

Muskie Fever - Part Three

by Captain Don Miller

On June 5 muskie season was observed on Lake St. Clair by anglers from all over Michigan and Southern Ontario. It didn't take long for action to take place. Approximately 126 muskies were landed and 8 were entered in the Michigan Ontario Muskie Club Opening Day Derby. The balance were released to conserve the fishery. The fish that were entered ranged in weight from 20 pounds to the first place 32 pound, 10 ounce trophy. My weekend clients and I didn't manage to take first place, however, we did land a pair of 25 pound dandles. All in all it was one of the best opening days I've witnessed and the exciting thing is that the best is yet to come!

In Muskie Fever - Part One we covered trolling techniques for St. Clair muskies. Part two covered types of lures, trolling speed and water clarity. This month we are going to discuss wind direction, structure, cover and muskie location as well as the effects of barometric pressure.

First, let's get a fast lesson in wind direction with a near and far shore forecast. Scenario: the wind is from the north at 15 to 25 MPH. The wave action is forecasted 2 to 4 feet. In conditions like this most of the time I would opt to fish the north end of the lake. The reason for this is number one, the lake will be calmer and easier to fish on the north end. But more importantly the water will be cleaner and more free of debris on the north end. Lake St. Clair is a fairly shallow and weedy body of water and a strong wind tends to flush floating weeds to the shore the wind is blowing into, making efficient trolling impossible. Going to the north end where the water isn't as rough allows me to fish more comfortably and keep baits in the water without becoming fowled by weeds. Heading to the shore the wind is blowing from is just one of Homer LeBlanc's old tricks for putting more muskies in the boat. Wind direction is just one good reason for knowing an entire body of water. Many anglers who know just one or two productive spots on a large body of water like St. Clair end up staying home or fishing in less than favorable conditions simply because the wind is blowing from the wrong direction. The wise muskie hunter has several areas on all sides of the body of water and lets wind direction dictate the areas he will fish.

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On windy days I generally find muskies tucked up behind small underwater points or behind substantial dropoffs. I believe this is because muskies don't like getting tossed around in rough water any more than we do. In heavy winds I always fish into the wind and work the lures off any dropoffs or points that serve as a wind (wave action) break to the fish. More often than not the muskies we hook up with are lying in these areas.

When the water is calm and the winds light and variable my most productive spots are water color breaklines off of river mouths. A substantial color change in the water such as stained green to aqua blue is one of the favorite cover options for St.

Clair muskies and in many cases is just as or even more productive than any solid piece of structure. Water color breaks on St. Clair move from day to day and have to be located visually. When a good color break is found try trolling inside the stained water away from the clear water. Some times you'll find the muskies close to the color break but more often than not it's best to concentrate your efforts away from the break, as far as 200 yards. I believe muskies prefer to feed in stained water and their prey, for obvious reasons, prefer clear water. Bringing the two together spells grocery store to BIG muskies.

The greatest fish holding structure available on St. Clair has to be the dumping

grounds. Years ago this was the area they dumped the dredging from the shipping channel and the canals. They might have figured because of the swift current in Lake St. Clair (it has a complete turnover of water every four days) that the current would carry the dredgings down the Detroit River. Some of it went and some of it didn't. The result is a lot of man made structure consisting of crevices, ledges and sunken islands bordered by the shipping channel on the west side and huge cabbage weed beds along the southwestern end. The dumping grounds is a great muskie hangout but there are many days that it is unfishable because of weather conditions. Late June and all of July are the most productive times of the year to fish the dumping grounds. I believe this is because the walleyes are coming out into the lake against the current of the Detroit River at this time of year and it's natural for the muskies to gang up out in front waiting on the structure to ambush the unwary walleyes. You like to eat walleyes you say? Muskies love to eat walleyes too!

The dumping grounds range in depth from 8 to 18 feet and muskies can be taken virtually anywhere. Running lures high over the dumping grounds assures no hang ups and allows you to cover the whole area in less than a day's fishing.

Now let's move along to barometric pressure. Without getting too complicated, I'll tell you my quick formula. Low pressure typically means cloudy, maybe even rainy conditions. The fish are active and tend to move up in the water column. On days like this, lures running very shallow (practically airborne) tend to be the most productive. High pressure typically means mile high clear skies, wind and decreasing temperatures. The fish tend to move deeper so I'll usually run the lures a little deeper but not on bottom. However I'll still always run one right on the surface because muskies, for the most part, are unpredictable creatures and as far as I know the fish don't know this formula.

Next month I hope to do an interview with Lake St. Clair legend Mr. Muskie Homer LeBlanc and cover a trip on St. Clair with Sportsman's Corner Editor Tom Irwin.

For further information or questions I welcome your calls. (313) 429-9551. ☐



The author with a 54-inch, 48 pound Lake St. Clair muskie.