

CHARTER CONNECTION

By Grant Dixon

Barry Kearny and *Utter Chaos*

The small Norman Islander plane was feeling the effects of 25 knots of breeze, even at 6000m, as we headed north to Great Barrier Island.

Excited by the prospect of two days' fishing out of Tryphena with one of the most experienced skippers around, there was some apprehension as to what the weather was going to do.

Calm conditions were forecast, but a nasty sou'wester had sprung up unannounced overnight and was looking like closing comfortable access to some of the best grounds.

"Not a worry," was skipper of *Utter Chaos* Barry Kearney's reassuring reply to my voiced concerns upon

landing at Claris Airport. "We will just fish around the back. I expect it will drop out overnight."

It was a 20-minute trip to the boat tied up at Tryphena Wharf, after a quick stop for liquid refreshments at the Mulberry Grove store.

With bait, berley and kit loaded, the mooring lines were cast and we headed around Cape Barrier, with Rosalie Bay area our first port of call. There was a quick detour to check a couple of pots Barry had dropped a couple of days before, and our luck was in – crayfish would be on the menu that night.

My companions for the trip were two regular fishing buddies from Te Awamutu – Paul Davies and Mike

Germann – and they, too, were keen to reunite themselves with some Great Barrier snapper.

Because of its relative remoteness, Great Barrier is a top fishing location. It is also on the spawning snapper route as schooling fish make their way through the Colville Channel heading for the warmer waters of the Hauraki Gulf to do their annual wild thing. Barry and his crews had enjoyed great action in recent weeks and we were hoping for more of the same. Consequently, we were armed with a mixture of soft-plastic and conventional bait fishing tackle to cover a number of bases.

The first afternoon saw us pinned down close to shore and working

hard for our fish. Here, Barry's local knowledge proved invaluable to our limited success, but you could hardly describe the bite as red-hot.

However, we finished off with a straylining session over a patch of foul off Medlands Beach, which produced better results, before tucking into the southern corner known as Shark Alley just on dusk.

Dinner that night consisted of crayfish, followed by venison steaks (courtesy of Paul's son Jarrod), along with fresh vegetables out of the Kearney's garden. And did I mention a couple of well-deserved rums?

The following morning, with the sun peeping over the horizon, it was time to reverse our tracks, and



Above: Skipper Barry Kearny with a big John Dory caught on a pilchard outside Tryphena Harbour.

Left: Excellent fishing space and a heap of refrigeration are two main features of Utter Chaos's cockpit.

it was pleasing to see the action had improved a little, with both soft-plastics and pilchard baits sharing the honours. With little or no wind, places that had been difficult to fish the day before, due to the speed of our drift, now allowed us time to cover the ground properly.

At one point, on a pin known locally as the '33', the rat kingfish came out to play, busting up around us. Both Paul and I were using soft-plastic outfits at the time and were soon hooked up on these fish, which were around 4-5kg in size. They were great fun on the lighter tackle, and gave us a great workout – the ideal warm-up for things to come.

Barry was waiting for a tide change around midday, leaving us just three hours to get the 'money shot'. Until now we had enjoyed plenty of action, but had not 'done the business' on a big fish. Mike had attracted the best chance, playing what we believe was a big snapper for several minutes, only to have the hook pull before he'd got any line back. Exciting as it was, you can't eat or photograph big 'runs'!

Running past the pots we added a few more bugs to the livebait tank, giving us two or three each to take home along with the fish fillets.



Paul Davies with one for the smoker.

Barry had been quietly talking up the location known as the 'trenches', a series of papa undulations on the north side of the Colville Channel, a short steam out of Tryphena.

We were all excited at the prospect of doing battle there, especially as the 'enemy' couldn't shoot back.

The berley pot was deployed, and we found ourselves fishing in around 30m-plus of water, with a relatively gentle current running.

"You have to have tide," is one of Barry's fishing mantras, and he was on the money with this one; as the tide picked up, so did the fishing. The bite was often tentative, requiring a great feel for what was going on. This was not helped by the tarakihi – notorious pickers – getting

Right: Fish like this one caught by Mike Germann are prime eating and smoking size.



Crayfish were a welcome addition to the great meals we enjoyed on board.



in on the act. Unfortunately our 8/0 and bigger hooks, used specifically for the big snapper, did not help our cause, although several 'turkeys' still found their way to the ice bin.

Once again the results were steady rather than spectacular, but this time the snapper were bigger. Barry was leading the charge from the front, accounting for the best snapper of the session, weighing just over 16lb (7.3kg). However, a number of others over the 10-pound (4.53kg) mark were also landed, along with several good blue cod and a large tope, which I played on four-kilo line for some time before releasing it at the boat.

All too soon our time was up, and with berley still left in the pot and

the fish on the bite, last baits were called and the anchor pulled.

The skipper's faith in his knowledge had paid off, and the result was a good haul of fish destined for the frying pan and smoker.

"It's a shame we couldn't be here at dusk," was Barry's parting comment. "The last charter [which included NZFN area contributors Richard and Bill Bathurst] really cleaned up."

The operation

Utter Chaos is an 11.5-metre Genesis Pro Fish, built by Barry (who worked for Genesis Marine for 25 years) and powered by a 300hp V8 diesel Mercruiser.

All electronics, GPS/chart-plotters, sounders and VHF's are doubled up and there is radar for night and reduced-vision navigation.

There is accommodation for up to five anglers, via four vee-berths up forward, as well as a double that is converted from the table and seating in the saloon. The galley is functional, providing meals for up to six passengers and crew, and everyone can get around the table comfortably.

Utter Chaos has extensive fishing room, and plenty of refrigeration. Charter boats cannot have enough of it, and Barry's boat has one of the best setups for its size I have seen.

Snapper and 'smaller' fish go straight into a refrigerated slurry after being iki'ed, until it comes time to process them, with the resulting bags placed in a below-decks freezer that's large enough to also hold bigger fish such as kingfish and hapuku.

There is a drinks fridge as part of the bait-station aft, as well as another freezer on the starboard side for either more drinks or food for extended charters. And if that is not enough, there is a large Icery-Tek bin



The Fly My Sky Norman Islander takes a little over 30 minutes to fly from Auckland airport to Claris. You can be fishing in just over an hour of taking off!

that doubles as a seat when underway, as do the two refrigerated units port and starboard.

A large bait tank that would be good for a hundred or so mackerel is located behind the bait station on the swim step. The bait station contains a sink. There are two large bait boards that sit on the gunwales and these are ideal not only for cutting baits but also for breaking down the catch. A commercial hauler makes picking up the pots a breeze.

There are plenty of rod holders around the gunwale and in the bait-station and a rocket launcher for further rod storage.

Barry and his wife Pam make a good team. They prepare all the food themselves. On our trip there were home-baked sausage rolls, scones and fruit loaf, as well as fresh vegetables from their garden, along with smoked snapper roe. The food was good and there was plenty of it.

Great Barrier Island is the Kearney's second home. Barry has been going there since he was a young lad and his family has had a home there for decades. He knows the area well, and despite tough conditions on the first afternoon especially, was able to put us onto some good fish. His commentary on the local fishing, characters and island life were entertaining

and intriguing.

Crews fishing with Barry have performed well in a number of tournaments, including the former Lion Red Furuno at Kawau and the current Maverix 6kg Challenge. While he is an accomplished snapper/kingfish/hapuku angler and skipper (his personal best snapper is a 32.5lb effort caught last year), he has also done well with some great striped and blue marlin captures to his credit, resulting in tournament wins at Tutukaka and Whangaroa.

Apart from all that, Barry is simply a great bloke to go fishing with.

The fly-fish package

While Barry offers a variety of charters, from half- to multiple-days, his most popular package is a three-day fly/fish option.

Based on four anglers, it includes Fly My Sky return flights Auckland-Great Barrier, three days' fishing, onboard accommodation, inland transfers, meals, bait and tackle for \$3400 (\$850 per person).

Taken over an extended weekend, anglers fly out Friday morning and fish that afternoon with a full day's fishing Saturday and more fishing Sunday morning before heading home early Sunday afternoon.



That's not very big, Baz...



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