



by Rob Torelli

In the Australian spearfishing fraternity the name Ian "Pucko" Puckeridge is synonymous with spearfishing success. He is of course a six-time Australian Open Spearfishing champion and the holder of various prestigious National spearfishing records.



It is however a series of recent events that has really made Ian stand out over and beyond his peers in the international spearfishing world. In September 2006 Ian came a very creditable 19th at the World Spearfishing titles in torrid conditions in Portugal. The following month Ian had a convincing win in vastly different conditions at the La Paz blue water World Cup Invitational. In the calm and clear waters off the coast of Mexico Ian won from an experienced international field of blue water hunters. January saw Ian venture to New Zealand to compete in the New Zealand National Titles. This event is a pair's competition and Ian teamed up with the fairly inexperienced NSW competition diver in Jess Falzon. Ian and Jess had a convincing win taking out both days of the competition. Then to top off a fantastic nine months of spearfishing Ian went out and speared a pending IUSA World Record 150 kg Black marlin off Sydney with a 1.3 meter speargun!

I caught up with Pucko recently in a bid to share with our readers some of Ian's knowledge and expertise:

Q. How long have you been spearfishing?
I have been diving for about 30 years and competition diving for about 20 years.

Q. How did you get started and is there any advice you could give our readers on how to fast track your spearfishing learning curve?
The best way to fast track your spearfishing is to join a club. I used to dive a lot with Adam Smith before I joined a club. It was not until I joined the Dolphins (a Sydney based club) that my spearfishing started to improve quickly. You can also hire a guide to show you the ropes but that is a more expensive way to go about it. It can however increase your learning curve quite quickly.

Q. You seem pretty good at both reef and blue water spearfishing, what is your preference?
I love chasing big fish so blue water would have to be my favourite type of diving. The fact that you tend to be chasing big fish in warm clear water also adds to the attraction of blue water hunting.

Q. How long have you been blue water spearfishing?
I have been trying blue water hunting for at least 15 years and have definitely gotten more adventurous over the last 10 years. Chasing fish offshore like Yellow Fin Tuna off Sydney, Dogtooth Tuna in the Coral Sea and Cocos Island. I've also had marlin trips off Cooktown, Tonga and Port Stephens. Recent trips have been to La Paz catching Wahoo and Rooster fish and the Three Kings in New Zealand for large Yellowtail kingfish.

Q. What do you attribute your success in spearfishing too?
I probably attribute my success to the amount of time I spend in the water. I live near the beach and love getting in the water as much as possible and being hungry to win also helps.

Q. What is the best training you can do for spearfishing?
The best training for spearfishing has to be diving as it keeps your fitness up and helps you get used to whichever gun you are using. If you can not get in the water yoga is good as they do lots of breathing exercises or just going for a run. I still go for a run on soft sand if I am out of the water for a few days.

Q. What gear do you use?
I have used Picasso equipment since the mid 90's. During most of this time I was using a 6 barb pranger gun in comps and a speed spear on social dives. I have been using a speed spear ie (a spear with a flopper) in comps for the last 18 months and used a 1300 Torelli gun to win the Kiwi Nationals and to catch

the 150 kg marlin last week. Other gear that I use include a rubber belt, belt reel, low volume mask a 3mm or 5mm wet suit and carbon fins to help with the deeper dives. I have an array of guns but usually use a 1200 or 1300 gun for most diving. In blue water situations I use a Collins Tuna gun or a long Edge gun.

Q. What are your ambitions for the future in spearfishing?
I would like to keep going on blue water hunting and keep trying to catch a few of the more elusive species like blue marlin or big tuna. If I am lucky I might even win another National champs in Australia before I am too old. I may even pick up the camera and do some filming like you.

Q. Tell us about your recent catch off a 150-kg Black Marlin off Sydney?
This was a chance encounter off Long Reef in Sydney in shallow water and ended up being my largest fish to date. I ran into this fish whilst on a quick afternoon dive with two mates. I was only in the water for about 5 minutes and had landed two nice Amberjack's when the Marlin came in to have a look. The Marlin started to slowly swim away with me trying hard to keep it in sight. I followed it like this for a few minutes. My friend came over in the boat to check on me which made the Marlin turn and gave me a chance at a shot. I had a 1300 Torelli gun, a small float and 35 meter rig line.

The only spot I could get a secure shot was half way down the side of fish so I knew I had a fight on my hands. I was fortunate that during the fight my friends were driving near by in the boat and that the fish stayed on the surface for most of the fight only briefly pulling the float out of my hands but surfacing near by soon after. This allowed me to catch up to the float and slow him down. The Marlin ended up towing me a few kilometres off shore before I was able to get another shot into him. I was then able to get the Marlin onto the boat. The entire time I was fighting the Marlin I was expecting the float to get dragged into the depths or the flopper to break off so I was kicking hard while hanging onto the float to relieve some of the strain on the gear. To sum it up I think I was just having a bit of luck that day!

Q. What are some of the dangers of spearing big game fish, especially billfish?
The dangers of trying to catch a billfish on a spear are very real. So far we have been lucky. The main thing is not to bring a fish in green or to lively as they could easily kill or seriously injure a diver if they speared you with their bill.

Q. What is your next big fish trip?
In regard to up coming trips I am going to attend the La Paz blue water comp in October and would like to try and get a large Wahoo as I saw them last year up to 50kg. I am still keen to try and catch a Blue Marlin or even a White Marlin in the Atlantic. Captain Tim Dean from Calypso Charters keeps me informed when the Blue's are around in good numbers.

Q. A few people have been on expeditions to try and land the "grander" a 1000 pound marlin. Do you think it is possible?
A few people like Doc Lopez have tried to catch a 1000lb Marlin and I think it's only a matter of time before one of them are successful. They have great gear and are properly rigged for fish like that and I think the size of the tuna the Kiwis have been catching recently show that it is possible. We have seen these big granders in the water but we have not been in the right situation to spear them.

Thanks Pucko for sharing some of your experiences with us. I am sure some of our readers can learn from your vast experience.