

ABU Dreamtrip to Puerto Rico in 1976..



Me on the wait..., and with the catch
- a small Bonito this time.

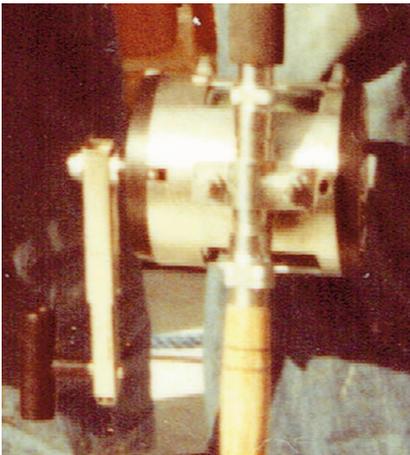
In 1976 ABU had just launched the Ambassadeur IGFA 20 and 30 reels and Big Game fishing was a priority. The waters outside Puerto Rico offered fantastic fishing back then. It was still early days for this location, fishing tourism was rather small and Puerto Rico was very much the professional's play-ground. Our guide on the water was the local IGFA representative Chris H. Roncoroni. He took us to waters where we could fish for Tuna, Wahoo, Sharks, Barracudas..., and did a wonderful job.

The ABU Dreamtrip events were big back then, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Dutch and German anglers fought hard to win the competition, and the chance to go to somewhere exotic. If you remember, this was in the time before mass tourism the way we know it today, and few of us travelled the world like we do these days - you can probably imagine that packing for a trip to a place you had never heard of and half way around the globe almost, was a very special treat. My first win was with a pike, 21,23 kg (Norwegian record pike for some years), and the second win (1978) was also won with a pike of more than 20 kgs.

I can fairly say that the Big Game fishing down in Puerto Rico won my heart for this type of fishing. Not only did we face new and spectacular fishing, we were given the chance to take part in ABU's product development. At the time ABU put down a huge effort to grab a piece of the Big Game market for reels. The Ambassadeur 12 and the radical new 20 and 30 reels had just been launched, and Olle Mattsson, ABU's sales manager back then, had also packed the prototypes for what was intended to follow. The Ambassadeur 50 and 80 IGFA reels. I fished a lot with the 50, a bigger version of the 20/30 reels and almost

identical for looks and features. A truly great reel, and offering the best breaking power of any reel I have yet to try. Also fished with the 80 reel, but I found it a bit too big and heavy for small me. One special feature of this reel was the telescopic handle which I found quite helpful.

As I said, I fished a lot with the 50 reel. I found it to be powerful with a fantastic break. The quality, even if this was just a prototype (one of only two ever built) was impressive. The stainless steel cage gave it a solid and trustworthy look, and the feeling of the spool giving out line was just magnificent. My largest catch with this reel was a Tuna of 250 kgs when hung up on the block in the harbor. It's probably the largest fish ever caught on an Ambassadeur 50 reel. To day this reel is a precious and extremely rare piece in my collection of some 350 Ambassadeur reels.



Local IGFA representative Chris H. Roncoroni, Ivar Lindmark from Gällivare, Sweden and myself with a 19,5 kg Wahoo. Note the reel, from the telescopic handle it can be recognized as the Ambassadeur 80 prototype. ABU did not allow any photos to be taken of the prototypes, but here the strict security failed... This reel has black sie plates, not he bluish/grey found on the reel at the ABU Museum - it is the reel which was stolen from Jack Erskine in Australia.





The IGFA 50 prototype and the Tuna hung up in Puerto Rico in 1976...

Despite all ABU's efforts, the attempt to grab the Big Game market came to nothing. A few months after the Dreamtrip to Puerto Rico ABU made the decision to cancel the 50 and 80 reels, according to what I have heard the decision was made for political reasons following a controversy with the American producer Pen. Be it so, or not, the 80 reel went down to Australia for testing, and was stolen. An act of industrial espionage? I don't know, but the reel has never been recovered. Today one Ambassadeur 50 and one 80 reel is in the ABU museum at Svängsta, one 50 reel sits on my shelf, and that's all there is left of what was once a tremendous development effort by ABU.

Apart from the reels and the fishing, meeting people from ABU this way and be able to stay with them for a week was a great experience. The Dreamtrips were all about marketing off course, but for me, winning this competition solidified my interest for the sport and made me a keen ABU fan. I met people who became my friends and I had the chance to discuss design and features and materials with the people who actually created the reels. Looking back I can recall numerous interesting discussions, a lot of good joking, and a couple of suggestions which actually led to changes on reels being developed.



ABU Ambassadeur 50 prototype - one of only two made. The other one is at the ABU Muesum in Svängsta, Sweden. A superb reel which sadly never went as far as production, a shame and a victim, I believe, of some high up controversy between ABU and American Pen.

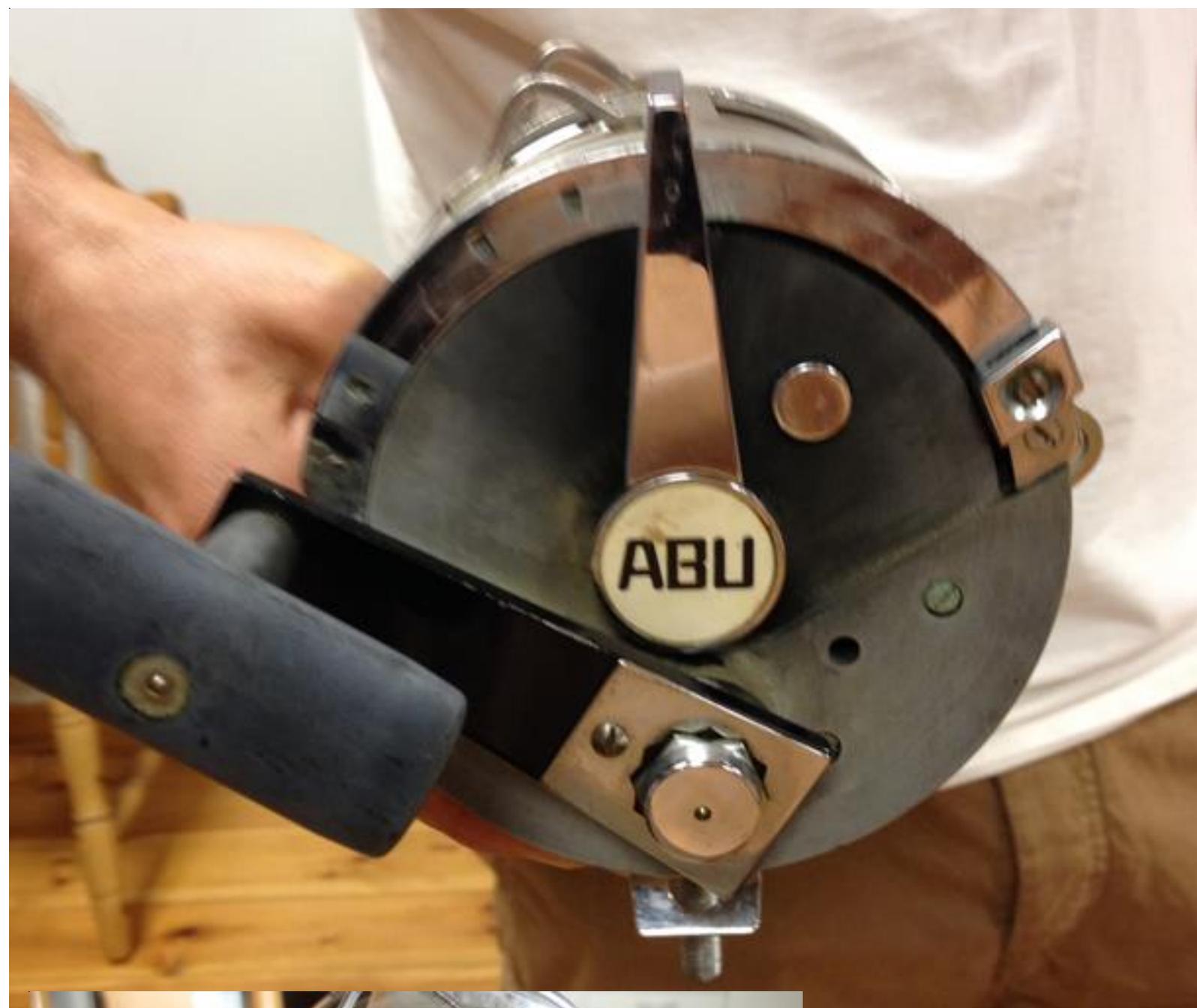


Apart from seize... the 50 lbs reel has two sets of hook-up points for harness (one set on the 20/30 reels) and different control buttons on the left side plate. Construction was basically the same with a tough stainless steel cage (tougher on the big reel) inside which everything was assembled. The simple spool shift by loosening only one screw is the same, and the spool and brake system is also the same, only beefed up a bit on the bigger reel. Anyone who has held an Ambassadeur 20 or 30 in his hands will remember the feel of weight and quality, this is even more present if you hold the 50 lbs reel.

The Ambassadeur 50 was just a prototype, but very close to production ready and in august 1976 the ABU people seemed certain the launch would take place shortly before the end of the year. A month or two later ABU decided to cancel all plans of production...

Changes which I know would be implemented for the production reel includes:

Black side plates (similar to those used on the 20/30 reels), a plastic «Ambassadeur» badge instead of the paper badge on my reel. The model number would not appear on the center nut, but would be printed on the badge. Both 50 and 80 reels would be fitted with two handles, the telescopic one from the 80 prototype and the one found on my 50 reel.



Not easy to spot a difference between 50 lbs reel (top) and the Ambassadeur 30 (below)...

On the right hand side you just see the top of the second set of hook ups for safety line or harness on the 50 lbs reel, and note the round chromed button (max brake preventer) - it is the same button on both reels. Givs you an ide of the difference in seize between the 30 and the 50 reel...

Per Erlandsen
persbox@online.no