

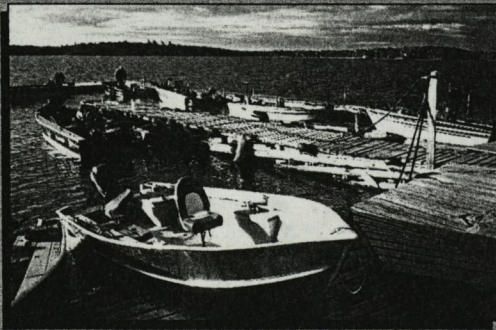
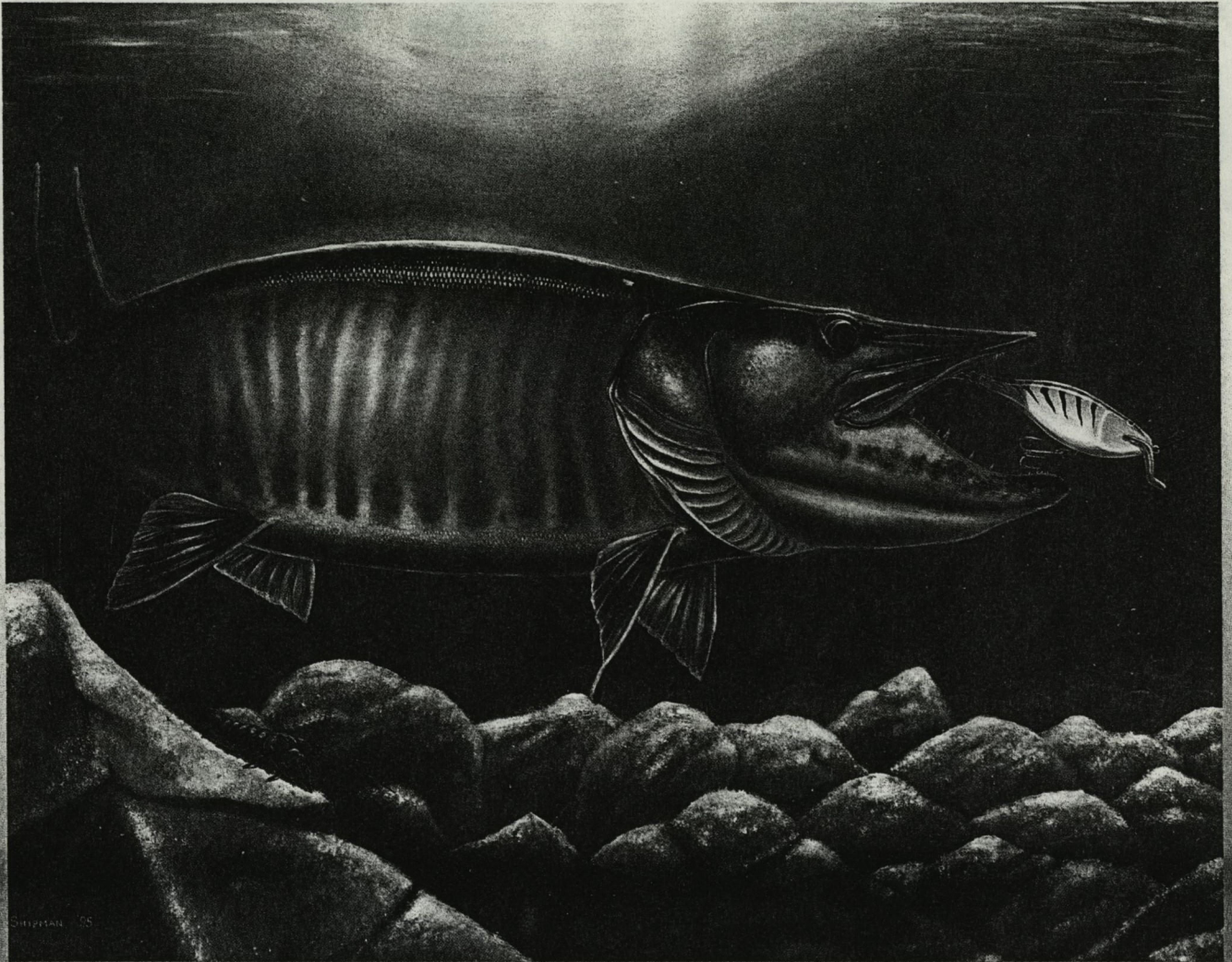
TOP TROLLERS
REVEAL SECRETS

WAS SPRAY'S 61-13 REALLY THAT BIG?

Musky Hunter

NORTH AMERICA'S MUSKY AUTHORITY

MAY 1996

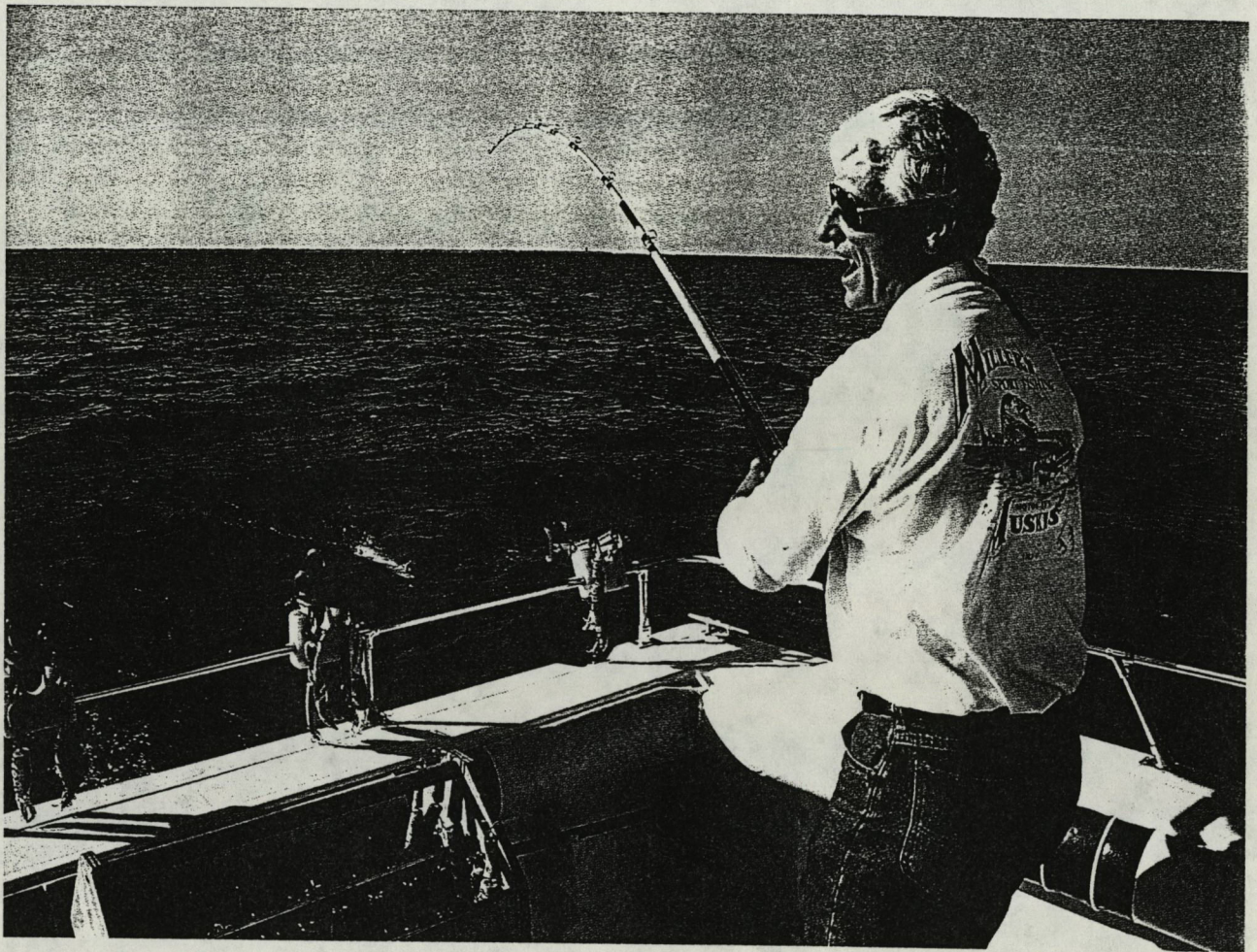


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By MIKE NORRIS
and JIM SARIC, Editor

POWERTROLLING

Five premier trollers from across the musky world offer their insights into this big fish technique

Mike Norris remembers well his first experience power trolling for muskies. "I was fishing Lake of the Woods in Ontario, Canada, and was cruising to another hotspot. I decided to toss my crankbait behind the boat and freespool the line until a minor backlash disappeared from my reel. I gently flipped the lure behind the boat and into the propwash, while letting the line out until the backlash disappeared. I felt a sharp rap on my line as I re-engaged the reel and immediately set the hook into a 46-inch musky which was quickly landed and released."

This type of situation is one that many casting anglers have heard on numerous occasions, and has given trolling a "no brainer" bad rap. Nothing could be farther from the

Captain Don Miller battles a Lake St. Clair musky that struck a lure while propwash trolling.

truth. Many a diehard troller has spent countless hours without a strike. There is much science to successful trolling.

While many musky anglers agree that muskies will suspend over open water, most musky hunters still spend most of their time fishing around structure and cover. And why not? Structure provides opportunities for muskies to use identifiable routes to follow when feeding. These are ideal routes to follow when structure trolling. Smaller waters may only have one or two "good" trolling routes, while larger waters may have many. On the other hand, structure is not the only area to troll. *Musky Hunter* Editor Jim Saric and many of the other editors have had

numerous outstanding days catching suspended muskies nowhere near structure.

In musky fishing though, only one thing is certain — you'll increase your odds for catching muskies if you cover as much water as possible in a day. Power trolling is simply a fast and efficient way of accomplishing this goal.

Power trolling works whether fishing the shield lakes of the north and east or the prairie potholes and rivers or reservoirs of the south.

To find out why this technique is so deadly, and for a better understanding of how to power troll for muskies, we interviewed five premier musky trollers across North America. The list included Marc Thorpe, a

JIM SARIC

Quebec guide who consistently catches his biggest muskies trolling large crankbaits; Terry O'Malley, a disciple of the Buck Perry Spoonplugging method who himself teaches Spoonplugging throughout the states and spends most of his time guiding for muskies on his home waters in Illinois; Don Miller, the protege of the late Homer LeBlanc, who guides on the famous Lake St. Clair; and MHM field editors Mark Maghran and Tom Slomka, who guide and fish the Niagara River in Buffalo, NY, and its confluence with Lake Erie.

All are accomplished fishing guides and precision trollers known for putting clients on both numbers and big muskies. Their tactics display some similarities, but also exhibit remarkable differences. Regardless, they all illustrate the effectiveness of power-trolling.

STRUCTURE TROLLING

Marc Thorpe, Terry O'Malley, and Mark Maghran are structure trollers, spending the majority of their time running lures in and around structural elements. Marc Thorpe prefers to power-troll crankbaits over and adjacent to bars, humps, rocky ledges or weedbeds, where muskies position them-

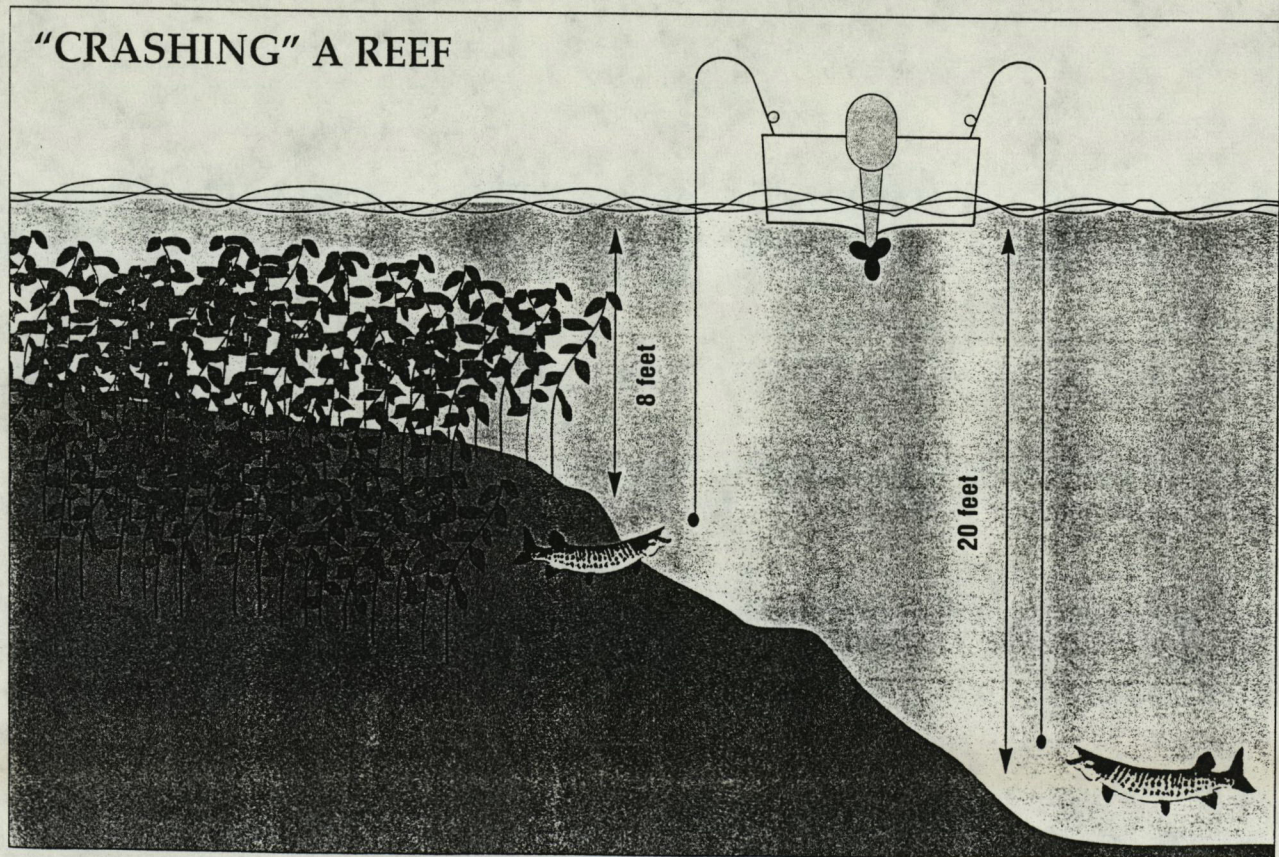
selves for an easy meal. "There's more to it than just dropping a lure in the water and going forward," says Thorpe. "I like to set up shoreline sightings so I can run a defined route. This allows me to keep my trolling passes right on the breakline. If I don't catch a musky on the first pass, I'll turn around and run the breakline again. But this time I'll change tactics in order to trigger a strike. I'll use a technique I call 'crashing the reef'."

"Crashing the reef" is nothing more than motor trolling parallel to the edge of a sloping dropoff and stacking lures so that they cover various depths along the dropoff (see diagram). Typically Thorpe runs his lures 10 to 80 feet behind the boat. "Muskies are sight feeders and their eyes are positioned so that they can only see out to the sides and above them," says Thorpe. "By running my inside lure shallow and outside lure deep I can zig-zag in and out parallel to the dropoff. When I troll shallower, both lures start to bump bottom (crashing the reef). When this happens, I'll turn back out and both lures will begin to suspend. I'll keep repeating this maneuver until I've triggered a strike."

"I do basically the same thing," says Terry O'Malley. "I bump bottom some time, but

usually I let the lure run free. Muskies have a tendency to strike a free-running lure more so than largemouth bass, so I avoid bumping the bottom too often. Fast-moving, free-running lures often agitate a musky and provoke a strike in shallow to medium depths. It's only when I get into deeper water that I'll try bumping the bottom more, as the water is cooler and I might only be dealing with neutral fish. It's here that a slower-trolled, bottom-bumping lure may be necessary to trigger a strike from a reluctant musky."

Mark Maghran also fishes structure in the Niagara River and the harbor area where Lake Erie enters the Niagara. In the river he focuses on trolling the breakline adjacent to depressions, holes or the river channel. In Lake Erie he concentrates his efforts on riprap breakwalls, discharges, and reefs. Maghran primarily keeps his lures in contact with bottom. "I've tried running lures suspended above bottom in both the river and lake but have only caught smaller fish. When I began working my lures on bottom I began to catch the 30-pound-and-larger class muskies." When Maghran talks fishing bottom he means it. He tries to keep his lures constantly bumping bottom, almost grinding



occasionally run another rod in a rod holder. However, they feel that one precisely trolled lure per angler is best. Miller and Thorpe find it physically impossible to hold the rod at higher speeds and use clamp-on Downeaster rod holders to troll multiple lines.

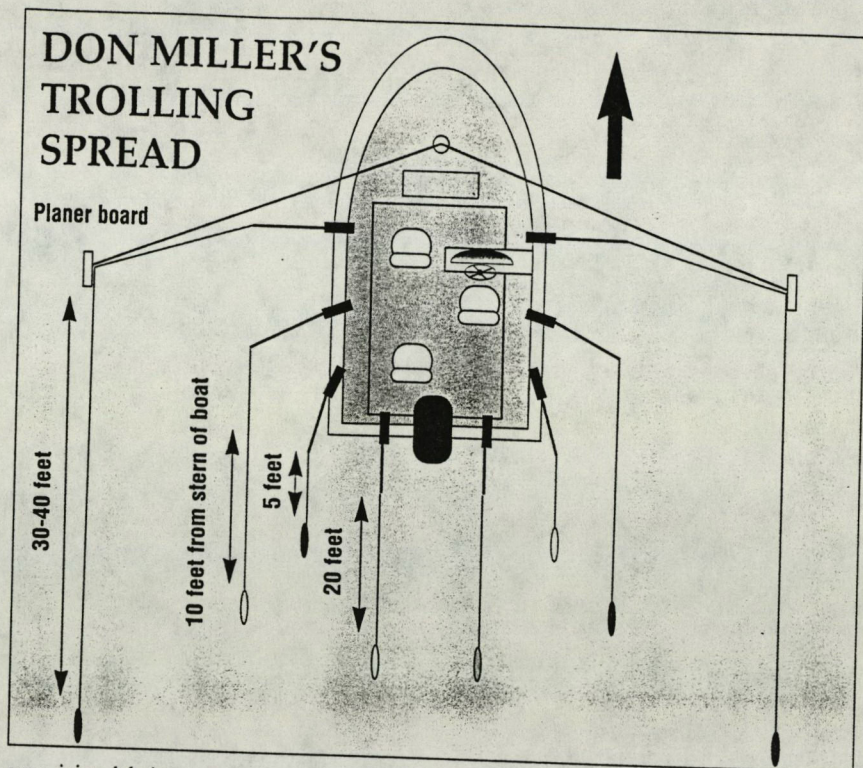
The lines used by the various trollers varied greatly from O'Malley using 17-pound test No BO monofilament, which is marked and pre-stretched, to Thorpe using 45-pound dacron. Maghran uses 30-pound Sevenstrand wire quite often.

Reels can be broken into two types: Penn-trolling reels for which anglers counted level-wind passes to determine a bait's distance behind the boat, or Daiwa's linecounter reels which indicate the amount of line between the rod and the lure. All trollers agreed that knowing and varying line length was an essential part of their trolling success.

LURES

Lures, like rods, lines and reels varied greatly with each troller. However, each had a favorite brand(s) and used them like tools. They knew exactly how deep the lure is running with a given amount of line and speed. Thorpe fishes primarily Grim Reaper Sickle lures and Hi-Fin Trophy Divers, Minnows and Scampers. He selects lure colors that match the natural forage of the waters he's fishing.

Don Miller primarily uses Believers. He uses eight-inch models in spring and summer and 10-inch models in fall. He also primarily



uses jointed baits to maximize sound and vibration. Perch, frog and black and silver patterns are his favorite.

Maghran and Slomka fish a lot of DepthRaiders and also experiment with Believers, Hi-Fins and Grandmas. Maghran is also a lure collector and has an assortment of old favorites he cracks out when things get tough. Maghran swears by white or chartreuse colored lures or anything with a high amount of contrast. Slomka fishes many walleye-colored lures or those with orange bellies.

Spoonplugs are O'Malley's favorite trolling lure and they come in seven sizes.

Each size is designed to reach a specific depth when trolled with 30 yards of line. O'Malley primarily uses medium to larger-sized Spoonplugs (200 through 800) preferring to vary the size as the depth dictates. "Because Spoonplugs are metal and don't dive or float, their depth remains consistent at various speeds," O'Malley said. This allows for total depth control. In clear water O'Malley prefers white, red-white, and silver, and in stained water he suggests chartreuse, yellow-black, and gold.

PROPWASH TROLLING

Propwash trolling is a technique used by

FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

Don Miller, Marc Thorpe and Terry O'Malley. Propwash trolling was developed by the late Homer LeBlanc on Lake St. Clair. He believed the propwash actually attracted muskies, and his many exceptional catches proved his theory correct. This method of trolling involves running lures in the propwash of the motor, and Don Miller has this down to a science.

The second diagram shows how Miller rigs eight rods for fishing. The two rods closest to the transom of the boat are pointed straight down toward the water. Five feet in front of the lure Miller attaches a one-pound weight. The lure is run with the weight even with the transom, so the lure is only five feet behind the boat! Another rod is rigged, angled toward the water. This lure has eight ounces of weight (five feet in front of the lure) and is run so the lure is 10 feet behind the transom. Miller also runs lures off of planer boards 30 to 40 feet back with two to four ounces of weight in front of the lure. Finally, Miller runs two rods directly behind the boat in the propwash with one pound of weight, running 20 feet behind the transom. This system is incredible, as there is nothing like hearing the drag scream when a fish hits one of these short lines. Remarkably, these fish hit these short lines in both clear and stained water.

Thorpe also uses this propwash system, crediting his success to Roy Brenner, another Lake St. Clair guide who taught him the system. Since then Thorpe has witnessed modified versions of this technique and frequently runs lines with one pound of weight 10 to 20 feet behind the boat in the propwash. "I believe the bubbles churning from the prop and the noise from the outboard help to attract muskies toward the boat," says Thorpe. "The bubbles reflect light and may make the muskies believe there is a school of baitfish above."

O'Malley also believes that muskies fear nothing. So, when he makes a trolling pass he

If you want to learn more about trolling from first hand experience, try contacting any one of the power trollers mentioned in this article.

• Marc Thorpe, Montreal, Canada
(514) 638-5094

• Terry O'Malley, Illinois (815)
344-1461

• Don Miller, Lake St. Clair (313)
429-9551

• Tom Slomka, Niagara River
(716) 871-9185

• Mark Maghran, Niagara River
(716) 649-5528

wants them to see his boat, hear his motor, see the line and know he's there. "If I can get his attention with my boat I've won half the battle," says O'Malley. "Once he's turned toward the boat he's bound to see my lures. O'Malley frequently runs a 700 series Spoonplug 10 yards in the propwash while running another lure along the

breakline.

Power trolling is a fast and efficient way to catch more muskies. It really focuses on covering water and structural elements in a precise manner. If you're not into trolling, you might be now.

