



**THINK FAST:** Wahoo are one of many pelagics that respond well to high-speed trolling techniques.

GEORGE POVEROMO

# Critical Speed!

Tweak the throttle to fine-tune your trolling strategy  
BY GEORGE POVEROMO

**IT WAS A PERFECT TEST CASE** — again! Friend Kevin Tierney and I were aboard my *MARC VI*, running offshore of South Florida in a rough ocean fueled by a northeast 15- to 20-knot wind thanks to a mid-October cold front. As determined as we were to get home, about 13 miles out of Miami we spotted something we just had to stop and fish — a huge floating tree.

Idling up to the tree with spinning outfits in hand, we saw — and caught — two dolphin. Kevin also caught two small wahoo jigging under the tree. Another 10 minutes of jigging yielded nothing, but I knew more fish had to be around. I grabbed one Penn 50 International outfit and one wahoo lure, put the boat in gear, paid the lure out, put the rod in the gunwale and told Kevin, “Whatever hits is yours.”

A few wide laps around the tree at 5 knots were uneventful, albeit comfortable in the tumultuous seas. I bumped up to around 9 knots, and not long after, we hooked up. After boating a beautiful wahoo, we put the lure back out, resumed our 9 knots of speed and soon hooked and landed another wahoo. We repeated the feat yet one more time, icing down a 30-pounder before continuing our journey home.

There’s no doubt that nearly doubling our trolling speed provoked these wahoo into striking. And had we wanted to deploy more than one lure and fish it deep, or troll longer, I’m convinced we would have caught more of them. Once again, this single lure “test case” proved that the positive adjustment to catch fish on the troll wasn’t necessarily lure size or color, but rather speed.

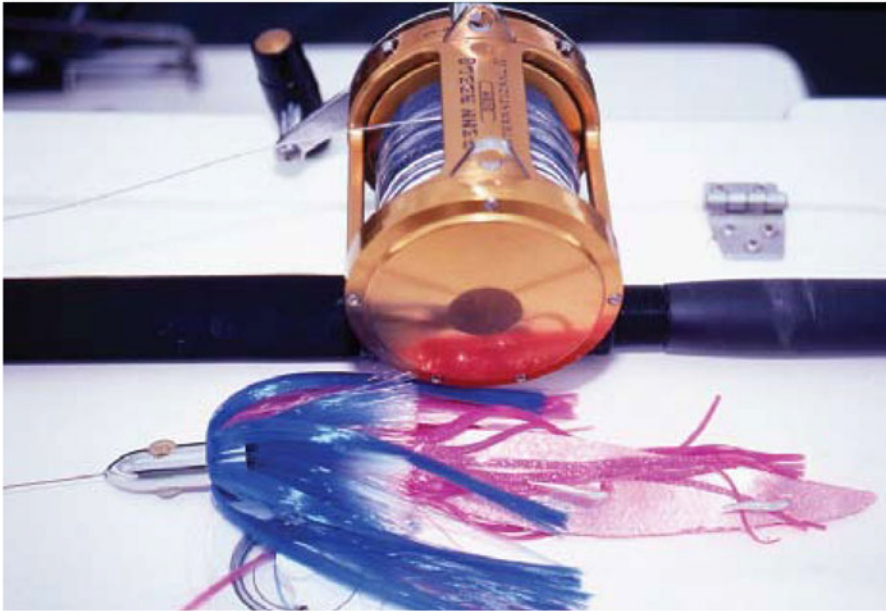
## WHAT IT DOES

**CERTAIN FISH, WAHOO BEING ONE OF THEM,** respond aggressively to quick trolling speeds. One reason is that the faster pace and tighter, more panicked action of the baits or lures — including the more intense splashing of surface-oriented baits and the vibrations of subsurface baits — creates the illusion of distressed baits fleeing

## Support Team

REPLACING A FLAT LINE BAIT with a weighted lure — or sending a bait down with a planer, downrigger, or sinker — is a good option when it’s time to increase speed. These baits remain in the water at faster clips at or beneath the surface. Bear in mind, when rough seas slow travel to 15 or 20 knots, you might as well be fishing. Many quality fish have been taken on a single or pair of 8- or 16-ounce, cone-head-style lures while cruising.





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**SWITCHING UP:** Large, weighted trolling lures (top) work well at high speeds, as they are more prone to stay in the water. Running lines through transom- or reel-seat-mounted clips also helps keep them in the water by reducing the angle of entry.

from predators. Many game fish react by chasing and striking out of instinct rather than hunger. I've seen this occur countless times, and sometimes bumping up the throttles is one way to hook a few more fish, even after a feeding blitz. This holds true for most offshore pelagics.

Rick Mola, a northeast canyon veteran who owns Fisherman's World Tackle Center in Norwalk, Connecticut, knows how to play the speed game very well. "One day at the Fish Tales in Block

Canyon, we were trolling a spread of Jet Heads, Green Machines and daisy chains of Tuna Clones between 8.3 and 8.8 knots," says Mola. "Suddenly, a wolf pack of bigeyes came up behind the baits. We're watching them swirl behind the baits — without eating them! I hurriedly increased our speed to 11 1/2 knots and instantly hooked a double header. When fish come up and aren't eating, you have just a couple seconds to make a decision, and increasing your trolling speed is

usually a good way to convert a window shopper into a catch."

Mola also contends that picking up the pace makes it difficult for fish to closely examine the lures, a big plus in clear water. "Speed can be your best friend at times," says Mola. "There's no doubt about it."

The other advantage of increasing trolling speed is that more ground is covered, be it along a dropoff, crevice, fathom curve, rip or weed line. And the more territory you cover, the better the odds are of finding fish.

### EASY DOES IT

**EXPERIMENTING WITH TROLLING SPEED** is the simplest adjustment you can make. We're not talking about specifically gearing up for high-speed trolling in excess of 15 knots, but rather tweaking your "normal" trolling speed by a few knots in either direction.

For example, when I set a spread of baits, be it all natural, pure artificials or a combination of both, we'll settle on an initial trolling speed once all the baits are running like they're supposed to. That is, skipping baits will be splashing along at the surface, not flying in and out of the water; the swimming baits will be pumping away enticingly just under the surface along with any cone-shaped lure/bait combos; and any blunt-head lures or lure/bait combos will be gulping air and leaving a smoke trail. Once we're happy with the look of the spread, we focus on finding fish.

If we know or sense fish are in an area but we aren't getting strikes, my first reaction is to increase trolling speed by a couple of knots initially, and then to bump up an additional 2 knots from there, if necessary. If the increase in speed doesn't cut it, I'll go back to my initial trolling speed and then slow it down from there. More times than not, providing fish are indeed around, our success depends on hitting the right trolling speed that brings on the strikes. Then the only adjustment to our bait spread is replacing those eaten by fish!

### TUNEUP

**A CHANGE OF SPEED** often dictates a bait-spread "tuneup." For example, if we're

pulling a spread of natural baits at around 5 knots and bump up the speed a couple knots, the baits closest to the transom might “launch” from the water or simply not swim as enticingly as they initially did. To counter this, I move the entire spread farther back until the baits track properly and mimic the action they had at the original trolling speed. This also holds true

#### NOT SO FAST!

**JUST AS INCREASING TROLLING SPEEDS** can ramp up strikes, so can slowing down. I recall numerous trips when our “normal” and “ramped-up” trolling speeds played second fiddle to slower speeds, specifically for dolphin, sailfish and even yellowfin tuna catches that occurred between 4 and 6 knots. Follow the advice above and experiment in 2-knot increments if your normal and quicker speeds go unnoticed.

with pure offshore trolling lures, which are typically pulled faster than natural baits.

Sometimes, keeping the close baits in the water also requires the use of transom or reel-seat release clips, which greatly reduce the fishing line’s angle of entry into the water.

Ditto with lowering outrigger release clips halfway.

To maintain the action of your spread at slower speeds, try bringing the baits closer to the transom. Also, run the flat lines directly off their rod tips, and place outrigger clips fully up, to maximize the angle of lines entering the water. This tends to lift the heads of the baits or lures, giving them better action at slower speeds. A tactic I sometimes use at slower speeds is to run a bait up close and smack in the middle of the spread, right between the two flat lines. This is done from my center rigger. Given the sharp angle of entry of the line attached to the center-rigger release clip, this bait dances enticingly up close at slow speeds. It has a deadly look to it, and it fools a lot of fish.

Experiment in 2-knot increments and give each adjustment enough time. That is, be reasonably sure you’re in an area holding fish and not in a “dead zone.” If you see fish or hear of one being caught by a nearby boat and you’re still fishless, try a speed adjustment.

Successful trolling is a combination of a lot of factors, including promising water, temperature breaks, baitfish, prominent bottom and suspended structure, the right baits and lures for the game fish you’re gunning for, effective teaser systems and bait spreads and, of course, dialing in on the right speed. Perhaps the least exploited is the latitude in trolling speeds.

The next time you’re trolling in a good area but the game fish are giving the baits the cold shoulder, try playing with your throttles. The right move in either direction just might warm up their reception. It has for me on many occasions, and it’s a go-to option I keep in mind whenever I’m towing baits offshore and need a quick fix! ~