

Hatchet Spinners Do Work on Erie!

by
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Here's a fact shared by those in the know about Lake Erie;

More often than not, smaller walleyes suspend while bigger ones haunt the depths just off the bottom.

The key is finding a method to get to the deeper fish fast and effectively. Spinner rigs and bottom bouncers do the trick for a lot of good reasons;

- They make a fish-attracting commotion that offers both flash and vibration. Walleyes can hone in using both sight and lateral lines.

- Bottom-bouncers take you down fast, they keep you in the strike zone and they let you cover lots of water in a short period of time.

- When dressed with a nightcrawler, spinner rigs offer a scent and taste that true trophies, even finicky ones, find hard to resist. Crankbaits are great, but natural bait is tough to beat when times are tough.

- Replace the bottom bouncer

with a snap weight to deploy spinner rigs at varied depths in the water column and catch suspended fish.

- You can spread baits with planer boards to cover a wide corridor and get the spinners away from noise and shadow of the boat. Those are important factors since water clarity at Lake Erie has improved so much due to the filtering action of zebra mussels.

Here's how to start.

Spinner Basics

A state of the art spinner rig starts with 5- to 6-foot snell from the snap swivel and bottom bouncer. Shorten leader length if you get hung up too often.

Next comes a Lindy Little Joe X Change clevis, the small piece of plastic that threads onto the line and holds your blade so it can spin freely. It's designed to let you snap blades in and out fast to change



Skilled fishermen often use various spinner rig combinations to land big walleye in Erie's Western Basin.

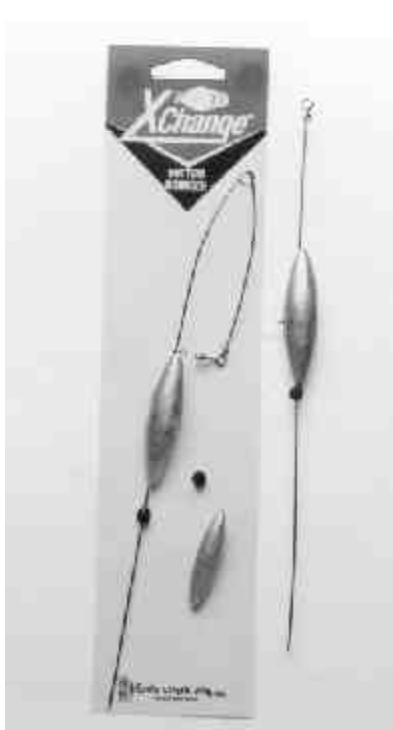


The Hatchet Harness

colors and sizes without having to retie the entire rig. Start with blades in #5s or #7s. Try metallics of gold, silver and bronze when the sun is shining; use florescent colors when it's cloudy or in dingy water.

Add enough beads to keep the spinner away from the front hook. Experiment with colors to see what the fish want. If you tie your own, the nightcrawler harness should feature two razor-sharp Gamakatsu's in size #4 or #2. Stick one right in the 'crawler's nose and the other farther back so the worm swims straight to avoid line twist.

If you don't want the hassle of making your own rigs, Lindy Little Joe makes a great pre-tied one called a Hatchet Harness, each features both the X Change clevis and the uniquely-designed Hatchet blade. Shaped just the way they



The Bottom Bouncer

sound, Hatchet blades turn faster and create more throbbing vibrations and flash at slower speeds than the standard Colorado, Indiana or Willow Leaf blades.

Lindy Little Joe makes a standard Hatchett Harness and a floating version to add buoyancy, bulk and color. Lindy Little Joe also applied the principle behind the X Change system to bottom-bouncer design. The result is a bottom bouncer that lets you change weights fast and easily. Rather than being fixed in place, the X Change weight merely slides onto the wire and is held in place with a rubber grommet or two, if you like. If you want to go deeper or shallower, change the size of the weight in a matter of seconds. If you get hung up, merely pull the

wire free and replace the weight without lost time. The X Change Bottom Bouncers come in sizes from one-half to three ounces and are packaged with spare weights. Use two weights on a wire to achieve mid-range sizes or weights over 3 ounces.

A standard rule of thumb is to keep a 45-degree angle between your line and the water. Use 1 ounce for depths of 10 feet or less, 1 1/2 ounces for 10-to 20 feet, 2 ounces for 20-to 30 feet and 3 ounces and more to go deeper than that. Best rod for the job is a 8-1/2 foot medium to medium-heavy stick with a medium tip rated for 12-to 25-pound test line and lure weight of 1/2 to 1-3/4 ounces .

Use 10 or 12-pound Stren Super Tough for its ability to withstand assault from sharp zebras. Still, you should check the line for nicks often. Lake Erie brutes will find the weak link in your tackle. You'd hate to loose a 10-pound trophy of a lifetime at boatside because of a broken line.

Use line-counter reels. The "why" of that will be clear in a moment.

On the water

Where to start? Lake Erie is a huge body of water, but good homework can cut it down to size. Check with bait shops, guides and even the Internet for the latest fishing reports to see where the big schools are located. If you can get coordinates, a Global Positioning Satellite system can take you right there. Maps are available

that feature the waypoints for places that traditionally hold fish.

In spring, you'll no doubt head for the Western Basin where huge numbers of big females and smaller males gather to spawn.

Like the general who said, "Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes," don't fish until you see 'eyes on your sonar screen. Run from spot to spot, slowing every so often to see if you can see bait fish or the tell-tale marks that signal walleyes. That search method is a lot faster than trying to find fish by fishing.

Cover the water column from top to bottom once over a school. Put out two lines with bottom bouncers. Use a snap weight on a third line. Watch the dial on your line counter reel to let out 50 feet of line, then add the weight and let out 50 more feet of line. Follow the same procedure on the fourth line, but use a different-sized snap weight. The 50/50 formula lets you return to the same depth over and over. "Precision Trolling," by Dr. Steve Holt, Tom Irwin and Mark Romanack focuses on the running depths of crankbaits. But, it also has formulas to determine the running depth of snap weights.

Use planer boards to cover water from side to side. Troll slowly from .5 mph to 1.5 mph with the waves. Use gentle "S" turns to cover more area and to vary the speed of the baits. Boards on the inside turns go slower, boards on the outside go faster.

Listen to the fish, let them tell you what combination of blade color

and size, speed and depth they want.

Next time on Erie, take a "spin" around the Western Basin with Hatchet blades, bottom bouncers and snap weights. They just might be your ticket to the trophy of a lifetime.

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