

Trap Pullers Ease Crab Into Your Plate

Motorized Trap Pullers Take Work Out of Crabbing

BY BOB DUKE

Catching Dungeness crabs or succulent shrimp is one of the most inviting rewards of Northwest boating. Boaters who would never call themselves fishers find trapping shellfish irresistible. It is rare to find Northwest boats of any kind – from runabouts to racing sailboats to megayachts – without a crab trap aboard.

Trapping crabs is as easy as lowering a baited trap into 30-to-100 feet of water and waiting for the trap to fill up. Trapping shrimp is only a little more complicated, with depths running 300-to-400 feet and the traps sometimes weighted against the effects of strong currents.

The hard part of trapping crabs and shrimp comes when its time to retrieve the trap. Recreational traps can weigh 75 pounds and more when full, and pulling one up, hand over hand, can be a workout. Hand-pulling a weighted shrimp trap from 400 feet can test your stamina and discourage you from setting it more than once a day. Getting a trap to the surface takes the most effort, but just when you are ready for a breather you have to make the extra effort to keep it clear of the boat's topsides when bringing it aboard.

Many boaters fish from their dinghies, which make poorer platforms for hauling and handling heavy traps than do larger boats.

To save yourself from back aches and arthritic shoulders, or just to be more productive crabbers, aging boaters and frequent fishers equip their boats with motor powered trap pullers. Most commercial crabbers are outfitted with a sturdy aluminum davit from which dangles a large-diameter

motor-powered sheave that grips and pulls the rope attached to the trap. Recreational trap pullers are light-weight versions of these commercial pole/motor/sheave assemblies, usually powered by a 12 vdc electric motor instead of the commercial crabber's hydraulic motor.

Recreational trap pullers are either portable or permanently mounted and cost between \$400 and \$1000 depending on brand and installation. Installation can be costly, depending on whether you do it yourself, have to run electrical power to the location, and what hull or deck structural reinforcement is required of the mounting area.

Safe-T-Puller

Motto: Designed with operator safety as its primary importance.

Safe-T-Pullers most resembles the commercial trap pullers found on most small Northwest crabbing and shrimping boats. The puller motor and sheave dangle from the end of

an aluminum davit. As its product name implies, safety is emphasized in the units' design and features. Sales literature stresses that the trap rope needs only to be laid into the rubber lined sheave and that operation is nearly hands-free. More than a dozen Safe-T-Puller models are offered with pulling capacities from 100 to 330 pounds. A small boat model is available.

Ace Line Handler

Motto: The easiest way to pull a full trap.

Recently redesigned for with a more powerful electric motor, improved finish and utilizing Scotty downrigger brackets for mounting, the new Brutus Edition of the Ace Line Handler began appearing in stores in September 2003. Compact and portable, like the original unit, the Brutus has a capacity of POUNDS and . The puller is a product of Ace of Baits, a processor of commercial and recreational crab and shrimp baits.



Safe-T-Puller trap puller by Quality Products Northwest.



Ace Line Hauler trap puller by Ace of Baits.

Robinson Retriever

Motto: Made by a fisherman for fishermen.

The smallest, most compact, of the electric trap pullers, the Retriever is designed to be easily moved from one vessel to another, from mother ship to dingy. Because it is portable, it can also be easily removed for storage. Lifting capacity is 75 pounds and it is fabricated from stainless steel. Features include hands-free operation and mounting using Scotty downrigger brackets and electrical connectors.

EZ-Pull

Motto: Pulling pots has never been easier.

With emphasis on affordability and compact design, the EZ-Puller is available for deck or gunnel mounting and has a capacity of 135 pounds. Options make hands-free operation possible and permit disassembly for storage.

Some things to look for in choosing a trap puller include:

Retrieval speed. Rated in feet-per-minute, speed tells you how long it will take to get your trap to the surface.

Weight lifting capacity. Know the weight of the trap you expect to pull and make a generous estimate for a load of crabs or shrimp, and allow for stray starfish and kelp that are sometimes snagged.

On/off switch. Some trap pullers

can be turned on and off with a foot switch, others with a hand switch and others run continuously until unplugged.

Mounting location. Permanently mounted trap pullers need to be out of the way of safe, routine boat operation. Whether permanent or portable, the long lever of the puller's arm can put a heavy load on the boat's structure. Smaller boats need special mounting care.

Installation height. Mount the puller high enough or choose one with a long enough arm to swing the retrieved trap inboard. Getting a loaded trap the last couple of feet can be the most strenuous part of the pull.

Electric trap puller alternatives that might better fit your pocketbook or particular situation include:

Gasoline engine trap pullers use lawnmower-size engines fastened to an aluminum davit. With a pull on the engine starter rope you can begin hauling a trap.

A simple, special-purpose plastic pulley, with an opening in one side for placing the trap rope over the sheave, provides a mechanical advantage for hauling by hand while standing securely on deck. Attaching the pulley to a high purchase point lets you pull downward on the trap rope. Most trap puller suppliers offer pulleys.

AnchorLift is a proprietary rope sleeve that can be shackled to a float

for lifting a trap. With the surface end of the trap rope through the sleeve and secured to a small boat, a trap (or small anchor) can be pulled to the surface by the boat pulling the rope through the sleeve as it motors away from the float. Zack Miller, fishing equipment department manager at LFS, Inc., in Bellingham, Wash. says the store sells 50 or 60 of the units annually to fishers looking for an inexpensive power-assisted trap puller.

Most boating, fishing and outdoor equipment stores, including the following, sell trap pullers:

LFS, Inc.
(360) 734-3336
www.lfsinc.com

Redden Marine Supply
(360) 733-0250
www.reddeninc.com

For more information about products and dealers contact:
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Safe-T-Puller
Quality Products Northwest
(360) 385-7006

Ace Line Hauler
Ace of Baits
(604) 312-2897
www.acehauleder.com

Robinson Retriever
Ocean Lake Equipment Co.
(250) 733-2465
www.oceanlakeequipment.com

EZ Pull Products
Cushman Boats
(360) 877-5244
www.cushmanboats.com

Lil Aud Pot Pullers
(gasoline engine powered)
Brothers Welding
(360) 796-4163
broweld@olyphen.com

AnchorLift
Ironwood Pacific, Inc.
(800) 261-1330
www.ironwoodpacific.com



Robinson Retriever trap puller by Oceanlake Equipment Company.



EZ-Pull trap puller by Cushman Boats.