

or an undersize juvenile bull. He's looking for the biggest bull, and he tries to gauge its length by observing the width of its head when it breaks the sea's surface. By now, half a dozen whales in the pod ahead are regularly breaking surface. The crew themselves are a little nonplussed. Will Trevor Norton ever fire at any of the whales? What, they wonder, can be holding him back now?

Again and again the sperm whales break surface in front of the bows, their shiny backs glistening in the morning sun and their spouts occasionally bursting into the air like escaping steam. The final phase of the hunt nears. Only Trevor Norton, crouched businesslike behind the huge harpoon-gun, can assess the whole scene and decide when to press the trigger. Now Trevor Norton is standing on the gun platform. Without turning, he gives hand signals to the bridge. He raises a single finger. This means "dead slow" on the telegraph to the *Orca's* engine room.

The pulse of the engine quietens. Stealthily, *Orca* inches ahead. The great mammal zig-zags in bewilderment as the iron ship pursues. The end is inevitable. Gunner Norton signals with his hands. The *Orca's* engine stops and she glides slowly, almost noiselessly, ahead. Everyone on deck is watching. The bull sperm spouts no more than 10 metres away.

Norton swings the harpoon-gun, bracing his legs wide apart on the *Orca's* deck. He points his gun downwards. There is dead silence. It seems like an eternity.

Gunner Norton, killer of more than 1,000 whales, looks down the white-tipped sighting device and squeezes the trigger. The gun barks. It is almost deafening, much louder than any layman would expect. The coiled-fore-runner (line) from a box in front of the gun is snaking outwards. The harpoon is embedded deep into the sperm's back, and there is a muffled thud from the delayed action grenade, exploding inside the whale's vitals.

The rusty steam winch on the *Orca's* fore-deck now begins to clatter. With the winch as the reel and the foremast as the fishing rod, the whole steel hull of the *Orca* becomes the fisherman. The whale is fighting for its life, a fight it cannot hope to win.

The harpoon line runs back over the bow rails of the *Orca*, then down inside the internal part of the chaser near the keel. Here there are about 20 to 30 special kinds of springs. The rope attached to the whale runs through a pulley linked to these springs and then up to two big blocks, weighing about 76 kilograms each, on the foremast. By this ingenious system of blocks, springs, and steam-winch, the whale is played like a fish, till it tires, dies or is killed with another harpoon.

From the foremast the whale line is fed back to the winch. As the harpooned sperm takes the strain, these weighted blocks on the foremast come down to meet one another. By carefully watching these blocks, the winchman driving the steam-winch can quickly see how much strain is being placed on the rope. When there is a heavy strain he eases the

brakes (tension) on the winch, and that in turn lets more rope go out with the whale. When the strain comes off the rope, the blocks go up the mast, the winchman puts his winch into reeling-in action again and pulls in the line with the harpooned whale on the end.

The struggle goes on. The whale, securely harpooned, surfaces 40 metres away. The bull sperm's great square head breaks the surface in a surge of foam several times in quick succession. His flukes wave madly in the air.

A soft groan comes from his open jaws. The sea is crimson with his blood. As he spouts, a crimson mist blows upwards. In old whaling vernacular "the chimney is on fire".

The harpoon gun is quickly reloaded. A mercy-killing harpoon is fired into the stricken sperm bull. A few death flurries, and it is all over. The *Orca* has added another sperm to her tally. Soon she will be chasing after other whales from the same pod.

(Reprinted by permission of Heinemann Reed, a division of Octopus Publishing Group (NZ) Ltd). ✎

Go with the flow



It's early morning.

Perhaps you wish you'd left some of your gear at home, because your pack feels as if someone filled it with bricks. Boulder hopping is a nightmare.

Your pack behaves like a straightjacket and belongs in the garage.

The solution is obvious

Macpac's unique Dynamic harness lets the pack flow with your body, and not against it. The hip belt is centrally attached, so the pack pivots and flexes at the base of your back.

Get yourself a **Macpac** and free yourself for what is really important.

Enjoying the outdoors in unrivalled comfort.

