

Warm Water Muskie

BY JOHN ANDREW

With high water temperatures during this time of year, muskie anglers have several options. Some of which are going to be discussed and presented to you in three separate presentations and three corresponding techniques. This article is about daytime fishing, late summer or pre early fall, depending on your location.

FIRST PRESENTATION

One of the most popular presentations is the rubber Bulldog and other rubber baits. There are several rubber baits that muskie anglers use and they continue to explode onto the market. Some of these are only four to seven inches long while others are over 20 inches. They can weigh as little as six or eight ounces or over two pounds. These baits work, and have been producing muskie for over a decade. If you're not using them, you should be.

FIRST TECHNIQUE

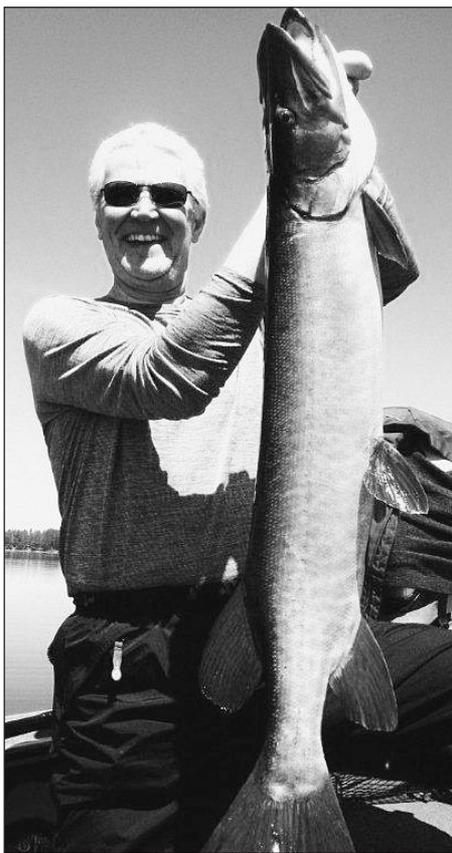
At this time of year, we work these baits over large extensive flats, from three to 18 feet deep, over weeds and over the flats that are connected to them. The weeds will be shallow, from three to 10-20 feet deep, depending on your lake.

Then, on deep clear lakes, when fishing 20 to 50 feet down on the bottom—not relating to weeds but instead, to ledges, drop offs and deep flats—anglers are producing muskie during the dark using Bulldogs off the bottom. It can be done during the daytime too.

Casting out, making a long three- to four-foot pull, then reeling up the slack, and then repeating the process is what has produced best. During the extended warm water period, we continue to produce best by casting out, letting our presentation sink to the desired depth or even to the bottom, and then begin the retrieve.

We continue to cast or troll these extensive flats, which could be 100 acres in size or as small as a football field. Trolling rubber baits is very productive. There is a distinctive edge from where weeds stop growing to the flat that is connected to deep water. Focus your efforts here and past that edge. Color is important to your water environment. Experiment with both color and size.

Last season, Lake Sinclair and other local lakes saw consistent muskie action. Green Bay, off of Lake Michigan, has been producing for the last several years, especially this year. There are sand bars,



William Saddler from Chicago, Ill., with a 43-inch muskie caught with the author while slow rolling a bucktail over a deep ledge in early September 2011.

rock bars, long, extended points off shore where main lake basin muskie are suspended and under fished. We should be fishing these locations year 'round. Any muskie row troller will tell you his biggest fish are caught over the flats or suspended.

SECOND PRESENTATION

Deep running and shallow running crankbaits are good options for the muskie hunter, casting or trolling. Many Canadian and U.S. muskie hunters will swear by these. They are available in a variety of sizes and colors. From small- to large-lipped baits, many lures

are continuing to be developed. Have you ever caught a 22-inch northern pike in August or later, chewed up and not from spawning rituals?

Every year, infinite numbers of muskie are caught on this large bait; they can be triple jointed or more and over two feet long.

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Gregg Vincent of Rockford, Ill., in mid September, slow rolling a bucktail, caught this 44-inch muskie while fishing with the author.

SECOND TECHNIQUE

With the nine-foot rods, super reels, heavy and thin super line, casting is no longer a challenge and trolling is even easier. With untold color patterns available, choices are endless.

We focus on the action of the bait, over expense, so how do you decide? Experiment—trial and error still rules.

This time of year, we pattern for size, color and action. By mid August, we throw and troll the big 16- to 25-inch heavy weights. These bait colors correspond to water temperature. Two-pound crankbaits with the right color and action, slowly retrieved over shallow weeds, is and has been producing. In as shallow as three to six feet, retrieve the bait so it is barely under the surface and comes back to the boat, winding like a snake. Cast the big baits to shallow rock humps, long points and over open water, near or around the main lake basin; it retrieves faster.

In some deep, clear lakes, casting to a deep shoreline break with a deep diving crankbait, cranking the bait down the ledge at a high speed is very productive.

Deep crankbaits are also best trolled for suspended fish, or cast along structure breaks. The list of structure breaks can be extensive, from weed lines, flats that drop into the main basin, rock bars, humps, points, extended points under water from shore, saddles between bars, and shallow bays that extend out into the lake.

Say our lake is only 29 feet deep but large, with a few weed infested humps. Trolling around the humps, up to 500 feet away and casting over the top with the shallow crankbaits is an option.

Also, weighing the shallow crankbait and then casting or trolling is a very good technique. The action from a floater is significantly better than a deep diver.

Divers have seen great action so both work. There are times of the year that color is very important. This is when patterning your lake from certain water temperatures to higher temperatures makes a difference.

Muskie feed on different types of bait-fish at different times of year, so color makes a difference in warmer water.

THIRD PRESENTATION

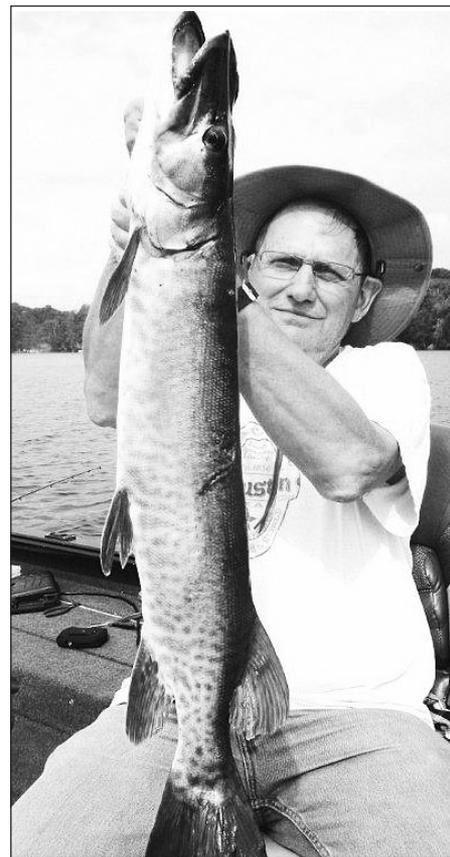
Bucktails in various sizes and colors are also a good presentation. These baits offer the widest variety of color and size, from a 0 Mepps spinner to a two-foot long mega triple Cow Girl or a large and long single blade. All are spinners and account for the most muskie caught every single year. Not in the 0 size, but from a Mepps #4 and up to larger stuff. The large bass spinner baits used for muskie fishing are also productive over hard obstructions when they are retrieved. Unlike a bucktail, they rarely ever get snagged.

THIRD TECHNIQUE

With very long rods available to us, we



Twelve-year-old Kevin Dixon of Lockport, Ill., caught this 48-inch muskie while fishing with the author. He was casting a small, white bulldog in the rain over the weeds.



Jim Fowler, Madison, Wis., caught this 41-inch muskie while fishing with the author using a large, shallow crankbait over the weeds.

can make huge 120-foot casts and occasionally, much longer. This is a fantastic advantage when casting over large weed beds, extensive flats and suspended muskie. Also, the long rods available today allow us to catch several more following muskie at boat side as our figure eights are much easier to perform.

With a wide array of bucktail colors, we can always find a color pattern that works, regardless of water clarity. The size and shape of the blades does make a difference when trying to create a reaction strike. Certain spinner vibration frequencies work better during specific water temperatures.

The bucktail has the highest hooking percentage per strike over most other baits. Retrieving this lure in either slow or fast stop-and-go action is an effective approach. We like to fish deep by casting out and letting the bucktail sink to the desired depth and then begin the stop-and-go retrieve. We also like to cast out and count down to the depth we want and slow roll the bucktail back.

Trolling is also good. We always like to add a repeating pumping motion, then a long straight troll. Reeling in slowly can also be very effective during warm water conditions. Adding tails or a small spinner to the rear treble is very effective.

Good luck and good fishing.

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