

TWO HOURS TO TUNA!

Alcudia, in Mallorca, is a popular family holiday destination that offers much more than sun, sea and sangria for visiting anglers looking to experience thrilling big-game action



Words by **Paul Fenech**
Photography by **Lloyd Rogers**

A WARM BREEZE FELT GOOD AS I sat back and stared at the sandy shores of Alcudia, a small town in northern Mallorca, disappearing into the distance.

Ahead of me was the blue Mediterranean Sea shimmering in the early-morning sunshine. As I prepared for a day in search of bluefin tuna, with just a tiny hint of a lazy swell and not another boat in sight, Captain Toni Riera, owner of Fishing in Mallorca, slowed the engine of Carpe Diem, his pristine Sunseeker Sportfisher 37, before bringing her to a stop.

Toni chatted quietly with his brother, Vince, as the pair studied the electronic screen on the dashboard. Their soft Spanish tones echoed around the boat, only interrupted by the occasional brief, crackling communication on the VHF radio. Meanwhile, I scanned the vast open water surrounding us, trying to imagine what lived in its depths, wondering if these amazing creatures I had read so much about would play ball.

"Now we catch the bait," said Vince, as he handed me a longish Tubertini glass-tipped rod, rigged with a fixed-spool reel that had been filled with braid and had a string of eight sabiki lures attached.

A brief nod from him was the signal to drop my tiny lures over the side and, rapidly, they disappeared into 190 metres of water.

Registering with a small bump when the sinker finally hit the seabed, I closed the bale-arm. With a couple of turns of the handle, I raised the rod high, immediately feeling the tip bending, and I was quickly hooked up to some livebait.

I swiftly swung a full house of small horse mackerel (scad) into the boat, and unhooked them into the livebait well before repeating the process.

Over the next hour, Vince and me managed to catch a good supply of baitfish that measured roughly 8-12in. Toni fired up the engine once more and pushed us further out to sea, deep into the tuna-rich fishing grounds at the edge of the Continental shelf. ▶

It's a quick ride to the fishing grounds



CHUM MACHINE

An extra 15-minutes' steam saw us coming to a halt once more. It was a little after 8am and the sun was climbing higher into the sky and raising the temperature to a comforting 19 degrees.

Toni immediately set to work attaching the buoy to the anchor rope to settle the boat, while Vince prepared the tackle for the day ahead. Before we could place our baits, though, we needed to try and attract some tuna closer to the boat.

Attached to the side of the boat is a neat, powered chum machine. Toni selected a handful of small fish stored in the cooler, cut them into chunks and dropped some into the tray of the chum machine.

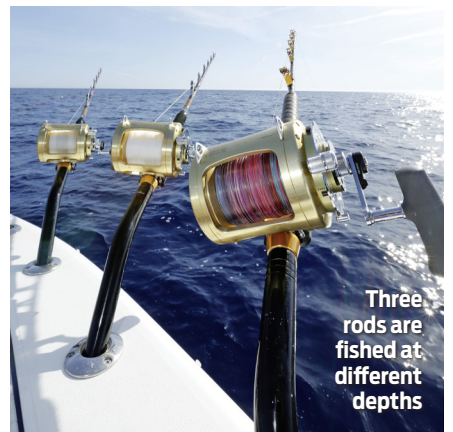
The beauty of this clever gadget is the fact it can be set at various time settings. Today it was set to release a chunk of fish every 10 seconds – which is done when a revolving spiked plate picks up a piece of fish from the tray and then swiftly drops it into the sea. After around 30 minutes, there was a decent amount of groundbait floating down through the depths that would, hopefully, attract the attention of some hungry bluefin tuna.

This was my first attempt at big-game fishing, and the tackle was totally new to me. Add into the equation my excitement and anticipation of connecting with something resembling a powerful torpedo and it was all suddenly becoming a little daunting, but in a rather good way.

The huge Shimano Tiagra 80 lever-drag multiplier was loaded with 200lb Jerry Brown braid and attached to a leader of 200lb mono. The rod was a brutish-looking Shimano Antares tuna stick in the 80lb-class, which was fully equipped with ultra-strong roller guides throughout its length. On the face of it, the tackle seemed a little over-gunned to me, but there is a very good reason for that, as Toni explained to me.

"We operate total catch-and-release with bluefin tuna," he explained. "Using inadequate tackle does the fish absolutely no favours at all. We try to beat the fish quickly, take measurements, and tag and return it immediately. The tackle we use works perfectly," he added.

With the prospect of possibly hooking into



Three rods are fished at different depths

"Look where the anchor buoy is...the tuna has pulled you, and the boat, for over a mile"



Posing with my last fish of the trip, weighing 76kg (167lb)

a bluefin tuna, weighing in excess of 400kg (881lb), the kit certainly has to match the task.

DIFFERENT DEPTHS

Three rods were finally ready to go, and each one would fish at different depths and distances from the boat, using a large plastic float. Vince glared at the fish-finder, then turned to me with a huge grin.

"Look at this Paul," he said, pointing at the screen. "Each one of these is a bluefin tuna; the store is open, let's go!" The display revealed that there was at least eight bluefins within a 500m radius to the boat – and more were arriving at depths of around 40-80m. The signs certainly looked promising.

A live horse mackerel was hooked on to a size 12/0 Mustad Demon circle hook and sent on its way. With baits in position, Vince meticulously set the drags on each reel to a whopping 20kg, and from then on, it was a waiting game.

STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!

An hour passed without incident when, suddenly, I noticed the middle rod nod slightly. I was about to mention it when it buckled and bent violently forwards as the

reel's ratchet screamed and braid spilled from the spool at a massive rate of knots.

"Strike, strike, strike!" screamed Vince, as he pounced into action. Toni, meanwhile, calmly told me to climb into the chair positioned at the back of the boat. This was it, I was finally climbing into a fighting chair to battle against a mighty bluefin tuna.

The rod was positioned into its holder mounted to the chair, as I was quickly buckled up and the reel clipped to my harness. To be honest, there is so much going on, you easily forget that hundreds of yards of line is quickly disappearing from the reel. Vince then explained to me how to use the chair by leaning back. This would enable me to pump the rod rather than trying to use my arms.

Then I had a bit of a panic moment; the line had suddenly gone completely slack. My angling experience, however, led me to believe that the tuna was, in fact, swimming towards me.

I reeled as fast as I could when immediately the full power and strength of the fish made itself known to me. In all my years of fishing, I hadn't experienced anything like this.

The rod leaned forwards and, between extreme heavy-nodding, the line I had just

gained back on to the reel, disappeared in a flash. The reel was screaming and there was nothing I could do apart from hold on to the rod. It was incredibly exciting, and I was enjoying it immensely; I had dreamed of this moment for many years.

Getting line back on to the reel wasn't easy, and the fight was certainly a hard slog. Take too much time and you offer the bluefin an opportunity to regain its strength. You need to pace it, and when it decides to run,



Horse mackerel livebaits were plentiful



My first tuna safely alongside



Port Alcudia is just a short walk from where I stayed

there's nothing you can do but allow it to go. However, by keeping the rod high, line tight and letting the powerful drag from the reel do its job, you eventually achieve the upper hand.

ENCOURAGEMENT

I was 40 minutes into the fight and the tuna showed no signs of giving up. Toni and Vince offered me words of encouragement, but I was determined to beat my first bluefin tuna myself. There would be none of this swapping the rod around malarkey.

It had now been on five extremely long and hard runs, and I have to admit, it felt heavier than anything I'd ever hooked before. The nods on the rod were becoming less frequent, so, it was time to put my back into it and attempt to bring it closer.

"One hour," shouted Toni. Had I really been connected to this missile for an hour? It seemed like only 10 minutes.

It would be a further 20 minutes before I eventually laid eyes on the fish. A distinct flash of blue and silver in front of me set my pulse racing. I could feel my heart pounding through my chest, and now was not a time to become complacent. There was still a bit to do before I could claim my first bluefin.

Vince, who was alongside me watching the fish as I guided it even closer, said: "Look where the anchor buoy is." I turned to see a tiny ball on the surface some distance away. "The tuna has pulled you, and the boat, for over a mile," he reported.

That's when I saw its huge eye looking up at me. I couldn't quite believe just how huge the

tuna looked in the water. This, however, was when a slight moment of emotion, along with huge respect, kicked in. I was in total awe of this beast in front of me.

Vince and Toni slipped a rope over the tuna and, together, lifted it on to the outer deck, right next to me. I couldn't take my eyes off it.

Quickly, a hose pipe fed water into its gills as they recorded measurements and tagged it.

Time is incredibly important for these fish, and cameraman Lloyd Rogers was aware of this fact and did a sterling job getting the angles and exposures bang on.

It was time for the bluefin to go back, so, I asked Toni if I could send her on her way? He agreed with a smile, and I think, deep down, he knew exactly what I was feeling.

Before sliding her back to the water, I gave her one last pat on the flank, thanked her and, with that big eye staring at me, she gave a powerful kick of the tail and was gone. ▶



A powerful 12/0 Mustad Demon circle hook

My first
bluefin tuna
weighed in at
99kg (218lb)

TUNA EVERYWHERE!

After a fair bit of back-slapping and handshakes, I had to sit down and try to reflect on what I had just achieved.

Toni then handed me a bottle of water. "Would you like to know its weight?" he asked. He uses an official measurement scale that gives a very accurate scale-to-weight ratio. "It went 99kg on the scale," he announced with a smile. That's 218lb to you and me.

"No time to waste," bellowed Vince. "Look at the screen, tuna everywhere!"

Over the next four hours, I had another three strikes, successfully landing two and losing one after being hooked into it for 50 minutes.

Absolutely shattered, it was time to head back with some of the best memories and experiences I could ever have wished for from a day's fishing.

INFORMATION

Alcudia is a popular family holiday destination, and there are plenty of bars and restaurants, all extremely well-priced and within easy walking distance from the harbour.

The Fishing in Mallorca business is run by Captain Toni Riera, who operates out of Port Alcudia, Mallorca, Balearic Islands.

He operates two vessels, a Sunseeker Sportfisher 37 and Rodman 34, and the fishing grounds are just a short steam of around 20 miles offshore.

I booked my package with accommodation overlooking the beach, and the harbour is just a five-minute walk. I flew with EasyJet from Luton to Palma, which takes two hours, five minutes.

Port Alcudia is just a 40-minute drive from the airport. Toni can arrange pick-up and drop-off.

Multi-day fishing packages, including accommodation in apartment, villa or hotel, are available on request.

All bait, tackle and drinks are included in your fishing trip. There is no need to purchase a fishing licence as you will be covered by the vessel's fishing permit.

Toni operates a strict catch-and-release policy with all bluefin tuna, and all planned fishing trips depend on weather conditions offshore.

CONTACT DETAILS

For more info and booking details, visit: www.fishinginmallorca.com or tel: (+34) 670 26 96 26.

Also find them on Facebook where they offer up-to-date information on fishing and catches along with videos. ■

