

Remember these walleye trolling tactics and tips

By Adam Walton of Pike Pole Fishing Guide Services

Although jigging spring walleyes is very productive during pre-spawn and immediately after post spawn, it's hard to beat trolling planner boards or long lining lures in the summer months. Many anglers simply throw on a Rapala, let some line out and call it good. They even catch fish here and there. What better way to cover a large amount of water and pull in fish, right? While this may be true, there are many other factors that can help you become a trolling master.

Let's first discuss crank baits. After spawning, many large females are exhausted and hungry. Water temps are still fairly cool and walleyes are looking for an easy meal that doesn't require a lot of effort. In other words, even though trolling cranks at a fast speed may produce some walleyes, slowing down your presentation will typically produce better. What is the best speed in this case? I've always done well pulling cranks at 1.0 to 2.0 mph early in the season. As the water warms up and fish fully recover from the spawn, their metabolism greatly increases. This not only means fish are going to move more aggressively, it means they'll feed more frequently to keep up with a faster metabolism.

I've found increasing the boat speed to a range of 2.0 to 2.5 mph to be very productive in warmer water; however, it's not uncommon to pick up very aggressive fish at 3.0 mph. Partnered with dive charts, crank baits can be deadly on the wariest walleyes. In order to match the depths of fish marked on electronics, dive chart books or phone apps offer a quick reference guide, showing the proper running depths of many lures. When trolling crankbaits, varying the speed plus or minus 0.5 mph works well. Another common tactic is to incorporate an "S" trolling pattern. When turning, lures on one side will slow while the other side speeds up. In either case, a change up in lure speed can help fluctuate the lure's action and incite fish to bite.

Another option to catch walleyes trolling is rigging up crawler harnesses. Harnesses have blades that provide a lot of action at a slow speed and work in a variety of conditions. Although there are several blade choices available, two common types are used when selecting a harness. One is the rounder "Colorado" blade which offers a wide and slow rotation that runs a little higher in the water. The other common blade option is a "Willow" blade, which offers a narrower and faster rotation that runs a little deeper in the water. When using a "Colorado" blade, your pole tip should be held so the line is at a 45 degree angle to the water. "Willow" blade harnesses, however, work best when the pole tip is dropped so the line angle is around 20 degrees to the water. Both blade styles can be very effective and only experimentation will decide what will work best for you. When pulling harnesses, boat speed and depth are very important. Running boat speeds in the range of 0.4 to 1.8 mph seem to be the most effective and adding bottom bouncer pencil weights, snap weights or in-line weights will help get your harness to the proper depth.

Lure color choice can make or break a day on the water. Most walleye anglers know chartreuse is the most common color used. The reason being is that walleyes see this color the best; however, they also see white, orange, bright pink and bright reds well. In semi-clear water, darker colors can also produce well, particularly lures with purple and gold coloring. If fishing very clear water, try matching the color of natural bait in the system. Only time on the water and experimenting will be the sure way to find what colors work best for you.



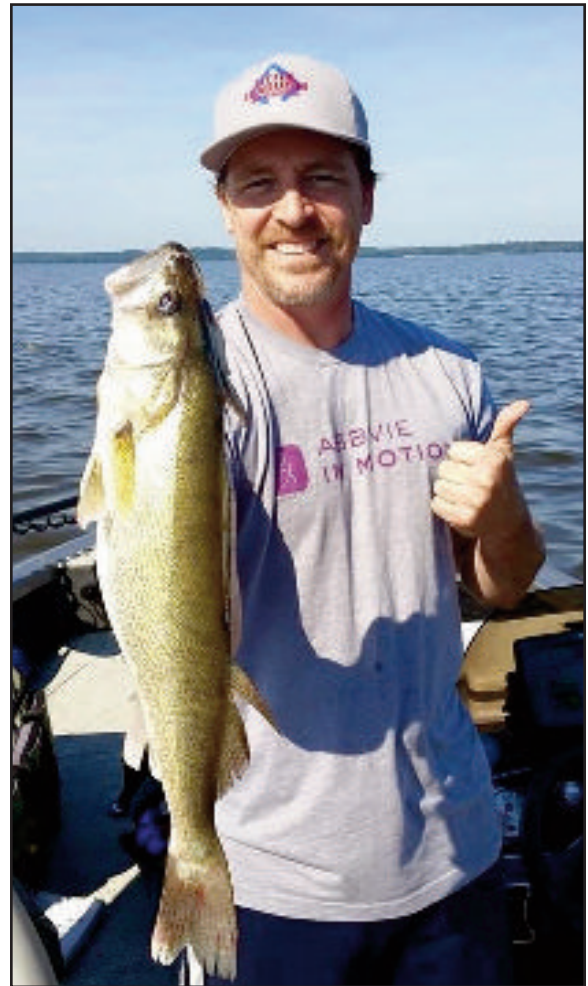
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When fishing deeper water, using electronics to find suspended fish feeding on near-by bait fish is an effective way to boat more walleyes. Fish positioned on the bottom typically are not feeding as actively as those suspended. Although you may get some reactionary bites from bottom dwellers, targeting suspended fish is usually more productive. Once you determine the depth most fish are suspended at, try running lures slightly above their position. Using line counter reels that give a precise measurement of line out, combined with knowledge of your lures intended running depth, are a must when targeting suspended fish.

When fishing shallower water six feet or less, like that found on Lake Koshkonong, running near or bouncing the bottom works fine. Since the water is shallow, feeding fish won't typically suspend and simply mix in with non-feeding fish near the bottom. This allows the potential to pull both aggressive fish and those docile fish which bite out of instinct. Marking fish using traditional sonar in shallow water is not as prevalent as marking them in deep water. Traditional sonar emits a cone from the transducer that reads roughly one foot down for every foot of depth. So if you are in five feet of water, the cone is only reading a small five foot diameter cone below the transducer. In this situation, don't expect to see them on the screen unless a fish is right below the motor. Instead, use sonar to watch water temperature, bottom composition, and depth. Those three factors can still point you in the right direction of fish.

Last, but not least, mastering the use of planner boards can greatly improve your trolling game. Planner boards allow anglers to use multiple lines and cover a large amount of water. When trying to pattern fish, running planner boards with multiple lines also allows anglers to use a variety of colors and crank baits. This helps speed up the trial and error process. If a certain color/size crank bait is the only one getting hit, it's time to change up the other lines to a similar presentation. For each crankbait I carry, I have at least four of the exact same ones for this reason (Feel free to tell your significant other this excuse to enhance your tackle bag). Planner boards have one other huge benefit. When fishing shallow water, fish near the boat can spook fairly easily. By using boards, they move the lures away from the boat into unsuspecting fish. Numerous planner boards are on the market, but we prefer "Off Shore Tackle." They can be a big investment, but they have been worth it.

As a last note, please be respectful to other anglers




This walleye was pulled from Lake Koshkonong. (Photo and graphics submitted by Adam Walton)

trolling near you. Pulling six lines that are out a great deal away from the boat are not the easiest to control in last minute situations. Cutting in front or across others can cause a huge problem of tangled or cut lines. Try to plan your course and watch what others are doing. Also, let's all help protect our fishery by selective harvest. Walleyes over 18 inches are key to successful breeding and long lasting quality fishing we have in our beautiful state.

Good luck on the water and stay safe.
 Captain Adam Walton
 Pike Pole Fishing Guide Service
www.pikepolefishing.com



An example of a planer board, which allows an angler to use multiple lines and cover a large amount of water.




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