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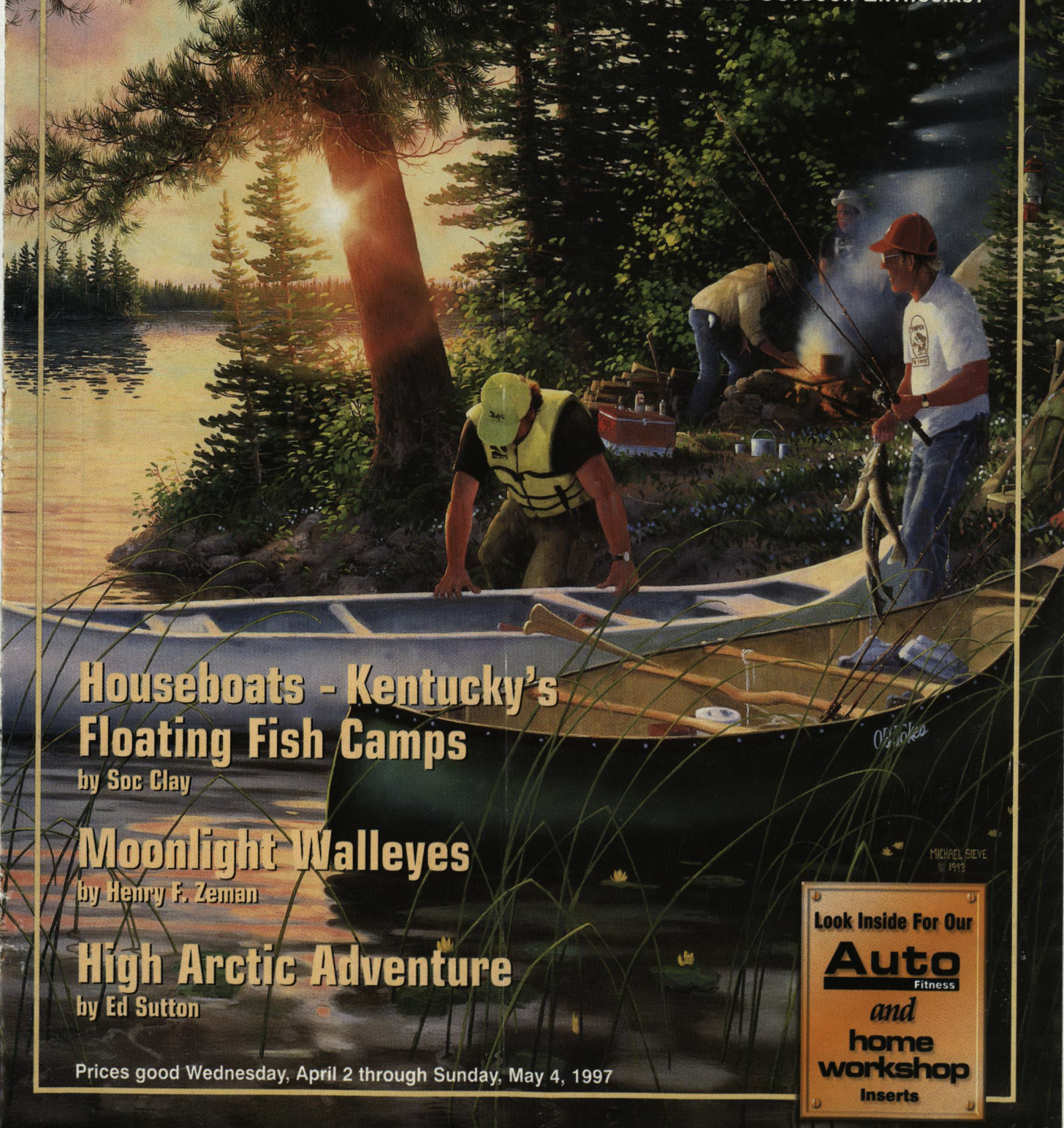
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Spring 1997

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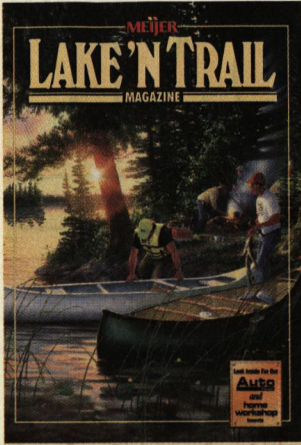
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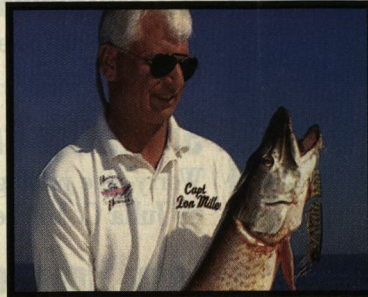
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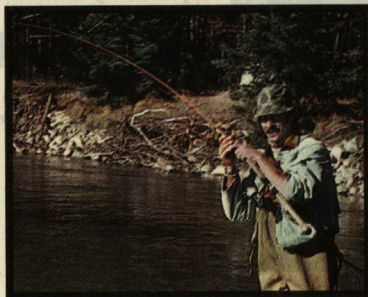
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MOTOR CITY MUSKIES

For decades, Hayward, Wis., has laid claim to the title "Muskie Capital of the United States." It's a moniker it may soon have to relinquish if Michigan's Lake St. Clair muskie population continues to boom. Where anglers in other states might fish for years to capture one legal-sized muskie, diehard Lake St. Clair muskie addicts often boat hundreds of huge, trophy muskies in a single season, all in the shadow of metropolitan Detroit.

Fact is, Lake St. Clair's muskie fishery is unequalled anywhere in the world, and there are indications that it should get even better.

"The muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair is as good as anyone can remember right now," said Mike Thomas, Fisheries Research Biologist at the Mt. Clemens Research Station. "All indications are that the muskie population is doing very well in Lake St. Clair."

Thomas said that a number of factors have combined to facilitate the explosion in the numbers of this top-of-the-line predator. Thomas sighted a decrease in exploitation, cleaner and clearer water, and an increase in macrophytes or submergent plants as the reasons St. Clair's muskies are flourishing.

Pollution abatement was a

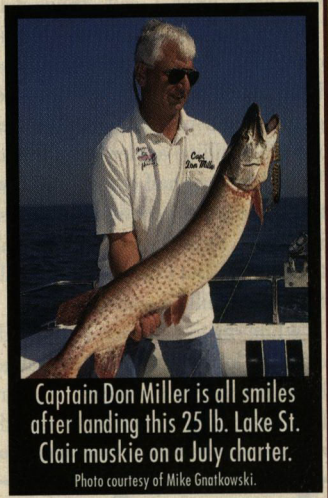
critical first step in starting the lake's rebound and surprisingly, zebra mussels have added to the cleansing effect. With better water quality, a tremendously diverse aquatic plant community began to bloom on Lake St. Clair. The weeds are important because they provide a substrate on which sediments can settle and hold while causing a filtering effect on suspended particles in the water.

Clear water favors sight-feeders, like muskies. The macrophytes also provide required habitat for aquatic insect communities which support bait-fish, as well as yellow perch and walleyes, that muskies feed on. It's a classic example of a healthy, thriving food chain.

Thomas indicated that one type of submergent vegetation, chara, is particularly important to Lake St. Clair muskies. Vast beds of chara have become increasingly common in the northern part of the lake, near Anchor Bay, where many of St.

Clair's muskies spawn.

Muskies are broadcast spawners and the crevices and niches in the bottom-hugging chara makes for ideal muskie spawning habitat and allows for better survival of young muskies. Once muskies hatch, there is a bounty of food for the growing fish. New attitudes in the angling community toward catch and release of muskies has insured an ample breeding stock, too.



Captain Don Miller is all smiles after landing this 25 lb. Lake St. Clair muskie on a July charter.

Photo courtesy of Mike Gnatkowski.