

Crank Control by Jason Mitchell

I was sitting at the bait shop one morning, waiting for my customers and there was a bunch of fish heads sitting around discussing crank-baiting. We were talking about what lures had been working and what colors seemed to be doing the best. We were debating which lures had the right actions and how far we were running the lures behind the boat. My customers came and I left the table.

Later on while fishing, I thought about the conversation and concluded that we were all on the wrong track so to speak.

Everybody at that table had been catching fish to some extent on various lures. One guy swore that a white Reef Runner was the ticket. The next guy was a firm believer in chrome Bombers. I had been having good luck on orange Little Rippers. So many times, we get hung up on that one lure that is catching fish for us and realize later that guys in different boats using different lures were catching fish too. We were all catching fish because we were all putting those lures in front of fish, plain and simple. Do you want to catch more walleyes on crank-baits? Put your crank-bait in front of as many walleyes as you can. Instead of worrying about what the hot lure is, worry about where you put that crank-bait. There are days when the fish are fussy no doubt and one particular lure or style of lure will out produce the others, but if you can focus on keeping your lures in front of fish, the fish will often meet you half way.

It often seems that people forget to use common sense when fishing and make fishing more complicated than it really is. We often seem to give fish more credit than they really deserve. Make your fishing fundamentally sound and efficient. Focus on finding fish and putting your lure in front of fish. Everything else will come.



Woodland Resort's
Jason Mitchell with
a Devils Lake Walleye

Keeping your lures where they need to be often boils down to good boat control. Everybody knows the importance of good boat control when presenting live bait to walleyes. For some reason or another, however, many anglers downplay the importance of boat control when trolling crank-baits. Trolling crank-baits is much more than simply driving around the lake, changing lures every half-hour.

If anything, boat control while trolling crank-baits can be much more difficult because of the amount of line behind the boat. Simply following the contour might work when live baiting below the boat but if you follow a contour while trolling crank-baits, the lures might be where they need to be a percentage of the time. Not only do you have to take a mental note of where the boat is at all times, you have to remember where the crank-baits are wiggling back behind the boat. You might have to swing wide or cut corners sharp to keep the crank-baits where they need to be.

One of the most important things you can do when trolling crank-baits is learning the area you are trolling. Drive through the area first and watch your locator. Make note of where the points stick out and where the weed beds end, etc. so you can troll the area efficiently. The time you spend where you are too deep, too shallow, snagged up or dragging weeds is time that is wasted. Learn the area you are fishing.

When trying to follow a contour and stay in a specific depth, learn to anticipate what the bottom is going to do. Anticipate what is coming ahead so you can swing the boat to keep the crank-baits where they need to be. When trying to anticipate where I am going to swing the boat, I like to use a depthfinder with a wide cone angle. I like knowing what lies ahead, even if I get this information only a second earlier. When I am coming up on a point or bar, I want to know as soon as possible, not after the transom is already past the change in depth.

The problem with using a depthfinder with a wide cone angle, however is that you lose your ability to separate fish from the bottom and you cannot pinpoint what is directly below the boat. You know what is coming sooner and you get to look at a larger area below you but you don't get as much detail as to what is going on directly below. A wide cone angle alone has applications but there is a trade off. I don't like "sacrificing" or "trading off" so I purchased a Vexilar Edge 507. This unit has a narrow nine-degree transducer and a wide thirty-nine degree transducer. You get information from both transducers on a split screen. By comparing the two screens, you know what is going on right under your boat seat and what is coming ahead. No voodoo magic involved, just more information to work with- the best of both worlds so to speak. I have always believed that we make better decisions when we have more information to work with and over the long haul, good information and good decisions mean good fishing.

When you need to keep your crank-baits in a tight area, try running the cranks below and closer to the boat.

Mount the rod holders in the rear of the boat and use long rods so you can turn sharp and avoid tangling with the motor. Learn how to turn sharp with lines out so that you can stay on contours and get back to where you hooked fish quickly.

It can seem obvious how boat control can be important when working structure with crankbaits but boat control is just as important when fishing flats or open water. People often talk about scattered fish but even where fish are scattered; there are often concentrations or small pods of fish, making one acre of the lake bottom better. The boat that can turn around and run lures back over those fish the most times in the least amount of time often brings home the most fish.

While finding the "right lure" is important, it is not what is most important. Keep your eyes glued to your depth finder and pay attention to what those crank-baits are doing behind you the next time you are out on the water. You will make your own luck.

Jason Mitchell is a Licensed Guide on Devils Lake, North Dakota. Call (701) 351-1890 to make reservations. Accommodations can be arranged through Woodland Resort by calling (701) 662-5996