

Jigging Variations by Bill Ortiz

Common knowledge that lead headed jigs catch walleye. Also common knowledge that jigs can catch fish day after day for the duration of each calendar season on a variety of water. Jigs give anglers a versatility that is unmatched. Most anglers know how to present a jig but often, anglers get comfortable with only one or two aspects of using a jig. Some anglers for example are very comfortable vertically jigging current seams but have a hard time pitching jigs. Other anglers might be very confident with bait but really have a tough time recognizing when and where plastics shine.

There are so many variations and different ways to use a jig to catch walleye that we are never really done learning. The only way to learn new applications for this tried and true presentation is forcing your-self out of your own comfort zone. Because there are so many ways to alter this presentation, there is no such thing as a perfect jigging rod or line that works well for all jigging applications. An angler vertically fishing a half-ounce jig in heavy current will probably have a different preference and equipment than an angler tossing 1/16th ounce jigs along weed edges in three feet of water.

The Line Debate

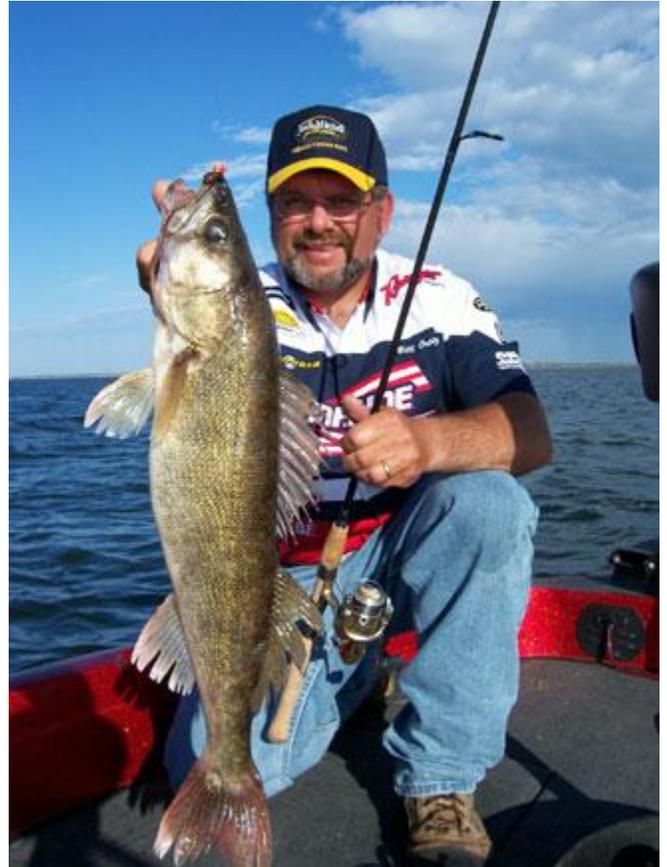
When I am touring the countryside fishing both the PWT and FLW tour, my co-anglers constantly ask me about my preference for line. Many anglers have this false assumption that there is some kind of debate between super lines and mono. Like one is better than the other for jigging. Many anglers believe that the sensitivity of super lines like Fire Line make this no stretch line superior for jigging. Yes and no. There are situations where I really like a super line. Some of these situations involve any kind of fishing where the jig is under the boat. Deep water and vertical presentations or snaggy environments like zebra mussels and wood are all situations where Fireline might work better.

Now for the other side of the story. The use of a no stretch line will not move through the water with as fluid a motion. The presentation can often be more "herky jerky" with no stretch lines. When I am pitching jigs or presenting the jig in any way where the line is more horizontal, monofilament often works better for me. My favorite line for these types of presentations is Berkley Sensation in the high visibility. When I am pitching jigs up into shallow current breaks or pitching jigs with plastics into weed edges, I love Sensation. This line is easy to see and the hits are often visual when the line doesn't settle like it should or just jumps.

For pitching jigs, an easy to see monofilament often works better for me. The best rod I have seen for this type of presentation is the Jason Mitchell Elite Series spinning rod in either the six and a half or seven foot model. These rods are really the buzz right now with many serious river rats that live and die using jigs. The rods are unbelievably light and sensitive. For applications where I use a no stretch super line, the Jason Mitchell Elite Series JMSS59 is rod slightly less than six feet that has a soft enough tip for cushioning hook sets but the action is extremely fast with a good backbone. This rod is also designed to fish "tip heavy" to make the rod even more sensitive. Pair this rod up with Fireline and you actually have to dull down your senses.

Plastics versus Bait

Many anglers have a hard time using plastics. The reality is if you aren't confident with something you have a harder time using it. There are a couple of situations where plastics really shine for me but the possibilities are really endless. The PWT Tournament on Frances Case in South Dakota is often early in the year. Weather conditions can be less than ideal. Wicked winds and frigid air temperatures often freeze up guides. Often, we find fish laying in current breaks and eddies caused by the shoreline and the fish are shallow. When we are pitching these areas, we could use a minnow and catch fish but... the time spent out of the water re-hooking bait is time wasted and this process is also cold. I can use something like Berkley's Powerbait or Gulp! to help me catch several fish on the same bait and actually let my hands warm up.



So yes, plastics can be efficient enabling you to spend your time fishing and not having to re-bait so often. Plastics also fall and slide through the water very realistically. Plastics can be rigged to fall slower, flash more and often have more action than the real deal. Weeds are another great candidate for the power of plastics and the same principle applies. Weeds don't tear off the plastics as easy and the stuff catches fish. Will plastics ever entirely replace live bait? Absolutely not, as long as using bait is still legal. What I would encourage all anglers to do however is get confident using both. Learn how to use both bait and plastics so that you have both weapons up your sleeve. You will become a much better angler and catch more walleye.

The Ultimate Jig

There are so many variations and styles of the simple lead head jig. Amongst walleye anglers, the round ball head jig is one of the most versatile and popular designs we see on the water. There are also stand up styles, bullet shapes and a host of other varieties. In my mind, the ultimate jig obviously has an extremely sharp wide gap hook that keeps bait and plastics in place, holds fish and is easy to sharpen (always carry a hook file and re-sharpen jigs constantly). This ultimate jig also has to perform flawlessly vertically jigged, dragged or pitched. This ultimate jig is the Knuckle Ball jig made by Fin Tech Tackle. The unique shape of the head almost resembles a helmet but this unique shape is responsible for make this jig the ideal tool for just about every situation I have ever used a jig. When casting and dragging for example, most jigs just drag on their side. Now the fish will still hit a jig dragging sideways along the bottom but your hooking ratio is often poor when compared to a jig that always seems to scoot along the bottom with the hook up. The hooks also have a long enough shank for securely pinning bait and I am a big believer in using a longer shank hook for higher hooking rates especially when fish aren't taking the whole bait in their mouths.

Color can sometimes be a factor and there are proven glow and high visibility color patterns to choose from including metallic which really seem to show up in stained water. We all know how simple jigs can be and we also know that just about any jig can and will catch fish when the situation is right. The ultimate jig however that absolutely shines in any walleye fishing application is the Knuckle Ball. Just drag one of these jigs next to the dock where you can see this jig work in action and you will know what I am talking about.

As you can see, the possibilities and variations of jig fishing are endless. There are no set rules that are cut and dry. We have caught walleyes using jigs from six inches of water all the way to sixty feet of water. The patterns can range far and wide but this effective presentation can cover the gamut of walleye fishing. Just remember that in order for this presentation to be flexible, we as anglers have to be flexible as well. Make a point each season to learn something new about jigging. Continue to learn how to fish jigs in different ways. Fish with anglers who fish jigs differently than you and learn from them. Adapt and refine your equipment for the specifics of your jigging applications.

Editors note: The author Bill Ortiz is a past PWT Angler of the Year and has several top ten finishes on the PWT and FLW Walleye Tours. Bill is sponsored by Evinrude, Ranger Boats, Lowrance, Fin Tech Tackle, Jason Mitchell Elite Series Rods, Off Shore, Berkley, Mathews Bows, Folbe, ElectroTec, Gollon Bait Farms and Jones Chevrolet.