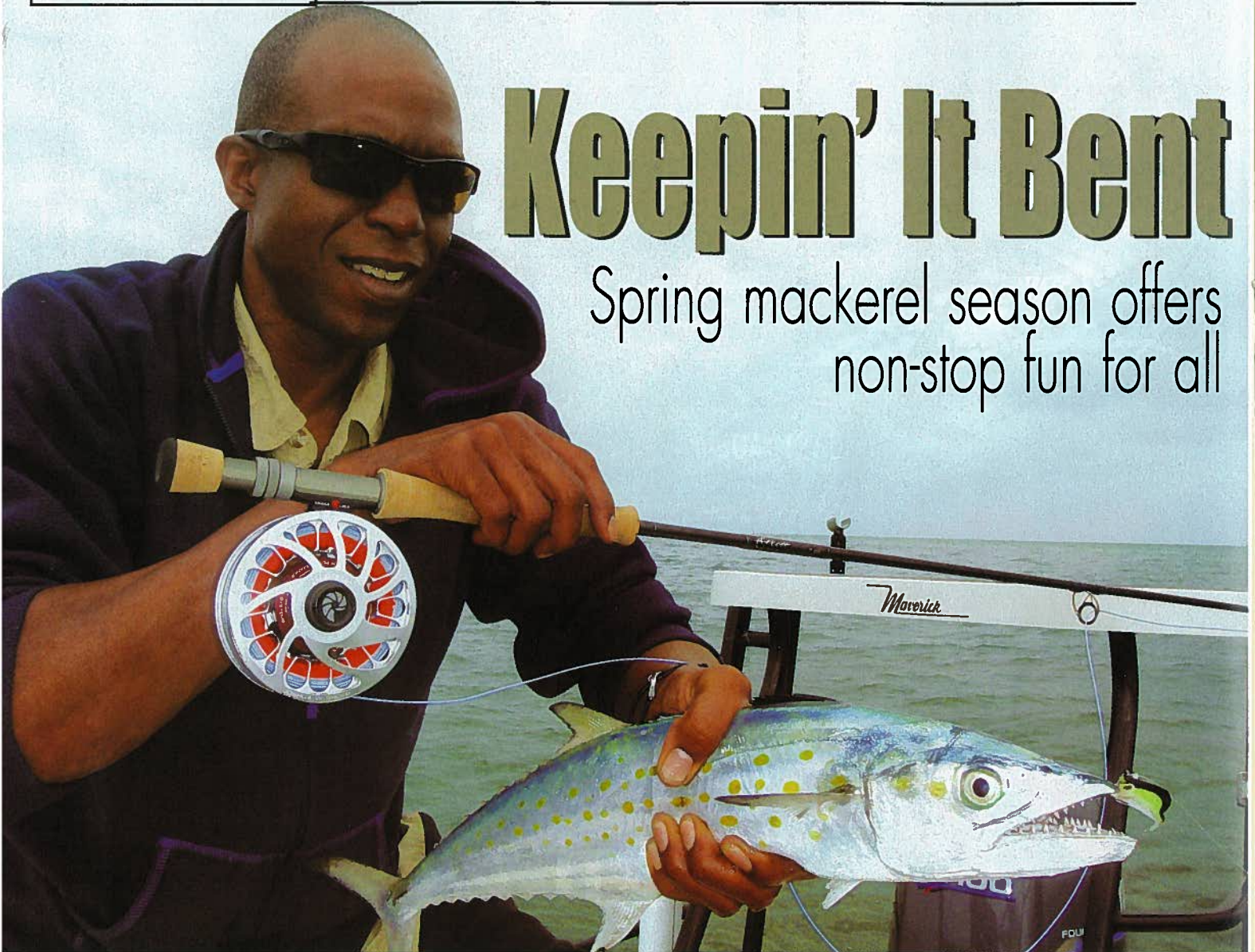


# Keepin' It Bent

Spring mackerel season offers non-stop fun for all



**W**hen Springtime comes back around in our home waters, there is one thing you can count on, and that's a huge rush of Spanish mackerel pushing through our warming waters. They offer easy non-stop action that hangs around for months.

I can't remember a single trip in the past 10 years or so that we didn't catch these toothy speedsters from low tide to high tide and back to low again. These fish can be in such abundance that even stagnant water will produce a non-stop bite. With the right conditions and correct tools

of the trade, fishing for spanish macks in the spring is perhaps the most guaranteed good time you, your friends and family, and especially kids, can have with hook and line.

To most, the real beauty of getting on a mess of macks is that pound-for-pound, they are perhaps one of the top five drag-peeling fish in their weight class. Even the little guys, on light tackle, can burn line off your spool and take you into your backing in a matter of seconds. These fish are great. They hit hard, make incredibly fast runs over and over again, and truly aren't that picky about what baits you offer them.

The real secret to getting them to come to your boat is the good ol' chum block trick. Just about all local bait and tackle stores sell inexpensive frozen chum blocks that, hung from the side of the boat for even just five minutes, will draw

in fish. These blocks are made from many different types of ground up fish, and, most importantly, soaked in menhaden oil which is the key smell that draws in the macks.

It usually doesn't take more than 10-15 minutes before you have these fish darting to and fro below your boat and all around the chum block. Off the beach, in passes and nearshore reefs are all great places to anchor up and get your slick going. I usually try to target them in water 10-15 feet deep but often they can be found at even shallower depths or on the flats. Once they get the scent from the block, it's time to sling a variety of offerings to them. Truly, they will eat just about anything you put in front of them, as long as it's moving fast and flashes. Many anglers like to troll for them using silver spoons since the spoons accomplish both of these. I'll usually start out with





live bait, including scaled sardines, threadfins, shrimp, etc. Once you get these fish in a frenzy, cut bait and artificial baits like spoons and flies will be just as successful.

Having fished for Spanish mackerel for most of my angling years now, I have switched almost exclusively to catching them on my fly rod. The thrill of catching a large mack on light fly tackle is very addictive. Like with conventional tackle, it's important to tie a larger diameter bite tippet between your main line and hook since these fish have some of the nastiest, razor-sharp teeth in the business! In addition to using either a larger diameter monofilament or fluorocarbon, or a short length of wire, long shank hooks are a must no matter what type of bait you're using. I now tie special flies on long shank hooks just for this purpose, to decrease the possibility of break-offs. Blue and silver and a touch of flash has proven to be the perfect color combination if you like to tie your own mack flies.

Finally, though many anglers consider these fish to be somewhat oily and not necessarily the perfect table fare, that opinion often changes once you've had some slow-smoked macks, fried macks or fish spread. Either of these methods completely takes away the oily and "fishy taste" that turns off many fisherman from keeping a few of these fish for the dinner table. Just remember to ice them quickly and keep them that way until they hit the filet table as macks have a soft flesh and will spoil more quickly than others.

Now's the time! Go grab yourself a chum block, a few dozen shrimp (or cast net your own bait if that's your style), and pick a spot to anchor up off the beach or in a pass. It's a guaranteed way to keep any friends, family and easily bored kids having fast and fun action all day long and eager for the next trip!



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