

Bull Fisher

Super Strike Charters Lives up to its Name with Adrenaline Pumping Dolphin Action in Venice.



Every summer the gulf teams with voracious pelagics that test the tackle and the wits of those that dare to hunt them. Knowing that the peak of the season was fast approaching, I called Damon McKnight to see if he was interested in hunting down some mahi-mahi and revealing some of his secrets to success in reeling these magnificent fish to the boat. He agreed and the order of the day was for the Marsh and Bayou crew to hit the water and strap into an eight second ride with the Bulls of the Blue.

That fabled June morning found Capt. Damon McKnight waiting contently in his brand new "Cajun Cadillac" as I walked down the crowded Venice marina dock to meet him. I was excited to be fishing in another Twin Vee catamaran. I knew what to expect from the boat, smooth and dry. However, this was my first opportunity to see what is really's new to fish engines had to offer, with twin 250s hanging on the transom of Damon's thirty foot Twin Vee.

Within a few minutes we had picked up the remainder of the crew: Chris Tibbitt, Ben Tibbitt, and Capt. Kevin Hunter. It wasn't long before we had cleared the ramp and started our down river trek to the fishing grounds. I sat next to Damon and quizzed him about the engines and their performance. He was obviously growing tired of the questioning because he tapped the throttle forward and told me to judge for myself how the E-Techs performed. Instantly the 22-foot cat was screaming down the river at 45 mph, passing antihook redfish hunters in their "go fast" bay boats. He qualified that with just him and half a tank of gas the boat was sipping out over 50 mpg. I was a believer and have already started saving my quarters to put a down payment on the exact same set up.

It didn't take long to get to the fishing grounds, where we were cruising at 38 mph down river. More impressive was that when we hit the mouth of South Pass, not only did the throttle stay at 38 mph, but you couldn't even feel a hint of a difference in the ride when we entered the choppy water gulf water. These boats are truly amazing, in no wonder that so many charter captains have switched to these boats to take advantage of the superior ride and fish ability offered by the Twin Vees.

We arrived at the BP 199 buoy just as the sun was beginning its climb into the morning sky and Damon and I began the ritual hand-jiggling to fill the live well with "perfect" strand baits. Unfortunately, this was not our morning and after 100 minutes I had managed only one landing and Damon had only managed one. Using his new outriggers the decision was made to head south to EE and see what kind of bait was lurking around the base of the platform.

EEF was surprisingly lifeless, with only one other boat laying the platform dragging a full spread. "We missed up the base of the platform and Damon and I began concentrated to catch. This time our luck had changed and the bar jacks were entering the

Jason Kenney
MED. CONTRIBUTING WRITER
Photos by Ben Tibbitt



platform base by the thousands. After figuring out that the strand jacks didn't like that traditional rapid twitching of the bait, we were able to round out a dozen or so jacks by switching to a slow, steady retrieve. With a full live well we again pointed the bow south to a floating rig called Uncle John.

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tioned the boat on the west side of the rig and relatively close to the platform as we deployed two anxious little bar jacks into the iridescent waters. Kevin Hunter quickly found his mark and among the irate fish into the canvas fish box in the Twin Vee. Damon was the last one left and he was locked into a clash with a trophy bull that was determined to escape the cold gaff tip that was eagerly poised to end the madcat match. Damon's bull gaff looped into the salty, humid air frantically shaking him but his hopes of avoiding his fate. Damon remained pinned to the gunned as the irritated mauler sounded into the purple water. Within ten minutes Damon had outlasted the exasperated fish and the shiny silver Topfish gaff took into the front part of the boat and all forty pounds of the trophy was hoisted into the boat.

"I've never been beat up that bad by a dolphin," flipped head over tall as the line on the Dad reel poured into the Gulf. Damon, seeing that I was fished with awe, ran over and grabbed the reel and swapped the drag with a stiff hook set. Chris had just finished fitting himself with a belt as Damon holed over for him to come take the reel. Of course, while Damon was passing the angry dolphin to Chris, Kevin Hunter had huffed the Angry Popper towards some nervous water and as soon as it landed it was devoured in a matter of five minutes and we decided that we should head home with our bounty.

Kevin quickly handed hook-up number two to Ben so he could get ready with a gaff to help land the fish. The chum was rising to intense levels with fish hooked and steady taking drag when everything really went haywire. Everyone was scurrying around the boat trying to keep the fish unaranged and when out of the corner of my eye I caught Damon diving towards the second bar jack that had been forgotten in the net. The little fish was scarfing on top the well, easily twice the size of the other two fish, shattered the surface separating the molting fish as it desperately tried to escape.

Among the lurch on the boat it seemed that we were destined to lose some or all of our fish. The three anglers danced around each other in a desperate attempt to keep up with their fish and minimize tangles and confusion. Ben was the first angler to beat his fish and a hefty twenty-pound bull was boat side when it gave an effortless leap and amazingly split the hook.

This crew had all it could take and cried solo so Damon started the boat straight north to the Venice Marina dock. The E-Techs poured to 4400 rpm and the Twin Vee portly cut through the gulf at a brisk 38 mph. Just seven hours after I stepped onto the boat I was back in the Marsh and Bayou Chevrolet with two live shoals full of mahi and tuna.

Damon is a first class guide, a professional captain, and an all around fun person to fish with. If you want to experience the best fishing in the South you'll want to get a great captain like Super Strike Charters a call.

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