

SIMMERING RIVER SMALLMOUTH

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**COLD FRONT
WALLEYE TACTICS**

**BIG BAITS, BIG FISH?
TELL IT TO THE CRAPPIE**

**SMALL WATER
BASS FISHING**

ALSO

**CATCH CATS
ON THESE THREE
ARTIFICIALS**

**TOP PICKS
FOR MUSKIE**



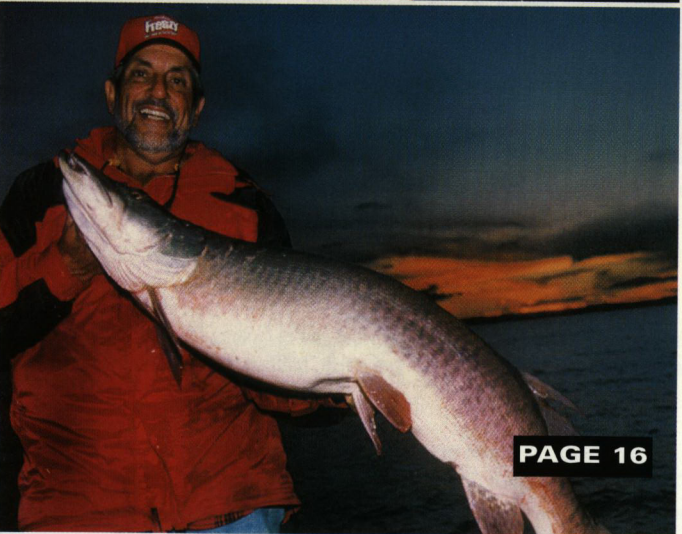
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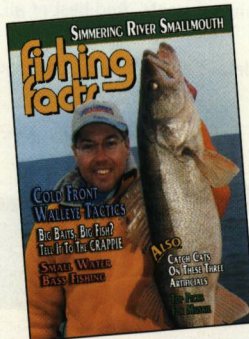
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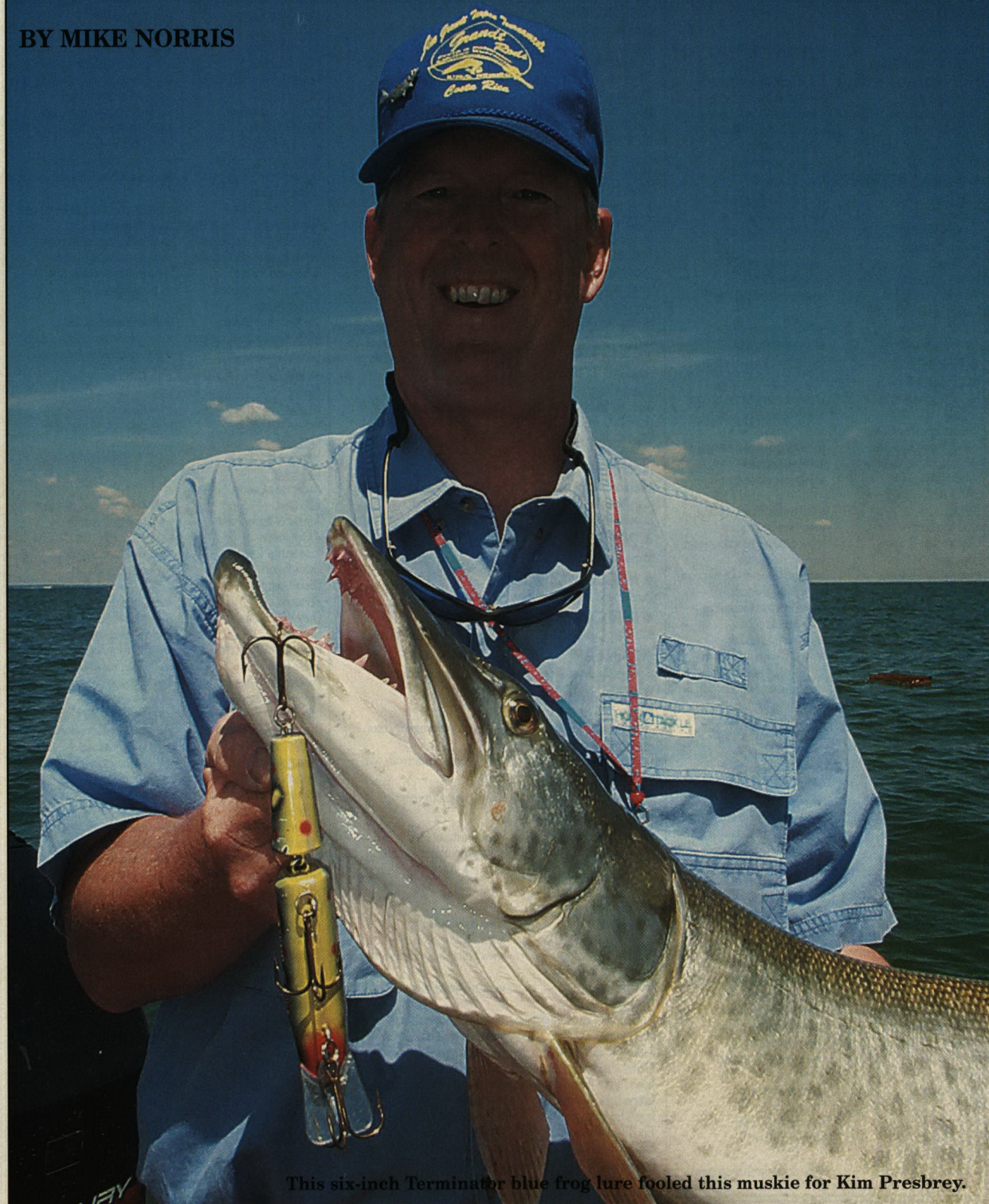


ON THE COVER:
Jig size, color and scent have a direct bearing on angling success. See story on page 20.

Lake St. Clair

Mayflies Determine Early-Season Muskie Patterns

BY MIKE NORRIS



This six-inch Terminator blue frog lure fooled this muskie for Kim Presbrey.

Stiff rods and premium reels are a necessity when high-speed trolling.



The dream of catching a 50-inch-plus muskie eluded me for years. I felt somewhat comfortable in that I didn't share this distinction alone. Once I overcame the belief that a muskie is "the fish of a thousand casts," my luck improved.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN? TWO REASONS

I concentrated on learning more about lakes that consistently produced numbers of respectable muskie and I gave up the notion that the only acceptable way to catch a muskie is by casting lures.

Yes, where appropriate and allowable by law, trolling for muskie is a major option. And Lake St. Clair, located just north of Detroit, Michigan tops my list for muskie trolling destinations.

LAKE ST. CLAIR

The natives of St. Clair Shores, Mich., call it the "Nautical Mile." It is a mile-long stretch of marinas along Jefferson Avenue between 9 and 10 Mile Road with six marinas.

Locals say the Nautical Mile holds the largest concentration of boats in one area. The six marinas moor over 10,000 boats from 16-foot runabouts to 42-foot liners. It is also home to Lake St. Clair, a 256,000-acre fertile fish bowl, which may very well boast a million muskie or more.

"Despite the numbers of muskie present here, anglers need to understand the predator/prey relationship to successfully find and catch them," said Don Miller, a St. Clair charter boat captain specializing in muskie for over 30 years.

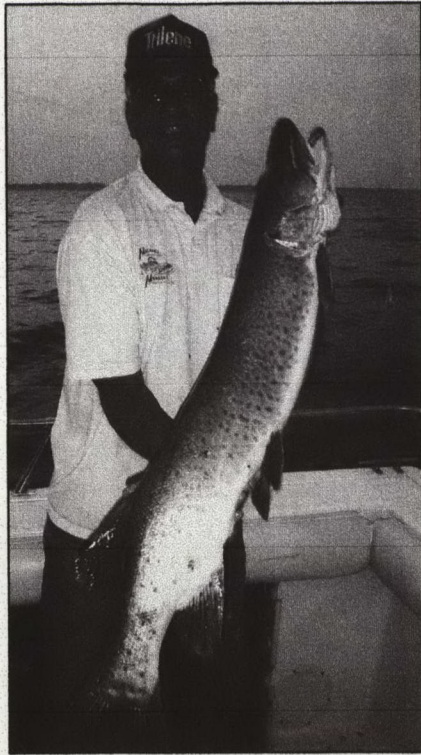
"We are showing a couple muskie up high," said Miller, as he pointed out several tell-tale arches on his Lowrance liquid crystal graph.

And that is one key to the fundamental early-season muskie patterns on Lake St. Clair.



Continued on next page

The author with a 50-inch Lake St. Clair muskie.



Capt. Don Miller has specialized in St. Clair trophy muskie for over 30 years.

Continued from previous page

PATTERNS AND LURES

With a mayfly hatch in full bloom in late June, most of Lake St. Clair's prey is near the surface feeding off surfacing mayflies recently hatched from St. Clair's soft bottom.

"It is a pretty simple proposition," said Miller. "The perch and walleye chow down on the mayflies and the muskie chow down on the perch and walleye."

Miller runs a 33-foot Baha Cruiser equipped to handle up to six anglers per outing. In addition to his liquid crystal graph, his boat is equipped with the latest in global positioning navigation equipment, all to help him return to areas where he suspects muskie will be on the prowl.

I joined Miller for a day of muskie fishing on a hot, steamy late June afternoon last year. Billowing

white clouds rose sharply over St. Clair Shores, but blue skies prevailed over the water. The roofed cabin of Miller's Baha provided the shade we needed to avoid a blistering sun.

Miller's arsenal of muskie lures included Believer's, Wiley's, Stalkers, and Terminator lures. He carries up to 500 different lures on board. Each lure hangs from a homemade lure rack Miller crafted to fit along the bulkheads of his boat.

A few of his hanging lures look like they just came out of the package. Most though, look battle-scarred from numerous encounters with St. Clair's muskie.

"Let's try a crackled belly perch on the down rod," said Miller. Minutes later he slid the lure into the water, let out 30 feet of line, and locked his rod into a Down Easter rod holder. "I like to run a couple lures close to the prop wash," Miller added. "Muskie are curious by nature and always come up to check out the commotion."

Miller prefers running his lures shallow as he trolls along at a brisk five miles per hour. With Lake St Clair boasting a maximum depth of 19-feet, most of Miller's trolling is confined to water 10-16 feet deep, though he often runs his lures no more than three feet below the surface.

Miller set one jointed Believer three feet down and 15 feet behind his boat. The second Believer was set a mere two feet down and five feet behind his boat. Two other rod and lure combinations were set further back from tethers attached to dual planer boards.

"The biggest mistake an angler can make is to run their lures below feeding muskie," said Miller. "Suspended muskie do not see lures run below them."

A day earlier, my good fishing buddy Kim Presbrey and I trolled for St. Clair's muskie out of my Ranger 620. Presbrey steered my boat as I watched as muskie, walleye and smallmouth bass scurried out of harms way from my boat deck. It was a testament to Miller's theory on muskie high in the

water column.

Presbrey and I caught and released our share of muskie that day with the largest going 46 inches. We found muskie relating to clouds of mayflies grouped on the lake's surface. Later that evening we caught up with Miller, who was putting on a spectacular display of muskie prowess, catching four muskie up to 47 inches within an hour following the same pattern.

"Muskie fishing on St. Clair starts to heat up in late June and can be spectacular in July," said Miller, who records up to 350 muskie catches each season. "These fish ought to break loose big time with the hot weather coming."

On another St. Clair trip with Miller, I boated and released a 52-inch monster spotted muskie, and two more that stretched the measuring stick at 48 inches each.

Miller made it look easy because he has the knowledge and equipment to do so.

TROLLING EQUIPMENT

High-speed trolling for muskie requires stout fishing equipment.

Like Miller, I use stiff six- to seven-foot muskie rods and premium baitcasting reels loaded with 40-pound Berkley Big Game monofilament. Oblong lead trolling weights of one to three ounces are connected to the tag end of the line using stout 150-pound test Sampo ball bearing snap swivels, and six feet of 100-pound Big Game monofilament leader material capped off with a heavy-duty snap. The lures are attached to the snap via the shallow running eyelet and the weight keeps the lures in the strike zone at higher trolling speeds.

Miller understands the predator/prey relationship and knows what lures trigger Lake St. Clair's huge muskie. He's also a master at matching certain colored lures to bright or cloudy conditions.

He prefers large six-inch jointed lures that send vibrations to a muskie lateral line via their shake and wobble. He believes these lures cause muskie to strike with abandon. He also believes muskie become conditioned to and impervi-

ous to boat traffic.

"I lived behind the legendary Homer LaBlanc, who is widely regarded as the best muskie troller who ever lived," said Miller. "I listened to and applied every belief he had on how to catch muskie."

REGULATIONS

Lake St. Clair is divided by the U.S./Canadian border and fishing regulations allow each angler up to two rods with two lures stateside, but only one rod with two lures per angler on the Canadian side of the lake.

Muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair opens the first week in June and continues through November. As muskie recover from their mid-June spawn, they move to open water to feed on small gamefish high in the

water column.

Anglers concentrate on fishing the southern portion of the lake with the sailboat buoys, the dumping grounds, Belle River hump, and St. Jude's being popular destinations.

When planning a trip to Lake St. Clair, Canadian fishing licenses can be ordered in advance through Lakeside Fishing Shop in St. Clair Shores, Michigan at (586) 777-7003. The shop also records a weekly fishing report which can be heard by dialing (586) 777-7008.

To book a trip with Miller's Sportfishing Charters, visit www.millers-sportfishing.com or call him at (734) 323-1870.

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