



BIG FISH DAY IN KONA

By Capt. Steve Sahines, with Capt. Lance Gelman

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It's funny how things come together. I was sitting at the picnic table in the shade of the structure behind the boat of our next-door neighbor. I had parts and tools spread out on towels, and the first of five 130's was ready for me to replace its rollers. I'd spent the morning going to all the tackle stores to gather enough parts to do the job. Now, a cool breeze picked up thru the harbor, calming the intense heat of that hot Kona morning.

"Summer's coming", I thought. Couldn't wait to get in the season of fishing every day. It's a grind but that seems to be when Lance and I are most happy.

There had been a little marlin action recently, but it seemed like forever since the Long Ranger had a 'nice' Blue bite. The ahi had been sporadic for the fleet. We did have a great day the week before. Starting out with a double 'rigger' ahi strike 10 minutes out of the gate. Our charter, Jim and Barbara Shultz, happily reeled in the 'his and her' tuna. Within minutes Jim caught a nice mahimahi. An hour later, another.

Lance, continually scanning the ocean, spotted that familiar single splash. Porpoise school? As the minutes passed, another splash. Then closer...birds.

"Looks good," he said. I've always known our fishing success over the years together has been the result of one of the best pair of eyes in the fleet. Would this be 'the one' or would it be just another school that refused to give up a fish?

The first pass sent the stinger screaming that pleasant tune. One fish box full! Awhile later it was the long corner's turn, and we boated yet another 100+lb yellowfin. The lines set out again I once again grabbed the knife to gill and gut the latest fish and get some ice on it. Looking up at Lance I said, "Wow, all we need is a short bait bite".

Before I had completed the task at hand with the latest tuna, the brand new Big Blue lure, running flat on the short corner did its thing. Jim once again kicked butt with the reel and brought the ahi to gaff. Five fish on five

different lures, prompted us to coin the term, 'fishing for the cycle', as in baseball. Time to point the boat for home, tired...happy.

The trip occurred right before Jeff Bennett, the owner of the Long Ranger, was over from California over Memorial weekend. Jeff, who keeps a beautiful vintage 1968 50ft Hatteras, loves to come over a few times each year and fish. He's lucky with ahi and has caught many marlins up to 550lbs. This particular trip yielded only one ahi, a small marlin we tagged and a handful on other small fish.

Back to the rod repair part of the story. Capt. Chuck Hauptert from the **Catchum II** walked by and said, "Now that's a great place to work on your gear rather than on the boat."

I was making good progress changing the rollers when a young couple came by. The standard "Aloha" brought a response from Eric Schaible and Melissa Lemon, who were visiting from Cincinnati.

"How's fishing?" Eric started out. We talked for a while and they said they were going out Sunday on a charter their local friends had set up. "But I'd really like to fish more than once while I'm here" Eric said. He and his family take a trip to Florida every year to fish sailfish, mahi, snapper and other such fish. "I'd really like to catch a marlin or a big tuna."

"Well, you won't catch it on the days you spend on the beach or sightseeing. You need to get out there" was my reply.

Steve Flood, from the Florida Keys, had given us a call several days before. A previously referred charter had referred him to us. Steve owns a real nice 36' Lures that he takes his friends out on. He wanted to experience some Kona fishing with us, but since wife Marie would rather stay on land, he wanted us to find someone to split the boat with him. That worked for Eric, so we set the trip for June 1st. The plan was to leave early and chase ahi, knowing there's always a chance to catch a marlin.

Everyone arrived at the boat and introduced themselves in time for our 5:30am departure. The boat headed straight out to the deep waters of "Long Ranger Land." Eric volunteered to go through the fighting chair instruction as the sun started to peek over Hualalai. Eric was quick to adapt to the sitting fish-fighting technique. A large strong frame seemed quite capable to handle what might be tossed his way. The sun's glare found us retreating to the salon and we continued talking about various

fishing experiences, Lance's eyes scanning the outward horizon from the bridge.

It was minutes before 7am when we crossed the 2000-fathom line, itching to see signs of life. No one saw the bite as the short 'rigger's clicker hollered for attention. I quickly arrived to the rod and a smooth steady stream of line coming off the reel made me sense a blue marlin. Not the screaming first run of an ahi.

I turned my head and yelled "somebody get out here!" After a few "You go first"... "No you go" between the two men, Eric finally slipped into the chair. Looking into his eyes I saw an excited and serious look as I slipped the rod into the gimbal and he clipped the bucket harness to the reel.

The sun's rays partially camouflaged the marlin as she made her first jump. "Big fish!" Lance called. "Five plus!"

The fish continued her steady run away from the boat as we frantically reeled in the other lines. After one side was cleared, Lance started backing down, line still peeling off the reel. The marlin accelerated, still extending its lead on our backward attempt to keep her close. Three times the big fish grey hounded across the surface, as her full body rose completely above the water. The Purple Softhead lure was now up by the swivel and trailed just behind the tail as the fish left behind huge holes, the size a small car would make if dropped from the sky.

We continued our reverse chase the first half hour of the fight. Eric was sweating like crazy as he played his game of give and take. "You still want to release this one?" I asked him.

"Yea, let it live", he came back, sticking to what we had talked about earlier.

"Stay up fish" I thought as we started to gain some line. The marlin had other ideas as she began a dive for the depths, deeper and deeper until nearly 400 yards were off the spool. When the fish settled the drag was advanced to 'sunset', nearly 60 lbs of pressure. Reaching a standoff and the fish straight down Lance said, "Let's plane her up."



I showed Eric how to use his thumbs on the side of the spool to add extra pressure, allowing it to slip slowly so as not to break the line. He had to give quite a bit of line, as Lance slipped the boat in and out of gear until we had some angle. Then the boat was thrown in reverse, Eric cranking hard. The first couple times we did this we lost line overall. Then, as the fish started to rise, we lost less and gained more.

Close now, the line rose rapidly this seventh time we planed, and up popped the fish belly up 40 ft. from the stern. So much for the release!

Lance slowly backed the boat and Eric took the remaining cranks. When the swivel at the rod tip, I grabbed the leader and the fish swung to the starboard corner at the last pull. I reached down for the stick gaff and slid it into the lower jaw of the motionless fish.

Lance was helping a tired and sweat-drenched Eric out of the chair when I said, "Can someone else come over with another gaff?"

"Aw, the fish isn't THAT big. Just hold her." was my captain's reply.

"Well, it's kinda heavy!"



Total fighting time was right at one hour. The tuna door opened and we hitched heavy lines to the bill so we could pull it in and resume fishing. Our door is narrow and high off the water. Everyone in position and a '1-2-3 PULL!' the fish started to lift out of the water and then stopped. Resting in between, we tried four or five more

times with different approaches but with no more success.

"Man, we must be getting old and weak" an exhausted Lance chuckled. "I've gotten every other fish into the boat including an 890 pounder. The only one we never got in the boat was the grander!", a marlin he caught 20 years ago. The fish simply would not fit through the door. That should have been our first clue.

We had no other choice but to secure the lines around the base of the fighting chair and tow it back to the harbor. Not being able to get a full look and some measurements we figured it weighed 700 maybe 800lbs. We arrived at 10am and backed to the scales.

As the fish was hoisted up Lance said "It's really fat....and long!" Long time Kona fisherman Fran O'Brien watched the digital scale as the number settled. He walked over to the back of the boat with a smile on his face and exclaimed "It's ten seventy-five!"

"Yeah right" Lance and I came said simultaneously.

"No really, it's a thousand and seventy-five pounds!" Fran came back.

Extending his hand and pulling me into an embrace, Lance quietly said "You got your grander!" Wow, the biggest marlin so far this year in Kona!

Lots of pictures taken as more and more people appeared out of nowhere to see the fish. The phones started ringing; congratulations from those still out fishing and had already heard of our catch. Isn't it amazing how news can travel so fast?

We lowered the marlin onto the dock and got the tape measure out. The short measurement was 139" while the overall was 14'6 1/2'. The girth of 70", the belly at 76" and a tail circumference of 20 1/4" all equate to a grander, along with a 36" bill. At some point Eric, Lance and I were pushed in the harbor as is the custom when you catch a four-digit marlin.

We got to our slip at 11am as we decided to "call it a day". A party broke out. Imagine that! A gas powered blender appeared and turned out margaritas for all. A number of well-wishers came by to join the celebration. More stopped over as everyone's fishing day came to a close. The group included a number of captains who already had granders under their belt. Gene Vander Hoek of the **Sea Genie II** brought over the huge marlin flag to be hoisted up our outrigger. He caught the last grander, a 1049# in March of this year. This has become a tradition with the Kona charter fleet, to pass the flag. Who will be next?



The party went until 8:30 that night. Lots of fish talk and beer. At some point someone asked me how long it took to catch the fish. "Twenty-two years!"Finally!

Now remember Jeff, the owner of the Long Ranger? After just missing the five ahi day and the grander on both sides of his last trip, he came back to Hawaii during the last week of June. He came to fish the Kona Classic, Firecracker and World Cup Tourneys. One non-tournament day he redeemed himself with a personal best Blue marlin of 727 1/2lbs on that same Purple Softhead.

It's funny how things happen. Now we just have to get our timing right!

Looking to land your own “grander” marlin? How about treating your friends, family, significant other, or even your co-workers or employees to an adventure of a lifetime? Whether you're a first-timer, a novice angler, or even an experienced sportsman, come join Captain Lance Gelman and Crew aboard the *Long Ranger* for YOUR opportunity to reel in a “big fish” off the calm tropical Kona waters off the “Big Island” of Hawaii.

Contact us for more information about booking your sport fishing charter using our convenient [online form here](#), send us an e-mail at info@longrangersportfishing.com, or call us directly at (808)937-1870.