

NEW ZEALAND fishing news

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**FLINGING
THE BLING
IN THE SURF**

BIG RED
FROM A SMALL MAC

*Family
festive fishing*

**SWITCHING
STRIPIES**

**BITE TIMES
OR BS?**

Marlborough Sounds magic

REVIEWED:

- Quantum baitcaster
- Coastal Kayak Scrambler II
- Ramco Fisherman
- Bay Scout
- Shimano Kaibutsu popper rod
- Jig Star/Jigging Master combo
- Black Magic pliers

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When boat beats kite

Mokau's Geoff Preston is no stranger to big west coast snapper. Having lived at the small north Taranaki coastal village for 12 years.

Geoff initially came to the magazine's attention with some magnificent kite-caught trophy snapper.

In these days Geoff lived in Auckland, where he fished the west coast beaches using good friend Paul Barnes' kite-fishing rigs. Geoff even remembers being one of the first buyers of a Paul's Kites rig, when Paul and his wife Peggy were sewing the kites on the lounge floor with the kids running around. Now Paul's Kites is a thriving business selling kite rigs and all manner of tackle out of their shop in Nelson Sreet, Onehunga.

When Geoff shifted to Mokau, he maintained his interest in this style of beach fishing for 10 years, becom-

ing a local agent for Paul's gear.

Over those years Geoff landed more than 100 snapper over the 20lb (9kg) mark. These included many just under the magic 30lb mark, but in 2006 he landed a whopping 15.7kg snapper, which was later to feature in a National Geographic Channel fishing-documentary re-enactment.

During those years travelling back to Auckland on weekends to a local market, he met Jonathon Fulton, a big snapper specialist who used to frequent the same market. Over the years Geoff had enjoyed Jonathon's articles in *NZ Fishing News*, and they talked extensively about fishing techniques. Geoff uses Jonathon's stray-lining techniques today, with big fillets or whole fish baits.

Two years ago Geoff set his sights on a new goal: buying a boat and the gear to target big snapper on rod and

reel. Because boat access to fish the waters off Mokau is governed by a rivermouth bar, fishing is limited by time and tides. Consequently, Geoff decided to purchase a Mac 360 with a long-shaft Mercury 25hp motor so he could beach-launch at any tide or time. He chose the Mac boat over the aluminium alternatives as they are extremely stable, safe and unsinkable – even when fully submerged (as he found out in earlier launching efforts before adding scuppers). But a key factor – probably the most important when chasing big snapper – is the fact that the Mac 360 is virtually silent. Being plastic and not much bigger than a kayak, there is minimal water slapping or banging noises emanating from the hull.

Geoff installed 60mm straight-opening scuppers, along with a large Hansen water-tank fitting possessing a screw-in plug, with the latter being

replaced as soon as his fishing spot is reached. The boat can take a good wave while launching now, become half-full of water, and be drained within the next 10 metres.

His earlier trips with his wife Heidi or friends were learning experiences. The biggest mistake he made was buying cheap reels that would break or clap out when on big fish. Today Geoff uses good quality spinning reels: two Shimano Thunnus Baitrunners and two Penn 760L Live Liners.

All Geoff's fishing is done at anchor, with plenty of rope let out, as the big snapper will often swim up past the bow.

When on his own, Geoff runs two stray-line outfits loaded with 15kg IGFA mono and 37kg (80lb) leader. The best hooks are the VMC 9/0, also a favourite of Matt Watson's. Geoff doesn't use berley, soft-plastics,

Mokau's Geoff Preston with his 14.04kg (30.88lb) snapper caught from a small boat launched off the beach.



fish-finders or a GPS unit. Instead, he will patiently sit and wait at his preferred spot for the fish to come to him, rather than move around.

This location has produced more than 25 snapper over the 20lb mark since Geoff ventured into boat fishing two years ago. His personal best from the boat was 12.4kg – until Wednesday, November 3. On that day, after returning from four days working away, the sea was flat and the weather fine. So Geoff was up early and anchored at his possie by 7.30am. At 8.30am it was high tide, which is usually fairly quiet for an hour or so afterwards, when the tide turns and the current starts.

Around 9.30-ish, Geoff had his first big run on one of his stray-lined baits. Successfully hooking it, he landed it five minutes later – a lovely 9.3kg snapper. Geoff had a feeling that this was going to be a special day – a feeling that didn't go away



Geoff's big snapper rig: two VMC 9/0 hooks snooded in place. The top hook fell out of the fish's mouth once it was in the net.



Another good day off the Mokau coast – several good snapper destined for the smokehouse.



While Geoff rates his Mac 360 dinghy highly, he has added scuppers to get rid of any water that comes on board when heading out through the surf.



Inside the hull, 60mm Hansen's fittings have been used so Geoff can close off the scuppers.

when the following hour produced four more snapper in the 15-20lb range, as well as two kahawai.

He decided then to go for whole fresh fillets, with the two 9/0 hooks carefully set, hoping for a really big one. Ten minutes passed before one of his Shimano reels started screaming and never slowed down, so he put it into gear and struck, the rod bending right over. After playing it for 10 minutes or so, the fish finally

surfaced, and just as Geoff had it half in his landing net, the snapper crunched down on the huge hook, bent it and spat it out. But by then it was secure in the net.

Geoff caught two more big snapper after that, but released them, before heading in to get the big one weighed.

The local hotel, The Awakino, recently purchased new calibrated scales for the fishing club. Geoff

knew it was going to be close to the magic 30 pounds, and sure enough, the digits settled on 14.04kg or 30.88lb. It was a great feeling getting his first 30lb snapper on rod and reel.

Geoff says Mokau is a special place, but anglers need to tread warily; sometimes you can have your boat parked up for months – it's the west coast at its best, he says.

"It must be treated with respect,

as many a fisho has learned – myself included. But when fishable, you just don't know what size snapper is going to strike your bait."

During Geoff's long-lining years in Mokau he saw a few snapper that may have been record breakers straighten out hooks or break traces.

"I believe there are a few more even bigger snapper out there waiting to be caught," he said. And Geoff's just the angler to do it. 