

ity, walleyes become more tuned into any vibrations in the water, so presentations way out away from the boat are typically the most productive. At these times you can count on the outside boards getting the most action and the further out they are — the better.

We started our trolling pass up wind from some GPS waypoints that we had punched in when we passed over and marked fish. To add even more stealth to our presentations, my Minn Kota, bow mounted, electric, trolling motor was dropped into the water. I turned on the handy Auto Pilot function of the electric motor and then directed the boat on a straight, hassle free course down wind and right through the fish. A very slow trolling speed was selected. Night fishermen often employ this same slow trolling technique. The object is to present the baits in front of the walleyes long enough to allow them enough time to locate the bait and accurately strike.

In no time, one of the boards started dropping back in violent jerks as a big walleye smacked a gold Jr. ThunderStick set-back 60' behind a board. After we hooked our second walleye on that same ThunderStick, we switched the rest of the rigs to the hot setup. As we slowly trolled along, we were constantly being annoyed by big walleyes as they relentlessly chomped on our baits. Four hours and four aching arms later, we had experienced true walleye euphoria, and we did it in the mud.

Slowing down the presentation is a critical ingredient to muddy water walleye success. Keeping the bait

in front of the fish for a prolonged period is the key. If the presentation is too quick, then the walleyes won't have enough time to react to the bait whizzing by. Even when the fish are feeding aggressively, they simply can't catch a fast moving target. Slow things down and the walleyes have time to target the bait and gulp it down.

When water visibility is low, walleyes will key in on structure more than ever. The walleyes will locate tightly to the structure because of a readily available food source. Rock piles, sharp drop-offs, reefs, channels, holes and shoreline shallows are all good places to search for active walleyes during dirty water conditions. The walleyes take advantage of the structure because bait-fish are forced to swim along predictable routes. Walleyes use these funnels to ambush prey and also to herd schools of bait-fish for easy pickens. The trick is to locate fish holding in these lairs and present baits slowly and precisely.

When the water is muddy, I almost always check for active walleyes in shallow areas first. If I find eyes' in shallow water, then the water column that holds fish will be that much narrower and my catching success typically skyrocket. However, when walleyes suspend in muddy, deep water, the strike zone is that much wider and success usually suffers. I generally make a reconnaissance run over shoreline depths of around 10' first and then make another pass a few feet deeper until I locate fish. Since it's nearly impossible to mark fish on sonar that are holding in water less than eight feet deep, I

usually just troll the shallows to seek out walleyes.

Walleyes sometimes relate closely to the bottom when visibility is low making bottom bouncer presentations a logical choice. Live bait appeals to the olfactory senses of the fish and it's hard to beat a spinner/crawler rig when dragging lead. Since the mud necessitates an ultra slow presentation, I use bottom bouncers that are just heavy enough to keep things on bottom while maintaining a 45-degree line angle. I also send my spinner/crawler rigs out on in-line boards to increase their effectiveness.

I've found that smaller blades about the size of a nickel work best in dingy water and chartreuse blades with a splash of fluorescent orange have produced well for me on Erie. I tie my own muddy water spinners by first cutting off a 4' length of clear, 20lbs-test monofilament. Two #6 bait holder hooks are snelled onto the business end about six inches apart. Above the hooks I add two chartreuse beads, then a chartreuse/orange rig float followed by a pair of orange beads. A quick-change clevis is used to attach the spinner blade. An overhand knot is tied on the end and the rig is attached to the clip on the bottom bouncer. I thread the crawler's mouth and head onto the front hook and then push it forward to the barbs on the back of the bait holder hook to grip it in place. The rear hook is threaded on in the same manner just behind the collar. This specialized rig has caught dozens, if not hundreds of Lake Erie Walleyes from Muddy Water, page 24

The next time your favorite walleye waters look like a cup of

Swing It for More Walleyes

How to fish the Pendulum System

by
Mark Martin

I have always looked at these winter months as the time when I can begin to catch up on some learning. You see, during the period from April through September is tournament season on the Professional Walleye Trial (PWT) where I compete. During that period, magazines stack up next to my reading table, waiting for this season when I can finally devote some time to studying the written word. Since I'm thinking so hard about what I'm going to learn for the coming fishing season, why don't I take this opportunity to pass along some wisdom that I'm sure will put more walleye under your belt next season also.

Sure, I can fish a jig, and pitch to shallow walleye or work them in weeds, but when it comes to my bread and butter, everyone has one.

The one that I am so effective at and have great confidence in

cashing a check with is trolling. Not just any trolling, but trolling with bottom bouncers. Bottom bouncers are actually a misnomer because they are quite a bit more versatile than just for fishing on the bottom.



The key to fishing the pendulum system is adjusting your trolling speed to swing your bait up or down over the fish. Nice catches are often a result. Photo is of author.

A bottom bouncer itself is just a 90° bent wire with a weight cast to the leg that sticks out towards the bottom and a trailing arm that you attach your bait to. Bottom bouncers can be of varying weights, typical weights in my box are from ¼ oz. to 4 oz. They can also be painted or plain lead, and in most instances I fish painted, it adds an element of attraction to the trailing bait presentation. Bottom bouncers, made by a variety of companies, all claim certain traits that make their designs better than the others do. The one

aspect of a bottom bouncer design that is truly imperative is, if it spins and twists your line if you pick up speed or hit bottom. This you can only find out by experimentation of many different kinds, or listen to the advice of an old pro... like me (I don't feel that old). The only bottom bouncer I use, for the previous reason stated, is the Northland Rock Runner. It has an R bend where you attach your line, and this simple bend will keep you fishing productively without tangles and spinning, as long as you are not dragging them on bottom.

Now the bottom bouncer itself is an element of the equation to successful trolling and not the only key. The rig that fishes the bottom bouncer is just as important. Working up from the bottom bouncer, the next element is the line. Although many fisherman use monofilament lines as their main line, I have a distinct advantage over them by using 20lb. test Fireline. Because Fireline has no stretch, it transmits information to me up the line. I have much better feel and am able to keep my rig at the precise depth to make it most effective. You see, many fisherman make the mistake, knowing or unknowingly in the case of mono, of having their bottom bouncer in contact with the bottom too much, especially if it is a soft or sandy bottom. When fishing a contour edge, we need to keep the rig slightly above the fish's head. Because all predators look up to feed, a rig presented below them may go by unnoticed. I want my bottom bouncer to tick the bottom slightly, just occasionally. In fact, the ideal depth would be, when I drop my rod tip down

to the water's surface, the bottom bouncer makes contact with the structure. By constantly checking for the structure, I am fishing within a foot or so of bottom, and right over the walleye's heads. The process of checking for the bottom attracts attention. Fireline transmits that slight bit of information to me immediately, no matter what the bottom content is, so that my presentation spends more time in the productive fish catching zone.

Now it's up the line to the ideal stick and gear (rod and reel), combo, to maximize not only our feel for this type of fishing, but give us the ability to haul in some monster 'eyes once we hook'em. A long rod is required, with my personal choice being the Gary Roach 7' 10" medium action collapsible rod teamed with an Abu-Garcia 5500 reel. The good news is that this is the same rod I use for many applications, including a planer board rod, so if you get this one, it has a great deal of versatility.

Now once we have geared up, it is time for bait selection. Although you can present a variety of baits on a bottom bouncer, the primary weapon is the spinner rig for fishing crawlers and leeches. For reasons you will understand better in a moment, the spinner rig of choice for me is the Northland Float-N-spin. Ideal shell lengths, for fishing structure, is 4 to 4 1/2 feet, and for open water, lengthen it to 6 to 8 feet. There are reasons why the Northland Float-N-Spin is a superior rig. One reason is the float that keeps my presentation from falling deeper than the bottom

bouncer when I reduce speed. Speed, whether fishing structure or open water, is the key to fishing a bottom bouncer for maximum effectiveness.

Here's another example, that should go a long way in helping you understand how to use a bottom bouncer and regulate its fish catching ability with speed with planer boards in open water. If I want to present baits to both fish that I've marked on my Eagle Optima depth finder at 20 feet deep, I'll use a 3 oz. bottom bouncer and let out 27 feet of line. Trolled at about 1.4 to 1.8 mph, this bait will take my bait down to about 17 to 18 feet deep, right over the fish's head, where I want to be. Now, let's say I mark a school of fish at 15 feet on my Eagle Optima, I want to put that bait in their faces, right now, not on the next pass, because they may be gone by then. The way I do that is what I call fishing the pendulum. By increasing my speed, up to about 2.0 to 2.2 mph, the bottom bouncer immediately rises up, and by the time the bait comes by that school, it is tight over their heads and if they are active, they'll hit it. This is a prime example of the pendulum theory of fishing where I can swing the bait up to fish for the fish that appear on my depth finder screen.

The other end of the pendulum, would be if, fishing the same rig under the same set of circumstances, my Eagle Optima shows me a group down at 23 feet deep. To swing the pendulum down, and get the bait in above them, I simply hit the idle/resume button on my TR-1 autopilot and it kicks the

speed down from 2.2 to 1.4 on my Mariner 9.9 hp Four Stroke kicker motor, and pendulum the bait down. As my Lund 1990 Pro V glides down in speed, the bait is presented right to the fish, and pow! In a perfect world, I've just caught a fish that otherwise would not have had the opportunity to see or hit my bait.

The pendulum system of fishing requires perfect boat control along with precise speed adjustments. Although extremely effective at producing fish for years, this was a very cumbersome technique because I was forced to steer my boat, control my throttle, and fish all my rods all at the same time. I already know what happens when I have a great multitude of tasks to take care of when fishing some of them invariably suffer. Well, the task of pendulum fishing has become much easier with the advent of autopilot systems for kicker motors. I now use the TR-1 autopilot system, because not only does it steer my boat automatically, adjusting for cross currents and cross winds, but also controls my throttle so I can adjust my speed without ever touching the motor. I simply stand anywhere there is a fish finder in the boat, and a small hand held remote about the size of a microphone, and making steering and speed adjustments. There is also a button on the remote that when hit, immediately idles the motor down, and when I hit again, brings the boat back up to the speed it was at before the button was hit. It allows me to work the pendulum more effectively than ever before. That means more fish on the end of my string, and after all, that is

why we go fishing! For more information about the revolutionary new autopilot system from TR-1, call Nautamatic Marine Systems at 1-800-58-TROLL.

So this winter, take a little time at the sports shows and learn some about fishing bottom bouncers. Collect some of your own and start to fish the pendulum on your favorite waters. I can guarantee, that once you figure it out, it is not very hard. You will be putting more fish in the boat also. See you at the sports shows!

From Muddy Water, page 21



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Lake Erie - Walleye Capitol?

by
Ted Takasaki and Scott Richardson

In the three decades since Jim Fofrich began guiding on Lake Erie, he's seen the big water go

though changes that have forced anglers to adjust their tactics in order remain successful. Jim is the owner/operator of the Single Spin Guide Service and developer of the Lindy Flip'N Harness. He tells story after story of what Lake Erie was like in the old days, what happened to bring about the walleye rebound and how the accidental introduction of zebra mussels forced fishermen to rethink the way they did things.

But, the need to put away the old ways and embrace the new doesn't seem to bother a man who started fishing at a time when the standard depth-finder was a rope

marked in foot-long sections tied to a piece of lead with wax smeared on its bottom. Counting marks told

you how deep the water was. Checking to see what was embedded in the wax - sand or rocks or clam shells - revealed what lurked below. "Talk about primitive," said Fofrich, 63. "But, it worked."

He recalls his first favorite spinning rod. It was 100-percent fiberglass, and its weight was measured in pounds, not ounces. "Setting the hook was a hernia-provoking experience," he laughed. "Your eyes crossed, not the fish's."

Fofrich disputes the common portrayal of Erie as a "dead lake" in the 1960s. True, commercial nets took tons of fish away. Pollution flowed freely into it, raising nutrients and creating algae blooms that depleted oxygen levels, especially in summer. But even then, reputable magazines listed Erie at the top of any list of the best small-mouth lakes in North America. The lake also held smelt, yellow



Even with Lake Erie's ups and downs, over the years, it is still considered by many to be the best walleye fishery in the world. Photo by Michael Veine.