

the tight line®

**Montebello Islands  
Osaka Fishing Tackle Show**

**Vol 6**

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**Osaka 2012 - Japan Fishing  
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# Expedition to the Montebello Islands

*Keitarou Ajiti with a beautiful Montes GT*

## Montebello Islands

The northern part of Western Australia is a pretty remote place. For many people living on the East Coast of Australia, it might as well be in another country: indeed it is faster to fly to many Asian and Pacific countries than it is to fly into parts of Northwest WA. Many anglers who make the trip over here comment that they 'should have come years ago'. It was precisely these thoughts that were in my mind as the plane made it's final approach to Karratha Airport. The late afternoon sun was lighting up the land and adjacent waters in a way that beckoned warmly to both the photographer and angler in me. The land was rich red, brown and orange tones while the waters lapped cool and blue at the edge of my aerial picture frame.

The view from the ground was a little different, but not unexpected. The dry desert heat tries to suck all the moisture from your body as you step from the plane and the fine dust haze gives everything a gritty look and feel. My fishing companion Mat and I wandered inside the terminal, to be met by our host Jim Isherwood, who in a perversely proud sort of way welcomed us to the 'worst airport in Australia'! The mining boom has lead to growth in

many areas, particularly numbers of flights for the 'fifos' (fly in, fly out workforce) but not, it appears in airport infrastructure.

Jim lives in Pannawonica, a short 2 hour drive from Karratha (barely 'round the corner' in WA distance terms). This was to be our base for the next few days as we packed all the gear for next phase of the trip. The 'trip' came about when Jim phoned up the store one day and during a conversation with my wife, Janelle it was decided (by Jim at least) that we had to come and check out the Montebello Islands. Unfortunately Janelle couldn't make it due to work commitments and so Mat Vinton stepped in to take the place. Matt is great to have on fishing trips, especially those which are a little bit more adventurous than the norm. He could have a good time anywhere, an important factor when words like explore and experiment are being bandied about, not to mention long travel times to get to destinations.

The Montebello Islands are a group of around 174 islands which lie about 160km east of Dampier in the Pilbra region of WA. To the south is Barrow, a much larger Island which is the site of a large gas port development as well as some stellar GT

*On the road to Pannawonica*





*Just some of the gear*



*Dampier, with Blue Lightning*

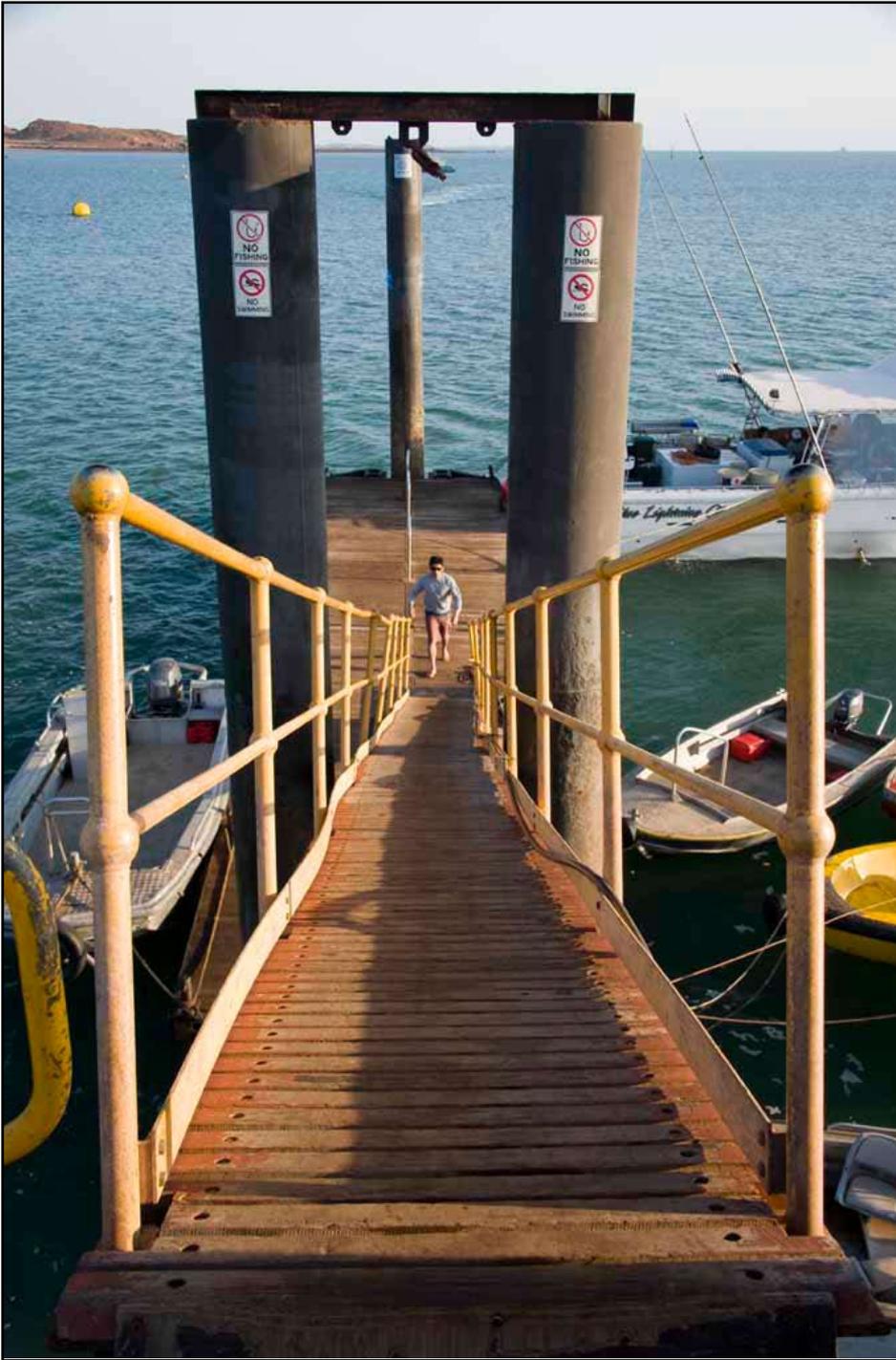
spots. The islands themselves are made up of eroded limestone bedrock topped with spinifex grasses. Protected coves and sandy beaches appear at regular intervals, and they would make a true desert island paradise if it weren't for the fact that the British detonated 3 nuclear bombs here in the 1950's. Some areas are still off limits for all but short visits and signs warn visitors as to the dangers of picking up rocks or kicking up dust at these locations. The northern most reef in the Montebello Islands is also the site of one of Australia's earliest known shipwrecks: that of the Tryall in 1622.

The amount of planning involved with mounting the trip to the Montebellos only really hit home when we reached Jim's place. Box trailers full of eskys, tents, tools, fridges and much, much more filled almost the entire back yard. The numbers were impressive. 5 trailer boats, 1 mothership with 8m centre console tender and a total of 23 anglers. Jim had been working on the logistics for months and had prepared much of the food in advance. Water and fuel would be two of the most important considerations as running out of either would be disastrous. We spent the next couple of days helping with the organising as well as checking out

some of the local landmarks. Just outside of town is Pannawonica Hill, a stunning pillar of rock adjacent to a waterhole - the perfect spot to relax with a beer as the sun goes down.

On top of the more regular crew of anglers were a contingent of Japanese anglers. These guys had come out to see what sort of prospects the Montebellos offered as a GT fishing destination. Among them were Kenji Konishi, probably the most famous GT angler in the world as well as being the owner of Carpenter fishing tackle company and Yoichi Mogi of Proshop Mogi who is credited as one of the inventors of modern Japanese style jigging.

The following couple of days were a bit of blur. The plan was simple: load the vehicles and travel to Dampier, then load the gear onboard 'Blue Lightning' and the trailer boats, the following day travel to the Montes. Easy. By the end of those couple of days I think I was ready for a holiday to recover from my holiday! The heat really started to kick in as well, not that the locals noticed mind you. I fell into bed the first night dreaming of carrying endless ice boxes and slabs of drinks from an unending row of trailers and with a resolution that I had to get fit before coming on these kinds of trips



encountered throughout the 6 hour run. The guys in the smaller boats may have got there faster but their bruised and battered bodies (and boats) paid quite a toll. The 15-20 knot winds also made them look like they had been standing in a saltwater shower for hours on end.

Arriving at the islands was quite a revelation. The limestone rock that forms much of the geography appears quite flat from a distance, but up close has been sculpted into stunningly fishy looking ledges, pinnacles and overhangs. As we motored to our anchorage I just wanted to stop and fish every lump of rock that we passed. At that rate it would have taken all week to drop anchor. A few hours later, after another round of unloading, unpacking and a very welcome feed we collapsed into swags. The starry display was nothing short of spectacular, but it couldn't prevent me from falling asleep almost instantly.

Coffee was the first thing that came to mind the next morning. After some quiet contemplation of the beautiful bay in front of the camp and a quick feed, it was down to business. Light tackle for reef dwellers sounded like a suitable way to open the accounts. Maps were consulted and a few likely

again. The trip to the islands was fairly uneventful for those of us who managed to snag a spot on the Blue Lightning. The 55ft ex cray boat made pretty easy work of the steep swells and nasty chop that we







*Evening in Dampier, overlooking the iron ore loader*

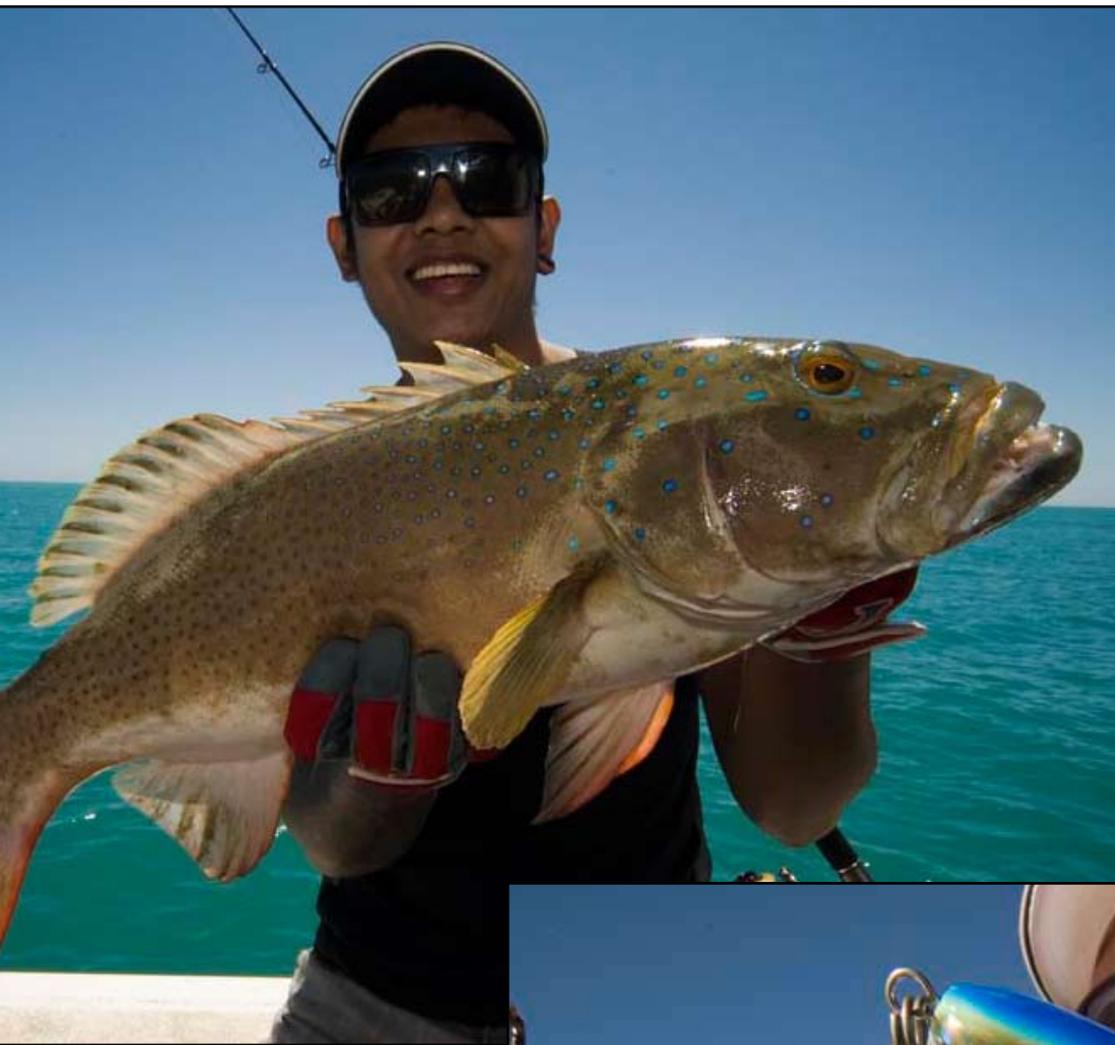


areas identified which would see us through the first few days of the trip.

The fishing started slowly as we explored and tried to come to grips with the area. The key appeared to be the bait. Many spots looked awesome with great structure and current but only a few were holding bait. As with anywhere, once the bait was located the predators weren't far behind. Around the rocks, precise casts were the order of the day. The limestone erodes faster below the waterline making fantastic mushroom shaped formations.

The problem here is that many fish are hiding a long way back under the ledges and when you do hook them, they are very well placed to bust you off quick smart. Plenty of fish also came from shallow coral flats adjacent to deep dropoffs, these fights were far more visual than under the mushroom rocks and a much higher percentage of fish were landed. Andrew, who was new to this style of fishing got the hang of it very quickly knocking off a bunch of firsts for himself, while Mat and I had a great time on emperors, trout, cod, queenfish and various trevallies. One of the best trout nailed Andrew's lure in less than a metre of water and was unlucky not to get away as it bolted from bommie to bommie across the coral flat. I also managed a first for myself: a cobia! While heading for a distant bommie we spotted a pair cruising just under the surface. They couldn't resist when a little FCL plug was laid out in front of them. The leading fish went after the lure like a heat seeking missile while the second smacked Mat's lure, unfortunately pulling the hooks shortly after. The cobe really performed in the shallow water,

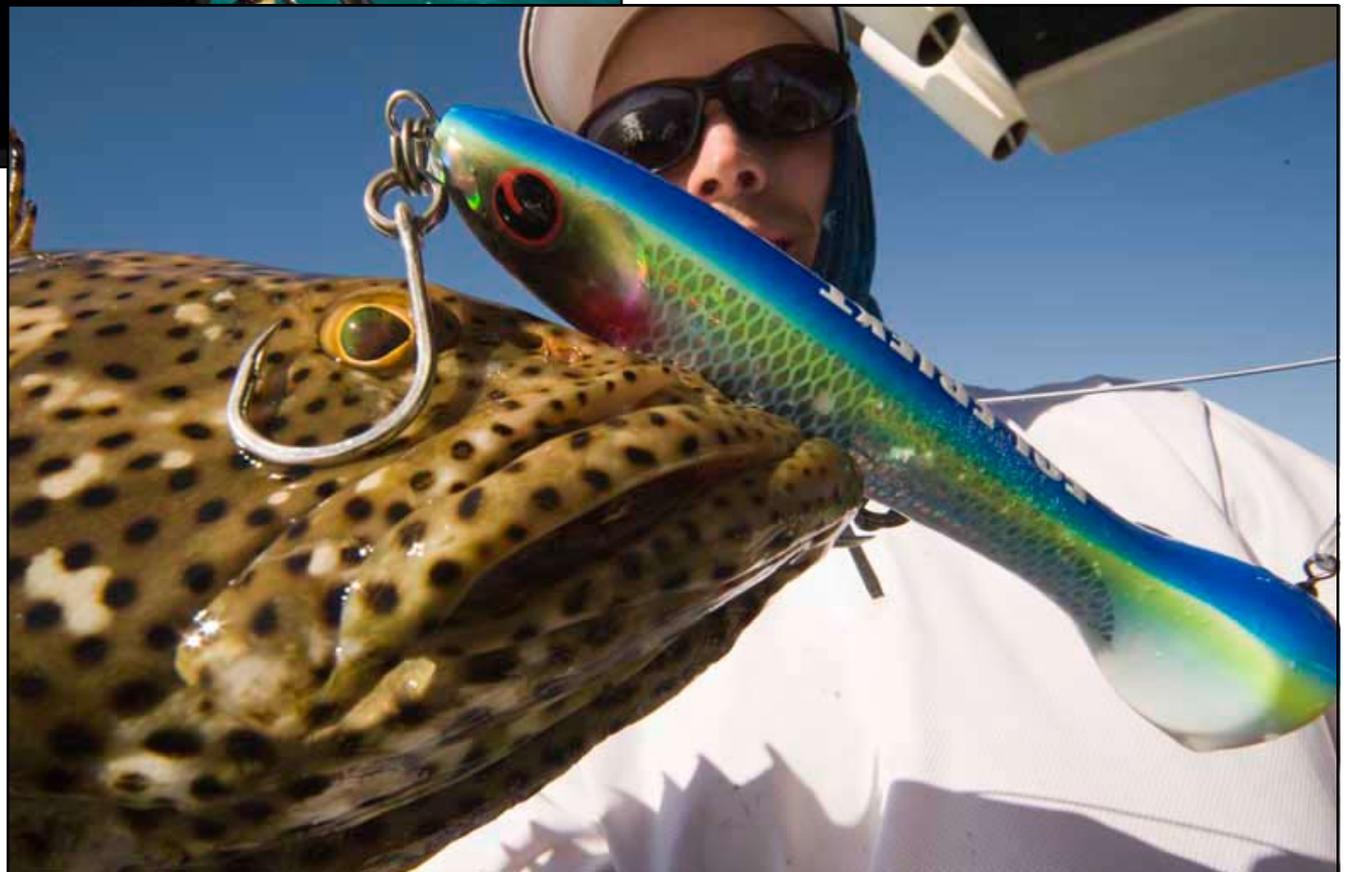


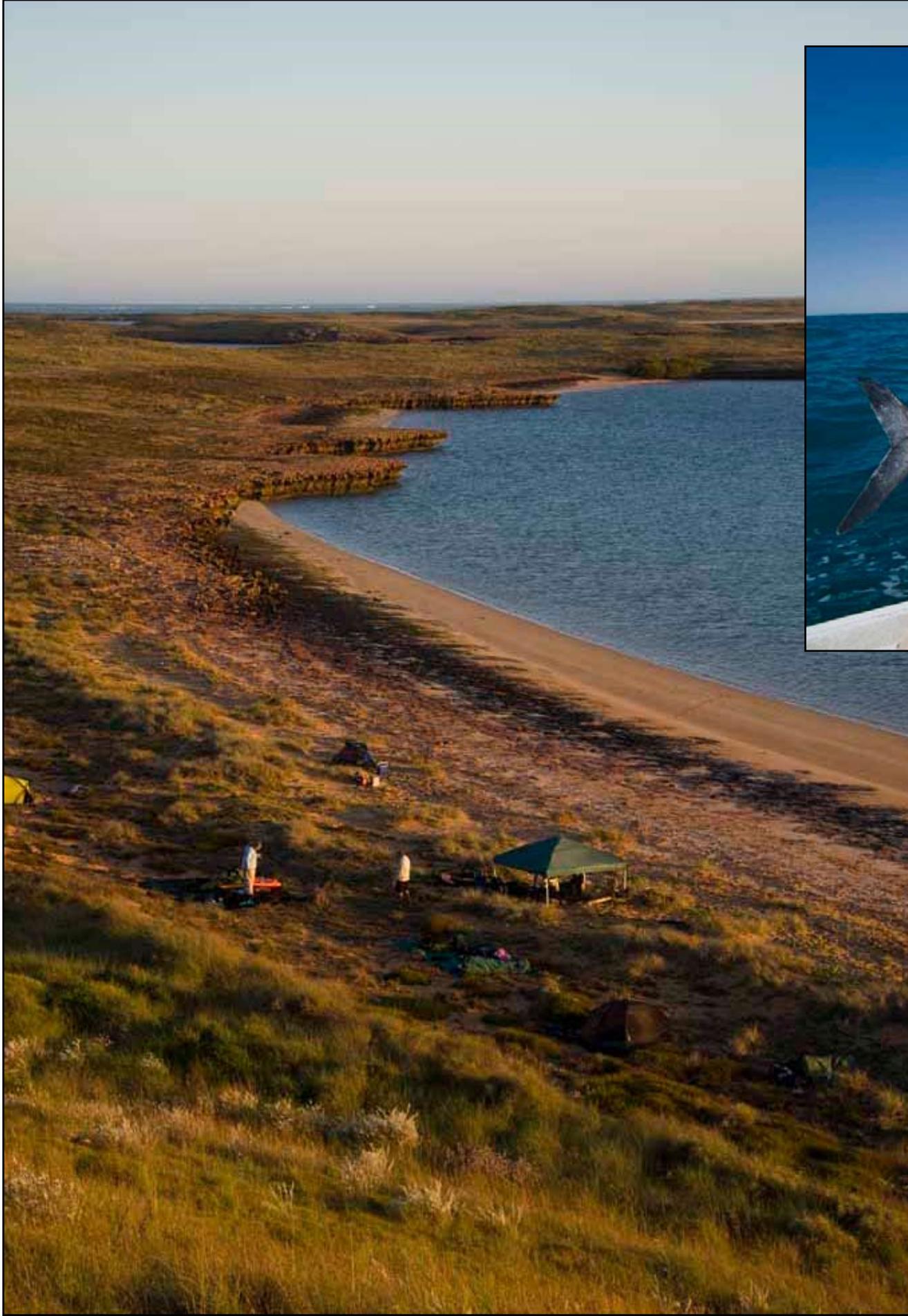


*Left, Andrew with a fine trout from a metre of water*

*Below, Estuary cod with eyes bigger than its stomach.*

*Over, the Northcraft Air Ogre was irresistible on the shallow reefs!*







which made it all the more satisfying when it finally came aboard. Now a 7kg cobia might not seem like much back home in South East Qld, but this is one fish that has eluded me throughout years of bay and offshore fishing. Twice I've gone so far as to hook up, then hand the rod off to someone else thinking it was a small fish, only for it to morph into a 20+kg cobia. That fish tasted pretty sweet, barbecued at sunset accompanied by a couple of cold drinks.

After spending a couple of days close in around the islands we decided it was time to venture further afield in search of some larger game. The guys fishing on Blue Lightning and it's 8m tender 'Heartstarter' on the outer reefs had pulled some excellent GT's and some monster Spanish mackerel over the previous couple of days, some pushing 40kg in weight! A plan was hatched to run down the

outside of islands, past a large green zone (no fishing allowed) to fish the outside reef edges at the southern Montebellos and the northern end of Barrow Island. The day started with the frustrating experience of finding a large school of Spanish mackerel finning around on the surface just 500m short of the end of the Green Zone. GT's were the main aim for the day though, so we worked our way south along the outer edge of the bommies, casting poppers and stickbaits as we went. A few 10kg GTs were attacking our lures here and there and Mat had a couple of unexpected braid failures on an otherwise quite new spool of line, the result being a couple of more substantial fish swimming away with brand new Patriot lures (one of them was actually me using Mat's rod, sorry Mat!).

Things turned our way further down the road at Barrow Island, where sandy shallow reefs met rocky cliffs. We had been informed by Chad, the skipper of Blue Lightning, that the good GT's would be right up in the shallows rather than off the deeper edges where we would normally expect them. I hadn't really believed him, until that one big fish came out. I was casting a Patriot Atomic FL; a tail weighted stickbait/ skipping





popper with great long distance casting ability. The lure hadn't moved more than a couple of twitches when massive silver flash annihilated it. The water was so shallow, the fish must have been lying half on its side to be there. Stung by the weight of drag, the trevally went on a long arching run across the top of the reef. Miraculously it missed all the outcrops of rock along the way. After some more to and fro across the skinny stuff, Mat was able to drive the GT out to safer waters, whereupon the fish tried it's hardest to drag me under the hull for the next five minutes or so. Most of that time was spent with me hanging over the side, rod butt jammed in my armpit as I tried to shuffle around and get a better angle to work with. Eventually, though probably only a couple of minutes later in reality, the fish rolled up at the side of the boat and Mat lifted it aboard. At 116cm it was by no means the largest GT of the trip but definitely one of the most brutal fights I've experienced. The explosive take in the shallows was something else!

The next delight to sample in this Pilbara wonderland was some of the offshore jigging. Chad pointed the Blue Lightning northwest to Tryal Rocks, a fantastic area of shallow reefs and pinnacles at the top of the Montes. The fishing was pretty much as expected in this pristine environment. Jigs, baits and plastics would all be sent to the bottom and a scant few would return. Unstoppables and sharkings were common but so were coral trout, red bass, rankin cod and red emperor. A couple of nice Chinaman fish also graced the decks. Unlike the Pacific coast of Australia, the Indian Ocean has no Ciguatera so many of the species which would be off limits over east are fine to eat here. While I was playing tug-of-war with bottom dwelling thugs on Blue Lightning, Mat and Jim were playing guide to the Japanese guys on board Jim's boat. They had a cracking day, earning Mat the title of 'Number 1 Captain' (though he may have come up with that moniker himself!) Konishi san in particular was very pleased with the 45kg GT he caught on his newly released 160H Gamma lure. This fish was probably the final nail in the coffin for the attitude that the West is a poor second cousin to the Eastern Australia when it comes to quality giant trevally. We didn't fare too badly on the GT's at Tryal Rocks either. Sam and Jay both pulled excellent 30+kg fish later in the day, casting from the front deck of Blue Lightning.

Our final day fishing involved a trip down to Barrow Island. Travelling further south than we had



*"You got enough kids?"*

*'Yep... you don't want any more do you?"*





previously opened up some stunning fishing grounds where boulder strewn rocky headlands ran into a stunning pale blue sea. The new gas port being built on Barrow Island along with all the vessels servicing the adjacent rigs creates a real juxtaposition with the obvious wilderness values of the region. One moment you are looking at seemingly endless waves, cliffs and sandy beaches, the next there are commercial ships and helicopters working in all directions. Typical of the North-West, everything is big. The ships, the trucks, the distances and the business. Especially the business. The day finished well with a few more big trevally landed as well as a host of smaller critters such as mackerel, various trevallies and trout coming on the light tackle.

The weather improved out of sight for the trip home (how many times have you heard that!). This made for a far more relaxing and enjoyable journey than the trip out. The journey out to the Montebellos is not for the under prepared and thankfully all of the locals had everything sorted long before we flew in. If you're planning on visiting a wild place like this, be prepared to put in several months of preparation or take advantage of charters like Blue Lightning who know the place intimately.

*This trip came together thanks to the massive effort put in by Jim Isherwood and Phil Dee, who planned the whole event over the best part of a year. Chad Mills, the skipper of Blue lightning did a great job as both a charter operator and mothership/ barge for all our gear. He also helped everyone get onto some great fish, not an easy task when juggling the needs of the 20 odd anglers involved with the trip. If you want to fish this amazing region, check out [bluelightning.com.au](http://bluelightning.com.au)*

*Looking south from Bluebell Island at dawn. Check out the massive limestone overhangs!*









*Left, leaving Dampier with tinnies in tow*

*Below, Battling a GT at Tryal Rocks*

*Over, Mat hooks into a solid GT at Barrow Island.*





*Above, If you leave Pannawonica for good then you must leave an offering at the tree just outside of town. Boots are a good offering, but sometimes the tree demands shirts and underwear too.*

*Above right, breaking camp on Bluebell Island.*

*Right, Jim's place in Pannawonica. Before the trip, every room in the house was filled with gear and supplies for the adventure.*







*Sturts desert pea*





*Pannawonica Hill*

# Symnit



## Synit Casting Rods

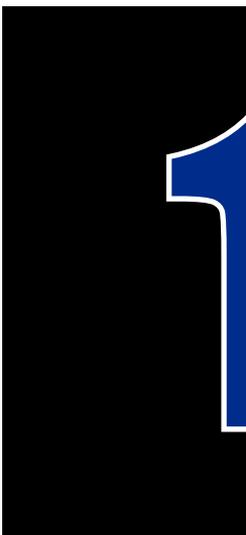
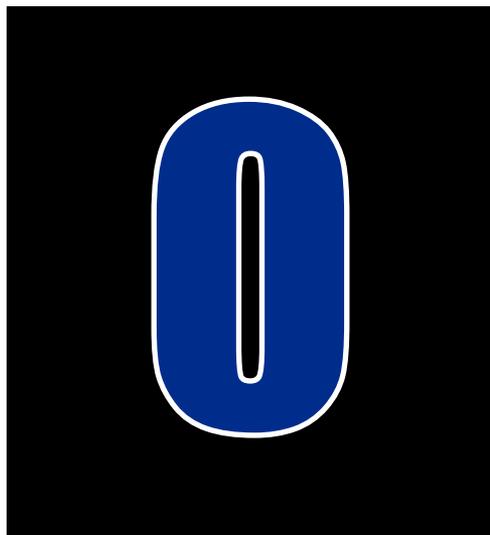
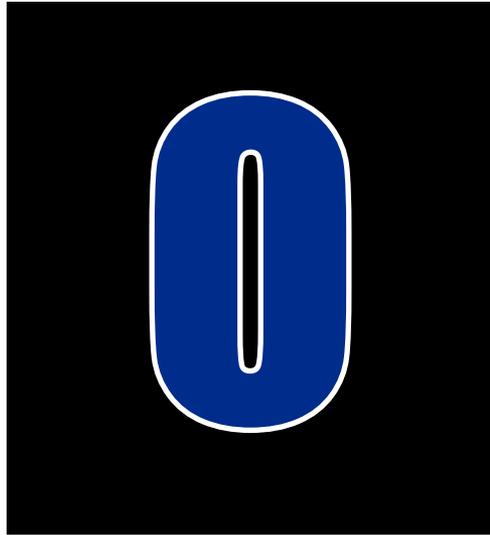
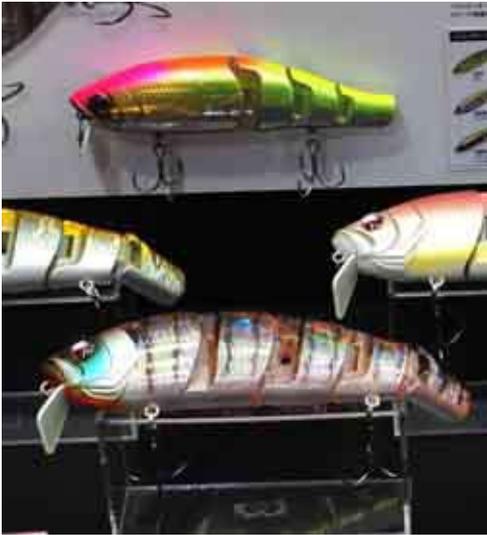
Model	Length	Line Class	Cast Weight
Lalandi	7'11"	PE 5-8	Max 170g
Topshot GT	7'11"	PE 6-10	Max 250g
Banshee H	7'0"	PE 2-4	Max 60g

## Synit Deepshot Jigging Rods

Model	Length	Line Class	Jig Weight
100LJ	5'5"	PE 1-3	70-200g
150	5'5"	PE 3-4	100-250g
250	5'3"	PE 3-6	180-400g
350	5'2"	PE 4-8	250-450g
450	5'2"	PE 5-10	300-550g
Seriola	5'1"	PE 6-10	180-450g

To view a large range of Synit Rods  
go to [www.fishhead.com.au](http://www.fishhead.com.au)





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**The Japanese tackle industry has had a challenging time of late.**

Aside from the ups and downs of the world economy, the Tsunami that hit north-east Japan devastated coastal communities that the fishing industry relies on. In the aftermath, businesses not directly hit by the disaster were still affected by power shortages and supply chain interruptions

for many months afterwards. Osaka itself is a fair way away from the impact zone of the tsunami, however, it sits right in the middle of Japan's industrial heartland, a place sure to feel the effect of the economic fallout of the disaster. As it turns out, my concerns were largely unfounded. I had heard reports of new projects being put on the backburner, but there was still plenty of new gear out there to keep a tackle junky like me well and truly transfixed.



*... in the field.*

**TIEMCO**



**TMC**

**EUFLEX**



*Jumping Jack* *Aqua Project*

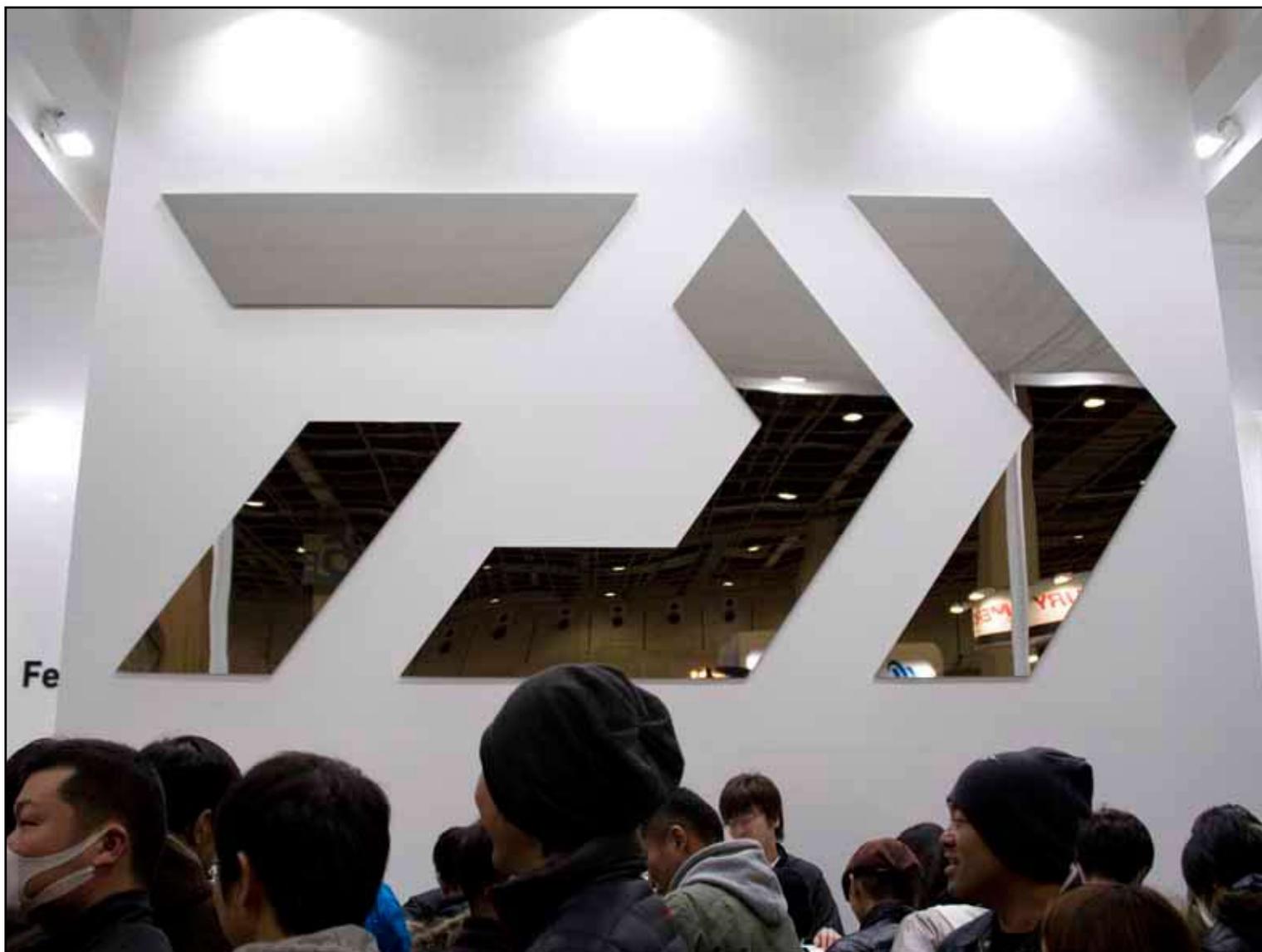


Katsu

JACKALL

ikatsu





The big companies like Daiwa and Shimano both had a bunch of new reels. Shimano was especially focused on its' two new premium baitcasters, the Antares and Calcutta while also adding a new light spin reel called the Vanquish, sitting just below the top of the line Stella. Daiwa, having recently released the T3 baitcaster were looking to the new Exist and Catalina spin reels to generate excitement.

To keep the fanatics happy there was also the limited edition J-Dream baitcaster, based on the Zillion reel format. Other major companies such as Megabass, Evergreen, Jackall and Lucky Craft all had a bunch of cool new product on show. Some of my favourite included the Megabass Black Jungle rods and reels and the Evergreen slow jig rods.



So whats hot in Japanese fishing right now?

### Bass fishing

For the last few years, Japan's fishing tackle trade has invested heavily in promoting saltwater fishing. Since last years disaster, interest for many anglers has switched back to the fresh water. Most lure companies released new crankbaits and jerkbaits or 're-birthed' older lures with minor changes or new finishes. On a similar vein, several companies have entered into collaborations with companies like Heddon, bringing Japanese styling and paint jobs to classic American bass lures. Hand made topwater bass lures have come along in leaps and bounds in popularity, with boutique manufacturers like Frog, Akashi, and Tsunami all having a presence at the show. These guys promote traditional lure making

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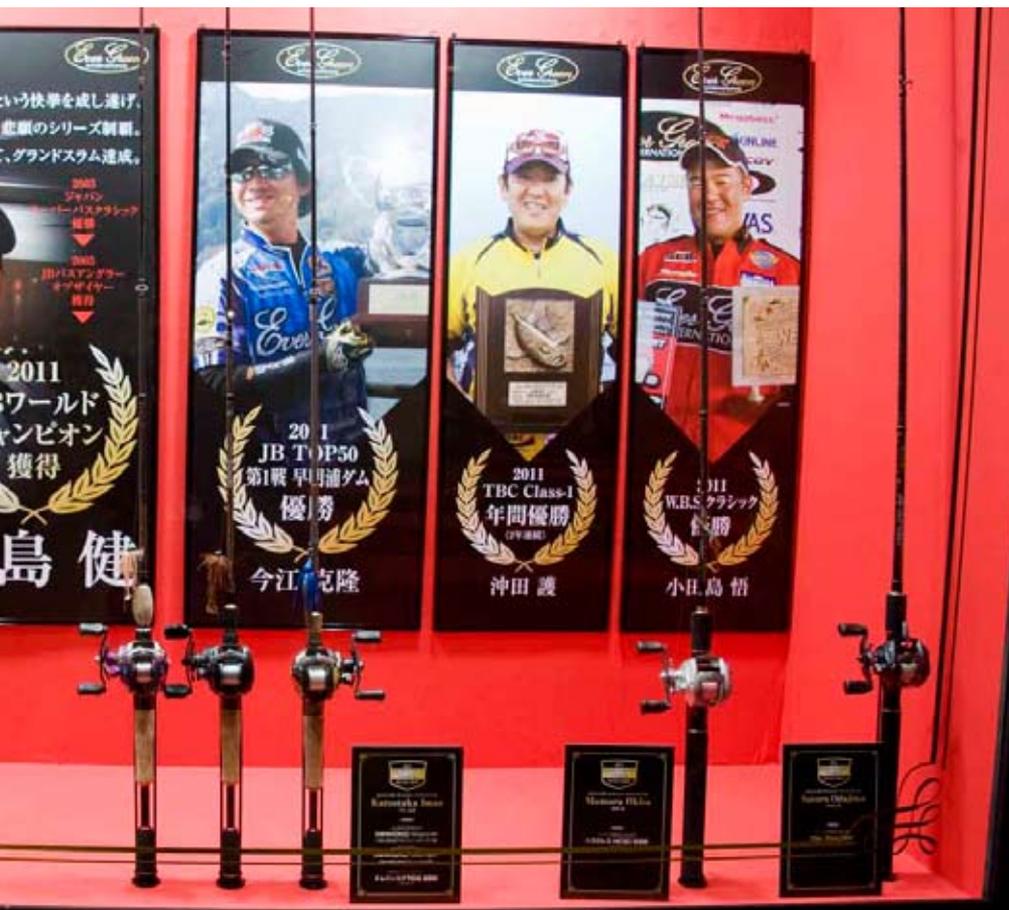
250円 | メガエビ丼 800円 | 天ぷらうどん  
カツカレー 700円 | きつねうどん  
- 600円 | 助六寿司 3

Jabass®  
Challenge



*Team Evergreen had plenty of prizes to show off this year*

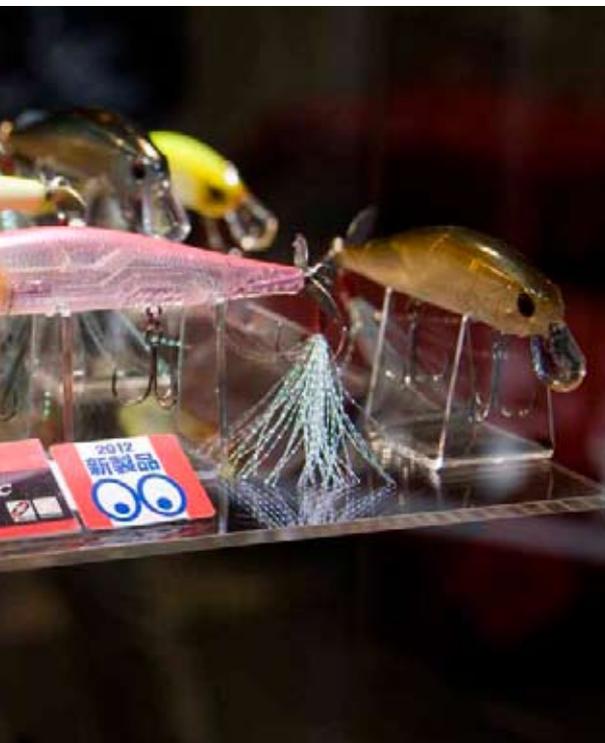




*Above: Cool bling parts for the Opus 1 reel*

*Bottom: New Bank Shad and Wake Magic from Evergreen*

*Far Left: Evergreen's 'Slow Style' jig rods*





*The Megabass Black Jungle may be just a Daiwa Ryoga in disguise, but it wins the coolest looking reel prize, hands down.*





Top Left: Too much power is not enough? meet the new new Megabass Black Jungle F10 - 76XBJ

Middle Left: The opposite end of the scale, Megabass Pagani Air Bamboo

Bottom Left: The 'spark rig' is the Megabass answer to the Alabama Rig that has created such controversy in the US bass scene.

Right: Collaboration between classic US lure maker Rebel and Megabass.

Bellow: New Megabass spinnerbait, note the teardrop shape of the blades.



techniques and customised retro tackle. Their laid back approach sees them pretty much heading in the opposite direction to the rest of the industry, making a great antidote to the glamour and hype of the rest of the show.

### Slow Style Jigging

Over the last few years deep water jigging styles have slowed down considerably. Anglers in Japan have noticed declines in the effectiveness of high speed jigging techniques in their highly pressured fisheries. Forward thinking anglers have been seeking out lures with more action in the water, to fool wised up trophy fish. Many of the long tail weighted jigs have vanished from the store shelves, now replaced by shorter broader styles with more action and flutter. The rods have started to creep up in length too. Rods released by FCL Labo and Evergreen this year more closely resemble a fast taper 7'+ offshore plastics rod with an extra long butt. They're not the greatest fish fighting tools ever, but are designed to get a great action out of metal jigs at a very slow pace. Every second saltwater company had slow style jigs on display at the show, mostly leaf or teardrop shapes, but also a few longer sliders as well. Speciality reel manufacturers like





*Some sights at the show simply defy explanation!*



Studio Ocean Mark have built low geared reels to suit the style too. The idea of Slow Style is to only flick the lure 10-15cm on each upstroke of the rod and get a little backwards flutter from the lure on the downstroke. For someone who is used to working jigs much faster, it really takes some concentration to jig this slowly! The technique is deadly on reef fish everywhere, but also on cagey kingfish and amberjack in highly pressured waters.

### **Kingfish Stickbaits**

Kingfish on surface lures have been a popular target with clued up anglers for a few seasons now,

but this year the technique really seemed hit the big time. There were plenty of up-sized stickbaits from companies such as Tiemco, Shout and many others, as well as the more boutique timber offerings.

The other thing I noticed was almost a complete absence of larger poppers (save a big GT popper from Daiwa). It has been apparent in Japan that, like fast moving jigs, noisy blooping surface lures were becoming less and less effective in home waters. The result is that stickbaits (or pencils as they are known here) have taken over in most situations for surface luring GT, kingfish and tunas.



*Far Left: There were some amazing one off painted reels on display. Unfortunately, none appeared to be for sale!*

*Left: Funky Studio Ocean Mark parts for the 4500/5000 size Daiwa Saltiga reels*

*Below: Matagi continue to expand the range of wild colours available in custom reel seats.*







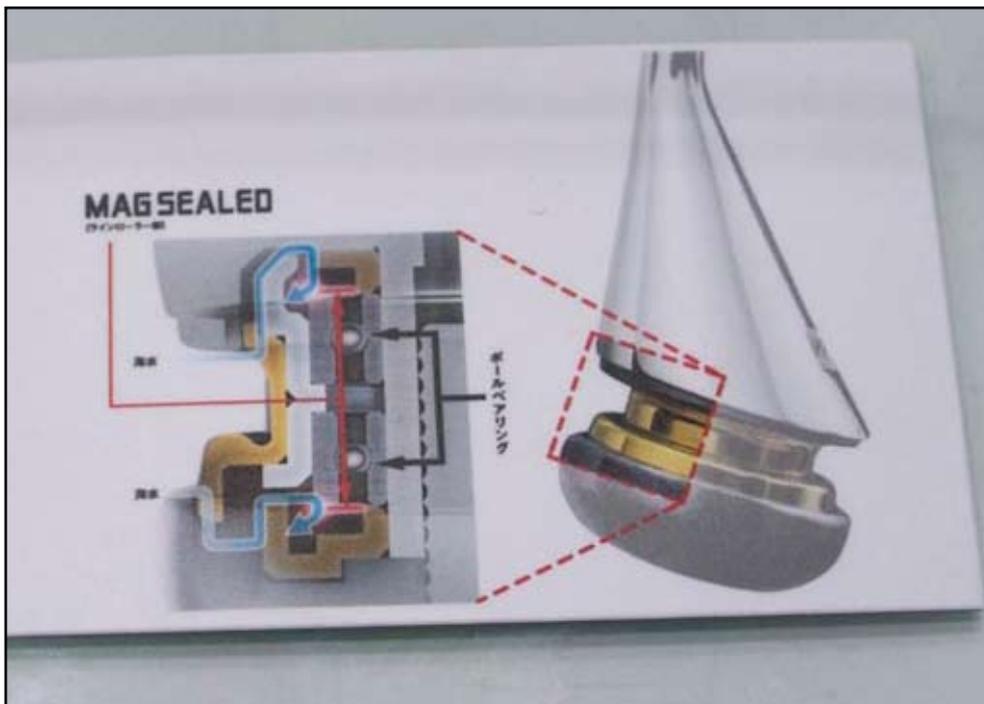
*The Brearden stand was typically understated*



*Sexy stickbaits from Shout, ideal for kings, tunas and mid-size trevallies*



*Above: Larger versions of Daiwa's ridiculously light weight AGS carbon framed guides are starting to appear on their top end rods. Don't expect them to come out as aftermarket parts though as the rod blank is built specifically for the guides hard feet.*



*Right and Left: The new Exist, pinnacle of Daiwa's spinning reels. The big new feature on this reel is that the Mag-Seal technology, previously only found on the rotor/main shaft, has been extended to the bail roller. Hopefully this the end of noisy bail roller bearings! Both the body and rotor is made of Zaion rather than alloy for light weight and corrosion resistance. Everything has been drilled to an inch of its life to save weight. The gears are as you would expect; silky smooth and very light to turn the handle. I can't wait to give this one a workout on the local grounds.*



MAKAI

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FOUR



*Above: The Bubblemaker is a new big popper from Daiwa at a time when everyone else is doing stickbaits. Should be great on GT's, Yellowfin and monster Kings.*

*Above Left: The Daiwa Catalina carries most of the parts from the Saltiga, but at a lower price. They will be available in 4000, 4500 and 5000 sizes in standard and high speed.*



*Below: Daiwa's collaboration with Heddon, featuring a light stick holder for night fishing.*



*Above: The J-Dream limited edition Zillions come in three speeds including this blazing fast 7.9:1 geared model.*

*Right: Kenny from Daiwa explains the features of the new Exist.*

*Below: Stunning silver finish on the new limited edition Heartland 6101MSB-SV12 baitcast rod.*





*Stunning custom paint jobs*



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*Left: The new Vanquish from Shimano is a super smooth and light weight spin reel. It sits just below the Stella and features a magnesium frame matched with a C14 carbon rotor. These light weight parts matched with the super smooth X-Ship gearing means the reel is effortless to turn the handle while keeping that smoothness even under heavy loads. Special mention to the cool machined handle!*



*The Shimano Calcutta hasn't changed much in many years, so it is great to see the old barrel baitcaster get a face lift. The body has been machined right down to make the reel easier to palm while internally it now has the same kind of smooth X-Ship gearing as the high end spin reels. The little drag star is on the outside of the handle, moving the handle knobs closer to the body for improved balance. The body has been anodised with the same coatings as the larger overheads for superb durability in a saltwater environment.*





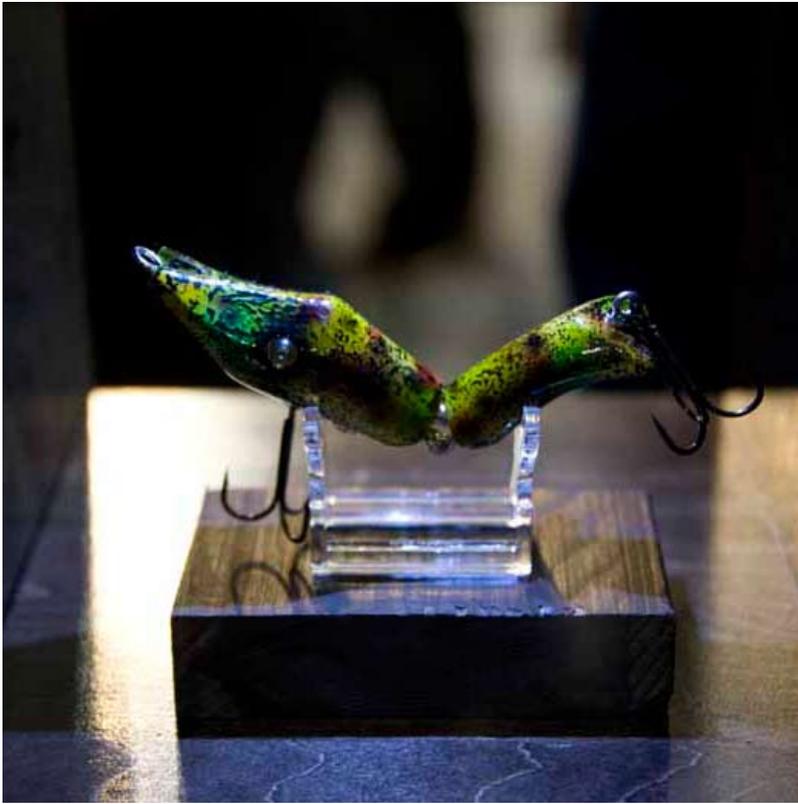


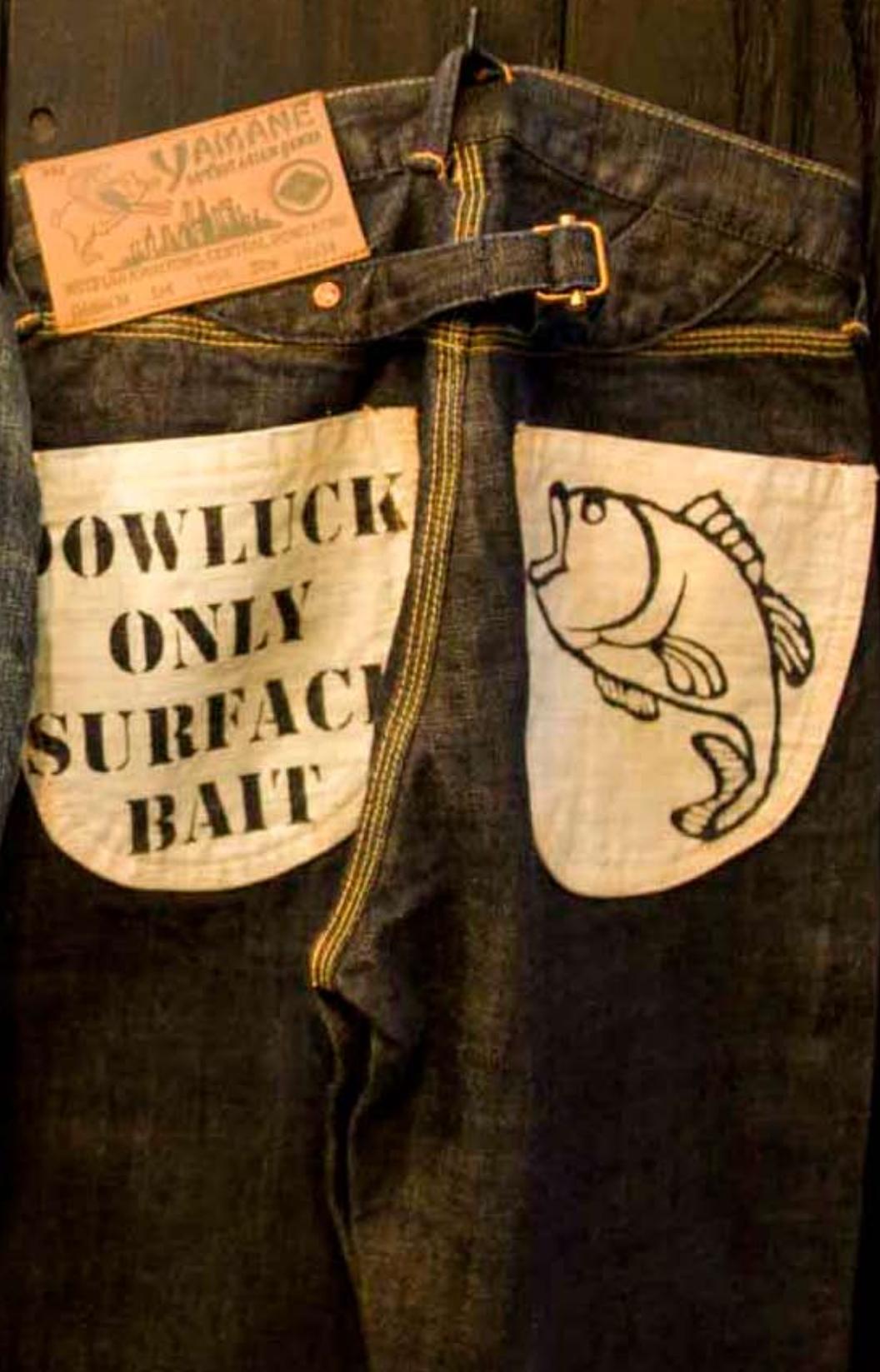
*Shimano's high end baitcaster, the Antares has had a major redesign with some significant changes. The most noticeable is the micro-module gearing system, where the gear teeth have been made extremely small. This leads to minimal gear noise when retrieving, allowing for maximum sensitivity when fishing. The magnesium spool is also super light weight and the reel also features the SVS Infinite centrifugal brake system. There was a video playing at the show where Shimano pro angler Hajime Murata uses this reel to cast 99m with a 5/8oz plug! Due to all the magnesium on board, this reel is for freshwater only,*

*Works of art on the Dowluck Stand*













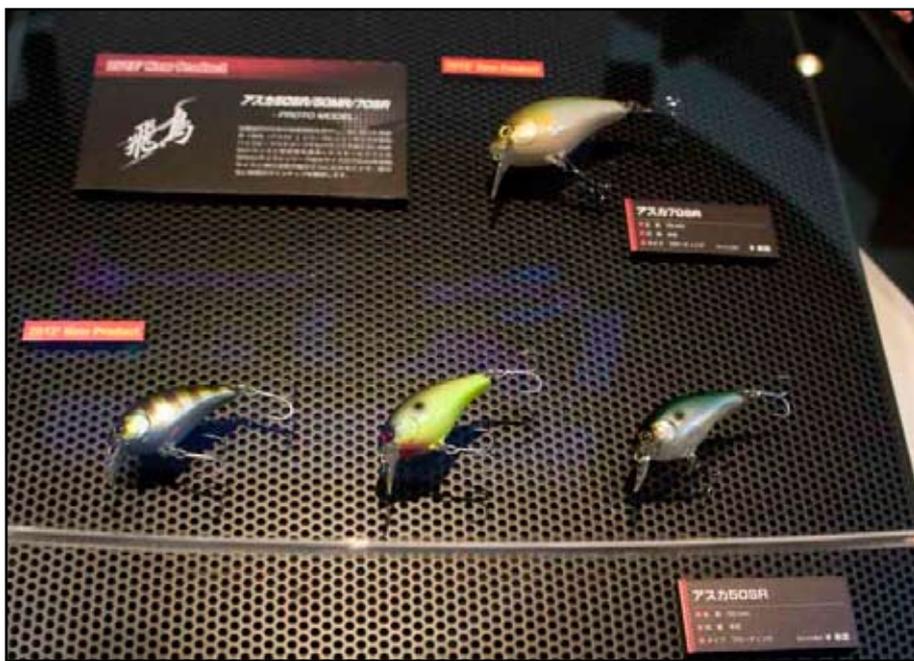
*Above Left: Vagabond kept the vibe going by bringing their own DJ.*

*Below Left: Custom timber parts from boutique rod builder / component manufacturer Greps.*

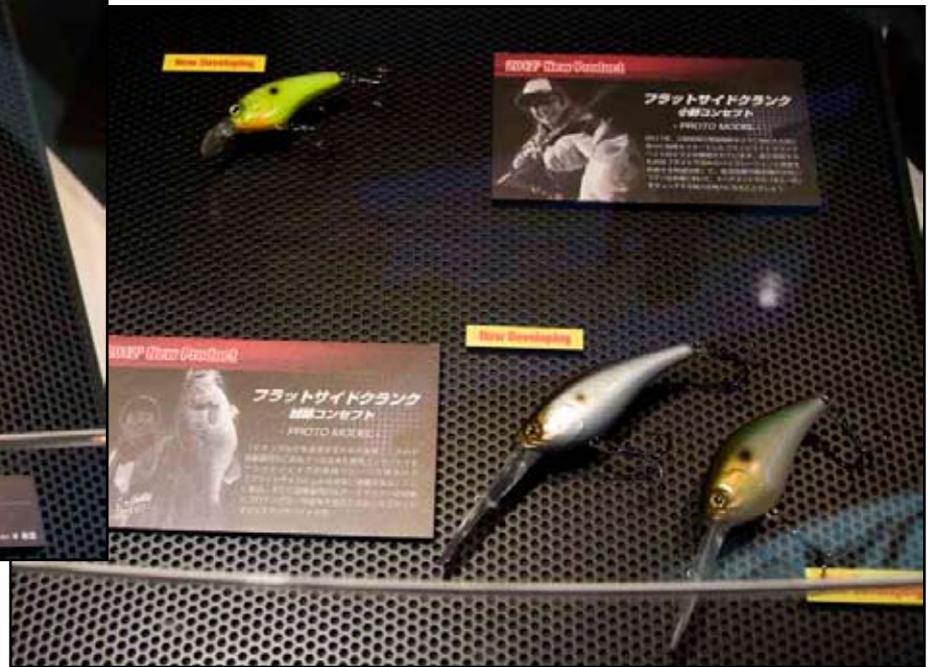
*Above: Livre collaborated with Tsunekichi for this super-light titanium handle*

*Above Right: Livre monoArm 56 adding extra bling to a Certate Hi-Gear Custom.*





*Above: New baits from Jackall*



*Above Right Cool designs on Gancraft swimbaits*

*Far Right and Below Right: New Cranks and Jerkbaits from Luckycraft*

*Below: One of the coolest collaborations has to be the Poison Glorious from Shimano and Jackall*









*Clockwise from top left: Children were entertained with a number of events, one of which involved microscopes, tweezers and trays of tiny dried sea creatures. It's important for pro bass anglers to keep sunglasses and mic's on at all times. Megabass fans spent hours lining up for a signed picture from Yuki Ito. The Fishing Show is opened with a major ribbon cutting ceremony. Fashion parade on the Tsunekichi stand.*

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