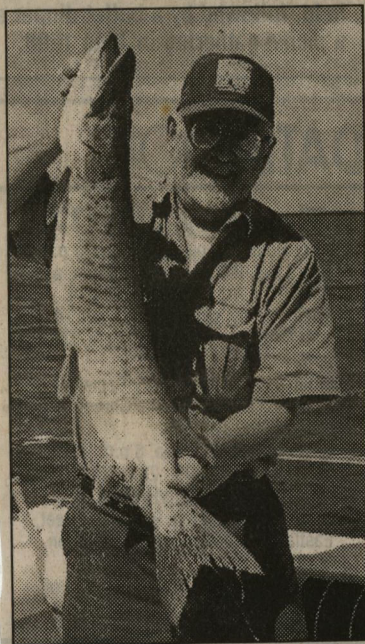


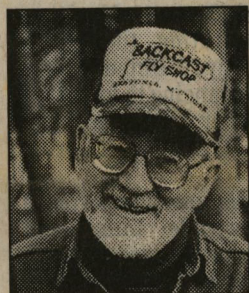
Hunting for musky on the Musky Hunter

Musky Hunter is the name of the boat, and musky fishing is the game. Captained by Don Miller, this 30-foot Baha is a deluxe craft to pursue the silvery sharks of Lake St. Clair. Miller has been a charter skipper for many years, and it is best known and most respected of all guides in Michigan for musky.

I first met Don a few years ago at an outdoor show I attended, and he was presenting a seminar on musky fishing. I was impressed with his knowledge, the amount of time he gave to answering questions, and his overall demeanor. I thought, "Here's a guy that knows the game and I want to give him a try."



Courtesy photo/George Richey
A 40-inch musky — big, yet not legal size.



GEORGE RICHEY

northwestern michigan outdoors

I booked a trip several years ago with him and we had outstanding luck. We hit four musky and landed them all. I managed to boat a 44-inch musky that weighed some 22 pounds. While it was a pretty big fish, it wasn't a wall-hanger of 30 pounds, so I released it back into Lake St. Clair. I was bitten by the musky bug then, have been ever since. I booked another trip during the fourth of July weekend this year.

We ran from St. Clair Shores to the mouth of the Detroit River in Canadian waters to begin our trolling. Don had set two lines and was working on the third when the reel began screaming, as line was being ripped off by the yards. I grabbed the rod and hung on as the big fish steadily took line. It melted some 100 yards of line off the reel in seconds.

When the fish finally stopped its run, I could feel the savage head jerks as the fish failed at the end of my line. I began working the musky back toward the boat when we just came unhooked. Don con-

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soled me, "you didn't do anything wrong — it just wasn't meant to be."

Trolling speed for musky is fast! Average boat speed is five miles an hour. Rods are set so the baits run in the wake of the boat. Don learned his musky fishing tactics from "Mr. Musky" — Homer LeBlanc. He learned his lessons well. All the lures are run close to the boat. Off the planer boards, the lures have four ounces of lead to keep the lure down above the tops of the weeds. He also runs "fat-lines" off the sides of the boat with eight ounces of lead to hold the lure down and then he uses a "down" rod where the rod is pointing straight down from amidship with a pound of lead ahead of the lure. This bait runs five feet behind the corner of the boat. Running lures tight to the boat means more musky strikes.

Musky are fearless, and often the "down" rod will produce most of the strikes. This trip found the planer boards and flatlines off the sides of the boat producing best. Twenty minutes after I lost the big musky, I had another on and managed to put the 38-inch musky into the boat. It hit a blue frog Terminator lure. Not being legal, it was quickly unhooked and released.

My fishing buddy Butch Thompson of Honor landed a 16-pound musky an hour later, and after a quick picture, it also went back into Lake St. Clair. I hit a 40-inch musky a bit later, and after a spirited battle, the 19-pound musky was returned to the 69-degree water. This fish also came on a blue frog Terminator lure. Every time I fish with Don, I marvel at the savagery of the silver sided black spotted and barred musky.

Because of a recent tornado and storm that tossed Lake St. Clair, our captain or Gary Sisler,

the mate, constantly checked lines and pulled weeds from the lures. Attention to detail makes Don successful and the top musky guide in the state. He told of a recent trip where he had 14 musky on for his clients, and they landed 11. This catch included one 50-incher and another 46 inches long. He prefers that his customers only keep a musky of 50 inches or longer.

Butch had another strike on his turn, and was rewarded with a small but extremely pretty musky of 30 inches. I didn't have long to wait, as another musky slammed a chrome head Believer bait off the planer board. This fish was strong, and I saw it roll up behind the boat and it looked pretty long. After playing the fish carefully for 10 minutes, I finally eased it into the net. It was a pretty fish of 40 inches, but definitely not large enough. In fact, musky need to measure 42 inches to be legal. I have my mind set on a 50-inch fish weighing 30 pounds or better. If I catch one, will I keep it, or just take a couple photos and turn it loose?

I don't know, but I do know that there are many excellent taxidermists that put out quality reproductions and there isn't a need to kill one of these trophies. We missed another fish, and ended our trip landing five musky of seven fish on. Not too shabby, and I had my opportunity for a wall-hanger. This gives me just another reason to book another trip with Miller. For more information of a charter aboard the Musky Hunter, contact Don Miller, 471 Canterbury Drive, Saline, MI 48176, or call (313) 429-9551.

When you lead a 40- to 50-inch fish to the net, after the explosive strike and strong fight, you'll soon understand my love affair with musky. They can be caught on a very regular basis, and they are exciting!