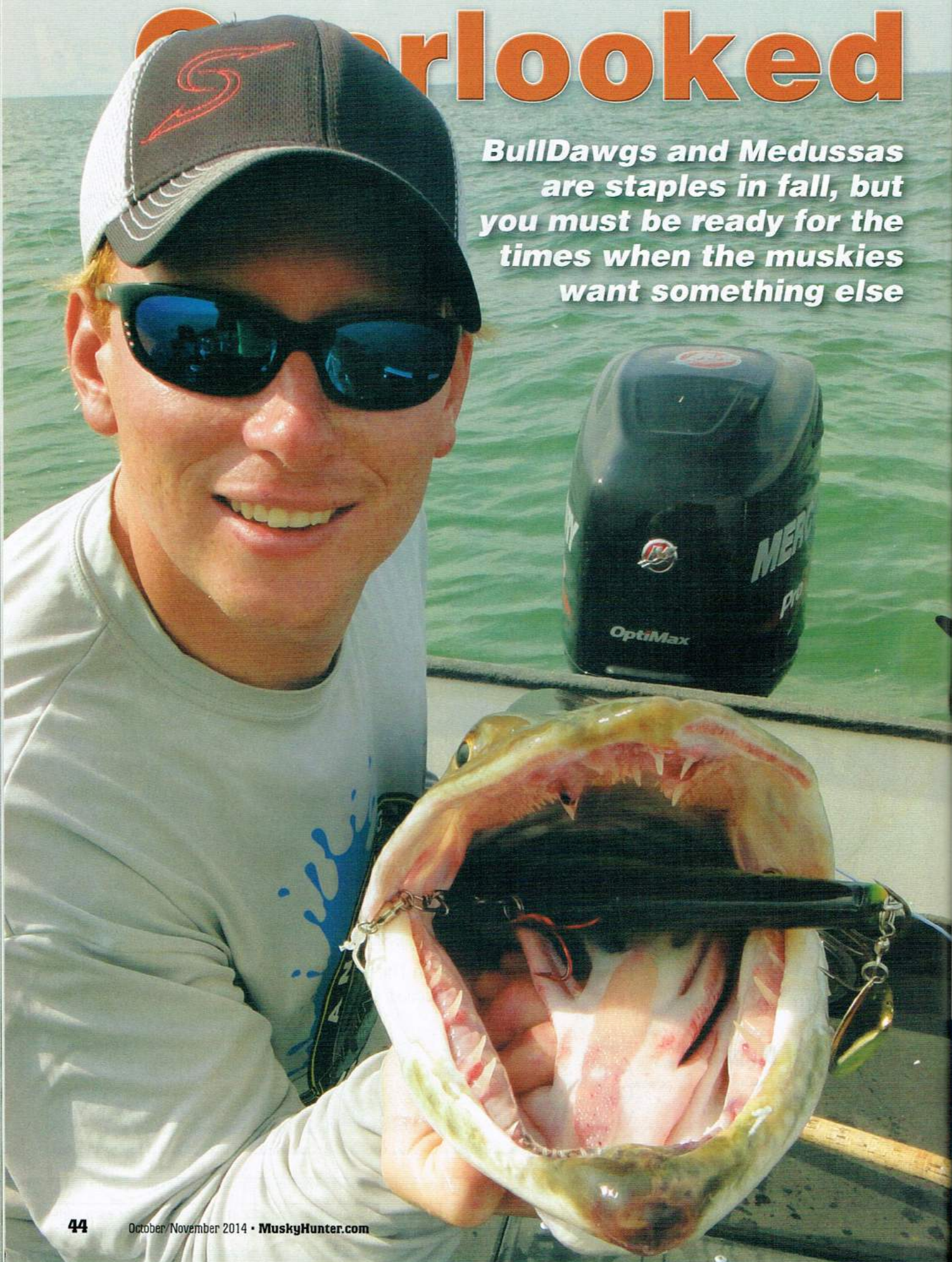


Overlooked

BullDawgs and Medussas are staples in fall, but you must be ready for the times when the muskies want something else



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Fall Plastics

By Spencer Berman, Contributing Writer

When you think of fall, which lures come to mind? For many, it's either big BullDawgs or Medussas, two baits that can absolutely dominate the musky world during the late fall. There are, however, a few tough conditions where a different group of fall lures should make it into your lineup because they could be your salvation.

The three baits that I turn to are the Shadzilla, the Heli-Dawg and the new Rippin' Dawg, which are not only different from the norm but have a few unique qualities which make them simply deadly in the autumn period, especially for big muskies.

Why They Work

These lures shine during the late fall season for several reasons. The first is that these baits are all simply good lures. Each has other applications and can catch fish on a daily basis.

Having said that, the first reason that these lures produce so well in the fall period is their subtle action. Most musky fishermen think the more action the better, and there is no doubt that at times that is true. However, as these lures demonstrate, sometimes less is more. A good example of a time when less action on a lure is better is when crankbaits with a tight wobble like a Super Shad Rap, Musky Train, Wiley or Loke outperform a lure that moves more water, like a Jake or Custom X. Soft plastic lures are no different. This subtle action seems to especially shine when the muskies are in a very negative state like what you will see when cold water is coupled with a large baro-

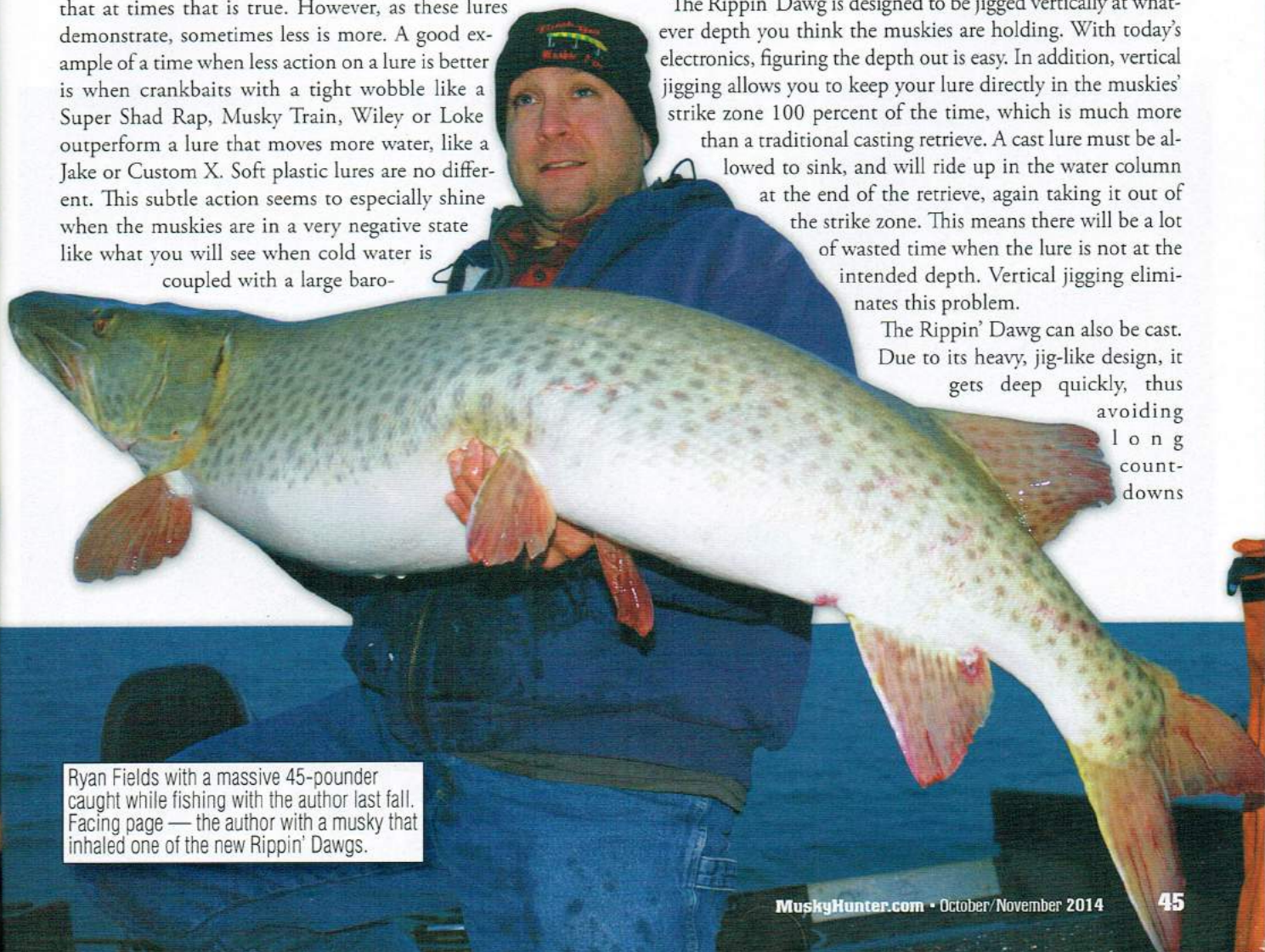
metric pressure change.

The next great attribute (especially in the Shadzilla and Heli-Dawg) is that these baits draw strikes with a straight retrieve. In the fall, most musky lures require ripping to trigger strikes, with the stop-and-start action turning following fish into biters. However, a straight retrieve works amazingly well on lazy, cold water fall muskies simply because the musky need not expend much energy to chase the bait down. If you think about what a heavily-worked BullDawg or Medussa looks like in the water, a lethargic fish may simply be unwilling to put in the effort to track down the lure.

Another great quality posed by the Rippin' Dawg is its ability to get deep. In the fall, dropping surface water temperatures drive both the bait and the muskies deeper in the water column. Combined with their cold body temperature, muskies are less likely to come up to eat a high-riding lure. Therefore, a lure which has the ability to get down deep in the water column not only plays well to the lethargic mood of the muskies but also puts your bait right in front of that fish, making the meal simply too easy to resist.

The Rippin' Dawg is designed to be jigged vertically at whatever depth you think the muskies are holding. With today's electronics, figuring the depth out is easy. In addition, vertical jigging allows you to keep your lure directly in the muskies' strike zone 100 percent of the time, which is much more than a traditional casting retrieve. A cast lure must be allowed to sink, and will ride up in the water column at the end of the retrieve, again taking it out of the strike zone. This means there will be a lot of wasted time when the lure is not at the intended depth. Vertical jigging eliminates this problem.

The Rippin' Dawg can also be cast. Due to its heavy, jig-like design, it gets deep quickly, thus avoiding long count-downs



Ryan Fields with a massive 45-pounder caught while fishing with the author last fall. Facing page — the author with a musky that inhaled one of the new Rippin' Dawgs.

Overlooked Fall Plastics

which waste a lot of time. Next, the subtle action of the blade on the back, coupled with the baitfish-shaped body, triggers strikes. Finally, a factor which I feel is the coolest part about this bait, is its back-and-forth shimmy, which is much like the wobble on a crankbait. The only downside I see to the Rippin' Dawg is it will not be available to the public until the musky show season.

The next major factor to consider about these lures is their high hookup percentage, something that is very rare in a rubber bait. In my experience it is not uncommon to land fish with close to 80 to 90 percent efficiency, which is dramatically better than other plastic lures. During the fall period when your bites tend to be few but the fish can be huge, losing fish is never something we want to have to deal with. This alone can improve your mindset because we all know the effect of losing a huge fall monster.

The final reason these lures work so well is because no one else is really throwing them. It's like nearly every musky has



The Shadzilla, by WaterWolf Lures.

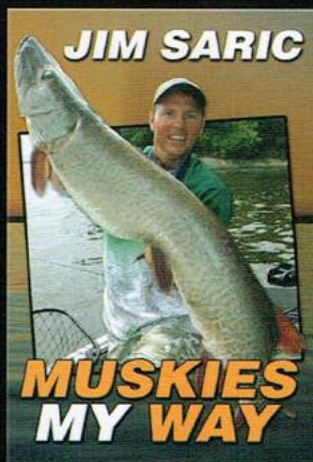
been caught on a BullDawg or Medusa, but many haven't seen this group of lures. This greatly increases the chance of a musky eating them rather than following hesitantly or nipping cautiously. When a musky does eat them it tends to do so very aggressively, which factors into your hook-up rate.

When These Lures Work

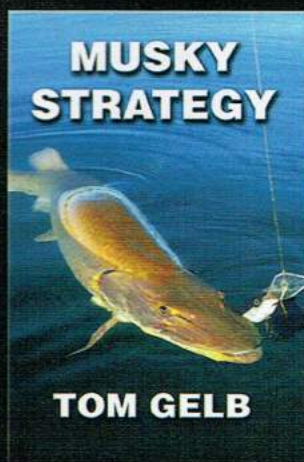
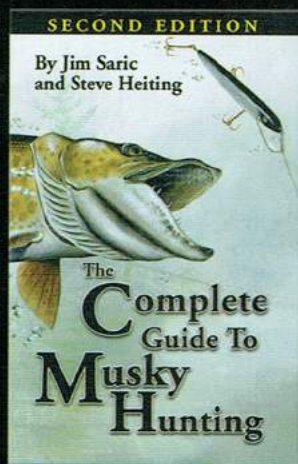
On November 19 of last year, I found myself fishing with one of my great clients and friends, Mike Ruchalski, who

has become a hardcore rubber fisherman with several big fish catches. On this day, however, we were faced with post-frontal conditions with big winds and dirty water. Because I am hard-headed I snapped on a Pounder BullDawg and gave Mike the Shadzilla that had caught fish the day before he arrived. At the beginning Mike was pretty skeptical, but five hours later he had caught a total of 10 fish up to 50 inches on the Shadzilla. We ended the day with 19 in the boat between the two of us with four over 48

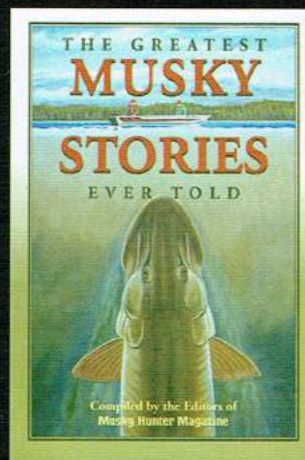
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inches and the 50-incher being the largest. This was the highest single day total of my 2014 season, and all but one of the fish was caught on a Shadzilla. A bunch of other fishermen in the area were fishing all the traditional lures and did not catch nearly as many as we did. So why is it that on this one day all the fish wanted to eat this specific lure?

stirred up either by wind and wave action, or by inflowing water. The fish are forced to feed in an environment where they have to use their lateral line more and eyesight less. Lures that are constantly stopping and starting and going up and down in the water column are very challenging for muskies to pin down and eat. However, lures that can be



Author Spencer Berman with 53 inches of proof that changing to an "overlooked" plastic — when necessary — can pay off big.

The first major sign that these lures are going to be hot for you is bad weather. In the fall, muskies are already going to be a bit sluggish with cooler water temperatures. Add bad weather and they become even more sluggish and unwilling to eat an aggressive lure presentation. In this scenario, subtle, tight-wobbled, straight-retrieved lures are much more appealing.

Another reason that these lures should make it onto the end of your line is dirty water. Dropping water temperatures can create turbidity as the plant growth dies and no longer holds the mud and sediment in place. In addition, the colder water temperatures mean that the water is denser, so it holds the sediment that is

straight-retrieved at a slow to moderate pace allow the muskies to zero in and effectively attack.

Musky fishermen we are always looking for the next big thing that will give us an advantage over fellow anglers. These overlooked plastic lures will do just that and at times could be your chance at a late fall monster.

Contributing writer Spencer Berman is a full-time charter captain on Lake St. Clair. For more about Spencer, visit spencersanglingadv.com

