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February 2008



The Mack Attack
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It's That *Magical* Time Again

How many Februarys do you have in a lifetime? Did you ever think about it that way before? And more importantly... how many do you have left?

February, March and into early April represent the best time of the year to catch the biggest fish of your life depending on the climate in which you live. Just ask Mike Hepper, who landed Washington's state walleye record last February. He is on the water most every day at this time of the year, because, as a seasoned big fish hunter, he knows that the odds are better now than at any other time. Big fish are full of Spawn and have been laying around packing on the pounds all winter. (Sound familiar?)

It would not be a good idea to start naming good locations to bag a whopper walleye, but in general, walleyes make big runs up tributaries during the early spring. These big "hens" as they are affectionately called, are moving slowly towards their spawning destinations where they will go on a

quick weight reduction program, dumping as much as two pounds of eggs and a lot of their fat reserves in the strenuous process.

The Columbia River is known for producing such behemoths in the west, and the Detroit River has a well--deserved reputation for cranking out eye-popping walleyes in the teens each spring. But many tributaries of the Great Lakes produce great fishing for big fish without all



Big Fish hunter Mike Hepper knows that Early Spring and Smile Blades are a deadly combination for the fish of a lifetime.

the attention that the Detroit River gets.

The Columbia can usually be fished year around in open water, but of course those of us in the Midwest must wait until the warmth of spring thaws the rivers. For most of the Great Lakes tributaries this happens in mid- to late-March. The big fish in lakes will have to wait until later yet. And in fact, Minnesota's state record was set in May, where the big females were making a spawning run up the Seagull River shortly after the ice went off Saganaga Lake.

We at Mack's Lure are surely in love with this time of the year. Why?

Because we not only get to sample some of this great fishing, but because we have the absolute best presentation for these early spring fish; the Smile Blade spinner. Although it was not common knowledge how effective these baits are for big spring fish, it's no secret anymore, and with Mike Hepper's monster caught on a Smile Blade last year, there's no holding the cat in the bag any

more, much to the disappointment of many big fish hunter.

It's that magical time of the year again. Grab some Smile Blade spinners and make the most of it.

Tip of the Month

Add a trailer for more hookups

by **Bernie Barringer**

Ever try to look at a spinnerbait through the eyes of a fish? If you have, then you have probably wondered, like I have, what exactly do they see in it? Think about it, what do they really think it looks like... a minnow? A crawfish? I doubt it.

Frankly, I have become a believer in the theory that fish often don't strike as much out of a need to eat, but out of a reaction that is triggered in their brain. Possibly at times they simply hit it out of curiosity. And I think that some fish hit certain baits as a way to get them out of their personal space. These topics could be discussed in a full article, but that's not the point of this piece. Let's just say that fish do not always bite baits because of the desire to eat them.

A spinnerbait really doesn't imitate anything they have eaten before. But it sure works well. Man, I have caught a ton of fish of many different species on spinnerbaits. Some professional bass fishermen have made a living fishing this contraption that looks totally unlike anything that would naturally be moving along through the water. It looks more like litter than food!

I think this also explains why the fish bite the hook rather than the spinner blade. Bear with me here. The blade is what is producing the flash and vibration, so why wouldn't they bite that part of it rather than the skirt, which has the hook in it? Can it be that they do not see the blade very well? Maybe.

I really believe that they usually just come up behind it and nip at it.



Dawson Barringer is a believer in trying new color combinations and, as this big bass proves, a trailer hook can be the difference between holding a big fish and missing a big strike.

Now we have all had those slashing strikes where the fish rushes the bait and slams it at boatside. But they are the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time the fish overtakes the bait from the rear and opens its mouth just enough to grab the bait. This can cause a lot of missed strikes, especially when the water is cold, or the first couple days following a severe cold front when the fish are not aggressive, even lethargic.

This is why I so often attach a trailer hook to my spinner bait. I almost never fish without one during the spring and fall, or after a cold front. The Stan's Spin is so good during these times. Because of the unique Mylar blade, you can fish it very slowly which is just the ticket for these conditions.

Next time you fish a spinnerbait, try a trailer hook and I am certain that you will have a higher hooking percentage.

Cookin' Your Catch

Fish Chowder

Here's a delicious hot soup dish for those cold winter days. This works the best with any white-fleshed fish such as walleye, perch, bluegills or crappie. But don't be afraid to try it with any other fish, you might be surprised how good it is. Make a big batch so you have plenty of leftovers. This dish keeps well. Yum!

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 4 fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 4 cups diced potatoes
- 2 pounds cod, diced into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1/8 teaspoon Old Bay Seasoning, or to taste
- salt to taste
- ground black pepper to taste
- 1 cup clam juice
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 (12 fluid ounce) cans evaporated milk

Directions

In a large stockpot, melt 2 tablespoons butter over medium heat. Saute onions, mushrooms and celery in butter until tender.

Add chicken stock and potatoes; simmer for 10 minutes.

Add fish, and simmer another 10 minutes.

Season to taste with Old Bay seasoning, salt and pepper. Mix together clam juice and flour until smooth; stir into soup.

Remove from heat, and stir in evaporated milk. Serve.

The Stan's Spin Spinnerbait

Tricks & Tactics That Put Fish In the Boat

By Hall of Fame Angler Stan Fagerstrom

Part 2 of 2

The Mack's Lure Stan's Spin spinnerbait can be a fish-catching son of a gun when it's in the hands of an angler who knows how to use it. In my last column I urged readers to get away from the habit that plagues so many bass anglers when it comes to spinnerbait fishing. The habit is to simply keep throwing such a lure without ever varying the speed of retrieve or trying certain other techniques that can sometimes make a dramatic difference in results.

One of the lakes I used to fish contained lots of pilings. These pilings were a favorite hang-out of some of the lake's largest bass. Most of the pilings were located in water that ran from seven to ten feet in depth. Rarely did I take bass on a spinnerbait by simply firing one up next to a piling and then just start reeling back in.

What sometimes did work was to cast just as close to the piling as I could get, then just let the lure drop on a slack line. I counted the lure down as I picked up the slack. Once I knew it was near bottom, I flipped my rod tip sharply to cause the lure to dart up and away. This simple procedure helped me boat

some of the largest bass I ever took from that lake.

More often than not I had my best success when I added a trailer to my spinnerbait hook. Sometimes I used a plastic trailer, but more often I'd tip the lure with an Uncle Josh pork rind strip. The Mack's Lure Stan's Spin works wonderfully well for this procedure. The main reason it does is because of the lure's lightweight Mylar blade. To observe what I'm talking about, drop your Stan's Spin in clear water next to your boat and



Never overlook throwing a spinnerbait if the water you're fishing contains the kind of submerged timber shown here. Be sure to let the lure bump off underwater limbs and branches during the retrieve.

watch what happens as it falls. You'll find that the lure's plastic blade has a unique helicopter-style action as it drops.

A swimming pool provides an even better place for you to get a look at what I'm talking about. Cast your Stan's Spin into the deep end of the pool, let it drop and then flip your rod tip once it gets down a ways. That old pot-bellied bass down there in the cover you're fishing has probably seen more spinnerbaits than you have. But she's never eyeballed one like the Pro Model Stan's Spin. Every now and then that 'copter blade action and the darting get-away it makes when you flip your rod tip are sufficient to trigger her short fuse. She'll smash the living daylights out of that bait and you better have a good grip on your rod when it happens.

In my last column I also touched on the importance of slowing down your retrieve sufficiently so your Stan's Spin bumps into the underwater cover where largemouth so often hang out. I love to use this approach whenever the cover happens to be submerged timber. If you've ever had the good fortune to fish Mexico's Lake El Salto you know what I'm talking about. This wondrous bass fishing paradise is loaded with wood cover. I've had a chance to fish it half a dozen times and always I come away amazed at the number of bass just one cluster of partially submerged trees might hold.

Often, depending on just how thick is the cover you're fishing, plastic lures of one kind or another provide the best chance to take fish. But this doesn't always apply. Never, and I emphasize that word, ignore a spinnerbait, especially in stretches where the partially un-

derwater wood thins out at bit.

I'll never forget what transpired one evening at El Salto just before it was time to head back to Anglers Inn Lodge for our evening meal. The guide eased our boat along a steep bank where partially submerged trees were scattered all along the shoreline. I'd made about a dozen casts with a blue skirted Stan's Spin and—wham! Fish on! That heavyweight bass had to be one of the largest I've ever hooked at El Salto. I've caught large-mouth down there of almost 12-pounds so I know what a trophy fish feels like. I was never to find out the exact size of that bass. The guide had the net poised and was all set to use it when the fish came unpinned. The line didn't break and the hook was

as sharp as when I took the lure out of its package. The fish just hadn't been well hooked.

As soon as I'd determined my Stan's Spin was in good shape, I went right back to casting. Whenever possible, I cast up between the trees that poked slender fingers up above the surface. Then I'd let the lure drop and endeavor to make it bump off the larger underwater limbs I couldn't see but I could feel as the lure came back to me. I made just such a cast, felt it bump off one of those larger submerged limbs and again—wham! Fish on! This one didn't get away. When we finally got it onto our Boga-Grip scales it weighed 10-pounds, 4-ounces. We shot a couple of quick photos of that old girl and

back into the water she went.

A guy like me who has spent most of a lifetime fishing bass in the Pacific Northwest doesn't have that many chances to eyeball a bass of 10-pounds or more. There just aren't that many of them around. You can be assured I was one happy camper when the fishing was done that day at El Salto. This two-part series on the Stan's Spin spinnerbait still just scratches the surface on the tricks and tactics you can use with it. You may well have developed even better methods of using it effectively. If you have, by all means let me know. I'll be happy to hear from you and I'll share what you have to say with the other readers.

Few lures are more dependable day in and day out than a spinnerbait. The Mack's Lure Stan's Spin has some things going for it that the others don't. I urge you to give it a try if you've not already done so.

Photo of the Month

We want your photos! Send your photos to bernie@mackslure.com.



Wish it was June?

Steve Bramhall of Burbank, Washington and partner Brett Vining caught 36 walleyes in 4 hours, including 3 doubles fishing in the Irrigon area of the Columbia River in six feet of water with chartruese Smile Blades and orange Wally Pop bodies. Pictured is Steve with the two limits they kept.

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