

Sailing to big fish adventures

"On our best day at Cape Verde we released five blues from five strikes."

action. A 30-knot breeze slammed into our faces as we left the marina, which made conditions far from perfect for heavy-tackle stand-up, although the catamaran is extremely stable when trolling and fishing in cross-wind.

While most boats took shelter behind the island, we managed to fish out in the rough, along with a 56 Hatteras and a couple of others. Within an hour we saw two boats hook-up and fight fish. And then it was our turn.

From out of nowhere, a nice blue suddenly appeared and crashed a lure, giving us our first Canary blue – although we had to work for it in 39-knots of wind! By the end of the day we'd raised 10, hooked six – including a double-header – and released two.

We were pretty happy with ourselves considering the conditions, but our greatest excitement was that the yacht had proven to be just as capable of raising fish as any normal big-game boat. One of my main concerns with this venture was whether a sailing catamaran slicing easy through the water with small engines would have sufficient sound and presence to raise marlin. On this day I received an emphatic answer that removed any doubts, and it was a definite YES!

We were a little unhappy that we'd only released two out of the 10 marlin seen, but when we returned to the marina that evening we found to our great surprise that no-one else had scored any fish at all.

In fact, as it turned out, we were the highest-scoring boat on three out of the five days we fished off the Canaries – and we were more than happy!

With renewed confidence, we set sail for Cape Verde, a small nation of volcanic islands off the north-west coast of Africa.

CAPE VERDE

"Without a doubt, Cape Verde is one of the best places in the world for catching blue marlin! Although you might find greater numbers of blues on the FADs off Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, they are mostly small fish up to 150kg. And while Ascension Island is hard to beat for the biggest blue marlin, Cape Verde offers the best combination of both large sizes and plentiful numbers of blues.

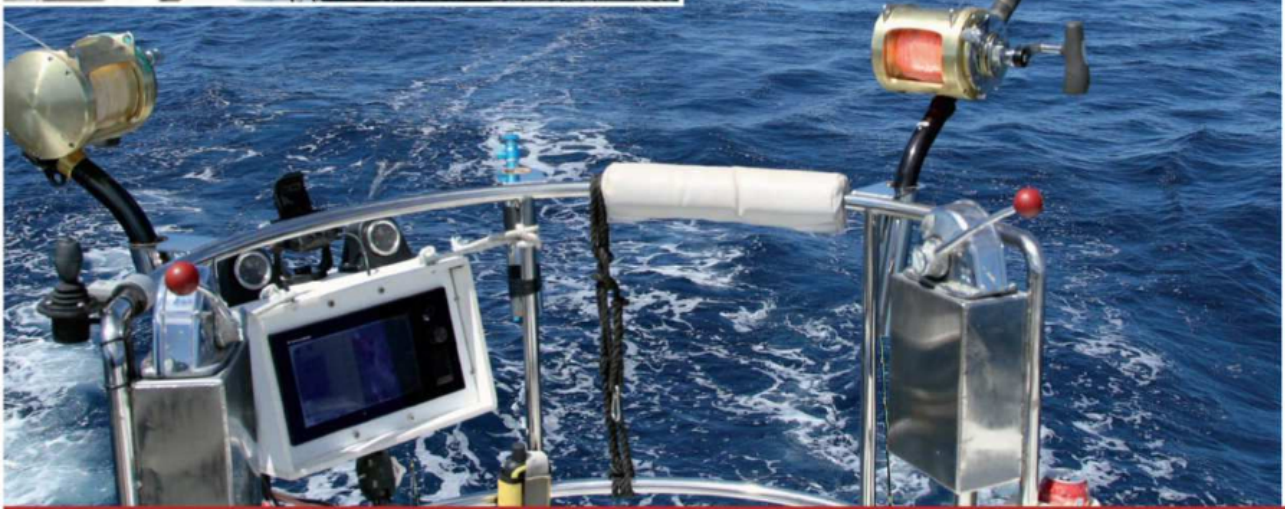
The main season here runs from April until the end of June, but you'll still find some blues here all-year-round. The average Cape Verde blue is about 150kg, but with plenty between 225 and 350kg. Almost every year there is at least one grander blue weighed among the 20 boats in the fleet, and a couple of seasons ago, the visiting American 24m Garlington *Dreamin On* weighed a 568.8kg (1254lb) blue. The region also produces very nice yellowfin tuna occasionally.

To be back in Cape Verde, this time aboard *Ocean Hunter*, was very exciting. Hannes Ribbner from Sweden was our deckie, assisted by various other guests that came and went throughout the voyage. Last season started a little slow – for us included – but after only a few days we had a massive fish appear in the spread and crash the short-left lure. We were trolling the calm waters in the lee of Santo Antao at the time, so it was incredibly spectacular to watch the more than 350kg marlin greyhound across the mirror-like ocean surface.

Down in *Offshore Hunter*'s starboard cockpit, Morten (with rod) says goodbye to yet another blue marlin.



The upper helm station gives Morten an excellent view over the fishing deck and twin cockpits below, as well as full control of the boat and the teaser rods.



We brought in the other rods at lightning speed and started to back-down on the fish. Already, several hundred metres of 60kg line snaked across the marlin's foaming track, but we remained in control and when I pushed the engines to max-revs we were on top of the fish after 15 minutes. Another 10 minutes of manoeuvring and we had the magnificent fish released and back on its way. It was probably the biggest marlin ever caught from a sailboat – more than enough justification for hearty celebrations back in the bar that night!

FRUSTRATION & ELATION

"Throughout the season we enjoyed many fish and lots of great experiences, but there is one particularly difficult fish that sticks in my mind. It first appeared fully lit-up behind the shotgun lure. It then switched to inspect both outrigger lures before coming in to check the short-corner lures. Having refused every lure in the spread, the marlin ended up just three metres behind the platform, where we tried pitching it everything we had before watching it slowly fade off into the blue. It was a frustrating encounter, but still amazing to see!

However, on another day we experienced the exact opposite. It was a difficult morning after a hard night at the bar. Hannes had just gone to bed and was fast asleep. Only my son, Emil, and I were on deck when the strike came.

Emil took the rod and with the boat pulled into idle, I ran down from the upper station to clear the other rods. At first we thought we had the situation all under control, particularly since Emil had wired big fish before – his first being the fourth-largest Atlantic blue marlin ever caught, a 598.74kg (1320lb) blue caught at Ascension Island – but as I cranked the final lure close to the boat I spotted another blue racing in to attack. The boat speed was far from ideal and the lure just flopped lazily on the surface, but the marlin still lunged at the lure, missed, then struck again. I ran to the helm to give the boat some speed, but even before I got there the Tiagra howled as the second blue streaked off, jumping all over the surface. We were two guys hooked to a double-header of blue marlin – from a yacht!

I ran to the cabin and shook life into Hannes, who was still far from sober. He came running out in his underwear with no idea of where we were or what he was doing. Remarkably, despite all this, we still managed to successfully release both marlin, estimated at 160 and 200kg respectively.

MOST MEMORABLE CATCH

"The double-header is a special memory, but my favourite without a doubt is the 300kg blue I caught on a Stella 20,000 spinning reel and jigging rod with only Hannes and I aboard. After teasing the fish to the boat, I pitched it a flying fish and hooked it perfectly.

At least 10 times I had the fish close, but each time it turned



and took off yet again. I found that if I free-spooled line each time it became stubborn, the blue would rise back to the surface, enabling us to back-down for a new attempt at the leader.

It was far from easy with only two guys and a tough 300kg marlin on casting tackle, but after nearly three hours, Hannes finally managed to grab the leader and release the catch.

Despite the limitations of the yacht, we caught a lot of fish and had many fun days at Cape Verde. On our best day we released five blues from five strikes, but on other days we raised up to eight in a day. In total, we ended up releasing 50 blues over our two-month stay.

OFF TO A NEW ADVENTURE

"By the end of June our stay in Cape Verde was coming to an end. We'd tested the capabilities of *Ocean Hunter* and were more than happy with our rig. It had proven its effectiveness above and beyond our expectations.

Now it was time to depart and sail 2400NM to our next big-fish adventures off Bom Bom islet, in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Africa. Beyond that, there were yet more big-fish hotspots to be explored, including the Grattan seamount and Ascension Island – the results of which will be revealed in the next instalment..."

Hannes Ribbner fights a big blue marlin on stand-up 60kg tackle while Morten controls *Offshore Hunter* from the upper helm deck above.

"A special memory is the 300kg blue I caught on a Stella spinning reel and jigging rod."

In the voyage ahead, *Offshore Hunter* would catch some very large blue marlin – as you'll discover in Part 2 of this amazing adventure.

