

Not a bad way to break your big barra duck! Starlo's first metre-plus fish measured 110 cm and weighed an extraordinary 13 kg (40 lb). It was built more like an impoundment fish and had probably used the first big Wet Season in five years to break free of a Top End lagoon. Successful lure was a Rapala Super Shad Rap.

salmon smacked mullet high into the air and great, fat, burnished-silver barramundi boofed anything they wanted to boof—including the salmon. This place was electric.

Fishing in a location where you know the next cast could light the fuse of a piscatorial bomb and see you connected to the biggest barra of your life certainly sharpens the reflexes and hones the senses. This is especially so when it's already happening to others all around you. We were rafted up to Braydon's big tinnie and his clients had already hooked, lost and landed several monster barra, almost all of which tried their best to rip deep into the flooded trees the moment they felt the hooks.

I'd missed several muffled thumps and tugs on the Barra Magnum when my line suddenly jerked spastically to the left and the brown water exploded. It's the noise that gets you in that confined space between the trees—like a depth charge detonating.

Almost immediately I was in trouble as the huge, platinum monster ripped me first this way, then that, before barrelling straight into the densest stand of drowned trees. Branches vibrated, trunks shook and leaves danced in the air as everything went shuddery, jerky and then stopped dead. Buried. Game over...or was it?

"Bad luck!" Mick sympathised. "There was nothing you could do to stop that one."

Way back in the bush, I could hear a heavy,

wet sloshing. "She's still there, ya know," I replied.

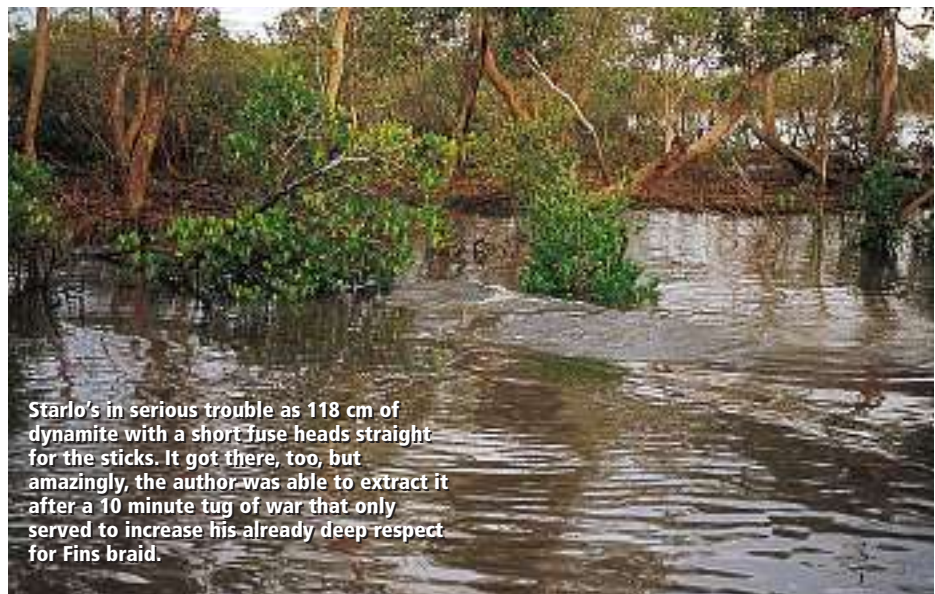
"Yair, I know," Mick said, "but there's no way we can get in there."

I wasn't quite ready to give up, though. At my urging, Mick untied us and fired up the motor. We changed angles several times while I strained on the immobile line for a good five or six minutes. Sporadic sloshing continued from 10 or 15 metres back inside the thick picket

fence of trees. Then there was a much louder splash and I gained a metre of line.

"Something's happening!" I enthused. "I've got her moving!"

Mick looked doubtful, but continued to manoeuvre us up and down outside the thicket. Several small branches floated clear, their thumb-thick stems sawn neatly through by the 15 kg braid. Suddenly, I gained a couple more metres and there was a flash of silver and a big



Starlo's in serious trouble as 118 cm of dynamite with a short fuse heads straight for the sticks. It got there, too, but amazingly, the author was able to extract it after a 10 minute tug of war that only served to increase his already deep respect for Fins braid.

