



THE

# Fisherman®

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April 20, 2000 - No. 16

New Jersey, Delaware Bay Edition

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# SKIMMING TOP FOI

Bluefish love green-tailed diamond jigs  
in the early season.



# ING THE R BLUES

by Carlos  
Bastos, Jr.

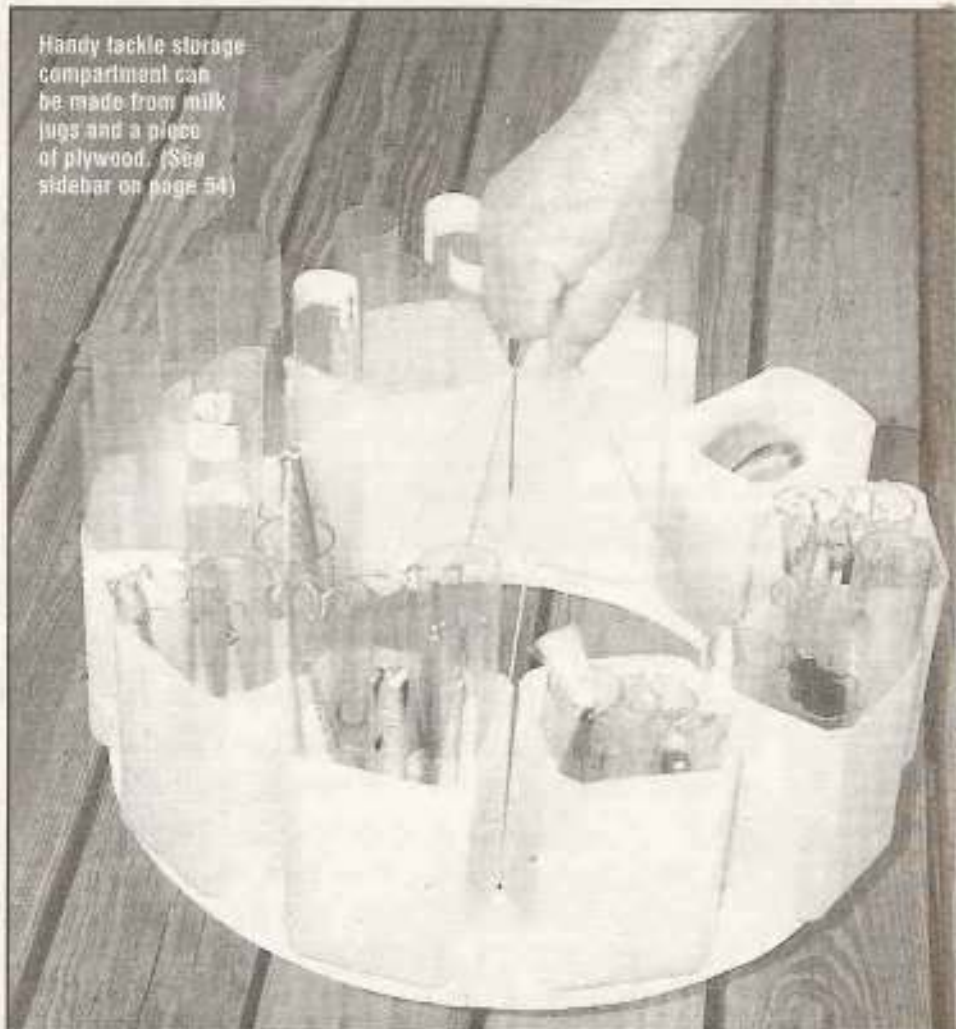
**A**fter many years of catching bluefish during the summer and fall, I tried the same tactics during the late spring when the blues first arrived with no success. They didn't want chum and trolling lures on wire line or planers also drew blanks. The only way to catch those fish was to keep all your lures within the first 5 feet of the surface water. That makes fishing for these early season blues just that more difficult.

It means more driving around looking for working birds or readings on your fish finder but when you do find them action can be fast and furious. I have had many days when you could catch a fish on every cast for hours on end but also if the water temperature drops a degree or two, you could be just practicing your casting techniques all day.

That's how it is when it comes to fishing for the early season blues.

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Handy tackle storage compartment can be made from milk jugs and a piece of plywood. (See sidebar on page 54)



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## PEDESTAL LURE AND TACKLE STORAGE

by George Rusnak III

As my wife says, I've been a crazy fisherman most of my life. It was nights and weekends when I was working, but now that I've retired, I fish weekdays. What a difference - no lines at the ramp and no crowded waters. Fishing is again as relaxing as when we were kids. I have several pals who fish with me out of a johnboat in ponds lakes and rivers, and up and down the beach. We start out for shad and herring, trout and bass, and then our true love stripers, fluke and weakies.

In our johnboat we've been drenched with spray, taken on water from passing boats in a hurry and nature has rained us, but that's what we retired for - fishing, fishing and more fishing. My loving wife found a center console that has

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## THE TRACE IS ON

Bluefish start heading up the coast sometime around the month of May. These fish are long and lean and are usually looking for something to eat after their long trek from the south. I think the reason why they tend to stay so far up in the water column is because they have just come from warmer waters and our waters are still a bit on the cold side so on a bright sunny day the first few feet are the warmest that they can find.

I find blues at a lot of different areas during the late spring and one area that

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given us more room but space is still limited and we always need more storage for tackle and lures. This little story is for fishermen with boats that have a pedestal seat and who need to conserve space.

The tackle compartment is easy to construct and very inexpensive. You'll need: 20 by 20-inch marine grade 1/2-inch plywood, ten 1/2-gallon empty milk jugs, 20 Phillips screws and some strapping tape.

Cut the tops of the jugs off about an inch higher than you want them with a razor knife. Trim to exact height with a scissors. Drill a few 1/4-inch holes in the bottom for drainage.

Draw an 18-1/2-inch circle on the plywood, then a smaller 12-1/4-inch circle inside the outside circle. Cut the plywood so you have a "doughnut" shaped

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produces for me is the Keyport area in Raritan bay. The water is only about 5 or 6 feet deep there and with all the bait it makes that spot a real producer for me. If I am fishing the northern grounds off our coast, I don't think there is a better place to start fishing for blues than Keyport. If for some reason I am not getting much action there then I will usually head west towards Cliffwood Beach or Morgan Beach.

## GET THEM TO BITE

My favorite way to catch these early season blues is by jigging with Ava jigs

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or by using top-water plugs. The jigs are usually plain or with a green tail and I use sizes from the 007 to the 27's. The plugs that I use are the Yo-Zuri surface cruisers or the Bomber plugs. Whichever one I go with, I make sure to replace the trebles with single hooks usually in the 2/0 size and they are easily replaced by using small split rings. It makes unhooking a bluefish much easier and will reduce the chances of getting bit by one. Believe me, they have very powerful jaws and sharp teeth. I still have the scars to prove it.

Some people might think that a 2/0 hook is too small but I feel that with a bigger hook, the action of the plug is greatly decreased. When I use the jigs I simply cast it out and retrieve it at a fast pace for the first few casts. If I don't get any hits, I will slow down the pace a bit until I find out which one is working that day.

The top water plugs are cast out and I like to twitch them a little as I am reeling it in. If the fish are feeding directly on the top, the plug will usually get inhaled as soon as it touches the water.

## TROLLING TACTICS

I'm not talking about the trolling that every fisherman is accustomed to doing. I troll for early season blues by just taking a 5-foot length of 30-pound leader and tying a jig on one end and a barrel swivel on the other end to prevent the line from twisting. I then let out the jig until the lure clears the wake that my boat is creating and stick the rod in the holder and wait for a hit. Trolling speed is dictated by how high the lure is in the water. I don't want it to skip on the surface. I should remain about a foot or two under. It might sound absurd but this method has worked for me many of times.

When I do decide to troll, it is usually on the blind, meaning that I'm not reading anything on my color scope or not seeing any life on the surface. There are many instances in the early season that the blues are widely scattered over a broad area. That's when this trolling technique really shines.

## TACKLE CHOICES

On my late spring bluefish trips I like to bring along both spinning and conventional tackle. I prefer to use spinning gear when I fish for blues. I feel that I can cast farther and retrieve my lure faster with a spinning reel. I use a Shimano Baitrunner loaded with 20-pound Silver Thread and a 7-foot medium action spinning rod.

My conventional outfit for trolling consists of a 6 to 7-foot medium action rod with a reel capable of holding at least 200 yards of 30-pound test line.

I have found out that when fishing for bluefish during the early part of the season you have to be prepared for whatever you encounter out there. When they first move in they can be very unpredictable. A cold night the evening before or a period of heavy rain and bluefish could develop lockjaw. Keep a close eye on the local fishing reports and a close watch on the weather. If both are in your favor, you might just come back to the dock with a boatful of sore arms.

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piece of plywood for the base. Apply a polyurethane-base paint and then mount the milk jugs with two screws per jug. To give some added stability, I add two wraps of strapping tape around the top edge of the jugs. You can also make a handle for the storage rack by using some cord fastened at 3, 6, 9 and 12 o'clock positions.

To install the compartment, simply remove the seat from the pedestal, lower the storage compartment in place, then replace the seat. The jugs hold metals, bucktails, rigs, plugs and sinkers. Aquarium supply stores sell 1-1/4-inch plastic tubes that fit nicely into the jugs to keep lures separated. This tackle compartment will hold more than 50 lures and it cleans easily with just the wash from a hose at the end of the day.