Three Rivers Pinball Association

Keefer's Guide to *Fish Tales*

Version 1.*2* as of March 28, 1993

Courtesy Keith Johnson <keefer@rahul.net>

No holds are barred in this Guide. I'm going to talk about EVERYTHING I know about. If you really want to learn all the undocumented features yourself, then stop reading!

1. Important Things

This section describes key elements and/or shots to be made in Fish Tales. They will be constantly referred to in the play discussion.

Rod: This is the auto-plunging device on Fish Tales. It's a little fishing rod handle with a button on the top of it. Hit the button to launch the ball. You also use the button during video mode to launch torpedos. Really.

Autocast: This is a timed device designed to protect you from instant drains. While it is flashing, you will get any ball back that you lose, instantly. If the game sees it hit an outlane microswitch, you'll get the next one before it even finishes draining! If you can death-save the ball you lost, you can have a mini-multiball. It is on briefly when a ball is launched from the Reel during a multi-player game, even though it isn't lit.

Long Cast: This is the right looping shot, exactly like the Chase Loop in Terminator 2. Making this shot when lit scores million+, and lights the next thing on the captive ball. If this shot is not lit, then the upper left gate will be closed, and the ball will go into one of the LIE lanes.

LIE lanes: Spell LIE to increase your bonus multiplier up to 7x. After 7x, each LIE made will be worth 5M, 10M, 15M, then 20M for then on (until you lose the ball (unless you had bonus held)). Don't forget you can change which lanes are lit with either flipper button, so you should never repeat a letter.

Boat: This is the inclined plastic figure right in the center of the game. There are 3 shots: The left ramp, the right ramp, and the captive ball. Because it is inclined, it is harder to hit the ball than on most other games with one (like Earthshaker). Any one of these 3 shots counts as a "boat shot" during Rock the Boat.

Captive ball: The captive ball is trapped in the middle of the boat. A dead-on shot will send it up to the top, where there is a target that it can trigger. If you don't hit it hard enough, it won't hit the switch. Only hitting the switch has any effect and counts as a captive ball hit.

Eject hole: This shot is equivalent to the Escape Route shot on T2. You usually get it by shooting up the left side, through the spinner, and into the hole. However, whatever it is lit for, you can still get it if it just happens to plop in there (if it's bouncing around the LIE lanes, for example). This is where you collect the regular Jackpot, the Fish Finder, and Video Mode.

Fish Finder: If you hit the Fish Finder, you are given ("randomly") one of several awards from points to multiball to light extra ball.

Video Mode: Lit by hitting the 2nd value on the captive ball. Shooting the eject hole will start it, and you have to shoot boats with water skiers going across the screen at 3 different distances.

Stringers: There are 2 targets on the left and right sides near the slingshots which have a 3-part fish in front of them. Hitting either target spots one of the segments, and a whole fish lights a Stringer, which is one of the 4 big fish with lights in them on the lower part of the playfield, just under the boat. This also lights the spinner for "Stretch the Truth" for 10-15 seconds. 4 Stringers starts the Feeding Frenzy.

Spinner: Located on the left lane shot. Note that any spinner award (Stretch the Truth or Monster Fish) just needs to barely get it to go around to get credit. Also note that hitting the spinner from the wrong direction (as from a Long Cast) DOESN'T count.

Stretch the Truth: When lit, scores 1 tale (for end-of-ball bonus, and the current set of 4 is displayed under the stringers) per Stringer you have hit before the award times out. The value of your fish ranges from 0-5M per fish. 4 tales starts a 30 second Rock the Boat.

Feeding Frenzy: There are 4 purple fish you need to hit. One on each of the ramp shots, one along the Long Cast, and one at the spinner. You have 15 seconds to hit a fish for 5M points. Doing so gives you another 15 seconds to hit the next one, etc., until you have 15 seconds to hit the last fish for 20M points (a total of 35M).

Rock the Boat: For a certain amount of time (20 seconds from the captive ball award; 30 seconds for 4 tales), each boat shot counts 10M (including U-turns).

Monster Fish: Right under the boat is a string of 6 fish (a "school" of fish — look closely!). Each time you make a LIT ramp shot, you light another fish. Getting all 6 lights the spinner for the Monster Fish award, which is a hurry-up award.

Caster's Club: A fairly hard-to-hit shot where you shoot balls to lock them. The balls don't even stay here; the game kicks them up a habitrail which leads to the reel all the way on the left side of the game.

Reel: Nothing really important, except this is where balls are stored. It can spin to accept new balls, or to let a ball out to have it kicked back into play. Balls kicked out go around the top of the machine and out a habitrail aimed for your left flipper.

2. What Lights What

The left return lane ALWAYS lights the Long Cast. (The light is always on.) Also, shooting the ball up the right loop while Long Cast is NOT lit will light Long Cast (seemingly until you make the shot). After making a Long Cast or lighting it from the left return lane, it will time out after 10-15 seconds or so. (So I'm not TOTALLY sure...) The first Long Cast you make scores 1M points, then 2M, and so on, probably without a limit. I've never gotten above 6M, personally. As stated, each long cast lights the next highest value on the captive ball that isn't already lit. You can light all of the values before collecting any of them if you wanted. If your current value is about to time out, and you go through the left return lane, it will relight for the full amount of time again, and KEEP the current value.

The right inlane lights Fish Finder when lit. It starts the game lit, and remains lit until the Fish Finder is collected. When the ball goes over the inlane switch, you have about 15 seconds to shoot the eject hole. If you get it, the right inlane goes off. To relight it, spell LIE (this is non-cumulative; i.e. you can't spell LIE 3 times and expect to get 3 Fish Finders in a row). The right return lane will NOT be lit during multiball and if Video Mode is lit. If it goes off for one of those reasons, it will come back on when it can.

The left and right ramps start the game lit, so you get 1 "free" shot at each side. After that, shooting the right ramp OR going through the right return lane will light the left ramp, and vice versa. The point is to alternate ramps, shooting the left ramp from the right flipper and the right ramp from the left flipper. It is fairly easy to backhand the ball up the ramps too, to if the left ramp is lit and the ball is on the left flipper, you should be able to make it up. Depending on the machine, it may even be easier to backhand! Making 6 LIT ramp shots lights the Monster Fish.

You can light the extra ball 1 of 2 ways: Hitting the Fish Finder, or as the 4th award on the captive ball. The extra ball is just to the left of the Caster's Club, and is probably the hardest extra ball target to hit yet. You may THINK you have a shot at it from the left flipper, but the bottom right of the Boat is in the way. The only way to aim for it is to backhand it from the right flipper, and even then it's not terribly easy. Depends on your machine. The one I played on the most you had to make an absolutely direct hit on it because I think it may have been a little flaky, but I also have played on one where it wasn't too bad.

To light the special, you have to complete the captive ball awards (get instant multiball), then hit the captive ball a certain number of times after that. Usually 4 more hits. The special is collected on the outlanes, is always lit on both of them, and stays lit the entire game. However, you have to light the special ON THAT BALL, or you lose it.

The Stretch the Truth spinner shot usually shots all 5 lights lit, but every time you spell LIE, the lowermost light will go out (until only the 5x is left). The spinner will then just circulate between the lit choices. Thanks to all the people who pointed this out to me, even though I figured it out the day I originally posted this message! Oh well. %)

3. Miscellaneous Scoring

Long Cast scores 1M the first shot, and each shot thereafter increases it by 1M while it is lit. As soon as it goes off, it'll start at 1M again.

The Fast Cast is scored by hitting the Caster's Club (or the drop target when it's supposed to be up) right after a Long Cast or ball launch (not an Autocast, though). The first Fast Cast is worth 2M and goes up 1M each time you get it. Not sure if there's a limit.

The captive ball awards are:

1. Hold Bonus (1M): holds your bonus and multiplier.
2. Video Mode (2M): lights the eject hole for Video Mode.
3. Rock the Boat (3M): Rock the Boat for 20 seconds.
4. Light Extra Ball (5M): What do you think?
5. Instant Multiball (10M): immediately starts multiball.

Note that you can only get one award per hit, no matter how many are lit. The numbers in parentheses are the amount of points you get for that award. Also, whether or not the captive ball is lit for the next award, hitting it scores "Grab Yer Gear" which is 1M x the highest lit award (excluding instant multiball, which is Sell Yer Gear as described below). If nothing is lit (as the ball after completing the captive ball), you get 500K.

After getting Instant Multiball, the captive ball becomes worth 5M points per hit, going up 500K per hit. So the 3rd hit is worth 6M. Not sure of a limit here, either. I've only gotten it up to 9.5M. If I had to guess, I'd say 10M. The outlanes are lit for a special after the 5th hit.

The Fish Finder awards are:

1. Light Extra Ball
2. Super Jets Lit: each jet bumper (the 3 under LIE) scores 500K!
3. Instant Multiball
4. Inc. Captive Ball: lights the next value, like hitting Long Cast.
5. Bonus x: lights the next bonus x value.
6. 1-5 million: varies each time.

Fish Tales is extremely fair about the Fish Finder. If you keep hitting it, and you haven't gotten the extra ball from it all game, it will eventually light it no matter how well you are doing when it does. However, if there hasn't been many good games in the recent past, you will see the light extra ball show up right at the beginning. It will never light bonus x if you are at 7x already. Nor will it award the captive ball increase if it's already maxed (at instant multiball).

The first Monster Fish you get will start at 20M and work its way down by 100K each 1/10th of a second, stopping at 5M. At 5M, you have 5 more seconds to try to get it. If you don't get it, it stays at its current value the next time 'round. If you DO get it (no matter when or for how much), the next time it'll be worth 10M more, up to a maximum of 50M. The amount per 1/10th second the score decreases goes up too, by 50K. There is some time before the countdown actually begins, so it IS possible to get the full award (unlike, say, Super Death Star in Star Wars where you can never ever get the full 50M, which IMHO is totally stupid).

The 6 ramps leading up to the Monster Fish are worth 500K, 1M, 1.5M, etc., up to 3M. So lighting a Monster Fish is worth 10.5M.

If you make a ramp shot that doesn't quite have enough uumph to make it all the way up a ramp and it comes down the other side, you get 1M points for a "U-turn." The U-turn is a valid shot for Rock the Boat!

Each fish you've caught (hitting the Stringers) awards 250K bonus at the end of each ball, cumulative through the game. Each tale told (hitting Stretch the Truth) scores 500K at the end of the ball for every ball.

There is a bonus cap of 3M for any given ball. Of course, this can be multiplied by 7, for a total of 21M, plus how many fish and tales you have.

If you get hold bonus, then everything is held over to the next ball. If you had 7x bonus, then whatever value the LIE lanes were when you drained is the value they are worth the next ball.

During Video Mode, each ship closest to you that you hit gets you 500K, each ship in the middle distance scores 1M, and each ship farthest away scores 1.5M. Be sure to lead your targets a little bit. You have 20 seconds and 20 torpedos. Always go for the close boats, since you need to hit four of them for an extra ball to come out on the back row. If you score between 15 and 19 hits, you get a 10M bonus. If you're a perfect 20/20, you get a 20M bonus!

Fish Tales can be configured to NOT give extra balls in video mode. To replace this, the game will offer you BS instead of EB. The BS stands for "Big Score" and is worth 20M points.

If you were really fast in killing the front boats, and the EB/BS comes out, but you MISS it, it may come out a SECOND time if you have enough time left for that to happen. Usually 1 boat will pass in the back before it comes out again. So don't give up if you miss it, and hold on to that last torpedo!

You can use the flippers to shoot off torpedoes as well as the rod button, though the game won't tell you that you can do that. It works a lot better with the flippers, I think. One person has written me that video mode will only last for that ball on his machine. However, on most it will stay on until you get it. I have no idea if they can be "stacked" or not (lit more than once). I've always gotten it before lighting it a second time.

There is a mysterious "Larry's Fishbone Bonus" or something like that that seems to have something to do with the bone fish swimming on the backglass. No one is sure just how to score it, but if you do, you get 10 points. (Hey, it's not the value that counts, it's figuring out how to get it!)

4. Multiball

The main goal in multiball is to get jackpots! Nothing else really matters. However, some people have taken issue with this statement, and so I offer a couple more ideas: Hit the captive ball a lot at the start if it's lit and especially if it's a drain shot on your machine. Autocast will save you. Also, Rock the Boat can be worth an awful lot of points if you can keep the balls going around the ramps.

To light a jackpot, shoot a ball into the Caster's Club. The game yells "Up to the top for jackpot!" Your next goal is to shoot the eject hole within 15 seconds (there's a timer on there!) to score it. The jackpots are worth 20M, then 30M, then 40M. The tackle box shows you which one you're on (flashing) and which ones you've gotten (lit).

Completing the Stringers during multiball adds 1M to the jackpot. (Wow!) Notice, though, that the Stringers are also flashing during Feeding Frenzy and Rock the Boat. I'm not sure what they do here, but I think they add 1M to the jackpot when they're completed as well. This extra value added to the jackpot remains for any other jackpots scored on that ball.

If you have 3 balls out, the Caster's Club will flash for "Doubles Jackpot." Shooting another ball in here at this time does just that, and resets the timer at 15 seconds. If it times out, though, BOTH balls are shot back at you and you have to start all over. If you lose the third ball, then one ball is shot back at you, and you shoot for a single jackpot. Any other shots at the Caster's Club are blocked by the drop target (and it keeps coming up).

After getting all 3 jackpots in the tackle box, the fun really begins. The captive ball becomes lit for the Super Jackpot, and I DO mean Super! Every time you hit the captive ball, you get 100M points, until multiball ends. Some people have seen the SJ start at even higher than 100M. Mark Phaedrus says there is at least a possibility the Stringers add 50M per completion.

[NOTE: Recently, I played a game where my first SJ was worth 200M (each hit). Still no one knows how it happens, to my knowledge. I know for sure that it ISN'T the stringers, though.]

Don't worry; you needn't get all jackpots in 1 multiball in order to get to the super jackpot. Whichever jackpot you are on is remembered through the whole game. If you lit the super jackpot, but never hit the captive ball, then the next multiball the captive ball will still be lit for the next multiball until you've hit it at least once.

Of course, it'd be anticlimatic to have to go back to the 20M, 30M, 40M jackpots, now, wouldn't it? Well, after going through an entire jackpot sequence (i.e. you've gotten at least one SJ), all of the jackpots become worth minimum 2x their original value! INCLUDING the captive ball super jackpot! And you can still double the jackpots, so you can make major amounts of points on this game. And it keeps increasing with each completed sequence. I have actually gotten the 60M, 90M, and 120M jackpots and had the captive ball lit for 300M. I never hit the 300M shot, though. Rumor has it that this can increase up to 6x original scores.

Note that during multiball, the Boat can still be hit for lighting the Monster Fish. Always be listening for the distinctive roar the game makes if you're not paying very close attention how many ramp hits you have. Also the captive ball can be hit for whatever it's lit for, and that it can still be advanced via the Long Cast.

Oh — one other thing about multiball. If you shoot a ball up each ramp at about the same time (at any rate before the previous one hits the return lane), you get 5M points for a "Double Cross."

5. Properly-Set-Up Machines

Fish Tales is probably the least tolerant of any game to incorrect alignment of any kind. On a lot of machines, there is a little bitty piece of rubber at the end of the left loop which, if the ball is travelling against the left side as it usually does, will cause the ball to go straight down the middle of your flippers. Also, the upper-left gate seems to cause a lot of problems for people. If you look closely, you can see that it is a one-way gate that should always allow the ball to go through from left to right. However, there is a little rod that the game can control and open the gate when it wants. It should ONLY open for right-to-left shots when the Long Cast is lit, or when you are launching a ball from the plunger (not necessarily for an auto-launched ball during multiball, though). If the gate is always open, this is not really a bad thing except that it makes it a bit harder to get LIE, since the ball will never stop on its way around the Long Cast. HOWEVER, if the gate is always CLOSED, you are in big trouble. This is because you can't advance the value of the captive ball except to get lucky on the Fish Finder. If your gate is always closed, or if the rubber at the end of the left lane is screwing your balls, then complain to your operator! The game is not worth playing in these cases.

Another problem that I recently discovered is the Caster's Club drop target. The game is supposed to be able to drop the target when it needs to. When does it need to? Well, for example, if you get instant multiball while it is up, it should go down to allow you to light the jackpot. I've played a game where the machine couldn't retract it, and it took 2 hits at the Caster's Club just to light a jackpot, then to double it, etc. It is next to impossible to get a jackpot when this happens. Out of 6 games, I managed 1. It's hard enough to light it, but when the drop target goes up, it really hurts things. THE ONLY TIME IT SHOULD COME UP is when you have gotten a jackpot during the last multiball (and maybe during multiball if you only have 2 balls so that you can't double it, but I'm not sure).

6. Strategies

You can usually get replays just by going for the Monster Fish bonuses. If you are good at the ramps and making the spinner shot, I highly recommend it. But after the replay, you're going to have to go for multiball.

At any rate, if you have a Monster Fish lit, ALWAYS ALWAYS go for it. If you don't get it, the Fish value won't increase, and you'll be stuck right back where you just were. Even if it's at 5M, try to get it because the potential for the next Fish is so great. Of course, once you're at 50M, it doesn't really matter as much if you miss the low value.

When shooting for the Monster Fish, keep a careful eye on how many fish in the school you have at the moment. I NEVER shoot the final fish from the right flipper, because that wastes time (and points) needed to get the ball to the right flipper from the left. Be sure to check your parity right after making a ramp shot. If you've just shot an even-numbered fish from the right flipper, shoot something else from the left, like the Long Cast if the captive ball isn't maxed out yet, the Caster's Club otherwise. Likewise, if you shot an odd-numbered fish from the left flipper, shoot for the Fish Finder from the right. Basically, keep careful track and you'll get the most Monster for your money.

If you're in multiball, try not to get Instant Multiball from the captive ball. It's a total waste, especially if you hit it right at the beginning of normal multiball. If you have 2 balls locked and Instant Multiball lit, always try for regular multiball first, since getting Instant Multiball means no locked balls after you lose them.

In Rock the Boat, go for the ramps and not the captive ball. They're both much easier and much safer to shoot for, though obviously not as fast. A couple people have had the idea that backhanding the ball up the same ramp is a good idea. I agree. Backhanding the ramps is generally easier than shooting the far one, and you can get into a pretty good groove this way.

One person says that going for the captive ball on Rock the Boat is a good idea if you have both extra ball and multiball lit. You risk a drain on the extra ball, but then you can hit the captive ball again for multiball, and a potentially very rewarding Rock the Boat.

For Feeding Frenzy, don't get the Boat fish right away. Try for the harder looping shot ones first. If you get low on time, shoot a Boat fish, then use the next time to try for the looping ones again. Note that you only need to hit the Boat ramp sensor to get a fish and NOT the actual ramp sensor. So if you got a U-turn, you'd get both Boat fish. For the left fish, all you need is barely touch the spinner, and the right fish is the microswitch just before the LIE lanes.

The most important shot to master (and the one that needs the most practice) is the Caster's Club. If you can get it down, then you'll do very well. Of course the captive ball and Long Cast are very important in conjunction as well. There are several machines around that let you backhand the Caster's Club from the right flipper. The only machine that I've been able to do this on so far is a PAPA tournament machine.

Don't aim for the Stringers. Just let the ball hit them as it pleases. If you have nothing better to do, or are really close to Feeding Frenzy or Rock the Boat, then go ahead and try for them. The reason I say this is because they are often drain shots. Some people always go for them anyway (if nothing else than to get Biggest Liar!) for the Feeding Frenzy and Rock the Boat. Rock the Boat is usually worth it, but Feeding Frenzy is only worth 35M. It's up to you.

Find out which LIE lane the ball goes up the most from the Jets, and keep that lane the unlit one. (This is almost always the I, from what I've seen and heard.) You'll be much more likely to complete it faster if you avoid duplicate letters this way.

7. Thanks!

Here is a list of people to thank for comments/additions/corrections. The order is who mailed me first, then the order at which they appeared on r.g.p.

Chris/alt.my.head.hurts (crywalt@vaxc.stevens-tech.edu)
- Pointed out "Stingers" are actually "Stringers." First thing to go are the eyes...

Jens (jxr1092@ritvax.isc.rit.edu)
- First to point out (to me) you can use flippers instead of Rod in video mode.
- Reminded me to put in most awards are still available in multiball.
- Pointed out backhanding balls strategy during Rock the Boat.

Bowen Kerins (bowen@leland.stanford.edu)
- Graciously risked a double jackpot to see if the drop target keeps coming up during multiball after doubling it. (Is this a man dedicated to a worthy cause, or what? :))
- First to remind me to put in Stretch the Truth scores value per fish caught.
- First to point out "Fishbone Bonus" mystery.

Dave Stewart (dstewart@cmu.edu)
- Pointed out the operator-settable availability of video mode.
- Pointed out Fish Finder won't award "inc. captive ball" if you already have instant multiball lit.
- Pointed out extra ball won't show up in video mode if you never hit a back row target.
- Pointed out 1M increment of jackpot is kept for entire ball on 2nd and 3rd jackpots.
- Provided additional Rock the Boat strategy.
- Figured out exactly when the EB comes out in Video Mode.

Christopher Hartman (hartman@symcom.math.uiuc.edu)
- Explained Grab Yer Gear award a little better.

Mark Phaedrus (phaedrus@halcyon.com)
- Pointed out availability of Autocast.
- Pointed out LIE lane strategy.
- Reminded me of reverse spinner shot not working for awards.
- Reminded me you need to get special lit on the ball or lose it.
- Suggested mentioning delay of Monster Fish timer.

Joe Schwartz (xor@acm.rpi.edu)
- Suggested putting in explanation of availability of captive ball.

Thanks to these individuals for making this guide a more definitive reference (and the world a better place!).