

Fishing Tip – “Choose The Right Leader” *by Capt. C. A. Richardson*

Most anglers like to homogenize leader choices based on the targeted species alone...that can be a big mistake. When I'm making leader selections, I weigh several factors including focus species, water clarity, and the environment I'll be fishing around.

I for one am a huge fan of fluorocarbon material and favor it over the standard monofilament leader that is much less expensive. Here's why...fluorocarbon is practically invisible, has better abrasion resistance, thinner diameter with a faster sink rate, and finally knot strength.

Fishing for shallow water gamesters like trout and redfish typically require 30" of fluorocarbon leader in the 20# to 30# class. But if you factor scenarios where crystal clear water and bright blue-bird skies come into play...you might be better off tying on 48" of 15# test fluorocarbon to get a suitable number bites. Another situation that might require a leader upgrade would be dock fishing or skipping baits underneath mangrove shorelines...this is where 40# to 50# test leader makes all the difference between catching them or breaking them off. Truly it all comes down to adapting to the conditions at hand.

Naturally if I'm looking to catch tarpon, a heavier leader is going to be necessary...but how heavy? Well that depends on where and how I'm fishing...shallow gin clear water on the beach, deep water passes, live bait or artificial lures, stained water in the back country or fishing around bridges and piers. For instance on beach tarpon, when the water is clear and the winds are calm, I use 5' to 6" of 50# to 60# fluorocarbon leader to enhance my chances of jumping a wary slow rolling tarpon. And then again if I decide to fish the "hill tide" at the Skyway Bridge or drift the infamous Boca Grande Pass...I'm likely to beef up my leader to 80# fluorocarbon and even 100# to increase the likelihood of boating a big tarpon in heavy boat traffic where lots of pressure is going to be applied to shorten the fight time.

Tossing certain artificial lures will also affect my leader choices...for example heavy class leaders often destroy the action of smaller plugs & jigs. Actually top water plugs perform better with a short piece (12") of monofilament leader rather than the heavier fluorocarbon material that sometimes weighs the nose of the bait down creating a less desirable action. It's all about balance when it comes to the artificial game, so experimentation is a necessity to match the right leader requirements to achieve the best lure action.

Finally, there is a wide array of connecting knots for braid and monofilament line to fluorocarbon leader material; some of my favorites are the Uni-Knot, Triple Surgeons, and the No Name Knot. Don't get intimidated...you can master any of these line-to-leader knots and more by viewing them over and over on *You Tube* or the internet...they are great resources for learning how to tie knots.