



There was nothing wrong with the calibre of black jew on offer a couple of kilometres from the river mouth, either.

since, figuring I needed everything going for me in terms of rattle, flash, pulse and vibration in this hearty beef stew. It looked like classic hard-body water to me. How wrong I was.

I reckon Mick made five short casts before he buttoned into a horse almost directly under the gunwale. It jumped spectacularly and I was glad there were no trailing trebles as I went for the net shot five minutes later. At 19 kg (42 pounds), it was one of the bigger fish I'd seen taken on a softie and I couldn't help laughing right along with Mick as he bubbled enthusiastically about these fantastic rubbers. I chalked him up as another convert—a significant one.

By the time the bite slowed I'd managed just one fat barra in the 80 cm range—a fish I might once have regarded as the highlight of a day, or

even of a trip, but which we shook free of the hooks at boat-side like a pesky runt. How quickly one's perceptions shift when casting in the land of the giants!

It was pretty much all over. We had maybe 15 minutes left before we needed to skedaddle from the gutter or risk getting stuck. I was into my last dozen casts and, somewhat to Mick's consternation, had yet again refused his offer of a big, new olive Bomber to instead tie on my giant-killer Super Shad Rap.

The strike wasn't especially exciting. Everything just crunched to a dead solid stop, snag-like, where I knew no snag lay. I had to poke the rod up hard twice before the message got through and the bomb detonated. This was her, we knew that right away when she showed her full length in the sort of jump you dream

about capturing on film or video, but never quite do.

I'm not renowned for being especially fleet of foot, but as that tyranno-barra-saurus turned the creek to foam and headed treeward, I covered the full length of Mick's boat, made the scary step-jump-step into Braydon's and ran the whole length of his vessel in less time that it takes to tell. The only thing that stopped my mad dash was Braydon's transom.

We chased that fish down, then back up the creek in Braydon's boat, his clients shouting encouragement as each new line angle narrowly cleared another obstacle and induced a half jump from a fish that now seemed almost too heavy to completely leave the water. It was heart-in-mouth stuff and in the video grabs Mick captured, I'm stony faced and uncharacteristically silent—totally focussed. I figured there and then that I'd probably never get a shot at a bigger wild barra in tidal saltwater and I seriously doubt I ever will.

She measured 126 cm and weighed exactly 50 old-fashioned pounds. There's really not much else to say, except "thanks, Mick".

Best of all, Alex Julius now remembers what my PB barra mark is, and he knows I caught her casting. Life is *so* sweet.

**Footnote: Starlo does paid product development work for Shimano Australia and Blue Fox. He would like to sincerely thank the NT Tourist Commission and Anglers' Choice Fishing Safaris for hosting his latest visit to the Top End. To find out more, log on to [www.anglerschoice.com.au](http://www.anglerschoice.com.au) or phone (08) 8928-0370.**

## FISHING THE RUN-OFF

The Wet Season run-off fishery can commence any time after January and extend as late as April, May or even into early June in exceptional years, depending on the extent and timing of major rainfall events across the Territory. Some river systems fire earlier or later than others, making local knowledge and good guidance critical to the success of southern visitors. Live-aboard charters based at the mouths of river systems like the Mary allow early, comfortable and convenient access to some of the very best action.

After the run-off period, barra fishing typically becomes tougher as the water cools and the emphasis swings more towards trolling and bait fishing, prior to another flurry of barra activity during the October through early December 'build-up' period.

This year's Big Wet was a ripper across most of tropical Australia, ensuring improved fishing in many northern waters for at least the next two seasons... Happy times indeed for barra hunters! So, if you've only ever fantasised about it, now is definitely the time to turn dreams into reality.