Spin-Fishing For The Island Angler

THE phenomenal growth in the popularity of spin-fishing started early after the cessation of hostilities in World War II, yet in this comparatively short time it has eclipsed all other types of fishing that have been developed over centuries.

Because of this we are apt to consider spinning to be a relatively new adjunct to sport-fishing. This, however, is not the case. The Pacific Coast Indians

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HOOK, LINE AND SINKER.

of the North American continent actually used a frame attachment to hold lines and cast from it by the spinning principle. A century or more ago, a type of fixed-spool reel was in use in Europe. This was used in conjunction with thread from textile mills, thereby earning the expression "threadlining"—a name by which this type of angling is known in British countries today.

Many variations of this principle were tried in European countries before Alfred Illingworth, an Englishman, in 1905 made the first workable spinning reel based on the fixed-spool principle. It became extremely popular in France, Switzerland, and many other countries. At one time it was actually banned from use in British rivers and streams because it was considered too deadly.

When Illingworth's patent ran out the boom in spinning reels really began, and improvement followed improvement until the fixed-spool reel reached today's perfection. Bache Brown introduced the reel to America as late as 1935, and after overcoming some early prejudices, that country welcomed it with open arms.

Coupled with the fantastic popularity

Amateur fishermen in the Pacific islands will find spin-fishing a fascinating and highly effective way of taking fish, both from river and sea. This article by a leading Fiji angler describes the gear needed, and how it is used.

By ROB WRIGHT*

Two types of spinning reel and rod seat are shown alongside. The bottom reel features a bail pick-up, the rod a permanent reel seat. The top reel has a finger pick-up, and the rod a sliding ferrule seat. The reel at left is a large salt-water spinning reel for medium to large game-fish.
The lures in the top row—with the exception of the two at the right end, which are home-made—were manufactured by the well-known Gibbs factory in Canada. The bottom row are Swedish lures. In the centre are swivel snaps which facilitate changing baits.

of the spinning reel has been the equally fantastic development of monofilament lines of nylon. Singly, it is doubtful if one or the other would have attained the heights they have reached today, but together—they are as inseparable as "ham and eggs".

The acceptance of this fishing method by a fishing-minded public is easily explained because the tackle can be mastered in a relatively short time.

A Different Action

The basic difference between a conventional reel and a spinning reel is that the latter has a fixed spool which does not revolve when casting. The conventional reel does, and the thumb or some mechanical gadget must be employed to keep it under control. If it goes too fast, the line doesn't leave the spool to keep pace, and a "backlash" with a tangle results.

This doesn't happen with a spinning reel, and that is why it is so different from other methods. As the reel spool does not revolve, the line simply spins off the open face. In this way it is possible to cast almost any lure from the lightest to the heaviest without getting a backlash. A beginner can make long casts in a fraction of the time it would take to accomplish the same distance with a revolving reel. It is the simplest method of casting to teach women and children: is ideal for the "occasional" fisherman who can't put in long hours of practice, and finally it offers a real challenge to the expert in catching very large fish on very light lines.

One of the important advantages of spin-fishing is the fact that very light lines are used—generally between four to ten pounds breaking strain. With these it is possible to drop a tiny spinner or plug sixty or seventy feet away without any effort, and with the line and lure under complete control. The line is so fine there is practically no drag from the current, and the lure is so small there is hardly a splash as it enters the water.

Had it not been for the development of monofilament lines and properly-balanced lures, spinning may still have had some problems, but the sleek single strand of almost invisible line has taken the last snarl out of fixed-spool casting, so that the newcomer can perform very creditably with but a minimum of practice.

Spinning A Highly-Adaptable Method

Spinning can be adapted to any kind of angling. An angler can take one rod, one reel, a few lines and an assortment of lures, and go off to either stream or ocean, content with the knowledge that the tackle will catch him fish.

Almost all spinning reels have interchangeable spools which can be taken off and put on in a matter of seconds. With three or four spools and with different weights of line on each, it is possible to cast a complete variety of jigs, spoons, plugs, spinners, live bait, and even flies.

Since the fixed-spool reel has a slipping clutch adjustable to the breaking strain of the line, playing a fish becomes a matter of ordinary procedure, and there's the extra dividend of fighting a fish on light rod and line which provides the maximum in thrills, fun, and sport. Every strike, every run, leap, lunge, and movement is telegraphed down the sensitive rod to the delight of the angler.

Initially developed for fishing in freshwater streams and rivers—which it has done with phenomenal success—the
spinning outfit has invaded the salt water, and rods and reels have been adapted for this purpose. Most of the latter are now made of corrosion-proof metals and are capable of giving long and good service.

The Spinning Reel

Let's look closer at this tackle. The average spinning reel for salt water use weights between 11 and 16 ounces. Since the angler in the Pacific is more concerned with the sea than with fresh water, it is suggested that he concentrate on this type of reel. The average spool capacity would be between 250-300 yards of 8-9 lb. line.

The body, generally, is made of some light-weight cast metal which encloses a simple but efficient set of gears. At the front end is the drag mechanism operated by a wing-nut which exerts pressure on the line spool. The spool itself resembles a super-sized sewing machine bobbin. Enclosing this on all sides but the front is a metal cylinder which, when activated by the crank handle, revolves around the spool like a flywheel. Attached to the edge of this flywheel is a pick-up arm or bail. The bail is fixed diagonally across the flywheel so that it falls almost in the centre of the spool. It works on bearings at both ends so that it may be flicked forward to open the spool or—with a touch of the crank—flicked back to close the spool. At one end of the bail is a line guide or roller of hardened steel or agate.

The dominant feature of this open-face reel is that the axis is parallel to the rod and not at right angles to it as with conventional reels. Another big difference between this and other reels is that the spin reel is fitted below the rod, while conventional reels are attached above it.

The spin reel usually comes with the crank handle on the left side, which may seem awkward and strange at first, especially if the angler is right-handed, but this inconvenience disappears in a short time. The big advantage in left-hand reeling is that there is no changing hands after casting. The right hand carries the rod and reel, and does the casting, hooking, and playing of the fish. The left hand simply winds the crank handle.

Drag A Vital Part

Another feature which makes the spinning reel different is the friction clutch, or drag. This mechanical device enables the fish to take out line under steady tension, permitting the angler to handle the fish more easily and tire it out sooner. Drags vary somewhat in construction but most of them exert pressure on the reel spool, and the amount of pressure may be adjusted by tightening or loosening a wing-nut in front of the spool.

Because of the light lines used in spinning, the drag is a vital part of the spinning reel. When a fish is hooked and takes off in a run, a good drag enables it to do so without placing too much strain on the line, so an all-important consideration in choosing a reel is to make sure the drag is smooth. Some drags are inclined to slip slightly and then bind, resulting in a jerking motion on the line.

Another useful device is the anti-reverse lock. When this is slipped to the "on" position it prevents the handle from turning backwards. It should, however, be left off until a fish is hooked, otherwise the pawl may wear. This, then, covers a description of the spinning reel, so we'll now look at the other half of the outfit—the spinning rod.

The Spinning Rod

Rods are made from tubular glass, solid glass, split bamboo, and steel. They vary in length between six and eight feet, and have actions between light, medium, and heavy. Most rods look alike and it is difficult to separate the poor quality from the good. Here is where the reputation of the rod manufacturer comes in. A product from a good manufacturer will be more expensive, but will pay dividends in the end.

For the angler in the islands, a good quality tubular glass rod of about 6'6" with medium action is recommended. This will stand up to the vagaries of the heat and humidity with which the fisherman in this part of the world must contend. Solid glass rods are cheaper in price but tend to be top-heavy and slow in action, and there is always the consideration of extra weight.

The clinch with two loops through the eyelet is the same as the simple clinch, except that an extra loop is made through the eye of the hook before the strands are twisted. The free end is run through the extra loop as well as through the space formed by the first twist of the two strands.

The Pendre knot is a variation of the Pendre dropper knot; it is merely a clinch knot with the free end tucked through the space between the single strand and the twisted strands.
The handle, or butt, of the rod is made of cork, which should be firm and not pitted. The cork handle is generally about 12"-14" long, and on this are fitted ferrules for attaching the reel. On the average rod, the reels and ferrules may be moved up or down on the cork handle so as to attain the best balance for the angler. Some rods, however, have permanent reel seats made of anodised aluminium or chrome steel.

The guides of the rod, which should be made from stainless steel or heavily-chromed brass, are placed strategically along the rod length so that when a fish is being played the bend of the rod extends all the way from tip to butt in what is usually termed a parabolic curve. The guides should graduate in size from a large butt guide near the handle to progressively smaller guides near the tip. This is important when using open-face reels, as it permits the spiralling line to pass through them without drag and keeps the wet line away from the rod lest friction impair the cast. Now to the accessories.

Lines And Lures

There are many makes of lines to choose from, and for average salt-water use an eight- or nine-pound test monofilament is perhaps the best bet. Since the line may become twisted when first placed on the spool, some care is necessary in this operation.

If the line is purchased on plastic spools, fasten the end to the reel with an ordinary clinch knot and pull it up slowly and tight. Slip a pencil or something similar through the centre of the plastic spools and, having threaded the line through the rod guides, begin winding on to the reel, keeping a tension on the line with the right hand. This will also indicate how the reel works.

When the bail picks up the line it slides it into the line roller or guide, and, as the handle is cranked, the line is laid neatly into the reel spool. Continue this operation until the spooled line reaches to within 1" from the lip. This should be the maximum amount required; any more may cause trouble by spilling off the open face and causing tangles.

There are dozens of different types of spinning lures for the angler to choose from. There are wobblers, plugs, spinners, spoons, jigs, and a host of others in various weights, sizes, colours, shapes, and actions. A particular type of lure in one territory may not be successful in another, so it is a matter of personal choice. For average use, choose lures ranging between 1 oz. and 1 oz. If heavier, they may place too much strain on rod and line, with perhaps a snap-off when casting.

There are various types of snaps, swivels, and other connections which simplify the changing of lures, but the less hardware used in spinning usually produces better results. However, there are times when it is not possible to avoid using terminal tackle of some type. For instance, when spinning into the sea, sharp-toothed barracuda and needlefish will cut the line in a flash, if a wire trace is not used. Six or eight inches of very fine wire is a wise precaution.

Now, to look at how the rod and reel function together. Attach the reel to the reel seat, making certain that the reel foot is lined up with the rod guides. Open the bail until it clicks back and is held by a stop. Take the end of the line from the spool and thread it through the guides, pulling enough from it to reach the handle, and then close the bail with a short turn of the crank.

As the first section of line takes the brunt of the fight and may come into contact with the fish, it is best to double this for about 12"-14" by the use of a double thumb knot or a Spooner knot. To the end of this double line, attach the swivel snap and lure with trace.

Tension the reel by pulling off line against the drag with your hand, adjusting the wing-nut to give you greater or less pressure. Do not put too much tension on. It is better to give the fish its head for a while than to have a break-off immediately. Allow the lure to hang about 6" from the rod tip, and reverse the handle of the reel until the roller of the bail comes to the top. Scoop the line up with the index finger of the right hand and at the same time open the bail with the left. All is now ready for the cast.

How To Cast

Point the rod horizontally at the target, then lift it sharply to a one o'clock position behind the head, at the same time keeping the elbow to the side. Without pausing, snap the wrist forward and, as the rod reaches the eleven o'clock position in front, arrest the action and open the forefinger to release the line. The lure will sail out like a bullet to the spot originally aimed at.

Retrieving is purely automatic—a matter of turning the crank handle. Keep the tip pointed at the lure to prevent excessive line wear. If a fish strikes, hook it firmly by flicking the rod tip upwards, throw the anti-reverse to the "on" position, and then raise the rod to a comfortable position to play it. It's as simple as that.

The retrieve may be fast or slow (the reels are geared high) and added motion may be imparted to the lure by manipulating the rod tip—jerking it slightly or swinging it side to side.

The axiom—"practice makes perfect"—may be applied to spin-fishing as with other things, but here are a few tips for the Pacific angler. Stay away from coral areas until proficient with the gear. Inspect the first few feet of line after a few fishing expeditions and, if frayed, pull it off and throw away. Don't alter the reel tension once a fish is on. Shallow water will often produce lunkers. Try spinning around mangroves and mangrove creeks. Don't monkey with the rod and reel if it is working well. Wash and wipe them dry before putting away. Wash lures in fresh water and dip hooks in oil.

The newer closed-face spin reels and the large salt-water reels for surf fishing have not been dealt with in this article, but the principle differs very little from that described here.