

Time To Cast Or Troll?

By Spencer Berman

In any musky fishing situation, there are many different factors that you must consider. You can look at the baitfish, water temperature or time of year; however, the most daunting consideration to ponder is whether you should be trolling or casting. Both of these techniques have many advantages and disadvantages which make them right or wrong for certain fishing situations. By acquiring a better understanding of how each of these techniques fits in your arsenal, as well as when each one will excel, you can be certain you will always pick the proper practice for the job at hand.

Trolling is much like using a paint roller because it allows you to cover a very large amount of area. Neither allows for a high level of detail for any one particular area. The strength of trolling lies in the user's ability to cover a lot of water quickly and easily. On the other hand, casting is like using a paintbrush, because it does not allow you to cover a lot of area, but you can achieve an extremely high level of detail within a small area. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of these two different techniques you should be able to gain a much better understanding of when each one can be employed most successfully.

To determine which technique is best for the current situation, you must consider the amount of structure, your knowledge of current fishing conditions, how much water you need to cover, and, finally, which technique you prefer. By analyzing these factors in conjunction with the strength and weaknesses of both casting and trolling, you can determine

Make the right call for the situation and instantly be more productive on the water

which technique has the best chance of producing a monster musky.

Structure

The first consideration is if you will be targeting structure and, if so, what kind. If you will be working open water areas that are mostly void of any structure, you need to cover water. Trolling should be your pick because it will allow you to put your lures in front of as many fish as possible.

Now fish location comes into play. You must effectively use your electronics to pinpoint both muskies and baitfish in open water areas. Watch for them on your fishfinder/GPS' screen and use waypoints to mark their locations. By doing this, as well as by marking the areas where you hook fish, you should be able to narrow the open water basin down into the smaller areas where baitfish and muskies are holding. One tool that can really help is side imaging, which allows you to mark both baitfish and muskies off either side of your boat. You'll not only scan a broader area for muskies and baitfish, but any that



Using the conditions to wisely choose whether to troll or cast can lead to big fish photos like this one with author Spencer Berman.

are spooked by the boat will still be scanned.

In contrast, if you are dealing with an area where there is a large amount of very complicated or very shallow structure, then you are going to need to switch gears and focus on picking apart the best-looking spots on the structure by casting. A few common examples of these areas are rock reefs, weedbeds, and any type of point. While you cast, pay specific attention to features such as high spots, points, inside turns, boulders and pockets. Each of these areas will often hold numerous fish and to trigger them it is important to give them a look at a couple different lures and colors. This further cements the area as a casting situation.

Information

The next major factor is how much you know about the fishing; specifically, do you know where the muskies are active. For example, if you have been out fishing recently and really feel like you have the muskies dialed into an area, then you should lean more toward casting that hot area because you do not need to cover much water to find fish. The same can be said if you have received a hot tip from someone who has once again narrowed the muskies down to a specific area of the lake. This information simply cuts down the amount of water you need to cover to contact fish. This "shrinking" of the lake allows you to take a much more methodical approach to your technique, which obviously means casting and picking spots apart slowly. For these reasons I always encourage musky fishermen to try to find out as much information

as possible before they fish so they have a jump start to locating fish.

On the other hand, if you are coming into a fishing scenario relatively blind you need to focus on covering water. By concentrating your energy on trolling you will be able to quickly locate fish and begin to refine the pattern for the day. When I have little information, as a general rule I like to start trolling around any key areas on the map that I hope will be attracting baitfish. These key areas are normally going to be river channels, points, outside weed edges, and outside rock bars. Trolling enables you to determine where the baitfish are located and, hopefully, find muskies quickly.

Another game plan that I commonly employ is to troll open water or pieces of structure and then come back and cast them. By starting out trolling and using this technique to locate spots where active fish seem to be concentrated, you can then go back through and pick the areas apart casting. This allows you to use the water-covering ability of trolling to find muskies and then utilize the precision of casting to pick a small area apart. Now you can utilize the strength of each technique to its utmost potential, which can result in both great numbers of muskies as well as some monsters.

Preference

The last factor to consider is which technique you prefer. Many of us identify ourselves as either a troller or a caster. For that reason, when you find yourself in a situation that does

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not give a clear choice based on the factors to consider, you have to go with the technique with which you are most comfortable.

There are many reasons for this, but the simplest is that you are probably better at it. If you identify yourself as a caster, then you probably spend the majority of your time casting which will inevitably make you better at that

technique. By choosing the technique that you prefer in these toss-up scenarios, you will play to your strengths and thus likely see better results.

You will also have more confidence in your preferred method. As we all know, confidence normally directly represents how much effort you will put into your fishing. By having confidence in your technique you are going to be more fo-

cused on important factors, such as how you work your lure, how long of a break you take between casts, how focused you are at spotting baitfish on your electronics, how often you change baits or check for weeds while trolling, etc.

When you must use the technique with which you are less comfortable, be sure to go into it with the correct attitude. Focus on wanting to learn about that technique and, more importantly, focus on using that technique to its utmost potential.

How do great musky fishermen always seem to produce fish? They do not try to feed the fish the technique and lures that they like to use, but rather they analyze the conditions to determine which lures and techniques the fish will currently want. By making the right call whether you should be trolling or casting, you will become a better and more well-rounded fisherman.

Contributing writer Spencer Berman is a USCG licensed captain, fishing Lake St. Clair. For more about Spencer, visit www.spencersanglingadv.com



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