



## On-Site Report The Real Skinny on That New Mothership

*Don Causey Note: In previous issues, I have reported on the mothership that guide Gregg Arnold has anchored in redfish-rich Biloxi Marsh southeast of New Orleans. Well, here is an on-site report from Hal Chittum, who fished from the mothership last summer. Hal Chittum, of course, is the maker of the famed Chittum Skiffs, arguably the best flats fishing boats ever made. Chittum's report contains some fascinating new information about Arnold's mothership operation, namely, that it's anchored in the middle of 5,700 acres of privately leased marsh. And there's more: these acres teem with ducks in the fall, and Arnold is gearing up to offer cast-and-blast trips this fall that combine duck hunting in the morning with sight fishing for reds during the day. Hal Chittum gives Gregg Arnold's mothership, as well as motherships in general, a rave review. Enjoy!*

I have become quite spoiled as an angler during the last 10 years by making frequent use of motherships. I have booked floating hotels all over the world at this point and experienced a lot of great fishing and adventures, some of which would simply not have been possible without these boats. From the Great Barrier Reef and unexplored islands in the Coral Sea to a secluded anchorage in the Marquesas south of Key West, one thing has become very clear to me. If you are looking for the best opportunity to have a successful trip, nothing comes close to fishing from a mothership. The reasons are many. When you fish from a mothership, you are normally anchored very close to prime fishing, which eliminates the need to make long runs to get to the best areas. In some areas, motherships open areas to fishing that would otherwise be closed because they are too far away to reach and return from in a single day. On a mothership you wake up in the morning, grab a quick breakfast, and take a short ride to the fish. No hotel, no rental car, no traffic, no restaurant, to buy lunch for the day is necessary. Also, there is no long ride back to the dock or hotel at night and no need to make reservations for dinner. When you arrive at your mothership, you can kick off your shoes and turn off your brain. For the next days or weeks, the rest of the world ceases to exist. Fishing, eating, relaxing, and laughing are the only things on the menu. I have frequently spent as many as 30 consecutive days on a mothership, and the only downside was returning to the “real world” afterward.

Last summer, my friend Capt. Gregg Arnold invited me to join him on his first mothership trip in the Biloxi Marsh southeast of New Orleans. Gregg is the dean of fly fishing guides in Louisiana, and he fishes all over the world. He and I have had many conversations long into the night about the wonderful adventures available on motherships. Possibly in part as a result of those talks, Gregg recently arranged for the exclusive use of a 72-foot yacht, *Southern Way*, which he is now using to fish and to explore vast areas south of New Orleans.

Gregg and I made the one-hour run in his skiff to a private dock built in the middle of the best redfishing and duck hunting area in southern Louisiana. It was midsummer but we saw more than 500 ducks on the way in, and we saw just as many every day I was in the marsh. The crew of the mothership laughed at my expressions of surprise at the number of ducks that were around months before duck season begins in that part of the world. They regaled me with stories about the great shooting they had the previous fall. The marshes of Louisiana are prime waterfowl habitat, of course, but there was another reason there were so many ducks around last summer. Gregg's mothership, it seems, is moored in the middle of 5,700 acres of privately leased marsh that is earmarked for the exclusive use of his guests. I had no idea that so much privately leased acreage existed south of New Orleans but it does. It felt a bit like we were on a private estancia in Argentina devoted to duck hunting, but better because of the flats boats tied up to the mothership, bristling with fly rods rigged to take redfish.

Gregg has leased *Southern Way* this coming year and subsequent years for the prime fall and winter redfish months. Luckily, duck season is open during much of this same period. The owners of *Southern Way* actually built the yacht to be used exactly as Gregg plans to use it, that is, as a duck hunting/redfishing hotel in the marsh. The crew of the boat was born and raised in southern Louisiana, and they could not have been better hosts. They are all great guys who love what they are doing. We discovered a couple of bottles of 23-year-old Ron Zacapa the first night, and the food was as good as their choice of beverage. By the time we hit the sack, the anglers, guides, and crew felt like old friends. It is amazing how often this happens to fishing people all over the world.

Gregg uses some very experienced guides with excellent boats. These guides have fished and guided the local marsh for many years, and they know their stuff. Biloxi Marsh is the number one place in the world to sight fish for reds. Many excellent anglers make it part of their program every year. The marsh, particularly the private land Gregg now controls, is a great place to bring someone new to fly fishing, or perhaps family members to whom you want to offer something special. The typical day here offers more good shots at fish than anywhere I have fished. Redfish in Biloxi Marsh simply love to eat flies! Because you fish close to the mothership on a typical day (we actually caught a few reds within sight of the mothership), most anglers run back to the boat for lunch. It's also easy for women anglers to take a privacy break as needed.

Gregg says he intends to run fishing-only trips this fall and also cast and blast trips. On the latter, the plan is to offer duck hunting in the morning. That will leave plenty of time for sight fishing when the sun is at a good angle for visibility. I have been lucky over the years to have spent time in many of the great areas of the planet with some of the best captains and crews. This has made me very picky about where I plan my trips. Gregg's mothership trip is now on my must-do list every year. For sure, I will be back this duck season.—Hal Chittum, [www.chittumskiffs.com](http://www.chittumskiffs.com)

*Postscript: Gregg Arnold can be reached on his cell at 504-237-6742. His Web address is [www.fishinthelandofgiants.com](http://www.fishinthelandofgiants.com). As for the cost of his mothership trips, that varies widely with the number of people in your party and whether you want to hunt ducks and fish or just fish. The cost of a fishing-only trip for eight to 12 people is \$700 per day. If you want to add duck hunting to fishing, the cost goes to \$950 per person, per day (two persons minimum per blind). Staying an additional night at the end of your trip costs extra, as does ground transportation to and from the airport in New Orleans to the mothership.*