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# Woods-N-Water News

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*17th Woods-N-Water News Outdoor Weekend  
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# Muskies and Capt. Don Miller

## Speed trolling is the suggested way to catch the fish of 10,000 casts

**T**ruth be told, there are plenty of musky in Lake St. Clair, and having the time to spend a day on the water trolling at five miles per hour will usually put you into a fish, or two, or maybe a dozen. If you want to catch one of these gorgeous lean, silver and black spotted eating machines, put your time in, run quality lures and troll fast. Chances are very good you'll do alright.

In mid-summer and into September, you'll troll over the tops of heavy weed cover at all times. Often, weeds have grown to within four or five feet of the surface. By trolling fast, Captain Don Miller has his lures darting quickly by a muskie hiding in the edge of a weedline. Weeds serve as cover for the muskie to ambush their prey so by trolling fast the fish has only a quick glimpse and he's got to hit the lure or pass. Each time I book a trip with Captain Don Miller of Saline, I look forward to doing battle with a lunker size muskie. He has his trolling techniques down pat, and unless the wind is constantly switching, or bad weather hits, you can virtually count on doing battle with a lean-mean muskie on the end of your line during a day's fishing with him.

Miller uses a system of trolling his lures fast and close to the boat, and he freely admits the originator of that program was none other than the famed Homer LeBlanc. Don spent many days fishing with Homer and learned all his tricks and added some to his arsenal. The theory is with the speed and the baits close behind the boat - a musky is attracted to the movement, prop wash and traveling at a rate of five miles per hour, the fish has to strike quickly, or the opportunity of a meal is gone for the fish.

Musky strikes right at the boat can be awesome. He fishes with a "down" rod on each side with about 10 feet of line out to the bait. A heavy sinker is needed to hold the bait down right at the corner of the boat. When a fish strikes on the down rod, they will boil up to the surface right at the edge of the boat. Imagine facing a 20 to 25 pound (or bigger) musky less than 10 feet away.

They're built for a burst of speed, which is how they ambush

their prey. Hiding along the edge of a weed line, a hapless perch swims by, and a quick dart by the muskie gets the muskie his dinner. The same thing applies with lures. To be sure, you can catch muskie by casting, but the speed trolling and presenting the lures close to the boat has enabled Miller to boat 343 musky last year out of 452 fish on.

"Last year, we posted 35 Master Angler fish taken aboard the Muskie Hunter. Those fish are a minimum of 45 inches in length, according to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources award program. Our biggest fish in 2002 was a huge 40-pound two-ounce trophy," Miller told me.

Miller and many others on Lake St. Clair actively practice catch and release. For a trophy fish, get several good pictures of the fish broadside, a length and girth measurement, and a graphite reproduction can be made and the fish continues to live and get bigger.

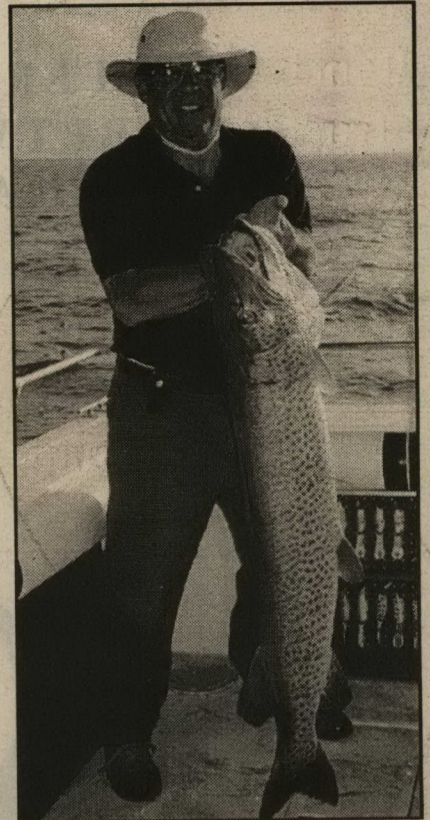
Miller has devised a planer board system which allows him to use two lures on one line, which is legal in Michigan. What this system does is allows him to place lures where previously an area was not being covered by a lure. I've watched muskies take a lure off a planer board, and you can hear the "twang" as the line

pops out of the planer board release.

Using this system, Miller has been able to add more fish to his yearly total, and it makes him certainly one of the most successful musky guides anywhere. He uses several different kinds of lures and his attention to detail makes him a pro. I've watched him putter with a lure, getting it to track straight - which can be difficult at the zip trolling speeds he uses: I saw one lure he had all chewed up, big chunks of wood gone, most of the paint was off, and yet the lure still kept catching fish.

In many cases, it's all about the action of the plug. However, Miller has found "hot colors really don't work that well on Lake St. Clair. "On my boat, we use primarily natural baitfish colors such as nine dollar bass, pike and perch finishes. If the water is really discolored, then I might put down something with an orange or chartreuse coloration - most of the time I don't," he said.

I've sat in on Miller's seminars at local sport shows; he also does seminars out east and in Chicago too. A charter trip for musky with Miller can also be a learning experience, as he readily answers questions folks ask and he passes along information.



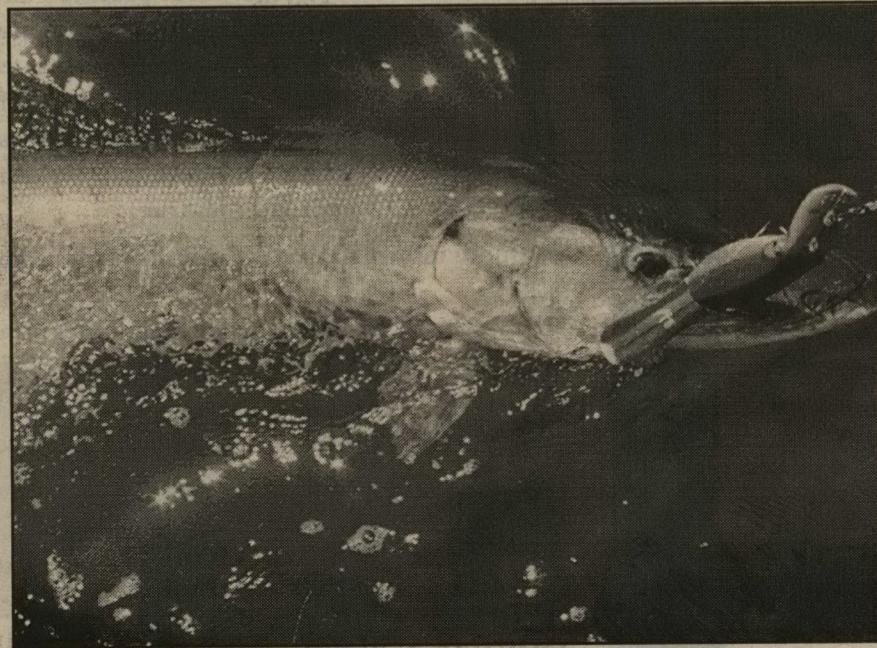
**This 40-pound plus muskie taken while fishing with Capt. Miller was quickly released.**

Catching a musky doesn't have to be an once-in-a-lifetime catch. His many years on Lake St. Clair have taught Miller many of the little quirks that can only be learned by time on the water. Between Miller and his mate Joe Bologna, they work hard to get customers into musky.

Sometimes, Miller is able to fish Michigan waters, and other times, when weeds are really bad, the Canadian waters can be the place to troll. I've had a good trip in August where we caught quite a few fish and September fishing can really be dynamite as the weather begins to cool a bit. You may catch more fish in July and early August, but the biggest muskies are typically hooked later in the year.

A recent trip with him we had three musky out of four hits. Dennis Wolfe landed a 45 inch 23 pound musky - so far, his largest. So far this year, Miller's largest fish is a 40 pound plus fish, and the longest was 54 inches. Don Miller fishes Lake St. Clair for musky from June 7 through October 11 each year. "We've really hooked some horses in late September and early October. It's also much easier to troll because it's not so hot, and weeds aren't the problem they can be in July. We don't hook as many fish later in the season, but they often are bigger," he told me.

Miller's Sportfishing charter is docked at boat well 311 at Michigan Harbor off Jefferson Avenue (south of 10 Mile Road), St. Clair Shores, you can contact by calling 734-429-9551 or email: dsmiller@provide.net). ■



**Up close and personal with a dandy Lake St. Clair muskie. George Richey photo**