

# Fall Fishing on Lake Ontario for "BIG KINGS"

*With Captain Frank Godina of Top Gun Charters*

by  
Rick Kubb

In Gordon Lightfoot's timeless ballad, the *Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*, he sings "...and further below Lake Ontario takes in what Lake Erie can send her". These two wonderful Great Lakes are connected together via the Great Niagara Falls. Both Erie and Ontario offer fantastic sport fisheries. Erie is a warm water fishery with walleye, smallmouth bass and yellow perch being the primary targeted fish with the more recently introduced steelhead trout in the deeper central and eastern basins of Lake Erie.

In contrast Lake Ontario is a 'cold water' fishery, dominated by steelhead trout, brown trout, coho salmon and king (Chinook) salmon.

Combined, these two lakes offer a

tremendous diversity of fishing opportunities for anglers to enjoy within a very reasonable driving distance. One day you can be



**In the fall the mature King or Chinook Salmon are found In-Shore as they migrate and stage up near the rivers.**

getting your limit of walleye and/or perch on Erie as well as fun fishing with catch & release smallmouth bass, then drive a few short hours and get hooked up with a monster King Salmon on the deep cold water Lake Ontario.

There are a few Charter captains that take advantage of the diver-

sity of these two lakes by running charters on both Erie and Ontario. Captain Frank Godina of Top Gun Charters is one of those captains.

Captain Frank starts his season in April on Western Lake Erie for the spring and early summer walleyes. He fishes there until the end of June. In early July he trailers his 28 foot Rampage to Olcott, NY, docks at the New Fane Marina and fishes Lake Ontario up till the end of September.

Recently, Captain Frank invited my wife Karen and I to join him for some fun fishing for King Salmon.

We jumped at the

chance and planned to meet up with the captain during the first week in September. This was going to be a fun-filled and hopefully fish-filled weekend. On Friday morning we caught an early bird flight from St. Louis (yes, I'm still land-locked here) to Cleveland, where we keep a 24' Bayliner docked at Fairport Harbor, OH (the family boat).

On Saturday, we fished Erie and were successful in limiting out on perch. Later that day we got the perch cleaned and frozen in freezer bags of water for the return trip home and stored 'em in the freezer.

With no time to rest, we got in the car and headed East, destination Olcott, NY. Olcott is a small fishing village located about an hours drive from Buffalo, on the southwest shoreline of Lake Ontario. Total driving time from the Cleveland area is about 4 hours.

We had to be at the dock at 6am to meet up with Captain Frank so we decided to drive up that evening and stay overnight at the local "Lighthouse Motel", located just a stones throw from the Marina Saturday evening. The motel was clean and very affordable. The motel owners have signs everywhere instructing their guests NOT TO BRING FISH INTO THE ROOMS. Those that do pay a hefty cleaning fee. Most of the rooms are set up to sleep 6 fishermen.

After a good nights sleep we were up early to meet our captain. We stopped by a local café to grab a cup of 'coffee to go' and then met Captain Frank at the Dock. Although I've known Captain Frank for several years (he was one of the first captains to advertise in *Lake Erie Walleye Magazine* and on the [www.walleye.com](http://www.walleye.com) web site), this was my first opportunity to meet him. It's always nice to match the name with the face and shake hands, in person.

We boarded "Top Gun" and a few minutes later we were headed out of the harbor, along with 4-5 other captains. Captain Frank explained to us that all of the captains from Olcott 'work together' and share information each day. They are a very closeknit group of captains.

As we headed out Captain Frank explained the days plan for fishing. We would start out doing 'In-Shore' fishing for mature King Salmon. If the lake was right and not too rough we would then head 'Off-Shore' to fish for Cohos, Steelhead and immature Kings.

He mentioned that the inshore Big King fishing was excellent up until a few days earlier when a large front blew over the lake causing it to 'turn over'. With the lake turn over the water temperature stratification all but disappeared and the Big Kings had scattered. The water temperature was at 68 degrees, pretty much from top to bottom.

Nonetheless we set up and began a slow troll east in about 90 feet of water. We set up with four lines out on the Big John downriggers using spoons at depths ranging from 60-80 foot. We also put out three Dipsy rods, again using spoons at the same depth ranges.

Captain Frank uses all Daiwa reels and Browning Rods. He uses 9-10 foot rods on the dipsy's and shorter 8 foot rods on the down riggers. He uses wire line on the dipsy's and 30 pound test monofilament line on the downriggers.

Wasn't long till we had our first hook up. I reeled in a first year

king (called a Shaker), about 15 inches long which we released. The pretty, silvery colored fish fought well but will be someone else's trophy in a couple of more years.

Looking at the Captain's Furuno color depth finder, we were marking some big kings, although as the captain reminded us, they were scattered about and not in the numbers of just a week ago. It is impressive though to see a big king on the color fish-finder as they really stand out among the bait and other markings on the screen.

Captain Frank received a call from another captain who hooked up a big king with cut-bait. So, we changed up and put a couple of 'flasher' rigs together with cut-bait to replace a couple of the spoons we were running. Captain Frank uses pre-packaged neatly shaped cut herring and slides it into a rig behind a 'flasher' The 'flasher' is a rectangular shaped (3"x 5") board that twirls in the water in a 5 foot circle and really moves the bait around. This is effective for mature Kings that have moved In-shore and are not as active as are the Kings of early summer when they are Off-shore and feeding more heavily.

About an hour later we had another hook-up. This was a big king. After about a half hour or so of fighting this one we almost had it to the boat when it released. Captain Frank gave me some encouragement by saying that on average only about 50% of big kings are landed in the boat.

As we continued our troll Captain Frank explained to me the differ-



**Karen Kubb with Captain Frank Godina at the helm of Top Gun, searching for BIG KINGS.**

ences in In-shore vs Off-shore fishing in Western Lake Ontario.

In the summer months, beginning in July, almost all of the fishing is 'Off-shore'. That is, about 10-20 miles offshore where the right temperatures and the bait are found. During the summer months the fish are in a feeding frenzy looking for large schools of bait. There is a real mix of fish caught including steelhead and brown trout, coho salmon, and king salmon, both the immature kings (also called teenagers) as well as the mature kings.

As fall approaches in late August and early September the mature Kings begin a migration to shallower waters In-Shore. They begin to stage or school together for a run up one of the rivers. There is a period of a few weeks before the lake turns over when the Big King fishing is excellent

and most of the captains fish In-Shore during this time.

As we were talking fishing, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a downrigger release and BANG,



**Captain Frank with a "Flasher" rig designed to move the bait in a circular pattern enticing big fish to strike.**

we had another Big King ON! This one we did land, a 20+ pounder. I took my good old time with this fish, taking only the line the fish would give me. It seemed like more than an hour before I had the fish to the boat. My wife Karen kept the actual time at about 20 minutes. The strength of these fish is amazing. I would bring in about 10-20 cranks on the reel then the fish would dive down and take out another 50-100 feet of line with it. This pattern repeated itself several times, till the fish tired. Captain Frank netted the fish and it was 'in the box'.

Earlier, one of the other captains headed offshore and reported a building sea and conditions weren't very good so we decided to stay inshore. We trolled for another hour or so then decided to call it a day.

As we headed to the dock, Captain Frank explained his

operation to me. His boat "Top Gun" is a 28' Rampage with twin 360 Chryslers and plenty of room in the cockpit for a group up to six fishermen. The electronics on the boat include a Furuno color depth finder and Lowrance GPS map system. The captain uses a Big John multi-troll system which gives speed and temperature both at the surface and at the cannon-ball at the depth fished. He uses a Raytheon auto-pilot with remote control allowing the captain to steer the boat from the back of the cockpit.

Captain Frank begins his season on Lake Erie in April for walleyes. In July, he moves to Olcott, NY for the Salmon fishing on Lake Ontario. He runs about 55 charters a year. He would like to (and could) do more charters but he is not yet retired from his day job.

Captain Frank has been chartering for 7 years but has been fishing with the professional-type rigging for close to 20 years. Frank explained to me that over the years he got to know and become close friends with several of the charter captains on both Erie and Ontario. After a while he was running with the same type of boat and rigging and was catching as many fish as his captain friends. He eventually decided to get his captains license and begin his own charter.

Many of Captain Frank's customers are 'repeats' and several of them fish with him on Lake Erie in the spring, then come to Lake Ontario for the summer and fall fishing for salmon.

A good number of his clients find "Top Gun" over the INTERNET where he advertises on the [www.walleye.com](http://www.walleye.com) web site as well as other web sites. He receives enough business from the INTERNET that combined with his repeat customers he really doesn't need to advertise elsewhere and he no longer doesn't do the 'Sport Shows' as they are too expensive with travel, hotel and booth costs and everything else that goes along with it.

Our day on the lake with Captain Frank came to an end as we headed back into the harbor and to the dock. We had our fish cleaned by one of the mates from another charter boat. He neatly dressed the 20 pound King and bagged our fillets for us. We put the fish in the cooler and after thanking Captain Frank for a wonderful day on the lake we headed back to our home port, Lake Erie, where we would again fish for perch the next day. This was a fun trip as we experienced the best of both worlds, Erie and Ontario for all they had to offer!

*Captain Frank Godina runs "Top Gun Charters" and can be found at [www.walleye.com/topgun.htm](http://www.walleye.com/topgun.htm). You can also reach him at [fishtopgun@hotmail.com](mailto:fishtopgun@hotmail.com) or by calling (724) 927-6912 or (724) 822-9712 -boat.*

## **Fish Ohio's Lake Erie Artificial Reefs!**

### **Lorain**

#### **Polish Fisherman's Club Reef**

41 28 .076 N

82 12 .758 W

#### **The Mountain Reef**

41 28 .150 N

82 12 .750 W

### **Lakewood**

#### **Cuyahoga County Commissioners Reef**

41 30 .175 N

81 47 .266 W

#### **1984 Experimental Reef Site "A"**

41 30 .271 N

81 47 .533 W

#### **1984 Experimental Reef Site "B"**

41 30 .256 N

81 47 .041 W

#### **Cleveland Stadium Artificial Reefs**

### **Edgewater**

#### **Cleveland Stadium Reef West #1 (north)**

41 30 .148 N

81 45 .575 W

#### **Cleveland Stadium Reef West #2 (south)**

41 29 .970 N

81 45 .416 W

### **Euclid**

#### **Cleveland Stadium Reef East (Euclid)**

41 35 .933 N

81 33 .804 W