



# COOLER COOLERS BY RIC BURNLEY





Yeti coolers may be more expensive, but their construction means they will hold up much better under the rigors of fishing.

The fish box is one of the unsung heroes of sport fishing. Suffering the elements, repeatedly dropped, kicked, banged and slammed, sun-scorched and blood-soaked, the old cooler soldiers on to keep our bait and catch cold.

Recently, I was looking at the fish cooler on my 20-foot Jones Brothers Cape Fisherman. A 160-quart igloo missing its hinges and handles. The drain is plugged with an old bottle cap. Time to upgrade.

For me, every fishing trip starts with a search for cheap ice. As I loaded my old, faithful Igloo with

50 pounds of bag ice, and another 10 in a 45-quart Coleman (also missing hinges, handles and drainplug) I asked myself how could I get more cooler with less space. If I didn't have to pack so much ice, maybe I could save some money, too.

I decided to break down and upgrade to a boutique cooler. My first stop was Thacher Stone public relations manager at Yeti coolers. My first question: Why are their coolers so expensive?

To begin, Thacher promises Yeti will last my lifetime. My bargain fish box survived two years before I had to replace the

first hinge, then five years before I got tired of fixing parts and just let her fall apart.

My experience with Yeti's smaller coolers proved they can withstand the abuse. The hinge is molded into the lid and cooler body with a metal rod running through. The rope handle is easy to replace. The drain plug screws into the cooler, but I don't have to remove it to drain water. Small holes in the plug allow water to drain when the plug is loosened. Of course, complicated construction and high-grade components don't come cheap, but they are worth less hassle and reliable cold storage.

Keeping ice cold wasn't the problem with my old cooler. As a weekend warrior, I usually throw away my ice after each trip. I realized I could use less ice if I had a colder cooler. With fewer bags to pack, I could use a smaller cooler, too. Downsizing from my 160-quart cooler to a 125-quart Yeti allowed me to save space and money.

To keep my bait frozen, I dropped an 18-quart Yeti Hopper soft cooler into the 125-quart hard cooler. I add a pack of Yeti ice, which freezes to a temperature colder than water ice, in the bottom of the Hopper. Then, I fit four packs of ballyhoo, and another Yeti ice pack to the top. I fill in the cracks with ice. The system keeps bait packs rock-solid frozen all day.

The new cooler still holds a boatload of small fish. For a bigger catch, I use a fish bag. I stash a 140-quart Reliable Fish Bag for trophy fish. By switching to the fish bag, I can use a smaller cooler. A couple bags of ice will get my big catch back to the dock, especially if I gut the fish and pack it with ice. The fish bag has waterproof seals with a drain plug in the bottom, so I can add salt water to make a slurry.

The last step was to upgrade my lunch cooler. My old Coleman 35-quart cooler fits perfectly under the leaning post, but it has about a half-inch of insulation and my sandwich always ends up swimming in a pool of meltwater.



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Reliable fish bags are a good option for to have on board, especially for those fish that would never fit in your fishbox.

To upgrade, I picked OtterBox's new 25-quart Venture cooler. The cooler includes tough hinges and molded handles with a tethered drain plug I can't lose. I went with the Venture because it has add-on features allowing me to secure the cooler under the leaning post. The smaller cooler means I can carry less drink ice, too. Now I use an Otterbox Otter Ice pack and 5 pounds of cube ice to keep drinks and sandwiches cold all day. The ice pack is so cold, cube ice sticks to it freezing into a block around the drinks. Brrrrr.

After the cooler upgrade to my center console, I have more room

for fishing and spend less on ice. The new coolers feature smooth interiors and exteriors, making clean-up easier. I have yet to break a hinge or lose a drainplug.

On my journey to a cold-storage solution on my smaller boat, I had an opportunity to check out the custom refrigeration on a Jarrett Bay Boatworks Super Sportfish. Slide-out bait and drink refrigerators, in-deck fish boxes, freezers and a cold box fed by an ice maker. Whoa! My coolers didn't seem as cool.

Brandon Davis, product manager at Jarrett Bay, took me on a tour of the possibilities for cus-

tom cold storage. "Our boats are built for fishing," he said. Fancy coolers, freezers and refrigerators are focused on one thing, making every bite count. In the world of competitive marlin fishing, any advantage is an advantage. Davis said installing drink-boxes and bait freezers on the deck keeps the crew ready for a bite. "Baits go from freezer to thawing and rigging in one place," he said. You can't catch them from the cabin.

Recent advancements in manufacturing and installation offer more options for cold storage. "We can make custom stainless-steel ice boxes to fit any



The Otterbox Venture offers the perfect size to keep your lunch and drinks cold while also keeping out of the way.

space," Davis said. Modern compressors allow them to run multiple units off one central system. This saves space and still allows the operator to control the temperature in each box.

Davis shared a recent build featuring two temperature zones in one box. "The customer wanted shallow drink box with a bait tray below," he recalled. To pull it off, they had to be able to independently control temperature in two areas in one drawer.

Another big step forward, Davis says, is switching to titanium coils, "We can pump saltwater to cool the system and the titanium lasts longer." Titanium coils resist mildew and corrosion reducing maintenance and increasing lifespan.

Davis also points to the advantages of air-cooled systems. "This gives the owner the option of not plumbing lines through the hull," Davis says. Air cooled coils also allow the refrigeration system to work when the boat isn't in the water. "You can keep everything cold even when the boat is on the hill," Davis says. Davis is excited about the options available for cold storage. "As the industry progresses, the components are getting smaller," he said.

On my small boat, downsizing the fish box and drink cooler saved space and dollars, too. Whether your boat is 20-foot or 80, keeping the catch cold and drinks cool is a big deal 🐟

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**RIC BURNLEY** is a father, teacher and outdoor writer from Virginia Beach, Virginia. He learned his love of fishing from his dad, Eric Burnley, who's also been a contributor to the Big Game Fishing Journal. After graduating from Radford University in 1994, he spent time serving in the Peace Corps. After his stint with the Peace Corps, he returned to Virginia Beach and wrote a book for kayak anglers: *The Complete Kayak Fisherman*. He also has written for a number of publications, including *The Fisherman*, *Marlin*, *Salt Water Sportsman* and *Outdoor Life*. While he spends a lot of time writing about kayak fishing, he loves to chase every fish that swims, fishing from the shore, the inshore waters and offshore every day the wind doesn't blow. When he's not fishing, Ric teaches English at a school for at-risk teens.