

How To Set Up and Use Downriggers

Downriggers are a valuable piece of equipment for use in both inshore and offshore fishing. Here we will work with offshore use only. Downriggers are used for trolling at a prescribed depth just like you troll baits along the surface. Offshore water are made up of many layers of different temperature water. These are called thermoclines. Offshore game fish will hold in the thermocline that they like best. Maybe the water at the surface is a little too warm for them and the water at the bottom is a little too cold. So your trolling along and see all these fish at the 45 foot mark on your colorscope and you see a wavy line just above them at say the 40 foot mark. (Your colorscope needs to be adjusted just right to be able to see thermoclines) So what we want to do is put the bait right at the 45 foot mark hoping to catch Mr. Gamefish. This is what the Downrigger is for. So lets set up and use a set of downriggers.

Downriggers come in many different shapes and sizes. For offshore use I recommend that you buy a manual one the first time. Look for one that has a long boom on it and make sure that you buy the swivel plate that goes with it. The swivel plate will allow you to turn the downriggers in what ever direction you wish. This is a nice feature so that you can turn them in when pulling up to the dock and turn them out when in use. I recommend Cannon or Penn Outriggers. They are both easy to use and durable enough to stand up to offshore use.

Now we have to rig them on our boat. Pick a location as far back and outboard as possible. This is so that we can use them without tangling them up in anything else.

Downriggers exert tremendous force on the area that they are attached to the boat. Make sure when you attach them that you use backing plates and thru bolt them with good stainless steel bolts. Also make sure that you use the swivel mounts that are made for the downrigger that you chose. The swivel mounts make the downrigger and you will be sorry if you don't bite the bullet

Ok, So we have them mounted, what's next? There are two more pieces to the puzzle that we need. The downrigger ball and the release clip. The downrigger ball is a heavy metal ball with a couple of attachment points on it. I like the balls that have fins built into them. The fin makes the ball track straighter.

The release clip is a pressure clip that is squeezed onto the line from the pole. I take the line and pull a piece about 4 inches long and turn it to form a loop. Then twist the loop 2 or 3 times and put the end of the twisted loop in the jaws of the pressure clip and set the clip. There is a set screw on most of the clips that you can use to adjust the pressure on the line. More pressure makes it harder to pull out. It is something you will have to play with a few times to get it set so that it does not come out every time you sent it down but comes loose easily when a fish strikes. So now we have our downrigger mounted and it has wire already on it, we have a ball and release clip. It's time to go fishing.

HOTT DAWG It's time to go fishing

You have arrived "On Station" and you see nice bottom at 100 feet with a bait plume above it. In the area around the bait plume you see marks here and there, these marks are usually game fish feeding on the bait. The colorscope shows them at about 45 feet down. I like to put out my Downriggers before I put out the surface baits. So take the ball and attach it to the wire from the downrigger. Swivel the downrigger outboard so that it is at a 45 degree angle to the boat hull. Attach the pressure clip to the ball. Now rig your bait on the rod that you will be using for the downrigger. Toss the bait overboard and let it out a minimum of 30 feet. This is the mistake that most people make when using downriggers is that they do not put out enough line between the bait and the downrigger ball. Now take the line and double it over to form a loop. Twist the loop 2 or 3 times and put the tip on the loop in the jaws of the pressure clip. Now this takes a little coordination to do by yourself and it is easier if someone else holds the pole. Now at the same time release the wire on the downrigger while the reel on the pole is in free spool with your thumb on the reel to prevent back lashes. Let them both out at about the same rate. It will take a couple try's to get this right so don't feel bad if things don't go right the first time. Just try again. You'll get the hang of it. I usually troll at a speed around 4 knots. So if I want the baits at 45 feet I will let out about 60 feet of wire. That's what the number gauge on the downrigger is for. You can check the depth on your color scope by slowing down and if your transducer in on the stern like mine is you will be able to see the ball on the color scope. When the bait has reached the desired depth lock the downrigger in position and set the drag on the reel. Now sing "Here FISHY FISHY" while dancing on one leg with your right arm flapping like a chicken. :)

Boom " GOT' EM ON" OK, we have hooked one. Grab the pole and fight the fish but you have to pull the downrigger up before he gets close to the boat.. If you do not pull the downrigger when you get the fish close ,he will wrap himself around the wire and cut the line so the downrigger must come up.

Standard Trolling Setup

Tight Lines and Slight Seas

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