

LAKES SALMON FISHING

By Jerry Hughes

line with the available baitfish resources, stocking is reduced. Fewer and smaller fish lead to reduced catches and anglers begin abandoning the big water fisheries. Many charter operations go out of business and many recreational anglers turn their attention to inland species.

As the new millennium sets in, the salmon fishing on the Great Lakes starts to improve again. Baitfish populations have stabilized to the point where stocking is increased, although not to the levels of the 80s. A few years into the decade and the anglers who are still chasing salmon are once again reporting good catches. It seems as if things have returned to the way they were in the "good old days" of the 80s and early 90s, but things aren't always as they seem.

The Great Lakes have changed, thanks largely to an influx of non native species like Zebra mussels. The water has cleared considerably and anglers have had to change their approaches to catching open water salmon. Running a spoon behind a cannonball will still catch a few fish, but employing other tactics will improve success rates considerably. Today's top salmon anglers are employing a variety of set ups including leadcore and wire line rigs, diving planers, planer boards and downriggers to consistently catch salmon.

Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with a couple of Southern Ontario's top salmon anglers and pick their brains about the new salmon fishery and what today's anglers can do to increase their success rates. The word that kept popping

VITO DATTOMO



Vito Dattomo is one of the top captains on lakes Ontario and Erie and his Lord of the Kings boat can be seen in the winner's circle at many salmon and walleye tournaments held around the big lakes each year. Vito doesn't run salmon charters in the traditional sense; rather he operates a unique fishing educational program that teaches anglers the intricacies of catching salmon with various rigs and techniques. His hands-on approach allows anglers to learn how to properly use tools like wire and leadcore line, diving planers, planer boards and more in actual fishing situations. After a day on the water with Vito, most anglers should be able to take what they've learned and use the new tactics on their own boats.

up was "diversity." Much like bass anglers who carry multiple rods and use a variety of baits and techniques, salmon anglers need to be ready to change presentations and baits to match the mood of the fish.

I asked Vito Dattomo, Captain of *Lord of the Kings*, about the changes that have occurred in the fishery since the glory days of the 80s. One of the things he commented on was that the lakes are much clearer than they used to be and anglers have had to adapt. He made a point of recommending the use of fluorocarbon leaders, which he is convinced will increase any angler's catch rate.

Vito also mentioned the increased use of technology in fishing and how the learning curve for anglers has been accelerated, largely due to the internet. Anglers can check on fishing conditions around the Great Lakes by simply visiting any salmon fishing website or discussion board. They can also pick up tips on hot baits and the latest techniques without having to spend hours or days experimenting on the water.

"What I've found to be the biggest change in the last five years is the diversity of the fishermen and how they have grown and learned and now are using more than just downriggers," says Vito. "Dipsy Divers are a setup, leadcore is a setup, planer boards are another setup. What they're doing is, when one apparatus or technique is not working, they are now putting a different one out that might be more effective than just downriggers."

THE FINE LINE TO SUCCESS

With the clearer water in the Great Lakes, fluorocarbon leaders have become a very important part of salmon fishing. Vito Dattomo has been using them for a few years and he swears that they make a huge difference in the numbers of fish he catches.

"A friend of mine, Frank, said he wouldn't spend the money on fluorocarbon. But I was getting tons of fish and he was only getting a few. He decided to try it on a trip with his brother and Frank got ten fish while his brother caught none. His brother changed to the fluorocarbon leaders and started catching fish one to one with Frank."

SETTING IT UP

Vito commonly runs a spread that includes one or two downrigger lines, a couple of wire line dipsy diver rods and perhaps another with leadcore behind a planer board. If the downriggers are getting most of the fish, Vito will pull one or two of his dipsy or leadcore rods and replace them with additional downrigger rods. If the fish are showing a preference for the leadcore set, he will swap out a

'rigger rod or dipsy rod for an additional leadcore rig. He continually rotates his presentations this way so the majority of his lines are always set up for what the fish prefer at the time. Vito is quick to point out that he changes the majority, but not all, of his setups, because the fish can change their preference at any time. It's not uncommon for one presentation to be hot for a couple of hours and then go cold, or for a cold presentation to suddenly turn on. When I asked Vito for his number one set up, if he could only run one rod, he said it would be a wire line rig pulling a Dipsy Diver.

BRUCE BURT



Bruce Burt is the Vice-President of the Metro East Anglers, the club who are in charge of the salmon rearing and stocking programme at the Ringwood Fish Culture Station where all of Lake Ontario's stocked salmon come from. Bruce and his club know a thing or two about salmon. Although he doesn't run charters, Bruce captains the Metro East Anglers' salmon tournament team on board his boat, *It's a Fishing Machine* - IFM, for short.

Bruce Burt has three downriggers on his boat along with planer boards, dipsy divers and a variety of leadcore and wire line rods. He typically starts by setting out two kinds of "meat" baits (herring strips, whole herring or anchovy) behind flashers on two of his downriggers and a spoon on his third downrigger. If the spoon doesn't produce quickly he will often replace it with a third type of natural bait. In this way he quickly learns which type of bait the fish prefer and he will change the other two lines to the hot bait.

In addition to his downriggers, Bruce also runs leadcore set ups behind planer boards.

"You know how you have your morning bite? Well, the boards will add about another hour to that morning bite."

Bruce always runs at least one dipsy rod too, because at least half of his fish come on this presentation. Like Vito, Bruce prefers to run wire line on his dipsy rods. Wire allows the dipsys to run deeper with less line out and it gives a direct connection to the diver, making it much easier to release them when it's time to retrieve them. The stretch in monofilament line can make it extremely difficult to pop the release mechanism. The wire line also emits a hum or vibration in the water that many salmon anglers feel attracts salmon.

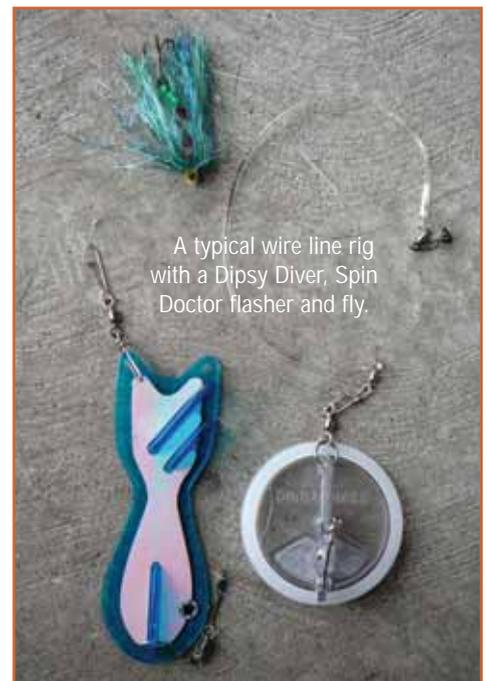
"I ran mono the first year I used dipsys, switched over to wire the second year and had at least a 30% to 40% increase in the number of fish on the dipsys," Bruce told me.

The captains I spoke with said that line counter reels were definitely the way to go when pulling wire line rigs. Because the amount of line out is crucial to the depth the dipsy will run, it's imperative to be able to duplicate your set up once you hook a fish. Of course this can be accomplished without a line counter reel, by marking your line at regular intervals and counting the marks when you set your line, but line counter reels do the job much more quickly and accurately.

When it comes to rods, there are a number of good choices for standard downrigger work. If you plan on using



Roller guides are ideal for wire line trolling



A typical wire line rig with a Dipsy Diver, Spin Doctor flasher and fly.

especially to the tip guide as wire will damage most regular guides in short order. If you do a lot of wire line trolling, it may be better to purchase a specific wire line trolling rod like one of the Talora or Tallus models from Shimano.

"With wire, you can use a standard rod but you have to change the tip to a roller. A lot of guys also use the Twili-tip - those coiled spring things that look almost like a doorstep. I've personally bought some roller rods," says Bruce.

Although Bruce runs multiple set ups on most trips, he has a couple of favourite "go-to" rigs that he puts at the top of his list.

"If I had only two rods to run, I would have one dipsy for sure, with a flasher and fly combination, and then the other one would probably be a herring strip with a flasher on a 'rigger."



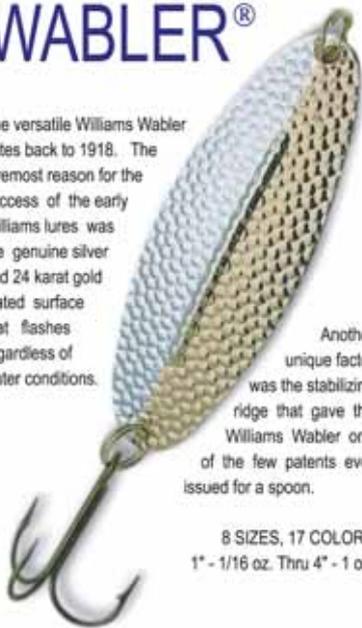
wire line, standard rods will work, but you may have to make some modifications,



THE ORIGINAL CLASSICS
Time tested and proven.

WABLER®

The versatile Williams Wabler dates back to 1918. The foremost reason for the success of the early Williams lures was the genuine silver and 24 karat gold plated surface that flashes regardless of water conditions.



Another unique factor was the stabilizing ridge that gave the Williams Wabler one of the few patents ever issued for a spoon.

8 SIZES, 17 COLORS
1" - 1/16 oz. Thru 4" - 1 oz.

Trophy takers for over 85 years.

WHITEFISH®

The Whitefish also features the Williams trademark ridge and genuine silver and 24 karat gold finishes. Designed and built in the Williams tradition of proven actions and the visibility only offered by genuine silver and gold finishes.



A wounded baitfish representation, "match the hatch" by imitating the forage base with 4 sizes to choose from. Cast or trolled, the Whitefish is a big fish favorite with a provocative action at a wide range of trolling &/or retrieval speeds.

4 SIZES, 10 COLORS
3-1/4" - 5/8 oz. Thru 6" - 1-1/2 oz.

The flash of genuine silver and 24K gold finishes

Brecks®

2560 Roy, Sherbrooke, Qc. Canada J1K 1C1

www.WILLIAMS.ca

SPEED and TEMPERATURE

Regardless of the number of rods or the variety of rigs employed in the quest for salmon, the really successful anglers will always be the ones who can find and stay on the fish. Most salmon anglers know that Chinooks are supposed to prefer the lower level of the thermocline in water between about 48°F and 55°F and as a general rule that's true - most of the time anyway - as Vito Dattomo explains.

"Probably the most important thing that I can express when it comes to fishing today is not necessarily temperature, it's down-speed. The speed is the most crucial thing. As crucial as it is, you'd be surprised at how many people on Lake Ontario still do not have a down-speed apparatus. Speed, to me, is more important than temperature. We start at around the 2-miles an hour range and then experiment. For me, the first question I ask other anglers is, how fast are you going down below? People don't always understand that there are lake currents out there. If your spoon runs optimally at 2-miles an hour and you're doing 3 1/2, or 1, half your day is going to be wasted by

Bowmanville. That area starts about 2 or 3-weeks before the (Scarborough) Bluffs and in the last couple of years it's been solid right into August. I'll fish there for 3 or 4-weeks then I'll go to Whitby for 2-weeks then I'll go to Bluffers for a week and then I'm back at home in Bronte or Port Credit when the fish are staging. We actually follow the fish as they cycle around the lake so we don't have to wait for that window when they turn up at specific area. There aren't any fish off the Credit River in 80-feet of water in the beginning of July."

Unlike Vito, Bruce Burt is a firm believer in temperature and suggests that big, active Chinooks are caught most often at temperatures of 48°F or lower. He says that big fish can be caught "out of temperature" in the early morning or late in the evening - if there are baitfish in the area. Chinooks will move into warmer water to feed on baitfish under low light conditions but once the sun gets up they return to their preferred temperature range.

"I find that 48-degrees is the most productive temperature. If you're looking for bigger guys, get close to the bottom and hopefully the temperature is 48 or lower," said Burt. "There are little, subtle changes



not fishing at the right speed. To me, it's a no-brainer. I would fish without my fish finder before I'd fish without my down-speed.

When it comes to temperature, I catch my biggest Kings, not at 55-degrees, but at 40-degrees. The thermocline for us, the guys who fish for mature Kings, is not that important. Very seldom do I personally fish in over 110-feet of water. Through learning the fishery we've learned the migration patterns of the fish. We know where they start, we know where they go all through the season and we know where they finish. Some of us actually follow the fish around the lake. We know that in the spring they're in St. Catharines and they stay there for 6 or 7-weeks. Then we shoot across to

in the bottom out there, just a couple of feet, little points and things where the flow along the bottom will change and maybe cause a little upwell. There is structure out there, very subtle, like five-foot differences, but you can see them (on a graph) and they are productive."

When it comes to speed, Bruce says that he always starts at about 2 1/2-miles per hour. If the fish aren't hitting he will speed up to about 3-miles per hour. That's partly because of Bruce's preference for pulling natural baits behind flashers.

"I'll work my way up. Probably top speed for me, especially if I'm pulling meat, is about 3-miles an hour. Lures are more tolerant of speed. Meat, especially when you get into whole herring, you don't want to be going too fast."

Oak Smoked Salmon

Ingredients

- 5 kg (10 lb) salmon fillets
- 1 lemon
- 45 ml (3 tbsp) fresh dill, chopped
- fresh ground black pepper to taste

Preparation

Place salmon fillet skin side down on oiled smoker racks. Cut lemon in half and squeeze the juice from one half over the salmon fillet. Sprinkle with chopped dill and pepper.

Smoking Method

Preheat Bradley Smoker to approximately 105°C (220°F). Place fish in the Bradley Smoker and using Oak flavor bisquettes, smoke/cook for 40 to 60 minutes.

To Serve

Remove fish from the smoker and garnish with a sprig or two of dill or parsley and sliced lemon.

Special thanks from
Bradley Smoker



THE EYES HAVE IT

Bruce Burt is a believer in using natural baits, "meat" as he calls it, for big salmon. Here's a tip from Bruce on how to increase the effectiveness of these baits.

"You take eyes, stick-on eyes or the googly eyes, and you put them on the plastic bait head. I personally think at least a 10% lift in hits as opposed to just running the head without the eyes. I've never seen bait out there without eyes. I do notice a difference. I was using them before, without eyes, and when I put the eyes on I caught more fish.



Hot spot flasher and Rhys Davis teaser head.

the baitfish or strip. More bend will give a quicker roll while less will give a slower roll.

"I personally find that the slower the roll, the more likely you're going to get the big fish. Sometimes when it's faster though, you'll get more quantity."

There's no question that Great Lakes salmon fishing has

changed over the years and it continues to evolve. As with most kinds of fishing, the greatest success will go to those anglers who are ready and willing to experiment with new tactics and techniques. This year when the old downrigger and spoon goes cold don't give up, change up, and try one of these other systems. Odds are you'll be pleasantly surprised. 🐟

anchovy heads for fishing whole anchovies. For whole herring, Bruce uses a Krippled Herring head made by Krippled Fishing Lures. As with lures, the fish can show a definite preference for one type of bait over another on any given day.

"I haven't figured out why one day they prefer one over the other," says Burt. "It's the same kind of deal with lures, one day green works and the next day blue. Who knows why?"

Bruce suggests experimenting with baits as well as with the way they are rigged. On some days the fish will prefer a fast roll, other days they will want it slow. The speed of roll can be adjusted by bending or straightening

changed over the years and it continues to evolve. As with most kinds of fishing, the greatest success will go to those anglers who are ready and willing to experiment with new tactics and techniques. This year when the old downrigger and spoon goes cold don't give up, change up, and try one of these other systems. Odds are you'll be pleasantly surprised. 🐟

BAITS

When it comes to baits, Vito likes to run a spread that includes spoons, cut bait, plugs and rotator (flasher) and fly combinations. He's especially fond of Spin Doctor and Hot Spot flashers. As with his choice of rod setups, Vito likes to start out with a bit of everything in the water until he starts catching fish, then he will start changing baits to the most productive ones. The same thing goes for colour choices. If he has, for example, green, blue and silver baits down, and blue starts taking fish, he will add more blue baits into his spread. He will still leave a couple of other colours down in case the fish change their preference, but the majority will be changed to the "hot" colour.

Bruce Burt is a firm believer in the power of natural bait to attract hungry salmon and he carries three different types when he's out trolling: herring strips, commonly referred to as cut bait; whole anchovies and whole herring. All of these baits are fished behind flashers on special heads that are designed for each type of bait. Bruce prefers Rhys Davis teaser heads for his cut bait rigs and he uses their

