

Trolling Concepts by Jason Mitchell

Regardless of whether you look for walleye in a river, lake or reservoir, trolling crank baits is incredibly effective come mid to late summer. The reasons that trolling can be so effective stem from the fact that fish will generally pull out into areas that are easy to troll. When fish suspend over open water, trolling is often the best way to find and catch these fish. When fish pull out onto massive offshore flats and basins, trolling shines. When fish slide out off of sharp breaking contours and channels, trolling steals the show. Whenever you have large schools of fish utilizing large areas, trolling becomes amazingly effective because you can fish these large areas fast, finding and triggering fish.

There isn't a rubber stamp however that will enable you to apply one trolling strategy to any situation where anglers may find walleye. Generally, anglers focusing on open water, suspended fish or fish utilizing flats will spread lines out with planer boards. Planer boards like the clip on boards manufactured by Off Shore spread lines away from the boat which accomplishes two major functions. First, spreading out lines covers more water and covering water is the name of the game when filtering acres of water for suspended fish or nomadic fish roaming flats and basins. The other function of planer boards is to get lures away from the boat especially if fish are high in the water column and are spooking from the boat. Planer boards can also give the lure a little bit of erratic action but the disadvantages of boards include difficulty detecting fouled up lures, more legwork unclipping the board to bring in fish and planer boards also have a tendency to bog down with heavy snap weights or several colors of lead core line. There is a time and place where planer boards are necessary but also recognize when they aren't effective.



One situation where anglers get away from planer boards is when trying to key on a specific structural contour. When following a channel edge, break line or some other structure, anglers often want the lures to follow right behind the boat in an effort to keep all of the lures in a specific zone or depth. For this application, lead core line and snap weights are often used because the lines can be stacked behind the boat on shorter distances which basically enables more precise boat control. To prevent tangles, long rods are run out the sides with short rods positioned off the transom so that anglers can run up to four or five lead core rods out the back of the boat without tangling.

I am confident that we have designed the most effective trolling rod combination for lead core line (jasonmitchellrods.com). This combination includes two fourteen foot trolling rods that run out each side along with two five foot trolling rods that run out the back. We also build standard telescopic eight foot trolling rods. The fourteen foot trolling rods are the longest commercially designed trolling rods available and the rod features a complex rod action. The tip is soft and sensitive for monitoring lure action but the action of the entire rod is very parabolic to handle the head shakes of heavy fish. Compared to the other long trolling rods available, this rod will comfortably handle several colors of lead core without loading up.

In order to stack several crank baits behind the boat without tangling, it is crucial that the lures are tuned. To the best of my knowledge, only Rapala and Salmo tank test their lures for tuning. Tune the lure before you use it or you are going to have a tangled mess. Lures that are already tuned are worth the extra investment.

In order to stagger the lures on multiple lines out the back, you will need to run the lures on varying amounts of line to prevent tangles. For example, the two rods out the sides might be run at one hundred feet behind the boat while the two rods out the back might be set at one hundred and fifty feet behind the boat. Running the same lure at different lengths of line from the back of the boat will obviously run the same lure at different depths with the lure getting run further back running deeper. You can cheat the system by clipping a snap weight onto the lead core right above where the leader is attached so that the lures running a shorter distance from the boat will run at the same depth as the lead core on longer distances. If using a heavy enough snap weight (4 ounces) you can drop some lures down right below the boat as well which will keep these lures away from the lead core. With the right system, you can make the turns necessary to stay on structure without spending major amounts of time out of the water with tangles. Stagger your lines and use lures that are tuned.

Successful trolling is a matter of duplicating what works. When one lure starts to fire, duplicate the

presentation with the other rods. This is why line counter reels are so important. Note however that line counter reels don't measure actual feet but measure revolutions of the reel spool. Some line counter reels aren't calibrated and are off significantly. Test your reels off the water by tying off of something and walking back say one hundred feet and then two hundred feet. If the reels are within three to five feet of each other at two hundred feet, they will match together. If the reels are off further than that, find another reel to pair with. Mismatched reels will not allow you to duplicate a hot setup. Also note that reels will read differently when the spool is low on line, keep the spools full. The most accurate I have found have been the Abu Garcia line counters and the Daiwa Sea Lines. The Abu Garcia has a much better drag however than the Daiwas. Something else to consider is to pair your trolling rods with the exact same line, leaders and reels.

Keep everything the exact same so that when something begins to work, you can repeat the winning formula with your other rods. You do not want to troll with varying leader lengths and line classes. Keep everything the same and calibrate your reels so that they are close in order to fine tune your trolling presentation.

Right now, some of the hottest lures hitting the walleye world have been Salmo Lures. These lures are so effective because they are hand tuned before packaging. This hand tuning creates delicate actions and tracking that triggers walleye under a variety of situations. Some of the lures under the most demand include the Salmo BD6SDR Bullhead, Salmo BD8SDR Bullhead and the Salmo H4F, H5F and H6F Hornets. Other brands that have a strong fan base include the Rapala Shad Raps and Jointed Shad Raps, Reef Runner's Deep Rippers and Little Rippers, Cotton Cordell Wally Divers and Bomber Long A's. If you are serious about trolling, chances are that you have tackle boxes with all of these different lures in a variety of sizes and colors.

One day for whatever reason, one lure will outperform all of the others and the key to catching many fish is matching what is working. Unfortunately as luck would have it, the fish often decide to light up a lure that you only have one of. This is why trolling can be the root of some serious crank bait addictions. We can't stand the thought of only having one lure; we need to have six of each lure. Perhaps there should be a support group called "Trollers Anonymous" for people who have racks full of different crank baits. All joking aside, trolling crank baits is so incredibly effective that more and more walleye anglers are joining the ranks.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell is a legendary guide on Devils Lake and designer of high performance, walleye specific series of fishing rods, www.jasonmitchellrods.com.