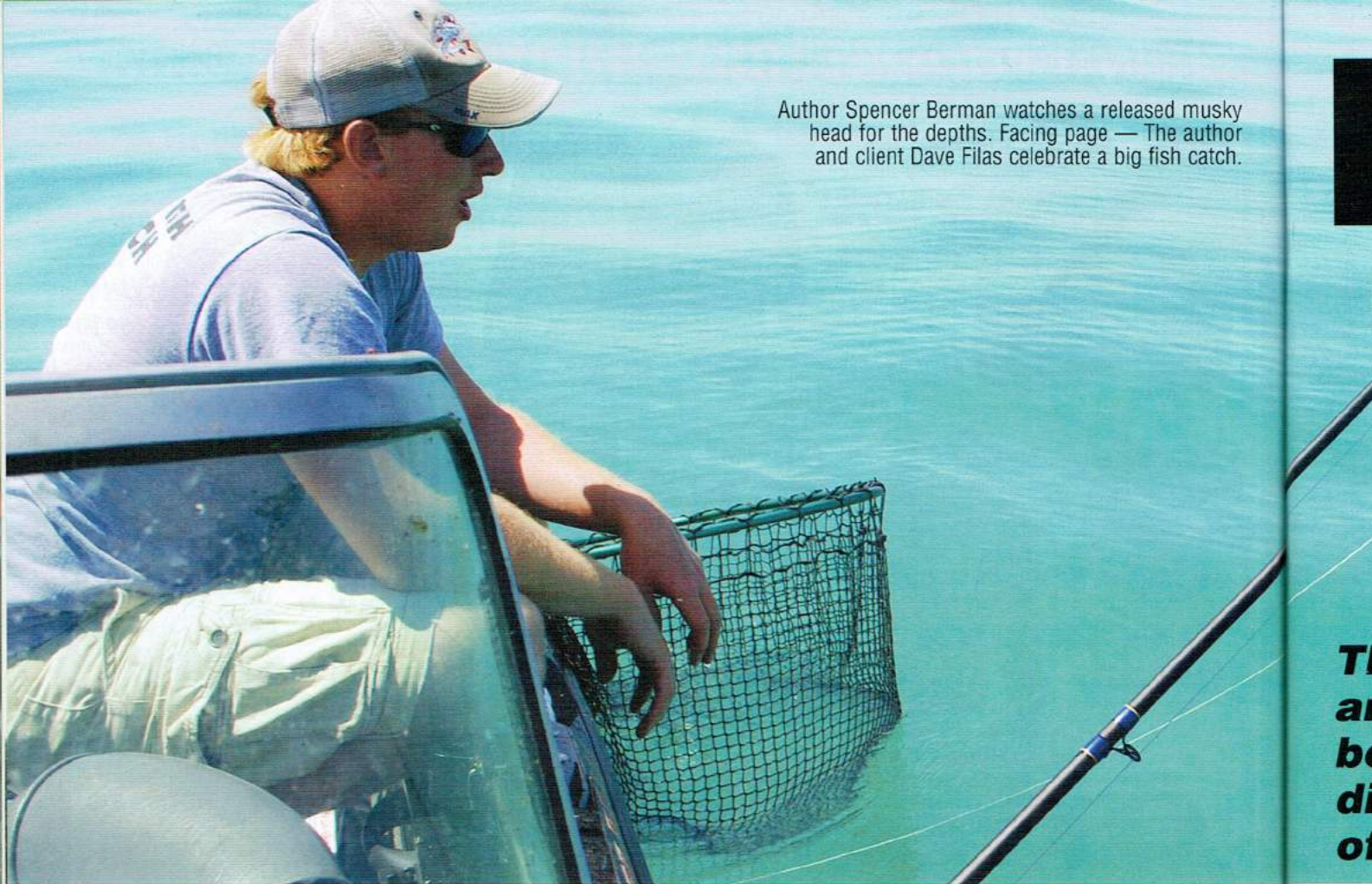


Author Spencer Berman watches a released musky head for the depths. Facing page — The author and client Dave Filas celebrate a big fish catch.



### By Spencer Berman, Contributing Writer

*"If a musky follows a lure all the way to the boat without eating it, the fish was not completely fooled and thus did not want to eat that bait. That's why it only followed."*

— *Legendary musky fishermen Steve Herbeck*

Last summer I was fishing on Lake of the Woods with friend Ross Dary. In the first three hours, Ross landed three muskies while fishing in the front of the boat, all caught by burning black Double Cowgirls. During that time, we didn't have any follows. After the third fish, I told Ross that I wanted a chance to fish first water. I was casting a walleye Shallow Bull Dawg and moved to the front of the boat. On the next couple of spots we fished, I raised a number of fish but could not get any of them to eat, while Ross, in the back of the boat, did not produce anything. I think it is fair to say that most musky fisherman can state that they have had a similar experience at some point or another.

There are a couple of different reasons something like this could occur, such as a feeding window, the time of day, or more active fish were holding on the first couple spots. However, in this case the reason was simple — it was because of an improper lure order. I am pretty sure about that because after I my sixth follow in the front of the boat without having a strike, I switched to a black Cowgirl and started getting

strikes.

Many would assume we should be okay in our presentation because Ross was in the back of the boat using a Cowgirl while I was raising fish with the Bull Dawg. However, in this scenario, my bait was pulling the muskies off their ambush spots but was not triggering strikes. By doing so I was not allowing Ross a chance to put a lure in front of these fish.

A lot goes into lure selection. We consider time of year, structure, the location where we are fishing, what has been hot, along with many other things. However, one vital aspect of lure selection that few people take into account is the order in which the lures are seen by the fish. You can actually catch fewer fish if you don't consider this. Lure selection based on your position in the boat should not be haphazard.

Musky fishermen love to see follows but you can't show off a picture of a big follower. We need to get muskies to bite and then get them in the net. For this reason I would advise all anglers to reread Steve Herbeck's quote and then think about it some more.

### Speed

To get the most from a day on the water you must set up your lures in a proper order. The first lures cast at a spot should be those that are best at triggering and hooking. Next should be those lures which normally get more follows and fewer strikes.

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# Lure Order

***The order in which lures are presented from your boat can make a huge difference in the number of muskies you catch***



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One of the easiest lures to lead off with is your fastest-moving lure, normally a bucktail or a fast-moving topwater. When a lure is traveling at a very high rate of speed it forces muskies to react quickly and this quick thought process for their small brain normally results in a lot of strikes. With a high rate of speed, muskies are forced to exhaust a lot of energy chasing the lure down and thus have more invested in the activity, making it harder for them to just follow and not eat. Bottom line — when the first lure in the boat is moving fast it is going to trigger a lot of strikes from active fish while not getting too many follows from semi-active fish, leaving them on the spots and catchable for the other people casting in the boat.

Next in line should be a medium-speed lure, something like a slower bucktail, topwater, crankbait, etc. This lure will often draw the most follows because it will make it much easier for semi-active fish to slowly slide in behind the bait and follow, but it does not necessarily mean that it will get a lot of strikes. When in this position, I like reeling the first part of the retrieve at a medium pace and then finishing the retrieve very quickly, which may trigger a follower. The lures I like for this are Cowgirls, medium to hard-pulled Bull Dawgs, twitched Jakes and Big Games, or quickly-worked Phantoms.

For the last in line, try a very slow-moving bait which will attract a lot of follows and get a fair amount of strikes from less-aggressive fish. The baits that I like to use for this are slowly-moved Bull Dawgs, Phantoms, long-paused Jakes,

slow-rolled Cowgirls and slow-moving topwaters.

Now, understand that very rarely will we use one lure from each category. These different categories of lure retrieves require different boat speeds, so normally I make an educated guess (based on water temperature and experience) and then start with only two of the different groups being used at the same time. Typically, with three anglers in the boat in conditions when I think higher lure speeds would be better, the first two fishermen will use fast speeds followed by the third angler with a medium-speed lure. If I anticipate the fish may be more sluggish, the first two anglers may start with medium-



## Lure Order

speed baits while the third follows up with a slow-moving presentation.

Another thing to keep in mind is success. If there are two fast-moving baits and one medium-speed lure being cast from your boat and the medium bait gets hit, then you should immediately consider switching one of the fast-moving baits to a medium. That same principle applies to any of the different levels of speed — if something works then feed the fish more of it.

One unfortunate scenario is when I have really no clue what speed of lures the fish will want. In this situation I choose to use one from each group and let the fish tell us what they want. I will, however, make sure the fastest-moving baits are going first.

### Casting Angles

A major consideration in lure order is your casting angle. Often when you are fishing a weedline, breakline or rockbar, there will be a fair amount of muskies suspended just off the edge rather than

on the top. When you recognize this, it's a good idea for the person in the front of the boat to cast his lure ahead of the boat, parallel to the edge. By doing this, you are not only targeting more fish than those on the reef, but you give the angler batting second to cast at "fresh" water, thus nearly doubling your chances of finding active fish.

### Open Water

Fishing for suspended muskies throws a monkeywrench into the lure order concept because there usually are just as many fish on one side of the boat as the other. In this situation — no matter if you are casting to open water shad or cisco schools or deep humps, it is important to spread out your lures by casting to both sides of the boat. Casting to different sides allows you to cover a 360-degree area of water and will allow everyone in the boat to have an equal opportunity at fish. In this scenario it is not really important to keep

the lures in the proper order based on speed, but it is important to consider which bait appears to be working and then duplicate its order to get more bites.

A quick guide note — when casting to both sides of the boat, be extremely careful that nobody's backswing hooks another in the boat. Everyone has to work together to keep all safe.

We all have favorite lures. However, when fishing with others you need to coordinate who is throwing what bait as outlined here. In this manner, each angler will have a good chance to land a monster no matter where they are positioned in the boat.

*Author Spencer Berman guides in Indiana from March through May and then fishes Lake St. Clair from June into December. For more information, visit [www.spencersanglingadu.com](http://www.spencersanglingadu.com).*



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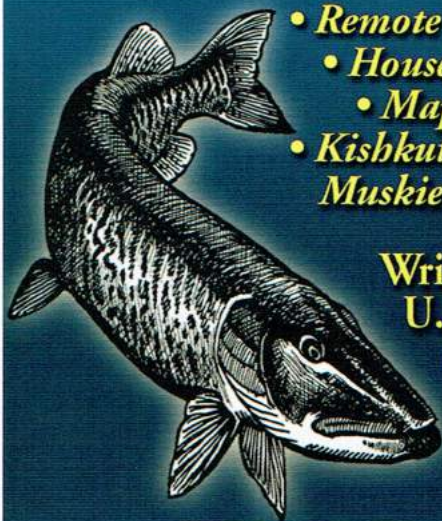
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