

# THREE BASIC BOTTOM RIGS

by George Poveromo

**How to build three proven rigs for taking grouper, snapper and other bottom species.**

Catching big bottom fish is an art as much as it is a science. Consistent success demands precise anchoring or drifting tactics, specialized rigs, a strong back and plenty of elbow grease, not to mention a little bit of luck. Should all of these elements fall into place, you'll find yourself muscling big fish out of the depths and into your cooler.

As simple as they might appear, bottom rigs have a major influence on success, or lack thereof. A lot of thought and fine-tuning should go into making these rigs, based on the fish you're pursuing, how finicky they are, and the type the structure you're fishing. Stealth and strength remain the key elements.

Fluorocarbon provides a major advantage. For many fishermen, the main selling point of fluorocarbon is that the material is simply less visible than traditional nylon monofilament. Fluorocarbon is also much stiffer and more abrasion resistant than nylon mono of the same breaking strength. Therefore, in murky water, where leader visibility isn't a concern, fluorocarbon still offers an advantage that justifies its expense.

When using heavy tackle, avoid swivels and hooks that aren't strong enough for the task. Over the years I have caught several large grouper with old hooks and leaders dangling from their mouths. I've seen leaders with broken barrel swivels, leaders that have frayed apart, and small hooks and light leaders that simply had no chance of beating a big bottom fish. If you're hunting monsters, make sure your entire terminal system can handle the strain.

As for swivels, I use a barrel design that's rated for a minimum of 130-pound test or, more commonly, No. 4 SPRO Power Swivels rated for 230-pound test. I like to use barrel swivels that far exceed the strength of my terminal system, for two main reasons: I don't want a failure, and I want a swivel that can't jam inside my in-line egg sinker. If the swivel eye will fit inside the egg sinker, I separate the two with a smaller egg sinker, which acts as a spacer.

I also use the smallest, strongest hooks that will get the job done, especially when fishing for snapper. Again, with 30- to 50-pound-class tackle, you don't want to risk straightening the hook. For groupers and amberjack, I'll use a large, double-strength, short-shank hook in a size ranging from 8/0 to 11/0, one with a relatively wide gap if I'm dropping big live baits. Keep in mind that I am often fishing with 50- and 80-pound tackle with nearly locked-down drags, so the hook has to be very strong.

Although there are numerous variations when it comes to bottom rigs, outlined on the following pages are three highly effective versions that will fool more big snappers, groupers, amberjack and cobia around reefs, wrecks and other structure. Leader strength, swivel and hook size can be adjusted to match the size of the fish you're pursuing, as well as the tackle you're using.

### Three-Way Swivel Rig



This is a good rig to use with weights heavier than 16 ounces and for fishing over heavy structure. The main line is tied to one eye of the swivel and a long leader is tied to a second eye. The weight, usually a bank sinker, is connected to the third eye of the swivel via several inches of lighter line. In my case it's 20-pound test.

This rig boasts many of the same advantages as the in-line version when using a long leader, plus the heavy sinker won't chafe the fishing line. Furthermore, should the rig snag on the bottom, it can usually be freed by locking down the drag and winding tight until the lighter line holding the sinker parts.

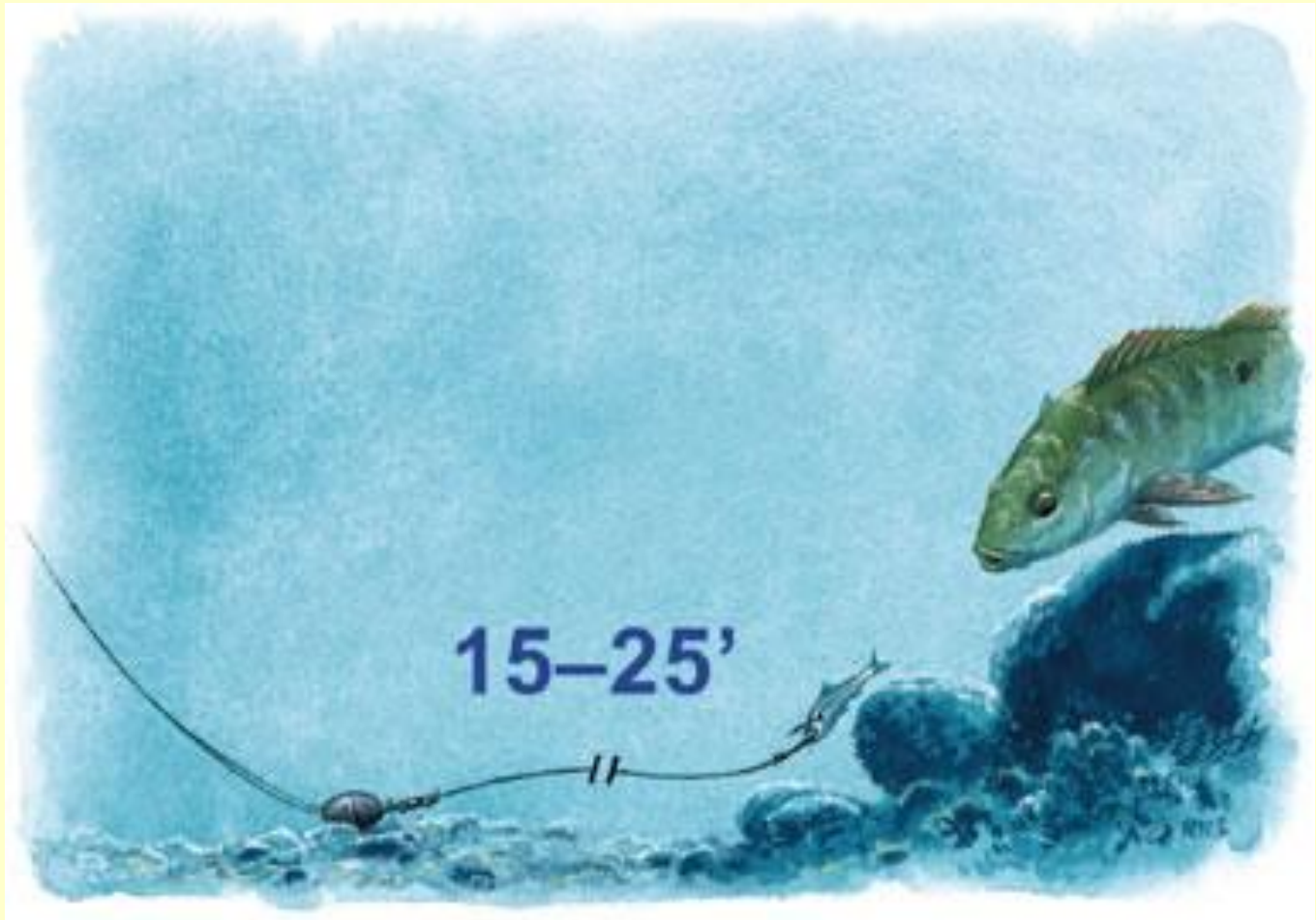
Again, when targeting snappers, such as muttons and reds, go with 50-pound fluorocarbon. For big grouper or amberjack, go with a minimum of 80-pound fluorocarbon, and as heavy as 100-pound test (for goliath grouper, use 180- to 220-pound test). Generally, groupers aren't as leader-shy as snappers, plus they're more likely to dive directly into structure and part the leader. Heavier is definitely better with grouper! Depending on your target species, the three-way swivel should be a minimum of 130-pound test.

## Knocker Rig



This is a popular rig for smaller snappers such as gray, red and yellowtail. The knocker rig is a good choice when fishing directly on top of reefs and close to wrecks, where the odds are high of a fish diving into the structure. With this rig, the fishing line is tied to a barrel swivel. From there, a leader measuring less than ten feet (five feet is most common) is tied to the swivel's opposite eye. Next, an egg sinker is added to the leader, followed by the hook. When the rig is cast out, the egg sinker will slide toward the swivel, putting a little distance between it and the hook. However, the short leader provides hardly any slack for a fish to dive back into the structure before or at the moment the hook is set. This is a rig that requires quick reaction on the part of the angler. I usually fish knocker rigs on a 20-pound spinning outfit for mangrove (gray) snapper. I double my main line with a Bimini twist, then tie the double line to a No. 6, 80-pound-test SPRO Power Swivel. Then I tie on six feet of 40- or 50-pound fluorocarbon and a 5/0 to 8/0 circle hook, based on the bait I'm using and size of the fish.

## In-Line Snapper Rig



This rig features a leader up to 25 feet long, although 15 feet is more common. It is an ideal rig to use when fish, primarily snapper, are reluctant to strike. It's also productive when fishing the bottom well upcurrent of a wreck or reef. The long leader allows a live bait to swim relatively unrestricted, or a dead one to float more naturally in the current. As the in-line egg sinker rests on bottom, the bait flutters enticingly above it some 15 to 25 feet back. Should a suspicious fish peck at the bait, the play in the long leader usually prevents it from detecting any resistance. This rig works with egg sinkers up to 16 ounces. For snapper, I use 50-pound fluorocarbon and a 8/0 super-strong hook.

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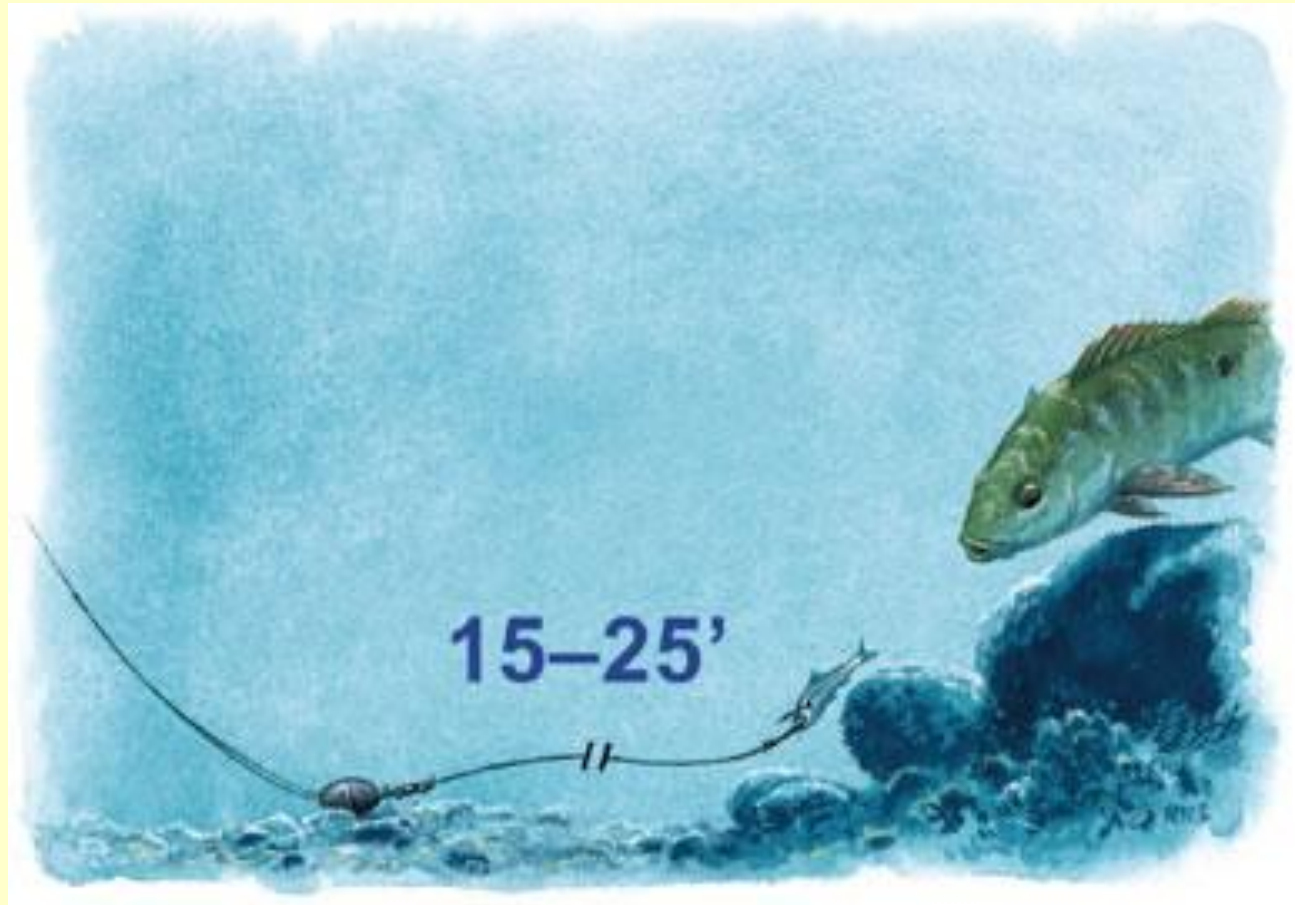
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