

It was downhill right from the ramp

by TODD CORAYER



Darkness casually faded into the summer excitement of unloading boats for a day chasing albies and striped bass. Galilee’s new boat ramp, designed to launch three boats at once with sturdy docks for coming and going, was bustling. Overhead were stars and stripes of irritating early morning cigarette smoke mixed with hints of gas station coffee. Four creams, five sugars please.

Using a public boat ramp isn’t terribly difficult. Until it is. Albie fever had spread quickly; everyone was politely impatient with the next boat holding them from hard tails, but everyone played by the rules. Pretty much.

There were Jones Brothers and Lund’s, classic Regulators and chalky Mako’s, Chevy vans borrowed from Cheech and Chong movies and new F350’s with LED headlights shining in everyone’s eyes.

There exists some unspoken, universally understood boat ramp etiquette. You prepare your canvas covers, tie on bumpers and set up rods while you wait, not on the ramp.

Good people don’t race through the lot, tear around the idling line to rev up a smoky diesel engine then dump in an ugly black sea mosquito and spin off without regard to the patient.

Captain Ray Stachelek of Cast A Fly Charters compares the etiquette to waiting at the barber shop. When you sit, you know who’s ahead of you. You may not know who sits in the chair next, but you know it’s not you. Anyone waiting behind you certainly isn’t getting a little off the top before you.

Squeaky, new school country music drizzled from an iPhone as a passenger waited for an entry level SUV with distinctive orange plates to wear out it’s lane assist alert system with a half mile snaking a line to go thirty feet to the water.

Trailing a boat isn’t terribly difficult unless you

- (A) can’t back up to save your life
- (B) forget to unhook the rear straps
- (C) forgot to replace the hull plug
- (D) fail to get your engine started until someone points to the

kill switch or

- (E) haven’t a clue what you’re doing.

Forty-five minutes later, at the thirty minute dock, Kelsea Ballerini had come around the noisy app again, reminding everyone how disappointingly easy it is to be a country pop star and how long it can take to stack junk into a twenty foot wreck of a Sea Ray.

We stepped over someone’s forgotten Thermos and Cumby’s egg and cheese on an English and headed for the east gap, searching for hardtails, aka bonito and bonita. These two close species often are confused by those who hook up and land one, or both.

“Hey, was that an albie you caught?”

“Yeah!”

“Are you sure that wasn’t a bonito?”

“Yeah! It was a bonito!”

“Sorry, bonito or bonita?”

“Yeah! It was awesome!”

The slow parade out the West Gap was orderly until a beast with four engines tore past everyone like the Death Mobile taking out the Camelot float in Animal House.

With a slow flashing light to one side and a rising yellow reminder of how fantastic this little piece of America really is, we cast for striped bass lurking in some last dark corners of a rock strewn point.

Coming up shy, we steamed to the west wall, Deep Hole, Five Cottages Minus Three, Moonstone and west. We found schools of nothing but endless schools of boats.

By noontime, Charlestown was the *Caddy Shack* bow christening scene with seven Rodney Dangerfield’s blowing through the bay at full throttle. Just as we’d found a decent drift near a brief albie sighting, a tiny Whaler with Allen Hale at the wheel trolled north at one knot, seven feet off our bow, dragging a Benny’s special rod and ten ounce Hopkins wound up in tight, never the wiser to his rudeness.

Then we came across a pretty Parker bobbing on a fresh south breeze with two young fishermen, Frankie and Johnny, on the bow. Each was locked and loaded with albie jigs. They could have used their smiles as bow lights.

How many times can I be out-fished?

“How’s the fishing?” we asked.

“We got a bass! It was eighteen inches,” they shouted back, perhaps a little too quickly.

Looking in unison at our empty cooler, we remembered few things are more rewarding than seeing families fishing. Here was dad at the helm of the Little Cottonwood, telling us how the boys landed a bonito the morning prior as Frankie and Johnny eagerly practiced their perfect casts.

Then again, few things are more challenging than being out-fished by two kids whose combined ages equaled less than the age of my newest spinning rod. We wished them all luck, squinted to see what colors the boys were using, turned our backs to the sun and steamed for the ramp.

Hauling out is no less challenging.

Seasoned drivers secure their boats efficiently while remaining dry. It’s really not that hard.

Captains in unevenly cut denim shorts and sleeveless tees earned with 500 Camel bucks, soaked from beer belly to dirty calf-high work boots are proof positive of a clear relationship between trailering skill and how wet the driver is after finally securing the forward strap. Most concerning are those who need to shake like a Labrador before getting in the cab. **(to page 36)**



Waiting to haul out