

THE NEW JERSEY ANGLER

\$2.50

DECEMBER 2008
VOL. 13, NO. 12
NJANGLER.COM

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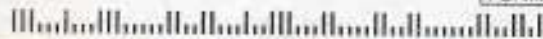
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Tricks for Making the
Year's Final Chapter a
Memorable One!



Without a doubt, there are lots of anglers out there who hate to troll. Perhaps some feel that way because they simply don't know how to troll or their trolling skills are not up to par. Other may detest the troll because they don't want to incur the added expense of obtaining the specialized trolling gear necessary to do it successfully. Love it or hate it, trolling big spoons is one of the most effective methods of catching trophy bass. Fortunately, some of the tackle that anglers already own is sufficient for successful spoon trolling.

The series of articles is intended to serve as a guide for those who are new to spoon trolling for striped bass. Learning the mechanics of the spoon troll will help any angler become a successful bass "spoon feeder".

To start, anglers need a pair of rod and reel combos suited for the task. What determines which types of



The author with a big striped bass that attacked a IGT tackle "Horse Spoon" pulled on wire line in the vicinity of the Shrewsbury Rocks. Trolling big spoons is a dynamic way to target the biggest kind of stripers.

wire, create an electrical charge that will cause pitting on the spool. Chrome-brass spools are less affected by this phenomenon. Carbon graphite spools have a tendency to warp under the side-to-side pressure exerted from the backing and wire when it's wound tightly. Hard plastic spools can explode under this pressure.

Once a reel is found that is suitable for wire line, one needs to know how to set it up for wire. First, one obviously needs to buy some wire line. Usually anglers buy a 300-foot spool of 40-pound to 50-pound Monel or stainless steel wire. Monel, an alloy of copper and nickel, has been a long time favorite, but the rising cost of these metals has

Spoon Feeding Bass

Big Stripers Can't Resist a Properly Trolled Spoon

Part 1: Rods, Reels and Line

By Capt. Rob Sabalowsky

rods and reels depends upon whether one wants to troll with wire line or one of the new super braids.

Selecting a reel for wire-line trolling

Anglers who want to troll with wire line do require more specialized gear. This author uses a 4/0 reel with a sturdy chrome-over-brass spool. The spools on aluminum-spool reels tend to corrode rather quickly due to the electrolysis effect of the dissimilar metals. When exposed to an electrolyte like saltwater, the spool and the stainless or Monel

many anglers seeking alternatives. A super soft grade of stainless-steel is now available and this author has switched over to using it. It's so inexpensive that if it gets kinky or otherwise screwed up, it can be replaced without any crocodile tears.

The reel will be capable of holding much more than 100 yards of wire. Therefore, one needs to add backing. In my opinion, monofilament is a poor choice. Over time, it becomes brittle, degrades and kinks. It also stretches, which is not good. Dacron in 50 or 60-pound class diameters works well as backing. It packs tightly without

the explosive rubber band qualities of monofilament and it does not stretch or rot. Connect the wire to the Dacron with an Albright knot, wind it onto the reel and tie on about 20 feet of 80-pound test monofilament to the wire with another Albright knot. While it may sound a bit lengthy, the 20 feet of leader is necessary so the wire is not dangling out the tip of the rod, causing kinks and loops as the fish comes boat-side. With the 20-foot leader, the angler will have several wraps of monofilament already on their spool.

Stripers are not line-shy; so fluorocarbon leader is not necessary. Additionally, heavy fluorocarbon tends to be stiff and more difficult to tie knots with than heavy monofilament.

At the business end of the leader, tie on a top quality snap swivel. Palomar knots provide a near 100-percent knot strength but are difficult to tie with even 80-pound monofilament leader. A Trilene knot, while slightly less dependable, is good enough. It's easier to tie, and it makes the weakest point of the system where it's most beneficial, at the end. In other words, it's better to lose a spoon instead of all the wire and possible the backing, too.


Marking wire

When trolling, it is rare to have less than 150 feet of wire deployed. One can judge the first 75 or 100 feet by eye, comparing the drop back to the length of the boat. Therefore, 150-feet is about right for the first mark. Most anglers use 20 to 24-gauge telephone wire. However, these light gauges can crush and slide if they get snagged in the tip or in a guide. In this author's opinion, 18 gauge is a better choice. It's a little heavy, but it's really solid. Wind a piece into the wire with a "Haywire Twist". The mark should end up being about 2 to 2 1/2-inches long. Then, at 200 feet, and at 250 feet, wind in two more marks respectively. Using different colors of telephone wire on each mark gives one the ability to know how far the drop back is at a glance. I patriotically use red, white and blue.

Some anglers use the new Spro swivels for markers. Unfortunately, they do tend to hang up in the tiptop and guides more than the telephone wire does. These anglers say that if a section of wire gets damaged, with the swivels one can discard that piece and "haywire" in a new piece. Well, this angler's take is that if a section between the telephone wire marks gets damaged, one can always stick in a new piece using those swivels; or better yet, they can just cut the wire at the bad spot and splice it wire-to-wire with a Haywire twist. It works great!

The trolling rod

Most spoon-trolling aficionados profess that a long, soft, slow-tapered rod of 8 to 10 feet is the best as it allows the spoon to work properly. However, over the years, this



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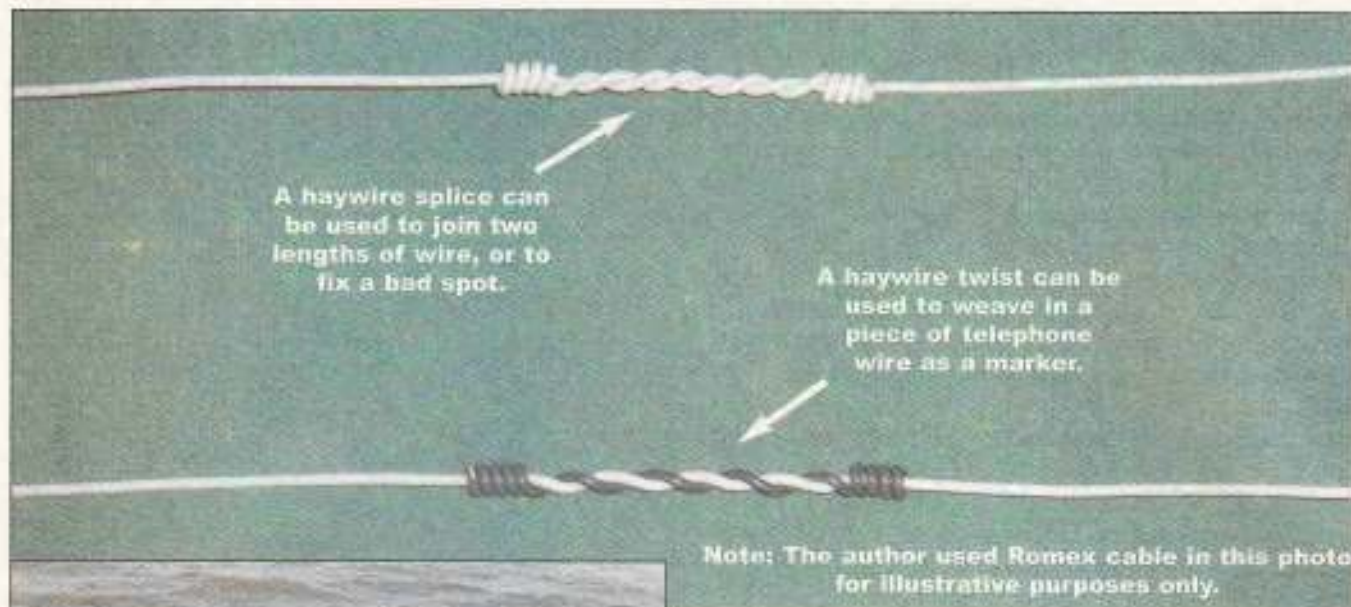
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A haywire splice can be used to join two lengths of wire, or to fix a bad spot.

A haywire twist can be used to weave in a piece of telephone wire as a marker.

Note: The author used Romex cable in this photo for illustrative purposes only.



Although conventional wisdom dictates that a long, 8-to-10-foot soft-action rod is best for pulling spoons, the author feels that a stiffer 8-foot model may actually result in more erratic lure action and more fish in the boat.

angler's observations tell me that a stiff 8-foot rod works just as well and has some distinct advantages over the long softies. Before hammering me about this statement, listen to the reason why. Take notice while trolling with one of those soft rods and one will see it is arced over in a semi circle and the rod tip is only moving about 3 or 4 inches with the action of the spoon. When the boat yaws or porpoises in the chop, the tip reacts, taking up the slack or bowing with the added drag caused by the motion of the boat. This actually deadens the spoon action. Put the wire-line-rigged reel on a stiffer rod and one will observe that while the rod is not bent nearly as far, the tip still pulses

about 3 or 4 inches, the same as with the long softie. However, in the chop, the stiff rod will jerk the spoon wildly and instill an even more erratic action to the lure. Go ahead and hammer away, but this author has had extremely good results with the 8-foot stiff rod, and it has actually out performed the softy when fished side by side.

For wire line spoon trolling, a rod length of 8 feet is about right. With a stiff 8-foot rod, anglers will be able to muscle a big fish at the boat, work it around their running gear without wrapping the line around it, and pass the fish under the boat if necessary.

The composition of the rod blank is also an important factor in choosing a rod. We all love the light and powerful graphite rods. Anglers, including this one, just can't say enough good things about them. Graphite is great for my steelhead fly rods and shad sticks. Graphite rods used for jigging, casting plugs or bottom fishing are simply fantastic! However, many professional anglers and rod manufacturers agree that for heavy-duty fishing they are not the best choice. Trolling big spoons and having to muscle in big bass can be a little like "combat fishing". Graphite rods have an extremely thin wall and will flatten and take an oval shape near the butt when one puts their shoulders into them. In fact, we've seen them explode with a noise equivalent to a gunshot! Being brittle and hard, they can develop undetectable cracks if accidentally step on, smacked on the T-Top or whacked against the gunnel. The result can be frightening next time one has to work them hard. A good old fiberglass rod is the choice of the pros. Even an old solid glass rod will serve the angler well. While they are a bit heavy, they are rugged and offer a great compromise between backbone and flexibility.

Be sure to choose a rod that does not have a light aluminum reel seat. These seats will corrode quickly and split if one doesn't keep on top of them. Anglers will need to

wash them thoroughly and give them a shot of WD-40 after every use. Heavy-duty aluminum seats are better, but they still need to be washed and lubed frequently to keep them in good working order. The newer graphite reel seats with the stainless steel hoods are acceptable too, but make sure they are made by one of the better-known, reputable tackle manufacturers. There are some lightweight knock-offs to steer clear of. Being from the old school, this angler still prefers heavy chrome-over-brass reel seats.

At a minimum, the tiptop should be carbide and if all the rod guides are carbide that is even better! A roller tiptop is also a workable choice, but is not necessary.

Trolling spoons with super braids

Many reels work well with the new super braids. Smaller, lighter reels than those used for wire are satisfactory for the braids. Anglers can fit many, many yards of these thin diameter lines on the spool, so there is no need for backing. For trolling spoons, this author likes to use 80-pound braid. While some anglers use lighter braids, this one

"With a stiff 8-foot rod, anglers will be able to muscle a big fish at the boat, work it around their running gear without wrapping the line around it, and pass the fish under the boat if necessary."

prefers the security of the heavier line. The filaments of braids are microscopic and if it scuffs or rubs on the boat or running gear, it will "fuzz it up" pretty quickly. Severely scuffed line can leave one with next to nothing between

rod and spoon. The coated braids still have that tendency and the coating will rub off with use. Sure light braids are the best for many applications, like bottom fishing, but are risky when used for trolling. The 80-pound-class lines can take a scuffing and keep on fishing with some margin of safety.

It's easy to mark drop-back lengths on braid. A light colored braid is a good choice when marking it is the plan. Again, bass are not line-shy, so the light color shouldn't affect the end result. To reduce its visibility, blacken the first 20 feet of the braid with a black indelible Magic Marker. Continue by marking the line at 50-foot increments starting at 150. One can use the following code to determine the drop back. Add a 1-inch stripe for every 50 feet, and a 2-inch stripe for every 100 feet of line. Therefore, at the 150-foot mark, code the line with a 1-inch stripe and a 2-inch stripe, with a 2-inch separation between



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the stripes. At the 200-foot mark, put two, 2-inch stripes, and at 250 feet, add two, 2-inch stripes and one, 1-inch strip. The marks will tend to wash out over time, so just occasionally touch them up with the marker before they fade completely. If one wants to get fancy, they can use different colored markers.

Behind the drail

Anglers can tie a drail directly to braided line with a Palomar knot. Other knots don't work as well with the braids. An 8-foot leader should be tied to the drail and a top quality snap swivel added on the end of the leader. Unlike trolling with wire line, a 20-foot leader is not necessary. Since the angler will not be able to wind the drail through the rod's guides, once the drail comes to the surface a shorter more manageable leader is best.

A 6 to 10-ounce drail gets a spoon down about the same as wire, but it may be too much or not enough depending upon the spoon. Make up a few leaders with drails of 4, 6, 8 and 10 ounces. A spool of wire weighs around 1 pound, so a 10-ounce drail is not too much.

Tie 8-foot leaders to the selection of drails and tie snap swivels to the business ends of each. To easily use the pretied leaders of different weights, tie a snap swivel directly to the braid. One can accommodate their needs by snapping on different drails to use for different trolling condi-

tions or different spoons. This system really comes in handy when trolling over uneven bottom or sharply varying depths.

Rods for trolling with braid

When trolling spoons with braided line, one can use the same rods that are used for wire-line trolling, with one exception. A roller tip should never be used with braid. Braid can ride up on the edge of the roller and the roller edge will abrade the line. The tiptop should be carbide, and it's even better if all the guides are carbide. But be careful about banging such guides around. Carbide is a very hard and brittle material. If one bangs it around it can crack. One will never see the almost invisible crack, but after having two or three rigs cut off for no apparent reason, a smart angler will figure out it's a cracked carbide tiptop. It's happened to this author twice, but the second time I caught on quickly. Now I treat my trolling rods with gentleness, being careful not to bang them around.

Editor's Note: Capt. Rob Sabalowsky is the owner of Tournament Grade Tackle, a company that specializes in producing bunker spoons, rod riggers and other high quality trolling gear. For more information, visit www.tgtackle.com. Part II of this series will deal with spoon selection. Look for it in next month's issue.

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