

# MILLION

## Dedication and Persistence are the Keys to Fishing and Winning High-Stakes Tournaments

By Jan Fogt

**W**HO DOESN'T WANT TO BE A MILLIONAIRE? The dream of winning a big bag of loot is the motive behind lottery tickets and the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. Television producers certainly advocate the get-rich-quick dream and appropriately named the top-rated quiz show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

For angler Richard Benn, the most enjoyable way to win millions is via big-game fishing tournaments. Taking a big chunk of a multimillion-dollar tournament purse is not as far-fetched as one might think. For one thing, odds are much higher that you will win money at a fishing tournament versus winning the lottery or breaking the house in Las Vegas. And sometimes, it doesn't even take the biggest fish to grab the cash.

Over time, it's even possible to earn a living as a professional big-game tournament competitor. Benn is walking proof. Along with his teammates, the crew of the *Spencer 57* boasts earnings of more than \$2.5 million.

### From Riches to Rags

Ten years ago, Benn, a native Virginian, was earning a comfortable

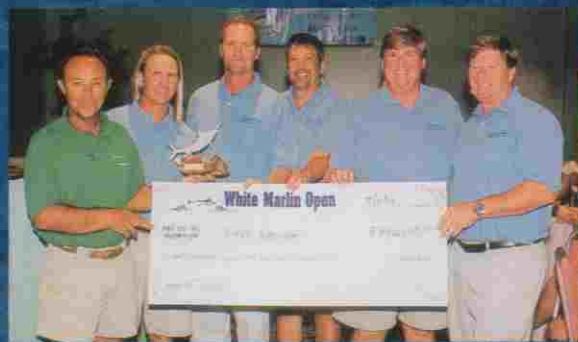
salary as an airline pilot and making enough money to fish regularly with charter captains like Omie Tillet, Chip Shafer and Paul Spencer. Thus began Benn's education in offshore fishing. He also managed to fish another six to eight days each year in spots like Mexico, Venezuela and Costa Rica.

In the mid-1990s, Benn called Tillet looking to schedule a charter. "He was booked that day, so he gave me a couple of different captains' names. One of them was Paul Spencer on the *Sizzler*. We've been fishing together ever since," Benn says.

In 1984, Spencer and his crew hauled in a 724-pound blue marlin at the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament in Morehead City, North Carolina. He walked off with a paper bag filled with \$58,000 in cash for his efforts. After that victory, Spencer never passed up a shot to fish the event, but he came very close to missing it in 1995

when his charter cancelled on him just before lines in. To fill the last-minute opening, Spencer contacted Benn.

"For me it was the chance of a lifetime," Benn says. "I'd never fished a big tournament. Besides, Paul was putting up the boat, so all I had to do was pay the entry fee and get us in the calcutta. I couldn't say no."



The *Spencer 57* team, with add-on angler Dave Warren, accepts a whopping \$870,150 for this year's win in the White Marlin Open. But it wasn't their first big-money prize.

# DOLLAR Men

