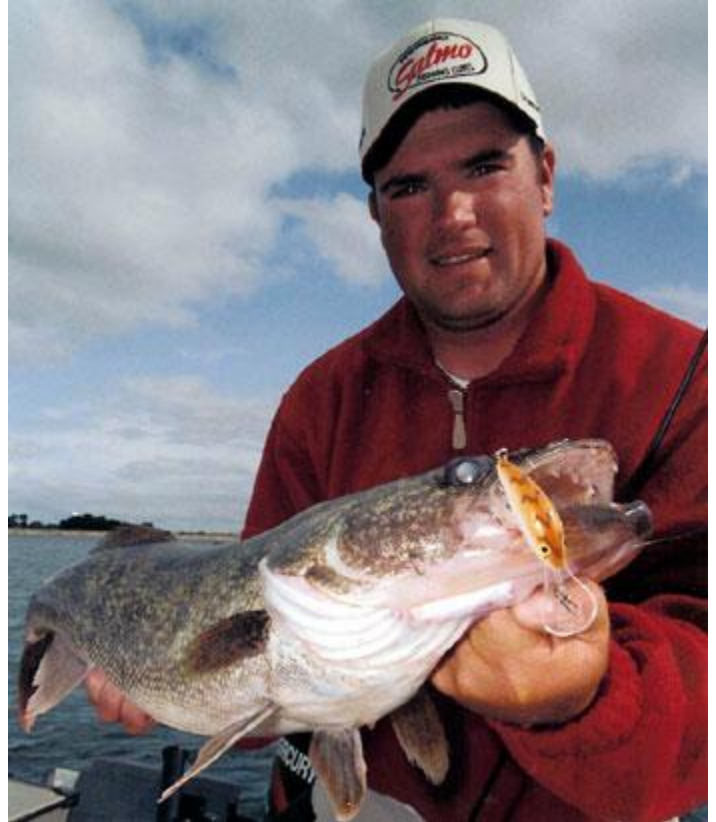


Lead Core Basics by Jason Mitchell

Over the past ten years, trolling with lead core line has gained in popularity amongst the walleye crowd. Lead core enables anglers to put any crank-bait in the tackle box in front of fish regardless of how deep. This in itself is a huge advantage but you can also accomplish the same task with snap weights, Dipsey Divers and downriggers. There are many ways an angler can put a number 5 Salmo Hornet into 25 feet of water. Anglers like lead core line however because the whole process is easy, inexpensive yet incredibly effective. This article will discuss the basics of trolling with lead core and will also offer a few tips for refining the trolling process even further.

The rod and reel combo for lead core line doesn't have to be much. Depending on how you spread multiple lines behind the boat, a six to eight foot rod works perfect. The rod tips should be somewhat soft with a moderate action for softening the blows of snags and heavy fish. In all honesty, all you need is a cheap fiberglass bait-caster or trolling rod. The reel should be somewhat large in the sense that lead core is thicker in diameter and needs a larger spool. Level winds work best and line counters are a big plus.

Before spooling the lead core line onto the reel, most anglers will spool on some kind of backing. I usually spool on some heavy mono for my backing. The heavy mono backing is important and serves many purposes. First, the mono gives you a stretchy backing that you will appreciate as soon as you get snagged up. Another purpose of the mono backing is that planer board clips will attach very well to heavy mono if you need to spread out lines with boards. The most important reason for using some kind of backing however is to fill the spool so that the line counter is accurate. Remember that the line counter doesn't actually count the feet of line but rather how many times the spool turns. There is a big difference in diameter between a full spool and an empty spool. Keep your spools full and identical to each other. Use the same kind and amount of backing on each reel. Calibrate the reels in pairs and match up rod and reel combos that are very close. If the reels don't match each other, you will have a harder time duplicating what is working.



How many colors of lead core line you spool up with depends on what you are trying to accomplish. Most of my fishing is less than thirty feet of water so I only need four colors (each color is 10 yards). If you spool with more than three colors, planer boards will sink. If you plan on incorporating boards into your trolling set up, you will want to spool up with three colors. For most walleye applications, three to four colors will suffice. There is an old saying that one color will put you down ten feet but at most crank-bait trolling speeds, one color runs closer to about seven feet depending on speed and line diameter.

Some anglers tie off the lead core to the backing by using a very small swivel. Other anglers use a lead core knot. There are a few options as far as diameter. I like using heavier line myself as it becomes easier to tie when rocking in the boat. Attached to the end of the lead core line is your leader. On some water, anglers are forced to use really long leaders of either mono or even fluorocarbon. Some anglers really like the stretch of mono and encourage anglers to use a mono leader which is more forgiving. I like a Fireline leader for a few reasons. I can tell what the bait is doing as far as being fouled or running right and the Fireline is tougher around snags. For the most part, walleye aren't real particular about being line shy on the water I fish so really long leaders aren't necessary either. The most important part of leaders is make sure they are all the same. I cannot stress this enough. Don't put a ten-foot leader on one rod and a twenty-foot leader on another. I usually go two rod lengths and keep it simple. The lures will actually usually go deeper on shorter leaders if you zero out your line counter right at the lure. Keep everything identical between rods so that when you find something that is working to catch fish, you can match what is working with the other rods.

Once on the water, the number one mistake anglers make is letting out too much line. If the lead core line is slapping along the bottom, you have too much line out. There is a time and place for letting the crank-bait

bump the bottom but you don't need to plow a ditch and usually, you will end up spending your fishing time snagged if you let out too much line. Slowing down will make your lure run deeper while speeding up will cause your lures to rise. Most of the time, an average trolling speed might be right around 2 miles per hour.

The real advantages to lead core line stem from the fact that you can put some extremely effective lures much deeper than they ever would by flat line trolling. Another advantage come from the fact that lead core will follow a contour much more effectively than most other presentations. Lead core line seems to snake through the water, mimicking the path that the boat takes. Following inside turns, points and other curves is much more efficient with lead core line. Some of our favorite casting or trolling baits like #4 and #5 Salmo Hornets, #5 Shad Raps, Wally Divers, Jointed Shad Raps, Husky Jerks, etc will work well for catching fish in 20 or even 40 feet of water. Lead core line is a tool to get some of our favorite lures down to the fish. The whole process is simple yet extremely productive.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell operates a large guide service on North Dakota's Devils Lake. The author can be contacted by calling 701-662-6560.