

The Day of Dan

By Brett Craik

Have you ever have one of those days when a member of your crew smashes the pants off everyone else? Well this day my team was to subjected to this, it was to be “the day of Dan”.



The plan was for a very long hard fought day, we rose early at 2am and groggily got on our way eventually arriving at the reef before dawn. The object for today was to run an enticing burley trail before dawn hopefully having the reef ready for us as we jumped in, pilchards were the chosen burley they are a good oily fish one of the best burley's around although probably not the cheapest option.

As we began to don our hunting attire the sun started to lift over the horizon, a warm glow coloured our faces and the dizzy dazed feelings of being up that early seemed to fade away replaced by the more familiar warrior endorphins.

The first splash was quickly followed by “we’ve got thirty” meaning we had 30 metres visibility, exactly what you want to hear as you are about to leap in armed to the teeth, as if we weren’t excited enough already. While the vis probably was 30 metres in distance it was quite dark since the sun was still quite low making everything looked shaded that soon changed, the hot Queensland sun doesn’t take long to rise and light up the floor. Within minutes everything was an iridescent shade of blue.

The experienced Dan Hanning had been out of touch of late, by missing some trips and dropping off on the training it appeared he was going to lag behind, well things were about to change. I watched as Dan hit almost 20 metres comfortably with bottom time on his first dive of the day, as he surfaced I said to him ‘you have been secretly training haven’t you?’ he responded ‘yep you better believe it’. This was a precursor of things to come.

The reef was alive almost certainly a response to the burley, I could see in the distance a descent size school of rainbow runners approaching they were running along a prominent ridge sniffing out the burley. They may have been hungry but so was Doug he dropped onto them very quickly choosing an intercept course, I dropped down onto his shoulder to try and capture the pending carnage on film. Sure enough the shot was excellent, from both of us I might add, and the fight brief it was a promising start to the day.

Not to be upstaged Dan had already picked up a parrot and was now chasing some snapper we had all seen them in the distance, the question was who was going to get one. Dan made an attempt hitting the bottom in 22 metres where he could see a school of about five snapper they began to moving to his left to evade him. Dan had noticed that the direction they had chosen to take was pitting them against the current, noting this Dan suspected they may turn. Moving in formation the leading fish did in-fact turn back the other way crossing Dan’s path and the others began to follow in unison one by one, Dan was wise to their game and had been finning forward slowly maintaining his line and his composure waiting for the last one to turn as the rest were possibly out of range. The last snapper was holding against the current just that fraction longer, which gave Dan a window of opportunity to set himself, holding his line he waiting for the mistake sure enough the snapper could not resist any longer and made the fatal move Dan quickly pounced, slamming him and hauling him up to several jealous onlooking pairs of eyes.

A new location was sought since the area we had been diving was now flooded with boats everywhere it was becoming dangerous to be in the water. After a quick move we found ourselves jumping in at a location we had not dived before. I made the first dive just with the camera descending on a ledge that rose from 25 metres on the sand to about 22 metres on the reef. As I approached the ledge I noticed a nice cave so I began leaning over to one side approaching it slowly when a large Tusk fish popped out giving a nice side on profile before moving up onto the reef. I looked up and I immediately pointed out the fish to the guys above me, they all began descending on the reef like silent missiles striking their targets before they knew what hit em. Dan was the first to strike nailing a cod as it moved along the top of the reef, the brief fight created enough of a stir to awaken a huge tuskfish it must have been at least 15 kilos, I could clearly see it from 20 metres above such a gargantuan head on those beasts. Dan ascended with his cod and tried to alert someone about the tusky but I was the only one in the vicinity and all I had was a camera on hand.

We continued to drift in water around 22/23 metres deep, the 30 metres plus visibility enabled us to sight targets from the surface and calculate when to drop. I followed Doug down as he descended on a gold spot wrasse, the wrasse had moved away when I noticed a spangly was making an appearance. Doug had not seen the spangly and was making his way to the surface, I thought ‘I’ll give him a go’ I intercepted Doug about 1/3 the way up and took the gun from his hand before descending further trying to track the fish with a gun in one hand and a large housing in the other proved to be too difficult for me as I duffed the shot.



By this stage we had our boatie providing a good stream of burley and the jobbies had arrived we were patiently letting them get more comfortable by permitting them to feed free of harassment, they were moving quickly taking the burley a metre or two off the bottom. We were planning to hit them when suddenly the pelagics arrived, first a smallish wahoo made an appearance on the flasher which had drifted a little wide from us as we had been focusing on the jobbies below, he came in a little wide and was able to escape. Suddenly everyone became more frantic and began to scan for more when another pelagic arrived this time a Spanish not huge but acceptable, he led two of us on wild chases before flicking to avoid an incoming shaft, the heat was certainly on now. Next on the rank was an amberjack a more easy target one would suspect, however he managed to avoid two shots before being slammed by a third from directly above (his blind spot), it was quite a laugh all happened in 3 or 4 seconds shafts flying in all directions before he was taken down and I will give you one guess who nailed him, yep Dan Hanning.

Dan was having a charmed day he quickly dispatched the ambo before falling to the bottom in 22 metres only to come face to face with a delectable coronation trout, dan made no mistake.

Daniel Skinner now wanted to get into the action as he noticed a jobfish moving up the trail of pilchards, levelled out at 7 metres he waited for the fish to grow in confidence, lying motionless mid water waiting for him to enter the danger zone. The fish was moving in and out taking the burley from the furthest point before working his way in, the dive had already become quite a long one although being at this depth it was a safe one. Everybody in the water was witnessing this hunt and enjoying it immensely it was great to watch, Skinner's patience was superb and proved to be the telling factor when he finally let the shaft fly securing a prized catch.

By this stage it was my turn to do a little hunting I had dropped the camera and immediately found myself amongst the action, Amberjack action to be precise. A school had moved in once again on the burley it was just a matter of a quick descent, slowing on approach before slamming it centre side. I was hauling it up and it was still kicking a fair bit when I looked underneath to see Doug extend and fire without appearing to aim almost instantaneously, and where did the spear go? Well it went right through the brain above and back from the eye, it staggers me what Doug Hanning can do with a gun, he is a freak.



As the drift continued a few smaller fish were taken, some parrots and also a peacock cod but we were beginning to head out the back of the reef where it was getting deeper, we began to wind up ready to start another drift when I noticed Tappies, the glory hunter, was making one last dive. I followed him down to about mid water just to watch, he had found a nice cave in about 25/26 metres and was having a good look in before firing as he later told me over the top of an estuary cod striking a mangrove jack which in the ensuing commotion tore free or perhaps was taken.

With everyone tiring from such an early start we decided to take some pics and call it a day, Dan's day.