

Ask Professor Flounder

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Q: Allen Turner asks: “*A high school buddy of mine who lives in South Dakota wants to come to Florida next spring to escape the winter weather. When should he come in the March-April timeframe to maximize his chances for great Big Bend fishing? We're more interested in steady action than in landing a monster or two and want to minimize the likelihood of finding more than 2-foot seas. Where would you recommend going and what type of fish should we target?*”

A: Allen, my first response is that no matter what time of year he comes to Florida from South Dakota, it's a good time!

March and April can be unpredictable months for fishing, depending on how harsh the winter that precedes those months. As the water temperature rises towards 68 degrees, the trout and redfish bite picks up inshore and the grouper get more active offshore. I personally think you'd have better luck getting a couple of days of inshore fishing than offshore, as winds are usually a factor, too.

If you're going to fish inshore, I'd do a Steinhatchee trip and fish the shallow water flats early in the mornings for reds and then move to the deeper flats as the sun comes up for some trout action. If you have calm seas, you'll be able to fish all the way from Horseshoe Beach to Keaton Beach with little trouble, and you should see lots of action.

As to when, the tides look nice for the weekend of April 17 and 18, 2004. There will be a good high at midday and the morning low won't be too low. I think April is better than March, if you're setting up a trip this far in advance, as March can still be cold and the bait may not be plentiful.

Have fun!

Q: This really should be a “Miss Manners” question, but here goes:

What's the proper ‘etiquette’ pertaining to fuel, ice and food when someone invites me along on a fishing trip?

A: That's an interesting question. ‘Legally’ the operator of the vessel must have a USCG Captain's License to receive ‘fees’ or ‘remuneration’ for services aboard a boat, which could include gas money or lunches and snacks.

However, I think that most of us are courteous enough to slip the operator some gas money at the end of the day, and certainly a bucket of fried chicken and a case of Cokes is fine to bring. As to how much money for gas, there are several options and considerations. My neighbors and I fish with each other frequently. We have a \$20 rule for our inshore trips that says that the guest contributes \$20 to the gas fund of the operator. If someone takes their bigger boat, the guests offer to pick up all or part of the fuel tab at the gas station on the way home, depending on how long the trip. In a general sense, the \$20 rule is good for inshore boats that get multiple miles per gallon. Bring your host's lunch and drinks, too, as that's still a pretty good bargain for a day of fishing. If you're fishing with Wiley or Charlie or someone in a big boat, think

about gallons per mile and contribute accordingly (Wiley and Charlie are licensed Captains, and will gladly accept contributions of gas money and chicken!). “Hostess” gifts are nice, too—I have a Greek neighbor who gives me a bottle of Ouzo when I take him fishing.

If you're in doubt about what to do, ask your host—just be sure to ask.

Q: Can you make any suggestions about taking care of electrical connections aboard my boat, particularly those for my depth finder, radio and GPS receiver?

A: Boat wiring (factory wiring) is typically pretty good in that the boat is rigged with good, solid marine wire of a decent size to handle lots of current under adverse conditions. For the most part, you'll find #12 or #14 wire used to connect your primary fuse panels to secondary panels or wiring blocks in your console. All of those connections are pretty solid, due to the large size of the wires, so long as the connections are tight.

It's at this point that most of us start having problems. We've all been 'sold' on smaller and smaller instruments, and of course that means smaller and smaller places to attach the necessary 12V DC power and other connections such transducers and speakers. Take, for example, many of the Garmin GPS units. The plug that fits the power input is wired with wire that's at least #22, pretty thin in any application. What that means, of course, is that there's a lot less wire, and an easier target for salt water corrosion and damage. Radio and depth finder inputs really aren't much better.

The answer, in my opinion, is mostly 'maintenance' (and more maintenance!). I suggest that at least once a year, you carefully and methodically disconnect any and all of your boat wiring (include all power blocks, fuse panels, in-line fuses, and battery connections), clean the connections thoroughly, grease them, and re-assemble them. Be careful to only work one connection at a time, and to label wires you disconnect to be sure they go back in the right place! I recommend using **CRC Contact Cleaner** to clean connections (with an old toothbrush) and **Dielectric Grease** to coat the connections before re-assembly. I also clean and coat the connectors to antennas, microphones and transducers, as well as my trailer light connector. It's not a bad idea to remove any light bulbs (both trailer and boat lights) and put a coat of this grease (which conducts electricity) inside the sockets and on the metal bases of the bulbs. These products are available at larger marine supply stores or at professional electronics stores (Skipper's in Gainesville has both.).

Taking a few hours a year to keep your boat's 'small wiring' in shape is not a bad price to pay for lots of successful days on the water.

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