

Marlin



ANATOMY
OF A WIREMAN

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THE GRANDER PROJECT

German big-game angler shoots for the stars

● Eight years ago, Stephan Kreupl accepted the ultimate challenge: Be the first to catch all three of the big marlin species weighing over 1,000 pounds. The Marlin Grander Slam, the Triple Grander Slam—is that even a thing? Well it is now, thanks to Kreupl (above, on left), who realized just how difficult this undertaking was going to be. Over the course of 96 fishing days, leaders snapped, hooks pulled, and a really big fish was lost while being gaffed. At times, he'd given up any hope of catching the elusive black marlin that was left on his list, even to the point of getting no joy from landing an 800-pounder. This project was taking a toll on him. But, on one fateful October day in 2019, his dream came true, and he's vowed to keep the gaffs stored safely away, at least for now.

On January 30, 2007, I had the great fortune to catch a 1,238-pound Pacific blue marlin on 80-pound-test off Rodrigues Island in the Indian Ocean east of Mauritius. This catch was an IGFA world record, and it still stands today, thanks

to Capt. Yann Collas. And in May 2011, I weighed a second grander, an Atlantic blue marlin of 1,150 pounds, which I was able to catch with Capt. Zak Conde off the Cape Verde islands.

All my fishing pals kept at me, saying

I should write history by catching a black marlin over 1,000 pounds to achieve the so-called Triple Grander Slam. Up until now, no one had accomplished this. A 1,000-pound black ought to be an easy job, they said, just go to the Great Barrier Reef, it should be a cup of tea, right? But realistically, this couldn't have been further from the truth. Even on the GBR, grander blacks don't exactly jump into your boat.

From the beginning of October to the end of November, more than 20 charter boats and numerous private vessels target heavyweight black marlin in a 200-nautical-mile area. If you are in the right place at the right time, and are fortunate enough to find a really big fish, hook

COURTESY STEPHAN KREUPL

it, fight it all the way to the boat, then gaff and pull it aboard, all in compliance with IGFA rules, then you have managed it, but not a second before. Marlin of this size will not forgive the slightest mistake, and carelessness of any kind will make all the difference between success and failure. There is also a huge distinction between fighting a black marlin until the wireman grasps the leader for a legally caught fish and actually fighting one all the way to the gaff.

From one year to the next on the Great Barrier Reef, I began to realize that this mission was going to be anything but simple. Then, after eight years and a total of 96 days of fishing, everything slipped into place. At last.

On this trip, we were fishing for 13 days on *Amokura* with Capt. Brett Goetze and his mates Jimmy Krauszer, Jake Flynn, and Richard Abela. We set out from Cooktown, and for the first couple

of days, we fished the central reefs down to Linden Bank, located to the south.

Things didn't look particularly promising for us. The current was flowing from the wrong direction, the water was cooler than usual, and very few fish were being caught by anyone. That afternoon, Goetze decided to make a move—straight from the Linden Bank in the direction of Ribbon Reef No. 10, some 70 nautical miles away. Around midnight, we dropped anchor at No. 10. Until then, I had experienced maneuvers like this with only a small number of Cape Verde skippers, and I have great respect for so much commitment.

Day Nine was the height of our frustration, going 3-for-11 on blacks, including a fine specimen in the 800-pound class. We had one strike after another but were unable to hook any of them. Then, an absolutely awesome fish, which can be described only as a

supergrand, cruised past us without showing any interest at all. None of us are ever likely to forget the sight of her huge tail fin.

We were totally frustrated by our modest hookup rate of 9-for-28, and obviously, there was no point in carrying on like we had been, so we had to change our system. Arguments, pressure, recriminations and shouting were not likely going to help, so together we tried to improve our quota by carrying out a few minor technical changes to our setup. Luckily, the atmosphere on board remained positive, and together, we stayed true to our motto—One Team, One Dream—knowing we had to persevere as a unit to succeed.

Day 10 provided us with plenty of wind and rain, but only small fish. We ended up finishing the day going 2-for-5, but Day 11 was the day of all days, and one we will never forget.



The advertisement features a close-up of the ICOM M37 marine radio on the left. The radio's LCD display shows '16' and 'VOL'. Below the display are several control buttons: '16/c', 'VOL/SOL MONI', 'SCAN DUAL', 'FAV', 'CH', 'Hi/Lo', and a power button. The background is a vibrant blue with white wavy lines. The ICOM logo is in the top right, followed by the model 'M37' and the slogan 'More Power, More Functionality'. A list of features is provided in a white box, and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn are at the bottom right. The website 'www.icomamerica.com/marine' is listed for more information.

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First thing in the morning on Day 11, we pulled the hook on a big marlin. *This can't really be happening*, we thought. Shortly afterward, we caught a 400-pounder that put up a good show. That afternoon, the strikes came in quick succession: a double strike and another 800-pound marlin caught. A half-hour later, another double strike. One of those fish was questionable, so the gaffs were brought out just to be on the safe side. It turned out to be about 900 pounds, so we promptly released it. *So close*, I thought to myself, *maybe it wasn't meant to be*. Or was it?

Another half-hour passed, and another monster-size fish struck. After 20 minutes, we had it close enough to grab the leader for the first time, but we weren't sure whether she was going to reach the mark—we all agreed it was going to be close. We discussed its size, then took the next opportunity to boat it.

We got a second chance, and the lads did an awesome job of gaffing it. The sharks were closing in, so the five of us quickly dragged the marlin onto the deck. We immediately steamed off to the nearest mothership, *Beluga*, to have the fish officially weighed. We knew it was going to be a damn close call, measuring it a couple of times. According to the conversion tables, it could have been anywhere between 980 and 1,050 pounds, depending on how well-nourished it was. The torture of a long wait set it in: Was it going weigh over the mark or not?

The calibrated and certified scales on *Beluga* settled at 1,032 pounds, and you could have heard the jubilant cheering as far away as Cooktown. With the mission accomplished, we hugged each other at least a hundred times, celebrating late into the night.

On the last two days of our trip, we took it easy but still managed to catch a

700-pounder that put on a great show, and on the last day, we set off early back to Cooktown.

We finished the trip with a ratio of 16 from 40 bites, and were all delighted and proud of what we had done. I can never thank the crew of *Amokura* enough, as well as Capt. Tim Richardson and his crew, who I fished with the first few years of the challenge. The Triple Grander Marlin Slam project was complete, and offshore fishing for me can take on a new dimension from here on out.

I still pinch myself to make sure it wasn't a dream, hardly believing I am the first angler to achieve the Marlin Grander Slam. The burden is off my shoulders. No more stress, no more record hunting—just fishing for pure fun. Maybe that was the real goal, and getting the slam is what it took. Either way, I'm happy to be here. —*By Stephan Kreupl, as told to Capt. Jen Copeland* 🍷

