

Fussy Walleyes on Crankbaits *by Jason Mitchell*

It can be hard to imagine that a walleye can slam a crank-bait and miss the treble hooks. How can fish shake loose from all of those hooks? You would think that a crank-bait would catch anything that came near it. There are days where the fish are practically inhaling the cranks and hooking the fish isn't a concern. There are other days where walleyes will hit crank-baits and somehow avoid getting hooked. I guess the bottom line is the simple fact that walleyes are more aggressive and easier to catch some days. There are some alterations, however that you can do while trolling crank-baits that can mean the difference between bringing a few walleyes into the net and not catching anything at all on the off days.

It often seems that walleyes will follow a crank-bait for a ways before hitting. The fish is aroused and curious and but does nothing more than follow the lure for awhile before losing interest. It often seems like walleyes will often trail right behind a crank-bait; just inches behind the lure but don't commit to striking.

Short hits and fish shaking off after a few head-shakes can be frustrating to the angler. Using the right equipment for the situation can greatly increase the number of walleyes that get reeled all the way back to the boat. Finding something that will trigger fish to hit more aggressively can also be the answer.

An obvious solution to sticking fish that are nipping the crank is using sharp hooks. Some people make the mistake of downplaying the importance of sharp hooks on a crank-bait because the lures have so many hooks and the fish often hit the baits aggressively. Nothing could be further from the truth. When a walleye hits a crank-bait, there is a good amount of pressure on the fish's mouth from the speed of the boat. One dull hook that is caught on a soft part of the fish's mouth can often tear out. Many tackle companies now offer premium treble hooks that are super sharp. Replacing or sharpening the trebles on a crank-bait can often mean more fish.



Devils Lake Guide Jason Mitchell
with a crankbait walleye.

Matching the right rod to the line you use and paying close attention to the drag can also make all of the difference. Talk to ten different fishermen about rods for trolling crank-baits and you will often get ten different answers. I believe the key to getting fish that are barely hanging on a hook is maintaining the right amount of pressure. For me, long fiberglass rods with soft tips enable me to keep pressure on the fish at all times yet serve as a shock absorber so the fish doesn't get too much pressure. Be careful not to give the fish any slack, but don't reel so fast that hooks start tearing out. Many fish are lost just getting the rod out of the rod holder because the fish got slack. Keep the right amount of tension at all times. Adjust the drag loose enough that the fish can't tear hooks out on its own account and be patient when bringing in big fish.

Over the past year, I have really grown to like fiberglass linear rods for trolling. The eight and a half-foot, medium action linear rod from Cabela's lets you get away with a few mistakes. The bend is so uniform and the rods seem as sensitive as many graphite rods. The rods are long and forgiving, making them easy to use. I just tell my customers to hold the rod up and reel. The rod generally does the rest. The bad side to using linear rods is stringing the line through the rod if you break the line off inside the rod. I have never had the line break inside the rod but I have had people reel in the line until the line was inside the rod.

When fish aren't attacking crank-baits, putting the boat in neutral and stalling until the bend comes out of the rods will sometimes trigger fish. Pumping the rod can also get fish to jump on the lure. Changes in speed are often the key. When trying to catch fish on a crank-bait that is barely moving forward, sharp hooks become even more important. Sometimes, holding the rod or holding the line helps because you can give the fish a little hook set when the crank-bait is at a practical standstill.

There are times when you need to get the crank-bait away from the boat or run some crank-baits further away from the boat to stagger the lines to avoid getting tangles, but there are many times when we can run the lures much closer to the boat than we do. I believe that running the cranks as close to the boat as the fish will allow counts for a few more fish. You are more likely to get a fish in on fifty feet of line than two hundred feet of line. If you can get away with running the cranks close to the boat, do it.

There are also times when simply changing to a lure that has a different action, shape or size will trigger a better strike out of a fish. Keep experimenting and make your fishing as fundamentally sound as possible and you will stumble into your own luck.

