



**MUSKIE
MAGIC:**

Captain Don Miller knows muskie and he proved it. At left, he poses with Ed Suboski and Ed's 19-pound, 37-inch muskie. Above, Mark Thompson shows off the 32-inch, 10-pound muskie he landed with Miller's help.

MUSKIE MADNESS

Trip to Lake St. Clair, Mich., well worth the effort

Last Tuesday, during the torrential downpour and hailstorm that pelted Lorain County, George, his hunting buddy Mark Thompson, my fishing buddy Ed Suboski and I were headed to Michigan's Lake St. Clair just east of Detroit for some world class muskellunge fishing.

Fishing specifically for muskellunge was something none of us had considered, especially since an experienced muskie fisherman in Ohio spends approximately 125 angling hours just to catch one muskellunge measuring over 30 inches long.

What made us decide to try a muskie charter was an ESPN cable television outdoor program that aired last winter and featured muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair. During the taping of the program, seven muskies over 36 inches were caught and released during just one day of fishing.

Definitely driving home the point that St. Clair is world class and probably deserves to be called the No. 1 muskellunge lake in the world.

The trip up past Detroit to Roseville and to our overnight accommodations was pretty simple. Traveling I-80 to Toledo, then I-75 north to I-94 East and right to Roseville, the entire trip took us a little more than three hours.

Not bad considering our hailstorm delay and the construction detour "tour" that took us through Detroit instead of the interstate loop around the city.

After having taken a few out-of-state charters and spending hours trying to find our boat and charter captain when we should have been out on the lake fishing, we decided it was best to find the marina and our boat that night instead of in the morning.

The sight of the 30-foot BAHA Cruiser Sport Fisherman backed into her marina slip erased any uneasy feelings we might have had about our unknown charter captain and Wednesday's charter.

Even at rest the "Muskie Hunter" was all business and ready to go. We all agreed this was going to be a trip to remember.

Wednesday found us up early, ordering breakfast and talking fishing by 7 a.m. I'm not sure if it was our fishing talk or my "So Many Lures ... So Little Time" monogrammed Father's Day shirt that tipped off our waitress Joann. But she turned out to be an avid fisherwoman who had grown up fishing Lake St. Clair and freely offered us out-of-state anglers some muskie fishing advice to go along with her cheery Michigan hospitality.

After a hearty breakfast and a short trip to the marina, we were just unpacking our gear when our charter captain arrived.

Captain Don Miller of Saline, Mich., wasted no time in preparing the "Muskie Hunter" for our day of fishing. His professional explanations and demonstrations of boating emergency procedures and the trolling tactics that had hooked his clients more than 175 fish 36 inches or



STEVE
BEISER



GEORGE
YOVANOVICH

larger during the first three weeks of this year's charter season, again out to rest any misgivings we might have had.

With the engine warmed, our gear stowed and our fishing tactics familiarization completed, we headed out onto Lake St. Clair on a clear and sunny day a little after 9 a.m. to start our hunt for Mr. Muskellunge.

As we motored to an area of the lake that had produced muskie hook-ups the day before, Capt. Miller began to set up the boat for fishing using the "wake-trolling tactics" he had learned from the late legendary Homer LeBlanc, Michigan's famous Fishing Hall of Famer and Lake St. Clair Master Angler.

First Capt. Miller played out two special redwood planer boards so that each was about 30 feet off the side of the boat and just even to the back or transom of the boat. Next he placed two special rod holders — one on each side about mid-ship — that would each hold a custom built 5-foot long trolling rod upside down with the reel up and the rod tip down just about touching the water.

To the 50-pound test line on the reels he attached to each rod a 20-ounce lead weight and then a 4-foot long, 100-pound test leader and finished each with an 8-inch jointed Believe natural perch plug lure.

These lines were trolled in the boat's side wake with the lures just 2 feet behind the swim platform or about 5 feet behind the boat. Next Miller set up two 8-foot long trolling rods on holders that held the rods perpendicular to the boat sides and parallel to the water.

Again he attached a lead torpedo style weight to each line followed by a 100-pound test leader and two perch style 8-inch jointed Terminator plug baits. These were trolled about 15 feet behind the boat.

For the planer boards Miller prepared two more trolling rods with weights, leaders and lures just like the side rods. Letting about 20 feet of line out, he then attached the rod lines to the planer board lines with releases and then let the rod lines slide out on the planer board lines until the releases were close to the boards.

The weights are placed on the rod lines to hold the lures in the boat's wake, which runs between 20 and 30 feet behind and from the sides of the boat, the idea being that this setup will look like a small school of fish to a hungry muskie as we trolled past him.

"Muskie are at the top of the lake's food chain and not afraid of anything else that swims," said Capt. Miller, explaining why this system is so successful. "They have no natural enemies and are not afraid of boats but are attracted to them because as a boat travels

through the water, the smaller fish move out of its path and that is what muskies hunt ... smaller moving fish."

As Capt. Miller predicted, the first bite came a little before noon. Trolling at 5.5 mph, the line just sings off the reel when a muskie hits a lure. After a five-minute battle between George and the first fish, Miller netted George's 34-inch, 13-pound muskellunge.

Following the traditional pictures, the fish was released unharmed. At about 12:30, the second reel started to sing and the battle was on with Ed on the rod.

Ed's fish was a 37-incher and weighed in at about 19 pounds. This fish was also carefully released after the pictures were taken. Captain Miller had just finished resetting the rods and started a third pass over the water that had produced the first two fish when the third rod began to sing.

It was almost 1 p.m. when Mark finally got his fish close enough to the boat for Miller to net it. Mark's 32-inch, 10-pound fish had taken a Massion 8-inch jointed perch bait on one of the upside down rods.

"Catching a fish on one of those short poles is really hard work," Mark said after pictures were taken and a third muskie was successfully released.

That left me as the only angler without a fish. But around 2:30 the fourth reel began to sing. Following a short fight, Capt. Miller netted my first muskie, a 28-inch, 6-pounder.

Not the biggest of the day but I was thankful. God had blessed me with a fish I could fight and land by myself. With two hours left of our charter, we had each landed a muskie. That was the icing on the cake.

At this point, Capt. Miller changed tactics, trolling through GPS (Global Positioning System) way-points, where this year he had already hooked into one of the 45-inch or bigger muskellunges, trying to find us a couple of trophy class fish.

We did hook up with one more fish on one of the short down rods, which Mark did fight to the side of the boat. But because it was a smaller fish that was hooked below the lip, Capt. Miller released it without bringing it into the boat.

Yes, it was a day that we will all remember and, yes, we will be going back again next year.

Capt. Miller is a busy charter captain but he does, once in a while, get a cancellation. If you want to try some world-class muskie fishing, give him a call at 1-734-429-9551 to see if he can work you into his schedule.

He runs a first-class charter on a world-class muskie lake.

Remember to take the time to enjoy the outdoors.

Steve Beiser writes a weekly outdoor column with George Yovanovich for *The Chronicle-Telegram*. Contact Steve by fax/voice mail message at (440) 775-3305 or by e-mail as sebeiser@ix.netcom.com or George by fax/voice message at (440) 355-5345 or by e-mail as yovano@ix.netcom.com.