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DECEMBER 2016

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DECEMBER 2016 | VOLUME 15 | ISSUE 8

## 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE



**31**



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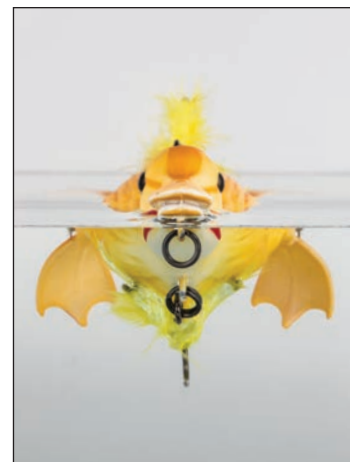


PHOTO BY MATT FACE

**ON THE COVER**  
**Savage Gear 3D Suicide Duck**

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# EDITOR'S NOTE



## THE DUCK PATTERN?

The first time I ever took Andrea, my girlfriend then and my wife now, on a bass fishing trip, it was an eye-opening experience for her.

"I had no idea fishing was so intense," she said to me about an hour into the trip.

I nodded and told her she wouldn't find any bobbers in my boat. Bass fishing isn't a sit-and-wait deal, as a lot of non-anglers believe.

"Fish eat other fish?" she asked later when I tied on a sexy shad crankbait.

Apparently my wife, who definitely did not grow up fishing, thought fish just ate worms – the live bait of choice for many novices.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not picking on Andrea. She's a sweetheart, and she reads my columns. And I'm not stupid enough to tick off the woman who encourages me to spend more time fishing.

However, I'll always remember that question about fish being fish-eaters because it reminds me what bass really are: unselective apex predators that'll eat pretty much anything they can get in their mouths.

Anything, including baby ducks.

Since you're reading this, I know you've seen the cover of this edition of FLW's Buyer's Guide, with its "cover boy," the Savage Gear 3D Suicide Duck.

No doubt, the notoriety of that duck, which was voted Best Hard Lure at the 2016 ICAST New Product Showcase, has raised some questions.

"Do bass eat ducklings?" "Is there a 'baby duck' pattern?" "Is it a gimmick?" "Does anyone who votes at the New Product Showcase know anything about bass fishing?"

I can tell you that enough anglers have witnessed predatory fish, including bass, eating birds to validate the notion that a mallard duckling is not safe from a marauding largemouth if the fish feels inclined to take a swipe. As for acknowledging a true "baby duck pattern," I'm on the fence. My gut tells me that a bass eating a duckling is more a matter of chance than the result of a forage pattern. Then again, Aaron Martens won the 2015 Bassmaster Elite Series event at Lake Havasu by fishing a blackbird pattern, proving that bass do occasionally get dialed in on a fowl diet.

As for the Suicide Duck itself, I'll admit that when I first saw it, I wrote it off. I assumed Savage Gear would have a tough sell with real bass heads. It's a duck, after all.

Then I got my hands on one and realized that it's not just a bird body with hooks. It sports some interesting design features. It's actually kind of like a larger version of River2Sea's now-famous Whopper Plopper, but with two small, subtle plopping feet instead of one big prop. Heck, if Savage Gear had chosen a torpedo-shaped body instead of a duck body, probably a lot of you would have already bought one.

So should you go buy one now? That's not for me to say. I'm not in the tackle-selling business. But what I will say is that, as you skim through the pages of the Buyer's Guide, don't let first impressions determine whether or not to give a product a try. Don't just focus on the same old types of products you always use. Experiment with something new. Draw your own conclusions, and maybe learn more about tackle design and rigging as you do it. I believe that trying new baits and experimenting with new approaches to bass fishing is part of the fun of the sport.

And if you happen across a baby duck pattern, let me know about it. That, I'd like to see.

**Curtis Niedermier, Editor-in-Chief**

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# FISHING EXPOSED

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## A NEW BEGINNING

The best part about a year and a season coming to an end is that anglers can start to look forward to new opportunities. Like a sunrise welcoming you to the lake, a new year symbolizes a fresh start. This photo was taken on the final morning of the final Costa FLW Series regular-season event of 2016 at Lake of the Ozarks. For the anglers shown here, it was a new day with new possibilities, and one of them — Duke Jenkel — found a way to earn the win. As you prepare for 2017 and your fresh start on the water, what are your goals? What opportunities will you seize? Hopefully, your season starts as beautifully as the scene captured in this image.

**Photo by Matt Pace**





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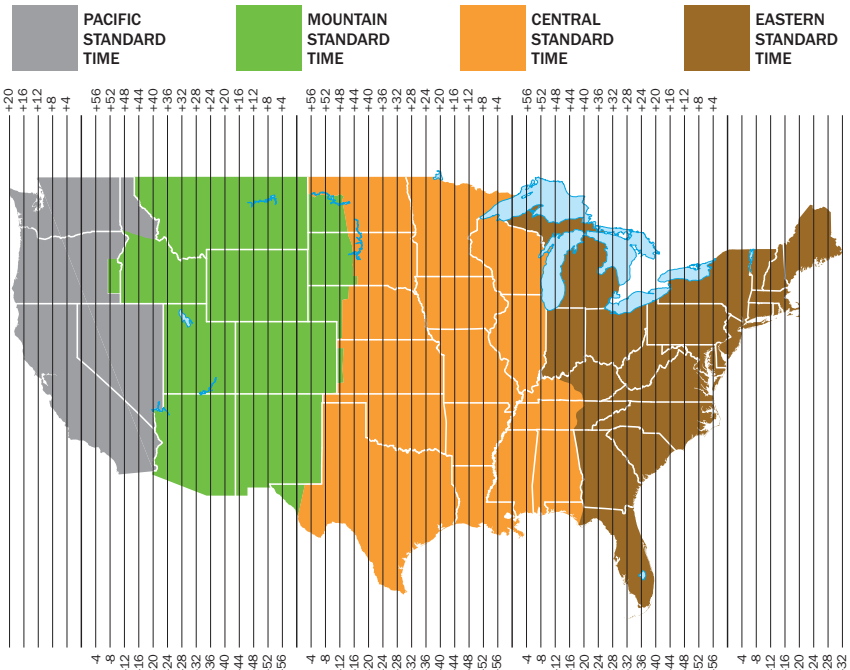
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# DECEMBER 2016 SOLUNAR TABLE



DEC. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases	DEC. Date	Day	AM Minor	AM Major	PM Minor	PM Major	Moon Phases
1	Thu	5:30	—:—	6:20	12:05		17	Sat	7:50	1:40	8:25	2:10	
2	Fri	6:40	12:30	7:15	1:00		18	Sun	8:45	2:35	9:15	3:00	
3	Sat	7:35	1:25	8:05	1:50		19	Mon	9:40	3:30	10:05	3:50	
4	Sun	8:30	2:20	9:00	2:45		20	Tue	10:30	4:20	11:00	4:45	
5	Mon	9:20	3:10	9:50	3:35		21	Wed	11:20	5:10	11:45	5:30	☾
6	Tue	10:15	4:05	10:45	4:30		22	Thu	—:—	5:50	12:05	6:10	
7	Wed	11:05	4:55	11:35	5:20	☾	23	Fri	12:25	6:30	12:40	6:50	
8	Thu	11:50	5:40	—:—	6:05		24	Sat	1:05	7:05	1:15	7:30	
9	Fri	12:20	6:30	12:40	6:55		25	Sun	1:45	7:45	1:55	8:10	
10	Sat	1:10	7:15	1:25	7:45		26	Mon	2:25	8:30	2:40	8:50	
11	Sun	2:00	8:10	2:20	8:35		27	Tue	3:05	9:10	3:20	9:35	
12	Mon	2:50	9:05	3:15	9:35		28	Wed	3:50	10:05	4:15	10:20	
13	Tue	3:50	10:00	4:10	10:30		29	Thu	4:35	10:40	4:50	11:05	●
14	Wed	4:45	11:00	5:10	11:25	☽	30	Fri	5:20	11:35	5:45	—:—	
15	Thu	5:40	—:—	6:15	12:00		31	Sat	6:15	12:05	6:45	12:30	
16	Fri	6:45	12:35	7:20	1:05								

SOLUNAR TABLES® are designed to forecast the daily active feeding periods of fish. They are formulated from the position of the earth in relation to the sun and moon.

The major periods last for approximately 2 to 3 1/2 hours, and the minor periods last for approximately 3/4 to 1 1/2 hours. To determine the start of major and minor times for your area, find the bold time-zone rule on the map. If you are located in the area left of the time-zone rule, add the number (in minutes) at the top to the corresponding time on the chart. If you are located in the area right of the time-zone rule, subtract the number (in minutes) at the bottom from the corresponding time on the chart. Add one hour to all times during daylight saving time.

NEWS AND NOTES FROM AROUND THE LAKE

# LIVEWELL



## WHAT'S INSIDE

- HARD WORK PAYING OFF FOR COLSON IN HIS LIFE AND CAREER
- BRYAN THRIFT AND SKATEBOARDING LEGEND TONY HAWK GONE FISHING?
- HOW TO TIE THE SIMPLEST KNOT FOR CONNECTING LEADERS

PHOTO BY DJW, REED II

# MEET THE JOHNSTON BROS.



**CHRIS JOHNSTON**  
AGE: 27



**CORY JOHNSTON**  
AGE: 31



## OH BROTHER

Surely by now you've heard about the Johnston brothers, haven't you? That's Cory (the older of the two) and Chris, the brothers from Ontario who have been dominating the Costa FLW Series Northern Division for several years and who more recently came to the States and fished their rookie seasons on the Walmart FLW Tour with big results. Check them out.

## NORTHERN DIVISION DOMINANCE

The brothers have combined for eight top-10 finishes in the AOY rankings in the Costa FLW Series Northern Division.



\*Cory established a Costa FLW Series benchmark this season with his third Northern Division AOY title.

## 2016 WALMART FLW TOUR AOY FINISH

## FLW WINS

**YEAR 1**

**CHRIS - 2ND PLACE**

**CHRIS - 0**

**CORY - 29TH PLACE**

**CORY - 3**



The Johnstons are used to fishing as partners in team tournaments in Canada, but they also work together on Tour, splitting expenses and earnings and sharing information. It's a unique arrangement in professional bass fishing. The brothers elaborated on their working relationship in a recent FLWFishing.com article:

"Most anglers help each other out and talk, but you never fully know if someone is leading you on

a wild goose chase," says Chris. "With Cory and I, we share everything, and we know the information is accurate. Whether it's in practice or the homework we do before an event, that honest communication is a huge help."

"I know I can always trust him and what he finds," echoes Cory. "If he goes into an area in practice, I know it's checked thoroughly. I don't have to waste time checking it. And vice versa."



The brothers are tied with 13 top-10 finishes apiece in FLW tournaments. They've been fishing with FLW since 2009.

### A FORREST WOOD CUP TOP 10

Chris got the better of big brother at the 2016 Cup - the first ever for either of them. He finished eighth, while Cory ended up in last place.



**\$506,298**

Combined career FLW earnings for the Johnston brothers. For the record, Cory leads his brother in career earnings by about \$90,000.

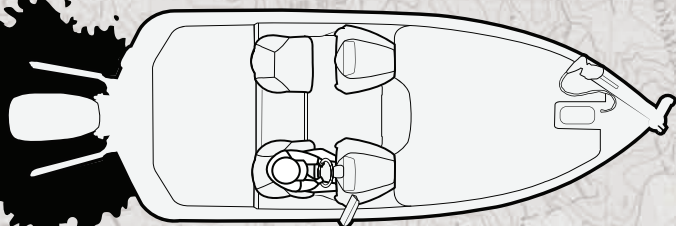


### CHRIS' ROOKIE ACCOLADES

- 2016 Rookie of the Year
- 2016 Ranger Cup winner

## THE .01-POUND RANGER

Fishing as a two-angler team, the Johnston brothers won the spring 2015 edition of the Sturgeon Bay Open Bass Tournament, which is sort of like the big kickoff to the tournament season up north. Their two six-fish limits weighed in at 55.75 pounds, which was just .01 pound better than second place. The prize package included a new Ranger.



## T-H MARINE BECOMES BFL TITLE SPONSOR FOR 2017

**FLW** recently announced a sponsorship renewal with T-H Marine for the 2017 season. As part of the agreement, T-H Marine will become the title sponsor of FLW's most popular tournament circuit, the Bass Fishing League. Based in Alabama, T-H Marine manufactures boating and fishing equipment, tools and accessories.

"T-H Marine is very happy that we are renewing and growing our sponsorship of FLW," says T-H Marine CEO Jeff Huntley. "FLW anglers cover the entire spectrum, from recreational weekend fishermen to elite professionals. We are very proud to be plugged into the foundation of bass fishing as the new title sponsor of the T-H Marine Bass Fishing League."



## FLW CANADA, FLW CHINA WRAP UP 2016 SEASON

**T**he first full season of FLW's International Division competition wrapped up in early fall, in time to qualify the International Division representatives to the Costa FLW Series Championship in November. By press time, results had come in for FLW Canada and FLW China.

The Canadian circuit actually produced its 2016 FLW Series Championship qualifiers at a championship event held in 2015. Its recent 2016 champions will compete in the 2017 FLW Series Championship on Kentucky Lake.



Held on Big Rideau Lake near Rideau Ferry, Ontario, Sept. 16-18, the FLW Canadian Championship was won by teen anglers Cooper Gallant and Danny McGarry (above) by a margin of less than a pound.

According to an FLWFishing.com web story filed by Limitfish Media, Gallant and McGarry spent a week camping in a truck as they prepared for and competed in the tournament. The sacrifice paid off, as the young guns uncovered the winning pattern of using their electronics to fish vertically for smallmouths over 40 feet of water. Their three-day total of 56.71 pounds earned a five-figure payday, in addition to the FLW Series Championship berth.

Across the world in China, the team of Xu, Jue Fei and Xu, Jun won the inaugural FLW China Championship thanks to a kicker bite 15 minutes prior to the tournament's finish. That fish boosted the team's total to 9.38 kg. The winning anglers earned a valuable prize package that included a Lowrance depth finder, rods, gift cards, rain gear and RMB 15,000, which converts to about 2,230 USD.

For more detailed information, visit [FLWCanada.com](http://FLWCanada.com) and [FLWChina.com](http://FLWChina.com).

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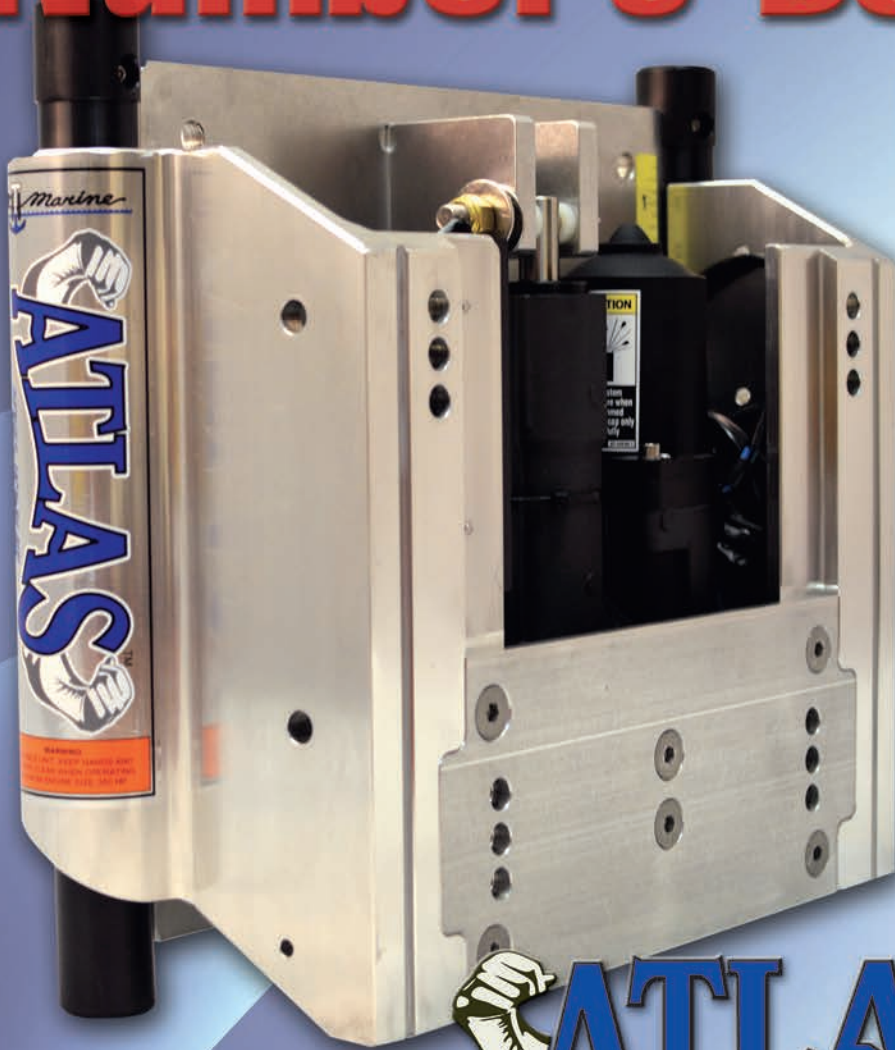
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# MATCHUPS



## WHO IS THE BEST DOCK SKIPPER ALIVE?

**BT:** Andy Montgomery. I think he is so good at it because that's all he does.

## WAS THERE MORE PRESSURE AT THE WALMART FLW TOUR INVITATIONAL AT NORMAN, BEING A LOCAL FAVORITE?

**BT:** Surprisingly, no. I felt really relaxed and calm for some reason.

## FISHING, HUNTING OR SOMETHING ELSE IN THE OFF-SEASON?

**BT:** I fish as much as I can during the off-season. I fish local tournaments, work trade shows and spend time with my family.

## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO FLY-CAST?

**BT:** I haven't ever tried it and really never had the desire to do it.

## IF YOU COULD TAKE ONE FAMOUS ATHLETE FISHING, WHO WOULD IT BE?

**BT:** Tony Hawk. I used to be into skateboarding when I was younger.

## HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FISHED YOUR FIRST TOURNAMENT?

**BT:** I had to be around 16 or 17, and it was a small club tournament.

## WHAT'S YOUR FIRST FISHING MEMORY?

**BT:** I was 6 or 7, and my dad, Tommy, took my cousin, Curtis, and me down to the creek to fish for catfish. He was so worried about us falling in, and he ended up falling in himself.

## WHAT'S THE STRANGEST THING YOU HAVE EVER CAUGHT?

**BT:** A rod and reel combo.

Bryan

# THRIFT

Shelby, N.C.

# COMPARING AND CONTRASTING TOP FLW ANGLERS

by Tyler Brinks  
PHOTOS BY D.W. REED II

## WHO IS THE BEST DOCK SKIPPER ALIVE?

**TA:** Andy Montgomery. I've seen him do it many times, and nobody is better at it.

## WAS THERE MORE PRESSURE AT THE WALMART FLW TOUR INVITATIONAL AT NORMAN, BEING A LOCAL FAVORITE?

**TA:** Yes and no. I had more spectators following me than normal.

## FISHING, HUNTING OR SOMETHING ELSE IN THE OFF-SEASON?

**TA:** I like to fish for stripers at Lake Murray, Wateree or Norman. That, or head to the coast and fish for flounder, drum and speckled trout.

## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO FLY-CAST?

**TA:** I messed around with it some when my brother, Greg, got one (a fly rod) years ago.

## IF YOU COULD TAKE ONE FAMOUS ATHLETE FISHING, WHO WOULD IT BE?

**TA:** Cam Newton. He seems like a very uplifting guy, and we would have fun.

## HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU FISHED YOUR FIRST TOURNAMENT?

**TA:** It was a draw tournament on Lake Wylie, and I was 15 years old.

## WHAT'S YOUR FIRST FISHING MEMORY?

**TA:** Fishing with my dad, Clyde. We used to fish off of the docks, and he would always fish for catfish and I would fish for bass.

## WHAT'S THE STRANGEST THING YOU HAVE EVER CAUGHT?

**TA:** A scuba diver. I didn't actually hook him, but my line got wrapped around his tank. We were fishing Beaver Lake and saw some bubbles and thought it was fish busting. ■



Todd

# AUTEN

Lake Wylie, S.C.

# ASK THE EXPERTS

## BRIDGE BASICS

**Q.** Any tips on winter bridge fishing?

**A.** Tracy Adams, Wilkesboro, N.C. –  
For starters, I like cranking the riprap on the banks. My go-to crankbait this time of year is a Rapala Shad Rap – one that dives about 6 feet deep. I cast parallel to the bank, keeping it close enough that it bounces off the rocks.

If that doesn't produce, I will back off the bank a bit and throw a Megabass Vision 110 jerkbait for suspended fish. If the fish aren't around the rocks, my next stop is bridge pilings, and I will work the jerkbait around them for a while.

If all else fails, I like to try a drop-shot, shaky-head jig or umbrella rig on the pilings, focusing especially on the corners.



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

**Q.** JIGGING SEASON  
What are your favorite wintertime jigging baits?

**A.** Terry Bolton, Paducah, Ky. –  
In winter, I use three types: Rapala Jigging Raps, traditional jigging spoons and blade baits such as a Reef Runner Cicada or Silver Buddy. The Jigging Rap, however, is my favorite among those. In my experience, it's most effective in 20- to 30-foot depths when bait is schooled along sheer drop-offs and vertical structure. It provides more action and glide compared to traditional spoons. It's versatile, too. You can fish it straight up and down, or cast it out and rip it back to the boat with a lift-and-drop retrieve. I like black/silver and chartreuse/white in No. 9 (7/8 ounce) and No. 7 (5/8 ounce) sizes.

**Q.** JERKBAIT SHADES  
How do you select jerkbait colors? Any favorites?

**A.** Zack Birge, Blanchard, Okla. –  
As a general rule, I select the most natural color I can for the body of water I am fishing, based on the baitfish. In my experience, darker hues work best in stained water while lighter ones seem to work best in clear water. I really like the 6th Sense Provoke series of jerkbaits, and I have two favorite colors: copper green shad for stained water and shad scream everywhere else. ■

**Q.** DIGITAL PREPARATION  
How do you conduct lake studies heading into a new tournament season?

**A.** Randy Blaukat, Joplin, Mo. –  
A lot of it depends upon my familiarity with the body of water. If it is one where I have past experience, I look for current information on four primary water conditions: temperature, level, clarity and changes in cover. Once I find out those four things, I can establish an approach for the event.

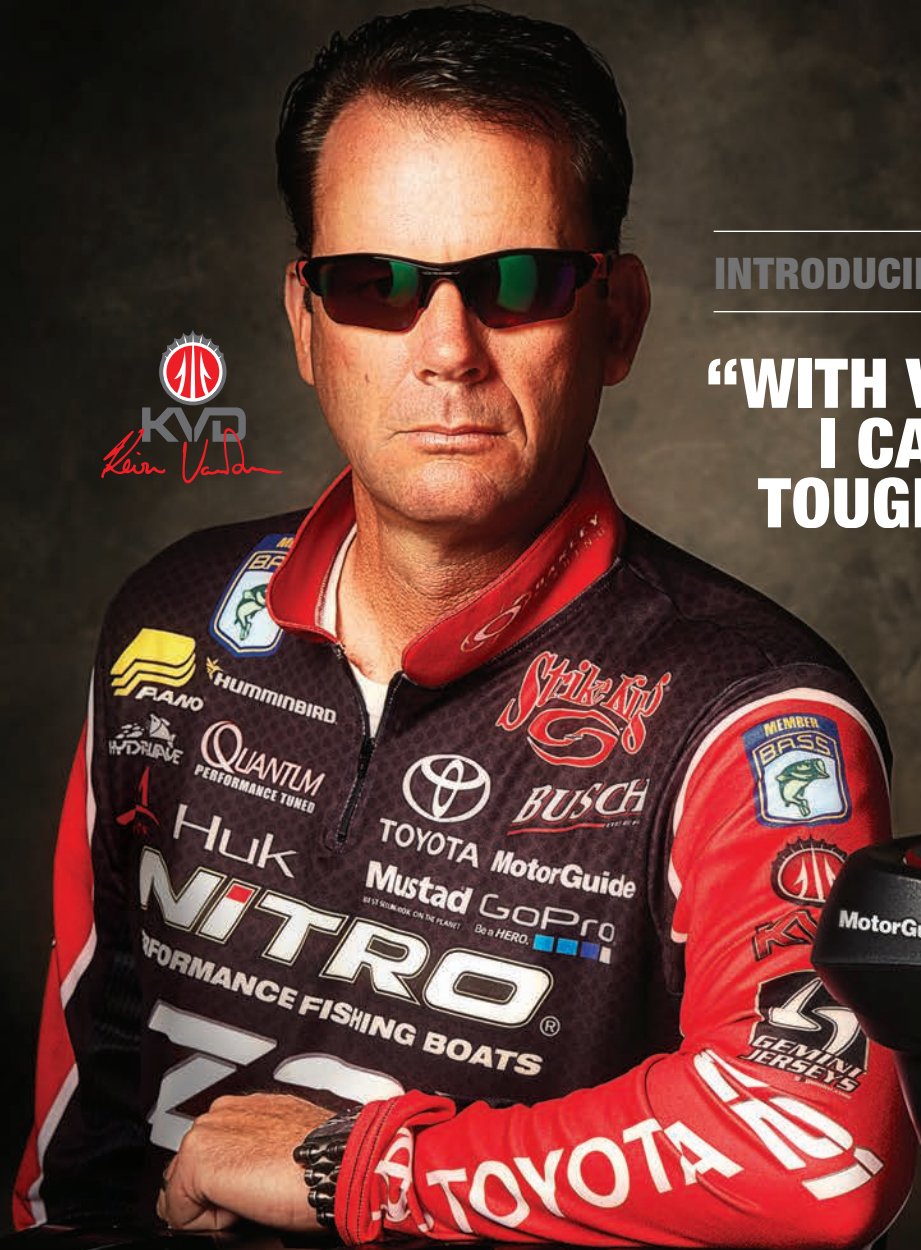
If I am going to a new body of water, the first thing I do is check out Google Earth and get a visual for how it lays out. Google Earth has really transformed tournament preparation as it lets you pre-fish from your laptop in the comfort of your own home. I also conduct some basic Internet research on past tournament weights, techniques and other relevant information, in addition to current conditions.

Ask the Experts is compiled by Paul Strege. If you have a question that you'd like answered, email it to [questions@flwfishing.com](mailto:questions@flwfishing.com).



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# ASK A BIOLOGIST

## BASS RANGES

by Dr. Steven Cooke

**A** When gauged across the knowledge we have on home ranges of many fish species, the best answer to that question is “small.”

Bass generally have much smaller home ranges than many other fish species, including other freshwater fishes such as trout, walleyes and northern pike. Largemouth bass in particular have some of the smallest home ranges known for fish of their size. If the conditions are right, a largemouth bass might spend its entire summer within several meters of a single log, dock or grass bed. Smallmouth bass generally have larger home ranges than largemouths, but they are still relative “home bodies.”

That’s not to say bass don’t move. Largemouths and smallmouths might move long distances seasonally, and we’ve documented groups of bass moving many miles from their summer ranges to wintering locations across many different bodies of water. This isn’t necessarily the same thing as a “home range” though,

because once set up in their wintering areas, bass commonly aggregate in very precise locations for the duration of winter.

From a regional perspective, there has also been research suggesting that the farther north one goes in the bass range, individual home ranges become even smaller and more concentrated, at least during the winter. We’ve located wintering holes in Canada in which hundreds and even thousands of bass packed tightly into tiny areas to wait out the cold season.

Unfortunately, the reasons for this are little known, but there are likely many micro factors involved, including oxygen level, temperature, food abundance and even possibly genetics.

Regarding home ranges, and wintering holes in particular, bass often use the same ones each winter, and some have been in use far longer than we’ve been in place to study them. ■

How big  
are bass  
home  
ranges?



### Meet Our Expert

Dr. Steven Cooke is an associate professor and Canada research chair of environmental science and biology at Carleton University.

**Fishing Tip:** Finding a major wintering hole is like striking gold, since the fish return each season. Yet, it’s not only a good find for winter fishing success. Use it as a starting point for the spring transition toward spawning areas by locating the nearest mid-depth structure or cover between the wintering hole and shallow flats. These are areas where bass will move during the prespawn. Now look ahead toward the shallows to areas with the proper spawning substrate and you can connect the dots once the weather breaks and spring arrives.

TJ Maglio produces the Ask a Biologist department. If you have a question you’d like to have answered by a fisheries expert, please email it to TJ at [info@flwfishing.com](mailto:info@flwfishing.com).

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# ANGLER PROFILE

GOING ON THE RECORD WITH NOTABLE FLW FISHERMEN



# RAMIE COLSON JR.

KENTUCKY PRO'S LIFE MOVES AT THE PERFECT PACE, ON AND OFF THE WATER

by Colin Moore

PHOTOS BY D. W. REED II

**G**ranny's Kountry Kitchen is on the right side of Highway 68 where it crests a long winding hill that begins near the entrance road to Lake Barkley Lodge and tops out a couple of miles from the city limits of Cadiz, Ky. Granny's serves the general purpose of being a gas station, convenience store, dry goods emporium, restaurant and neighborhood gathering place – a common arrangement in these parts.

Most mornings, not counting Sundays, a band of the local yeomanry is ensconced at Granny's, sitting around tables with their hands wrapped around coffee cups while they discuss the latest happenings. Their gathering is not so much a coincidence as it is a tradition in the time-honored fashion that small-town citizens express their views and clarify the world and its ways for each other.

Depending on the season, the main topics of such forums at Granny's include politics, basketball, hunting and fishing. The languid pace of the discussion is interrupted by comings and goings, with speakers chiming in in varying sorghum thicknesses of Kentucky twang when something germane to the subject occurs to them.

The tempo suits Ramie Colson Jr., who is likely to be there if circumstances allow, having been initiated into the ranks some

years ago. He is at home in such company. His presence both defines him as an individual and suggests why he's been one of the more consistent anglers in the Walmart FLW Tour ranks. Colson is a grinder who, like the conversation at Granny's, most often progresses at an unhurried, deliberate pace.

As Forrest Gumpish as it sounds, working with concrete is like fishing for bass. At least Colson sees the comparisons, and he's made a lot of money doing both. When he's not fishing in FLW Tour events, the burly Kentuckian is likely to be found helping his father in their concrete finishing business. Once the concrete is poured, it's "finished" in a series of stages that can't be rushed or skipped, until the slab is perfectly formed and harder than a tournament director's heart.

Colson's fishing style, too, can be maddeningly slow and painstakingly methodical. More often than not it involves picking cover apart, and he came by his skills honestly. Growing up near Kentucky and Barkley lakes as he did, where sinking Christmas trees and brush in not-so-secret spots is commonplace, the 12-year FLW pro has developed a knack for knowing the best places to plant fish-attracting cover. More importantly, perhaps, in the process of cultivating his home waters he's also learned how to identify such bass magnets in the lakes on the Tour schedule.



Granny's is ground zero not only for a hearty breakfast, but also for bragging about recent forays into the outdoors. Here, Colson shows off some trail cam photos to Randy Hefner (center) of Taylorsville, N.C., and local celebrity Harold Knight of Knight & Hale Game Calls.

## Highs and Lows

Most FLW Tour pros could be classified as 1.) ledge fishermen, 2.) shallow-water fishermen or 3.) a combination of both. If you were to pattern him, the 49-year-old Colson could be typified as a fourth type: a deep-water wood cover specialist. The 2015 Forrest Wood Cup, where he finished runner-up to Brad Knight at Lake Ouachita, provides an example of the good things that can happen when Colson is on his game. That was a high point of his career, followed by a low point. He failed to qualify for the Cup in 2016, and finished 101st in the rankings.

As the 2016 season proved, part of what makes Colson so effective as a fisherman also can work against him. He's a plodder who will bang away at a spot if he thinks it's worth mining. By his own admission he often struggles with the answer to that question every tournament angler is confronted with at some point in an event: Should I stay, or should I go? In Colson's case, it's usually the former choice. If he catches one solid keeper from a shallow bar, he might spend hours fishing it without another decent bite.

"I've always been a slow fisherman. If I catch one fish in an area I'm going to try to take it apart," confesses Colson. "Andy Morgan can go into the same place and tell within 15 minutes what kind of fish are in there and if he needs to stay. I can't do that yet. You take somebody like Andy or Bryan Thrift and they're going to put a pattern together in one day that works over the whole lake. I know that a lot of times I get too locked in. Sometimes I'd be better off moving around more, but that comes when you have more confidence in doing other things than what your main strengths are."

Colson's 2015 Tour campaign turned out to be his most lucrative yet. Counting the \$60,000 he won at the Cup, the Kentucky pro collected almost \$100,000 in prize money. For him, though, the bitter was mixed with the sweet. His mother, Ulonda, who had been incapacitated by a stroke a number of years ago, died the week before the Lake Eufaula event. Despite a lack of practice, and with the help of such "scouts" as Morgan to provide some general information about the lake, the universally liked Colson was able to finish 18th.

"Momma was my biggest fan," recalls Colson. "Even after her stroke, if I came back from a tournament where I didn't do well she'd always know. She'd give me that look like she was saying 'you're going to have to do better than that,' and I'd get the message. Dad and my aunt and uncle were able to bring her to the final weigh-in of the FLW Series Eastern Division tournament that I won on Wheeler Lake in 2008. That was a great day."

A great day, perhaps, but not the greatest. When asked by emcee Jason Harper if being in position to win the 2011 Tour event at Kentucky Lake was his best day ever, Colson matter-of-factly told him that, no, the greatest moment of his life occurred the day his son, Douglas, then 11, spontaneously announced that he wanted to be baptized. Such reflection comes earnestly and easily for Colson, whose faith is understated, but nevertheless built on solid rock.

## Faith in the Future

When he was Douglas' age, Ramie had aspirations to join the Kentucky State Police, but his interest in competing in tournaments eventually won him over after a year and a half of college. Ramie, usually with his father as partner, fished local events at first and eventually stepped up to what was then the Red Man circuit. It became the FLW Bass Fishing



Colson's professional career doesn't end at the water. He's also a full-time concrete finisher.

League, where Ramie befriended and competed against such up-and-comers as Morgan, Terry Bolton and Dan Morehead.

Now Douglas, 18, is considering a career as a tournament fisherman. His mother, April, and Ramie encourage his aspirations, but also caution him that a lot of hard work is in his future.

"My mom and dad instilled good work ethics in my brother and me," says Ramie. "They worked hard, and nothing was given to them. It was the same with us. We were taught that if you wanted something, you had to work for it. I think a lot of tournament fishermen were raised that way. That's one thing we all have in common. If you don't think that way, you're not going to stick around very long."

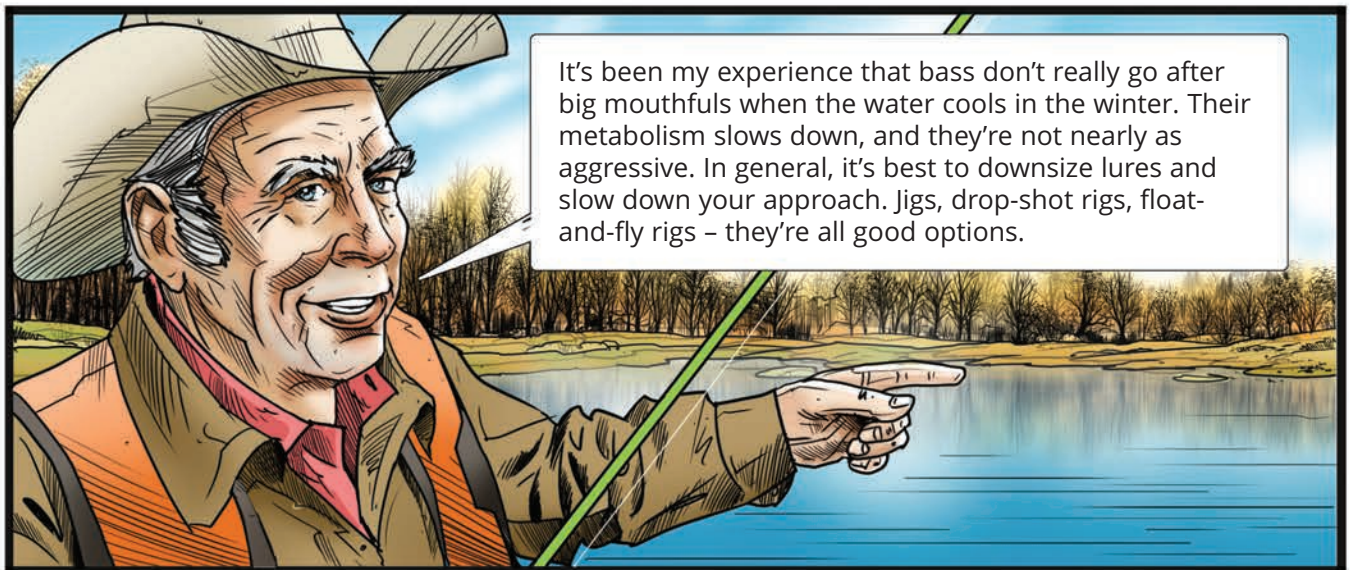
Ramie plans to stick around a long time. Just as he is patient with bass, he also is patient with his career, and confident that as long as he works hard and learns from every tournament – even the bad ones – his best days are ahead.

But there's no timetable, no schedule for him to meet. He's in no hurry. ■



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# ESSENTIAL SKILLS

## FISHING 101

by TJ Maglio

### How to Tie A Leader to Braid

**B**raided superlines have a lot of benefits, but the upside comes with two big caveats: Braided line is too visible for clear water or high-pressure situations, and it's tough to break if the lure snags.

The compromise is to attach a monofilament or fluorocarbon leader. Several knots accomplish the task, but Quaker State pro Matt Arey prefers a double uni-knot. Arey recommends a 6- to 10-foot leader, which is long enough to retie baits several times each day without having to replace the entire leader.

Here's how he ties it.

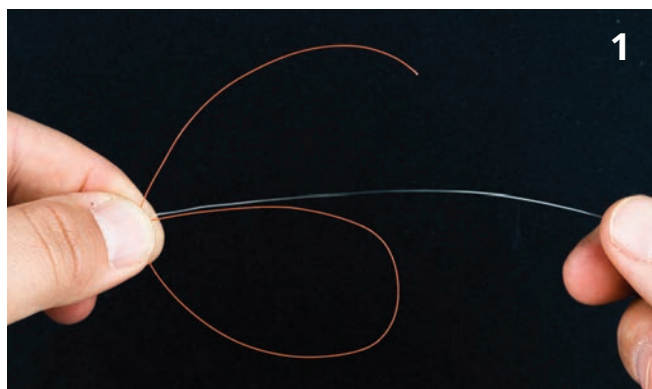
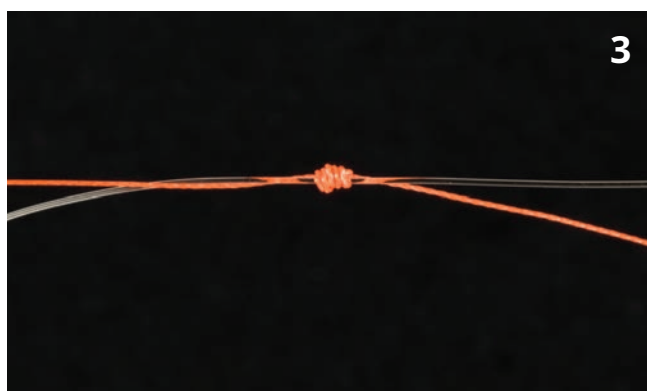
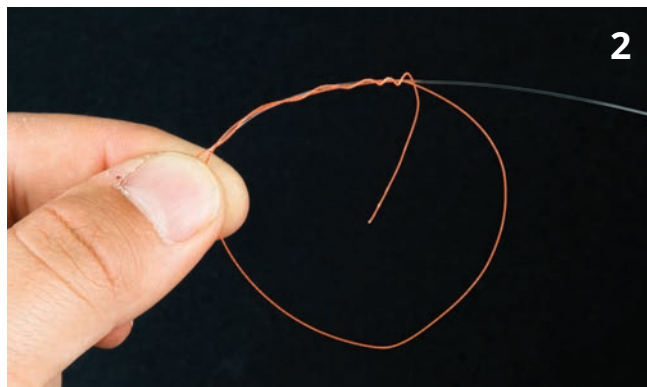
1. Overlap the two lines by about 6 to 8 inches and then double back the braid, creating a loop. (You can start with either line.)

2. Wrap the tag end of the braid around the leader and the standing part of the braided main line about six times, passing through the loop formed in the previous step with each wrap.

3. Lubricate with saliva, and slowly pull the tag end of the braid until the wraps draw together, but do not cinch it down all the way.

4. Repeat the process with the leader around the standing part of the braid.

5. Lubricate both sets of wraps, and slowly slide them together. Tighten by pulling the tag ends in opposite directions, then gently pulling the standing lines in opposite directions. Trim the tag ends to finish the knot. ■



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# BUYER'S GUIDE 2017

## New Tackle for a New Season

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If you don't like new gear, then you might not be a bass angler. Fact is, fishing is a gear-intensive sport, and folks are always looking for something – rod, reel, tackle, line or otherwise – that will take their fishing to another level.

For the upcoming 2017 season, FLW has produced its annual Buyer's Guide to be as close to a complete recap of the new products released at ICAST 2016 as possible.

The following pages serve as a first introduction to what's new, along with a few bits and pieces of buying advice. For more in-depth evaluation and understanding of how to choose the right gear, check back in the pages of *FLW Bass Fishing* or at [FLWFishing.com](http://FLWFishing.com) throughout 2017 for follow-up reviews and advice.

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*Information compiled by:  
Curtis Niedermier, Colin Moore,  
David A. Brown, Tyler Brinks  
and Keith Jackson*

# HARD BAIT

## TOPWATER

### 1. ima Finesse Popper

This downsized version of the common popper is for tough fishing conditions and when small baitfish are present. It can be fished on a spinning rod and will walk and pop. \$9.99  
[imalures.com](http://imalures.com)

### 2. Jenko Flea Bag 110

Here's a pretty standard walk-the-dog topwater bait that's made to be easy to work. \$7.99  
[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)

### 3. Old School Balsa Baits Wesley Strader's Old School "W" Dog

The bent body shape helps it bob up and down while walking. \$13.99  
[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)

### 4. Lucky Craft Super Sammy 10lb

This upsized version of the popular Sammy walking bait features three treble hooks. It measures 5 1/3 inches and weighs 1 ounce. \$9.99  
[luckycraft.com](http://luckycraft.com)

### 5. Jenko J-Pop 90

This large popper spits as it pops and features a flow-through water chamber that adds a unique sound. \$8.99  
[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)

### 6. Megabass Dog-X Diamante

Made for hard side-to-side action, the Dog-X Diamante is intended for covering water at a high speed. \$19.99  
[megabasusa.com](http://megabasusa.com)



**"V-HULL" TOPWATERS**

The overall shape and surfaces of a topwater bait not only affect the profile and the lure's ability to mimic prey, but also how the bait acts in the water. Take, for instance, the V-shaped belly design used on this pair of new topwater baits.

The **6th Sense SplashBack** popper (\$12.99; 6thsenselures.com) features a V keel that helps it to cut through water as you work it. A large open mouth spits more water than other poppers of its size. Since it also has flat sides, the SplashBack can easily move side to side and "walk the dog" like more traditional walking baits. It comes in 70mm and 90mm sizes.

**Rapala's** V-bellied intro is the new **Skitter V** (\$9.49; rapala.com), a walking topwater. The shape is said to help it quickly cut left to right when walked with snappy rod movements. It's 4 inches long.



**3 UNIQUE TOPWATER DESIGNS**

**1. Lunkerhunt Link**

Available in two sizes, 4.5 inches and 6.75 inches, the Link is two topwater baits in one. The body segments are joined together on end with a through wire and offer a unique walking action that mimics two chasing or fleeing baitfish.

\$12.99 or \$13.99

[lunkerhunt.com](http://lunkerhunt.com)



**2. Bill Lewis StutterStep**

Walk it in place, walk it violently with lots of splash, wake it, turn it 180, or wag it with a high-speed twitch-and-reel retrieve. This topwater bait provides plenty of options in a large 5-inch profile. The curved belly and tail are the keys to its versatility. \$13.99

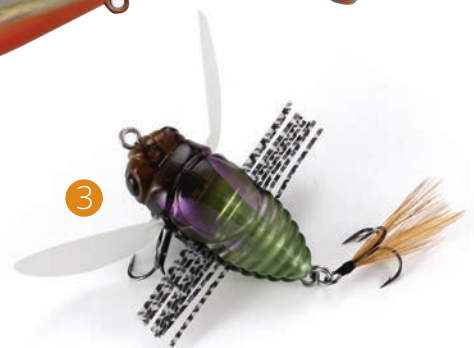
[rat-l-trap.com](http://rat-l-trap.com)



**3. DUO Realis Shinmushi**

This bite-sized 1 5/8-inch topwater imitates a cicada, thanks to flexible rubber wings and silicone skirt strand "appendages." The lure comes apart for customizing or replacing the wings and skirt. In action, the lure wobbles on a straight retrieve to mimic a dying bug. \$13.99

[duo-international.com](http://duo-international.com)



## WAKE BAITS

### 1. Megabass i-LOUD

A body joint that knocks as the bait moves, a rear prop for flash and splash, and a bill that helps it wobble characterize the i-LOUD wake bait. \$29.99

[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)



### 2. PH Custom Lures Wake Up

The Wake Up is a new take on an old favorite that was once made by Buckeye Lures. Its long, slender body is made of balsa. The circuit-board lip keeps it wobbling on a slow retrieve. \$20.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)



### 3. Old School Baits Wesley's Vee "W" Wake Bait

A jerkbait-shaped wake bait, the Vee "W" will roll side to side and still wobble on the retrieve. \$14.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)



### 4. Megabass Funky Flipper

This 2 1/3-inch wake bait can be fished from the surface down to 6 inches. The front treble hook is attached without a split ring, which allows for a larger hook and less fouling. \$19.99

[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)



### 3 WAYS TO ADJUST WAKE BAIT ACTION

Wake baits wake on the surface. Well, maybe it's not so simple.

Most wake baits can be fished within a depth range that spans from the surface down to a foot or two deep. There are three ways to adjust the presentation.

#### 1. Speed

Generally, a faster retrieve causes the bait to dig in deeper.

#### 2. Rod tip height

Adjust the angle of the line to the bait to adjust its depth by lifting the rod tip higher for shallower and lowering it for deeper.

#### 3. Line type/size

Heavier, thicker lines have more drag in the water and might help keep a wake bait up on the surface, and vice versa. Also, if you want a wake bait to dive a bit deeper, try fishing it on fluorocarbon, which sinks.

## SQUARE-BILL CRANKBAITS

### 1. 6th Sense Movement L7

The 6-foot-diving Movement L7 hunts left to right in an S-shaped pattern as it's retrieved. It's also highly buoyant so it will easily deflect and float out of snags. \$9.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)

### 2. 6th Sense Cloud 9 Magnum

This extra-large square-bill crankbait comes in at 1 1/2 ounce and just a tad over 4 inches long. It will dive down 6 to 11 feet. \$10.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)

### 3. Lucky Craft Fat CB BDS6

The CB BDS6 is a large-profile square-bill at 3 3/4 inches and 1 1/2 ounce. It's a silent bait made of plastic that was built to have the same properties as a balsa crankbait. \$13.99

[luckycraft.com](http://luckycraft.com)

### 4. Megabass Knuckle LD

Adapted from the original Knuckle square-bill crankbait, the LD is fitted with a circuit board lip. It's silent with a swivel for the front hook hanger. \$19.99

[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)

### 5. PH Custom Lures Tiny Hunter Square Bill

Hand-tuned before it's packaged, the Tiny Hunter's fat body is only 2 inches long. It dives zero to 4 feet. \$22.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)



## SWIMBAITS

### 1. Castaic BD Glide 8

At 7 1/2 inches long and slightly smaller in profile than other similar lures, the BD Glide is a good budget-priced glide bait option. \$29.99

[castaicswimbait.com](http://castaicswimbait.com)

### 2. Duel Hardcore Ninja Twitch'n Glider

This 7-inch glide bait weighs 2 5/8 ounces and features stout components meant to handle big fish. It's made from a durable polycarbonate material. \$39.99

[yo-zuri.com/products/#duel\\_products](http://yo-zuri.com/products/#duel_products)





### 3. PH Lures "W" Gilde

PH builds the "W" Glide from a resin material that has similar buoyancy compared to wood. It's 7 inches long, weighs 2 3/4 ounces and sinks at a rate of 6 inches per second. \$90

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)

### 4. Lucky Craft REAL BG 165S

Here's a larger and improved (it now features a swiveling treble hook) version of Lucky Craft's Real Bluegill swimbait. \$19.99

[luckycraft.com](http://luckycraft.com)



### 5. Jenko JenkoListic Swim Bait

This jointed swimbait features five segments for a realistic swimming action. It comes in 6-, 7- and 8-inch sizes and emits a loud knocking sound. \$15.99 to \$19.99

[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)



### 6. 6th Sense Speed Glide 100 Swimbait

Though only 4 inches long, the Speed Glide weighs 7/8 ounce so it can be bombed a mile for covering water. \$12.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)



## WHAT MAKES A GLIDE BAIT A GLIDE BAIT

A glide bait looks like any other jointed hard-bodied swimbait, but the difference is in the way it swims. Glide baits tend to amble along in a somewhat S-shaped pattern. Many "standard" jointed swimbaits will wobble during the retrieve, but they track a straight line.

Glide baits also traditionally sink slowly when paused, can be twitched to turn 180 degrees and are effective when fished with a combination reeling/twitching retrieve. Detailed paint jobs are a plus, since glide baits are "visual" baits that bass locate by sight.

The visual aspect is a glide bait's biggest strength and downfall. Strength because a glide bait is subtle and natural, downfall because it's not ideal in dirty water and because bass tend to track a glide, bait but sometimes seem reluctant to bite. A quick twitch, jerk or pause can tempt them, but not always. For that reason, many tournament anglers prefer to use glide baits to locate fish in practice by getting them to follow or show themselves. The anglers later return during the tournament and fish another bait that's more likely to get bit.



**7. Jackall Gantia 180**

Jackall designed the 7-inch Gantia 180 to be retrieved very quickly without rolling. It can also be made to turn side to side if twitched. It features an extra eyelet that can be used to attach a weight and adjust the buoyancy. \$37.99

[jackall-lures.com](http://jackall-lures.com)



**8. Duel Hardcore Ninja Swimmer**

Similar to the Glider, but with a bill on its chin, the Swimmer can be waked just below the surface to 2 feet deep. \$39.99

[yo-zuri.com/products/#duel\\_products](http://yo-zuri.com/products/#duel_products)



**9. Madness Japan Balam 300**

The Balam 300 is a beast at 12 inches long and 6 1/2 ounces. It's designed to perform at a slow crawl or fast retrieve. \$160

[optimumbaits.com](http://optimumbaits.com)

**LIPLESS CRANKBAITS**

**1. Storm Arashi Vibe**

The Arashi Vibe is thin and is equipped with a "soft knock rattle." Both features are intended to create subtle vibration even at slow speeds for when the bite is tough. \$6.99

[stormlures.com](http://stormlures.com)

**2. ima Suspending Vibration**

This is a slightly larger version of ima's Rock-N-Vibe that can actually suspend and can be fished just above grass and other cover. \$9.99

[imalures.com](http://imalures.com)

**3. 6th Sense Quake**

Available in two sizes, 5/8 and 7/8 ounce, the Quake has a flat back design that is said to grab more water and increase the vibration, thump and feel as it is retrieved. \$8.99 to \$9.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)



## MIDDEPTH CRANKBAITS

### 1. PH Custom Lures Cyber Craw

The Cyber Craw backs up when paused to look like a crawfish swimming backward. It's made of balsa and with a circuit board lip that gets it down to 6 feet deep. \$22.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)

### 2. Livingston Lures Shredder 53

At 2 inches long, the Shredder has a diminutive profile, but it weighs 3/8 ounce for longer casts and dives down to 6 feet. \$7.99

[livingstonlures.com](http://livingstonlures.com)

### 3. PH Custom Lures Lil' Diver

This balsa bait will dive down to 6 feet deep with a hard thumping action. It's just 2 1/2 inches long and weighs 3/8 ounce. \$22.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)

### 4. PH Custom Lures Dollar Bill

A flat-sided balsa crank, the Dollar Bill will dive down into the 5- to 7-foot range with what PH calls a "medium vibration" for both warm- and cold-water cranking. \$22.99

[phcustomlures.com](http://phcustomlures.com)

### 5. Livingston Lures FlatMaster SQ

This flat-sided square-bill swims with a tight wobble, but with a hunting action. It dives down 4 feet. \$9.99

[livingstonlures.com](http://livingstonlures.com)

### 6. Livingston Lures Dive Master Jr. 8

It has the same body style and length (2.3 inches) as the Dive Master Jr. square-bill, but it gets down 8 to 10 feet deep. \$7.99

[livingstonlures.com](http://livingstonlures.com)

### 7. Livingston Lures Vapor 50

Though just 2 inches long, this coffin-billed crankbait weighs 3/8 ounce and will dive 10 feet deep with an aggressive hunting action. \$9.99

[livingstonlures.com](http://livingstonlures.com)



## DEEP CRANKBAITS

### 1. DUO Realis Deep Crank G87 15A

This G87 15A dives quickly to 16 feet because it weighs 1 1/4 ounce and features a unique casting weight that's mounted in its own chamber outside the main body chamber. The body shape is said to make it easier to retrieve. \$15.99

[duo-international.com](http://duo-international.com)

### 2. 6th Sense Cloud 9 Series

The series includes the C10, C15, C20 and C25, with the numbers indicating their average diving depths. Premium components and paint jobs finish out the package. \$8.99 to \$10.99

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)

### 3. Berkley Dredger

Available in five sizes, the Dredger was developed to get smaller baits to deeper diving depths. The largest model reaches 22 to 26 feet and is 3 1/4 inches long. \$8.95

[berkley-fishing.com](http://berkley-fishing.com)

### 4. Jenko Fishing CD20 and CD25

Jenko says these 20- and 25-foot divers can get deep without tiring out the angler. They're hand-painted and come with VMC hooks. \$9.99 and \$10.99

[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)

### 5. Mann's DL (Deep Ledge) Series

Premium treble hooks and 24 sharp new color patterns characterize this new lure family, which includes the DL15, DL20 and DL30. The DL30 features a patented lip that's slightly narrower but with a "kicker plate" bend that forces it to dive faster. \$10.99

[mannsbaits.com](http://mannsbaits.com)



## JERKBAITS

### 1. DUO Realis Jerkbait 120F

The new "F" model is a slow-floating version of the Jerkbait 120. The bait features a tall profile for extra flash. \$15.99

[duo-international.com](http://duo-international.com)

### 2. Megabass Kanata

This jumbo jerkbait is more than 6 inches long and weighs a full ounce. Its flat sides create flash and a wide, darting action. When paused, the front of the bait slowly rises. It dives 4 feet deep. \$24.99

[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)



## SPYBAITS

### 1. Storm Arashi Spinbait

Storm's Spinbait features a unique counter-rotating prop design, with a three-blade prop up front and a two-blade prop on back. \$7.99

[stormlures.com](http://stormlures.com)

### 2. Lucky Craft Screw Pointer 110

Lucky Craft upped its spybait game with a 4 1/3-inch, 5/8-ounce model designed to be fished on baitcasting gear. \$11.99 to \$12.99

[luckycraft.com](http://luckycraft.com)



## METAL BAITS

### Jenko Fishing 8-inch Sticky Spoon

For its Sticky Spook, Jenko attached an extra treble hook in the middle of the spoon blank using a swivel. \$14.99

[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)



## A TRIO OF NEW SPOONS FROM NICHOLS

From Nichols, the company that dropped the “magnum spoon” bomb on the fishing industry, comes a trio of new spoons for 2017. At 2 1/4 inches long and 1/2 ounce, the **Mojo Flutter Spoon** (\$6.99) is a compact option for casting and jigging. The **Ben Parker Wired Jigging Spoon** (\$8.99) and **Line Through Jigging Spoon** (\$8.99) are virtually identical in design — textured surfaces, 3 1/4 inches long, 2 1/4 ounces — except the Wired version is built with a fixed through-wire connecting hook to line tie, whereas the Line Through is free to slide up and down the line away from the hook. The latter is a nice touch for keeping hard-fighting bass hooked.

nicholslures.com



## SAVAGE GEAR'S NEWEST TOPWATER CRITTERS

Apparently the media was impressed with the idea of luring big bass with an innocent duckling during the 2016 ICAST New Product Showcase in Orlando, since the **Savage Gear Suicide Duck** was voted the best new hard bait.

Whether or not you're interested in imitating a baby duck doesn't really matter, because the Suicide Duck still has the potential to be a productive, albeit nontraditional topwater in your arsenal.

For starters, it's a large-profile bait that comes in a 4 1/4-inch, 1-ounce version and a 6-inch, 2 3/4-ounce version. A bit of feathers on each hook is a nice touch, while the option to remove the belly hook around heavy cover makes the bait a bit more versatile. Perhaps the most interesting feature, however, is the pair of dabbling feet. They're actually little props that are similar to the “plopping” prop of the now uber-popular Whopper Plopper. Fish it with a straight retrieve, or by ripping and twitching it. Price is \$16.99 for the small and \$19.99 for the large.

For a slightly different approach, there's the **3D Rat**, which is a jointed surface waker with a large bill and detachable/replaceable feet, arms and tail. It comes with two hook hangers on the belly and one on the back, providing options depending on the type of cover being fished. It also comes in two sizes: 7 3/4 inch, 1 ounce and 11 3/4 inch, 2 1/2 ounce. Price is \$19.99 for the small and \$24.99 for the large. Check them out at [savagegear-usa.com](http://savagegear-usa.com).



Some products are shown at their actual size, but not all. Refer to description for size details.

# SOFT PLASTICS



## 1. Luck-E-Strike Trickster 2

**First look:** The Trickster 2 is a wobbling Scrounger-type skirted swimming jig that comes packaged with a soft plastic. It has a flexible lip and a detachable hook that can be interchanged if desired.

**Size:** 1/4 and 3/4 ounce

**Colors:** 3

**Suggested retail:** \$5.95

[luck-e-strike.us](http://luck-e-strike.us)

## 2. Gene Larew Ned Rig Inch Worm

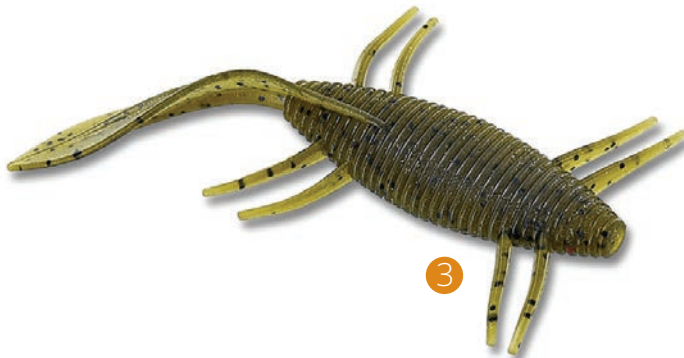
**First look:** The underside of the segmented body is serrated, while the top is ribbed. It ends with a unique sickle-shaped lower section with a small paddle tail. Use it with the tail, or tear it off for a more "traditional" Ned rig worm.

**Size:** 3 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$4.29 for seven

[genelarew.com](http://genelarew.com)



## 3. Gary Yamamoto Sanshou

**First look:** The Sanshou is sort of a salamander, sort of a generic creature bait. It has a ribbed, flattened body with antennae or legs sticking out fore and aft and a spear tail.

**Size:** 4 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$6.49 for six

[baits.com](http://baits.com)

## 4. Keitech Custom Leech

**First look:** Here's something different for drop-shot fans. Rig it "flat" to mimic a leech or "vertical" to mimic a small baitfish. The articulated body is designed to stand out horizontally at rest.

**Size:** 3 inches

**Colors:** 12

**Suggested retail:** \$4.99 for 10

[keitechusa.com](http://keitechusa.com)



## 5. YUM Genie

**First look:** Built for "magnum shaky head" fishing, this worm has a flapping tail, straight tapering body, round head and body segments.

**Size:** 7 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 13

**Suggested retail:** \$2.99 for eight

[yumbaits.com](http://yumbaits.com)

**6. Jackall Archelon**

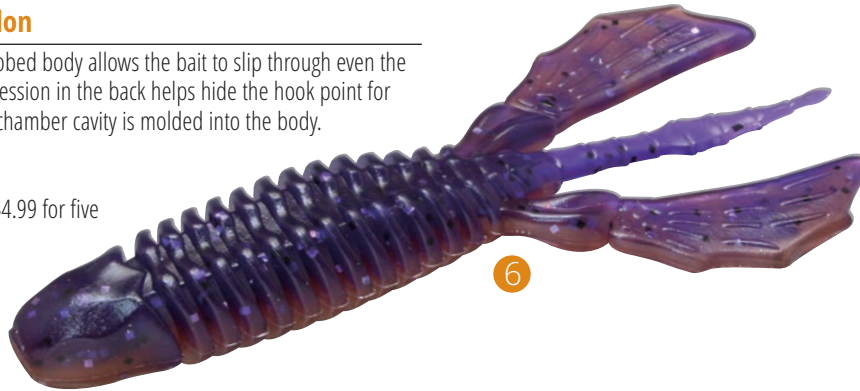
**First look:** A thin, ribbed body allows the bait to slip through even the heaviest cover. A depression in the back helps hide the hook point for Texas rigging. A rattle chamber cavity is molded into the body.

**Size:** 4 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$4.99 for five

[jackall-lures.com](http://jackall-lures.com)



**7. Keitech Crazy Flapper**

**First look:** When retrieved quickly or lifted with some dexterity, the claws flap like the arms of a college band drummer beating out his school's fight song. The claws flank two long antennae, and at the front there are two rear-facing paddles attached parallel with the body.

**Size:** 2.8, 3.6 and 4.4 inches

**Colors:** 22

**Suggested retail:** \$4.99 for eight of the 2.8-inch size; \$5.49 for seven of the 3.6-inch size; \$5.99 for six of the 4.4-inch size

[keitechusa.com](http://keitechusa.com)



**8. Missile Baits Craw Father**

**First look:** The segmented, tapering body has two swimming claws up front that are designed for maximum action no matter how it's rigged or used as a trailer.

**Size:** 3 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$4.39 for seven

[missilebaits.com](http://missilebaits.com)



**9. YUM Magnum Christie Critter**

**First look:** Some of this, some of that; if soft baits had bells and whistles, this one would jingle. It has two swimming arms, two paddle tails and two swimming tails, all attached to a segmented body.

**Size:** 7 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$3.49 for five

[yumbaits.com](http://yumbaits.com)



## 10. River2Sea Mad Yabbie

**First look:** In appearance, it looks like a crawfish that's worked out at the gym. The Mad Yabbie is designed to be paired with a 4/0 or 5/0 hook. Otherwise, the double-ribbed bait can be fished by itself as a crawfish imitator or as a jig trailer.

**Size:** 5 inches

**Colors:** 13

**Suggested retail:** \$5.24 for six

[river2seausa.com](http://river2seausa.com)



## 11. Strike King Magnum Rage Bug

**First look:** Bigger by a half-inch than the original Rage Bug, the Magnum model is identical in features with two sets of appendages, antennae and a flattened, ribbed body.

**Size:** 4 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$5.99 for six

[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)



## 12. Strike King Drop Shot Half Shell

**First look:** The ribbed body tapers to a broad, flat tail with vertical fins that give it action when lifted, dragged or hopped.

**Size:** 3 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 16

**Suggested retail:** \$4.99 for nine

[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)



## 13. Lake Fork Trophy Lures Needle Worm

**First look:** A slim body and subtle action make it a likely candidate for drop-shotting and fishing on shaky heads.

**Size:** 9 inches

**Colors:** 7

**Suggested retail:** \$5.49 for nine

[lftlures.com](http://lftlures.com)



### THE HISSY FIT

If you like the looks of Lake Fork Trophy Lures' new Needle Worm, you might want to scope out the new Hissy Fit. It's a hard-plastic water snake topwater lure with a cupped face and a Needle Worm as a trailer. When combined, the topwater duo has a wobbling, side-to-side movement. The Hissy Fit comes in four colors and sells for \$9.99.

[lftlures.com](http://lftlures.com)

**14. Z-Man Big T.R.D.**

**First look:** Some soft plastics manufacturers have downsized existing models to accommodate the recent surge of interest in Ned rigs. Z-Man has upsized its popular Finesse T.R.D. by 1 1/4 inch to appeal to bass with bigger appetites. The Big T.R.D. is made of Z-Man's tough ElaZtech compound and, like the Finesse T.R.D., can be paired with the company's Finesse ShroomZ jigheads.

**Size:** 4 inches

**Colors:** 12

**Suggested retail:** \$4.49 for six

zmanfishing.com



**15. Z-Man Boar HogZ**

**First look:** The Boar Hogz has a ribbed body with three appendages, a mini paddle and a swimming tail on each side. The combo of swimming tails provides most of the action, but at rest – depending on how it's rigged – the tails will float up to emulate a crawfish's pincers.

**Size:** 4 inches

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$4.49 for five

zmanfishing.com



**16. Z-Man T.R.D. TubeZ**

**First look:** This is a variation on the Ned rig theme for when bass want a bit more teasing than the plain-Jane original can deliver. The nose is solid for rigging with the Finesse ShroomZ jighead.

**Size:** 2 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$4.49 for six

zmanfishing.com



**17. Zoom Z-3 Trick Worm**

**First look:** The Z-3 Trick Worm is a triple-laminate hand-poured straight-tail worm patterned after the company's standard Trick Worm.

**Size:** 6 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 5

**Suggested retail:** \$4.79 for 10

zoombaits.com

**ADDING PIZZAZZ TO A SOFT BAIT**

As old school as it might seem to some, many pros still keep soft-bait dye handy for those occasions when they feel fish in stained water can't see their bait very well.

Walmart FLW Tour pro Chris Johnston is a firm believer in added attraction, and prefers bottles of SPIKE-IT to accomplish it. It's as easy as removing the top and dipping one end or the other – but usually the tail – in the waterproof dye.

"Chartreuse, for sure, is No. 1 with me, especially when I'm fishing green pumpkin baits," says the Canadian pro. "Then I'll use other contrasting colors depending on what my primary color is."

Johnston doesn't just use dye when he's fishing dirty water. Sometimes when he's sight-fishing he uses a bright-colored dye to help him keep up with his bait.



## SWIMBAITS

### 1. Gary Yamamoto Zako

**First look:** With forked tail and ribbed body, the Zako resembles a small baitfish. It can be put to good use as a spinnerbait or buzzbait trailer or a drop-shot attractor and even rigged as a swimbait. The articulated rear section provides enhanced action no matter how it's fished.

**Size:** 4 inches

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$6.49 for six

[baits.com](http://baits.com)



1

### 2. LIVETARGET Swimbait Series

**First look:** The baits in this family of new swimbaits from LIVETARGET look good enough to fillet. Among the offerings are threadfin shad, golden shiner, blue-back herring, rainbow trout, gizzard shad, parr trout and yellow perch. The line tie is in the nose, and there's a single hook in the back that matches the body size, with a hanger extending from the belly for an extra hook if it's desired and practical.

**Size:** multiple realistic sizes per bait species

**Colors:** 2 per bait

**Suggested retail:** \$8.99 to \$16.99, depending on size

[livetargetlures.com](http://livetargetlures.com)



2

### 3. Optimum Boom Boom Swimbait

**First look:** Not counting the paddle tail, the textured scales and fins give it a lifelike appearance. Two versions are available: a weedless model that can be rigged with an 8/0 swimbait hook and a rigged model with a No. 1 belly treble.

**Size:** 6 inches

**Colors:** 12 (rigged) or 15 (weedless)

**Suggested retail:** \$9.99 for two weedless; \$10.99 for one rigged

[optimumbaits.com](http://optimumbaits.com)



3

### 4. Megabass MAGSLOWL

**First look:** A slender body profile delivers maximum movement at even slow retrieve speeds. Available in three sizes, its realistic head and body taper to a paddle tail.

**Size:** 5, 7 and 9 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$12.99 to \$24.99

[megabassusa.com](http://megabassusa.com)



4

### 5. Strike King Rage Swimmer

**First look:** A ribbed body and paddle tail characterize this latest entry in the Rage lineup.

**Size:** 3 3/4 and 4 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$5.49 for six (4 3/4) or seven (3 3/4)

[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)



5



**6. V&M Hightail Shad**

**First look:** A slim shad body is said to add body movement to the action, while the upturned paddle tail keeps the bait down in the water column better when fished on a jighead or umbrella rig.

**Size:** 6 inches

**Colors:** 4

**Suggested retail:** \$5.49 for 5

[bayoutdoors.com](http://bayoutdoors.com)

**7. Gambler GZ**

**First look:** The 5-inch Big EZ is no longer the biggest swimbait in Gambler's lineup. The new mouthful is the GZ, available in 6 1/2- and 8-inch versions. Like the Big EZ, the rear end of the body is crimped to enhance the action imparted by the paddle tail.

**Size:** 6 1/2 and 8 inches

**Colors:** 29

**Suggested retail:** \$8.99 per pack of four (6 1/2) or two (8 inch)

[gambler-lures.com](http://gambler-lures.com)



**8. Savage Gear 3D Line Thru Gizzard Shad**

**First look:** The line-thru tie system reduces the likelihood of fish throwing the hook using the weight of the lure's body. Its articulated slow-sink body is designed to provide lifelike swimming motion at medium retrieve speed.

**Size:** 7 and 10 inches

**Colors:** 3

**Suggested retail:** \$15.99 to \$24.99

[savagegear-usa.com](http://savagegear-usa.com)

**9. Big Bite Baits Suicide Shad**

**First look:** The Suicide Shad's slick body finishes with a paddle tail. The head is solid to last longer without having to be replaced or re-rigged. The belly has a hook slot.

**Size:** 3 1/2 and 5 inches

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$7.99 for five of the 3 1/2-inch size; \$8.99 for four of the 5-inch size

[bigbitebaits.com](http://bigbitebaits.com)



**PADDLE OR STRAIGHT TAIL?**

By the looks of sales records, the paddle-tail swimbait is the most popular type, but there are times when a straight tail gets the nod, according to Tennessee pro Jason Lambert.

"The paddle tail is my favorite, but sometimes it's better to switch up," he says. "For instance, at Kentucky Lake last summer, I won with a straight-tail Castaic Jerky J. The straight-tail swimbait is a bit more subtle, and that might be its advantage where there's a lot of fishing pressure such as at Kentucky Lake or Pickwick. A straight tail can produce a bite or two extra sometimes."

Lambert notes that the paddle-tail version is better when the water is murky or when fishing in low-light conditions. In the final analysis, however, he thinks that the tail type is a matter of personal preference most of the time.

"Whether it has a paddle tail or a straight tail, any swimbait's key objective is that it imitates a shad as closely as possible," he says.



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

## FROGS&TOADS

### 1. Eco Pro Toad

**First look:** A non-popper, what distinguishes the Toad from the rest of the frogs in the big pond is that it's lead-free and weighted with tungsten. It will always right itself and comes equipped with a Trokar frog hook.

**Size:** 2 3/4 inches; 6 inches with legs

**Colors:** 8

**Suggested retail:** \$8.99

[ecoprotungsten.com](http://ecoprotungsten.com)



### 2. Livingston Freddy B

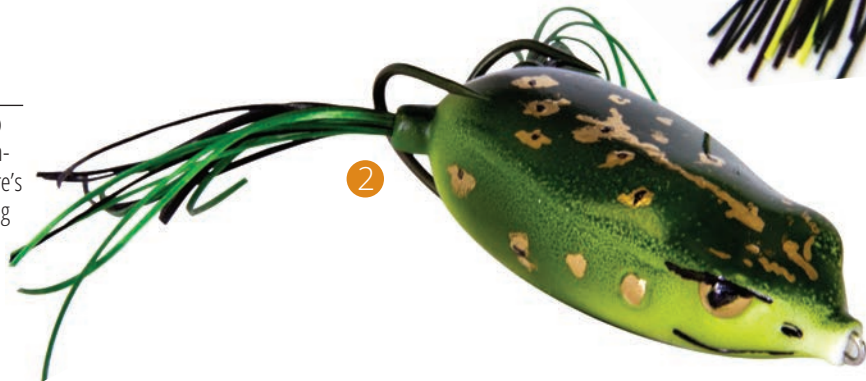
**First look:** If it's Livingston, you know it's got to make a sound. This one emulates a frog, presumably one that knows a bass is hot on its tail. There's a double-hook rigged just ahead of the extra-long skirt legs.

**Size:** 2 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 5

**Suggested retail:** \$9.99

[livingstonlures.com](http://livingstonlures.com)



### 3. Jackall Gavacho Frog

**First look:** This one's a popper with two skirted legs and another skirt mounted between them. The body is about 2 3/4 inches long, and the overall weight is 5/8 ounce.

**Size:** 5 inches (including legs)

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$9.99

[jackall-lures.com](http://jackall-lures.com)



### 4. Mann's Pygmy Frog

**First look:** From Goliath to Pygmy, Mann's now has the frog front covered. This snack-size morsel with an oversized popper head weighs 3/8 ounce and has a Mustad 4/0 tandem frog hook and silicone skirt legs.

**Size:** 3 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$6.89

[mannsbait.com](http://mannsbait.com)



### 5. Molix Sneaky Frog

**First look:** This outsize frog looks like it could handle itself in a confrontation with a bully bass. It was designed for walking the dog, which it is supposed to do very well.

**Size:** 3 1/2 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$14.49

[molix.com/en/](http://molix.com/en/)



**6. Rapala Terminator Popping Frog**

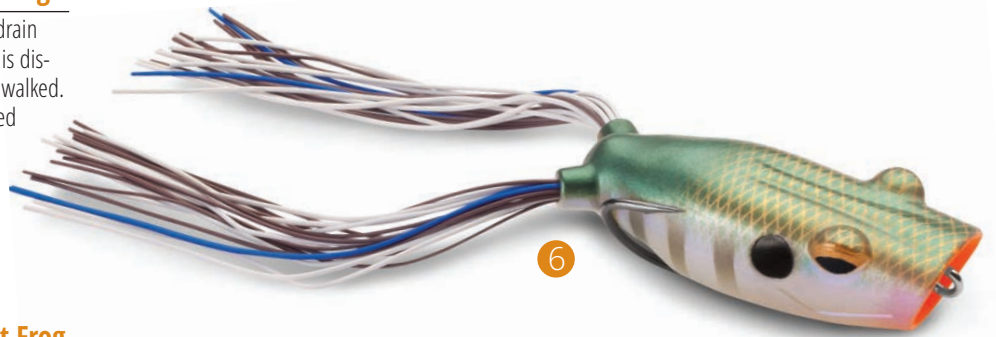
**First look:** The tail-weighted body has a drain hole to get rid of water quickly. The weight is distributed so that the lure can be popped or walked. The frog weighs 9/16 ounce and is equipped with a VMC frog hook.

**Size:** 2 1/2 inches; 5 inches with legs

**Colors:** 16

**Suggested retail:** \$10.99

rapala.com



**7. Savage Gear 3D Floating Skirt Frog**

**First look:** Like other lures in the 3D line, the Floating Skirt Frog body is that of an actual scanned frog. Its legs also float.

**Size:** 2 1/4 and 2 3/4 inches

**Colors:** 4

**Suggested retail:** \$7.99 to \$8.99

savagegear-usa.com



**8. SPRO Bronzeye Spit Shad 60**

**First look:** A hybrid of SPRO's popping frog and Bronzeye Shad, the Spit Shad has a cupped mouth that has been slit open at the bottom to spit, rather than chug. Vertically rigged legs, a keel belly and the mouth design help it walk.

**Size:** 2 1/3 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$10.99

spro.com



**9. Strike King Popping Perch**

**First look:** Though it lies on one side, the lure has 3-D eyes on either side. Its deep-cupped popper makes it easier to work the Popping Perch in place. A 4/0 double-hook facilitates hookups, and it has unique wide skirt strands.

**Size:** 5 1/2 inches with legs

**Colors:** 10

**Suggested retail:** \$9.99

strikeking.com



**10. Strike King Super Toad**

**First look:** Big enough to make a ruckus in the thickest grass, the Super Toad can be fished with a belly hook, Texas-rigged or as a trailer on a buzzbait.

**Size:** 4 inches

**Colors:** 6

**Suggested retail:** \$3.99 for five

strikeking.com



# WIRE BAITS

## BUZZBAITS

### ima US Buzz

The oversized blade creates a large bubble trail and loud squeaking noise. The head design is supposed to help it get on the surface quickly and stay there, even at slow speeds. \$15.99

[imalures.com](http://imalures.com)



### Nichols Reflex Buzzbait

This buzzbait was specially designed so the blade makes contact with the elongated head. It also features Nichol's toothpick keeper system for adding a toad, swimbait or similar soft bait. \$7.99

[nicholslures.com](http://nicholslures.com)



### A COOL IDEA: RIVER2SEA DOUBLE PLOPPER

River2Sea's Whopper Popper is the hottest topwater bait in the business right now. Building on the Popper's success, the company created the Double Popper, which features – you guessed it – two Popper blades for double the “plopping.”

The Double Popper is similar to a double-bladed buzzbait, but it floats, so it can be paused on the surface or fished at crawling speeds. The blades counter rotate to create a commotion on the surface. Trailing back from between the blades is a fish-shaped body with a skirt and the 5/0, 2X-strong hook. \$17.84

[river2seausa.com](http://river2seausa.com)

## SPINNERBAITS

### Jenko Fishing Spinnerbait

Jenko's take on the classic spinnerbait design includes a long flowing skirt that doubles as a trailer. It's available in sizes up to 1 ounce, for those who like to fish spinnerbaits on deep ledges, with a double-willow blade configuration.

\$6.99

[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)



### Jenko Fishing Night Blaster Spinnerbait

Designed with the night-fisherman in mind, the Night Blaster features a black and purple skirt with a large, thumping black Colorado blade. The skirt's extended design is such that a trailer is not needed.

\$6.99

[jenkofishing.com](http://jenkofishing.com)



### Mann's Muddy Water Special Classic Spinnerbait

Mann's "The Classic" spinnerbait has been around for years, but a new version was released just for muddy-water situations. It features UV finish on the head and skirt, a Colorado/Indiana blade combo for thumping action and blade colors meant to stand out in dirty water, including chartreuse/white, orange/white and orange/gold.

\$7.95

[mannsbait.com](http://mannsbait.com)



**Nichols Pulsator Depth Finder Spinnerbait**

This 1-ounce spinnerbait is meant to get deep. It features a big profile and large blades for more vibration and flash, plus the Nichols toothpick trailer keeper. \$9.99

[nicholslures.com](http://nicholslures.com)



**Freedom Tackle Corp. Double Willow Spinnerbait**

The removable wide-gap hook lets you adjust for various trailers, and can be rigged Texas style for a weedless presentation. It's been redesigned from Freedom's original spinnerbait with a shorter arm, for longer casts without the dreaded "helicoptering" effect. \$8.99

[freedomlures.com](http://freedomlures.com)



**A COOL IDEA: THE OWNER SWING BLADE**

**Applications:** Slow-roll it, or fish it with a lift-hop retrieve. The spy blade will spin even at the slowest speeds, while the willow-leaf blade provides some thump and flash. It's designed to hold a variety of swimbaits or other soft-plastic trailers.

**Sizes:**

- 1/8 ounce, No. 2 hook
- 1/4 ounce, 1/0 hook
- 3/8 ounce, 1/0 hook
- 1/2 ounce, 2/0 hook

**Price:** \$12

[ownerhooks.com](http://ownerhooks.com)



# JIGS AND JIGHEADS

## Under-Spins on the Upswing

Under-spins have become quite the rage lately, partially thanks to their contributions to top-10 finishes in recent Forrest Wood Cups and Bassmaster Classics, but mostly because an under-spin with a soft jerkbait or swimbait body flat out catches fish.

The combo does a good job of imitating blueback herring, shad and other forage species, and can be fished in all seasons and all depths.

### Things to Look For:

- premium hook
- ball-bearing swivel
- large blade that can move easily under the head at slow speeds
- baitkeeper

### Several We Like:

**1. Strike King's Tour Grade Spin Head** uses the Raz-R-Blade, which spins even at slow speeds, but won't cause excessive lift at high speeds. It has a lead baitkeeper. \$7.99 for two  
[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

**2. The Pro Model Fish Head Spin** is an upgraded "tournament" version of the original made for swimming through the water column or creeping along bottom. It has a Sampo swivel, Gamakatsu hook and screw-lock baitkeeper. \$7.99  
[fishheadspin.com](http://fishheadspin.com)

**3. The Stand-Up Fish Head Spin** features a weight-forward design that lets the fisherman create a different action – one where the lure appears to be nosing along the bottom. \$5.79  
[fishheadspin.com](http://fishheadspin.com)

**4. Adapted from Casey's Classic Runner is Casey's Finesse Runner**, a 1/8-ounce model with an oversized blade. It's made for shallow or super-slow presentations, and can work on an umbrella rig. \$4.99 for one; \$8.99 for two  
[ttiblakemore.com](http://ttiblakemore.com)

**5. The exaggerated belly keel of the VMC Spin Jig** keeps the blade away from the head, allowing the blade to spin freely. \$3.99 to \$4.99  
[rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**6. Perhaps the most notable detail of the 1/2-ounce 6th Sense Divine ScrewLock Underspin** is its quality screw-lock bait keeper. Nice paint jobs are a plus. \$4.99  
[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)

**7. Take the under-spin to the ledges with the Shane's Baits Mega Spin**, a 1-ounce jumbo model (more sizes coming) made for toting big plastics and a No. 5 willow-leaf blade. \$6  
[shanesbaits.com](http://shanesbaits.com)



# VIBRATING JIGS

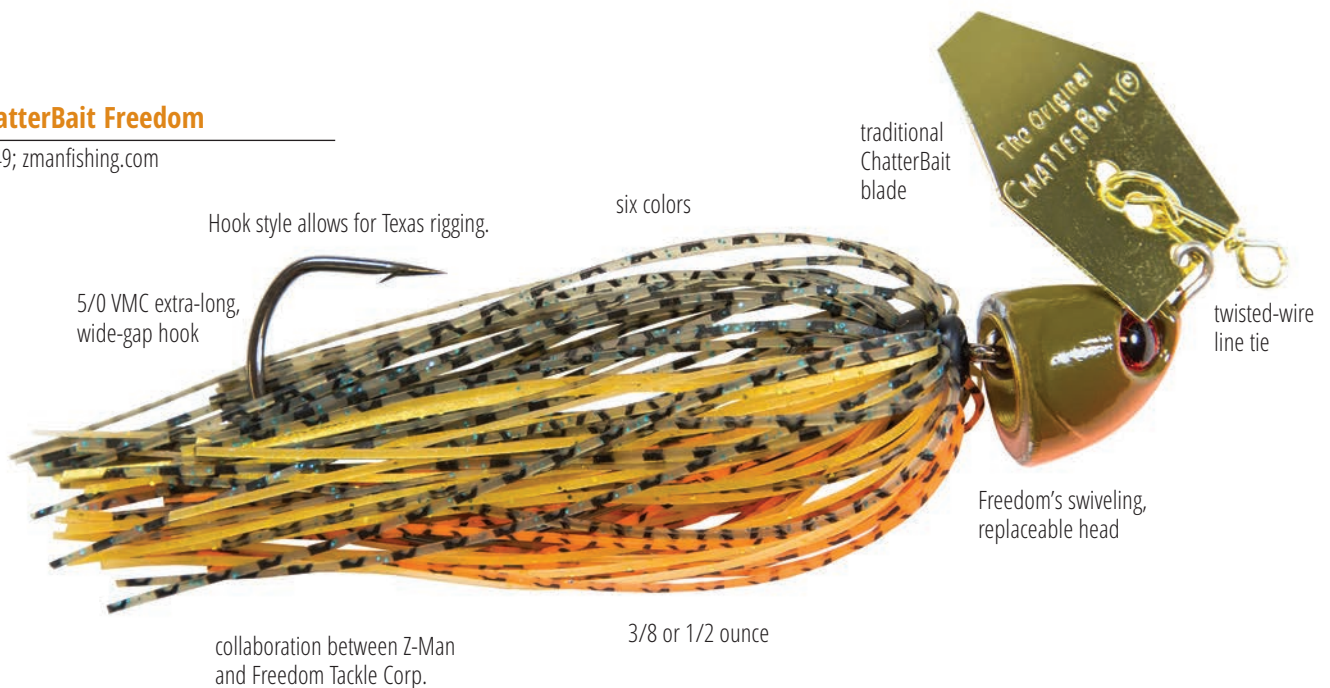
## Project Z ChatterBait Weedless

\$9.49; zmanfishing.com



## ChatterBait Freedom

\$8.49; zmanfishing.com



# 6 NEW SKIRTED JIGS

## 1. Owner Akuro Structure Jig

It's compact to work through the thick stuff, with a heavy-duty weedguard and wire baitkeeper. \$8

[ownerhooks.com](http://ownerhooks.com)

## 2. Strike King Tour Grade Skipping Jig

The head shape helps it skip easily, and the corkscrew baitkeeper holds plastics securely. \$4.99

[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

## 3. Nichols Lures Sledgehammer Swim Jig

Its heavy-duty hook withstands the shock of braided line, and Nichols' patented toothpick bait-holder system keeps plastics in place. \$4.99

[nicholslures.com](http://nicholslures.com)

## 4. Z-Man ShroomZ Micro Finesse Jig

A No. 1 light-wire hook, mushroom-shaped head and compact skirt create a great finesse jig option. \$4.99

[zmanfishing.com](http://zmanfishing.com)

## 5. Mantis Dart' N Swim Jig

It bears its weight on the bottom and to the rear of the head for a horizontal free-fall, but with side-to-side darting action when the rod is snapped. \$5.49

[mantislures.com](http://mantislures.com)

## 6. Missile Jigs Ike's Head Banger Jig

The triangular-shaped head is designed to bang and bounce off rocks. \$5.39 to \$6.39

[missilebaits.com](http://missilebaits.com)



1



4



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3



6

## HAIR JIGS

The hair jig continues its triumphant return to glory, though the momentum has slowed down a bit since last season. There were four that caught our eye: **1) Owner's Bucktail Shad** (\$13; ownerhooks.com) falls into the "standard" hair jig category and mimics a gizzard shad with its long, white natural bucktail and 3-D eyes. It features a quality Super Needle Point hook. **2) The Freedom Tackle Hydra Shad Hair Jig** (\$7.99; freedomlures.com) uses the company's swinging head design, which allows for swapping the hook and its 6-inch-long bucktail/feather tail. **3) Also from Freedom Tackle**, the 1/8- or 1/4-ounce **Marabou Jig** (\$3.99; freedomlures.com) has the same jointed, detachable hook design, but with Marabou fluff and the compact build that smallmouth anglers love. **4) The Road Runner Buck-Tail Pro** (\$5.99; tiblakemore.com) is based on the old, popular design, but with new features such as a premium hook, 3-D eyes, ball-bearing swivel and willow-leaf blade.



## A COOL IDEA: GENE LAREW'S BASS SHOOTER SYSTEM

The technique of shooting docks is done with a spinning rod. The angler grabs the bait – usually a small jig – pulls it back to create a bend in the rod and then releases the bait. The rod springs forward like a bow releasing an arrow and shoots the bait on a fairly straight trajectory. It's a favorite of some crappie anglers, but it works for bass too, and Gene Larew has a new tackle system designed specifically for shooting docks for bass.

One part is the new **Pinhead jighead**. It's similar to a standard lead ball head, but the weight is distributed along the hook shank. This helps the bait skip as it shoots, and promotes a horizontal position while it falls. It's also great for traditional dock-skipping techniques, if shooting isn't your thing.

Larew also created the **Bass Shooter soft plastic** to mate perfectly with the Pinhead. It has a flat top and keel-shaped belly for easy skipping and a fluttery fall. Finally, the company designed a simple **Pull Tab** device that is threaded onto the hook gap, providing an easy place to grip and "draw back" the bait when shooting.

Five weedless or seven open-hook jigheads sell for \$5.59. Bass Shooters sell in packs of eight for \$5.29. Pull Tabs cost \$4.99 for 12.

[genelarew.com](http://genelarew.com)



**Detailing New Jigheads**

In its most basic form, a jighead is nothing but a hook and some lead or tungsten for weight. The details make the difference, and we saw some interesting details in the new jigheads at ICAST 2016.

**1. Fish Head Spin V-Lock Swimbait Head**

**Cool detail:** V-shaped dual-wire swimbait keeper  
\$6.99 for two or three

[fishheadspin.com](http://fishheadspin.com)

**2. Strike King Internal Swimbait Head**

**Cool detail:** slides inside a hollow-bellied bait  
\$4.99 for two

[strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

**3. VMC Finesse Rugby Jig**

**Cool detail:** deep hook gap on a jig as light as 1/16 ounce  
\$5.29 for four

[rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**4. TroKar Pro-V Tungsten Jig**

**Cool detail:** TroKar's three-sided razor-sharp hook with a tungsten head

\$6.99 to \$10.99 for two or three

[eagleclaw.com/trokar](http://eagleclaw.com/trokar)

**5. V&M Lock Down Swimbait Head**

**Cool detail:** a ridged lead keeper along the shank to hold small swimbaits

\$6.59 for five

[bayououtdoors.com](http://bayououtdoors.com)

**6. 6th Sense Lures Divine ScrewLock Swimbait Jig Head**

**Cool detail:** corkscrew baitkeeper in line with the hook shank  
\$4.99 to \$5.99 for two

[6thsenselures.com](http://6thsenselures.com)



**A COOL IDEA: MANTIS TRIX SHAD**

It's a spoon, a jig and a tool for fishing a soft jerkbait or swimbait – all rolled into one. The Mantis Trix Shad offers anglers a variety of presentations with one bait: Swim it, walk it, rip or jig it, hop it and more. It comes in 3/8, 1/2 and 3/4 ounce and sells for \$9.49 to \$10.99.

[mantislures.com](http://mantislures.com)



# TERMINAL TACKLE

## Gamakatsu G Finesse Swivel Shot Worm Hook

Make rigging a drop-shot setup easy with this new version of a light-wire, straight-shank hook with a Tin Keeper baitkeeper molded onto the shank. \$10.17 for three [gamakatsu.com](http://gamakatsu.com)



## Mustad UltraPoint Grip-Pin Big Bite 2X

Built using a 2X-strong wire, this hook features an extra-long shank and nose to accommodate large soft plastics. A Grip-Pin bait keeper and sealed eye finish out the design. \$5.12 to \$12.13 [mustad-fishing.com](http://mustad-fishing.com)



## STRIKE KING UPSIZES ITS TUNGSTEN OFFERINGS

Strike King has been in the tungsten sinker business for a few years, and this season enhanced its offerings with 1 1/2- and 2-ounce flipping weights. A 5/8-ounce model was also added to fully round out the series. For finesse anglers, Strike King added 1/2- and 3/4-ounce drop-shot weights. Prices vary by size and series. [strikeking.com](http://strikeking.com)

## A NEW IDEA FROM TRAPPER TACKLE

It looks odd, but Trapper Tackle's new hook design so impressed folks at ICAST that they voted it Best Terminal Tackle at the New Product Showcase. The hook's most notable feature is its boxy bend, an interesting design meant to assist in better retention for both the fish you hook and the bait.

Currently, Trapper makes five styles of hook: Offset Wide Gap Hook, Offset Wide Gap Hook with X-heavy Wire, Dropshot/Live Bait/Finesse, 30 Degree Jig Hook and Heavy Cover Offset Super Wide Gap Hook. Prices, sizes and quantities per pack vary by style. [trappertackle.com](http://trappertackle.com)



**1. VMC Neko Hook**

This hook is built for the light-line Neko rig technique with a wide gap and resin-closed eye. It comes in four sizes. \$2.99 to \$9.99 for six or 25 [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**2. VMC Neko Weight**

A thin, ribbed profile that firmly anchors without damaging soft plastics rounds out the Neko Weight. It comes in four sizes. \$3.29 for 10 [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**3. VMC Half Moon Wacky Weight**

Here's a bigheaded version of a nail weight that provides a bit more sink to the cast. It comes in three sizes. \$3.29 for 10 [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**4. VMC Crankbait Snap**

Provide more freedom of movement for crankbaits with this wide-base teardrop snap. It comes in five sizes. \$3.39 for eight or 10 [rapala.com](http://rapala.com)

**5. Z-Man EZ KeeperZ**

This weighted hook has a unique U-shaped swiveling bait keeper. Also, a rubber O-ring on the shank helps keep soft plastics in place near the barb. It comes in three weights and three hook sizes. \$5.99 for three [zmanfishing.com](http://zmanfishing.com)

**6. Z-Man ChinlockZ SWS**

The hook is large – 10/0 or 12/0; 1/2, 3/4 or 1 ounce – and designed to be used for big swimbaits. A special pin on the offset shank helps hold baits in place. \$7.99 for two [zmanfishing.com](http://zmanfishing.com)

**7. UFO Sinker Distance**

Made from high-density concrete, the UFO Distance sinker is appropriate for Carolina rigging. Other styles are available. \$0.65 to \$0.90 [ufosinker.com](http://ufosinker.com)

**8. Owner Oval and Tear-Drop Split Rings**

These stainless-steel split rings help keep the knot away from the ring's opening. \$4 for 20 [ownerhooks.com](http://ownerhooks.com)

**9. Owner Beast Flashy Swimmer**

The Flashy Swimmer got bigger thanks to this new Beast model. It comes with an 8/0, 10/0 or 12/0 hook. \$12.50 to \$15 for two [ownerhooks.com](http://ownerhooks.com)



# LINE

## FLUOROCARBON

### P-Line CFX Fluorocarbon Leader

It's designed with a refractive index that makes it virtually invisible underwater. Line comes in 25-meter spools of 2- to 60-pound test. \$7.99 to \$22.99

[p-line.com](http://p-line.com)

### Seaguar Finesse Fluorocarbon

Technique-specific for spinning tackle, it's made from a "double-structure" process that combines two fluorocarbon resins for a thin, supple final product. It sells in 150-yard spools of 5.2-, 6.2-, 7.3- and 8.4-pound test. \$26.99

[seaguar.com](http://seaguar.com)

### KastKing FluoroKote

KastKing combines its copolymer line with a fluorocarbon coating for tough, invisible line with low memory. It's available in 300-yard spools of 4- to 30-pound test. \$5.98 to \$10.98

[e Poseidon.com/kastking](http://e Poseidon.com/kastking)

### Duel Hardcore Leader

This clear, abrasion-resistant 100-percent fluoro leader is made for use with Duel's Hardcore Super 8 Braid. It sells on 30-yard spools of 6- to 40-pound test, starting at \$9.99

[yo-zuri.com/products/#duel\\_products](http://yo-zuri.com/products/#duel_products)

### Yo-Zuri TopKnot Fluorocarbon MainLine

Yo-Zuri touts the line's diameter-to-strength ratio, claiming it's stronger and more durable than previous Yo-Zuri fluorocarbons. It's available in 200-yard spools of 6- to 20-pound test. \$12.99

[yo-zuri.com](http://yo-zuri.com)



### 2016 BEST LINE: P-LINE TACTICAL FLUOROCARBON

P-Line took home top honors in the line category at the ICAST New Product Showcase for its new Tactical Fluorocarbon, a fishing line created to offer optimal castability, invisibility, softness and sensitivity without sacrificing strength and durability.

"This line is super smooth and super limp, so it comes off your spool a lot faster and a lot easier with a lot less memory," says FLW Tour pro and P-Line pro-staffer Scott Canterbury. "It has a little more stretch than other fluorocarbons, and that helps if you're cranking and you're worried about breaking off when you make a long cast."

Canterbury says the line is also great for spinning rods. Because of its limp nature it doesn't twist or suffer as much memory as other fluorocarbons. It's available in 200-yard spools of 6- to 20-pound test. \$19.99 to \$32.99

[p-line.com](http://p-line.com)



## BRAID

### SpiderWire Stealth Translucent

This new version of Stealth is highly visible above the surface, but turns semi-transparent below, thanks to a white fiber and special coating. It comes in 6- to 100-pound test with spools of 125, 200, 300, 500, 1,500 and 3,000 yards. \$12.99 to \$339.99

[spiderwire.com](http://spiderwire.com)

### SpiderWire Stealth Smooth

Eight strands woven together with a special process create a line that slips quickly through guides. Smooth comes in 6- to 80-pound test with spools of 125, 200, 300, 500, 1,500 and 3,000 yards. Prices start at \$13.99

[spiderwire.com](http://spiderwire.com)

### Duel Hardcore Super 8 Braid

This Japanese eight-strand braid comes in white for finesse fishing or camo for flipping. It's available in 150- and 300-yard spools of 10- to 65-pound test. \$13.99

[yo-zuri.com/products/#duel\\_products](http://yo-zuri.com/products/#duel_products)

### Vicious No-Fade Braid

Using a pre-dyeing technique, Vicious "builds in" the color for this eight-carrier line, rather than adding it with a coating. It's available in 150- and 300-yard spools of 20- to 100-pound test. starting at \$32.99

[getvicious.com](http://getvicious.com)

### Stren Max Cast

Stren fuses together the strands that make Max Cast for a line that it says has "the body of a monofilament and the strength and thinness of a superline." It comes in 150-yard spools of 6- to 50-pound test. \$9.99

[stren.com](http://stren.com)

### Lunkerhunt Premium Braid

Lunkerhunt's braid is made of eight fibers with a super-tight weave that does not require a coating. It sells in 150-yard spools of 15-, 20-, 30- and 50-pound test. \$13.99

[lunkerhunt.com](http://lunkerhunt.com)



## BRAID



### KastKing Fortis

A special treatment helps reduce color fade. Fortis is available in spools of 165, 350 and 600 yards of 10- to 80-pound test and four colors. \$8.98 to \$24.98

[eposeidon.com/kastking](http://eposeidon.com/kastking)

### TUF-LINE 4ORCE

For the pitchers and flippers or anyone fishing heavy cover, this four-carrier braid is designed for maximum strength, abrasion resistance and minimal stretch. It sells in 125-, 300- and 2,500-yard spools of 8- to 80-pound test. \$10.99 to \$149.99

[tuf-line.com](http://tuf-line.com)

### TUF-LINE DOMIN8

This eight-carrier braid is made for casting applications, with a round, smooth finish that allows it to flow through the guides. It's available in 150-, 300- and 2,500-yard spools of 10- to 80-pound test. \$19.99 to \$239.99

[tuf-line.com](http://tuf-line.com)

## MONOFILAMENT

### Lunkerhunt Premium Monofilament

Intended for long casts and low memory, this mono has high "friction tolerance" for durability. The 330-yard spools come in 6- to 20-pound test. \$8.99 to \$9.99

[lunkerhunt.com](http://lunkerhunt.com)

### Seaguar Rippin' Premium Monofilament

It was designed to be thin and supple for long casts and easy handling. Rippin' comes in 200-yard spools of 4- to 20-pound test. \$10.99 to \$14.99

[seaguar.com](http://seaguar.com)

### KastKing Masters

Here's a budget-priced mono with thin diameter and abrasion resistance. It sells in 300-yard spools of 4- to 30-pound test. \$7.98 to \$8.98

[eposeidon.com/kastking](http://eposeidon.com/kastking)



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# RODS

## 4 TAKES ON CRANKIN' RODS

### 1. Kistler Rods KLX Feel-N-Reel S2 Hybrid

This series features what Kistler calls S2 Hybrid Blank Technology, which blends S2 hybrid material (Kistler says it's a lighter, higher-modulus, stronger fiberglass than anything out there) with high-modulus graphite to yield a blank that offers graphite's strength and sensitivity with the flexibility of fiberglass for better hooksets and control when fishing with reaction baits. Kistler notes it's a totally new type of action, which it calls "modified fast." The series includes 13 casting and two spinning models. \$249.95 to \$289.95

[kistlerrods.com](http://kistlerrods.com)

### 2. Lew's David Fritts Perfect Crankbait Speed Stick Series

Lew's expanded its popular line of affordable cranking rods with four new models: 7-foot and 7-foot, 6-inch, heavy-power standard models and 7-foot and 7-foot, 6-inch, medium-heavy-power "palmer" models. The latter feature a special reel seat designed to allow the user to palm the reel and rod with four fingers in front of the trigger for less fatigue. Blanks are built with a blend of graphite and glass. \$79.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

### 3. St. Croix Legend Glass IPC Casting Rods

The winner of the Best Freshwater Rod title at ICAST sports a throwback "honey" look that nods to St. Croix's innovative color-infused glass of yesteryear, but it presents an impressive set of features. Most notable is the linear S-Glass blank, which is stronger, lighter and flat-out better than old-school fiberglass. St. Croix describes the action as "smoother," due to the way the blanks are formed. Four sizes are available for various cranking tasks. \$240 to \$250

[stcroixrods.com](http://stcroixrods.com)

### 4. Shimano Zodias

Shimano expanded its Zodias line to include a pair of new rods specific for cranking: a 7-foot, medium-power, moderate-fast-action model and a 7-foot, 6-inch, medium-heavy-power, moderate-fast-action model. Both feature Shimano's Hi-Power X blanks, where the outer layer is diagonally wrapped with carbon tape to keep the blank from twisting on the cast, but the company infused a glass composite material into the blank to provide the moderate bend that most anglers prefer. Longer rear grips provide extra leverage for long casts. \$199.99

[fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)





## 1. Duckett Fishing Triad

Features include grooved EVA grips, minimalist two-piece reel seat, and proprietary guides with a plasma coating and Zirconia inserts. Seven casting; two spinning \$129  
[duckettfishing.com](http://duckettfishing.com)

## 2. Falcon BuCoo SR

The series benefits from what Falcon calls "Cobra Cloth, an outer layer of carbon fiber reinforcement. Fuji components, including EVA grips and exposed blank reel seats, round out the rods. 19 casting; five spinning \$99.99 to \$109.95  
[falconrods.com](http://falconrods.com)

## 3. Okuma EVx "b" Series Bass Rods

Two crankbait rods join eight casting and four spinning models in a lineup built on ultra-sensitive and responsive 30-ton carbon fiber blanks with EVA/cork combo grips (full for cranking rods; split for the rest). \$99.99 to \$124.99  
[okumafishing.com](http://okumafishing.com)

## 4. Abu Garcia Fantasia Premier

The premium carbon blank is infused with a high-tech 3M resin to create a crazy-light rod – 4.1 to 5.5 ounces, depending on the model. Eight casting; five spinning \$299.95  
[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

## 5. Daiwa Cronos

Daiwa reinforces Cronos rods with X45 BIAS graphite fiber construction and BRAIDING-X carbon fiber braiding technology. Though neither process is explained in detail, Daiwa says each helps to prevent blank twisting during casts. Five casting; five spinning \$169.95 to \$179.95  
[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

## 6. Denali AttaX Series

The IM7 graphite blank gets a woven graphite inlay for strength and a cool carbon fiber finish. Then Denali tops off each rod with Winn grips and a minimalist "skeleton" reel seat. Four casting; two spinning \$119.99  
[denalirods.com](http://denalirods.com)

# 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE

## 7. Lew's Custom Pro Speed Stick Series

Each rod is technique-specific and built on a proprietary multi-layer blank that results in a highly sensitive rod. Lew's adds A-grade cork with Duracork and EVA inlays, plus tangle-free stainless-steel guides with Zirconium inserts. Nine casting; three spinning \$199.99 to \$219.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

## 8. Fitzgerald Vursa

Seven casting models with high-modulus blanks are engineered for extreme sensitivity and durability. The guides are ringless, meaning there's no insert to fall out.

\$129.99

[fitzgeraldrods.com](http://fitzgeraldrods.com)

## 9. St. Croix Bass X

The budget-conscious Bass X features a proven SCII graphite blank, aluminum-oxide guides, split cork handle with EVA trim, Fuji reel seat and five-year warranty. 10 casting;

four spinning

\$100 to \$110

[stcroixrods.com](http://stcroixrods.com)

## 10. 13 Fishing Muse Black

"Cool" and "sculpted" accurately describe the Muse Black, with its ergonomic carbon fiber reel seat blending into an EVA split grip. The 36-ton graphite blank provides high strength but is lightweight. 15 casting;

four spinning \$175 to \$215

[13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

## 11. TFO Pacemaker Series

Designed by pro Cliff Pace, the Pacemaker features a proprietary guide system, grippy rubberized reel seat and cork grips. The blank between parts of the split grip is color-coded to identify each rod's power rating. 12 casting;

two spinning \$189.95 to \$199.95

[tforods.com](http://tforods.com)

## 12. DUCE Echo

DUCE touts its Spiral Wrapped Technology, whereby the guides start on top of bait-casting rods but wrap around to the bottom. It says the result is less torque, less line friction and more sensitivity. Eight casting;

five spinning \$140

[ducerods.com](http://ducerods.com)



**13. Enigma Fishing HPT**

HPT means High Performance Titanium, and stems from the titanium frames in the MicroWave guides that Enigma used in this series to cut weight. The guides feature Nanolite inserts, and grips are cork instead of EVA foam for a higher-end finish. 13 casting; four spinning \$149.99  
[enigmafishing.com](http://enigmafishing.com)



**14. Carrot Stix GEN-X ELITE**

Lighter and stronger best describes the GEN-X ELITE. It features high-grade cork and AirWave guides for a high-end package. 11 casting; five spinning \$399.99  
[carrotstix.com](http://carrotstix.com)



**15. iRod Crusher**

Aside from the cool carbon fiber finish on the Crusher, the rod features quality components and materials such as 36-ton graphite, Fuji guides, a custom reel seat, EVA grips and a lifetime warranty. Four casting; one spinning \$189  
[irodfishing.com](http://irodfishing.com)



**MEET FAVORITE USA**

Among the most talked about rod companies at ICAST was a new player that's not really new at all. Favorite USA is a new venture based in Missouri, but the Favorite brand has been established in 26 countries for 10 years. The company's focus is on what it calls the future of fishing – in terms of both innovative design concepts and helping young folks learn to fish.

On the rod front, Favorite showcased several new series at ICAST. The Summit is its pinnacle offering. It's made of high-tech Toray 46T carbon for lightness and strength (the 7-2 medium-heavy only weighs 3.3 ounces), but the most notable feature of the summit is iGrip, a design in which the grip and blank are a single unit. It's said to enhance sensitivity

and overall feel. The Summit series is built with all high-end components and is super slim and trim. Each rod sells for \$349.99.

For anglers on a budget, the White Bird series sells for just \$49.99, but each is made of 24-ton carbon for a rod that performs beyond expectations.

In between is one of the company's most popular rod series – the Defender. Rods in the series sport red, white and blue color schemes and range from a 6-foot spinning rod to an 8-8 cranking stick. Defender rods sell for \$99.

Additional models are available in a variety of price points with various features. All rods come with a free rod sock with an EVA foam protective tip. Learn more at [favoriteusa.com](http://favoriteusa.com).



# 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE

## 16. McCain Hi-Performance Premium Series

This technique-specific series features American-made graphite blanks, Fuji reel seats, Kigan guides and premium cork handles. Nine casting; four spinning \$199.95  
[mccainfishing.com](http://mccainfishing.com)

## 17. McCain Hi-Performance T-Roy's Swamp Series

Swamp Stick, Texas Lightning, The Beast – these are just some of the rods in FLW pro T-Roy Broussard's signature series. Each of the five baitcasting rods is designed to be "sensitive but tough." \$149.95  
[mccainfishing.com](http://mccainfishing.com)

## 18. McCain Hi-Performance Tommy Martin Signature Series

The seven technique-specific rods in this line are built with a blend of graphite and S-glass to legendary pro Tommy Martin's standards. \$199.95  
[mccainfishing.com](http://mccainfishing.com)

## 19. ALX ENOX

The ENOX series only includes six casting models, but that might be just enough. ALX designed the series with versatility in mind, so each rod can perform multiple tasks. Grips are combo cork and EVA foam. \$294.99 to \$299.99  
[alxrods.com](http://alxrods.com)



16



17



18



19

## BUDGET-PRICED RODS FROM ONE 3

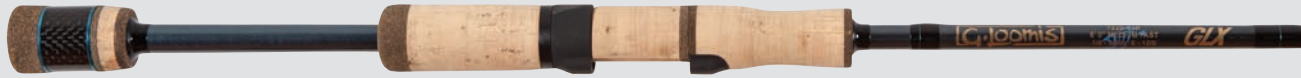
ONE 3 is the new sister company of 13 Fishing, and what you'll find throughout its new Defy Black, Fate Chrome and Fate Black series of rods is a lot of hard-core options at low price points. Each series includes casting, spinning and crankbait-specific casting models, and the most expensive series – Fate Black – tops out at round \$100. Details vary by series, but you have options for cork and foam grips, and different grades of graphite.



**G. LOOMIS GETS LIGHTER**

The G. Loomis GLX series has been around for a while, but the company has decided that lighter is better and released 35 new GLX bass rods that are up to 20 percent lighter than previous versions. New handle configurations increase comfort and ergonomics too. \$420 to \$465

[gloomis.com](http://gloomis.com)



**SIZE MATTERS**

ICAST saw a handful of rod makers debut their big guns — models made for slinging hefty swimbaits, jumbo crankbaits, magnum spoons and the like. Here's a look at five new meat stick releases.

**1. ALX Rods Expert Series**

The series includes an extra-heavy big spoon rod, extra-heavy swimbait rod, 20-foot-diving crankbait rod and hair jig rod designed by ledge expert Ben Parker. \$249.99 to \$274.99

[alxrods.com](http://alxrods.com)

**2. 13 Fishing Muse Black Swimbait**

A sculpted full-grip EVA foam handle helps with launching big baits. Six rods in the series vary from 7 feet, 9 inches to 8 feet, 6 inches long and from heavy to XX-heavy. \$215 to \$235

[13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

**3. Denali Swimbait Series**

Three 7-foot, 10-inch rods are rated for heavyweight swimbaits — up to 12-ounce baits for one model. They're rated medium-heavy, heavy and extra-heavy. \$149.99

[denalirods.com](http://denalirods.com)

**4. Okuma SBX Swimbait**

A trio of 7-foot, 11-inch rods offer heavy, extra-heavy and extra-extra-heavy power for throwing big baits of up to 14 ounces. \$229.99

[okumafishing.com](http://okumafishing.com)

**5. Lew's Custom Speed Stick Series SuperDuty**

Lew's added four 7-foot, 11-inch SuperDuty rods (medium, medium-heavy, heavy and extra-heavy). The largest handles baits as heavy as 10 ounces.

\$169.99 to \$179.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)



# 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE

## NINE RODS FOR ABOUT \$100

You don't have to spend a fortune to get a high-quality rod in 2017. Here's a selection of nice rods priced for about \$100.

### 1. Lew's Mach Speed Stick

\$79.99

**Cool features:** Winn Grips, AirWave guides and carbon nano tube blanks

lews.com

### 2. CastAway Taranis CX1

\$99.99 to \$109.99

**Cool features:** carbon nano tube polymer composite and a sculpted EVA grip

castawayrods.com

### 3. TFO Professional Series

\$99.95 to \$109.95

**Cool features:** composite cork grips and a color-coded handle that identifies the power rating

tforods.com

### 4. Enigma Fishing Phenom Black

\$99.99

**Cool features:** 30-ton Toray graphite blank, MicroWave guides and EVA grips

enigmafishing.com

### 5. Daiwa Fuego

\$69.95

**Cool features:** braid-ready aluminum-oxide guides and stainless-steel reel seat hood

daiwa.com/us/

### 6. Okuma Reflexions A-Series

\$69.99 to \$79.99

**Cool features:** ultra-slim skeleton-style reel seat with cork insert

okumafishing.com

### 7. Quantum Prism

\$99.99

**Cool features:** stainless-steel guides with hard chrome inserts and split cork/EVA grips

shop.zebcobrands.com/quantum

### 8. Halo Rave

\$69.99

**Cool features:** stainless-steel guides, EVA grips and yellow-on-matte-black color scheme

halofishing.com

### 9. Berkley Series One

\$99.95

**Cool features:** 30-ton graphite and 100-percent carbon fiber blank

berkley-fishing.com



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WWW.LOWRANCE.COM

# SPINNING REELS

## 1. Lew's Mach II Speed Spin Series

This rad-looking black and green reel features a high-speed 6.2:1 retrieve ratio and a Winn Grips knob. Lew's added nine stainless-steel double-shielded ball bearings plus a clutch bearing. It comes in two sizes. \$79.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

## 2. Lew's SSG Speed Spin Series

The skeletal graphite rotor cuts weight, but not strength. An oversized line roller is said to reduce line twist, while the 6.2:1 retrieve ratio eats up line quickly. It comes in four sizes. \$49.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

## 3. Lew's Laser G Speed Spin Series

Graphite with a metallic finish makes this low-priced reel an attractive, yet light and durable product. It has an eight-bearing system with aluminum spool and handle. It comes in four sizes. \$39.99

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

## 4. One 3 Creed Series

One 3 minimized weight with what it calls Air Foil carbon design for the frame, rotor and handle in its Creed series of affordable spinning reels. Air Foil is basically a carbon skeleton with the extra cut out. Three models are available: GT (shown – \$89.99), X (\$59.99) and K (\$49.99). Each comes in four sizes.

[13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

## 5. Okuma Helios SX Spinning

The woven C-40X carbon fibers used to make the body, side plate and rotor on the Helios SX are said to result in parts that are 25 percent lighter and 50 percent stronger than comparable graphite reel components. It comes in three sizes. \$129.99

[okumafishing.com](http://okumafishing.com)





### 6. Abu Garcia Revo Rocket Spinning

The Revo Rocket Spinning reel has all the high-end materials and design keys that you'd expect from a product made by one of the industry's legendary manufacturers. Its most notable feature, however, is the blistering 7:1 gear ratio, which recovers 37 inches of line per turn. Finesse anglers have never fished so fast. \$199.95  
[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

### 7. Shimano Stradic CI4+

One of the best all-around spinning reels on the market got an upgrade this season. Primarily, it's lighter – less than 7 ounces for the 2500 and 3000 sizes most bass heads use – with a lower center of gravity that makes it feel feathery in the hand. Durable forged gears and a highly rigid rotor design help ensure a long service life. It comes in four sizes. \$229.99 to \$239.99  
[fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)

### 8. Pflueger President XT Spinning

Never a bad thing, Pflueger upgraded the President series to be lighter and faster, giving the 30, 35 and 40 sizes a 6.2:1 gear ratio. It comes in five sizes. \$79.95  
[pfluegerfishing.com](http://pfluegerfishing.com)

### 9. Carrot Stix Spectra Series

The most interesting feature of the Spectre is its ability to be switched between two gear ratios: 4.7:1 and 6.7:1. For throwing lightweight cranks or swimbaits use the slower speed, but turn it up when bottom fishing to haul baits back between casts. It comes in two sizes – the smaller has a lower-priced option with fewer bearings. Each reel includes a spare aluminum spool. \$149.99 to \$249.99  
[carrotstix.com](http://carrotstix.com)

## 10. Daiwa BG

The BG series gets its strength from Daiwa's HardBodyz design concept, which is basically an aluminum-structured frame and side cover. The spool is made braid-ready, while the gears have been upsized for strength and durability. Daiwa sells it in sizes ranging from ultra-light to extreme saltwater. The bass sizes range from \$99.95 to \$109.95.

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

## 11. Daiwa Certate

Daiwa incorporated the HardBodyz design in its Certate reel, but topped it off with two Magsealed ball bearings and a Magsealed main shaft and line roller. The Magsealed system protects moving parts such as ball bearings with magnetic fluid so the parts won't corrode and can move freely. \$399.95 to \$499.95

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

## 12. Daiwa Luvias

Ultra smoothness comes from a nine-bearing system and Magsealed main shaft, while a proprietary body material called Zaion results in a lightweight reel. Daiwa offers the Luvias with a shallow or standard spool. \$349.95 to \$399.95

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

## 13. Wright & McGill Skeet Reese Victory II Spinning Reel

Wright & McGill lightened up the reel with a bit of re-engineering of its aluminum parts. With its 9+1 bearing system, this reel is a good option at a middle price point. \$99.99

[wright-mcgill.com](http://wright-mcgill.com)

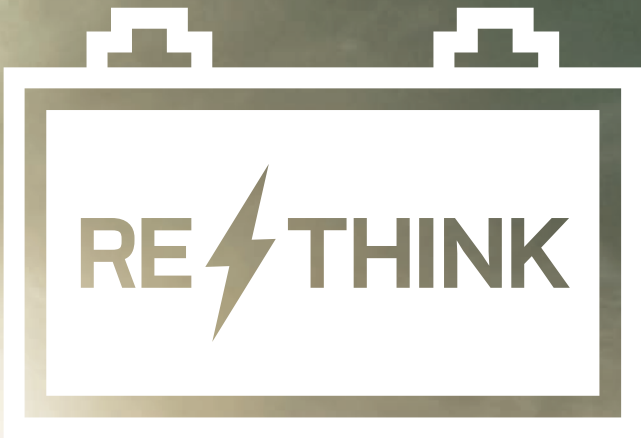


### HIGH-SPEED SPINNING REELS ARE A GOOD THING

Most finesse techniques performed with spinning tackle don't require burning a bait through the water or catching up with an aggressive bass before setting the hook. Yet that doesn't mean there aren't advantages to speeding up a reel's retrieve speed.

You'll notice throughout this section that several new reels feature retrieve ratios of 6:1 and higher. The Abu Garcia Revo Rocket checks in at 7:1 and can recover 37 inches of line per turn of the handle. This is a promising trend. Fast reels – spinning or casting – allow anglers to haul their baits back in quickly for making the next cast. That equates to time saved during tournament hours.




For finesse lures, which are often fished on bottom or vertically over deep water, the presentation doesn't usually involve moving the lure a great distance. Rather, they're cast to a specific spot, fished slowly for a bit and then reeled back for another go. Speeding up the "reel back" step should make finesse anglers even more efficient.



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[minnkotamotors.com/Chargers](http://minnkotamotors.com/Chargers)   



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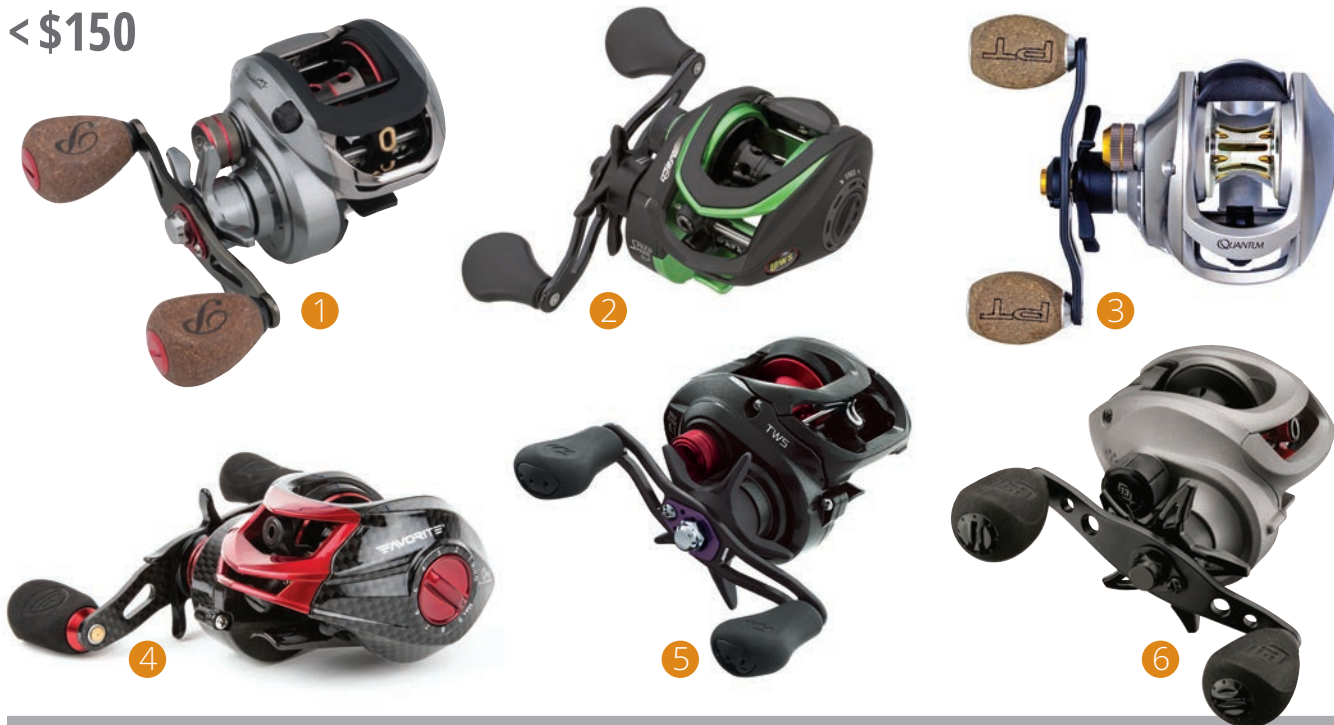
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LH = available in a left-handed model

8:1 = available with 8:1 or faster retrieve ratio

# BAITCASTING REELS

< \$150



## 1. Pflueger President XT

**Cool features:** Cork handles and nine bearings give this affordable reel the look and feel of a much higher-end product.

**Price:** \$79.99

**Overall weight:** 6.8 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 9

**Retrieve speeds:** 7.3:1

[pfluegerfishing.com](http://pfluegerfishing.com)

## 2. Lew's Mach Speed Spool SLP Series

LH

**Cool features:** Lew's gave it the same Super Low Profile (SLP) design of its higher-end reels and plenty of premium features, but with a \$100 price tag.

**Price:** \$99.99

**Overall weight:** 7.2 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 10

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.8:1/7.5:1

[lews.com](http://lews.com)

## 3. Quantum Vapor

**Cool features:** An oversized carbon fiber handle, cork grips and metallic finish combine for performance and aesthetics, while 11 bearings and an aluminum drive gear make up the guts.

**Price:** \$149

**Overall weight:** 6.7 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1/7:1

[shop.zebcobrands.com/quantum](http://shop.zebcobrands.com/quantum)

## 4. Favorite Fishing Phantom

LH

**Cool features:** It looks pretty sharp with its carbon fiber/red finish combo, and the carbon composite materials keep the weight down.

**Price:** \$129.99

**Overall weight:** 5.9 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 8

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1

[favoriteusa.com](http://favoriteusa.com)

## 5. Daiwa Tatula CT

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** It's more compact than before and features the T-wing level-wind system and Daiwa's high-tech Magforce Z magnetic braking system.

**Price:** \$130

**Overall weight:** 7.4 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 8

**Retrieve speeds:** 5.5:1/6.3:1/7.3:1/8.1:1

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

## 6. 13 Fishing Inception

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** With 18 pounds of drag and a mix of eight bearings, this aluminum and graphite reel is a pro-level workhorse in a weekend angler's price range.

**Price:** \$120

**Overall weight:** 6.85/6.9 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 8

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.6:1/8.1:1

[13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)

## A HANDFUL OF BIG RIGS

There are standard reels, and then there are the reels on this list. These are the big dogs – wide-spool and/or heavy-duty baitcasting reels packaged into the modern low-profile design that bass anglers tend to prefer. Some are truly oversized; others are “standard,” but with extra line capacity or more powerful “guts.” All are capable of heaving and hauling jumbo swimbaits, umbrella rigs and even 20-plus crankbaits, while serving double-duty for inshore fishing or targeting muskies, pike and the like.

### 1. Lew's SuperDuty Wide Speed Spool

It's compact like the standard SuperDuty, but holds 190 yards of 14-pound-test monofilament. \$199.99  
[lews.com](http://lews.com)

### 2. Abu Garcia Revo Toro Rocket Low Profile

Its 7.6:1 retrieve ratio coupled with a large spool (it holds 250 yards of 14-pound-test monofilament) equates to 42 inches of line rolling in with each turn of the reel handle. \$399.95  
[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

### 3. Abu Garcia Revo MaxToro Low Profile

The MaxToro has many of the same features as the Revo Toro Rocket, but with four bearings instead of seven and a graphite frame. \$149.95  
[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

### 4. Quantum Monster

The Monster holds 201 yards of 14-pound-test monofilament. It comes in 6.4:1 and 7.1:1 retrieve ratios – the former with an impressive 26 pounds of drag. \$149.95  
[shop.zebco.com/quantum](http://shop.zebco.com/quantum)

### 5. 13 Fishing Concept A3

Oversized brass gears deliver under extreme loads, and there's a whopping 30-pound drag. Plus, the reel holds 240 yards of 12-pound-test monofilament. It comes in right- and left-handed configurations and 6.3:1 and 8.1:1 gear ratios. \$225  
[13fishing.com](http://13fishing.com)



# 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE

## \$150–\$250

### 1. Lew's Tournament LITE G Speed Spool SLP Series LH

**Cool features:** Carbon and aluminum are part of the recipe that produced this feathery beauty – just 5.7 ounces. It's also corrosion resistant for lasting durability.

**Price:** \$179.99

**Overall weight:** 5.7 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.8:1/7.5:1

[lews.com](http://lews.com)



### 2. Lew's Custom Speed Spool SLP Series LH/8:1

**Cool features:** A dial line-type indicator, flip-down hook keeper, carbon fiber handle and Winn Grips knobs are nice touches.

**Price:** \$179.99

**Overall weight:** 6.6 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 10

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.8:1/7.5:1/8.3:1

[lews.com](http://lews.com)



### 3. Abu Garcia Revo ALX Low Profile LH/8:1

**Cool features:** It's very similar to the elite MGX but with a high-strength aluminum frame and a lower price point.

**Price:** \$249.95

**Overall weight:** 5.47 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 9

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.4:1/8:1

[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)



### 4. Quantum Smoke HD PT

**Cool features:** HD is right. This reel holds 180 yards of 12-pound-test line, with an aluminum spool and frame to provide strength. It's built for heavy baits and hard duty.

**Price:** \$199.95

**Overall weight:** 6.9 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 7

**Retrieve speeds:** 5.3:1/6.6:1/7.3:1

[shop.zebcobrands.com/quantum](http://shop.zebcobrands.com/quantum)



## A SOLID SEASON FOR SOUTHPAWS

In addition to all the brand-new reel series released by the major manufacturers, several companies have expanded previously existing lines to offer more options for lefties. Here are four to consider:

- Lew's SuperDuty Speed Spool Series – 8:1 retrieve ratio
- Lew's Tournament MB Speed Spool LFS Series – 5.6:1 retrieve ratio
- Lew's Speed Spool LFS Series – 7.5:1 retrieve ratio
- Quantum Icon PT – 6.3:1 and 7:1 retrieve ratio



5. Carrot Stix Coral Series

LH

**Cool features:** It ships with two handle sizes to customize for technique. The longer handle provides a bit more torque.

**Price:** \$149.99 or \$229.99

**Overall weight:** 7.2 or 7.6 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 6 or 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1

[carrotstix.com](http://carrotstix.com)



6. Favorite Fishing Rush

LH

**Cool features:** An Airlite main gear and tough, light carbon frame and side plates keep the weight down, while soft-touch coated cork knobs provide sure grip.

**Price:** \$150

**Overall weight:**

**Ball bearings:** 10

**Retrieve speeds:** 7.3:1

[favoriteusa.com](http://favoriteusa.com)



7. Daiwa Tatula CT Type-R

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** Like the standard Tatula CT, the Type-R features a more streamlined, compact frame, but by swapping in an "Extra Super Duralumin" (high-grade aluminum) spool, it's even lighter.

**Price:** \$180

**Overall weight:** 7.2 ounces

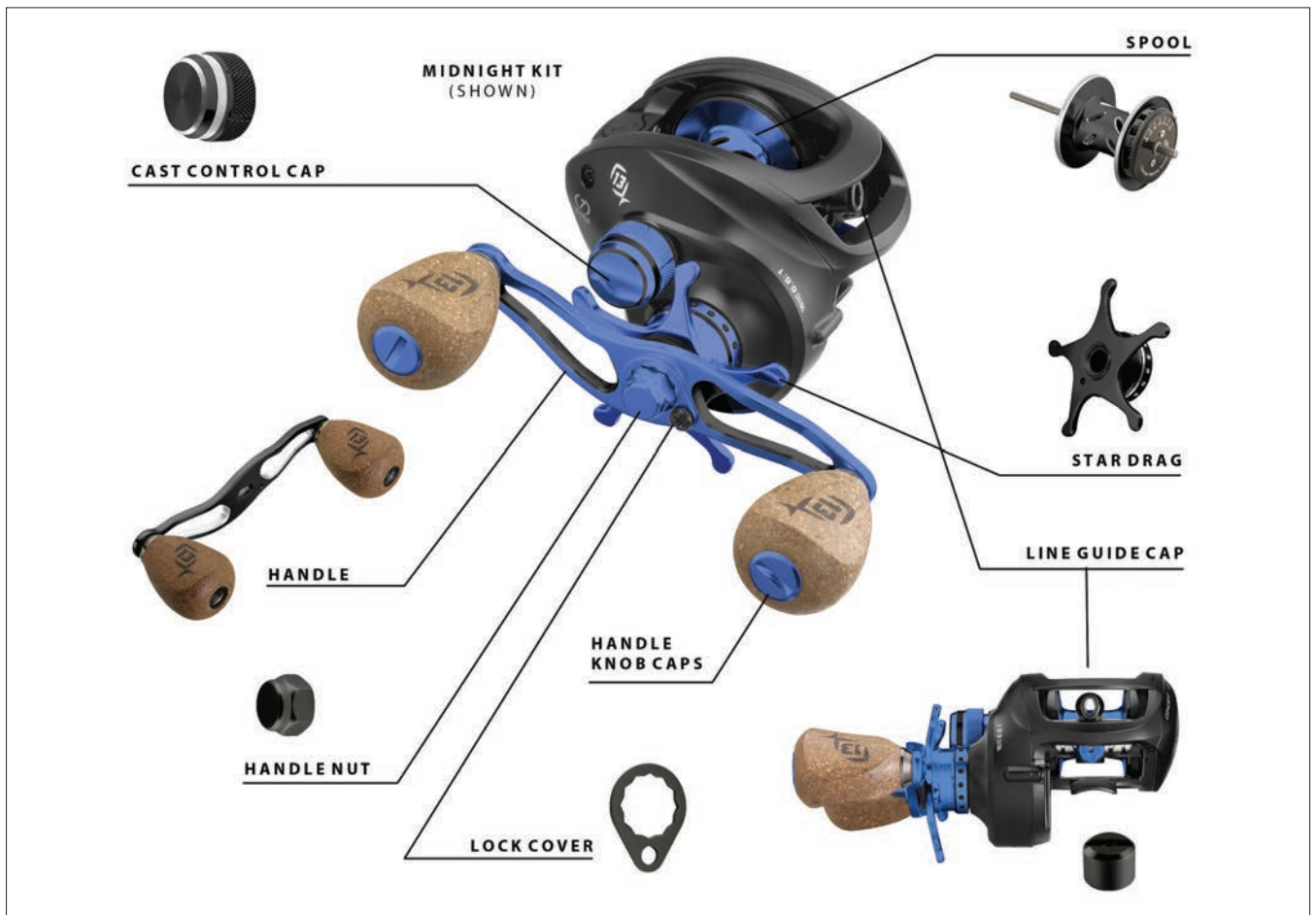
**Ball bearings:** 8

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1/7.3:1/8.1:1

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)

== CHECK OUT THE 13 FISHING TRICKSHOP ==

Your boat, your jersey and now your reel – it can all match thanks to 13 Fishing's sweet TrickShop. The online store allows anglers to choose custom parts for Concept series reels, see what the parts will look like when installed and then purchase everything needed to bring a reel up to personal spec. Check it out at [13fishing.com/trick-shop-2/](http://13fishing.com/trick-shop-2/).



> \$250

## 1. Team Lew's Custom Pro Speed Spool SLP

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** Its extreme low profile (Lew's lowest profile design ever) and scant weight are complemented by a dial line-type indicator, flip-down hook keeper, Winn Grips knobs and an external lube port.

**Price:** \$259.99

**Overall weight:** 5.8 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.8:1/7.5:1/8.3:1

[lews.com](http://lews.com)



## 2. Abu Garcia Revo MGXtreme Low Profile

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** The Super Lightweight Concept (SLC) spool and ceramic bearings, along with a lot of other cool materials and engineering, scale this baby down to a minute 4.5-ounce package.

**Price:** \$499.95

**Overall weight:** 4.5 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 8:1

[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)



## 3. Abu Garcia Revo MGX Low Profile

LH/8:1

**Cool features:** As the flagship all-purpose reel in the Revo lineup, the MGX has it all – high-end materials (including a magnesium frame) for durability and weigh reduction, a compact profile and a sweet black/silver color scheme.

**Price:** \$369.95

**Overall weight:** 5 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.4:1/8:1

[abugarcia.com](http://abugarcia.com)

LH/8:1

## 4. Shimano Metanium MGL

**Cool features:** The lightweight Hagane metal body and X-Ship internal supports for the gears withstand a lot of abuse. Smaller gear teeth and numerous other high-end features make for a smooth, elite-level reel.

**Price:** \$419.99

**Overall weight:** 6.2 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 11

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.2:1/7.4:1/8.5:1

[fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)

LH/8:1



5. Daiwa Steez SV TW

LH

**Cool features:** The Steez has always set the benchmark for an elite high-end reel, and now it benefits from Daiwa's T-Wing level-wind for longer casts and the shallow, free-floating SV spool, which is said to reduce backlashes further.

**Price:** \$499.95

**Overall weight:** 5.5 ounces

**Ball bearings:** 13

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1/7.1:1

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)



6. Daiwa Zillion SV TW

LH

**Cool features:** It's been redesigned into a more compact package and features Daiwa's cool T-Wing level-wind line guide and SV free-floating, shallow spool designed for casting light baits with ease – and without backlashes.

**Price:** \$299.95

**Overall weight:** 6.9 ounces


**Ball bearings:** 9

**Retrieve speeds:** 6.3:1/7.3:1

[daiwa.com/us/](http://daiwa.com/us/)




# 2016 ANGLERS of the YEAR



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**ANDY MORGAN**

**3x FLW AOY**

# ELECTRONICS AND ACCESSORIES

## Meet the Minn Kota Ultrex

Minn Kota's newest trolling motor took Best of Show honors at the 2016 ICAST New Product Showcase, generating much fanfare and chatter among members of the media and professional anglers in attendance. Here's the scoop on the new Ultrex.

**The basics:** The Ultrex combines the swiveling foot pedal design and responsiveness of a cable-steer trolling motor that most bass anglers prefer with the automatic control capabilities of an electronic-steer trolling motor.

**The specs:** Choose between 24-volt, 80-pound-thrust or 36-volt, 112-pound-thrust versions with 45-, 52- or 60-inch shaft. \$2,199.99 to \$2,799.99

[minnkotamotors.com](http://minnkotamotors.com)



Lift assist makes stowing and deploying easy.



The i-Pilot system allows the motor's speed and direction to be wirelessly controlled with a remote or smartphone app.

Control buttons are on both the foot pedal and remote.

Heel/toe steering is just like standard cable-steer models.



There's no recoil in the head when your foot is removed from the pedal.

Electronic control requires minimal pressure on the foot pedal to change direction.

Digital Maximizer conserves battery life.

Spot-Lock uses GPS and minor trolling motor adjustments to "anchor" the boat in place.

The composite shaft is indestructible.

AutoPilot automatically guides the boat on a selected path.

The Universal Sonar 2 system's transducer is integrated into the lower unit to cut down on interference and reduce the risk of damage.



### LOCK IT UP:

The DuraSafe E-Lock has been around for a few years and is a proven product. Now it's available for Minn Kota quick-release trolling motor brackets. The lock mounts flush to the bracket so it can't be cut. \$29.95

[durasafelocks.com](http://durasafelocks.com)

# 7 HANDY GADGETS TO HAVE AROUND

## 1. Catch Comander

This scale integrates with a smartphone app to record fish weight and length, location, weather conditions, catch details, and photos for easy tracking and sharing. \$199 [catchcommander.com](http://catchcommander.com)

## 2. Aqua-Vu HD700i

Get 720p HD resolution on the 7-inch screen of this new flagship underwater camera from Aqua-Vu. \$699.99 [aquavu.com](http://aquavu.com)

## 3. Go Puck 6XR

Charge an iPhone 6S five times or a GoPro HERO4 seven times (on average) before needing to recharge this 9,000-milliamp pocket-sized power source. \$99 [gopuck.com](http://gopuck.com)

## 4. RinseKit

The 2-gallon tank fills in 20 seconds and "stores" the pressure from a spigot or faucet to provide up to three minutes of spray without batteries or pumps. \$89.99 [rinsekits.com](http://rinsekits.com)

## 5. FishFinderMounts.com Magnetic Boat Mount Kits

A unique magnetic transducer mount that holds through the hull allows this all-in-one portable kit – including electronics mount, battery – to transfer from kayak to johnboat to rental boat to whatever else you might fish from in a snap. Prices vary by model. [fishfindermounts.com](http://fishfindermounts.com)

## 6. RAM LED Spotlight

Light it up with this weather-resistant, 1,900-lumen LED spotlight, which runs on 12-volt power and is available in a variety of mounting options. \$98.99 to \$111.99 [rammount.com](http://rammount.com)

## 7. Weego Jump Starter 44

A jumpstarter, battery charger, LED light, portable power source and more all in one compact water-resistant device. \$149.99 [myweego.com](http://myweego.com)



## 3 INNOVATIVE IDEAS

ICAST is full of bright people with big ideas. Here are three products that evolved from particularly innovative ideas that, while not yet proven among bass anglers, certainly have potential.

### 1. An Electronic Kill Switch

Fell Marine's new MOB+ is an electronic kill switch for boats. It operates with a hard-wired receiver that's installed in the boat and a wireless fob that's worn by the user. If the fob is submerged or winds up more than 50 feet from the receiver, the engine shuts off. \$199

[fellmarine.com](http://fellmarine.com)

### 2. A Knotless Connection

The Tauten Line Welder replaces old-fashioned knots with a device that "welds" line together using heat and a polymer binding material. Additional accessories are coming, but currently it works with monofilament, fluoropolymer and braid. \$199.95 for the unit; \$13.99 for three additional weld cartridges

[tautensports.com](http://tautensports.com)



### 3. A Portable Weigh-in System

The Frabill Weigh Bag System contains three parts: **1)** a durable reinforced PVC bag that holds up to 11 1/4 gallons of water, **2)** a mesh weigh bag that fits inside and **3)** a portable aerator. It might be the perfect solution for small tournaments that don't have aerated staging tanks. \$79.99

[frabill.com](http://frabill.com)

### AN INTERESTING NEW TOOL: THE KNOTHEAD

Think of it as a cousin to a fly-tying vise that provides an extra set of hands. That's The Knothead, a portable knot-tying station that makes rigging up easier in windy, cold conditions or for anyone who might have issues seeing and grasping thin fishing line. The company's website includes video tutorials on how to tie most of the popular knots that bass anglers use, plus some custom knots, for both line-to-line connections and attaching hooks and lures. \$44.95

[theknothead.com](http://theknothead.com)



**GoPro HERO5 Family**

From the leader in action cameras comes a pair of new high-performance models that make producing fishing flics easier and better than ever. The HERO5 Black (\$399.99), which is the new flagship model, is the most capable and simplest-to-operate GoPro ever built, while the HERO5 Session (\$299.99) offers many of the same features in an ultra-compact package. Both are compatible with the free GoPro Capture app, which allows for viewing and sharing content and controlling cameras remotely, and the GoPro Quik free editing app. They also work with the GoPro Plus cloud-based system.

[gopro.com](http://gopro.com)



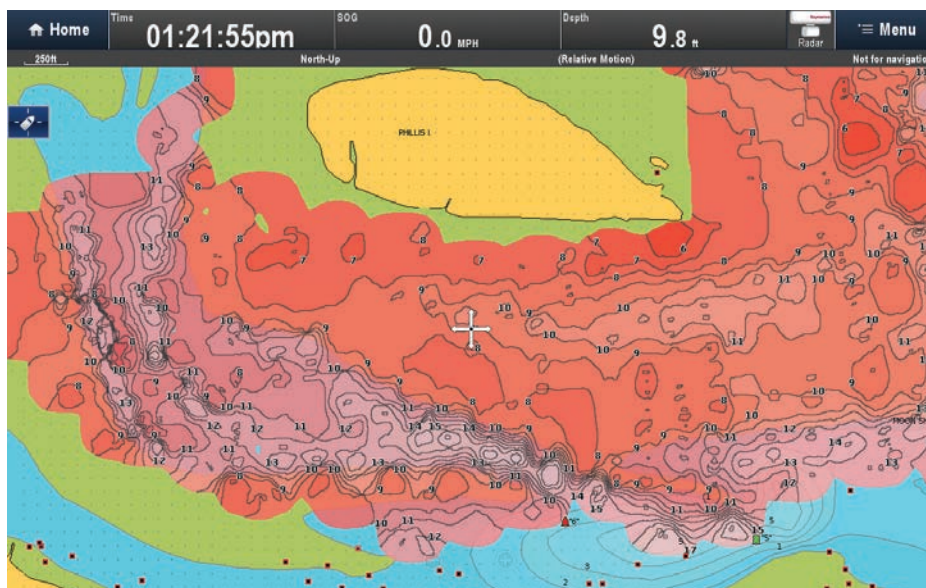
**HERO5 Session Features:**

- compact 38mm cube body
- voice-activated commands
- 4K video
- 10-megapixel photography
- single, burst and time-lapse modes
- advanced image stabilization for action filming
- one-button control
- waterproof body – no housing needed
- compatibility with more than 30 accessories and mounts



**HERO5 Black Features:**

- voice-activated commands
- 2-inch touch-screen display
- on-screen editing and adjustments
- waterproof body – no housing needed
- one-button control
- advanced image stabilization for action filming
- GPS enabled
- compatibility with more than 30 accessories and mounts
- 4K video
- 12-megapixel photography
- single, burst and time-lapse modes
- RAW and WDR photo capabilities
- three microphones for enhanced audio quality
- left and right stereo audio channels



**Navionics SonarChart Live**

As if Navionics maps weren't powerful enough, now you can draw your own maps with 1-foot contours while boating around your favorite lake using SonarChart Live. The system creates maps in real time, either displaying on the screen of compatible units or on a wirelessly connected smartphone with the free Navionics Boating app. The SonarChart system can also compile bathymetric detail from multiple users, which it then makes available to SonarChart users in daily map updates.

[navionics.com](http://navionics.com)

# 2017 BUYER'S GUIDE

## Lowrance Elite-7Ti and Elite-5Ti

Leave it to Lowrance to pack CHIRP sonar, DownScan and StructureScan into a touch-screen unit for less than \$1,000. That's what you get with the new Elite-7Ti and Elite-5Ti, which start at \$649 and \$449, respectively.



### Cool features:

- Low/mid/high CHIRP and DownScan
- Optional StructureScan when paired with the TotalScan transducer, which is sold separately
- Bluetooth and wireless connectivity
- Touch-screen control
- Internal GPS antennae
- MicroSD map card compatible

[lowrance.com](http://lowrance.com)



1

### 2 NEW WAYS TO RIG YOUR LOWRANCE ELECTRONICS

T-H Marine expanded its Kong series of electronics mounts with two new models: the **Dual Kong Electronics Mount** (\$379.99) and **Kong Mini Super Duty Electronics Mount** (\$189.99). The former is a side-by-side double mount available in console and bow configurations. Its most unique feature is a pair of locking nuts that let the user customize positioning and quickly remove the units. The Mini is a simpler setup that's great for bow or side console use. Metal pins in the joint lock it where you set it, while a spring-loaded tab at the base makes it quick to remove. Get the Mini in no lift, short arm or long arm configuration.

[thmarine.com](http://thmarine.com)



2

**ANOTHER TOOL FOR SAFE FISH HANDLING**

If you're culling, you're having a good day, but the fish that you're handling don't enjoy the process as much as you. When done inefficiently, culling can force bass to be kept out of the livewell for an extended time, and some culling beams are rough on a bass' mouth. You need a quick, safe system. One new example is Lew's Speed Beam Culling System. It's like a traditional culling beam, but instead of hooks that pierce the mouth to hold the fish, it features wide zinc-plated steel clips that grip the bass' jaw. The beam costs about \$20.

lews.com



The 10-foot Blade gets updated with a new stronger, more streamlined bracket.

**New Products from Power-Pole**  
**Even better performance from an already proven brand**

Power-Pole continues to enhance its lineup of shallow-water anchors by improving performance of existing models and adding more user-friendly controls. The latter is primarily thanks to the Power-Pole C-Monster 2.0 control system, which now provides 10 times faster communication between the pump and controller and a stronger RF signal for extended range. A new iOS and Android app allows the system to be manned from a smartphone and includes a unique theft recovery feature.

Elsewhere, Power-Pole has tweaked several of its most popular models with new brackets, new finishes and the like. Of note is a new stronger, low-maintenance bracket design for the 10-foot Blade model and an enhanced hydraulic pump. The pump is more compact, replaces hydraulic tubing with hydraulic hoses, and can provide increased pressure to operate the poles. The pump will come with all hydraulic Power-Pole models.

Check out power-pole.com for a complete breakdown of all the company's shallow-water anchors.

Better "guts," including a new hydraulic pump (shown), improve all Power-Pole models.



# ODDS AND ENDS

Need a simple gift idea for an angler this holiday season? Or maybe you're looking for a product you never knew you couldn't live without. You might find both here.



## 1. Buck Knives Splizzors Sheath

Stainless hardware, injection molded polypropylene, an open-air design for quick drying and a locking tab that can be opened with one hand define this new sheath. \$30  
[buckknives.com](http://buckknives.com)

## 2. Cal Coast Fishing Cali Clip

This drop-shot leader keeper clips on the rod and doubles as a standard hook keeper. \$6.99 for three  
[calcoastfishing.com](http://calcoastfishing.com)

## 3. Rapid Fishing Solutions Rapid Line Clip

Remove your bait, clip this to the end of the line, reel it to the rod tip and it'll hold right there, cutting down on tangles and eliminating line kinks. \$7.99 for six  
[rapidfishing.com](http://rapidfishing.com)

## 4. Rapid Fishing Solutions Rapid Line Guide

Like a needle pulling thread, this product makes spooling up simple even with cold hands and failing eyesight. \$6.99 for two  
[rapidfishing.com](http://rapidfishing.com)

## 5. Reelsnot Java

Add casting distance and reduce line memory with this Teflon-based food grade lubricant that's eco-friendly and smells like coffee, which the company says attracts fish. \$9.99  
[reelsnot.com](http://reelsnot.com)

## 6. Cal Coast Fishing The Bait Sack

Stowing tackle on rods without tangles is as easy as squeezing open The Bait Sack and dropping in the lure. \$8.99 to \$10.99  
[calcoastfishing.com](http://calcoastfishing.com)

## 7. Line Cutterz Ring

It's an adjustable ring (it can be attached to a rod or finger) that cuts fishing line. \$12 to \$13  
[linecutterz.com](http://linecutterz.com)

## 8. Rod Grip Rod Handle Cover

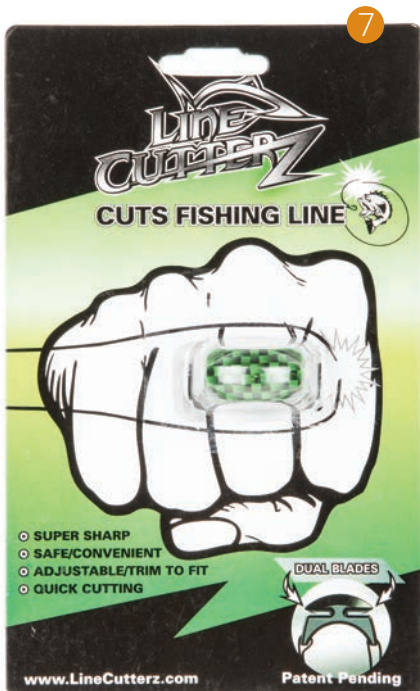
Cut it to fit, then slide it on just about any rod handle for a nonslip grip. \$9.99  
[reelgrip.com](http://reelgrip.com)

## 9. Winn Grips Super Rod Wrap

Add grip without sacrificing sensitivity with this 1.1mm-thick handle wrap, which comes in 17 colors. \$9.99 for 44 inches; \$18.99 for 96 inches  
[winngrips.com](http://winngrips.com)

## 10. Fish-A-Way

Eliminate fish odor at the molecular level from the livewell, clothes and hands with spray, foam or wipes. Prices vary.  
[hunterspec.com](http://hunterspec.com)



# TACKLE STORAGE

## 6 NEW HARD CASES



### 1. Bass Mafia Blade Coffin

The 25 individual sealable pouches that are included will keep wire lures tangle-free and organized, while adding an extra barrier to combat corrosion. \$49.99

[bmtoutdoors.com](http://bmtoutdoors.com)

### 2. Bass Mafia Terminal Coffin

Inserts custom-made for weights and sinkers slip in and out (and are available individually), which makes the box entirely customizable for each season, trip or day. \$54.99

[bmtoutdoors.com](http://bmtoutdoors.com)

### 3. Bass Mafia Deep Cranking Coffin

The 6 1/2-inch-deep haul of this watertight box will allow for snag-free vertical storage of up to 44 deep-diving crankbaits. A jerkbait box is coming too. \$54.99

[bmtoutdoors.com](http://bmtoutdoors.com)

### 4. Flambeau Waterproof Satchels

Thick walls, a modular design laced with an anti-corrosion material and a completely waterproof floating case are the foremost of the features that make this series moisture's worst enemy. \$49 to \$97

[flambeaoutdoors.com](http://flambeaoutdoors.com)

### 5. Plano Plastic Worm StowAways

Keep bags of soft plastics along with terminal tackle in one transparent case with this dual-sided retake on the classic 3600 and 3700 frames. \$7.99 to \$9.99

[planomolding.com](http://planomolding.com)

### 6. DyeSafe Containment System

Dye soft plastics without the worry of also dyeing deck carpets and clothes with this kit that features a foam insert that cozily holds three dye bottles. A center hole in the foam holds a bottle upright for dipping baits. \$24.99

[dyesafe.com](http://dyesafe.com)

# 8 BAGS

## 1. Mustang Survival Bluewater Gear Haulers

A coated nylon shell and urethane-coated zippers make for all-around waterproof construction throughout the series, which features two bags (a hydration pack sells for \$119.99). Each bag also features its own modular panels for custom gear configuration. \$189.99 to \$239.99

[mustangsurvival.com](http://mustangsurvival.com)

## 2. Mustang Survival Bluewater Roll Top Dry Bags

Packing gear and accessories in this upright dry bag is made easy with the roll-top opening. Five sizes are available. \$24.99 to \$49.99

[mustangsurvival.com](http://mustangsurvival.com)

## 3. Mustang Survival Greenwater Waterproof Deck Bag

These waterproof deck bags are designed to stand by your side even in the roughest conditions in the back of the truck, on the boat or at camp. \$269.99 to \$299.99

[mustangsurvival.com](http://mustangsurvival.com)

## 4. Plano Guide Series Tackle Bags

This new series includes four bags that feature a top and bottom rail system that will externally hold a compatible StowAway so it can be easily reached. The rail system also sports tie-down notches and attachment points to anchor numerous accessories and tools. \$59.99 to \$109

[planomolding.com](http://planomolding.com)

## 5. Plano Z-Series

Zippers are notorious for going bad. That's why in this new series Plano waives the zippers and replaces them with buckles and hook-and-loop closures to permit ease of access and to prolong the life of the bag. The series includes two bags, a backpack and a wrap. \$19.99 to \$94.99

[planomolding.com](http://planomolding.com)



## 6. Flambeau Ritual Series

These soft tackle bags are constructed with tough polyester sidewalls and heavy vinyl-coated bottoms. The series includes three duffel bags, a large backpack and a satchel. \$35 to \$85  
[flambeaoutdoors.com](http://flambeaoutdoors.com)

## 7. Flambeau Portage Series

Although not a hard-bodied storage system, the Portage Series features a semi-rigid foam body design that allows each duffel and backpack to hold its shape when not fully packed. Storage trays fit neatly inside. \$44 to \$150  
[flambeaoutdoors.com](http://flambeaoutdoors.com)

## 8. Simms Challenger Tackle Bags

View hard boxes before you unzip the bag with the look-through top featured on these water-resistant duffel bags. \$99 to \$149  
[simmsfishing.com](http://simmsfishing.com)



## 3 ADDITIONAL STORAGE OPTIONS

### TackleWebs Cup Holder

Make use of bare sidewalls and compartment lids with this easy-to-install mesh cup holder that will multifunction as a safe spot for a phone and much more. Other similar storage products are available from TackleWebs. \$14.99  
[tacklewebs.com](http://tacklewebs.com)



### Cobra Garage Door Storage

This rod storage system easily clamps to most overhead garage doors with the twist of a few wing nuts, allowing for organized and out-of-the-way storing of your rod collection. It won Best Tackle Management product at the ICAST New Product Showcase. \$35  
[cobrastorage.com](http://cobrastorage.com)

### Bass Mafia Rod Noose

Bundle together up to a dozen rods before lugging them to the truck or boat. \$6.99 for two  
[bmtoutdoors.com](http://bmtoutdoors.com)



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# CLOTHING

## 1. Columbia PFG Force 12 Long Sleeve Zero Shirt

The PFG Force 12 is Columbia's state-of-the-art technical shirt, with such niceties as a sunglass cleaning patch, zippered chest pockets, button-down collar and bonded seams. It's also vented and offers Omni-Shade UPF 50 protection. The Omni-Wick treatment allows moisture to evaporate quicker, and the Omni-Freeze Zero sweat-activated finish actually cools down the skin when the temperature soars. It's available in three colors, in models and sizes for men and women, sizes S-2XL. \$120 for women; \$130 for men

[columbia.com](http://columbia.com)



## 2. HUK KScott Collection Shirts

The KScott collection of HUK clothing features designs inspired by artist and apparel maker KScott. Among the shirts in the lineup are long-sleeve and short-sleeve options, in a variety of styles and materials. While the art heavily favors the saltwater scene, several bass prints are available, including this smallmouth T-shirt. Sizes and prices vary.

[hukgear.com](http://hukgear.com)



## 3. Buff UV Arm Sleeves and Caps

Like other products in the Buff line, new arm sleeves and caps come in a variety of sizes, colors and patterns while providing UPF 40+ protection. Three sleeve styles will be available: traditional length (\$24.99 per pair), one imbued with Insect Shield repellent (\$29.99) and a longer version that extends over the hands (\$26.99).

The adjustable five-panel Trucker Cap and six-panel 10-4 Snapback Cap (either \$29.99) have a non-glare underbill, moisture-wicking headband and stain-guard finish on the bill.

[buffusa.com](http://buffusa.com)



## 4. SoftScience Fin 2.0

The SoftScience booth at ICAST saw a lot of foot traffic, as the company debuted its line of lightweight fishing shoes and short boots. The Fin actually was introduced in 2015, but the newest version has been upgraded inside and out with a quick-drying mesh upper, washable insole, cushioning bed and an outsole that sipes water away from the wearer's foot. It's a lace-up model available in four colors and size 7-13. \$89.99 to \$99.99

[softscience.com](http://softscience.com)

**ANOTHER WINNER FROM COSTA**

For the umpteenth consecutive time, a pair of Costa fishing sunglasses was selected as the Best Eyewear at the 2016 ICAST tackle show in Orlando. The latest winner is the Rafael. The signature three-hole venting in the system alleviates lens fogging, and rubber temple tips and nose pads help keep the glasses from sliding down the wearer's nose in sweaty weather.

Four frame colors – retro tortoise (shown), matte olive teak, blackout and matte black teak – are available, as well as several colors of Costa's popular 580 lenses (glass or polycarbonate). The asking price ranges from \$169 to \$249.

[costadelmar.com](http://costadelmar.com)

**JACK FROST-PROOF SUIT FROM FRABILL**

Frabill is known for its rain suits, but the company turned some heads at ICAST with its new I-Float bibs and jacket for anglers who fish in extreme winter conditions. The suit was named Best Technical Apparel by the media that attended the show.

The jacket is certified by the U.S. Coast Guard as a personal flotation device. Jacket and bibs are waterproof and windproof with hand-warmer pockets, tough Cordura fabric at the stress points and mesh self-drainage openings that help the wearer get out of the water more quickly if he should fall overboard or be thrown from the boat. The jacket, which has a collapsible hood, sells for \$299, while the bibs retail for about \$249.99. Available sizes for either piece are S-3XL

[frabill.com](http://frabill.com)



5. **STORMR Nano**

Think of the Nano Shell Jacket and Pant as STORMR Light, as it's a non-neoprene model made for anglers who spend most of their time fishing in southern climes. Features include a waterproof and breathable shell with full-sealed seams, YKK Aquaguard front and pocket zippers, a two-way adjustable hood, a draw-cord adjustable waist on the jacket with elastic in the pant waist, and knee-high zippers. The price is a big attraction: \$149.95 for the jacket (red or charcoal gray) and \$99.95 for the pants (charcoal gray only). Sizes range from S-3XL in various lengths for the pants.

[stormrusa.com](http://stormrusa.com)



6. **Simms Challenger Jacket and Bibs**

This affordable rainsuit with premium features includes two-layer Toray waterproof and breathable fabric, fully taped seams and a three-point adjustable hood with collar stowage. The jacket also has a dual draw-cord adjustable bottom hem and YKK zippers, and the pants have hand-warmer pockets as well as adjustable suspenders. The jacket weighs just over 25 ounces, while the bibs weigh about 27 ounces. Four colors are available. S-4XL. \$199.95 per piece.

[simmsfishing.com](http://simmsfishing.com)



**7. Under Armour CoolSwitch Thermocline Long Sleeve**

A long-sleeve shirt featuring Under Armour's proprietary CoolSwitch technology, the Thermocline is a performance choice for the hottest days on the water. Besides cooling sweaty skin and providing ventilation under the arms, the shirt offers UPF 30+ protection and anti-odor technology. The Thermocline is available in sizes S-3XL, and there are two color choices. \$54.99.

[underarmour.com](http://underarmour.com)

**8. Gill FG12 Expedition Shorts**

Gill's snazzy-looking FG12 shorts have a lot going for them: low-profile hook-and-loop adjustable waist band with belt loops, soft stretchable fabric, 50+ UV protection, a heavy-duty plier pocket and zippered cargo pocket, as well as standard slash pockets and back pockets. S-3XL. \$65

[gillna.com](http://gillna.com)



**COOL-DOWN CLOTHING**

Manufacturers such as frogg toggs – with products such as Chilly Bands and Super Chilly Cooling Towel – have been working on fabrics that actually have a cooling effect on the skin.

Under Armour thinks it has a winner in its CoolSwitch technology, which incorporates a coating on the inside of the garments. When it gets hot and the wearer starts sweating, the fabric begins to cool off the skin and dissipates heat away from the skin. Among the available CoolSwitch clothing: long- and short-sleeve shirts, hoodies, gloves, neck gaiters and more.

Likewise, Columbia has stepped up with its Omni-Freeze ZERO. It works on the same principle as similar climate-control clothing: You work up a sweat catching fish – or because you're not catching fish – and the perspiration-activated properties of the clothing's fabric kick in. We're not sure how it works, but the wearer can detect a noticeable difference.

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TACTICAL APPROACHES TO SEASONAL CHALLENGES

# TECHNIQUES



## WHAT'S INSIDE

- SUBTLE SWIMBAITS
- DECEMBER BUZZBAITS

PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

# SMALL, SUBTLE SWIMBAITS

A FINESSE OPTION THAT STAYS ON THE MOVE

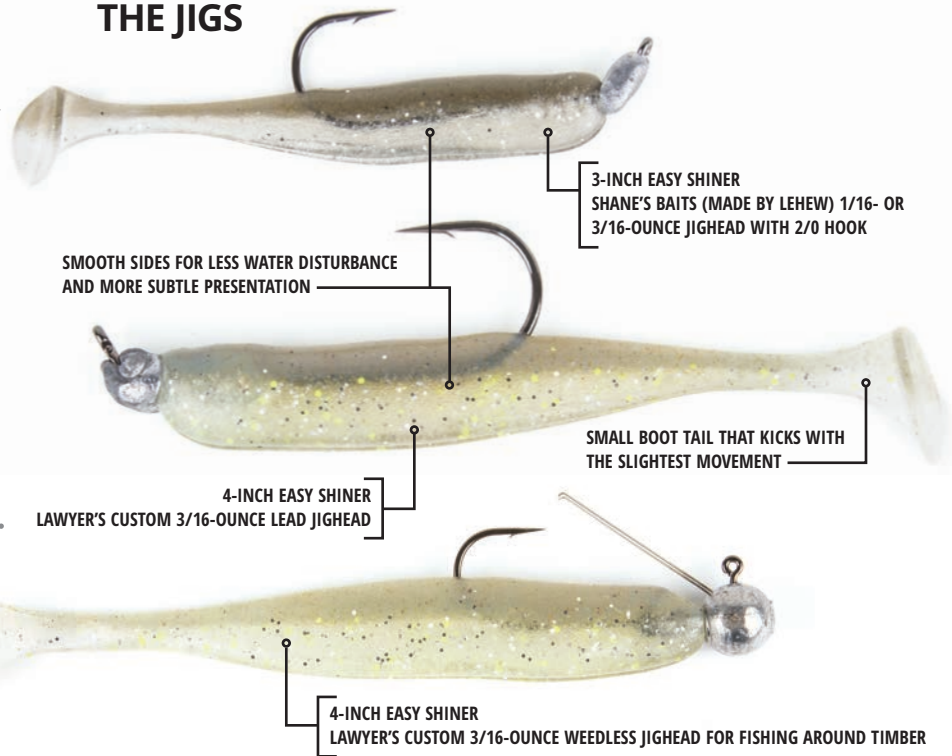
by Curtis Niedermier

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT PACE

**F**inesse fishing doesn't always mean dragging a worm on bottom. Small swimbaits offer a great finesse option too, and they work from the surface to the lake floor.

FLW pros Shane LeHew and Jeremy Lawyer proved small swimbaits' worth in the summertime by using Keitech Easy Shiners (the 3-incher for LeHew and 4-incher for Lawyer) at the Forrest Wood Cup to make the top 20. However, both anglers use the Easy Shiner quite often in the fall and winter, and in many tough-bite situations.

## THE JIGS



## WHEN IT WORKS BEST

- wintertime in clear-water fisheries
- post-frontal bluebird days with slick conditions and neutral fish
- when bass are foraging on small baitfish
- anywhere smallmouths live in clear water

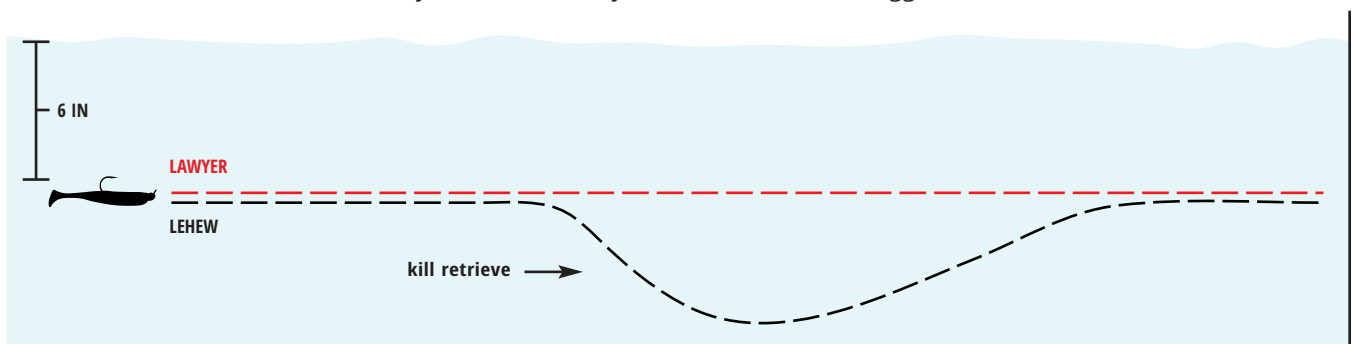
## CHANGE OF DIRECTION

When winding a small swimbait, any kind of deflection or change of speed or direction helps trigger bites. Otherwise, bass are prone to follow the swimbait without eating.

## PUTTING IT TO WORK

### SCENARIO 1: Bass are schooling at the surface

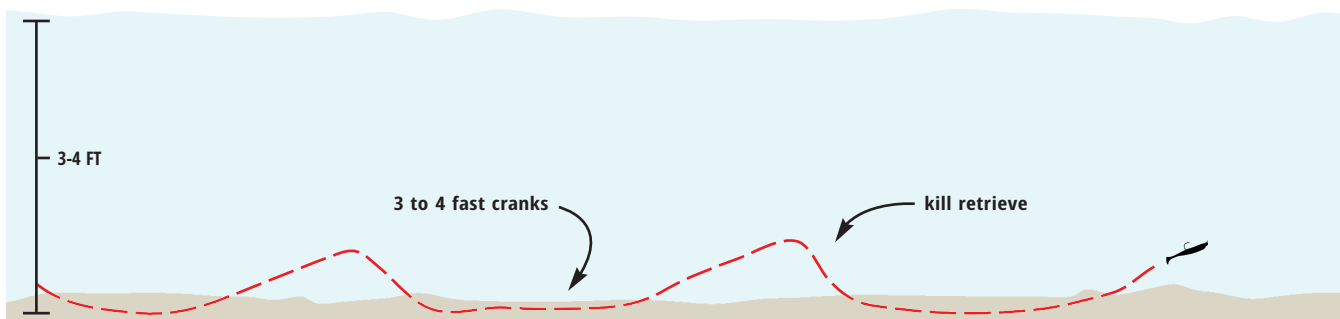
**TECHNIQUE:** At the Cup, LeHew and Lawyer threw the Easy Shiner to catch schooling bass that seemed to shy away from topwaters and soft jerkbaits. Lawyer had some success by burning the bait about 6 inches under the surface. LeHew fished his the same way, but occasionally killed his retrieve to trigger bites.



## SCENARIO 2: Bass are schooled up, but not actively feeding on top

**TECHNIQUE:** When the surface schoolers dropped back down at the Cup, Lawyer adjusted his approach.

"When they were down I was slow-rolling it; just kind of bouncing it off the bottom in 3 to 4 feet of water," he says. "I couldn't catch them just barely winding, so instead I'd crank it three or four times real fast then kill it to make them react."

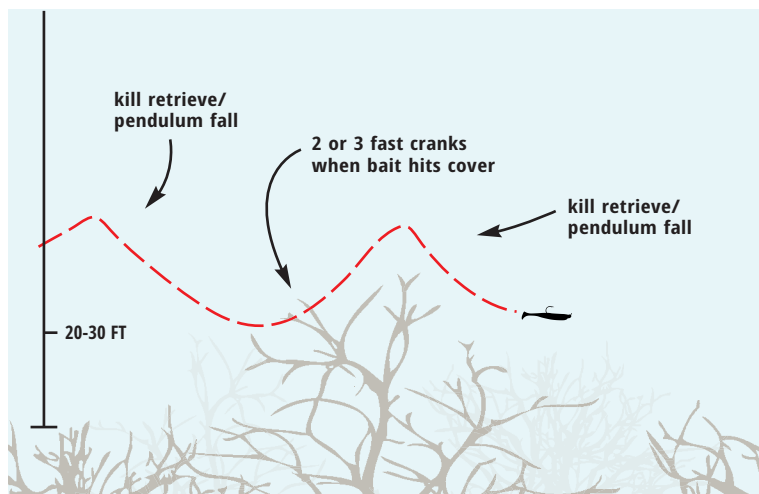


## SCENARIO 3: Bass are suspended in the tops of timber

**TECHNIQUE:** Using Table Rock as an example, Lawyer often finds fish suspended 20 to 30 feet deep around trees rooted in 60 feet or so of water. He says the fish will come up to eat the bait, so he counts down the bait and keeps it near the tops of the trees.

His retrieve is a slow reel with the rod tip at 2 o'clock, occasionally pausing and letting the bait "pendulum down." The pendulum fall is key, and deflecting it off cover helps.

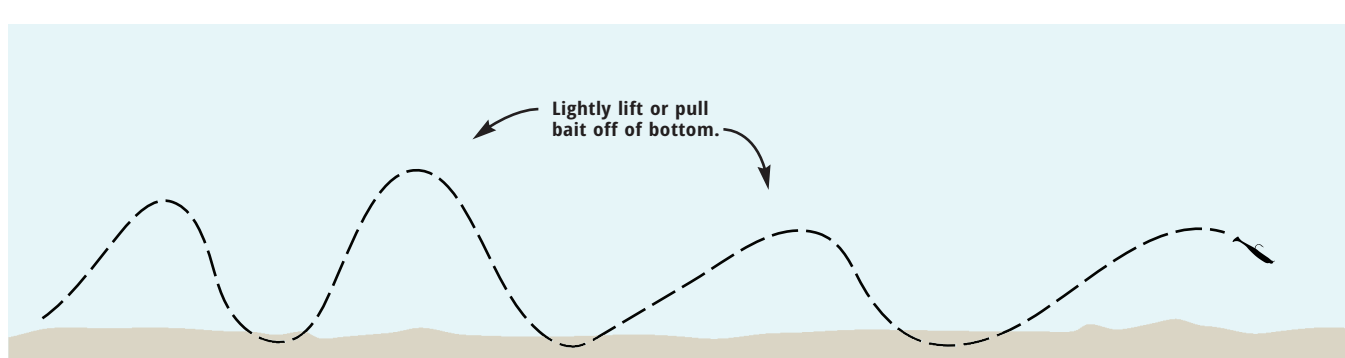
"When I feel a limb I crank it two or three times real quick and then kill it and let it pendulum, or drop the rod back to it. That allows the bait to fall back in their face," he says.



## SCENARIO 4: Bass are holding on deep channel edges

**TECHNIQUE:** LeHew's winter tactic is simple, but effective. He lets the swimbait sink to the bottom then works it with a series of lifts or pulls.

"I'm really lightly lifting it like a spoon off the bottom," he says. "I never lift it more than 2 or 3 feet. And I try to keep a little bit of slack when it falls."



# DECEMBER BUZZBAITS

A SLOW, GURGLING TOPWATER CAN BE A COLD-SEASON KILLER

by Curtis Niedermier

**E**arly December is not too late to throw a buzzbait, says Keystone Light pro Jeff Sprague. Granted, Sprague lives in Texas, where winter doesn't really arrive until January or February most years. He says that as long as the water temperature is right, a buzzbait is a big-fish killer in the late season.

"You might not smash a whole lot of fish, but you're going to catch some good ones," he says.

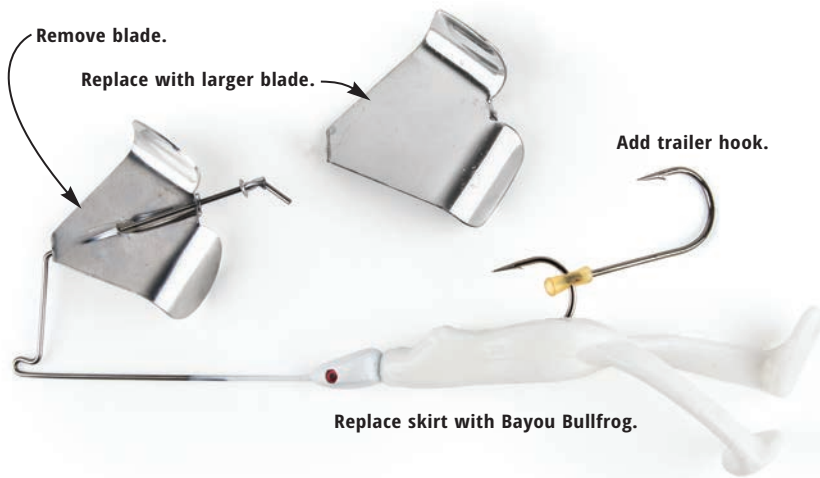


PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

**KEY WATER TEMPERATURE RANGE:** Low to mid-50s

## A PERFECT BUZZBAIT FOR THE PERFECT RETRIEVE

It's all about slow and steady in December, which is why Sprague has tweaked his buzzbait to be a "really slow, fat buzzbait - a big thumper" that'll stay on the surface even at a lumbering speed.



- 1** The frame is a 3/8-ounce V&M Cyclone Classic Buzz Bait.
- 2** Sprague removes the blade and replaces it with a blade that is one size larger.
- 3** In place of the skirt, he uses a white V&M Bayou Bullfrog paddle-tail toad. "I like to stick to something with a lot of drag in the water that time of year to help me slow the bait down. That toad-type bait is wide and has bigger legs to slow it down in the water," Sprague says.
- 4** A trailer hook helps catch lethargic fish that suck in the lure but don't get it deep into the mouth.

## ROCK ON

Buzzbait target areas aren't unlike traditional cold-water cranking target areas.

"I look for rock and riprap on steep banks where fish can easily move up and down in the water column to adjust for climate changes if we have a cold front come in," says Sprague.

Creek bends, primary and secondary points, small bluffs, and steep-sloping main-lake pockets are all prime places to find the right types of banks, with the best depth range typically in the 10- to 12-foot-deep zone.

## IT'S SLOW, BUT IT'S NOT

"You can still cover water with this type of technique," says Sprague, "but the deal is when you get in an area where you get a bite or two, a lot of times you can come back with another bait such as a crankbait or jig. You know there are active fish there. I just catch a lot bigger fish on a topwater that time of year."

### PRESENTATION KEYS

1. Position the boat parallel to the bank.
2. Cast to the bank at an angle so you can target the shallowest water out to 10 to 12 feet.
3. Wind the bait slowly so it's chopping water, but not racing in.

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<sup>4</sup> As measured in ASTM Sequence IVA test, using SAE 5W-30 conventional motor

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FLW TOURNAMENT COVERAGE AND RESULTS

# ON TOUR



## WHAT'S INSIDE

- BRYAN THRIFT DETAILS HIS RUN-AND-GUN WINNING GAME PLAN AT LAKE NORMAN
- THE FALL FISHING SYSTEM THAT HAS EARNED JAMES WATSON THREE WINS
- HOW THE FINAL TWO COSTAS WERE WON AT GIBSON AND LAKE OF THE OZARKS



# LAKE NORMAN – SEPT. 15-17 | PRESENTED BY **LOWRANCE**

Hosted by Visit Lake Norman, Visit Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation

## RUNNING THE NUMBERS

### Bryan Thrift's run-and-gun system pays off again

by Rob Newell

**F**or Bryan Thrift, tournament bass fishing is a numbers game, having far less to do with areas, patterns and conditions and far more to do with making more presentations to more targets than anyone else.

As a youngster, Thrift learned this style of fishing at Lake Norman in North Carolina. Norman's innumerable docks and brush piles provide more bass cover than can be fished in a lifetime. And Thrift would know, because he has spent a lifetime trying to fish it all.

So when Thrift gets to play his numbers game on his home turf on Lake Norman, it does not bode well for his competition. He earned his first Walmart FLW Tour win on Lake Norman in 2010. In September, it was déjà vu all over again as he claimed victory in the FLW Tour Invitational on the very lake that has shaped his successful career.



PHOTO BY ANDY HAGEBON



An astute memory and years of local experience helped Bryan Thrift win the Invitational on his home lake.

PHOTO BY SEAN OSTRUSZKA

Scott Canterbury comes up short as tournament director Ron Lappin calls out his weight. Bryan Thrift likes what he sees.

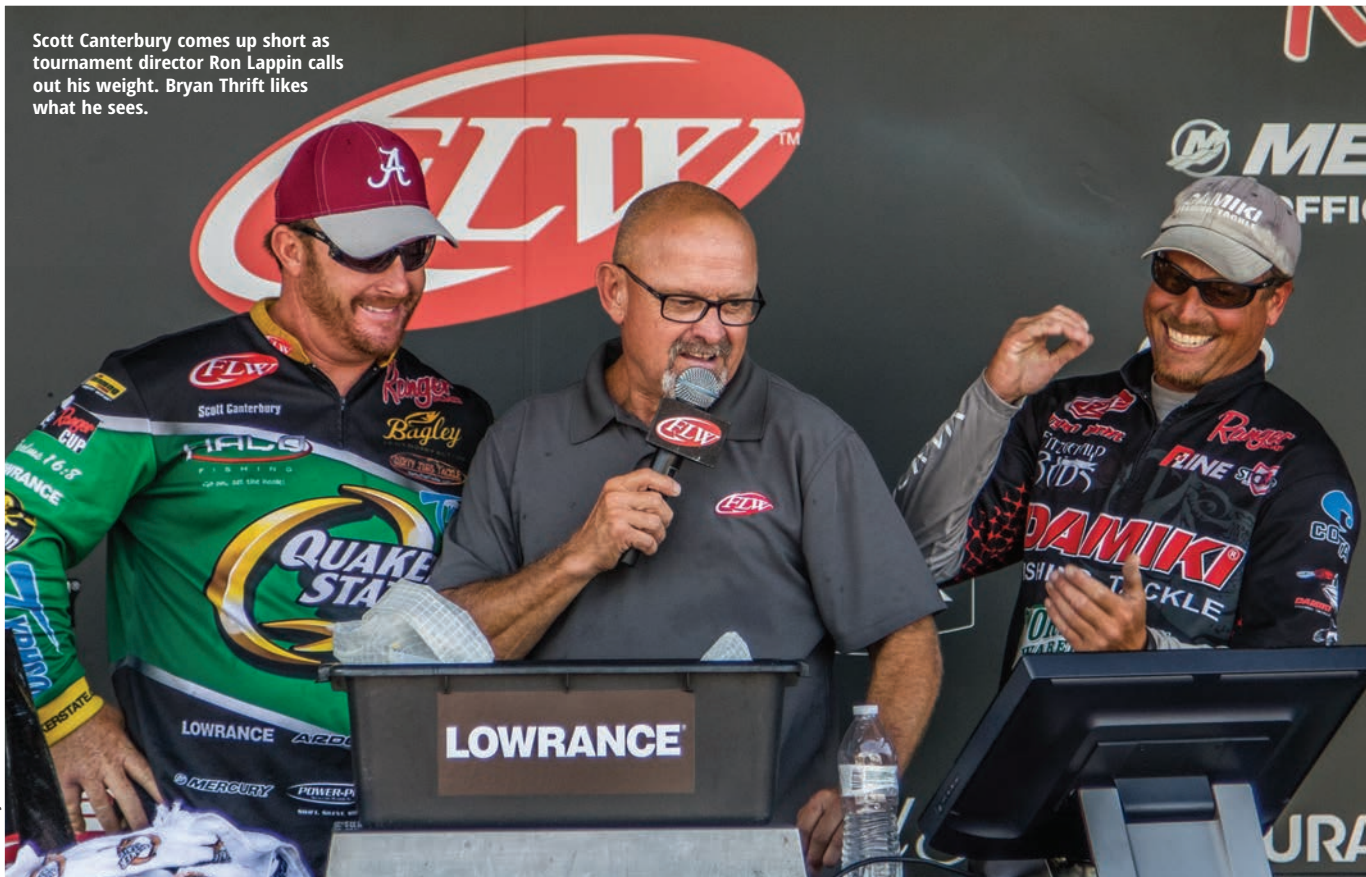


PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

## Fishing Memories

Thrift is a natural favorite to win on his home lake. In fact, it's like his mind is pre-programmed for it.

"I have a really good memory," Thrift says. "I can tell you every place I have ever caught a bass on Norman over the last 20 years. I can take you to the exact dock where I caught my first bass on this lake, and all the others since."

For that reason, Thrift knows literally hundreds upon hundreds of fishy spots on Norman, and running his numbers game in a three-day tournament during a tough time in September is like throwing him in a bass fishing briar patch – tough on the surface, but an easy opportunity for a guy who knows every nook and cranny.

"Really, anyone can catch them on Norman in a one-day tournament," Thrift says. "But the more fishing pressure that gets applied to the lake over a few days, and the tougher it gets, the better my chances are of making some of the sneaky single-fish spots I know pay off."

In order to make those spots pay off, Thrift has to hit a lot of them in a day, and that's where he is an absolute master in number-running efficiency.

For instance, Thrift puts all of his "bank-related" rods on one side of the deck and all of his offshore rods on the other side. He keeps them separate so he can unstrap only one side

and easily find what he needs, depending on what he is fishing at each stop.

Thrift also adds in duplicate rods and baits to each side so that if a fish short-strikes him and fouls the bait or steals his trailer, he can pick up a new rod and quickly fire right back without having to take the time to fix his original bait.

When running "bank-related" objects such as docks, riprap or laydowns, Thrift uses just his strong memory – no GPS. Offshore spots are marked with waypoints, but Thrift knows what's down there – usually brush or rock – based solely on memory, and the former AOY knows exactly how far he needs to be from the juice to hit each spot perfectly on the first cast. Once he tickles the target with a few more casts, Thrift runs to the next waypoint. He repeats this process about 50 times per day.

## Conditions

**Weather:** mostly cloudy; breezy on day one

**Air Temperature:** highs in the mid- to upper 80s

**Water Temperature:** mid-80s; upper 90s near power plant discharges

**Moon Phase:** full

**Predominant Lake Features:** docks, bridges, brush piles, power plant discharges ("hot holes")

## TOP FIVE

### 1. BRYAN THRIFT SHELBY, N.C.

Total Weight: 34-12 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$71,000\*

\*Includes \$10,000 Ranger Cup and \$200 Costa Award

### 2. SCOTT BEATTIE LINCOLN, N.C.

Total Weight: 34-06 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$18,340

### 3. WESLEY STRADER SPRING CITY, TENN.

Total Weight: 33-09 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$15,200

### 4. TODD HOLLOWELL FISHERS, IND.

Total Weight: 33-09 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$12,160

### 5. MICHAEL NEAL DAYTON, TENN.

Total Weight: 32-14 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$9,120

## Baits and Tactics

Thrift's offshore arsenal at Norman (located on the right half of the deck) included a 10- to 15-foot-diving crankbait, a Damiki Anchovy Shad swimbait rigged on a 3/16-ounce head, a 1/2-ounce jig and a shaky head. He had duplicate rods rigged with jigs and Anchovy Shads for those sneaky bait stealers.

His bank-related arsenal (on the left side) consisted of a buzzbait, a Damiki Rambler walking topwater, a Damiki D-Pop, a River2Sea Whopper Plopper and several 1/2-ounce jigs, which are duplicates for the chunk stealers.

Thrift says there is no rhyme or reason to when he fishes offshore spots and bank-related spots. He contends that largemouths, typically Norman's better quality bass when compared to spotted bass, usually come from the shallower banks and docks where they form wolf packs to hunt bream. His species mix for the tournament consisted of five largemouths and 10 spotted bass.

"If I get a bite off of a particular piece of cover, I'll run all the stuff that's like it in that area," Thrift says. "Other than that, I'm truly just making presentations to different objects as fast as I can. At the end of the day my GPS looks like a bowl of spaghetti."

His GPS tracks might have been a jumbled mess, but his daily scorecard was deadly consistent: 11-5, 11-12 and 11-11.

Thrift was the only angler in the field to break the 11-pound mark every day, for a winning total of 34-12.

"That's the beauty of multiple-day tournaments here when it's tough," Thrift adds. "You don't necessarily need a lucky big fish to win, but you have to be consistent. And I have a better chance at maintaining that consistency across three or four days with the sheer number of places I know."



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

## Shooters, Buzzers and Poppers Dominate at Norman

The Carolinas have served as proving grounds for many "secret" lures that are now tackle box staples.

From the old days of David Fritts' Poe's 300 to ChatterBaits to hand-carved topwater prop baits, a lot of true bass-catching lures have reached the market thanks to the innovative tournament-angling community around the Charlotte area.

At the FLW Tour Invitational at Lake Norman in September, three lures were proven mainstays in the top 10: a 1/2-ounce Shooter Lures jig, a buzzbait teamed with

a Zoom Horny Toad and a River2Sea Whopper Plopper topwater.

Though none of these lures is a secret any longer, obviously all are still catching a lot of fish in the Carolinas.

**1. Shooter Lures jig** - Made by Carolina fishing legend Louie Hull of Casar, N.C., it's a hand-tied jig that is custom-made for skipping docks. The thread keeps the skirt from sliding down, and the Arky-style head skips easily. Most pros team it with a big plastic "chunk" to help the lure slide across the water's surface. They also use it when fishing Norman's offshore brush piles after simply changing the trailer to more of a swimming-type craw or twin-tail.

**2. Buzzbait/Horny Toad combo** - This topwater combo was also born from the necessity to skip up under docks. By taking a 1/4- to 1/2-ounce buzzbait, pulling off the skirt and gluing a Zoom Horny Toad on the hook, a buzzbait becomes a much more "skippable" lure.

**3. River2Sea Whopper Plopper** - Something about the gurgling of a buzzbait/toad combo drives shallow fish on Norman crazy, which might help explain why the River2Sea Whopper Plopper caught fire in the Carolinas several years ago. The "Plopper," as it is casually referred to, is a topwater hard bait with a very unique gurgling sound. The 130 (5 inches) and 90 (3 1/2 inches) models are both popular with bass anglers, and both sizes were used by several pros that made the top 10 at Norman. ■



PHOTO BY MATT PACE



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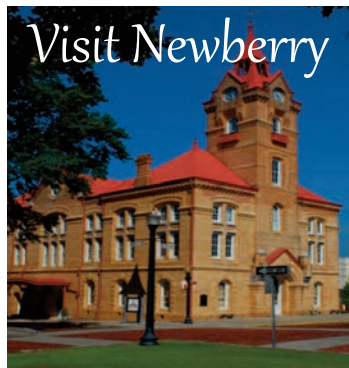
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# NORRIS LAKE – OCT. 20-22

PRESENTED  
BY



Hosted by Anderson County Tourism Council

## DIALING UP THE FALL BUZZ

James Watson rocks a topwater approach to win Norris

by Rob Newell

**J**ames Watson of Nixa, Mo., does not claim to be the best springtime fisherman in the world, but when it comes to fall fishing, he's not bashful about assessing his angling acumen.

"I love fishing in the fall," Watson says. "I have the most confidence from August through December. For some reason I just have a better feel for what the fish are doing that time of year."

Watson has the record to back up his claim to fall fishing fame. He has won both a B.A.S.S. Open (2015) and a PAA event (2013) on Table Rock in the fall of the year. Looking even farther back than that, Watson says he and a friend won a big team tournament championship event on Stockton Lake in Missouri in October 2009.

While naming a team tournament championship win seven years ago might be a bit of a stretch for fishing cred, it's Watson's most recent win at the Walmart FLW Tour Invitational on Norris Lake in Tennessee in October that proves he certainly has some mad fall fishing skills.

### The "Vacuum Effect"

Watson's underlying premise of fall fishing rests in how water levels affect bass behavior.

"I'm not claiming to be an expert in the spring, but I do know this: Falling water in the spring is a negative, but falling water in the fall is a positive," he says. "In the spring, bass are trying to reproduce, and a drop in water level is a threat to their eggs and fry. In the fall, bass are trying to eat, and a drop in water level helps bring food to them."



PHOTO BY KYLE WOOD

Watson is regarded as a top autumn angler, and he backed up his reputation on Norris in October.

## TOP FIVE

### 1. JAMES WATSON NIXA, MO.

Total Weight: 36-10 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$95,400

\*Includes \$17,000 Ranger Cup

### 2. JASON LAMBERT PICKWICK DAM, TENN.

Total Weight: 36-07 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$23,720

### 3. TRACY ADAMS WILKESBORO, N.C.

Total Weight: 35-10 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$19,600

### 4. DERRICK BLAKE ROCKWOOD, TENN.

Total Weight: 33-14 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$15,680

### 5. WESLEY STRADER SPRING CITY, TENN.

Total Weight: 32-15 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$11,760

For that reason, winter drawdowns are Watson's starting point for finding fall bass. Many reservoirs across the country begin to draw down water in late August and September in preparation for reaching winter pool levels. Watson says that once that process starts, bass know where to go to find their next meal.

"I call it the 'vacuum effect,'" Watson says. "When the lake starts getting sucked down, it pulls everything out. Bait, especially those big gizzard shad, can't hide up there around cover anymore. They get pulled out where bass are waiting on them."

## Reading the Rock

As the water falls, the lake bottom along the shoreline and other shallow areas is exposed, revealing ambush points where bass can take advantage of the vacuum effect. To the untrained eye, the new exposed shoreline might just look like a random, jumbled landscape of rock and mud. But to Watson, scanning such banks is like reading a book where every paragraph points him in the right direction to where bass will be.

Watson doesn't just see random rock. He sees flat rock, boulders, pea gravel and slate rock. Watson doesn't just see mud run amuck. He sees sand, clay, soft silt and hardpan. Watson doesn't just see bank. He sees varying degrees of slope.

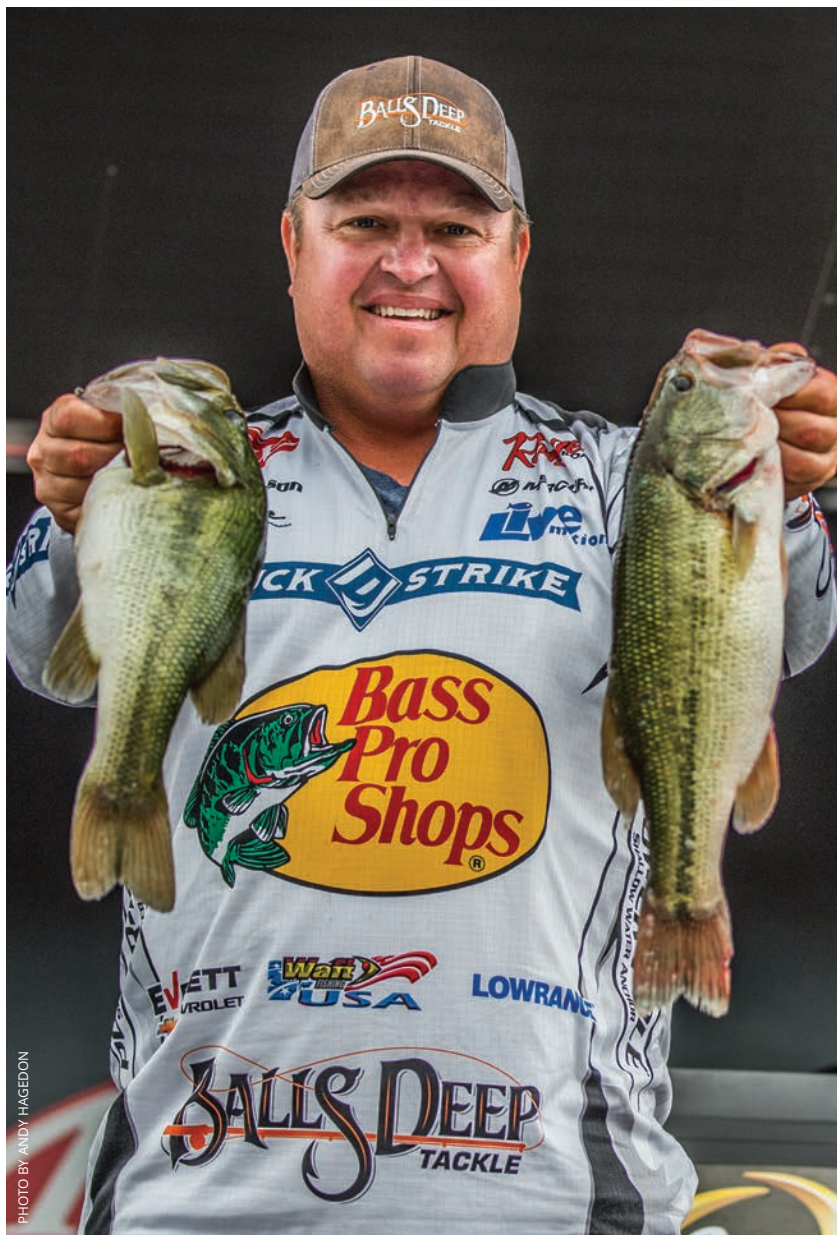
When read correctly, the best places, according to Watson, are seams in the substrate of the shore that run down into the water.

"Junctions, transitions, seams and veins," Watson reveals. "Junctions of rock and mud, rock veins that run through mud flats or sandbars, big isolated boulders up on bare clay bank, transitions of one type of rock to another – basically any kind of seam of contrasting earth is fair game.

"Typically, I like flatter stuff," he adds. "But I'll try all angles of slope because slant of the bank usually plays a big role in the patterning process. If I can identify seams and transitions and a particular degree of slope, I'm well on my way to being dialed in."

## Better with Weather

In the fall, lake drawdowns generally coincide with cooling water and turnover. But Watson says that water temperature is not so much a part of his fall fishing strategy as are the cold fronts that cause the cooldown.



Watson weighed in a mixed bag of bass species, but largemouths anchored his win.

## Conditions

**Weather:** warm and sunny with gusty winds on day one; cool, cloudy and rainy on day two; cool with partly cloudy skies on day three

**Air Temperature:** high in the upper 80s on day one; upper 50s on days two and three

**Water Temperature:** mid- to low 70s

**Moon Phase:** waning gibbous

**Predominant Lake Features:** mud flats, rock veins, points, rubble piles, boulders, docks; the water was about 20 feet low

"I want the fronts that bring in those windy, cloudy, colder conditions," Watson says. "The late-summer doldrums seem to put a lake in a slick, stagnant funk, making you wonder where all the fish went. But once the water starts dropping and you get those first several fronts that shake up the lake a little bit, now you have a whole new playing field in front of you."

Watson's wheelhouse forms when all of these fall-based elements come together. Put him on a lowered reservoir with plenty of rock bank while the leaves are changing and he feels right at home, which is exactly what happened when he arrived at Norris Lake in October.

"I had never been on Norris before," Watson says. "But the minute I put my boat in for practice, I felt right at home. The water was down. The composition and slope of the bank looked exactly like Table Rock."

Watson initially tried several techniques, but when he gurgled a buzzbait over a shallow mud-to-rock seam and immediately got "pummeled" he knew exactly what to do.

"I started riding the lake just visually scanning the banks for those seams of hard rock to soft ground," Watson says. "I found a few isolated boulders that spilled out into the water. I found a couple of man-made rock fences that ran off into the water. I marked several big rock veins that traversed through mud flats out into the water. Norris had a lot of that kind of stuff."

The bonus for Watson was seeing big gizzard shad hovering around the shallow, isolated rock.

"I was giddy," Watson says.

In addition, weather helped to further Watson's game plan when a cold front blew through during the tournament. Day one was warm and balmy with south winds. Day two featured dark clouds, misty rain, gusty west winds and a temperature drop of some 30 degrees. The final day brought slow-clearing clouds and more cold wind.

Watson had perfect conditions for chucking a buzzbait and a River2Sea Whopper Plopper (see below) up in inches of

water where the gizzard shad were mottling the surface around the shallow rock targets.

"The bass sit in the rock junctions and seams and ambush those shad as the vacuum effect pulls them out off the mud flats," Watson says. "A buzzbait and a Whopper Plopper are the perfect tools for skimming those shallow areas, and it helps tremendously to have a little ripple from the wind."

## Commitment was Key

One thing Watson did not mention much during the event was the commitment he had to the topwater lures during the day, sticking with them through thick and thin.

"I did catch a few weigh fish by flipping docks with a 1/2-ounce War Eagle Heavy Finesse Jig," Watson says, "but that was if I just happened across a dock while gunning down the bank. Mostly I stayed committed to the buzzbait and Plopper. Even when I went awhile without a bite, I stayed with them all day."

On days one and two Watson made fishing look easy, weighing in limits of 13-10 and 13-4. But on the last day he brought in just 9-12, leaving the door open for runner-up Jason Lambert of Pickwick Dam, Tenn.

"That last-day slip-up was really about not having enough new water to run each day," Watson reveals. "That's a big part of the fall program; you have to fish new water a majority of the time because the fish are not replenishing. I had enough water for two days, but on the final day I started repeating some water and fishing water I think other competitors may have been running."

Despite running short on prime real estate, Watson was rewarded with two final-hour keepers that each helped him cull by an ounce or two, allowing him to hold off Lambert by just 3 ounces.

"Usually, if you stay committed to those baits, you get a kicker in the last hour," Watson says. "That didn't happen this time, but the last two fish I caught did help me. And without them, I would not have won."

## WATSON'S WINNING LURES

James Watson's performance at the Walmart FLW Tour Invitational on Norris Lake was mostly a topwater show involving a black River2Sea Whopper Plopper 130, a War Eagle Buzz Toad teamed with a black Luck E Strike Frantic Frog trailer and a River2Sea Bubble Walker walking bait.

Most of his winning fish came on the Whopper Plopper and the Buzz Toad, which were both fished on 50-pound-test Maxima braid on a 7-foot, 10-inch Waft heavy-action rod with a 7:1 Bass Pro Shops Johnny Morris CarbonLite Baitcast Reel.

Watson says the long, heavy-action rod works for him on the buzzers because he "pull sets" into his fish.

"Instead of jerking when I get a bite on those topwaters, I just keep reeling until I can feel the fish pulling, and then I just sort of lean into it and start cranking the reel, letting the rod do the hooksetting," Watson details. ■



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

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# FORT GIBSON LAKE

WAGONER, OKLA. – SEPT. 29-OCT. 1  
Hosted by Wagoner Area Chamber of Commerce

PRESENTED BY  
**LOWRANCE**



by David A. Brown

## WINNING ANGLER

**DEREK FULPS**  
**BROKEN ARROW, OKLA.**

**Stat Line:** Fulps has amassed eight top-10 finishes in the FLW Bass Fishing League since 2000. Two of his best finishes were fourth-place efforts on Fort Gibson in 2012 and 2016. This is his first Costa FLW Series victory.

## Tactics and Target Areas

Fulps caught every fish he weighed in from one large laydown about seven miles up the Grand River. Sprawled out in 7 to 14 feet of water, the tree covered an area about the length of a truck and boat trailer.

While practicing, Fulps located the fairly fresh laydown on his Lowrance HDS-10 when he moved off the bank from where he had been scanning for the usual mix of shallow wood that river anglers target. He found other completely submerged trees along the same flat, but that first one offered a full, leafy profile that the fish seemed to favor.

"Bassmaster Elite Series pro Edwin Evers gave me some tips on how to zoom in and zoom out and what range you should be on when you're scanning for cover," Fulps adds. "If

you spread that range out too far, you lose your definition and can't really tell what you're looking at. I had my range set at 60 feet."

## Keys to Victory

Knowing how the fish were positioned around the tree and adjusting accordingly proved essential to Fulps' success. The cover of the large tree provided a broad field of opportunity for fish and fisherman, but he quickly dialed in a replicable pattern.

"I caught fish all around that tree – north, south, east and west, depending on the current," Fulps says. "When the current was running strong, they were all on the east and north [deep and upcurrent] sides, but when the current was slack or it wasn't running as hard you could catch them around anywhere. Once the current started

ripping, they were easy to pinpoint. You could sit in one spot.

"I think they're easier to catch when they're ganged up during the strong current because they're competitive. They see one fish run out and grab something and it fires up the school. When they're scattered, they're harder to catch."

Fulps caught the majority of his fish on a 6-foot, 10-inch Falcon LowRider rod with a 6.4:1 Daiwa Steez baitcaster carrying 12-pound-test Berkley Trilene 100-percent Fluorocarbon.

"That outfit allowed me to throw those lighter baits a long way with that lighter line, and I think I got some extra bites because of that," he adds. "That lighter line allowed me to get those baits down quicker. If you're using 20-pound, that current's grabbing your line."

## TOP FIVE

### 1. DEREK FULPS

**BROKEN ARROW, OKLA.**

Total Weight: 45-05 (13 fish)  
Winnings: \$78,500\*

### 2. KYLE CORTIANA

**BROKEN ARROW, OKLA.**

Total Weight: 43-04 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$13,004

### 3. BRANDON MOSLEY

**CHOCTAW, OKLA.**

Total Weight: 42-01 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$9,990

### 4. JIM TUTT

**LONGVIEW, TEXAS**

Total Weight: 41-10 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$8,325

### 5. ZACK BIRGE

**BLANCHARD, OKLA.**

Total Weight: 41-03 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$7,716

\*Includes Ranger Z518 w/ 200-hp outboard and \$200 Costa Award

## PRESENTATION KEYS

Current was critical, and Fulps says that he strived to maintain awareness of what the water was doing, how the fish were reacting to the current dynamics and how he needed to present his baits. On day one, the current started running at around 9 a.m., but the second day saw a later start, with no water movement until about 11.

Fulps leveraged current-related feeding to sack up a fourth-place limit of 17 pounds, 7 ounces on day one and then followed that with a day two weight of 16-2 that sent him into the final round with nearly a 2 1/2-pound lead. The final day saw nearly no current, which likely accounted for Fulps' drop in productivity. He caught just three fish in the final round, but they were good ones that weighed 11-12.

Fulps adjusted his weight size to match the varying current levels. He used a 3/8-ounce weight during the swift flows of days one and two, but stuck with the 3/16-ounce weight before the movement began, as well as when the current went slack on day three.

Fulps had one other area where he made a couple of stops to flip visible cover. On day two he caught several keepers there that he ended up culling later. He went there again on day three and caught a few non-keepers, but says the time away was time well spent.

"When I returned to my special tree, I caught a 6-pounder," Fulps says. "Sometimes you just have to let them settle down. When you come back, they're usually ready to bite."

## CO-ANGLER CHAMP

**TATE BRUMNETT, WAGONER, OKLA.**

**Total Weight:** 38-07 (11 fish)

**Winning Program:** With current running and the wind blowing the first two days, the 16-year-old Wagoner High School sophomore relied heavily on a Gene Larew Biffle HardHead articulated jig with a Gene Larew Biffle Bug in the Sooner run color. In the final round, Brumnett fished with pro winner Derek Fulps and fished a 1/2-ounce shaky head with a green pumpkin stick worm and a 1/2-ounce jig with an Okeechobee craw Strike King Rage Craw trailer. He tossed a River2Sea Whopper Plopper when he spotted surface activity. ■



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II

## CONDITIONS

**Fishery Type:** Grand River impoundment with large creek arms, shallow pockets with flat points, rocky shorelines, docks, laydowns and stumps

**Air Temperature:** low 70s on day one; mid- to upper 70s on day two; mid-70s on day three

**Water Temperature:** 71 to 74 degrees

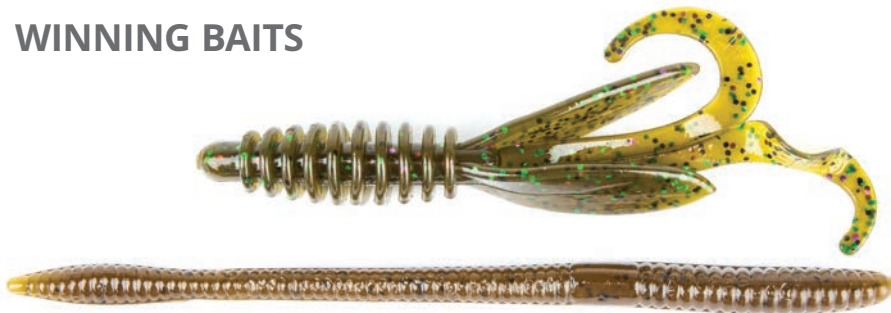
**Wind:** N at 8 to 12 mph on day one; N-NW at 10 to 15 mph on day two; NE at 3 to 5 mph on day three

**Water Clarity:** 4 to 6 inches upriver; clearer down the lake

**Precipitation/Cloud Cover:** sunny to mostly sunny on days one and two; partly cloudy on day three

**Moon Phase:** new

## WINNING BAITS



Fulps caught most of his fish on a 4 1/2-inch Gene Larew HooDaddy Jr. and a Zoom Trick Worm, both Texas-rigged with 3/16- to 3/8-ounce weights.



PHOTO BY D.W. REED II



A subtle bait change helped Jenkel overcome tough conditions for the win at the season finale.

PHOTO BY JODY WHITE

# LAKE OF THE OZARKS

OSAGE BEACH, MO. – OCT. 6-8  
Hosted by Tri-County Lodging Association

PRESENTED  
BY **EVINRUDE**   
OFFICIAL ENGINE SPONSOR

## WINNING ANGLER

**DUKE JENKEL**  
PINCKNEYVILLE, ILL.

**Stat Line:** In 117 tournaments with FLW, Jenkel has finished in the top 10 22 times. This was his second win, and his first above the BFL level.

by Jody White

## Tactics and Target Areas

Sometimes pros run all over a lake and burn tank after tank of gas to win a tournament. That wasn't the case for Derek "Duke" Jenkel in his win at Lake of the Ozarks.

Seeking to hide from a passing thunderstorm on the first day of the tournament, Jenkel ducked into a creek and started in a marina in a pocket near Hurricane Deck Bridge.

"We took off, and that storm had me a bit spooked. I don't like the weather," says Jenkel. "So I started in a marina, knowing I had a place to hide if the lightning got bad. And it was on like Donkey Kong. They were biting in there like crazy."

The marina where he stopped was in the same creek he'd mined for a few fish last fall in an FLW Bass Fishing League event. It also happened to be a major release location for the

Big Bass Bash, a big-fish derby with more than 3,000 entries that had taken place the weekend before.

It turned out to be the place to be. Though Jenkel made a few culls near takeoff on the first two days, he relied on the marina for the entirety of his catch on the last day. Outside of the marina, he targeted shallower docks in the middle of pockets. In the marina, he flipped everything he could find. In particular, he concentrated on a break with some brush that ran under the docks and some scattered brush around the poles on the perimeter of the docks.

## Keys to Victory

Jenkel's first fish of the tournament actually came on a frog, but he quickly switched to a tube for the rest of his

weight on day one. On days two and three, he changed over to a Zoom Magnum Trick Worm to weather the pressure of other competitors, and it worked like a charm.

"I really believe it was that subtle bait change that made a difference," says Jenkel of his second day. "I came up into The Glaize [the area around Grand Glaize Recreation Area where the tournament was based] at the end of the day and pulled up onto some docks and culled out with a 3-pounder, and it was all on that bait."

That change to a worm proved to be critical. While others fishing his area stumbled as the fishing pressure built, Jenkel just kept catching them.

## PRESENTATION KEYS

A Magnum Trick Worm is a pretty subtle bait on its own, but Jenkel worked to get the most out of it by fishing with extra care. If you had watched him fishing, you'd have noticed two key things: the accuracy of his presentations and the slow speed of his retrieve.

Pitching and skipping around the docks, Jenkel only rarely hit a float or dinged off a pontoon. During the retrieve, he slowly lifted and dragged his bait over each bit of brush. The fish had ample time to make a decision and often enough that they decided to bite.



PHOTO BY MATT PACE



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

## CONDITIONS

**Fishery Type:** large reservoir in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains

**Air Temperature:** low 50s to mid-70s

**Water Temperature:** mid-70s

**Wind:** light on day one after a passing thunderstorm; strong on day two; light and variable on the final day

**Water Clarity:** stained up the lake; 3 to 4 feet of visibility down the lake

**Moon Phase:** first quarter

Jenkel's winning bait arsenal (shown left) included a Lunker Lure Limit Series Jig with a Strike King Rage Bug trailer (both green pumpkin), a Texas-rigged Zoom Magnum Trick Worm (red bug and watermelon candy) and a Texas-rigged Gambler Flipp'n Tube (green pumpkin and blue).

## TOP FIVE

**1. DUKE JENKEL**  
PINCKNEYVILLE, ILL.

Total Weight: 52-05 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$35,815

**2. MARK TUCKER**  
KIRKWOOD, MO.

Total Weight: 51-04 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$14,078

**3. DION HIBDON**  
SUNRISE BEACH, MO.

Total Weight: 51-01 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$10,745

**4. DUSTIN EVANS**  
EADS, TENN.

Total Weight: 48-13 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$9,054

**5. MARCUS SYKORA**  
OSAGE BEACH, MO.

Total Weight: 48-06 (15 fish)  
Winnings: \$8,058

## CO-ANGLER CHAMP

**BRAD HOSTETLER JR.**  
FRANKLIN, IND.

**Total Weight:** 37-10 (14 fish)

**Winning Program:** Through three days on Lake of the Ozarks, Hostetler made the right adjustments each day and ended up in first thanks to a big 14-pound, 15-ounce bag on day two that earned him the win via tiebreaker over Scott Parsons. They each caught 37-10 in three days, with the tie settled by heaviest two-day weight coming into the final day.

The first day, Hostetler ended up fishing shallow around laydowns and caught his fish on a buzzbait, a tube and a homemade jig. The second day, he found himself fishing deep with a Zoom Ol' Monster worm. On the third day, fishing behind Brian Maloney around docks, Hostetler says the worm and a Zoom Brush Hog did the trick. ■



PHOTO BY MATT PACE

## BRYAN COLLEGE WINS BIGGEST COLLEGE QUALIFIER EVER

by Colin Moore

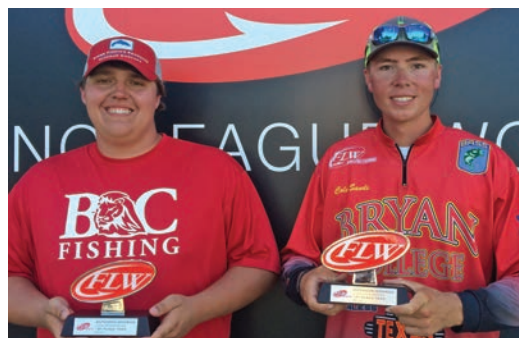
In what was the largest qualifying event in FLW College Fishing tournament history, Connor Cohran and Cole Sands of Bryan College turned back a strong bid by 2015 national champs Patrick Walters and Gettys Brannon to win a 2016 Southeastern Conference tournament on Lake Chickamauga in late September. Cohran, a freshman, and Sands, a sophomore at the school of about 1,400 students, had a limit that totaled 16 pounds, 3 ounces, while Walters and Brannon of the University of South Carolina had 16-2.

A record field of 203 teams notwithstanding, Cohran and Sands were able to take advantage of their experience and Bryan's proximity to Lake Chickamauga to overcome most of the traditional powerhouses of the Southeastern Conference.

"Basically, we're right on the lake, practically overlooking Dayton [Tenn.] Boat Dock, and any day we have off is a practice day," notes Cohran. "Prior to the tournament, on Monday, we had about 18 1/2 pounds, so we knew we had the fish to do well. We just didn't know how well until the weigh-in."

The Bryan anglers started the morning in Possum Creek fishing deep wood cover in 15 to 22 feet of water with MGC jigs in green pumpkin paired with Strike King Rage Craw trailers. They had a small limit within 45 minutes. Though they boated about 35 keepers during the day – including 10 that were caught on either a Strike King Shadalous (blue gizzard shad) or a Gambler Big EZ (new shad) – the fish that made the difference came from an area between Chester Frost Park and Soddy Creek. That's where Sands, a business major, boated a 5 1/2- and 4 1/4-pound bass.

"We wound up fishing the outside edges of hydrilla mats where they disappeared into deeper water," recalls Sands. "You couldn't really see the hydrilla, but you could feel it. I was just dragging the jig along the bottom and popping it loose whenever it got caught in the grass. Sometimes that's when a fish would grab it." ■



## OUACHITA RIVER, MONROE, LA. – OCT. 8

## HOME TEAM PULLS OFF A WIN ON THE OUACHITA RIVER

by Colin Moore

Familiarity with the fishery and a lifelong habit of fishing together paid off for juniors Tyler Stewart and Nicholas Joiner of the University of Louisiana-Monroe in the FLW College Fishing Southern Conference qualifier on the Ouachita River as they won the title with a limit that totaled 16 pounds, 9 ounces.

Stewart and Joiner had the advantage of an abundance of practice time just prior to the tournament, and also benefited from their shared years of experience on the river. As it was, they finished just 10 ounces ahead of the runner-up team of Southern Conference rookies Cody Salzmann and Aaron Porterfield of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, who had 15-15.

Mainly, the two anglers flipped and pitched shallow wood cover in the back of Darbone Bayou, which was all but inaccessible to most boat traffic at tournament takeoff. The pair took advantage of low water to pole an aluminum boat back into an area where the fish hadn't been pressured in weeks, then fished 1/2-ounce black/blue or black/red V&M Adrenaline Flippin' Jigs with matching V&M Wild Thang Craw trailers.

"We caught 90 percent of our fish on the jigs, and we caught them consistently all day," recalls Stewart. "When it got really good, they would take off with the jig as soon as it hit the water. Sometimes you couldn't hardly get your reel in gear before they took off with it."

In stretches of Darbone where cover was scarce, Stewart and Joiner also fished the channel with a black and chartreuse-colored WEC Custom Lures E1 square-bill crankbait.

"We caught fish out of about 2 or 3 feet of water when we were flipping, and from about 6 feet of water when we were cranking," says Stewart. "We must have caught 80 fish all day, which wasn't surprising, considering that nobody had touched them in at least a few weeks. They were hungry." ■



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# TOURNAMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**Division** Arkie  
**Event Location** Lake Dardanelle  
**Date** 8/27-8/28  
**Winning Angler** Jerry Williams  
**Hometown** Conway, Ark.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished deep drops and ledges at the lower end 3/4-ounce jig  
**Winning Lures** 29-12  
**Winning Weight** Tabitha Lancaster  
**Winning Co-Angler** Arkadelphia, Ark.  
**Hometown** 17-09  
**Winning Weight**

**Division** Bama  
**Event Location** Lake Eufaula  
**Date** 8/27-8/28  
**Winning Angler** Dustin Wood  
**Hometown** Eufaula, Ala.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished ledges, hydrilla and brush  
**Winning Lures** Strikezone Deep Daddy crankbait and Strikezone Meat Stix  
**Winning Weight** 34-06  
**Winning Co-Angler** Wesley Rushing  
**Hometown** Abbeville, Ala.  
**Winning Weight** 17-15

**Division** Buckeye  
**Event Location** Lake Erie  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Steve Hatfield  
**Hometown** Ashland, Ohio  
**Winning Pattern** Targeted riprap and wood  
**Winning Lures** Big Bite Baits Salt Tube, Strike King 1.5, Z-Man ChatterBait and All-Terrain Tackle jig  
**Winning Weight** 26-00  
**Winning Co-Angler** Brian Short  
**Hometown** Oxford, Ohio  
**Winning Weight** 25-01

**Division** Bulldog  
**Event Location** Lake Eufaula  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Dustin Wood  
**Hometown** Eufaula, Ala.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished isolated stumps and brush  
**Winning Lures** Strikezone Deep Daddy crankbait and Strikezone Needle Worm  
**Winning Weight** 28-03  
**Winning Co-Angler** Ken Smith  
**Hometown** Lula, Ga.  
**Winning Weight** 21-02

**Division** Choo  
**Event Location** Lake Gunterville  
**Date** 9/24-9/25  
**Winning Angler** Gil Summerlin  
**Hometown** Gunterville, Ala.  
**Winning Pattern** Worked two offshore shell beds  
**Winning Lures** Strike King 6XD and Mean Mouth jig  
**Winning Weight** 38-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Randy Hill  
**Hometown** Athens, Ga.  
**Winning Weight** 23-13

**Division** Cowboy  
**Event Location** Sam Rayburn Reservoir  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Jason Bonds  
**Hometown** Lufkin, Texas  
**Winning Pattern** Fished mid-lake points  
**Winning Lures** Double Z Custom Lures Bull Whip Worm and Strike King Popping Perch  
**Winning Weight** 45-03  
**Winning Co-Angler** Bill Fussell  
**Hometown** Thibodaux, La.  
**Winning Weight** 30-09

**Division** Gator  
**Event Location** Lake Okeechobee  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Robert Crosnoe  
**Hometown** Inverness, Fla.  
**Winning Pattern** Flipped heavy cover in Harney Pond  
**Winning Lures** Reaction Innovations Kinky Beaver  
**Winning Weight** 43-13  
**Winning Co-Angler** Rick Gunter  
**Hometown** New Smyrna Beach, Fla.  
**Winning Weight** 25-14

**Division** Great Lakes  
**Event Location** Mississippi River  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Mike Brueggen  
**Hometown** La Crosse, Wis.  
**Winning Pattern** Targeted largemouths on clean, sandy areas  
**Winning Lures** 1/4-ounce swim jig, Kurejii buzzbait and Kurejii frog  
**Winning Weight** 32-06  
**Winning Co-Angler** Nicholas Leno  
**Hometown** Chicago, Ill.  
**Winning Weight** 27-02

**Division** Hoosier  
**Event Location** Ohio River  
**Date** 8/27-8/28  
**Winning Angler** Kevin Reece  
**Hometown** Elizabeth, Ind.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished main-river breaks and channel swings  
**Winning Lures** Hawgback spinnerbait  
**Winning Weight** 14-02  
**Winning Co-Angler** Steve Keller Jr.  
**Hometown** Bethel, Ohio  
**Winning Weight** 11-09

**Division** Illini  
**Event Location** Lake Shelbyville  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Dan Shoraga  
**Hometown** West Frankfort, Ill.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished a rock pile and lay-downs  
**Winning Lures** Yamamoto Senko  
**Winning Weight** 23-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Dave Dobill  
**Hometown** Royalton, Ill.  
**Winning Weight** 17-13

**Division** LBL  
**Event Location** Kentucky-Barkley  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Stephen Barga  
**Hometown** Benton, Ky.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished stake beds, stumps and brush  
**Winning Lures** War Eagle spinnerbait  
**Winning Weight** 40-02  
**Winning Co-Angler** Brian Futch  
**Hometown** Vienna, Ill.  
**Winning Weight** 20-06

**Division** Michigan  
**Event Location** Lake St. Clair  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Matthew Malmquist  
**Hometown** White Lake, Mich.  
**Winning Pattern** Drifted deep water and fished flats and grass  
**Winning Lures** Heddon Super Spook, Yamamoto Shad Shape Worm and Strike King Coffee Tube  
**Winning Weight** 21-00  
**Winning Co-Angler** Alex Newman  
**Hometown** Wapakoneta, Ohio  
**Winning Weight** 22-05

**Division** Mississippi  
**Event Location** Pickwick Lake  
**Date** 10/1-10/2  
**Winning Angler** Cody Nichols  
**Hometown** Fayette, Ala.  
**Winning Pattern** Worked two large mats  
**Winning Lures** Basstrix Paddle Tail Swimbait and Strike King Menace  
**Winning Weight** 27-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Craig Mayo  
**Hometown** Corinth, Miss.  
**Winning Weight** 21-02

**Division** Mountain  
**Event Location** Barren River  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Brett Graham  
**Hometown** Cold Spring, Ky.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished logjams and laydowns  
**Winning Lures** White buzzbait and Texas rig  
**Winning Weight** 31-05  
**Winning Co-Angler** Brent Clark  
**Hometown** Bowling Green, Ky.  
**Winning Weight** 22-08

**Division** Music City  
**Event Location** Old Hickory Lake  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Michael Delvisco  
**Hometown** Dandridge, Tenn.  
**Winning Pattern** Started shallow; then fished deep drops  
**Winning Lures** Z-Man ChatterBait, Yamamoto Shad Shape Worm and VMC Rugby Jig  
**Winning Weight** 28-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Edward Lovely  
**Hometown** Manchester, Tenn.  
**Winning Weight** 19-00

**Division** North Carolina  
**Event Location** High Rock Lake  
**Date** 10/1-10/2  
**Winning Angler** Robert Mixon  
**Hometown** Lexington, N.C.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished dock piers and main-lake points  
**Winning Lures** Zoom Trick Worm and Magnum Trick Worm  
**Winning Weight** 33-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Louis Kraft  
**Hometown** Salisbury, N.C.  
**Winning Weight** 19-05

**Division** Northeast  
**Event Location** 1,000 Islands  
**Date** 9/24-9/25  
**Winning Angler** Tom Tarasoff  
**Hometown** Kingston, Ontario  
**Winning Pattern** Targeted humps, flats and drops  
**Winning Lures** Tube  
**Winning Weight** 44-04  
**Winning Co-Angler** Eric Ashley  
**Hometown** Little Falls, N.Y.  
**Winning Weight** 34-15

**Division** Okie  
**Event Location** Grand Lake  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Benjamin King  
**Hometown** Garnett, Kan.  
**Winning Pattern** Ran flats and flipped willows  
**Winning Lures** Mesu Baits shaky head and Reaction Innovations Sweet Beaver  
**Winning Weight** 29-07  
**Winning Co-Angler** Jason Sandidge  
**Hometown** Centerton, Ark.  
**Winning Weight** 20-06

**Division** Ozark  
**Event Location** Lake of the Ozarks  
**Date** 9/24-9/25  
**Winning Angler** Ed Young  
**Hometown** Harrison, Ark.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished black rock on points and around a bluegill spawn on flats  
**Winning Lures** River2Sea Whopper Plopper and Zoom Magnum Trick Worm  
**Winning Weight** 37-13  
**Winning Co-Angler** Stephen Delgado  
**Hometown** Lees Summit, Mo.  
**Winning Weight** 25-13

**Division** Piedmont  
**Event Location** High Rock Lake  
**Date** 9/10-9/11  
**Winning Angler** Jeremy Talbert  
**Hometown** Albemarle, N.C.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished floating docks in the backs of creeks  
**Winning Lures** Zoom UV Speed Craw and Trick Worm  
**Winning Weight** 30-08  
**Winning Co-Angler** Frank White  
**Hometown** Marion, N.C.  
**Winning Weight** 14-00

**Division** Savannah River  
**Event Location** Lake Keowee  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Andy Burgess  
**Hometown** Greenville, S.C.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished mid-lake docks on sandy flats and chunk rock banks  
**Winning Lures** Swim jig and Greenfish Tackle TAT  
**Winning Weight** 27-03  
**Winning Co-Angler** Chad Swaim  
**Hometown** Cumming, Ga.  
**Winning Weight** 12-07

**Division** Shenandoah  
**Event Location** Potomac River  
**Date** 8/27-8/28  
**Winning Angler** Kermit Crowder  
**Hometown** Matoaca, Va.  
**Winning Pattern** Fished grass beds in Aquia Creek  
**Winning Lures** SPRO Bronzeye Frog, Yamamoto Senko, Lobina Rico and Rebel Pop-R  
**Winning Weight** 35-02  
**Winning Co-Angler** Todd Hurst  
**Hometown** Pulaski, Va.  
**Winning Weight** 24-03

**Division** South Carolina  
**Event Location** Lake Wylie  
**Date** 9/24-9/25  
**Winning Angler** Tom Rubbo  
**Hometown** Lexington, S.C.  
**Winning Pattern** Cranked in backs of creeks  
**Winning Lures** Luck E Strike Rick Clunn square-bill  
**Winning Weight** 24-14  
**Winning Co-Angler** Calvin Sharp  
**Hometown** Round O, S.C.  
**Winning Weight** 11-13

**Division** Volunteer  
**Event Location** Lake Chickamauga  
**Date** 9/17-9/18  
**Winning Angler** Alex Davis  
**Hometown** Albertville, Ala.  
**Winning Pattern** Flipped and punched mats  
**Winning Lures** Jackall lobee Frog and Archelon  
**Winning Weight** 28-06  
**Winning Co-Angler** Jerry Neuner  
**Hometown** Rutherfordton, N.C.  
**Winning Weight** 10-09

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# TBF



by Dan Johnson

## WHAT'S MAKING NEWS IN THE BASS FEDERATION

### FINAL 2016 TBF DIVISIONALS IN THE BOOKS

The final three of The Bass Federation's seven traditional Divisional Championships are in the books for 2016. TBF members from the Northern, Eastern and Mid-Atlantic divisions competed for state bragging rights and coveted invitations to the 2017 TBF National Championship.

#### The Winners:

Northern Division Presented by Lowrance – Sept. 7-9  
Lake Oahe, Pierre, S.D.  
Boater: Shane Cowan  
Pierre, S.D. – 56-3  
State team: South Dakota – 466-0

Eastern Division Presented by Cabela's – Sept. 14-16  
Lake Ontario, Kingston, Ontario  
Boater: Russell Watkins  
Aurora, Ontario – 56-14  
State team: Massachusetts – 437-9

Mid-Atlantic Division Presented by Minn Kota – Sept. 21-23  
Monongahela River, Morgantown, W.Va.  
Boater: Bobby Crisman  
Bracey, Va. – 13-15  
State team: West Virginia – 74-7

### TBF'S FIRST NATIONAL SEMI-FINAL EVENT MARKS NEW ERA OF TOURNAMENT FISHING



Colorado's scenic Lake Pueblo hosted The Bass Federation's first regional super-qualifier in the organization's new National Semi-Finals system for reaching the TBF National Championship.

The new TBF program pits top grassroots anglers from each state in a "close to home" weekend event with neighboring states for significant cash prizes and advancements. TBF members from Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico competed on Pueblo in the District 21 Semi-Finals Aug. 13-14.

Colorado's Greg Gizzi won top honors in the boater division with an 18.91-pound two-day total. He was sitting in second with 9.17 on day one, but took over the lead on the final day with a solid four-bass catch of 9.74 pounds. Fellow Colorado angler David Pauly topped the co-anglers with 7.29 pounds.

Gizzi and Pauly advance to the 2017 TBF National Championship, along with Wyoming representatives Bubba O'Neil (boater) and Lee Thomas (co-angler) and New Mexico's Andy Cochran (boater) and Adam Campbell (co-angler).

A total of \$5,100 in cash prizes, champion titles and slots in the National Championship were awarded in the boater and co-angler divisions. The top three boaters and co-anglers in the 16-boat field divvied up \$4,100 in total pay-back, including a \$500 Ranger Cup award.

# RAY CROWNED DISTRICT 6 TBF NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS CHAMPION

**A**rkansas' Josh Ray finished strong to win the District 6 The Bass Federation National Semi-Finals on the Arkansas River out of Muskogee, Okla., Sept. 24-25. The tournament featured top anglers from Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Ray sacked 7.65 pounds on day one of the event, which put him in third behind Oklahoma's Jackie Husmann (12.20) and Stewart Ryan (11.96). When overcast skies greeted anglers on the final day, Ray responded with a 15.05-pound bag that was the biggest stringer of the tournament. It pushed him to the top of the leaderboard with 22.73 pounds.

Ray reported burning about 45 gallons of gas to reach the lower Kerr Reservoir pool approximately 30 miles from the launch site at Three Forks Harbor. Although it was Ray's first trip to the Arkansas River, he was able to find areas with fish-holding water willows in practice.

"I set waypoints on my Lowrance HDS-12 to return to them on tournament days," he notes, adding that the muscle of his 112-pound-thrust Minn Kota trolling motor helped him stay in position to present frogs and swim jigs despite the heavy current.

For his efforts, Ray qualified to fish the 2017 TBF National Championship, plus the \$1,700 first-place cash prize.

Day one leader Husmann brought in 9.40 pounds on day two and slipped to second. It was a respectable finish that qualified him to fish the TBF National Championship and paid \$900 plus the \$500 Ranger Cup award. Husmann also earned the distinction of being the only angler to record limits both days.



Josh Ray

The co-angler champion was Sandy Hooker from Oklahoma, who received \$850 and a chance to compete in the championship as a co-angler for his 14.47-pound two-day total. The top Arkansas co-angler, Robert Scott, also received a berth in the championship. Collectively, the Oklahoma Bass Federation claimed the first District 6 State Pride Award with 65.93 total pounds.

The new National Semi-Finals format pays back 100 percent of anglers' entry fees, with 75 percent going to the top 20 percent of the field, 10 percent to the state federations and 15 percent to the National Championship. A total of \$10,120 in cash and prizes was awarded at the event.



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## BONNEMA WINS WIND-WHIPPED DISTRICT 9 TBF NATIONAL SEMI-FINALS

Longtime The Bass Federation member Scott Bonnema topped a hard-fishing field of 100 fellow Federation anglers to win the District 9 TBF National Semi-Finals on Minnesota's Gull Lake Sept. 24-25.

Bonnema, of Zimmerman, Minn., is no stranger to Gull Lake, a popular fishery nestled in the Brainerd Lakes region, having won other events there such as the 2011 TBF Northern Division Championship.

Still, he was a little nervous when high winds during pre-fishing challenged anglers to locate the lake's abundant largemouths.

"I found three good areas earlier, but when practice was tough I started getting worried," he admits.

To make up for it, Bonnema kicked off the competition by focusing on classic Gull Lake structure such as small points and inside turns in the 10-foot depth range. Bonnema also credits a new high-tech trolling motor for helping keep his boat in striking position when strong winds continued in competition.

"I was using one of Minn Kota's brand-new Ultrex units," he says. "It's basically a hybrid that blends the body of a Fortrex with i-Pilot technology, complete with Spot-Lock electronic GPS anchoring."

Bonnema opened the Semi-Finals with a banner day.

"I probably caught 40 to 50 bass on day one," he says. "I would circle around the key areas I had marked, catch a fish, engage the Spot-Lock, tag my fish, get right back up on the front deck, and catch another two or three fish off that same clump. The Ultrex is the only thing that would've allowed me to do that. Without it, I would've been blown across the lake. It's definitely a game-changer."

Bonnema mainly flipped jigs into patches of cabbage and coontail. He notes that 8-foot-diameter clumps held the best numbers of bigger bass.

He began day one using a 3/4-ounce jig on the edge of the vegetation, but switched to a 1/2-ounce head after being plagued by pike.

Bonnema ended the day with an 18.10-pound limit and turned in another solid performance on day two to finish the event with 32.53 pounds. Brad Leifermann came in a close second with 31.01. John Fairbanks Jr. topped the non-boaters with 25.80 pounds.

The District 9 Semi-Finals offered a 118.5 percent pay-back, with \$18,120 in cash and prizes, including \$2,500 for the top boater and \$1,250 for the top co-angler. Plus, the top boater and co-angler from each state advance to the 2017 TBF National Championship.



Scott Bonnema (left) and John Fairbanks Jr.

## TBF MEMBER TIES NEW YORK SMALLMOUTH RECORD



TBF member Patrick Hildenbrand tied the New York state smallmouth record with this obese bronzeback.

New York The Bass Federation member Patrick Hildenbrand carved his name in the record books Aug. 28 by catching a giant St. Lawrence River smallmouth that tied the longstanding state record.

Hildenbrand, of Red Hook, N.Y., was competing in a state TBF tournament out of Cape Vincent, sponsored by the local chamber of commerce. At around 7 a.m., fishing in calm conditions under overcast skies, he marked a large arch on his sonar in 35 feet of water.

He reached for a 7-foot, medium-light spinning outfit loaded with 15-pound-test braided main line with a 6-pound-test fluorocarbon leader and deployed a drop-shot rig. His go-to setup included a goby-colored Berkley PowerBait Dropshot Power Bass Minnow on a 1/0 drop-shot hook with a 3/8-ounce tungsten weight.

The obese bronzeback inhaled the soft bait, and Hildenbrand quickly deposited it in his livewell.

Although the fish's weight was originally reported as 8.15 pounds, the scale needed to be recertified to verify the potential record weight, and after recertification the fish checked in at 8 pounds, 4 ounces. It tied the New York smallmouth record set by Andrew Kartesz on Lake Erie in 1995.

Hildenbrand's historic catch stretched out at 21 1/2 inches long and sported an enormous girth of 20 3/4 inches. After being weighed, measured and photographed, the fish was successfully released back into the St. Lawrence.

Along with tying the state record, Hildenbrand scored big bass honors in the tournament and ended up finishing in second place overall.

# HIGH SCHOOL FISHING UPDATE

**A**fter a solid start to the 2016 tournament season, the Student Angler Federation High School Fishing program continued to enjoy strong participation in the latter half of the year as organizers from coast to coast provided budding bass anglers with exciting, professionally organized fishing events.

Tournament winners from mid-June to September include:

**June 11** - Iowa State Championship, Mississippi River, Kaleb Tweite and Kyler Bauer of Riceville Bass Fishing Team

**June 11** - Oklahoma State Championship, Arkansas River, Jacob Lott and Blake Denny

**June 18** - North Carolina State Championship, Lake Norman, Dylan Lamm and Austin Blair of Bunker Hill High School

**June 18** - South Carolina State Championship, Lake Marion, Oakley and Gantt Connor of Devildog Anglers

**June 19** - Washington State Championship, Lake Chelan, Nathan Portch and Brayden Liebe

**June 19** - Wisconsin State Championship, Minocqua Chain, Colin Steck and Nathan Lorenz of Waunakee Warriors

**June 25** - Missouri State Championship, Truman Lake, Johnny and Tony Deluca

**June 26** - Idaho State Championship, Cascade Lake, Jason Felter and Anthony Mellow of Mountain View High School

**June 26** - Michigan State Championship, Detroit River, Carter Williams and Cameron Scarbrough of Grand Haven Bassmasters

**June 28** - High School Fishing World Finals, Pickwick Lake, Peyton Porter and Coleton Jennings of Marshall County High School and Calloway County High School

**July 16** - Delaware State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Christopher Murry and Joey Warren of Salesianum High School

**July 16** - Kansas State Championship, Milford Lake, Thomas Heinan and Brock Bila

**July 16** - Maryland State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Jonathan Hamilton and Alec Borden of North East High School

**July 16** - New Jersey State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Dylan Hartman and Ryan Degraw

**July 16** - Pennsylvania State Championship, Chesapeake Bay, Nathan and Jordan Sypeck of Lehigh Valley Junior Bassmasters

**July 23** - Nebraska State Championship, Elwood Reservoir, Grant Pavelka and Tyler Rowland of North Platte Bulldogs

**July 23** - New York State Championship, St. Lawrence River, Perry Marvin and Alex Laeliss

**July 30** - South Dakota State Championship, Lake Cochran, Zachary Brown and Riley Greenhoff

**July 30** - North Dakota State Championship, Lake Cochran, Thomas Lent and Hunter Wood



Missouri state champions Johnny and Tony Deluca

**July 31** - Minnesota State Championship, Mille Lacs Lake, Keegan Decker and Cody Czech of Brainerd Warrior Fishing Team

**Aug. 7** - Ontario Provincial Championship, Georgian Bay, Kyle Pender and Mathew LeBlanc

**Aug. 14** - Minnesota FLW/TBF Northern Open, Mille Lacs Lake, Mason Raveling and Ben Provost of Prior Lake High School

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anglers are fishing. They have a very firm idea of how they want to fish, almost to the point of being stubborn.

Plus, they're absolutely fierce competitors, especially when it comes to outdoor pursuits. They don't like to lose to the critters they pursue.

"To come in with just two or three fish when others have caught 20 pounds is something that just sticks in my craw," says Morgan. "Not that I lost to another angler, but that I lost to the fish. They were biting somewhere and I missed it. I might not show it on the outside, but on the inside, it eats me up, and I'm betting Dudley and Wendlandt are the exact same way."

Wendlandt agrees.

"We all want to be the best in the outdoors on any given day," he says. "Whether we're hunting or fishing, when we don't figure that animal out on that particular day, it doesn't sit real well with us at all."

Each member of this trio of veterans is an extreme self-starter, highly motivated by his own ambition. No one has to tell Morgan, Dudley or Wendlandt what time to get up, what time to put the boat in or what time to take out. They make their own hours,

and 16-hour days pursuing fish or game is what they live for.

"We're all self-employed," Morgan adds. "Fishing is our product. And we know what it takes to produce that product successfully. We have an obligation to ourselves and our families to perform and produce – or we go out of business."

In my experience watching them fish, the three-time AOYs never seem to be too jacked up or too dejected during a tournament. No matter if they caught 25 pounds a day in practice or never had a single bite, the emotions never show on game day. They know every day is different, and they have to roll with what's happening in the here and now.

Finally, they fish with no fear of failure.

"That's probably the strongest common denominator in the three of us," Wendlandt says. "I think a lot of times we wake up on tournament day and have no idea where or how we're going to catch fish. But that doesn't spin us out because deep down we know we're going to catch them – some way, somehow. When they call that boat number, there is no fear of failure." ■

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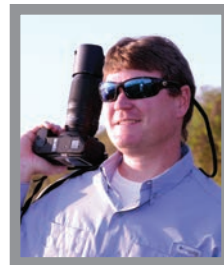


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by Rob Newell

## THREE PROS, NINE AOY TITLES

Since 1996 when the Walmart FLW Tour debuted, three pros have garnered nearly half of all the Angler of the Year titles. Andy Morgan, David Dudley and Clark Wendlandt have each won three AOY titles to account for nine of the AOY trophies handed out in the Tour's 21-year history.

During that time, I've had the privilege to spend a lot of time with each of them, and what I find so compelling is how similar Dudley, Morgan and Wendlandt are in terms of character, drive, intensity, obsession with the outdoors and the way they carry out their fishing business.

For starters, all three pros are dedicated outdoorsmen, spending the majority of their time outside where they are constantly exposed to nature's daily and seasonal rhythms. The pursuit of wild game, either through fishing or hunting, consumes them day in and day out. You can name a weather scenario or seasonal condition, and the chances are good that these three guys have fished or hunted in it – a lot. No

book, video or Google search can provide that sort of insight into the natural world.

"So much of fishing involves playing the weather and changing with it day to day, sometimes hour to hour," says Dudley. "The only way you can learn that is to spend thousands of hours outdoors, seeing how weather changes affect fish and wildlife."

Dudley, Morgan and Wendlandt also have a long history in tournament fishing. They were all competing in tournaments before FLW was founded. As a result, they have fished just about every region of the eastern half of the United States. No matter whether they're in the Ozarks, the Northeast, Florida or Texas, they have a feel for what to look for and what techniques will work.

With the experience to do it all on the water, interestingly, all three seem determined to catch fish their way. They don't chase dock talk or worry about how or where other

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ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER

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