

I Want to go

A Guide to the Absolute Basics in Gear you will Need

I'VE chased marlin for a quarter of a century including working a season on the deck in Cairns. Those of us who live this branch of the sport to the extreme are gear junkies, technique nuts, brand snobs, weather and water experts and hopelessly addicted to that next fix – there is nothing, but nothing, like having a marlin up behind the spread... All of which makes me one of the worst offenders because we tend to forget that all the gear we have and money we've spent (not to mention the collection of 547 lures...) has been built up over many years. We too started with basic gear and caught most of our marlin on 15kg line. This brief article is designed as a primer for those who really would like to catch a marlin, have no idea exactly what they need and don't want to spend \$12,000 before their first day out...

The Platform

Having made the assumption that you have a boat already, you'll need to plan for the following –

Fuel – you need plenty and then plenty of spare fuel as well. You will use more on a calm day than a rough (usually less revs for the same speed using the waves). If you haven't trolled with your boat at 6.5-8 knots yet you need to do so to find out how much fuel you will use.

Rod Holders – A minimum of two, but probably four. Don't use plastic ones; replace them with stainless, aluminium or chromed brass. This is an essential.

Rods and Reels

There is something special about a rack of gleaming gold across the back of a boat. Some may think it's phallic, like the red sports car. Nothing could be further from the truth; gamefishermen love the beautiful engineering that is the modern game reel. The look and sound of a reel unloading at speed with a marlin attached is an experience like no other...

Reels

Most gold reels will be around \$1000. While gold is good, it's not essential. If gamefishing becomes your thing you will end up with them though. Consider that good second hand reels are impossible to find so if you do bite the bullet early and later change your mind, there will be a ready market for them.

There is a belief by new players that it's essential to have a whole series of lures in the water at any given time. Not so. The boat does the work of being a big teaser. Two well placed lures will do the job. You can seriously fish with just two sets. Go for 24kg (50lb) as the best all-round line weight to choose. Here are the reasons – 1/ 24kg line can stop any fish swimming in our waters (within a few limits and with a bit of luck) 2/ smaller and cheaper reels are required. The standard reel has a size designation of '50w'. The 'w' stands for wide and is a wider spool version of the 50 reel. The '50' is the designated line weight in pounds. 3/ 80 pound reels are big things and take some serious transport and handling. 4/ its far more fun to catch a 100kg striped marlin on lighter line. In fact there's no reason why you couldn't use 15kg line if you don't anticipate running into blacks and blues. (I can confirm you will have a lot of fun if you do though!)

Penn and Shimano dominate the game reel market. They aren't the only game in town though (who wrote that...). Other top-end brands include Daiwa, Alutecnos and Duel. Below those are established new players in Okuma and Tica. There are also even newer entrants such as Omoto. Don't underestimate those reels; we caught two marlin, and played several others on our Okuma Gold reels last season. It's no longer a two horse race. We are talking about lever drag reels here. I strongly suggest you stick with this format. Star drags will work but it is hard to accurately set drag pressures. Keep in mind that there are very good graphite lever drag reels available from Shimano, Penn and Okuma as well that are quite capable of catching marlin.

Rods

If you are new to this you won't have the slightest idea how the action should be on a medium game rod. So instead I recommend you buy on brand, quality, price and features.

Often reels will be packaged with a rod. Often this is to reach a price point so understand that the rods will probably be okay but not exceptional.

What you are looking for is what is called a standup rod, as opposed to the slightly longer rods used exclusively from a chair. They will typically be from 5' to 6'6" in length, usually in the middle of that range. It's a lot about the guides. Rollers are best; don't let anyone tell you otherwise. They cost the most. Outside of that the price will vary depending on how far up the Fuji guides range you go. Have at least a roller tip on a rod using Fuji guides. Some will also have a roller 'stripper' guide, that's the one closest to the reel. To buy a good game rod will cost around \$450 to \$1000. Understand that there is little return for retailers in selling gold game reels of the main brands; often they are lucky to make \$50 from a reel, although better buying power means better margins for the big shops. That's why the wholesalers sell packages, so everyone makes something. That means if you are a buying a rod separately look for a deal. Don't expect to screw the price too much on the reel...

Look for quality winch fittings, that's where the reel mounts. It should also have a solid gimbal fitting, that's the cross piece at the bottom that stops the rod twisting in the rod holder. The names Aftco (roller guides, winch mounts, fittings) and Fuji (guides) indicate very high quality components have been used.

Line

Get the best pretest line that you can. Brands I recommend because I use them are – Platypus, Sufix and Berkley. Ande is widely regarded and holds many world records. There is the option to use Dacron and place a shorter length of mono called a 'topshot' over that. This is a basic guide so I suggest you use all mono and work up to some of the other methods that require better knowledge and a few new skills.

Lures

Let's ignore baits and presume you will be trolling. Basically any lure can potentially catch a fish. To start, look for something that has an overall length, including the skirt, of around 275 -300mm. Go for a 'pusher' style of lure; it will have a square but 'cupped' surface on the front of the head. They are more forgiving to run correctly and can handle a range of speeds and conditions.

Let's not get started on colour combinations other than to say the traditional purple/black and lumo patterns work rather well. So does pink/white/blue, orange/black, green/yellow etc. See why we have 500 lures? Have your local Pro Shop rig them for you, at least the first time. Generally marlin lures are run on a trace of 400lb breaking strain mono.



Gamefishing

Don't get too worked up about 'must have' lure brands. The fact is that almost anything will work at some time. If we had the fish sussed out everyone would run the same thing. Many lure brands are just copies of others but they will work. I personally suggest 'matching the hatch' by keeping lures a similar size to any visible baitfish. It's all about confidence; if you like the lure and are happy with its performance, you will catch fish.

There are a small number of skilled and qualified lure makers in this country who know what works and why. Read their writings and draw off their knowledge. We have absolute confidence in our own man, Bonze, who has incorporated his Hawaiian experiences into his own lures. They work when you follow his system.

If this is all new to you then you have so many great experiences to look forward to...

Hooks

Lures can be rigged with single or double hooks. I suggest again that you have a Pro Shop rig them for you initially. They will size the hooks to suit and keep them IGFA legal. Hook size, placement and sharpening would take a series of articles...

Knots and Attachments

Learn to tie a Plait or a Bimini Twist, and a Catspaw. These are the only knots you initially need for gamefishing. The first two are used to tie a double in your line. Do this. It creates a strong connection and acts as a shock absorber when the line is stretched tight. Make the double a little over a rod length and the trace around 8m. That will make everything IGFA legal on all lines of 15kg and heavier.

The Catspaw is used to attach the swivel to the double. The swivel MUST be a ball-bearing one with a Coastlock snap attached. Avoid other snaps, particularly the ones called McMahons. The snap will attach directly to the loop on the trace.

Other Gear

Essentials – a rod bucket and harness unless you have a game chair. A tag pole and tags. A flying gaff maybe; we have grabbed all our marlin by the bill for years. A big fish needs a gaff though and it wants to be a flyer as a fixed head has potential for personal injury. Tail ropes to secure things. A couple of pairs of those orange gloves with the nylon sticky stuff on the front. A set of scales to pre-set the drags. Safety lines to attach the reels to the boat. Spare ball bearing swivels. A camera. Hook sharpeners.

Desirables – extra gaffs. More lures. A high quality set of wiring gloves. Rigging gear consisting of; crimping pliers, crimps, line cutters, thimbles, spare trace material. An AFTCO flatline clip.

Xmas presents – Outriggers (great, but don't believe that they are essential). More lures. A downrigger.

Basic Trolling

Run your two lures somewhere around waves four to six. If you can't work that out, try around 20-40m behind the transom. Don't worry, you can't get a lure too close; our nearest one is usually little more than a trace length behind. As a starting point, attempt to get the lures to sit on the front side (nearest the boat) of the wake waves. Troll at around 6.5 to 8 knots. The reels need to be preset with a certain amount of drag at the stop point on the lever. Usually this is 1/3 of the lines breaking strain. That's 8kg on 24kg line. If you aren't sure, get your shop to show you; they should gladly do so when you are spending money...

There are two schools of thought; troll with the lever at the 'strike' position, or, troll with just enough drag to stop the lure pulling out and push the lever to 'strike' after the marlin has it. I suggest you run with strike drags for your initial forays to keep things simple. Go where the fish are. I can give you no better advice.

If a marlin grabs a lure and runs off its okay to panic, its part of the fun. Initially do nothing – leave the boat going forward and clear the other gear (while being aware of the potential for a double strike). After that, settle things down. Keep the line tight at all times. If lots of line is taken from the reel, ease the drag OFF. Pressure increases as the line load diminishes. Its basic physics that can go out the door when everything is happening. Don't worry, you probably have near 1000m of line on the reel and there is plenty of time.

Priority one is safety. Make sure there are no hooks or lose gear on the deck. Make sure the angler is designated before the strike. Keep the line tight. Don't worry about the harness until everything is under control. Just get the bucket on and settle things down. Keep the line tight. When the fish slows, chase the line down to recover it. Forget about backing down, use the sharp part of the boat and play the fish forward and to the side of the boat. Follow where the line is entering the water REGARDLESS of where the fish is, otherwise you may inadvertently run over your line or get a huge loop in the water that can break the line by water pressure alone.

With the fish at the boat think safety and keep the line tight. Get a tag in first so the capture will count should the lure fall out. Keep the rod tip down so the trace isn't able to loop over people's heads or limbs. Ease the drag off too and point the rod at the fish so trace can't catch on it if someone has to let go.

There is so much more that could be added but this is just a very, very basic starting guide. Gamefishing is fantastic. It's simple to do if you don't over-complicate it. You don't need to spend thousands. I look forward to seeing pictures of your first marlin!

