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On the Cover

Captain Timothy Garrett of Aqua Fantasea Charters with a Central Basin Summertime trophy walleye weighing in at 14 pounds

From The Editor

Boy, what a difference a year makes. Walleye fishing to this point (May 25th at this writing) has been fantastic; the best seen in several years, according to many charter captains. Walleyes have been caught just about anywhere in the western basin. Limits are common and the weather for the most part has been very cooperative. In the central basin there has been an excellent spring and early summer night-time and near-shoreline walleye bite.

Just a year ago catching walleyes was tough, and that's putting it mildly! In 2000 spring and summer fishing more often than not was nothing to write home about. In the western basin we couldn't consistently find the walleyes and when we did mark fish, the bite just wasn't there. Fishing for walleyes in the central basin was so tough that many charter captains switched to targeting steelhead trout. The steelies were there in great numbers. Good thing for that cause the walleyes were having fun playing hide and seek. Last year fishing didn't pick up until very late summer and into the fall, when walleye fishing suddenly turned into something truly special.

So what gives? How can a single year make such a difference? There are likely many factors but here are a few. **Weather:** The weather to this point in the season has been better than last year. Fewer fronts have allowed fisherman to get on the water more often. **The strong 1999 year class:** A very large 1999 walleye hatch has plentiful 2 year old fish swimming around and being taken by fishermen in big numbers. **Lower numbers of bait fish:** Potentially,

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Lake Erie Walleye

Rick Kubb, Editor/Publisher

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Diving Planes for Erie 'Eyes

by
Mark Hicks

Captain Bob Troxel's first experience with diving planes illustrates why these trolling devices should be mainstays for every Lake Erie walleye angler. The outing took place on a hot July afternoon several years ago.

Drift fishing with weight-forward spinners had slumped badly after the peak early summer season. Faced with markedly clearer water due to the zebra mussel invasion, Troxel conceded that he would have to adopt trolling methods to catch boat-shy walleyes in deep water.

Heading his 30-foot cruiser, "This Is Reality," out from Foxhaven Marina on Catawba Island, Troxel and two friends boated west of Rattlesnake Island in the western basin. When the graph began marking fish near the bottom in 32 feet of water, they put out four brand new diving planes matched with spoons fresh out of their colorful packages.

"I really didn't know what to expect," says Troxel. "But I didn't

The relatively low cost of diving planes, plus the fact that other anglers were enjoying excellent results with them, figured into Troxel's decision to try this method of trolling. He still relies on the same brand of diver he started with-Luhr Jensen's Dipsy Diver.



Captain Bob Troxel with a big Lake Erie walleye taken on a diving plane and a spoon.

have much time to think about it. In two hours we landed three limits of big walleyes, including one over 11 pounds. It was unbelievable."

and the Dipsy digs powerfully downward. When the release breaks free, the Dipsy flattens and stops diving, eliminating its strong resistance.

ESSENTIAL DIVERS

Available in three sizes that run at depths ranging from 14 to more than 50 feet, the Dipsy Diver is built around a hard plastic disk. The larger two sizes come with an "O" ring that expands their diameters and increases their running depths. These models also feature an adjustable release mechanism that attaches to the rod line. Snap the release in place

Fishing Erie's Central Basin

Tips for Walleye and Steelhead

by
Bud Riser

If your nose is buried in this article, you're probably thinking in the back of your mind, "How much is gas going to cost me to find fish"? Can I catch 'em close in? Sure you can...it just depends on how many jet skiers you want to get buzzed off by.

My fishing day usually starts off like this. That chirping robin goes off at 4:15 AM next to the window. 45 minutes later, I'm creeping along the Lake Erie shoreline dropoffs in 17 to 27 foot depths anywhere from Huron to Conneaut.

I'm a die-hard lead chucker so I begin my morning a little shallower than I probably should...usually in 9 to 12 feet...just because I can. Bouncing bottom with jigs and minnows or

crawling a weight forward spinner generally produces a couple early AM fish in skinny water.

If that doesn't do it, I set up my next drift from 10 to 14 feet and maybe switch to a slip sinker and worm harness combo. Bango!—one or two more fish, including the world's largest sheephead.

This time of year, I still like silver, gold or chartreuse color combinations. No matter what your lure choice is, concentrate on using the lightest possible baits but still maintain contact with the bottom.

By this time, it's 9:00 and a boat or two has showed up. I usually slide into 17 to 27foot depths and try blade bait jigging or casting a worm harness in a sweeping arc pattern (casting the swing as charter captains call it).

One or two more fish, a couple of smallmouth bass and a perch or two...not bad for 3 or 4 drifts. 9:45 to 10:00AM and more boats show up



Albert Moll, of Avon Lake, OH, proudly displays a chunky 'eye that fell to a Northland Tackle "Rattlin' Rainbow Spinner" worm rig. Photo by Bud Riser.

Precision Jigging

by
Ted Takasaki with Scott Richardson

Trolling is usually the ticket when it comes to catching walleyes on the Great Lakes. Spreading your lines and sifting through large areas of water fast will often connect you with active fish. But, trolling is not always the answer. Sometimes the situation calls for a presentation that lends itself to pinpoint accuracy. That's when it's time to turn to a jig.

The decision on which presentation to choose – jigging vs. trolling – is dictated by how the walleyes are relating to structure on any given day. Using electronics will tell you all you need to know before you ever wet a line. Just ask yourself one question as you watch the fish marks move across the sonar screen. Are walleyes dispersed over huge areas or are they tightly schooled and holding close to reefs, points, rock piles or weeds?

Then picture which method, trolling

or jigging, will keep your bait in front of the most fish for the longest period of time.



Jigging is an effective technique when precision is required to reach walleyes held in structure or when hugging the bottom.

Using this simple analysis, it

becomes clear that trolling does the trick for walleyes that are scattered or suspended. This is normally true in the warm, summer months when walleyes are on the move in search of suspended baitfish. Vary the choice of crankbaits and the amount of line out or use a combination of snap weights and Lindy X-Change bottom bouncers with Hatchet Harnesses and live bait to cover the water column from top to bottom. In-line planer boards can spread your lines to cover a wide path.

Experience has taught us that walleyes will often hold tight to the bottom in small groups on the largest bodies of water. Rock piles, humps and reefs act like magnets in spring and fall or when cold fronts strike in places like Lake Erie's Western Basin or Little Bay de Noc. At other times, walleyes will hold in dense cover, like the weed beds of Saginaw Bay. In all

Steelhead Madness on Lake Erie

by
Jeff Frischkorn

Steelhead trout are expected to again give Lake Erie's walleye a run for their rainbow smelt. No one knows this likelihood better than does Ron Johnson, a charter captain from Painesville and whose base of operations is the Grand River. "I bet we caught between 600 and 800 steelhead last year," said Johnson. "It was, by far, the best steelhead fishing that we've ever seen. It was phenomenal."

Officially last year Ohio's Lake Erie boat fishermen caught a projected 33,524 steelhead. That figure is the second highest ever recorded; the highest being in 1993 when an estimated 34,000 steelhead were taken.

Though Johnson said he and his customers still took more walleye than steelhead last fishing season, on more than one occasion it was the steelhead that saved the day.

"I'd say the ratio was something

like three walleye for every steelhead but that is impressive since we targeted walleye and

catches would have been much, much higher."



Captain Ron Johnson of Thumper Charters with a prized steelie. The action really heats up in summer.

not trout," Johnson said. "Had we gone after steelhead exclusively I know that our

Johnson typically fishes the summer months north of the Grand River, shunting his boat's position west to off Euclid or east off Geneva depending on the migration pattern of the fish.

Last summer the largest steelhead netted by Johnson for his customers was a 16 1/2-pound fish with a 17 1/4-pound trout being reeled in the year before. Most of the trout caught by Johnson's clients average 5 to 8 pounds, and his best day last summer saw 21 steelhead being poured into the boat's cooler.

Such keeping is not discouraged by the Ohio Division of Wildlife. It is

that agency's belief that trout taken from the lake's deep waters will probably die anyway so it's

Erie Innovation for Walleyes

by
Mark Martin

Right now, as hard-core trolling tactics are in full swing every place on Erie, I'm armed with a selection of dependable lures that are excellent alternatives. For simplicity's sake, and to offer a straightforward strategy for success, I've come up with three of the most effective lure and bait styles that will do the trick around the reefs and river mouths when the trolling bite isn't working out. Or even if it is, these tips and tricks can serve as backup plans when the wind blows or if you're in a smaller boat without the full assortment of trolling gear. Whenever you're around walleyes, it pays to break out the jigs, body baits and a dead rod. Now is the time to adapt them to Erie.

Jigs

Of all the jigs on the market, none is more effective or versatile than the Northland Fire-Ball. They come in sizes from miniature to magnum, giving you the ability

to cover all depths and drop speeds. And they're perfect for snap-jigging, vertical jigging in rivers and lakes, casting and dragging, any

way you want to fish them. Though they are round jigheads, they excel even in current because of the slight keel shape of the head, which makes them track straight in running water. Fire-Balls are large

for their weight, too meaning a 1/16th-ounce specimen is bigger than a lot of regular 1/8th-ouncers, and have bigger, more dramatic profile fish like.

More than anything, the Fire-Ball is a live-bait jig, since it comes without a keeper collar to hold on plastics. I use them with minnows, leeches and half night crawlers. In springtime, I turn to a few tricks to catch more fish. When I know a bunch are beneath me, I often bait up with two small minnows, one hooked upside down, the other right side up. This gives you a pair of minnows in the shape of a V for a more enticing profile. And if walleyes are striking short, if one does rob you of one of the



The author with a good size walleye.