

Getting a whiff of the fish!

Now for something completely different. Russ Symons joins a party whiffing for bass and as you are about to find out it is not as simple as slinging a sinker over the side of the boat!

Trolling! Bah, that's what the Americans do when they want their lines yanked according to many Brits who think the method is borrowed from our cousins on the other side of the Atlantic, but nothing could be further from the truth.

"Il faut tracher" is Celtic Cornish for "I must whiff" although some will be pedantic and say that whiffing is only properly done under sail, sculling or pulling with oars, which in truth means no more than being under power. Whiffing, trailing, or trolling as it is popularly known today, is a method as old as Davy Jones

himself and such is its effectiveness that commercial fishermen and anglers hunting larger fish swear by the method... especially for catching bass and pollack.

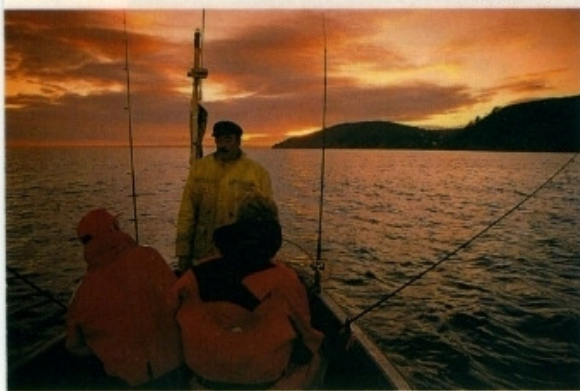
The uninitiated have dismissed whiffing as a mind-numbing, essentially boring method of catching fish, where the boat is motored around at slow speeds trailing lures or sometimes sandeels behind the boat for hours on end.

To the initiated it is an exciting method where the lures are presented to the fish using the influence of the currents, the state of the sea, wind, and most important of all, the knowledge of where the fish are going to be.

There is a skill in lining up shore marks, combining that old skill with the precision of modern GPS. Now you now know why little 16ft boats have differential GPS fitted!

To move a pattern of lures up through a gully or accurately through a boil coming off the top of a rock without spooking the fish demands spatial skills where perhaps half a dozen different influences are considered to get the boat over the fish and the lures through the shoals.

These are subtle skills, unseen and little appreciated by those who do not understand.



It's dawn and the artificial eels are fishing some 80 yards behind Cisajek skippered by Dave Butt

A blue and white Eddystone whiffed close to the rocks catches many a bass



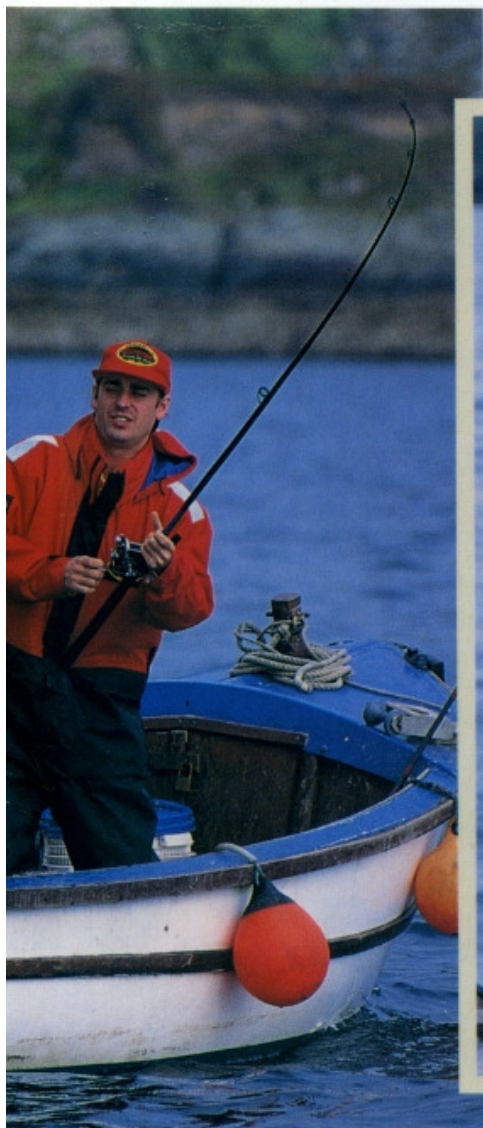
So what is the best tackle for whiffing?

First the boat must be considered as an integral part of the tackle. Wooden boats are believed to absorb engine noise and issue a less frightening 'signature' to the fish, although most of the people I fish with use glass boats without any detrimental effect.

The best engines are slow-running diesels, on small boats the baby Saabs, Yanmar or Kubota diesels are much favoured with the bigger diesels such as the 1.5 or 2.2 BMCs being rebuilt and rebuilt again to keep boats over 20ft going.

It's quite possible to whiff with outboards, the oil-injected engines are the best, because the ratio of oil to petrol is automatically reduced as the engine speed falls, so the plugs are far less likely to oil up at prolonged slow speeds.

If you do not have an oil-injected engine then a second fuel tank can be taken containing a reduced oil mixture for slow speed running. But be careful if running on a low oil mixture that



Left: Martin Beer enjoys his stand-up fight with a bass

Above: What a happy chap! Martin with his 9lb 6oz bass

you don't forget which tank you are on and open the throttle because if you do, something sad will quickly happen to your engine!

Depending on the strength and direction of the tide you have to be able to maintain a trolling speed between one and a half and two and a half knots for several hours.

Rods need to be about 10ft long, the original Conoflex 3oz uptider is a favourite, but various other uptiders and salmon spinning rods all work well.

Reels such as the Penn 310 Gti, Shimano TR2000 Charter Special and the ABU 9000 are the right size and have stood the test of time.

There is little advantage to be gained from using braid lines, and monofilament about 15 to 18lb is standard for sport fishing, although commercial rod 'n' reelers use 20lb minimum.

What is important, especially if two anglers are working four rods at the same time, is that the breaking strain of the line is similar on all rods. If you fail to get the lines right they will all tangle up when the boat turns and the advantage of using different sinker sizes lost.

Rigging the rods is a skill in its own right. It is

normal for a pattern to be followed to draw the lures over the shoal of fish or to present the lures over ground through which fish are known to pass over.

If the boat follows an oval track the pattern of sinkers should be deployed so that when the boat turns to port all the lighter sinkers will be on the outside line of the boat and the heavier ones on the inside.

As the boat goes around in a wide turn, the inside sinkers will tend to sink deeper than the outside ones and the lures will swim over one another without tangling. When the tide changes and you need to change direction, the rods may well have to be swapped around.

Most West Country anglers use Eddystone Eels for trolling because they are good swimmers. It's essential that the lures swim upright and track in a straight line - lures that lay flat can be towed around until hell freezes over without inducing a strike!

Often a matchstick taped to the shank of the hook and lubricated with saliva can be forced inside the lure so the position of the hook can be shifted from side to side to counter any



Steady with the net. Dave Butt brings an angry bass to the net

manufacturing defects. This helps make the lure swim more naturally.

The eel is fastened off to a 3 or 4ft leader to either a ball bearing swivel or two or three barrel swivels joined together. This is done so that any twists are reduced to a minimum if the lure is plucked by a fish.

The sinker is clipped on the mainline above the swivels. Typically the lightest line might not have any sinker at all on the mainline, the swivels alone are enough.

The next line could have a quarter ounce lead, the next a half ounce and the heavy line a one or two ounce weight.

A flat line might also be run in the

middle position with a 6 or 8 ounce sinker and run on a shorter line than the others.

After checking that the lure is swimming properly, the sinker is held in the hand and the lure payed out perhaps 20 yards, the sinker being held in place with a Fairy liquid bottle top, elastic band, tube and matchstick or you could use a Ziplock boom.

Then another 50 or 60 yards of line is paid out so that the lure is swimming perhaps 80 yards behind the boat.

Place the rod in a holder, setting the clutch and reel's ratchet just hard enough to resist the natural pull exerted by the lure 'whiffing'.

When a fish strikes the lure, the ratchet