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Eric Moller



by Vic McCristal



ERIC MOLLER



ERIC AT WORK

His hands are solid, big-knuckled, scarred and obviously very powerful. The top joint of the right forefinger is missing and if you ask Eric Moller he will admit with a gentle smile that he lost it making lures. He was running some cedar slats through a planing machine when his hand slipped. His left hand has lost some of its control due to a stroke he suffered a year or two ago. His left leg drags a little and sometimes buckles at the knee on uneven ground. But despite these disabilities, Eric Moller continues to carry on the work he loves so well and at which he has become famous all over Australia; the crafting of quality lures. Eric Moller is now in his seventies, whitehaired and just a fraction hard of hearing but he has never heard of the generation gap. Young and old alike respond to his courteous, hospitable and generous nature. He is a man to whom the phrase 'one of nature's gentlemen' could aptly be applied.

Early life

Eric Moller was born at Childers near Bundaberg and as a child received his education at a small bush school at Kilkivan near Kingaroy. During his youth he developed a close affinity for the Australian bush, its trees, streams and wildlife. As a young married man, things weren't always easy in the Queensland of fifty years ago and Eric worked at everything and anything to support his wife and six children. He hand cut timber in remote country towns, worked towns, worked long hours cutting sugar cane and battled the wind and waves as a deckhand on professional fishing boats. A lifetime spent outdoors has left him the legacy of a skilled hand and a sharp eye. Until recently he was also an excellent rifle shot and still discusses range and target shooting with friends of former years. Except for two years spent in the Australian army during the last war, Eric has lived all his life in north Queensland and now lives with his wife at Cardwell.

Sportfisherman

As an amateur angler, Eric accepts the principles of sportfishing as basic ethics. When I took him fishing for the first time following his stroke, the first fish he caught was a mangrove jack of barely legal size. Eric undoubtedly needed it at home but he unhooked it and slipped it back in the water, speaking gently to the fish: 'You're a bit small - old mate.' He did this without thinking. Courtesy to fish is as natural to him as breathing. Eric Moller became the first Honorary Life Member of the

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Australian National Sportfishing Association on the strength of that philosophy and attitude. He is the classic example of what a true sportsman should be: the kind of man other men admire and respect. Whether other fishermen follow his principles or not they have no argument about the way he designs and builds lures. Moller lures became a classic pattern and Eric has fostered their acceptance and developed the hobbyist lure business by giving them away to many novice lure fishermen. Other lure makers have followed suit with methods and styles similar to Eric's. The hobby of making your own lure is now a major part of the Queensland fishing scene.

Beginnings

Eric Moller's lure craft first started by necessity around 1968. As a pensioner, he found the cost of commercial lures prohibitive. I suggested that he try making his own and showed him a technique with an integral wire. It was a slow but effective method involving shaping and glueing together two halves of timber slats. Typically of Eric, he improved and advanced the basic idea. As a keen, practising fisherman, he studied the reasons why fish were lost or landed and why they responded to a certain style, size or depth of action. At his age, there is a coolness that assists his judgment. Watching Eric play a good fish, it is obvious that he is happy but not overexcited. All the moves he makes are the right ones. He has the ability to lose a fish and laugh without regret. Amongst Eric's possessions is a well-thumbed address book filled with the signatures of hundreds of fishermen; young, old, great and otherwise, a virtual Who's Who of Australian lure fishermen. Eric can refer back to names, faces and fish with the aid of a phenomenal memory. He often surprises me by referring to fish we caught years ago, fish I've long since forgotten, creeks to which we've not returned. Once we walked some miles through tea-tree country with Eric leading the way to small lagoons where he knew fish swam in quiet isolation. He had been to this spot fifteen years before and still knew the way through featureless, flat, forest country. He could name individual trees he had marked for the Forestry Service and take you straight to them through the bush, fifteen years later. He is the complete bushman.



START CARVING

The best timber

Eric's choice of timber for his lures is based on his experience with the best boat building timbers. He likes beech which is impervious to water, sweet to carve and cures at the right weight for the size lures he makes. In the back shed where he makes his lures, a visitor will find a string, of a dozen lures hanging for the paint to dry. The floor is thick with shavings, the shed is filled with the noise of pigeons he feeds but doesn't race. There is an old bench which carries the woodworking tools; the battered vice, a hacksaw, cans of zincanneal bibs. Shelves higher up carry an assembly of paints and enamels. An old cabinet holds his flies, containers of completed lures 'for some old mates up on the Tableland, they go over to the Staaten about twice a year'. Eric does much of his carving with an old Schrade pocket knife with blades worn thin and the bone handle nestling in his palm as though it grew there. He has the woodcarver's knack with the knife blade. Pressure and control allow him to work even against the grain without splitting the timber. The blade works in a quiet relaxed fashion, almost with a life of its own and the lure shapes itself under your eyes. One of Eric's delights is to fashion a lure to your own needs. If you know enough about them to discuss the technical problems, Eric will fashion the lure to your specifications then pass the shapely body over to you for painting and assembling.

Barramundi lures

Eric's lures are built for casting on spin or plug tackle. They are barramundi lures and the basic design is equally effective in greater and smaller sizes on almost any fish that swims. A small Moller will catch bass, redfin, trout, sooty grunter, yellowbelly and mangrove jack. In the medium size they will catch almost any predatory fish in fresh or saltwater. The larger or heavier models are mostly used for specific fishing where distance, depth or fishing in darkness is required. They too, will catch almost anything.



SANDING

Fishing style

Eric Moller's fishing style is identical to mine with a marked preference for practical line classes. We rarely fish around the mangroves with less than an 8kg (17lb) line. Casting distances from a small boat need not be fancy and working casts of 10-20m (30-65ft) are easy enough with lines up to 15kg (30lb) on workhorse gear. I like line strengths around 9-10kg (20-22lb) for meat fishing or for tagging estuary fish heavier than average. With that kind of reserve power, you are still in control against the lunge towards the snags of a big jack or solid cod. Eric and I have learnt the hard way that fine-line fishing is for fine, open country.

Three casts, three fish

During a fishing trip along a creek in Missionary Bay I recall talking to Eric about a slightly larger than medium lure, built for deeper running but with only a slight quiver action instead of the usual lively wobble. Earlier on I had lost a commercial lure to a good mangrove jack. While I was having these problems, Eric had landed several fish including two hefty barramundi. Suddenly Eric decided it was his turn to row and mine to cast. He patiently removed the successful lure from his own line and held it out to me. 'Put that on' he said, 'it's the one you were talking about, deep action, narrow wiggle.' With that lure I scored a hat trick of big barra almost immediately. Three casts for three fish. I was delighted with the success of the principle but when I tried to take the lure off and give it back to him,

he waved it away. 'Keep it,' he said, 'I can make more any time I like.' Such is Eric Moller's generosity. Of course he can make other lures, but how many friends would give another fisherman a proven winner so casually.



Lasting strength

Eric will guarantee any of his lures to break an 11kg (25lb) line. From curiosity, I checked one on a 22kg (50lb) line and snapped the line. These lures are robust enough to score a century of heavy sportfish catches and still survive. Because they tend to be used by experienced fishermen they don't survive forever. They are usually lost around mangroves, oysters, coral or snags. Sometimes a lure will float to the surface after it has been smashed or it'll be discovered within reach on a snag on which the fish broke the line. Most of these 'survivor' lures have one or more escapes.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

During the course of a few fishing trips, good catches are taken on a particular lure. Suddenly this becomes the lucky one and you begin to take more notice of its performance and start counting the fish. Once the score climbs near the hundred, the angler goes through the rigours of the 'nervous nineties' known to cricketers.

Durable eyelets

Eric's method ensures maximum durability for eyelets. He drills body holes to ensure a very firm fit for the double wires that have a tensile strength around 100kg (220lb). The high quality epoxy glue is applied to the lure and the wire eyelet. The fit is so tight that the epoxy sets under pressure. To add further strength, the eyelet holes are drilled at angles to the timber grain to function as a kind of steel reinforcing for the lure body.

Weight

Eric doesn't like weighting lures, preferring instead to use the natural weight of the timber. Should a sinker type lure be needed, it can be made in hardwood. A floater may need a bulkier body of well-dried white beech. A lure for fast trolling may have a longer body and a smaller bib. All his lures are designed to 'work' at the first touch of the rod tip. His own casting has always been first class so he aims for a lure to be responsive from the second it hits the water.

Fittings

Fittings have to be the best; usually 6H rings and 4x strong Mustad or Eagle Claw hooks. The rings are near flawless but the hooks will finally rust and have to be replaced several times if your lure has a longer life than average. Stainless hooks appear more likely to break than bend on a fish. All fishermen have their idiosyncrasies. One of mine is a preference for double hooks rather than trebles, using a larger size rigged direct to the wire eyelets. Given extreme wear, the same eyelets may be worn out by work if the lure lasts long enough. Around this country it is not uncommon to see one of Eric Moller's lures hung up in honoured retirement, like a champion boxer who retired undefeated.

Early design influences

Eric is a fair and honest man. He is the first to point out that his basic patterns are to some extent derivative. There have been two influences. One was a Heddon Tiger which I lent him as a pattern of excellent design when he first started. To this day, his tiger pattern yellow lures show that origin. However, the belly is better shaped so that a fish's mouth is better able to get around the hook. Also, Eric's lures are more versatile in several important ways. The second major influence has been the Nilsmaster patterns. Although the early Nils patterns worked they were made of balsa and lacked the strength which Eric can build into a lure. When he found the shape easy enough to duplicate, he modified it and developed his own design for casting and fish-holding reasons and started turning out similar but much stronger lures for delighted friends. Some of the heavier commercial lures in plastic, such as darter designs, will last as long as Eric's, but there are not many of them.

Long, hard usage

Amongst skilled lure fishermen, tackle needs the strength to stand repetitive, heavy use. Some lures are built for small fish and light lines, or for anglers who don't catch many fish. The good lures, the great ones, are built to work long and hard on heavy lines for fishermen who catch a great many fish. Using a Moller, a fisherman is unafraid of the power in the jaws of a great turrum or the razor-edge crunching of a mackerel or a long and difficult fight with any species, anywhere. Eric's lure will stand up to it. Eric's choice of zincanneal bib metal is logical. It is relatively easy to cut and will take a concave curve if a stronger action is needed. It can be bent but is stiff enough not to buckle if it strikes a rock during a cast or is crushed by a striking fish. Eric and I differ in the way we tune a lure for accuracy or speed retrieves. He bends the metal bib. I take a pair of pliers to the front eyelet. With sensitive adjustment from an angler who understands the principles, it is possible to refine lures to a point where they'll troll deep at planing speed. With a bibbed lure, a faster troll speed sends them much deeper than is possible during normal retrieves with cast lures. Some troll jigs are so balanced that speed trolling is no problem, but the wobbling minnow lures require tuning.

Colour

Colour plays a vital part in an angler's choice of a lure. It's debatable whether or not colour is so important amongst fish. Colour can certainly be chosen for contrast or to make lures more visible in bad light. Certain lures are chosen because they are harder to see in crystal clear water. Eric's colours have been chosen by fish rather than fishermen. Eric Moller's fame has spread nationwide. It is not unusual to see his lures being used by fishermen in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and South Australia. What makes his lures so special for so many people is their

authenticity. They are handcrafted and built by a man who knows and loves his fishing. Each lure is a personal thing, stamped with its maker's personality and love of craft.

Vic McCristal



THE END RESULT

To sell swap or buy Eric Moller lures, go to www.LureLovers.com

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