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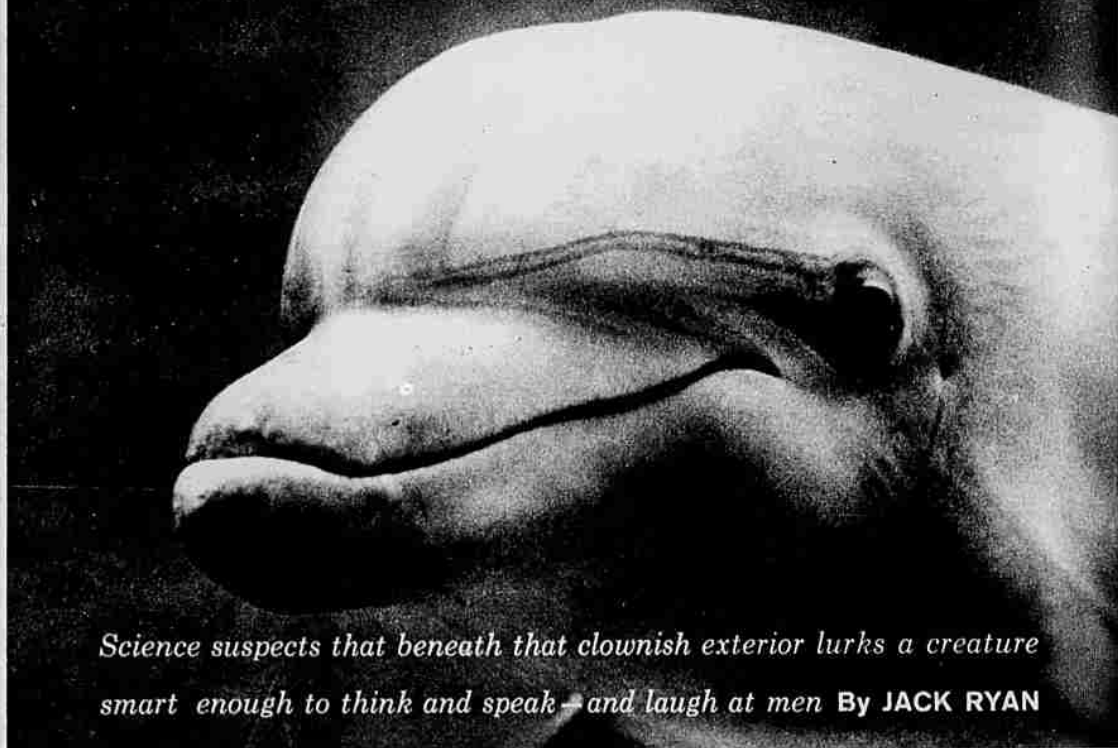
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How Human Is the Porpoise?



Science suspects that beneath that clownish exterior lurks a creature smart enough to think and speak—and laugh at men By JACK RYAN

IT WAS A MYSTERY that the locksmith at Marineland, Fla., couldn't solve. His bolt-locking device was perfect for the job of securing the gates of the porpoise pond so the clowns of the ocean couldn't enter a large tank where they would spend all night at play.

Yet every morning the lock was opened, and porpoises were splashing happily in off-limits water. Attendants set up a night watch. When it was dark and still, some of the younger porpoises darted to the lock. One steadied the gate while another nuzzled back the bolt. Then both pulled open the gates, quacked a few Donald Duck sounds, and the whole porpoise colony frolicked into the play tank.

The ability of a porpoise to recognize and solve problems has posed a favorite question for scientists in recent years. How human is this happy-go-lucky mammal?

Navy researcher Dr. John Lilly, a neurophysiologist, has come to these conclusions: the porpoise may be superior to the chimpanzee in ability, in some cases learning a trick in one attempt when it has taken a monkey 300 tries; he has a brain structure comparable to the human's—40 percent heavier with the same number of cells per cubic centimeter; and he can "talk" in a series of some 20 different sounds which conceivably man could learn.

If man ever does "talk" to the porpoise, or dolphin as he's often called, it won't be to learn how he gets such a kick out of life; instead, we'll want him to tell us how to fight wars better and how to conquer space.

The porpoise has a sonar system—a method of "seeing" what's around him by sending out sounds and receiving echoes—that our submarines could use. With it they could dodge the submerged nets and mines to enter enemy harbors. The dolphin also can withstand sudden changes in pressures, an ability our space men would like to copy.

There's a sizable group of sentimentalists who feel that as long as dolphins have such a peaceful existence, we shouldn't burden them with our problems, but F. G. Wood, Jr., curator of Marineland, suspects they don't mind.

In 1955 his crew captured a young female porpoise and named her Priscilla. Although she was a dunce among the dolphins, scientists pampered her until she became a local pet. But this is a no-nonsense world, and when Priscilla couldn't learn to perform for audiences or tell scientists anything they didn't already know, she was returned to the sea.

Two years later, an epidemic killed many of the captive porpoises, and a fishing crew was sent to sea for replacements. During one cruise, a dolphin spotted their boat and obligingly teased them into following it into shallow water. At this depth, about all they had to do was help it aboard.

Experts at Marineland were surprised at the ease of capture. The dolphin's antics were not normal. When Dr. Wood heard how the porpoise also docilely ate out of crewmen's hands and whistled for more, he had a hunch and dispatched an assistant to look at the catch. He found a mature porpoise, lying contentedly on the bottom of the tank, nuzzling some Marineland toys. The assistant called Wood.

"You were right—Priscilla has come home."

Porpoises love to retrieve things for humans—pretty or not.

