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Warning: The Polaris RANGER® can be hazardous to operate and is not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers must be at least 12 years old. Drivers and passengers should always wear helmets, eye protection, and seat belts. Always use cab nets or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All drivers should take a safety training course. Call 800-342-3764 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. Polaris Industries Inc.

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Photo by John N. Felsher

Jackie Van Cleve, a professional crappie angler, admires a crappie he caught on a spinnerbait.

## CRAPPIE: Big ones like thick cover

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exceeding three pounds rarely happens, but it does occur. Larger baits usually entice fewer bites, but bigger fish and smaller spinners put more crappie in the boat. A quarter-ounce spinner can catch many big crappie and also smaller ones for the dinner table.

Big fish tend to seek thick cover like grassy patches and wood, both found in abundance throughout many south Alabama waterways. With wire guards deflecting branches, fallen logs or other hard objects, safety-pin bass spinnerbaits can slip through tight places that other lures cannot navigate. This trait makes them excellent lures to try when fishing the forested shorelines of many lakes along the Alabama River or in the woody Mobile-Tensaw Delta swamps and backwaters.

“Like bass, really large crappie are going to be in the thickest cover they can find, so I fish in the thickest cover that I can find,” Houston explained. “The right spinnerbait can get into thicker cover easier than a tube jig or some other crappie baits. I like to work spinnerbaits in thick cover with a method I call ‘sloppy fishing.’ Let the bait roll through the brush hitting branches, snags and other things in the way. Let it flut-

ter down through there banging off lots of stuff. Don't rip it through the brush tops or slow roll it like in bass fishing.”

In thick cover, many anglers reel their baits steadily back to the boat or “helicopter” them up and down by briefly pausing during the retrieve. When a spinnerbait bumps into cover, let it fall a few feet. The blades continue to spin as the bait flutters down. That action mimics a dying baitfish. Fish often hit baits on the fall. With any retrieve, maintain contact with the cover as much as possible.

Slim willow-leaf blades cut through grass better than other blade types and don't go as deep, good for fishing the marshes of the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Some people run these baits just over the tops of submerged grass, occasionally stopping to let the bait flutter into the vegetation.

Rounded Colorado blades go deeper and make more commotion when wobbling through the water, thus attracting more attention when the rivers turn dingy or muddy. Colorado-bladed spinners also work well when fishing deep water in places like Millers Ferry Reservoir or Big Creek Lake. Try several blade configurations, sizes and colors to see what works best that day.