

A man wearing a white tank top and a cap stands on a boat, smiling. In front of him are seven large mahi-mahi fish, stacked horizontally. The background shows the blue ocean and the boat's structure.

**Bimini**

**Bonanza**

**By Capt. Kevin Kates**

*WOW! Seven Big Wahoo. High Speed Trolling  
Pays Off Big!*

**A**s fall turns into winter, prevailing southeast winds turn to the northeast and along with the appearance of cold fronts, the crossing to Bimini can be a task in itself. But for those of you that are looking to catch big Wahoo and big Grouper, winter is the time to go. You really have to pick your days carefully but when the conditions look favorable, double check the forecast and run over for the day or even the weekend.

Once in Bimini, your first target should be Wahoo. High speed trolling for Wahoo is widely becoming one of the most effective methods for targeting these striped torpedoes. Trolling speeds exceeding 15 to 18 knots are the norm for success throughout the winter months and seem to make the "speed demons" strike the baits out of natural instinct.

With favorable conditions, double digit catches are possible and with the average fish in the 25 - 50 pound class, that's exciting! Add the possibility of Tuna, Dolphin, and 50 + pound smoker Kings and you have the makings for the trip of a lifetime.

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**What ever your pleasure, Bimini offers south Florida anglers an escape from the winter doldrums**

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While targeting Wahoo off Bimini, we will usually troll 3 rods although with excellent conditions, you can get away with 4. We generally fish 2 baits deep on outfits spooled with wire line or Power Pro due to its thin diameter. The third bait is fished on the surface and way back to keep the lure in the water. A minimum of 50-pound tackle is a must. Reels should be Penn 50's, 80's, or any other



*A Beefy Bimini Grouper.*

equivalent size reels. For rods consider bent butts and a full set of roller guides to be a plus, especially for the deep baits.

Terminal tackle consisting of a 30 to 50 ounce trolling lead and connections made to the shock leader and main line should be heavy duty ball bearing swivels. At these speeds you do not want to use the plain everyday snap swivels. Trust me when I tell you, they will not hold up. You will lose fish, gear, and the line can spin causing tangles. Connected to the lead is a 12 ft. shock leader, 200 to 300 pound test mono is the norm. A double ring ball bearing heavy-duty snap swivel at one end of the shock leader fastens to your trolling lure's leader. Mono, although vulnerable to the Wahoo's razor sharp teeth works best for your shock and makes handling fish next to the boat safer and easier than wire.

At these speeds natural bait is not an

option. 10" - 14" high speed trolling lures are the ticket. Color is your preference. I fish a mix when starting out on any given day. If I see a particular color or head style doing better, I will double up on that style. Most of the time Wahoo will eat whatever is presented as long as it is presented properly. Placement of lines, all fished flat should be at lengths of 100 feet, 150 feet and 250 feet behind the transom. For the far line, use just enough lead to keep the lure in the water, but still close to the surface. I like to mark my line so that I can return my lure to the exact position without guessing or hesitation. This can be done with wax line or a magic marker.

Where to fish? Wahoo, like all other predatory species congregate around structure. It draws bait and basically from there you can follow the food chain on up. Off of Bimini the most prevalent form of bottom

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*Bob Schneider, Red Eye, and Ballyhood all produce excellent high speed lures.*



Two very happy anglers, two very unhappy Wahoo.

structure is the drop-off that occurs on the western side of the Bahamas Bank. Within a few hundred yards of the edge the bottom drops from 100 ft. to 600 ft. Fishing along the drop-off is accomplished by trolling in an "S" or zigzag pattern from the outer edge of the reef in 200 feet of water to 450 feet of water and back in to 200 feet. Some days the fish are in tight to the drop, other days, they may be just outside.

The zigzag pattern increases your odds of finding where Mr. Wahoo is located on any given day. Usually you will see a pattern develop as to the depth the fish are holding at. Something else I do is continually keeping an eye on my depth recorder. I will find pinnacles and ledges that are not marked on any chart. I also will mark areas where there is a lot of baitfish activity on the bottom. You can always come back later that day or on a future trip to deep drop that area. Some of these num-

bers have yielded great catches year after year, as long as you do not tell the world where your "secret spot" is.

On the subject of bottom fishing, when your arms are tired or the Wahoo bite has slowed, try trolling these same lures at a slower pace over shallower reef areas. In the winter large Black Grouper move to shallower water and will really give you quite a fight.

When hooked, you'll want to try and move off of the edge as soon as possible to avoid the grouper finding a hole. I don't even try to fight the fish until I have put enough distance between the boat and reef.

Again, use at least 50-pound tackle for this type of fishing. If your Grouper gets rocked up you'll have a tough time getting him out. When trolling over these areas, try to keep your baits about 15 feet off the bottom. This way you'll have a fight-

ing chance.

Another option for reef fishing in Bimini, is the tried and true method of anchoring or drifting over the structure. Live and fresh chunk baits are both excellent for Grouper & Snapper and although you won't usually see the large numbers of Yellowtail you're accustomed to in the summer, they are still around. You can count on winter months producing solid catches of tasty Red and Black Groupers that you don't see much of in the heat of the summer.


Another option to try is deep jigging over a reef. Use an 8 to 12 ounce jig with a Barracuda strip or Ballyhoo added for scent. Using braided line, which has less stretch and will give your jig more action with less effort. Keep the jig very close to the bottom and yo-yo it up and down. Hang on! Big Groupers hit with enough force to rip the rod out of your hands if you're not paying attention. The typical Bahamas reef Grouper is 12 to 25 pounds, but its not uncommon to have a tug of war with a 40 pound plus jumbo!.

What ever your pleasure, Bimini offers south Florida anglers an escape from the winter doldrums. Remember to check, double check, and triple check the weather forecasts, and be prepared to tangle with lightning fast Wahoo, and brutally strong Grouper.



A tasty mix of Snapper and Grouper caught with fresh chunks on a Bimini reef.

**About THE WRITER**



Capt. Kevin Kates has been fishing the South Florida area for over 22 years. As a professional charter captain, Kevin has fished most of the eastern coast of Florida along with the entire Keys and Bahamas. His tournament rigged 31' Contender, Intrinsic Value, allows him to take advantage of all of the sport fishing opportunities, which the southeast region has to offer. Whether its making a day trip to Bimini, heading offshore in the dark for Swordfish, or fishing the reef for Kingfish, Blackfin Tuna, Sailfish, Capt. Kevin Kates is familiar with a number of different reef and wreck dwellers. Capt. Kevin Kates can be reached at 954-725-9662 or his cell phone 754-367-0259.

