



A HISTORY OF SUCCESS IN THE WILD WEST



COURTESY PICANTE SPORTFISHING

HOW A WINNING FISH LANDED DURING THE BISBEE'S BLACK AND BLUE
SPARKED A LEGACY THAT CONTINUES TODAY

BY BILL BOYCE



THE WILD WILD WEST: We've all seen the same scenario play out dozens of times on the big screen. A modest stranger with an out-of-place derby hat saunters into a dusty Western town and sneaks through the swinging barroom doors. He makes his way to a full table of card players who don't know his name, his place of origin or his reason for being there. He timidly enters the card game with an impressive pile of chips. In short order, he slaps down a bet that makes the other shady characters at the table twist their mustache ends with glee, thinking about how they'll spend the pile of chips they're convinced they will be scraping from this seemingly unsuspecting new player.

Just when they think it's a done deal, a rabbit of a card is pulled from the unknown shark's hand. Staring in amazement, they all realize all bets are off — and the chips just fell in his favor.

Fast-forward to 1994, in another dusty Western town full of fresh faces showing up for a big game. It's Cabo San Lucas, it's the Bisbee Black and Blue and it's a no-name angler — with no history of winning a big event — named Phil Gentile. During a leisurely walk one day, he came across a man washing a boat in the marina. "That looks like a lot of work," Gentile said. The man wiped his forehead, looked at his trusty steed and replied, "I'd wash this boat every day if I could!"

Gentile grinned and walked away, thinking that owning a boat someday could be a lot of fun. He went back to Southern California and promptly bought a 40-foot

Tollycraft named *Picante*. Then he decided to make the trip to Cabo to enter the Big Dance. Nearing Cabo up the Pacific side of the cape while making his way to the Bisbee, Gentile saw a huge marlin jumping, and he made note of the area. On Day One of the tournament, he and his crew raced to the numbers. Within the first hour of fishing, they hooked a 500-pound blue marlin, one they were confident would take the daily. After a short fight, the fish was lost — and with it, the crew's confidence in Gentile's luck.

Later in the day, a second fish was hooked. It dwarfed the first one by double its weight: a huge female who had just spawned her eggs and, in doing so, expended all of her energy. A short fight ended with the landing of a 993-pound blue — and it wasn't just the daily winner, it was a sure bet to run the table. To sprinkle more

Picante's charter fleet sits in front of their office located right next to the IGY Marina. The fleet consists of boats ranging in size from a 24-foot center console to a fully custom 68-foot sport-fishing boat (opposite). There is a boat to meet any angler's need, and that's a good thing if you're looking to chase acrobatic striped marlin in nearby waters (right).



COURTESY PICANTE SPORTFISHING (OPPOSITE BOTTOM), BILL BOYCE (2)

luck on Gentile's tail, Cabo Yachts was giving away a new 35-foot convertible model for any blue marlin over 600 pounds caught on the first day of the tournament — which is why the owner of that new Cabo Yacht doubled down and started the *Picante* Sportfishing charter fleet right in the Cabo



marina. The rest is history in the fishing lore of Cabo. After this tournament, Gentile became close friends with Mike Howarth, the owner and builder of Cabo Yachts, and the relationship flourished. Cabo Yachts built their reputation as masterful fishing platforms and serious tournament winners, while *Picante* became a dealer for Cabo Yachts in Baja and beyond.

In the 20 years that followed, *Picante* has sold over 50 Cabo Yachts. Without a doubt, it has established itself as the most modern and best equipped, boasting the most successful captain/crew combinations in the IGY Marina. "A reputation backed by the success they can proudly claim," says Ross Kramer, sales

manager for *Picante*. "Our boats, captains and crews have won the largest jackpots in Cabo tournament history — now totaling up to \$4,350,586 in winnings — and have won the prestigious Billfish Foundation award for the most striped marlin released worldwide 18 times in the last 20 years."

THE PICANTE FLEET

The current *Picante* fleet offers an impressive lineup of 14 modern sport-fishers for charter. They range from *Picantito II*, a 24-foot Shamrock center console, to *Pegasus*, a 68-foot custom sport-fisher, alongside nine additional Cabo Yachts. The *Picante* headquarters is located next to the IGY Marina office near the



Phil Gentile's 993-pound blue marlin aboard *Picante* won the Bisbee's Black and Blue tournament in 1994 and spurred the partnership that became the *Picante* Sportfishing charter fleet.

Puerto Paraiso Mall. The *Picante* fleet proudly lines the eastern side of D dock, and it's a simple stroll from the office to the boats. During a chat with Kramer between his duties of welcoming charter guests to their fishing adventures, I ask why he chose to help manage and

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market the Picante fleet. “The ease of promoting the experience this fleet offers in terms of the quality of boats and the high level of tackle available for guests to fish with,” he replies. The pride in the charter experience Picante offers is immediately evident in the tackle sitting on the boats — Cousins rods matched with Shimano reels filled to capacity with fresh line — and it makes them stand out as a serious charter operation.

THE FISHING

Anyone seeking their first or thousandth marlin knows that the most consistent year-round bite is found off Cabo. Year after year, the constant flow of fish passing the cape on their journeys north and south seemingly find comfort in the offshore oceanographic terrain. Add to that a high concentration of two important billfish forage sources — finfish like sardines, mackerel and small tuna, along with mollusks like squid — and you get a

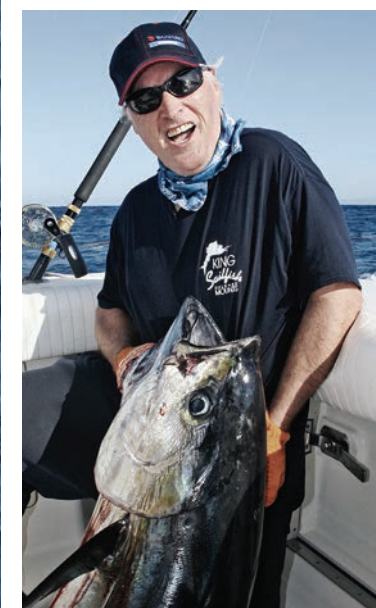
booming combination. Fantastic current conditions create upwellings of nutrients, which rev up the food chain. Anglers using their sight-fishing skills to find marlin typically use the glassy morning conditions to spot sleeping marlin; then they wait for

the northerly breezes to get the marlin tailing in the afternoons. So many areas of shoreline are full of nesting seabirds, whose constant presence on the offshore fishing grounds give captains and anglers something to run to when fish are chasing bait.



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Striped marlin are a year-round resident. Depending on El Niño or La Niña oceanic conditions, the winter bite can be as good as it gets during hotter times of the year. As waters warm in May and June, tuna start making their way into these waters; not far behind



Large blue marlin (opposite) frequent the waters around Cabo in the fall, attracting anglers from around the world to fish the world-famous tournaments. Arriving back at the marina after a day of fishing, you will see flags of every color and shape flying from the outriggers of the charter fleets (above). And while most anglers come to Cabo in search of billfish, the yellowfin tuna fishing can be phenomenal (left).

will be blue and black marlin. July through November mark the best catch rates for the bigger marlin brethren. The local tournaments, like the Los Cabos Billfish Tournament and the Bisbee's Black and Blue, are typically won by a fish weighing 500 pounds

or better. Are fish like Gentile's 993-pounder a rare catch? Yes, but many have been hooked and lost. Most charters fish lighter gear for striped marlin during the year, as opposed to the larger 80- and 130-pound tackle that most Hawaiian charters pull during their trips, which increases the chance of landing a four-digit fish when she decides to eat something with a hook.

MONSTER YELLOWFIN

In recent years, the Cabo charter fleets have had large yellowfin tuna on their radar as a target species, and the Picante fleet has been one of the most successful fleets in this endeavor. I recently fished with Ray Douglas from King Sailfish Mounts, who handles all the Picante fleet fish-mount orders, down in Cabo targeting striped marlin. He had never caught a yellowfin tuna before, but he got the surprise of his life while baiting a striped marlin on a 30-pound-class Cousins Marlin Baiter rod with an AVET HX 5 two-speed reel. A 150-plus-pound yellowfin ate the live green jack, then made for the horizon. Keeping the rod bent to the grip for most of the 50-minute fight, Douglas put it on the deck for a catch of a lifetime.

In terms of participating boats, the ever-popular Western Outdoor News Tuna Jackpot Tournament has become one of the world's biggest tournaments. And the jackpots are getting just as big as the yellowfin landed during this event, held in November. In last year's competition, a 210-pound yellowfin won the tournament and earned the winning team a check for \$78,550. But the Picante fleet and Capt. Eduardo Gonzalez took top money honors with a 181-pound yellowfin tuna that earned the team a fat check of \$242,150. Having the confidence and tournament experience to enter all the daily



Striped marlin are often found tailing on the surface (below) and require a keen eye and a quick boat to present a live bait in their direction. The Picante fleet recently added the new Mag Bay 33 (above) to its fleet, the ideal boat for this type of run-and-gun style of fishing.

categories netted them the run of the table. It just seems to be the way the Picante fleet rolls in big events. The Picante boat that took home the bounty: the Mag Bay 33.

MEET THE STALLION OF THE PICANTE FLEET

The newest steed in the Picante corral of high-spirited sport-fishers is the one of the hottest new center console designs on the planet. That's quite a statement to make in a world of super-refined boats of its class, but with its twin 300 outboards, the Mag Bay 33 is the perfect boat for comfortably chasing tuna 50 miles offshore, pitching live baits from the bow to tailing striped marlin or trolling quietly along the shore for wary

roosterfish. I've had the pleasure of fishing on a lot of boats in this size class and of this caliber. They are all impressive in their own right, but this Mag Bay 33 steps up and steps out like a 36- to 38-foot center console. And it's comfortable in its skin with a twin-outboard application, not needing three or four outboards to perform well.

The Mag Bay 33 is the product of a heritage of fine boat designs and impeccable craftsmanship. Barrett Howarth, the son of Cabo Yachts' Mike Howarth, was born into a boatbuilding family, and he started making his own skiffs as a young teen in Newport Beach, California. While still in diapers, Barrett saw his father team up with longtime industry friend Henry Mohrschladt to start Cabo Yachts in a small, dusty desert town in Southern California. Along with partner Greg Bourque, these three amigos built Cabo Yachts into a sport-fishing legend. Sixteen years later and 540 employees strong, they sold the company to the Brunswick Corporation.

With the passion and the love of building premium boats still in their hearts, Barrett and his father wanted to make their mark in the fishing-boat industry once again.

They hired Michael Peters Yacht Designs of Sarasota, Florida, to design a center console hull, one that would be the best of all worlds for handling various seas, yet have the sleek and stunning lines of a Carolina beauty. This masterpiece was introduced in 2015 as the Mag Bay 33, and its quality and craftsmanship is everything Cabo Yachts' reputation was built on. The Mag Bay 33 is the latest arrow that adorns the quiver

of the Picante fleet. The working relationship of Mike and Phil Gentile continues as Picante was appointed the Mag Bay dealership for Mexico. Additionally, the Howarths recently brought on Phil Bourque, son of Greg Bourque, to support the sales arm of the Mag Bay project, adding to the generational legacy from the former Cabo Yacht team. With this new design and the familiar recipe for success, the guys at Mag Bay are sure to champion their new goal of rocking the fishing-boat world with the best they can collectively build.

HOW THE WEST WAS WON

The sun sinks into the Western horizon, blessing Cabo San Lucas with another stunning sunset, falling on the gambler who rolled the dice and put his chips on the table. He won the jackpot over 20 years ago when Cabo was still finding its roots. The fleet of dreams he started on that tournament bet during the Bisbee's has grown into a world-renowned charter operation that is joined by others like it to create one of the most successful marlin hot spots in the world. You can now roll the credits. 🎰

