

Dog Gone Walleyes

by
Rick Olson

Late summer and into early fall can make for tough fishing, especially if you're a walleye angler. Old marble eyes can become difficult to find, and even tougher to pattern. Most anglers have given up for the season, and many of our top walleye lakes become almost desolate. It may seem a little eerie to have so much water all to yourself but just because nobody's around, doesn't mean the fish aren't there. It's just that where and when they do what they do may have changed. Instead of giving up, you may be well served to do what you do when and where the walleyes are doing it.

The late summer/early fall period is a time of consistent locations and patterns (good or bad), that set up

and remain until late into August and even September. On many natural lakes throughout the Midwest the action can be pretty



In early fall many of the top anglers will switch to live bait rigging. Under the right conditions, live bait can really turn the walleyes on.

darn slow, especially if you stick with the usual tactics in the usual

places.

The usual tactics includes live bait rigging and jigging, both of which are main stays of any serious

walleye angler. The usual places include deep rocky bars and humps, or maybe underwater points, or even deeper weed lines all of which can fall into the category of "classic" walleye structure. Classic structure may start out as hot spots earlier in the summer but the action may begin to wane as hordes of anglers take their toll on the existing populations.

Another option available to all of those walleyes is to simply pull up stakes and move and head for greener pastures. They may head for more of the usual locations but on the other hand they may not.

Instead of more of the same they may actually leave

all of the usual far behind and head for wide open spaces, out in the middle of nowhere.

Rather than clinging tight to deep structure, late summer walleyes will often suspend far off the bottom relating to nothing else but their next meal. Suspended schools of perch, shiners, smelt, alewives and even immature sunfish and crappies can draw walleyes a long way from anything considered "classic". If there is enough bait suspended there is going to be a sizable following of walleyes, without a doubt. This phenomenon actually happens more often than you may think, and may be your best bet for nailing dog day walleyes.

Even if the usual spots are holding and producing fish there is a good chance that a portion of the population will be suspended and may be the secret to finding the super sized models. If you're after a real hawg a little time spent plying the great abyss may be the answer.

Determining if suspension is an option worth pursuing on your body of water requires a little investigation. A couple of factors that help make it all happen includes clearer water and a presence of suspended schools of bait fish. Walleyes don't suspend because it feels good, they do it because it's an excellent opportunity for filling their bellies. Water quality need not be crystal clear but the option may be eliminated by the presence of dark, dingy, or muddy water.

Finding suspended fish begins by taking a look around said deep

structure and heading into deeper and deeper water while keeping a close eye on the depth finder.

While it can be almost impossible to mark fish with your average graph when on plane, the Ray Marine SL1250 combined with High Definition Fish Imaging allows you to do just that.

The ability to mark fish while on plane can be a huge advantage as you can cover a lot of water in a short amount of time. They won't show up as classic arcs though, but instead show as spikes that are up off the bottom. If you're marking spikes you better slow down and get a better look at what might be down below. Clouds of bait and schools of bigger fish are what you're looking for and if it starts to show up you can bet at least some of what you're looking at is walleyes.

The next step is to get a bait in front of all those fish and see if there are any takers. The most efficient way to get the job done is to troll a crank bait at the depth where you are marking the most fish. It sounds a little complicated but it isn't all that difficult if you keep it in perspective.

All you really have to do is get close and the fact is there will probably be fish at many different levels. The thing to do is vary your presentations and try and duplicate what works.

First timers should keep it as simple as possible and you can do so by sticking with a couple of basic crank baits like the Shad Rap or Down Deep Husky Jerk. They have different diving depths and actions and are about all the

variety you will need. From there you can tie one on and vary the amount of line you have out to vary the running depth.

To achieve the maximum diving depth you'll have to let out a lot of line, like a hundred feet or more. You can also add an inline weight about eight feet or so in front of the lure to achieve even greater diving depths. By varying the amount of line you have out, or the size of the inline weight you're using, you can hit different depths. Working different depths is the key and even if you're marking fish from top to bottom, there is usually a narrow band holding the bulk of the biters.

Another thing to keep in mind is the spooking factor as suspended fish exhibit all of their natural tendencies including being extremely boat shy. Clip on planer boards are the way to go, as they can get your bait far and away from the boat and in front of fish that haven't been harassed. They're the way to go because they're inexpensive, easy to use, and easy to store.

If you get serious about trolling you may also want to add a couple of rod holders as holding on to a rod, a board, and a deep diving crank bait can get old fast. If you get really serious you might want to pick up a copy of Precision Trolling as it will tell you exactly how deep a specific bait will run with a specific amount of line out.