



**Heart of the Nation**  
PHOTOGRAPHY DARREN CLARK

**T**wo blokes chugging around Bass Strait in a 14m boat for days on end, laying and hauling octopus traps, is a recipe for boredom. “You try different stuff just to keep yourself amused,” says skipper Brad Hardy, pictured. A case in point: when *Seafarer’s* kettle died recently, he and his crewman wondered jokingly if it would catch an octopus. So they clipped it onto a long-line with 500 regular traps and sent it to the seabed for a week. And when they hauled it up, bingo, a nice fat one was inside. That trusty old kettle has been to the bottom a dozen times since, and it’s come up trumps every time. It turns out they’ve had success with other DIY occy traps over the years – bits of plastic piping, a coffee tin, even a gum boot. “If it works, it works,” shrugs Hardy. The 36-year-old father of two from Stanley, on Tasmania’s north coast, has fished these waters for half his life. It’s a family



business. His dad, Michael, used to catch gummy sharks for the fish and chip trade, and in the late ’70s added octopus traps to his lines after seeing lots of sharks with bellies full of the cephalopods. What began as a by-catch earning a measly 30¢ a kilo has become the main game, as culinary tastes have changed. Hardy’s dreaming of a honeymoon next year (“maybe in the Whitsundays”) after marrying Ash-Lee, whom he met in Stanley’s only pub, but meanwhile, icy winds and five-metre waves are all part of the day job. Another hazard is being splattered with ink by his quarry. “They always seem to aim for your eyes,” he says. Octopus are said to be highly intelligent, if the ability to open jars is any marker. Given that he knows these animals intimately – he’ll catch a tonne on a good day – what does he make of their brain power? The man who catches them in an old kettle laughs. “I don’t think they’re very smart at all,” he says. ROSS BILTON