

The All Ords Index

Every night at the end of the TV news, during the stock market report, a figure is announced for the All Ordinaries Index or *All Ords*. Doesn't mean a lot to me I'm afraid, but I did think of the term several times as we thundered down the snag and gravel bar-strewn lower Ord River in Andrew McEwen's big tinnie, flying scant centimetres above prop and skep-destroying obstacles with apparent immunity. I'd imagine that when the All Ords drops a little up that way, aluminium and stainless steel stocks immediately rise!

The fishing game is full of fashions, fads and trends and you'd have to be Blind Freddy not to have noticed the increasing prominence of the name Macka in big barra catching circles over the past few years. The previous issue of this magazine carried a great cover shot and feature article by publisher, Alex Julius, set at Macka's Barra Camp and it has had quite a deal of coverage elsewhere in the angling media of late too. With good reason.

I visited Macka's Barra Camp for the first time in August this year, along with my mate Bushy and our *Hooked On Adventure* TV crew. Despite the fact that we'd uneringly chosen the worst set of tides in the slowest month of the year, I was instantly impressed with Macka — both the man and the camp of the same name.

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Once you've been around a bit, some blokes immediately strike you as fair dinkum and good at what they do. Andrew Macke McEwen is such a man. He speaks quietly and doesn't say a whole lot until he knows you a little, but there's an assurance in his manner that stands in stark contrast to some of this industry's show ponies and grand-standers. I liked him from the word go.

Macka was also brutally honest about our chances of catching one of the metre-plus barramundi in this tank-trap stretch of water is

now so famous for. Those chances were not high but they did at least exist. Especially if we were willing to soak baits.

Whatever It Takes!

Bushy and I have never been too concerned about exactly how we catch fish, so long as we catch some. Sure, we both love our lure and fly casting, and my distaste for trolling is widely known, but if that's what it takes, I'll do it. Ditto bait fishing. In fact, I've actually got to admit to a soft spot for using the real McCoy. Truth is, I enjoy bait fishing about 10 times more than trolling!

As is the case in so many other parts of the world — be it snaring a frigate mackerel at Montague Island or securing a live bardi grub down on the Murray — catching the bloody bait turned out to be the hardest part of the entire exercise! Not that I can whinge... Macka did all the hard work with the cast net!

Smaller mullet were reasonably abundant but Macka badly wanted the snub-nosed, kilo-class bruisers that haunted most backwaters. The fact that they were as skittish as bonefish and almost as fast made the hunt for them something akin to trapping unicorns.

On day one we scored exactly zero big mullet but smaller baits fished on the freshwater snags and down in the muddy tidal stuff yielded a handful of modest fingermark, a 65 cm salty barra for Bushy and one good hook-up for me.

I was whip-jigging a nose-hooked dead mullet at the time — one of Macka's proven techniques. The bite was for all the world like a massive estuary perch woofing a soft plastic and I socked the fish instinctively. It jumped in the snags and I pulled as hard as I could on 15 kg braid, then a bit more. Luck was on my side and it arced into mid-stream.

Beside the boat and pretty much beaten, that barra looked 95 or 96 cm and was thick-shouldered like a dam-dwelling fish. I was congratulating myself on at least

If Bushy looks relieved rather than delighted at boasting his PB barra, it could have something to do with the fact that, thanks to a bout of the Kunumurra Kurse, he was throwing up five minutes before hooking it!

equalling my PB barra (taken not too far west of there on El Questro Station) when the 30 kg mono leader popped like cotton at the fish's jaw hinge. It shouldn't have happened but it did. Not the first time and won't be the last. Sometimes they just get it at a bad angle and even the toughest string wears out. The dag of nylon looked like it had been dragged over a concrete step a few times.

A Big 'un For Bushy

Next day, Macka got his big mullet — just one, but as it turned out that was enough. Bushy was fighting a stomach ailment we'd both picked up in town (the *Kunumurra Kurse*) and wasn't in a communicative mood between chunders over the side but he moved quick enough when that big mullet went off.

This fish took our breath away when it cleared the water way back in the bad stuff and Bushy had to free spool it twice as Macka picked us out through the timber, but everything hung together. At 105 cm it was Bushy's best by a long shot and he almost managed a smile for the camera as we released her.

Helluva place that Macka's Barra Camp, and one helluva bloke who runs it. I reckon I'll probably be back.

