

GIANTS BOATED  
IN MINNESOTA

BIG REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD FIGURE-8

# Musky Hunter<sup>®</sup>

NORTH AMERICA'S MUSKY AUTHORITY

JANUARY 1997



- MUSKY LEGEND HOMER LeBLANC
- THE ART OF PLACING A LURE

U.S.A. \$3.99  
Canada \$5.50





# Musky Hunter<sup>®</sup>

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1997

## FEATURES

- 22 BIG REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD DO THE FIGURE-8**  
Joe Bucher provides reasons — 50 inches at a time — why you should always do the figure-8. *By Joe Bucher*
- 28 THE ART OF PLACING A LURE**  
Yes, it's an art form — precise lure location and/or presentation must be practiced to be consistently successful. *By Pete Maina*
- 34 THE IMPACT OF MUSKY CLUBS**  
Musky clubs launched the catch and release philosophy and have helped expand the musky's range. *By Roger Sabota*
- 38 THOSE TOUGH OLD GUIDES**  
A look at the guiding profession nearly 50 years ago. *By Gordon MacQuarrie and Phil Drotning*
- 40 VERSATILITY & CHANGE: TWO KEYS FOR THE MUSKY HUNTER**  
Lakes change seasonally, conditions change daily. You need to adjust your tactics to score. *By Todd Kobielush*
- 47 NEW YEAR'S MUSKY RESOLUTIONS**  
A list of old habits that need breaking in the coming musky season. *By Rick Landaal*
- 50 MUSKY LEGEND HOMER LeBLANC**  
He wrote the book on Lake St. Clair and the propwash trolling technique. *By Don Miller*
- 54 LITTLE 'LUNGERS**  
The future of fishing is the kids. Aren't they great? *By Jeff Hagemann*
- 58 CHANGING ETHICS IN MUSKY HUNTING**  
Our waters and formerly secret hotspots are under increasing pressure. Are we up to the challenge of good sportsmanship? *By Lou Eich*

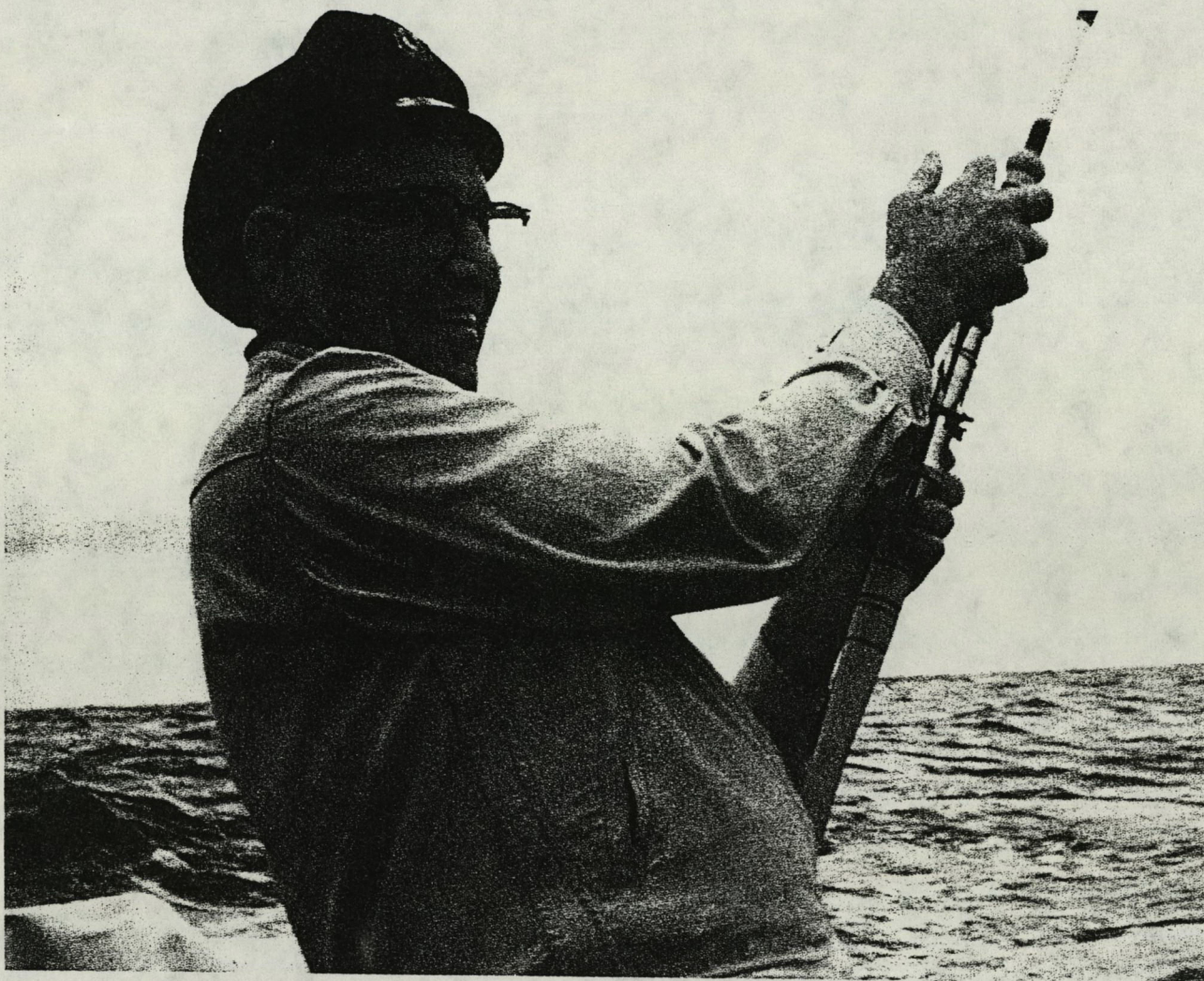
## DEPARTMENTS

- 5 EDITOR'S LINE**  
A season ends while a new year awaits.
- 6 MUSKY FOLLOWS**  
Trophies: Are we doing the right thing?
- 16 MUSKY MATTERS**  
Anglers claim 60-inch release. Two monsters highlight Minnesota season.
- 20 JOE BUCHER'S MOON SECRETS**
- 62 CLASSIFIED ADS**
- 64 READERS' PHOTOS**  
Check out your fellow readers' photos of success.
- 66 PARTING LINE**



"Big Timber Musky," by wildlife artist Rodd Umlauf, 7881 Rainbow Road, Lake Tomahawk, WI 54539, telephone (715) 277-4474.





## MUSKY LEGEND HOMER LeBLANC

*He wrote the book on Lake St. Clair and the propwash trolling technique*

By DON MILLER

It was in the early 1980s when I first met Homer LeBlanc. Over the next decade, he became the best fishing comrade that any fisherman, pro or otherwise, would ever want to have as a mentor: "Mr. Muskie" himself. I was amazed at the thousands of antique lures, many pictures, and other fishing artifacts that gave a mute testimony of a restless, tinkering mind and of many years of fabled musky fishing on Lake St. Clair for big ones that didn't get

*The late Homer LeBlanc battles a musky on one of his last trips to the fabled Lake St. Clair.*

away. His basement was literally a museum, and all who entered had to sign his visitors' book.

Author of a book entitled, *Muskie Fishing, Fact and Fancy. Lore and Lure* and characterized as Mr. Muskie throughout his career, Homer was constantly inventing and making lures to go musky fishing. He ran the state of Michigan's most successful charter boats and guided on them for over 30 years. He also had his complete, distinct line of tackle that he made and sold.

Homer may never have set the world's record for the largest catch, but no one disputes the fact that he caught the most. When I would ask him how

many he caught, he would candidly reply, "Thousands." Any musky fisherman would acknowledge that there aren't any bad muskies — small or large. On September 11, 1986, Homer was finally inducted into the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame. "Fish hard, and think like a musky" were Homer's fishing words of wisdom.

Born in Stoney Pointe, Ontario, along Lake St. Clair's shoreline on August 3, 1901, Homer began catching muskies when he was six years old while fishing with his grandfather.

A jack of all trades, Homer worked as a carpenter, ran a laundromat, boxed as a prize fighter, and even sold eggs and

DON MILLER



butter until 1933 when he retired so he could make being a musky guide his primary profession.

### PROPWASH TROLLING PIONEER

Before he made fishing his livelihood, Homer made frequent trips to Florida and noticed how the churning waters of the boat engines would attract fish. He then applied his theory of salt-water fishing to freshwater tactics, placing a bait right behind the boat for Lake St. Clair muskies. His theory was if muskies had no natural enemies that inhabit the water, why would they be afraid of a boat.

Homer set out in his first boat, which was 12 feet in size and had a 2 1/2 horsepower motor, purchased for a sum of \$40, to prove his theory. He hadn't traveled a mile on his first outing when he caught a musky right in the boat's propwash!

Once he was convinced that his theory was correct and muskies were fearless and didn't know what boats were, he perfected the Homer LeBlanc trolling setup on a 26-foot Chriscraft, his first professional boat. His design was such that you could fish eight rods off the boat while trolling. LeBlanc's theory was a stunning success, and he began to conduct seminars across the state of Michigan from sportsmen's clubs to school gymnasiums and marinas, where people would come to be instructed on

*Homer LeBlanc in his younger days, holding a good fish caught on his Swimm Zag spoon.*

how, what, when and where to catch muskies. However, his technique and tackle were often considered ridiculous by those uninitiated to the LeBlanc method of fishing.

More naive, yet somewhat more polite, neophytes considered the crusty oldtimer's approach to catching musky illogical. In the end, neither group could refute his success. LeBlanc could produce hookups with big fish when everyone else on the lake was producing zeros.

From 1935 to 1940, Percy Haver was claiming sensational catches of muskies, but Homer never gave any credence to him because Haver was always fishing alone, or no one was around to observe him. Personally, LeBlanc never acknowledged Haver's records, which have since been proven to have been falsified.

The word was out in the early 1950s about Homer's success and the type of tackle he manufactured. Several tackle shops wanted his tackle, and nothing else would do. After a day's outing on the lake, Homer would come in and make more tackle and lures to wholesale to the local area tackle shops. It's a fact that because of supply and demand,

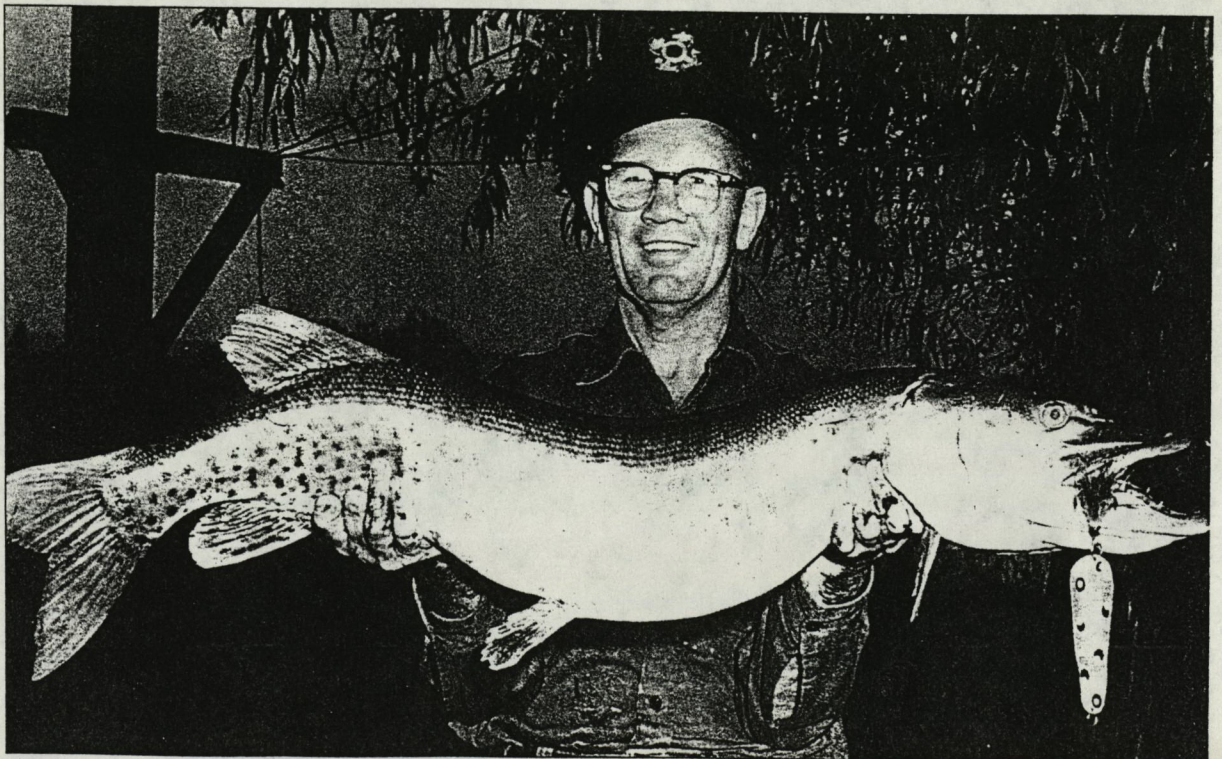
the LeBlanc tackle setup was often rented to an angler for \$2 (with a \$15 deposit) because Homer couldn't supply the requests fast enough.

Throughout his charter career, Homer taught thousands of people and fished with notables like former Michigan governor G. Mennen Williams, baseball great Ted Williams, Michigan Out-of-Doors television host Mort Neff, and almost every major outdoor writer in the country.

### TACKLE MANUFACTURING

Homer went into the tackle business in 1952 because he was dissatisfied with the musky lures that were on the market. He wanted a spoon that wouldn't twist the line and had better hooking qualities. He had some dies put together and developed the Swimm Zag spoon.

A couple years later, he developed the 4-B spinner, which was created because of lost muskies that would bite the wire shank and spinner blade, missing the hook with the bucktail on it. His 4-B spinner added an extra hook rolled in the wire with strung beads in front of the spinner blade, as well as the standard hook at the end of the spinner. The





result was more fish to the boat and happier clients.

After years of carving his own wooden plugs, all without a metal lip, in 1958 Homer had an idea to produce a hard plastic lure that had the ability to dive deep without much weight. He named the lure the Swimm Whizz. His theory was that when a musky grabbed a Swimm Whizz the bait would slip through the musky's teeth for better hookups.

In 1969 and 1970, the mercury scare came to Lake St. Clair, and keeping fish from the lake was banned. The charter business

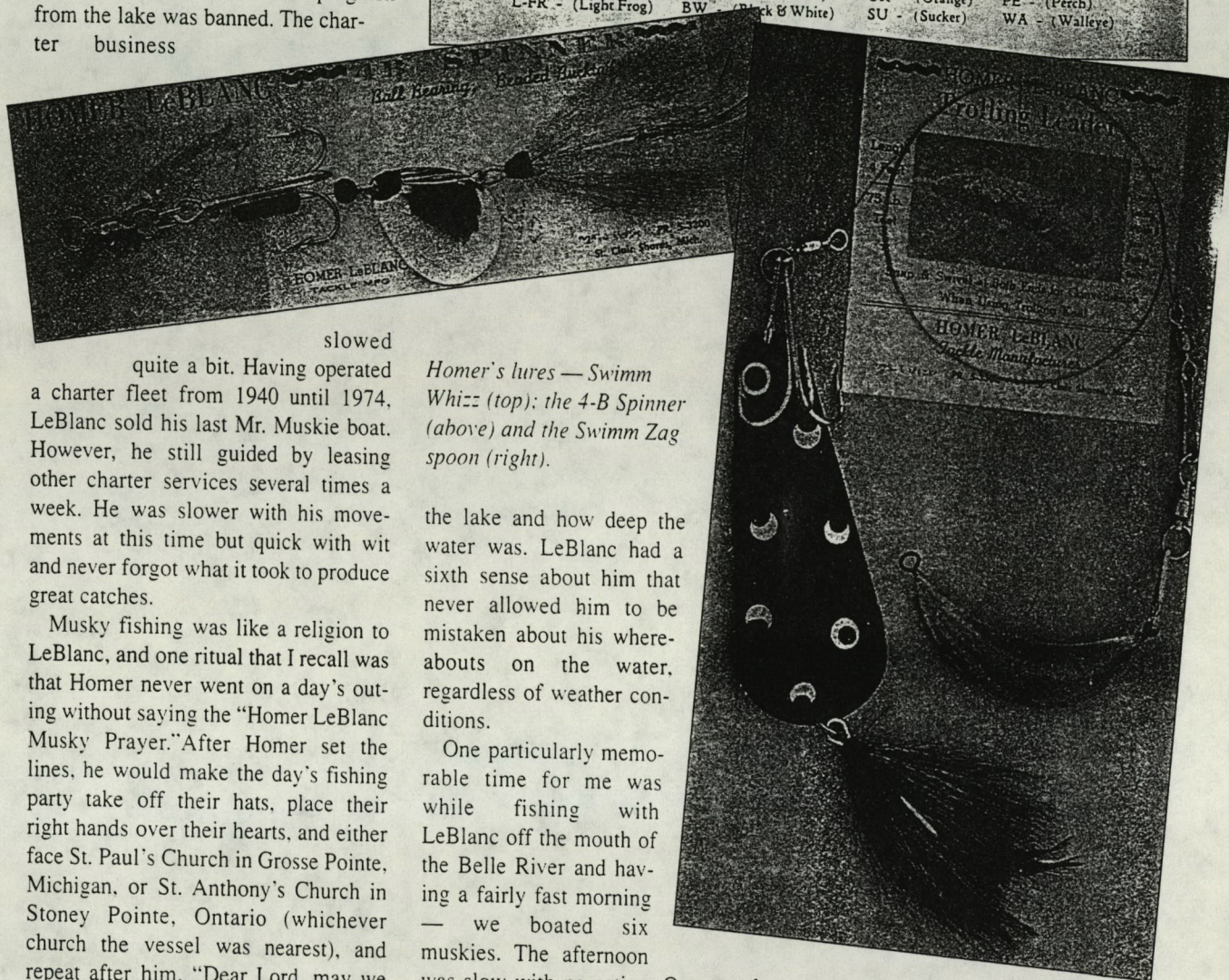
**SWIM WHIZZ - IT'S NEW!**

Hard, hollow plastic plug lure. For Muskie, Pike and other game fish. It floats, casts and trolls beautifully. Very effective on a fast or slow retrieve. Runs deep, shallow, or on the surface. The Swimm Whizz - Swimm Zag - and 4B Spinner lures were all designed by America's leading active Muskie and Bass fishing guide, Homer LeBlanc, who still operates his boat for charter fishing, all tackle furnished.



Weight: 2 oz. Length 7½ inches (\$2.95) 4/0 treble hooks

D-FR - (Dark Frog)	RW - (Red & White)	OR - (Orange)	PE - (Perch)
L-FR - (Light Frog)	BW - (Black & White)	SU - (Sucker)	WA - (Walleye)



slowed quite a bit. Having operated a charter fleet from 1940 until 1974, LeBlanc sold his last Mr. Muskie boat. However, he still guided by leasing other charter services several times a week. He was slower with his movements at this time but quick with wit and never forgot what it took to produce great catches.

Musky fishing was like a religion to LeBlanc, and one ritual that I recall was that Homer never went on a day's outing without saying the "Homer LeBlanc Musky Prayer." After Homer set the lines, he would make the day's fishing party take off their hats, place their right hands over their hearts, and either face St. Paul's Church in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, or St. Anthony's Church in Stoney Pointe, Ontario (whichever church the vessel was nearest), and repeat after him, "Dear Lord, may we catch a musky so big that when telling about it, we will have no need to lie. Bring us back safely with our limit of muskies each, especially since we are fishing with Homer LeBlanc tackle. Amen."

Homer always knew where he was on

Homer's lures — Swimm Whizz (top); the 4-B Spinner (above) and the Swimm Zag spoon (right).

the lake and how deep the water was. LeBlanc had a sixth sense about him that never allowed him to be mistaken about his whereabouts on the water, regardless of weather conditions.

One particularly memorable time for me was while fishing with LeBlanc off the mouth of the Belle River and having a fairly fast morning — we boated six muskies. The afternoon was slow with no action. One member of the party spoke and said that we might as well go home — that we wouldn't catch another musky. Homer responded that we would catch another or he would go double or nothing on the day's fee. Homer turned to me and told me to "Get one" because I had watched

him enough, and now it was my turn.

Talk about being under pressure. With literally minutes left in the day, I dug through every tackle box until I found my favorite Swimm Whizz lure. I placed it on a prop rod with 12 ounces of in-line weight and about 15 feet



behind the boat. We were almost home when the reel began to spew out line and the party landed a 22-pound musky in front of Grosse Pointe! Deep down inside, I knew that if I couldn't get one for him then that I might never live it down or quit hearing about it. As it was, I never heard about it anymore, but there's definitely no pressure like being tested by the world's greatest musky master. I figure I must have passed his test because I never was told that I failed.

Some of Homer's wit will live forever in my memory like, "Old fishermen never die — they just smell that way"; "Most fishing guides are bums — they'd rather fish than work"; "Anyone can be a fishing guide — all you have to do is look like a bum and smell like a fish"; "I never wanted to be a millionaire; I'd rather live like one."

Homer took his last outing on Lake St. Clair in June 1993 when three muskies were caught in about an hour and a half while aboard my boat with my mate Larry Ossennmacher and me. Homer requested to go home and while

*Homer LeBlanc conducts a seminar about his trolling technique from the back of his ChrisCraft at a marina.*

underway, he stated that this was his last trip.

One last practice that Homer always preached was not to "fish the bottom of the lake." He would say that muskies look up to see what they can eat, and their stomachs don't have eyes. A musky will come up after a bait and usually won't go down for it. So, keep the bait over their heads.

Homer's method, developed over 60 years ago, still outproduces most conventional methods today. His theory that you don't need to fish far behind the boat has never been disproved, and there isn't a musky boat in this part of the country that doesn't employ this method. A true sportsman and angler, Homer promoted catch and release, and his words still remain true — "If you want to catch a musky, you must think like a musky."

In fact, in 1956 Homer, Detroit News photographer Joe LaPage, and WJBK-AM radio personality Tom George founded the Michigan-Ontario Muskie Club (MOMC), which is still active today. The club was formed to help interested anglers become more successful with documented records of caught and released muskies. The MOMC traditionally conducts monthly

derbies from June through October.

The June derby is named in honor of LaPage and the July derby is named after LeBlanc. Today, an annual election of officers and board of directors, supported by a strong membership, have followed up on the preservation of muskies in southeastern Michigan. Strong conservation ethics begun by LeBlanc, LaPage and George are continued by the current group and have helped increase the Lake St. Clair musky minimum size limit from 38 inches up to the present minimum size of 42 inches. Musky anglers who belong to the MOMC have even established a higher standard of 45 inches for all derby entries.

In July 1993, Homer suffered a stroke and recovered in time for a professional tournament named in his honor in September. By November he had a relapse and was released in the Good Lord's landing net on November 19. I'm sure he was judged big (and good) enough to keep!! However, at Lake St. Clair and throughout the musky world his legend lives on.

