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# Nice rod

**JENNY LEE RICE finds a Jersey fishing trip with her name written all over it**

**B**ILL Nighland has a big fish story. In 1994, he and two friends caught a 900-pound tuna off the coast of New Jersey.

As we sit on the deck of the Jenny Lee (no relation) waiting for the fish to bite, it seems like a good time to tell the tale.

"We had our bait in the water maybe 10 minutes when we

looked up with the fish of our life," he says, "a giant bluefin."

The fish, which briefly held a Jersey record, was too large to bring aboard, so pal John Lehmann kept watch as they towed in the tuna, his shotgun ready to take on hungry sharks.

Nighland and Lehmann don't expect to find another 900-pound fish this weekend. Still, it never hurts to stock the deck, so when Nighland begins passing out mini Milky Ways for good luck, most of us take one.

Outside, Capt. Dave Bender, the owner of Jenny Lee Sportfishing, is avoiding the deck. It's been 10 hours since we left the dock, and, so far, only two tuna sit in the boat's giant cooler.

We are 90 miles east of Atlantic City on a two-day "cleaning and trolling" trip. It's a well-kept secret that the Jersey coast offers terrific tuna fishing, and the Jenny Lee is one busy charter boat.

Bender is everything I've always wanted in a sea captain, from his T-shirt stained with blood to his khaki cargo shorts. Also a high school softball and wrestling coach, he looks at novice fishermen as kids on his team. "They need coaching," Bender

explains. "I break their balls a lot."

Nighland's friend Koborg, who caught the first fish of the day, learned this right away. While he struggled to bring the fish in, Bender yelled such encouragement as, "Maybe you can have the fish to death," and "Do we need to have [a reel in it]?"

With Bender's competitive instinct and manic energy, our trip on the Jenny Lee feels more like hunting than fishing.

Our boat is a well-appointed boat, with a CD player, a TV/VCR and videos with names like "A Tribute to Tuna" and "Drop Color."

The fishermen microwave TV dinners and drink beer. I carry my soggy bodega sandwich.

Twenty minutes after our second fish, Paul Dierker, a Staten Islander who prepared for the trip with a motion sickness pouch, pills and wristbands,



Staten Islander Paul Dierker reels in a yellowfin.

reels in a yellowfin.

We are in a spot thick with tuna and the energy is high. Just then, a lobster fisherman steers his huge our way. We are parked near his port and have to move.

We never find our spot again, and the rest of the night passes without a fish. The next morn-

ing, we have a few hours to trail before starting the four-hour journey back to Monmouth.

We sail around sluggishly until the navigator spots a huge school of dolphins. Tuna are likely nearby. In spite of myself, I reach for a Milky Way.

It isn't but a moment before Bender yells, "It's on!"



## The lowdown

**Where:** The Jenny Lee is docked at Edman's Anchorage, 171 Brille Road in Monmouth, a 2½-hour drive from Manhattan. Captain Bender offers trolling trips until mid-November.

**Cost:** \$1,895 for six people on a one-day trip, \$2,695 overnight. **Info:** (201) 903-1071; [www.jennyleesportfishing.com](http://www.jennyleesportfishing.com)