD or 15LD (my faves) have just as much grunt to handle big fish, and hold way over 1000m of braid on top of a half-spool of nylon. Being so much smaller and lighter, they make life far more

pleasant when using them. In fact, I would have to say the reel that truly drove home to me the advantages of smaller, lighter, yet tough and rugged reels made for braid would be my Avet LX, an American reel, around a 2/0 reel. Black Magic Tackle in New Zealand is bringing in modified, smaller Avet reels under their own brand name.

This Avet LX is a high-speed (6:1 retrieve ratio) reel with a bullet-proof aluminium body and a simply awesome drag capacity, way more than is needed to handle the 50lb braid I run on this reel. As a high-speed jig reel, it has nailed dozens of kingies and hapuku weighing over 20kg in the last

year or so, and has really had one helluva thrashing in all sorts of climates, never skipping a beat, either.

This small (it's smaller even than the Penn 10LD reel) reel has finally proven to me that I don't need a humongous reel to deal with any fish I am likely to need to control on such a set, even up to big mutha sharks and a sailfish in the Solomon Islands.

If I can get away with using a small, easy and comfortable-to-use reel such as this for all my fishing needs, why should I lumber myself with a dinosaur like the Senators?

I honestly cannot think of any rational reason, can you? Pretty much all reel manufacturers these days are concentrating more on these higher-tech, more capable and user-friendly reels, from Daiwa's Saltiga series through to the new Tica Umbawangawoo reels due out around June.

The hot new use for these lighter, faster, stronger rod and reel sets is probably jigging. I talked about this a couple of issues back, and in the months since I have had no reason to change my mind about the effectiveness of these jigs on pretty much all species of predatory fish.

Hell, I have even got snapper on these big slabs of iron now. A fast-action rod, moderately fast retrieve reel, worked in a vigorous flick-and-wind style will land you a hell of a lot of fun, especially if there are any kingfish within a mile or so of you!

However, as the nice summer weather has become a little more scarce, and I have been fishing more in sheltered waters for snapper and what have you, I have found myself having a ball playing with the other hot new product occupying the headlines in fishing magazines and websites lately - the Berkley Gulp! artificial baits. In the previous issue I told you all about the fun I had been having with the smaller versions of these lures, small crab imitations, up the estuary at Whitianga.

Since then I have been able to use these beaut fish-takers in some more open waters, like the Colville Channel and around the Mercury Islands, most recently on a fishing trip with my mate Pete MacKenzie on the boat Taiho.

On this trip I found my newest, favouritest bestest buddy, the Gulp! White Pogy. Using this lure in the same way as I would a straylined pilchard, I scored fish after fish, and nice 2.5kg snapper at that, and more interestingly, I was out-catching the guys using normal cut baits of squid and kahawai when anchored one evening on the southern end of Great Mercury Island.

I guess if you need know, this is how I had the Pogys rigged. I used a trace of some 7ft or so of 20lb Vanish fluorocarbon trace (Man, that stuff is tough. Extreme abrasion resistance, just awesome stuff to use. Snapper teeth didn't bother it, and rubbing over rocks held no worries. I was very impressed!)

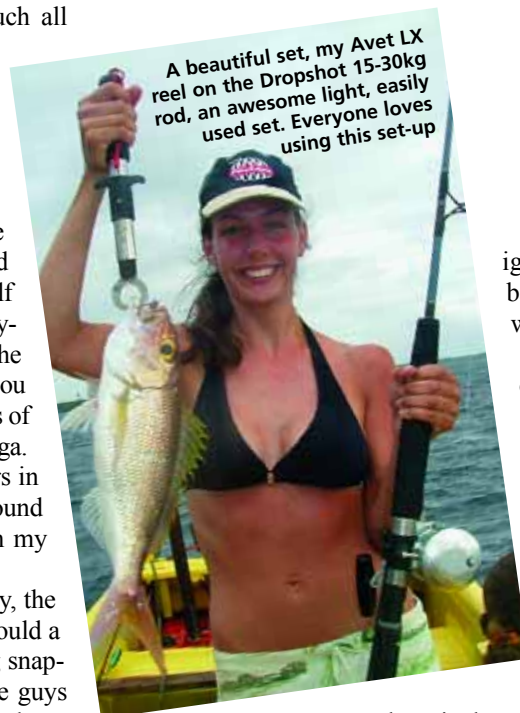
Mid-length I had a small swivel, with a tiny 1/8th oz ball sinker above it. This sinker was just enough to help pull the bait, the 4 White Pogy, down through the slow current behind the boat.

The last metre or so of the 20lb trace was connected to a single 3/0 octopus-style hook, no big deal really, just a conventional light strayline rig. I had the 4 Pogy threaded on this single hook, which went in through the nose of the bait, out just behind the head along the "spine" of the Pogy, and then back in and rolled through, to finally sit with the hook exposed pretty much smack in the middle of the fish's back. The high-density, Gulp! bait held the hook perfectly and solidly, with at least a centimetre of the hook fully exposed, ready to nail any fish foolish enough to swallow this tempting morsel.

We could see this rigged bait just sitting in the water behind the boat, swimming very enticingly in the easy, slow current - very sexy. Cast out to the back of the berley trail (as was everyone else's baits), and left to slowly waft and wiggle its way down into the 20m water. The snapper were just swooping in on the bait,



Some of the best fun when fishing is seeing children get into it. This light 2-4kg Dropshot rod and 10lb line sorted out young Jack (from Ireland) with his biggest ever fish



A beautiful set, my Avet LX reel on the Dropshot 15-30kg rod, an awesome light, easily used set. Everyone loves using this set-up

ignoring the cut, natural baits of me mates. I love it when that happens!

Isn't it nice to be able to demonstrably say, "I told you so!" when boating your third nice fish in a row while they are just pulling in stripped hooks and washed-out baits. Damn, it's so sad!

I guess the big difference between these Gulp! baits and all the other soft plastic baits

out there is that the fish actually enjoy eating them. Smaller fish will strip the baits down to the bare hook bite by bite, whereas with your normal, oil-based soft plastic lures they take one bite and run for the hills, presumably spitting and spluttering all the way. Buy some, try some, see what you think.

Matched with the 6-10kg Dropshot rod and the high performance Abu T-4500 reel loaded with Fireline, I really had the ideal inshore set-up. Again, it was a light, easily handled rod and reel set-up, with more than enough grunt to handle some pretty decent fish, and more than enough line capacity, thanks to the tiny line diameter of the Fireline, to reach, fight and land any fish in even moderately deep water.

Using these new toys has seen me move away from my former, standard-style rigs. The days of the bulky, solid old reels have gone the way of the dodo, I suspect, along with the need for the heavy-duty stand-up semi-game rods they needed. It has made fighting fish and handling gear all day a way nicer experience.

To regress a little, what led to this whole story was overhearing a conversation in a sports shop the other day, when a local "expert" was holding forth about how the only reel you really need was the Senator 9/0 for serious fishing, all other options being just "yuppie toys." His comments made me just walk away, shaking my head. If only he had tried something new, surely he would soon change his tune, too. I certainly have. How about you?