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Time To Launch a New Season

- New Wave of Soft Baits
- A Codfish Comeback?
- Spoon Fed Stripers
- A Year in a 'Yak
- Tying a Ling Rig
- Snowy Trout



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On the Fisheries Front:

- **Shape of the Saltwater Registry**
- **The 2009 Fluke Season Prognosis**

Whether one is using wire line or super braid outfits, as discussed in part one of this three-part article series, they will need a selection of spoons. While many anglers like umbrella rigs, spoons are much easier to troll and in this captain's experience, generally take larger fish. They are also more consistent than umbrella rigs. In the long run, spoons will cost less than soft plastic rigs as they do not require replacing torn up shad after each bump from a Blue. By the end of the day umbrella rigs might cost you more than bait. As a matter of fact there is a spoon spreader out there to match the small bait hatch of the fall and it's indestructible.

However, if the need to deploy an umbrella rig arises, the same rods will work. To recount the previous article about rod action, the stiff rods that work great for trolling spoons can troll umbrellas without any of the problems associated with trolling softies. A Good stiff 8 foot rod can do both, so the number of rods one needs can be reduced.



Oversized spoons will target the biggest kind of bass in any locale.

stainless steel unless it's properly treated before painting. Stainless first needs to be "passivated" (a solvent and electrolysis process), and then iron or zinc phosphate etched prior to finishing. If they are powder coated after these processes, the finish will last forever. Sure they will get scratch from blues, but the finish will not peel. Ask at the tackle shop about the finish before buying the spoons. Spoons with superior finishes are worth one's spending the extra few dollars to buy.

Another point to consider is that some spoons are made from a light gauge stainless and will bend rather easily. This could either add to the action or destroy it. Generally, a flatter spoon will have good action but a severely bent one will have a tendency to spin at lower speeds. Even though we troll at slow speeds for bass we still need a little zip. Spoons should be made of at least 18-gauge stainless steel. If one can flex the spoon with a few

Spoon Feeding Bass

Big Strippers Can't Resist a Properly Trolled Spoon

Part 2: Choosing Spoons and Outrodders

By Capt. Rob Sabalowsky

Selecting spoons

There are dozens of spoons from which an angler can select. They all catch bass from time to time however, some work better than others do. The cost of one spoon could range anywhere from 10 to 40 dollars, and the most expensive is not necessarily the best.

Most bunker spoons are painted stainless steel. They start out as whatever color they were when purchased, but by the end of the day they are silver. Nothing sticks to

pounds of pressure it's probably too light and will cause trouble.

Take a look at the "Nuts and Bolts" of the thing as well. Spoons should have nylon lock nuts of the proper length so hooks can be replaced, which can be done for under 2 dollars. Without the lock nuts, vibration will loosen the keels and hooks will mysteriously fall off of the spoon. Some spoons are riveted to eliminate the problem, but replacing hooks on those models is a chore.

Some spoons have a single small hook hung off the tail,

with a single 10/0 or 12/0 hook in the body of the spoon, a big main hook and a treble attached to it. I find the two hook setup has a better hookup ratio than a single hook.



Some spoons have a keel weight that can be adjusted close to the nose or slid back an inch or two. However, the best action is achieved when the keel is moved as far forward as possible. I think the movable keels were originally developed because the designer didn't know what to expect from the lure. From that point on everyone thought it was a necessary option and it was "monkey see, monkey do" with spoon manufacturers. Some of the newer brands have eliminated this option and have the keel permanently set in the forward position where it works best.

Some spoons have teaser tails incorporated into their trailer hooks. Look for spoons with synthetic hair. Bucktail looks nice, but a single bluefish can bite most of it off in a single encounter. The best teaser tails are made from synthetic hair and will last a lot longer than the natural stuff.

Lastly, studies have proven lures with eyes and rattles catch more fish. Many independent tests have proven this to be absolutely true. Buy spoons that rattle and bead eyes, which will add attraction to the lures. If spoons with all the extras are not available, add some peel and stick eyes or color the eyes in with an indelible magic marker. One can also break out the fly vise and tie some synthetic hair on the stinger hook. It will definitely improve its effectiveness. A good quality spoon can last several seasons before needing any maintenance.

Buying a couple of every size, color and style of trolling spoon available will set an angler back as much as a mortgage. Fortunately, anglers only need to start out with a few. We're all familiar with the old cliché "Bigger baits catch bigger fish" Generally speaking this is a statement in which this captain strongly agrees. While smaller spoons will generally catch smaller fish and bigger spoons will catch bigger fish, a compromise falls somewhere around 10 or 11 inches. A spoon of this size will catch bass of just about every size, from shorts to real trophies.

The next decision to make is color. While white is a time tested color, this captain prefers different colors. We all know Yellow has been catching bass since, well, forever. What serious angler hasn't got yellow plugs and jigs in their arsenal? Yet yellow spoons are a rarity. Inshore salt water filters the reflected light of some colors in the spectrum more than others, and this light filtration increases with depth. For example, red is practically invisible at 20 feet deep, so red is a color I stay away from. Yellow is a color that remains bright and highly visible at all depths. Green is another color that is not affected by the filtering properties of salt water. This captain refers to the two best colors as "bass yellow" and "bluefish green", as yellow seems to catch more bass than green and green catches more bluefish than bass. The ratio might vary a bit from day to day, but over time yellow has proven to be the best color for bass.



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The color blue can also be very productive at times. One day, while thinking about the blue-black herring run in early spring and late fall, I cut down a bunker spoon to make it narrow, like the body of a herring, and painted the top half of it blue. The thing worked like magic! During the runs, I would run a blue spoon with any other color and found that all of the fish came in on the blue one. The only time I caught a fish on the other colors is when I got a double and the blue spoon was hit first. Unfortunately, blue is another rarity at tackle shops. One way around this is to paint 1/2 of a white spoon blue. I guarantee it will produce.

For some reason, silver spoons don't seem to work for this spoon trolling angler. In fact, I don't even own one anymore! Yellow and Green will do the job and if one can dig a little deeper into their wallet, they should pick up a blue spoon or two, or at least a white spoon and a can of light blue spray paint.

To heck with the hatch!

Trolling big spoons is a great way to target big bass, but most spoon draggers still have some umbrella rigs on

"If a patient angler sticks with big spoons, it is true his or her numbers will go down, but the few quality fish that they will catch will easily compensate for the low numbers."

board for times when peanut bunker, sand eels, rainfish and other small forage is thick. They think that the bass, which are obviously keyed in on small bait, won't take a big spoon.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. In this scenario, if a patient angler sticks with big spoons, it is true his or her numbers will go down, but the few quality fish that they will catch will easily compensate for the low numbers. Anyone can catch a hundred "shorts" by dragging umbrella rigs. However, coming back with a couple of bass that go "THUD" when they are thrown onto the dock will earn an angler much more respect.

Matching it spoon style

If one's patience grows thin while trolling big spoons with no results, there is a downsized spoon technique that anglers can employ to liven up the day. Shad umbrella rigs are heavy, tangle often, require expensive bait replacement maintenance and are dangerous on the deck with a fish or two flopping around on the hooks. Instead of going to the umbrella rig, take a simple spreader bar and attach two small Krocodile or Clark spoons at the ends with about an

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A comparison of spoon sizes. On the left is a "standard" spoon which will take everything from schoolies to stabs. The "horse" spoon on the right is used to target only trophy fish.

8-inch drop. In the center, rig up a 2-foot drop with snap swivel, and clip on a big spoon. Be sure to use monofilament of 100-pound test or more on the spreader rig. There is a good reason for using this heavy line. By rigging it with 50-pound test, for example, and an angler has two or three big fish latch on at the same time; then inevitably the fish will decide to go in different directions and there will be a parting of their ways.

When things are slow, troll this rig along with a big spoon on the other rod. This technique will bring enough action to keep one busy while they're waiting for a nice one to come along. Quite often, that nice one will take the big spoon at the center of the spreader rig. Best of all, one doesn't need to continuously replace soft plastic when bluefish are in the mix. After having some fun with smaller fish, this captain likes to replace the spreader with a big spoon, settle in and look for a few trophy-size fish. By my standards, a good day is not 100 shorts, but rather a few heavy weights.

Cows do eat giants!

While the fabled giants of various folk lore could easily



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eat a cow, in the world of trolling spoons, the cows eat the giants, the giant spoons that average about 18 inches in length. Most anglers look at them and don't believe that a striped bass of any size will hit them. However, it is no secret that these giant spoons have been winning tournaments from the first day they were used. One tournament pro trolls them exclusively and has accounted for six wins in the last 2 years fishing from Sandy Hook to Cape May. Another New Jersey charter captain trolled a pair of them and got a 43 and 47-pound fish on at the same time. These are not isolated events.

Trolling these giant spoons, however, is not for everybody. They will literally cull out most of the smaller fish due to the lure's size. These lures are for those who would rather sacrifice quantity for quality. If catching only cows is the goal, these monster spoons are a must to have onboard.

One final note is that bluefin tuna love big bunker spoons. While trolling for bass in the fall, getting a tuna surprise is always within the realm of possibility. To the north, around Cape Cod, they consistently take bluefin on spoons during the summer months.

Rod Riggers and Outrodders

One accessory every boat needs is a pair of rod riggers. Just putting the rods in flush mount rod holders will make trolling difficult when it doesn't have to be. In the flush mounts, the rods will be sticking straight up in the air and the drop back could be up to 100-feet farther than when the rod is in a rigger. Riggers will get the lines in the water closer to the boat, drastically reducing drop-back distances. Without riggers, the spread will be quite narrow setting one up for potential line crossovers and hopeless tangles.

At the risk of sarcasm, one hasn't lived until they have had a couple of spoons pirouetting around one another for a minute or two. Unwinding braid will take all day and it may become scuffed to the point where it's useless. Wire line will probably have to be thrown away. With all that line up in the air before it enters the water even wind can blow them together in a wide turn, not to mention a tight one.

A set of rod riggers will minimize these potential problems. Instead of an 8 to 10 foot spread it will increase to around 20 feet or better, and in calm conditions, one might

even be able to run a third line down the middle. If a middle line is deployed, add a heavier drail if using braid, or add a drail if using wire, so the center line runs deeper and shorter than the outer spoons to the port and starboard sides. Of course, a deep diving plug is ideal for this center spread location too. The center line is an option, and is in no way a prerequisite

to a successful spread. In fact this captain often trolls without a center line.

Rod Riggers and Outrodders do have some shortcomings. First and foremost, and most troublesome is the fact that one must reach over the gunwale to slide the butt of the rod into and out of the rigger. An angler must extend out over the side, grab the butt and pull it out of the rigger when a fish strikes. This can be a struggle when a big bass is on the other end. It's not uncommon for a rod to be dropped overboard, especially in a heavy chop when anglers are struggling just to keep their balance! Even a cheap set of rod riggers usually comes with a short safety line with plastic dog collar clip to secure to the reel. Of course the clip will break under any real stress, so it should be replaced with a metal one. Keeping the rod tethered is the best defense against losing it.

Another problem is that anglers often make the mistake

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of pulling the rigger up and out of the flush mount when they excitedly remove the rod after a strike. If they're lucky, it will fall into the boat. If luck is running thin, guess where they go. The answer is to tie the rod riggers to a cleat or other convenient location with yet another safety line.

The potential for an additional hazard is that if a spoon gets hung up in a turn, especially the spoon to the inside of the turn, the rod has a tendency to shoot out of the rod rigger. It's in a turn that spoons tend to get hung up on the bottom most often. Again, keeping everything tethered will help prevent the loss of a rod.

There is a high end set of rod riggers made by TGT that addresses and solves all of these problems and is used inshore as well as offshore with big 80s for Marlin. If you want to go first class look them up.

Editor's Note: Coming up next month in the series "Spoon Feeding Bass" is the final installment which will cover boat handling on the troll, boat speed, finding hot spots, fishing structure, and how to use and select the right spoon for the job.

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