

Fishin'

Saltwater Series

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Run and Gun Bluefin with Capt. Freddy Gamboa



Ride along on a quick trip to the tuna grounds on Andrea's Toy

There's a group of charter captains running large center console boats in the New York/New Jersey area, many of whom specialize in offshore trips for tuna. The speed and versatility of multi-engine center consoles turns what used to be a long, time consuming trip into a quick jaunt to distant fishing grounds, leaving at sunrise and returning to the dock in time for dinner.

Yamaha Pro Captain Freddy Gamboa has been a member of this specialized charter fraternity for many years. Held in high regard by his peers, clients and private boat fishermen alike, Freddy is a congenial, knowledgeable, and experienced captain who is always willing to help out a fellow angler. Don't believe that? We had a run in with Freddy before we ever got to know him. While fishing a Yamaha-powered 32

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Capt. Fred spends a lot of time in the tower of his Contender® when offshore searching the water for birds and surface-feeding fish.

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Regulator® offshore for bluefin some years back, the Yamaha team came across a small cluster of recreational boats fishing behind a commercial scallop boat. The group was respectful of each other, taking turns running up near the transom of the commercial boat so they could drop a bait down and hook one of the blue tuna in the area. The scallop boat crew was shucking its catch and discarding the unwanted portion of the scallops over the side, and tuna were waiting there to gobble up the tasty treats.

We were trolling and jigging for bluefin nearby with little luck, so we arrived late on the scene. Unfortunately, we had no bait and were unable to join in the fun until the

captain of one of the other boats hailed us on the VHF to ask why our boat was hanging back.

“No bait,” was our reply. A minute later, a 31-Contender named Andrea’s Toy came alongside, and the captain threw a bag of scallop guts onto the bow of the Regulator with a big smile on his face. The unexpected, generous gesture was courtesy of Captain Freddy Gamboa.

“I am a big believer in Karma,” Freddy said. “It’s always better to be friendly and helpful to other anglers. Karma has a way of coming back to reward you when you’re helpful, or to stick it to you if you’re not.”

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Gamboa's newest Andrea's Toy is a beast, a Yamaha-powered 44-foot Contender. It's a hardcore fishing machine with great creature comforts for up to six anglers. It's also incredibly fast, thanks to four Yamaha XTO Offshore® V8 outboards that provide a combined 1700 horsepower capable of pushing its hull to speeds approaching 70 MPH. And while running it at top speed is a rarity, when the seas cooperate it can cover a lot of miles to get to a hot bite in a matter of minutes cruising at over 50 MPH.

We had the pleasure of riding along on a charter out of Capt. Freddy's home base, Clarks Landing Marina in Point Pleasant, New Jersey. The charter consisted of three of Freddy's regulars, Bob Davis and Russ Chelak of Highlands and Chris Vaughn of Netcong, all Jersey natives. During the day we

had the opportunity to watch Gamboa work, observing how his boat performs and the way he structures a daytrip offshore.

"We're going to run and gun for bluefin tuna," Gamboa said as we broke Manasquan Inlet and set a course for our first stop about 35 miles away. "The goal is to catch tuna on topwater using poppers and spinning tackle, but first we have to locate them. That means running fast from one spot to another until we find the right signs, trolling a little as we prospect each area, then pulling out the spinning tackle when the fish decide to come shallow and crash bait on the surface. I also have some light bottom-fishing tackle and bait ready so we can make a few drops on nearby wrecks as we move from place to place so my guys can catch some sea bass to augment the day's catch."

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Chris Vaughn and co-captain Arion Ali show off a nice “under” bluefin that hit the side tracker bar.

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Gamboa always has an alternate plan ready at a moment’s notice, whether it’s wreck fishing for sea bass or deep dropping for tilefish when he is fishing closer to the submarine canyons that scar the edge of the Continental Shelf off this area of the coast. Bluefin are highly regulated by international treaty and the Highly Migratory Species Division of the NOAA® Fisheries. The current regulations limit charter boats like Andrea’s Toy to no more than two between 27 and 47 inches (called unders) and one between 47 and 73 inches (called overs). The stops for sea bass serve two purposes, Freddy explained. They give the anglers a break from trolling when the bluefin are not cooperating, and they provide some tasty fillets for anglers to bring home along with the limited amount of tuna the law allows them to keep.

The morning was a little chilly for late May and bumpier than originally forecasted so Freddy took it easy, cruising in the low 30 MPH range to his first stop.

“There’s no reason to beat up the anglers or the boat running hard into a head sea,” Freddy commented. “We’ll be at our first destination quickly enough and ready to rock and roll.”

The first stop was a bust. The water was cold, dirty and devoid of bait so Gamboa turned the boat to the east and headed to spot number two, moving faster as the seas offshore began to subside, and he was able to take the sea on the beam. As we approached, the water color improved and the sea temp jumped a few degrees. There were scattered

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pods of bait and a few tuna marks on the depth finder, one of two massive Garmin® multi-function displays that fill the helm. The signs were not right for plugging so he broke out his “run and gun” trolling pattern that consists of four side-tracker spreader bars, two long squid daisy chains and a large ballyhoo under a Joe Shutes weighted head. The side-tracker bars are designed to do what the name suggests, they run out away from the sides of the boat without having to use the outriggers to open up the spread.

“Arion Ali, my mate and co-captain, can get a full spread out and in the water in a matter of a couple of minutes. We’re prospecting, trying to get subsurface tuna to come up and bite,” Freddy instructed. “It’s so much faster when you don’t have to fumble with the outriggers, and the tuna seem to like the tighter pattern run closer to the boat wake. If the fish come to the surface while we’re trolling, we can get the gear out of the water faster while I put my

anglers on the bow with the spinning rods to take advantage of the opportunity.” Freddy worked the structure for a while and checked in via radio and satellite communicator with other boats he knew were working nearby areas. He didn’t like what he was seeing or hearing, so he pulled the spread and got ready to make another move. His network includes friends who run commercial boats, and one of whom told him there were whales and tuna on a spot about 15 miles distant the day before. Everyone grabbed one of the six high-backed helm chairs that reside under the boat’s large hardtop and settled in for the ride.

This time we cruised faster, around 45 MPH, and were at the next spot in 20 minutes. The big XTO outboards were quiet, smooth and the boat traveled at speed effortlessly. Unfortunately, the whale and tuna departed with a change in the water to a milky green color. After a quick look around, it was off to the next spot.

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Heavy duty poppers like this one are designed for taking larger gamefish like the bluefin tuna we were chasing.

“Run and gun fishing is only possible with a boat that has the ability to get around quickly,” Freddy told us. “In my opinion, this is the ultimate run and gun boat. By the end of the day, I am sure you’ll agree.”

Freddy said it was break time before we headed to the next spot, so he made a one-mile detour to an old shipwreck in about 125 feet of water. As we came over the wreck Freddy smiled and said, “Watch this.” He pushed a button on the joystick at the helm putting the boat into FishPoint® mode. It held position all by itself as his clients moved to the bow to drop jigs and baited hooks to the bottom.

“This is my first boat with Yamaha’s Helm Master® EX system and I gotta tell you, I would never have another boat without it,” Gamboa said. “No wasted time anchoring

the boat over a specific spot or having to re-anchor if the wind or current change. It makes bottom fishing a joy, especially on run and gun trips when doing this is just a quick side-venture to fill the fish box.”

Chris, Bob and Russ quickly started cranking up one sea bass after another as Gamboa used the Helm Master joystick to work the boat around the structure below us, then put it back in FishPoint to hold position. He kept the boat over the part of the wreck where the fish were congregating, and his anglers caught plenty of sea bass for dinner that night.

Thirty minutes later it was back on the hunt for tuna. At the next spot, we saw whales, dolphins and some bird life - all good indicators. He was even marking tuna high in the water column, but we got no bites on

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Bluefin tuna are frequently found in areas where whales and dolphin are found since they all feed on the same baitfish.

the trolling spread, nor did anyone else in the area. That's when Freddy's Karma came back in a wonderous way. A quick hail on the VHF came in from someone who said, "You don't know me, but you called me in on a bite last year and I'm returning the favor." The anonymous captain said he just caught four in succession, and fish were coming up and busting on the surface. He gave Freddy the numbers, an area about nine miles away, and thanked him for his generosity in the past. Our trolling spread was out of the water in a flash, and we were flying over the wavetops at 55 MPH, arriving on at the spot in little more than ten minutes—run and gun indeed! The birds were diving, whales were spouting, great pods of dolphin were frolicking through

the bait pods – and tuna were crashing bait on the surface. Freddy dropped two side tracker bars as we worked our way into the area, and one hooked up immediately. As Chris fought that fish, Arion got the gaff ready and reeled in the other bar. Gamboa brought the boat carefully within casting range of the surface feeding tuna. Bob and Russ were already on the bow with spinning rods casting big poppers trying to coax a strike when Bob hooked up. The bluefin sprinted off, taking drag off the reel with little effort. Mission accomplished.

It was late in the afternoon, well past the time a typical charter boat would pull up and head back to port, but Andrea's Toy is not a typical

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Seeing an exciting surface strike and fighting a tuna on spinning tackle was the goal. Mission Accomplished!



A nice pair of “unders” provided enough tuna steaks for everyone.

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charter boat. We spent the next couple hours chasing pods of tuna as they blasted to the surface here and there, providing more shots for the anglers’ casts. The action began to wind down so Freddy made the decision to hit a couple more wrecks and see if he could find a larger “over” tuna to add to the limit of two “unders” already on ice. The first wreck stop produced a few more sea bass, but a larger tuna eluded us. Another run to another wreck only 12 miles from the inlet was not productive, so we headed in to clean some fish. Freddy pulled into his slip at Clarks Landing shortly after 6:00 p.m. after covering close to 200 miles in the twelve hours since we left the dock.

Andrea’s Toy is an amazing fishing machine that makes taking clients on these kinds of trips not only possible, but quick work with comfort and safety. No one was tired or any worse for the wear after a long day on the water. The next time you hear someone mention “run and gun” you will have a better idea how it’s done by a master, Yamaha Pro Captain Freddy Gamboa. You can learn more about it at www.andreastoycharters.com or email him at captainfred@andreastoycharters.com.