

# The Great Outdoors

Thurs

## Albacore: a compact, powerful and tasty fish

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Fish & Game/Jeff Goyert

Every few years, Northern California fishermen are treated to some of the best sport fishing on the Pacific Coast — off-shore albacore fishing. It doesn't happen every year because the fish follow the warm water currents, usually 58-60 degrees. If these warm water currents run close to the mainland, the sport boats are able to take advantage of a great fishing opportunity. The past week or two has shown many albacore taken within 40 miles off the Santa Cruz County coast.

Albacore, or long-finned tuna, are a very compact and powerful open-ocean fish. They travel in schools that range up and down the Pacific Coast. They seek the warmer ocean waters and the baitfish that these currents hold. Albacore will range from "peanut" albacore as small as four pounds to giant 80-pounders. They are recognized by their long pectoral fins that will extend beyond the anal fin.

These tuna are known for their long, deep and powerful runs. Their bodies are designed for speed. Many a surprised fisherman has had his reel run down to the backing, worked the fish back up to the boat, then had the entire process repeated two or three times. The fishing can become very fast and frenzied when all lines are hooked up at once.

A good way to stir up a lively discussion among veteran albacore fishermen is to pose the question: When is the best time to fish, after a bright night or after a dark night? Many feel that a bright, full-moon type of night will reduce the luminescence caused by the baitfish, which in turn causes the tuna to feed during the day. Another group argues that if the baitfish can be found, regardless of the brightness of the moon the night before, albacore will be found.

The wise skipper will keep one eye on the flocks of birds and another on the temperature of the water. One local albacore veteran offers a sure-fire (but tongue-in-cheek) way of finding the fish: "Get out into water over 57 degrees, find the clear water and look for the big round eyes of the albacore looking back up at you. It is then time to put your lines in the water."

A sport boat out for albacore should try to run four rods, each with a feathered hexhead jig. The two stern lines should be without any weight and run out a good hundred "pulls" behind the boat. Deep lines can then be run off the port and starboard side of the boat rigged with 8 to 10-ounce torpedo sinkers. In the sometimes-successful grand plan, a school of tuna can be brought up to the boat by means of the long lines and then taken on the short lines. An albacore fisherman with true faith will leave a long line tuna hooked pumping in the water while trying to work the school with the weighted rods. If



Commercial fishing boats have been selling their albacore catches right off the deck to local bargain hunters.

everything works right, the deck will soon be covered with wild, flopping tuna.

Many hardcore seafood lovers prefer fresh albacore over any other fish from the sea. It is full-bodied, firm meat which breaks into large chunks that offer a mouth-watering taste treat. They are best prepared by poaching or on the barbecue. When cooked and chilled, these tuna

are great in salads. With fresh albacore, the only concern is to avoid overcooking. When the large chunks flake, it is done.

Because the fishing has been so good, many of the commercial boats have been greeted with low market prices. Many have resorted to selling their catch off the boats at the dock. At a dollar-a-pound it is a great deal for the consumer. Look

for the big boats tied up near the launch at the yacht harbor.

Sport fishing for albacore is great fun. Care should be used in regards to weather and the condition of one's boat. When the wind picks up, 40 miles can be a long way out at sea. For more information on charter trips or latest reports, call 476-2648.