

An artists approach to catching fish. By Nick Meyer



Poncho Brundridge (Poncho)

I was working in the shop when one of our customers spotted some lures I had on display. Boy, was I surprised when he said; “Those lures were made by Poncho.” He was correct. Poncho’s workmanship portrays knowledge, understanding, observation and beauty that can only be achieved from hours in the water, married to skilled hands and an artist’s eye. I wanted to get to know Poncho and jumped at the opportunity when Ralph Wade invited me to meet him.

Poncho is now eighty-two years old and is one of the legends of what is now Padre Island National Seashore. Arriving at Ponchos, he warmly greeted me with a slow, polite Texas accent. Every word was well thought out, slow in delivery, but precise and to the point. I asked Poncho what he liked to fish for, which is always a good opener with a fisherman. He said that Trout in the surf using lures was his favorite. He told me that he would target and catch about 1200 lbs of reds each session during October through December. “That’s on the hoof weight,” he said, “Cleaned properly; you would get about one third the original weight of the fish in filets.” Most of his reds would be caught on a double dropper rig using cut mullet. After catching that much in Reds you would get a little tired and trout fishing with lures became his passion. This led Poncho to begin creating his own lures made from wood found on the beach. He invited me into his workshop.



When you go into a man's workshop it's like looking at his life. His workshop was big and immaculate, every drawer filled with a story and original ideas. A lot of the material that Poncho uses to make his treasures comes from his other passion of beach combing. Nothing goes to waste. He will turn a piece of drift wood in his mind before he picks it up, deciding what wonder he can create. Wood he has found on the beach over the last 40 years is now neatly stacked, his base material ready to be crafted.

His first job when starting to make a lure is to decide the action he is after; from a slow sinking treble-hooked lure to a floater that will sit tail down and twitch to the top when popped. The base wood is roughly cut to the shape of the lure he is after



The grain in the wood runs from forward to aft of the lure. The top piece clearly shows the side elevation and the rough outline of the lure, the bottom piece is from the top elevation and shows the guide lines which will be used to produce the curved sides of the lure. Shaping is done by grinding and sandpaper achieving the desired shape.

Hook placement is critical to the action of the lure, He said that it is important to the tracking of the lure how the hooks are positioned. On a treble hook that is under the body of the lure he places the single barb forward, so the other two will be either side of the

body of the lure during retrieval. The rear hook will have the single barb facing towards the rear.



Poncho makes both top water sinkers and slow sinkers, as this one is. This lure weighs in at 1oz and will cast a country mile. The finished slow sinkers are fine winter lures used to entice the trout lurking in the warmer, deeper water. Worked slowly, he has enticed many a fine trout on this lure pattern.



The flat slow-sink effect is caused by the addition of internal weights and the thin long body.

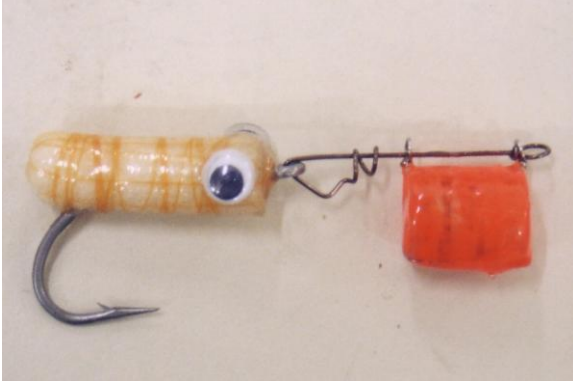
His top water lures are similar in size to a She Dog mirror lure, but have a slightly more aerodynamic shape and a quality of color and workmanship that is more pleasing to the eye.



The thicker part of the lure is one third back from the nose of the lure which makes the lure sit tail down in the water and exaggerates the action as you pop it. He firmly believes that eyes on the lure are critical to the success of the lure. "They love the eyes!" he says. I asked him if he thought the fish could see color. He explained to me that he was not sure, but he was sure that certain colors work at certain times.

Billy Sandifer told me a funny story about Poncho. He said he was fishing south of Poncho and had been doing very well on a particular Mirror lure. He had his box of trout and was heading out and stopped to talk to Poncho. He advised Poncho of the lure he had been using, "Poncho you should be using one of these," Billy said. Poncho replied that he had discussed it with his wife and decided that if the Trout didn't like his lures, he didn't want them." I asked Poncho about this and he said that there is something special about catching a fish on a lure that you have made yourself. Somehow, the story now made sense.

When the trout are biting light Poncho has a trick up his sleeve. What you need is something less intrusive. This lure emulates an insect, he calls it his Bee and said that he even has got some with wings on, and they work.



The front part of the lure is a rattle and the foam on the hook acts as a float. He said it is very effective in the summer in the flats, almost like using a fly. Another observation that Poncho shared with me was that at certain times of the year, trout caught in the flats will have inside their gut a green slime. Nothing you could call meat, just a green slime. Like they had been eating something in the mud. When you notice this the best way to catch them is to work a weedless spoon slow in the grass flats. For this Poncho has a spoon which he has attached one of his home made rubber worms tails.



He has no idea what the green slime is, but when he observes it, this is the lure he uses to put the trout into the box. Confirming his belief, he said “that nothing else seems to work but they will hit this spoon and tail”. Rubber worms and jig heads, of course Poncho has his own. Made By Him and fished by him. His jig head again has the same uniqueness which one can easily identify that Poncho had made them.



The jig head section weighs in at  $\frac{3}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> of 1oz and is designed for the reds in the surf, Note the eye's. “they love the eyes, he would say with a grin”. The rubber worm tail has also been tweaked by Poncho, with white paint. Again this lure will be worked slowly in the Texas fall surf and will produce.

Whilst spending time with Poncho it was great to open some of the drawers in his mind, he talked of the amazement and enjoyment he had as a bee keeper. Observing the discipline of the hive and comparing to how we live. It's his ability to observe that has made Poncho a gifted lure maker and fisherman. I asked him if he would like to go fishing with me on PINS. Poncho looked at me and I could see sadness in his eyes. The beach to him was a place for his wife and him, together, alone. He would fish and she, who was a teacher, never touched a rod but would spend her time searching the beach for a treasure to take home. That's how Poncho liked it and that's how he will remember. I will spend time with Poncho as he is now a friend and his workshop a place that I can go and spend some time with one of the Texas Fishing Legends. Regards Nick Meyer.