

# Planer Board Basics

by  
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Few anglers would argue the effectiveness of planer boards. In fact, many would argue that planer boards are the most deadly lure delivery system ever invented. Not only do planer boards enable anglers to fish multiple lines and lures, the amount of water that can be quickly covered with a planer system is second to none.

In addition to straining water and offering multiple lines, planer board fishing is also the best way to tempt strikes from wary species such as brown trout, steelhead or heavily fished walleye; However, these sought after species aren't the only targets of planer board fishing. Hardly a fish swims that doesn't regularly fall prey to anglers using a planer board system. Salmon, trout, walleye, steelhead, muskie, pike, bass and even large panfish such as crappie and white bass are commonly taken with the help of these trolling aids.

Planer boards are effective and easy to use. To get the most from these trolling aids, anglers must understand a few of the basics of planer board fishing.

## UNDERSTANDING DUAL BOARD SYSTEMS

Different types of planer boards

are designed for different fishing applications. Anglers can choose from two types of planer boards. The most popular type of planer board system are dual boards or what some anglers refer to as



mast systems.

A dual board planer system includes a set of boards that feature two runners attached parallel to one another. The Riviera Dual Planer Boards are collapsible, making them easy to store even in small boats. These boards also feature three tow point adjustments for different wave conditions and a durable maintenance free design. A dual board system also requires a six foot planer mast that mounts near the bow of the boat. A tow line/reel system attaches to the mast and allows the planers to be easily deployed and retrieved.

The boards of this type of planer

system are normally set to run 50-100 feet out to the side of the boat. In calm water the boards are set out the furthest. Fishing lines are attached to a dual board system by using specially designed spring loaded pinch pads. These pinch pads with the fishing line secured between their jaws are then attached to the tow line using a shower curtain hook (aka quick clip). As the boat trolls forward, line is played off the fishing reel allowing the line release and lure to work down the tow line towards the planer board.

Commonly called planer board releases, Off Shore

Tackle is the worlds largest manufacturer of planer board releases designed for all types of fishing situations. The size of these line releases, pad diameters and tension settings vary depending on the size and type of fish to be targeted. The line release has two functions. First it must hold the line securely while trolling at a variety of speeds and varying line diameters. Second this fishing aid must release its grip on the line



once a fish strikes. Designing a release that masters these functions is no easy task. A quality release provides enough tension to insure fish are solidly hooked before the line slips free. It's also essential that the release function over and over again without damaging the fishing line.

Most releases on the market either have too much tension, or not enough. Many of these products abrade the line and few can withstand the tortures of day to day fishing. It's important to note that no single release is universal to all types of fishing. That's why Off Shore Tackle produces a wide variety of line releases that are suitable for all trolling applications.

When targeting smaller species such as walleye, lighter tension releases are employed. The OR-10 release is the best selling walleye release on the market. The sliding spring allows the tension setting to be easily adjusted as desired. When fishing in rougher water or for larger walleye, the OR-14 release is the ideal choice. Like the OR-10, this release has a sliding spring adjustment. The slightly heavier spring tension of this release allows anglers to troll in rough water or at faster speeds without false releases. .

Larger species such as trout or salmon require line releases with more spring tension. The OR-3 was designed especially for anglers who target steelhead, brown trout and trophy walleye. The larger pad diameter of this release increases the friction on the line without having to signifi-

cantly increase spring tension. The amount of tension desired can be adjusted by how deep the line is placed in the rubber pads. The deeper the line is placed in the pads, the more tension it requires to trigger the release.

The OR-17 is similar to the OR-3 except the release has stronger spring tension. Ideal for high speed trolling or when fishing in rough water or when pulling large plugs, dodgers and other attractors, this product has been an immediate success with salmon anglers. For muskie anglers, the OR-30 is the most requested planer board release. This release is similar to the OR-3 and the OR-17 but it has the heaviest spring tension available.

Also available is the OR-19, a small release with a very strong spring tension. Popular with charter captains who prefer a release with extra tension, the OR-19 insures positive hooksets and the maximum number of landed fish. Often when a fish strikes a lure attached to the OR-19, the line doesn't pop free of the rubber pads. The angler however can easily trigger the release by simply snapping the rod tip quickly toward the release. Triggering the releases as desired helps charter captains manage lines and reduce tangles better when two or three fish may be hooked at the same time. Matching line releases to the target species insures that anglers will enjoy the best possible success.

Dual board systems can be used on virtually any boat and for any species. The primary advantage of this type of planer board system

can't be disputed. Once a fish strikes and the line is popped free from the release, the angler is free to fight the fish. This convenience is the primary reason so many dual board systems are currently in use.

Dual boards also have the advantage of being able to deploy large numbers of lines. Many anglers fish up to five lines per side with the help of dual boards. Anglers who are often faced with rough water also favor dual boards. The larger board size helps this planer system plow through rough water when fishing both with and against the waves. The versatility of the dual board system is a major reason why so many anglers swear by them.

#### **WHY IN-LINE BOARDS?**

In-line boards such as the Off Shore Tackle OR-12 Side Planer have seen significant increases in sales in recent years. Price is one of the major reasons these small boards have caught on so quickly. For less than \$50.00 a pair an angler can get started planer board fishing. Compared to dual board systems, in-line boards are less expensive. In-line boards also have some other unique features that has helped them carve out a significant niche in the planer board market.

Because in-line boards attach directly to the fishing line, the board becomes a strike indicator that makes it easy and fun to tell when a fish has been hooked. The weight of a struggling fish causes the board to surge and sag backward in the water. When two or

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The lures of choice once again will be similar to last year with Ronesty plugs and spinner and worm of various colors and sizes leading the way. Tipping your body baits with a small piece of worm also has proven effective when the walleyes are biting short. The terminal tackle preferred by most offshore anglers is planer boards, Jet Planers of various sizes, downriggers, Dipsy Divers and wire and braided lines. A good fish locator and GPS satellite navigational system are also a must if you wish to locate and stay "on" the small tight walleye schools.

Don't be surprised if you catch quite a few steelhead this year as the population of this great fighting fish is very high due to the stocking efforts of primarily Pennsylvania and New York. The late summer offshore walleye fishermen are also fishing in 60-100 feet of water, which is considered steelhead territory along with the late summer walleyes.

The bottom line is that the eastern basin walleye fishery appears to have evolved into a stable quality fishery comprised of many class years of walleyes. Remember the new daily creel limit for walleyes in New York waters of Lake Erie is 4 fish at least 15" long.

Perch fishing will once again be very good in 2003 and I would expect to see more and more boats fishing for these delectable little morsels as the word continues to get out on the rebound of this popular Lake Erie fishery. The key to perch fishing is to move until you find a feeding perch school and if they stop biting continue to move until you find

them again. Look for small tight pockets of boats still fishing, this is a sure sign of fishermen probably working a school of perch. The bait of choice is a Lake Erie emerald shiner but in a pinch almost any minnow will work. If unsuccessful try fishing deeper water as the NYSDEC netting surveys have shown that most perch seemed to be found in deeper water than the fishermen were working.

Local sportsmen's groups such as the Erie County Federation of Sportsmen, the Erie County Fish Advisory Board, Southtowns and New York Walleye Associations have joined in a cooperative effort with the NYSDEC to develop plans for a potential walleye stocking program in the Buffalo river and Lake Erie. This stocking program could start as early as 2004. The initial program calls for an annual stocking of approximately 50,000 walleye fingerlings into the Buffalo River for a period of 5-7 years. If the program is successful, it could lead to an annual walleye-spawning run in the Buffalo River that would probably enhance the local population of walleyes in the eastern basin waters of Lake Erie. This program is based on the initial success of a similar program started in the Cattaraugus creek approx. 8 years ago. This cooperative venture between the sportsmen and the NYSDEC is the first of its kind on eastern Lake Erie; hopefully it will not be the last! Have a great 2003 fishing season.

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more of these boards are being fished side by-side it's especially easy to tell when a fish has been hooked.

When a fish strikes and is hooked, the board and fish are reeled in together. Depending on how the board is attached to the fishing line, the angler can either reel in the board and quickly remove it, or release the board and allow it to slide down the line while fighting the fish. We'll get in more detail on how to rig in-line boards in another feature.

Walleye anglers are some of the most devoted in-line board users, but these smaller sized boards can be used effectively on any species of fish. The important thing to know about in-line boards is not all are created equal. A good in-line board should be large enough to support the weight and drag of common trolling tackle such as deep diving crankbaits, snap weights, lead core line, attractors and other gear. Many boards simply aren't big enough to get the job done.

An in-line board should also be ballasted properly. The OR-12 Side Planer is carefully weighted so the board rides nose high and always rights itself in the water. Boards that aren't ballasted correctly tend to dive in rough water causing all sorts of problems.

Because in-line boards are small, they can be tough to see on the water. The OR-t2 features a bright red flag that contrasts with the yellow board, making them easy for other anglers in the area to spot. The OR-12 is also versatile enough to be rigged in a number of ways suitable for walleye, salmon, trout and a wealth of other species.