

How Fast Can A Fish Swim? You Guess!

By Richard W. Emery

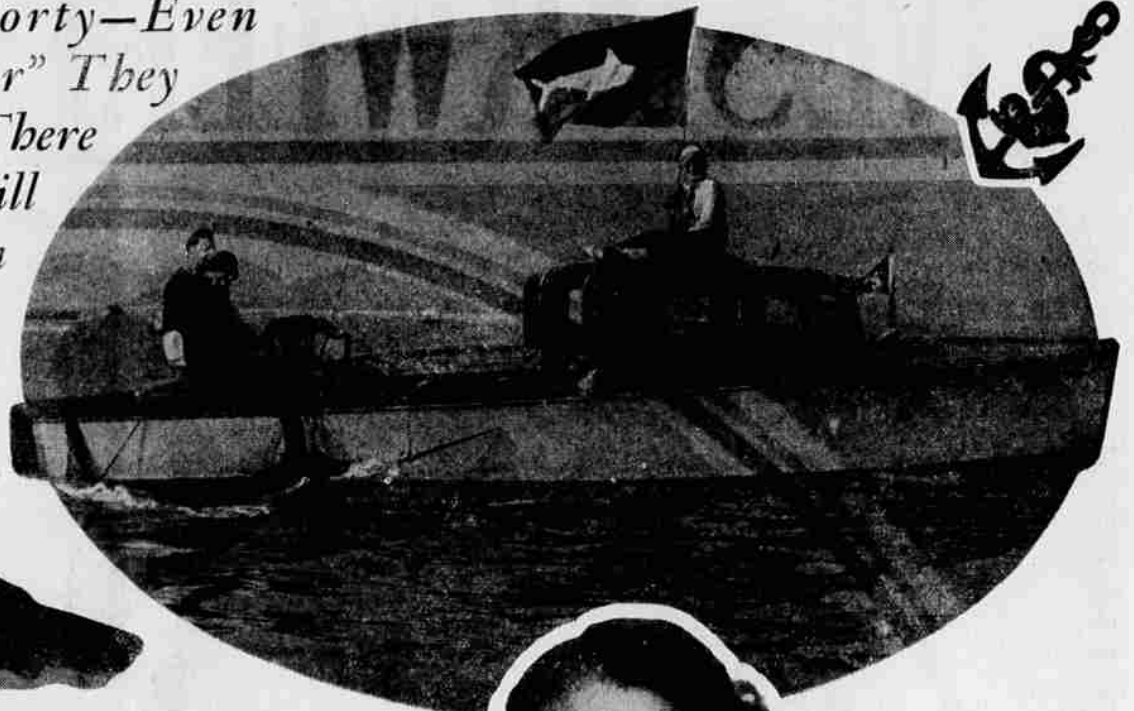
HOW fast can a fish swim?

Now there's a question to make the ears of every fisherman on all the blue Pacific's coast stick out like handles on sugar bowls. Mackerel fishermen will guess offhand:

"Twenty miles an hour!"

And that's all that is necessary to start a raging brawl from one end of fisherdom to the other, with yellowtail fishermen yelling "Thirty!", albacore fishermen shouting "Forty!" and a whole clique of other sportsmen braying com-

"Twenty, Thirty, Forty—Even Sixty Miles Per Hour" They Will Tell You, But There Are Old Salts Who Will Say They Can Outrun A U. S. Submarine



Here's looking down the business end of a fishy swordsman, one of the deep Pacific's fastest swimmers.

Cruising homeward with a vanquished deep sea speed demon lashed alongside. The flag fluttering over the cabin is a typical sight in big game waters of the Pacific.



One of the most spectacular sights to be seen anywhere—the prodigious leap and dance of the great marlin, called by many a "swordfish". In reality it is a member of the sailfish family.



Methods of calculating fish speed are far from foolproof, but there are plenty fishermen who will contend that the streamlined albacore can out swim anything that has fins.

petitive figures for twenty different marine speed demons.

Outstanding in the battle will be the croaking of the lonely scuba who have spent half their lives plowing coastal channels in search of the great blue torpedo, the blue-fin tuna. If blows are struck, they will be between the tuna fishermen and the marlin fishermen, with a sword fisherman standing by to swing a fist if the chance offers.

Too full of wrath even to speak, the seekers of dolphin and mako sharks will listen in poisonous silence. They think they know that ALL the others are just infants in the sport of ocean fishing.

What really are the facts? The story of the speed of fish is a strange one, akin to the heavenly iridescence of the marlin which fades in sunlight. Methods of calculating fish speed are far from foolproof, and in the mouth of a fisherman truth performs outlandish treacheries.

There are certain facts to go by, landmarks in a wilderness of argument. Even the facts are disputed.

Certainly the ocean offers few spectacles more astonishing than the torpedo-like rush of the blue-fin tuna, the mad dance of the marlin sailfish and the aerial plunge of the mako shark. And where is there an ocean passenger who has not stood wondering by the rail watching a school of dolphins skipping along like a band of greyhounds?

IT IS the fisherman, however, the hard-bitten sportsman who gives up everything but his trousers in quest of big ocean game, who must supply the estimates of top-speed. When he struggles at the stern of a little cruiser far at sea, his face raw with sunburn, his eyes wild, his arms and back nearly paralyzed from muscular strain, he makes his guess at the capacity of whatever has swallowed his bait.

Minutes or hours later, when the sharp gaff sinks into some finny express train and the fisherman leans back half dead with weariness and joy, there is something about the sunlight on the ocean waves around him that makes the truth ferment in him. Despite oaths and prayers, with in his very heart the facts turn fable.

And what are the fables?

Tremendous tales of pacing tuna with speedboats and losing, at forty miles an hour; of watching finny locomotives whisk out a thousand

feet of line and never come back; of hearing a \$200 reel screech like a fire siren and seeing it fly into bits while some outraged marlin did flip-flops and tantrums from wave to wave!

Such stories are not restricted to big game fish. The true angler stops at nothing. One salt-encrusted sportsman of the San Pedro channel swears that the great eel of the Pacific is speed champion of the deep. Another, who has fished among the channel islands of California since 1915, hangs the laurel on the "torpedo" shark, whatever that is. And there is the classic legend of the barracuda, which many a fisherman will insist he has seen flashing through the water to drill like a bullet through some larger fish. Who but a fisherman could believe such a fantastical yarn?

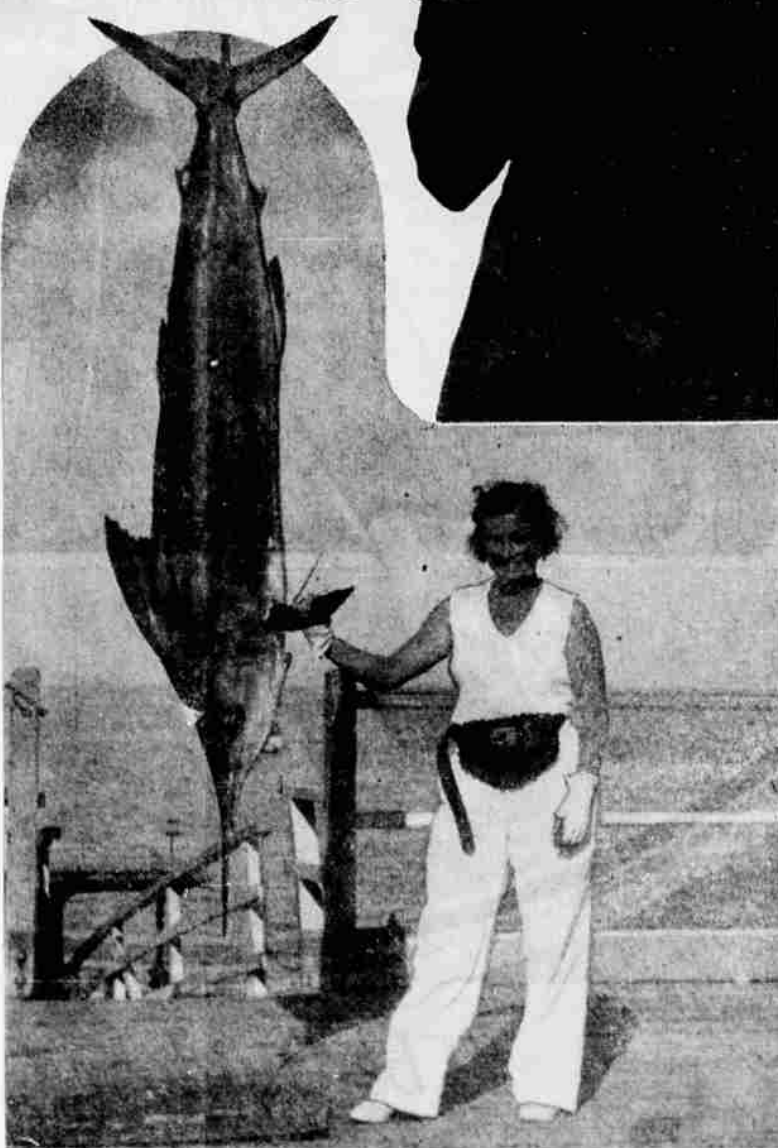
Broken rods, tangles of linen line, twisted hooks and eyewitness reports are offered from one end of the Pacific coast to the other, and at many an island fishing grounds, as proof that the wrangle over speed championship must consider the swift albacore, the fiery bonito, the skipjack and yellowfin tunas, the broadbill swordfish and that good-humored race-horse of the seven seas, the dolphin.

SEVERAL of the greatest fishermen say this without doubt the dolphin can swim faster than any other creature in the sea. Skeptics sourly retort that the dolphin's big cousin, the whale, supreme mammal and largest inhabitant of the sea, can achieve only twenty-five miles an hour.

One of the most disputed points in the argument is the speed of the flying fish. Sportsmen have paced the swift gliders hundreds of times, using speedboats with a capacity of forty or fifty miles an hour. Their estimates indicate fifteen to forty miles an hour for the winged fish.

The figure is of particular importance because it is known that the tuna and marlin can overtake a flying fish. Many a landsman has watched agape while a tuna foamed across the surface chop, like a torpedo, to leap up and gulp the shimmering prey four feet above a wave crest. From a study of this common chase, fishermen are generally agreed that a tuna can swim from forty to sixty miles an hour.

Yet even that speed is said to be surpassed by such gallant racers as the marlin. Forty miles an hour for that terrific fighter of the sailfish family is just an early morning warming-up. His amazing plunges have won him the respect



The end of a perfect day! Men are not the only fishing enthusiasts, as evidenced by the above picture. This splendid catch was made off the Southern California Coast.

of the most hardboiled angler that ever set a hook.

Forty, fifty, sixty miles an hour this seven-foot swordsman hurtles across the surface.

Millionaire sportsmen who have withstood "buck fever" on mountain hunts have been stricken with ague at the sight of the marlin's supreme defiance. The shattering of tackle in nerveless hands has broken their spells.

When a fisherman sets a hook in such a super-

powered speed demon, he may expect to watch a series of circus stunts climaxing in a big splash. A famous attorney, member of the Tuna Club of Avalon, describes how it is:

"In big game fishing, if you have any sporting blood in you, it will win you. There is no other thrill on earth like taking a big marlin. He's hard to find. He's hard to hook. You can't get into his element. He is stronger than you. He can beat you any day and can break your tackle."

YOU hook on a fresh flying fish, limber it up, break its wingtips and troll at four to six knots with the bait sixty feet away.

"The marlin hits just like a mule. He has no teeth. He runs fifty or one hundred yards, stops, turns the bait around, swallows it head first."

"When he feels the hook he can outswim a boat going 40 to 45 miles an hour. He can do fifty. He leaps from the water. With only the bottom fluke of his tail churning the water he plunges fifty, one hundred, two hundred and fifty feet. He turns somersaults. He turns flips on his back. He waltzes on his tail."

Not alone in his estimate is the attorney. Others of his famous organization of sportsmen have estimated the marlin's speed at fifty-five, sixty or more miles an hour. In smoky meeting rooms under the trophies of past seasons the members embroil in dispute of the exact capacity.

A wealthy steel and silk manufacturer of Buffalo, N. Y., has commuted to the Pacific coast several times each year for many years, just to fish for marlin and tuna. Long ago he swore to determine the speed of the two game fish. He is still commuting, still winning trophies and medals, but he has given up the quest for the answers.

"No," he says in somber philosophy, "Marlin and tuna can't swim as fast as they do. It's impossible."

Strange it is that through past ages man has studied the swift antelope and wolf, the great gray goose and the albatross, and has learned to surpass their speeds on land and in air. Stranger still is man's apparent inability to challenge the underwater speed of fish. Submarines built at a cost of millions can't keep pace with a scared mackerel. Compared to some of the ocean's finny speedsters, the best that man can do in his submarines is only quarter-speed.

CAN man conquer the mysteries of undersea travel as well as he has conquered those of earth and sky? Engineers scratch their heads and confess that the mackerel has beaten lowly man all through the ages. Streamlining, they say, is not enough. What man-made engine can match the efficiency and superb concentration of power in—for instance—the super-streamlined albacore? Many an engineer, perplexed over that question, has thrown down his charts and tables and has gone venturing after ocean game.

Fishermen say the question of how fast fish can swim probably never can be answered fully. The pot of gold at the foot of every fisherman's rainbow is that ancient statement about greater fish being in the sea than any on a hook.

"It wouldn't matter if we did find out how fast a certain fish can swim," say these unfailing optimists. "The ocean covers three-fourths of the earth—and somewhere there must be a faster fish!"