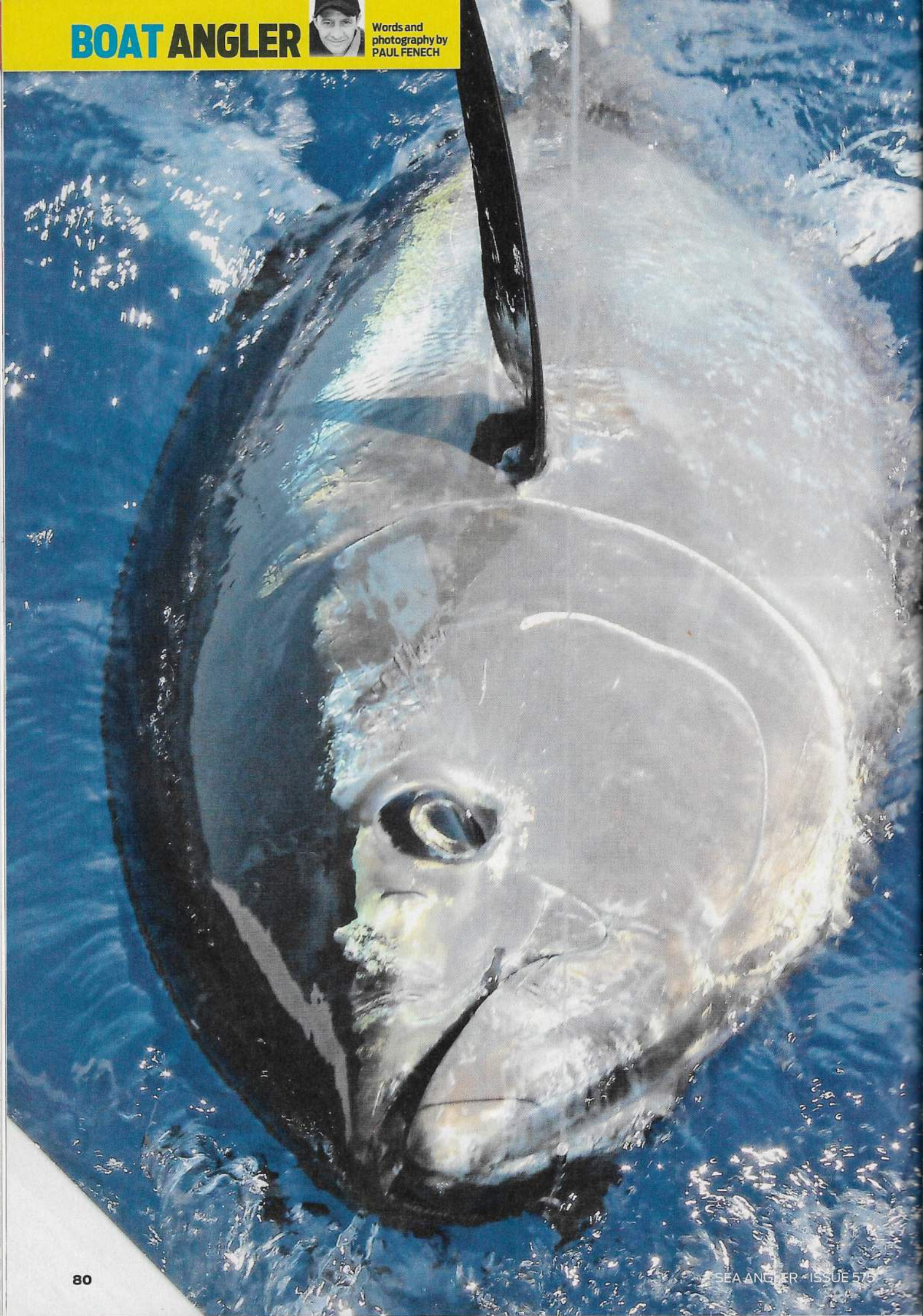




Wicked tuna!

The food-rich Mediterranean Sea around Alcudia offers you the chance to catch mighty bluefin tuna...

IT'S A LITTLE AFTER 5.30AM, QUIET and pleasantly warm, as I enjoy another sip of coffee from the balcony of my apartment. Looking beyond the sandy beach, I'm focussing on a hazy glow slowly brightening over the horizon that's signalling an imminent sunrise.

A couple of joggers slip by below me as they go about their daily routine and, just then, something catches my eye, quickly diverting my stare towards the sea.

As the calm water gently laps on to the sand, it begins to shake. There's a bit of drama going on under the surface, and suddenly, an eruption smashes through the top layer. Hundreds of mullet begin to flee in utter panic and are

frantically leaping into the air, desperate to seek safety.

"Must be a barracuda hunting breakfast," I whisper to myself. And, as quickly as the mayhem occurred, everything suddenly settles and the early-morning calmness resumes.

My iPhone pings and the screen lights up with an incoming WhatsApp message. It's from my good friend and top skipper in Mallorca, Captain Vince Riera, who I've arranged to meet at 6am.

His message is short: "We're on the boat and ready when you are," it displays. I finish my coffee and hurry off excitedly for the relatively short stroll around Port D'Alcudia, to where his vessel Mad Max is berthed. ▶

MESMERISED

The marina in Alcudia is laid out with lots of pontoons – known as piers here – where a variety of yachts, pleasure boats and fishing vessels are moored. While walking, I stop to watch a small shoal of mullet feeding on plankton that's hanging from a mooring rope.

Every so often a fish swirls on the surface, creating a splash, before gliding back down to join the others. Nothing exciting there you might think. But, when I reveal that this particular group of fish appears to be averaging 7lb to well over double-figures in weight, I'm totally mesmerised by them. To make things even more unbearable, fishing isn't allowed in the marina. Boy, would I love to float a piece of bread flake past one of their noses.

When I arrive at the boat, I can see Vince busy on deck while his partner Charlotte is doing some final preparations before we leave.

"Permission to step aboard skipper?" I politely ask. I'm greeted by one of Vince's huge grins and he ushers me on to Mad Max.

"We're just waiting for Colin and John to arrive and then we'll be picking up Norbert along the way," he adds. Within minutes, Colin Soar, from Doncaster, and his fishing mate, John Sixsmith, from Barnsley, are on board and we slowly drift out of the marina.

Once in open water, Vince pushes forward on the throttle and opens up the twin 690hp diesel engines and the 14m Tiara 4100 open 50-feed vessel rises up in the water and we quickly leave Alcudia behind us.

In no time at all the engines slow as we pull into a secluded cove and gently tick over to a small wooden jetty.

The surrounding hillside is filled with trees, rising high above us with a few villas hidden among them – one of them belonging to none other than pop icon Robbie Williams.

Waiting on the jetty for us is Austrian angler Norbert Perchtold, whose holiday home meant that he was actually neighbours with the former Take That star. I wonder if they have friendly singalongs on a summer's evening over a glass of wine?

"Let's go and catch some monsters," shouts Vince as Norbert steps on board. Once again we power out into the open blue sea.

WAITING GAME

Our first stop is to catch mackerel for bait, and after 30 minutes of working a set of sabiki lures, we get more than enough in the livebait well. After a further 20 minutes steam, Vince eventually kills the engines and prepares to drop the anchor.



Shimano's Tiagra 130 reel does the job

Colin holds on to a running bluefin tuna, before getting it to the boat (below)



As we slowly drift, Charlotte begins preparing tackle while Vince studies the Raymarine electronics in the wheelhouse.

He is watching for a sign on the screen that indicates bluefin tuna are close. The all-important tuna marks he is hoping for are affectionately called 'bananas' because of their shape and colour.

All of a sudden, there they are, three bright 'bananas' on the screen and ascending through the depths.

In no time at all, three rods are rigged and fishing at different lengths and depths. It was now a waiting game, all of us hoping to hear the unmistakable ratchet scream from a Shimano Tiagra 130 reel.

There isn't a breath of wind as the sun burns down from a cloudless blue sky. The anticipation is electric and you can almost cut the atmosphere with a knife through the silence.

While we wait for a bluefin tuna to strike, I decide to fill my time by doing some bottom fishing with strips of squid for bait. It is great fun, and almost every drop yields two or three black bream to 3lb.

Vince then grabs the rod from me and rigs it up to target something different. Dropping a whole mackerel over the side, he suddenly stops it at around 50 metres, leaving it suspended 100m above the seabed.

"Let's see if we can catch a John Dory," he tells me. After five minutes, the rod tip arches and



After releasing an 84kg bluefin, Colin is shattered

line spills from the fixed-spool reel. Vince jumps into action and plays a fantastic John Dory to the surface, proving his tactics were spot-on. I am utterly speechless that this fish had taken a whole mackerel, but, at the same time, overjoyed to see my first ever John Dory being caught.

EXHILARATING RUNS

It is at this precise moment when a ratchet screams out from one of the rods, making my



Vince caught this John Dory on a whole mackerel



Colin with his capture certificate



John (left) and Colin had a great day

pulse really quicken.

Norbert is first in the fighting chair, and he is quickly harnessed to the rod and reel. This fish is running fast and hard, but he's got the whole situation under control.

He is as cool as you like, and I can tell he's done this before. He sits back, totally relaxed and waits for the bluefin tuna to come to a stop. "Why should I waste my energy trying to stop him?" he says.

After half an hour and after several exhilarating runs from the bluefin tuna, Norbert gets the fish alongside ready for unhooking and tagging before a swift release. All of this is done in the water. Norbert's face lights up as Vince gets the measurements, inserts the tag and removes the hook. As it swims off quickly, he shouts: "120 kilos man!"

After the excitement, it was time for lunch. Charlotte offers us a wonderful variety of meats, cheeses, tomatoes, crusty bread and homemade quiche...and, right on cue, another screaming ratchet saw us all leap into action.

This time Colin, still eating, jumps into the chair and hangs on to the rod for dear life. It's absolutely fascinating to see just how powerful bluefin tuna really are.

It's hot and Colin is feeling the heat as sweat runs down his brow. This tuna is taking quite a bit of line from the reel and it's an arduous task to gain it back. He's putting his back and all of his strength into the fight, and slowly making

NEED TO KNOW



I booked my flight with Ryanair from East Midlands airport to Palma, Mallorca. Flight time is around two hours and it cost me less than £100 return. Vince can help you to arrange booking accommodation and airport transfers if needed.

There are plenty of



places to eat and drink nearby, but I thoroughly recommend eating at Sa Placa restaurant at Placa De La Constitucio in Alcudia's old town. A wonderful part of Mallorca and only a five-minute taxi ride from Port D'Alcudia, and their seafood paella is superb.

good progress. And, wouldn't you believe it, another reel screams from another rod. "Double strike! Double strike," shouts Vince.

With Colin already in the chair, John is going to have to deal with this angry tuna standing up. Sadly, the tuna John is attached to throws the hook after a blistering run...that's all part of tuna fishing, I suppose.

After 30 minutes, Colin has done well to get the bluefin alongside. He's shattered but overjoyed to learn his 84.6kg specimen has been tagged and released.

People may go to Alcudia, in Mallorca, for the sun, sea and sand, and that's great. Me? I want all that too...but more than anything, I'm there for the bluefin tuna fishing.

And, under the expert guidance of Captain Vince Riera and Charlotte, I know I'm in good hands to succeed.

It won't surprise you to learn that I can't wait to come back here next year. ■

CONTACT

If you want more details about booking a trip with Captain Vince Riera, tel: +34 6679 30902.

■ Web: www.fishing-mallorca.net

■ Email: capt.vinceriera@gmail.com

■ Facebook: Fishing Mallorca – Capt. Vince Riera

