

# TV SHOW SCORES **'Holy Grail'** OF SHARK FISHING



Andy LoCascio, Scott Braun, Bill Brown, Rich Tenreiro with thresher shark

Photos by Tim Smith, [www.skimmeroutdoors.com](http://www.skimmeroutdoors.com)



By CAPTAIN ANDY LOCASCIO

Capt. Bill Brown looks like a man who has made fishing a cornerstone of his life. When he speaks of shark fishing, he cannot contain his passion or hide his incredible insight and understanding. As host of the Northeast Angling television show, I knew that we wanted more than the usual shark show. We knew we could get a good blue shark bite in a variety of locations, but the Holy Grail of sharks we were seeking was a big mako or, better yet, a rarely seen thresher. I know a lot of shark fisherman and only a handful have caught even one thresher. Brown had already caught 53! We thought Brown was just the man to help us. The weeks before the shoot showed all the signs that the annual migration was on schedule. A few days before our arrival, Brown and his crew saw a big mako. The day before we arrived, they caught their first thresher of the season. It seemed like the right time.

Block Island was quickly fading as we motored southeast in the summer of 2004. Overcast skies spanned from horizon to horizon and it was doubtful that we would see the sunrise. The sea and air had a greasy feeling like the kind of day every fisherman dreams of. Co-host Rich Tenreiro and I settled in for a long ride. Leading our way was Brown in his 34-foot Crusader sport fisherman, the *Billfish*, which would be the camera boat for the day. The radio crackled with "another 34 miles on this course and we're there" as Brown updated us on our progress.

We pulled up to the *Billfish* and Brown jumped aboard and we began to execute the plan. We got the baits in the water and after a few moments realized that our plan stunk. The camera boat needed to stay close. We had shut down the *Billfish*'s big diesel engine, but the two boats did not want to drift together. We attempted to tether the boats, which made the problem worse. Brown was losing his patience because he knew we were wasting critical time. It was clear that Brown had dropped us into "shark central" because only a few minutes later a blue appeared. Tenreiro got on the 50-pound rod and a moment later a solid fish was pulling line out of his reel. While we were waiting for the hook set, another shark appeared at boat side. I remembered Brown's words from the prior evening when he insisted we get all other lines out of the water once a fish was hooked up. But I couldn't bear being left out, so I grabbed a 30-pound outfit and quietly slipped a mackerel bait over the side right in front of the shark's nose. I feigned complete ignorance and asked Brown if we should get the other baits out of the water. Before he could respond, I was hooked up. Double header!

With two sharks on the hook, Tenreiro and I got a chance to show our stuff. We were using some great tackle from Shimano and were both making good progress. Brown was busy coaching Tenreiro as I was hooking up my fish, and in the excitement we forgot to get the third bait out of the water. We had placed the rod in the leaning post rod holder and used an outrigger clip attached to a rod in the T-top to keep the line well above the other two baits. The line was so high that we couldn't even see it. Moments later the line was screaming out the reel and Brown was reaching for the rod. By the time it

was clear of the clip, the shark was gone, but the live bluefish bait remained. Rather than bring it in (and follow his own instructions from the night before) Brown left it out. He must have been thinking that the confusion created if we got a third fish on the hook would not be much worse than the confusion we already had. The reel started screaming again. This time the shark committed and Brown joined the hosts of Northeast Angling for a triple header!

After we got these sharks, we still had a lot of fishing ahead of us and had to keep our chum slick going. We danced around the boat slipping over and under each other's lines. Whoever was closer to the chum at the moment laddled it overboard. Not all of it was making it overboard and the deck was becoming slick. Tenreiro was the only one who had a chance to get a fishing belt on. Brown and I were gutting it out with our respective fish. Mine was hooked the closest to the boat and there it remained. Brown's fish was well away from the boat and Tenreiro's was somewhere in between. Brown clearly had hooked a much larger fish, but it had not shown itself. I was hoping it was something special as my fish appeared at boat side. My hopes quickly faded when Brown put his rod in the rod holder (with the fish still on) and turned to assist me in releasing mine. We made quick work of the release and then a few minutes later we released Tenreiro's fish. Eventually Brown wrestled a monster blue shark to the boat and we were three for three! We were all a little disappointed that it wasn't a mako or a thresher, but our disappointment was tempered by a great sequence on camera footage. We hooked, filmed and released another hefty blue, and then as our drift continued it took us over the temperature break and the water color changed from tropical blue to deep green. The water was almost a full degree cooler than when we started. This is a huge difference because a temperature break acts like a barrier that baitfish and their predators congregate along. Usually there is little or no bait on the other side and few large predators.

At lunch time, the water was continuing to cool as the drift progressed. We had a bite to eat, then picked up and started our drift again. The overcast remained stubborn, a good sign. The mid day sun will often force fish to retreat to deeper waters and become less active. Tenreiro and I were preparing the boat for running while Brown was bringing the baits. As he retrieved the final bait it happened – a big thresher was stalking the live bluefish bait just a few feet from the boat. The word "shark" left Brown's lips and, as I turned to look, we all saw the huge tail of the great fish break the water. A moment later the bluefish was gone and line was peeling off the reel. The rod bent and the line crackled off the reel as the fish turned and ran. We were hooked up. Brown had the best look at the fish and, in a voice barely audible, said, "It's big." We agreed the night before that, in fairness, if we hooked a mako or a thresher we would pass the rod so everyone would have a chance to fight it. But the fish we hooked had the makings of a possible state record so it no longer made sense to pass the rod. A record like that should be held by a single angler if he dares pit his strength and skills against such a formidable fish.

Brown continued his battle and I was on the throttles working hard to keep the fish positioned on either the port or



starboard stern quarter. We assumed this would be a long fight. The longer it went on and the more strain that was placed on the tackle, any weaknesses would be exposed. Tenreiro was busy policing the boat and communicating the relative position of the angler, line and boat. As the battle wore on we worked the fish closer to the boat and several contrasting things were happening. The fight was nearing a possible conclusion (a good thing). The elasticity provided by the long length of monofilament was no longer available and the strain on the already stressed tackle was at a maximum (a bad thing). The boat and engines had come into play and the line could easily be cut against them (a really bad thing).

The fish used its weight to get itself directly beneath the boat. This was an incredibly bad position, as it could easily move diagonally beneath the boat more quickly than the boat could be maneuvered. After more than 40 minutes of battling this fish, it did. It darted beneath the stern of the boat in an instant and Brown was in big trouble. The line had passed directly beneath the engine outdrives and was rubbing up against them. There was so much pressure on the rod he could barely keep his position and was quickly forced to bend over the transom. I was frantically working the throttles to pivot the boat off the fish while not cutting the line with the spinning propellers. After what seemed like an eternity, it finally worked and the boat swung free of the fish. We positioned the fish off the starboard quarter and were all terrified as we knew that some kind of damage must have been done to the line. I drove the boat hard astern and gave Brown a chance to gain back and inspect the line. Moments later, our worst fears were realized as Brown and Tenreiro inspected the damaged line.

We were about an hour into a fight that could typically last several hours and involve dozens of cycles of the fish taking line and us getting it back while waiting for it to tire. The damaged line could not be allowed to leave the reel. The nimble boat and our skill as fishermen to exhaust this fish over the course of the fight had paid off. We were gaining on the fish and it looked like we might have a chance to finish it very soon, but we did not have the gaffs or equipment to subdue the fish onboard. An unspoken superstition is that if we were fully prepared, the fish would never have come along. The equipment was aboard the *Billfish* and it could not get close enough to complete a transfer. Captain Kip Jenkins, who was running the *Billfish*, had to make sure it would not get near the fish. At the same time our boat was a moving target as we had to keep up with the fish. The wind and sea were starting to build and the task of linking up was getting dicey. Jenkins somehow managed the impossible, and we got everything we needed to end the battle. With Brown's son, Patrick, aboard we could finish the job. Brown had good line to work with and was putting incredible pressure on the fish while the boat continued to maneuver closer. Then, almost without warning the leader was out of the water and Patrick latched on to it. We wasted no time getting a couple of gaffs into the completely exhausted fish, and it was quickly dispatched. It was over. We hauled the fish into the boat and quickly filmed the closing scene for the show. We raced into the muted setting sun through choppy seas to Point Judith, RI, where there was a scale and an opportunity to take pictures. On the

way we wondered if this fish could be a new Rhode Island state record. The thresher tipped the scale at a whopping 480 pounds, not far from the record of 526 pounds for a thresher caught in 1999, according to the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA). The fish went back into the boat and we headed back to Block Island and a warm welcome at the Block Island Boat Basin. The light rain that was falling did not seem to dampen the spirits of the crowd that had gathered to see the great shark. For nearly all of them, it will be the only one they ever see in their lives. 🚩

