

Leadcore Trolling - In Sunken Wood  
By  
Brian Stangel – ABQ Sportfishing

After dedicating some of my time the last few years fishing some of the local bass circuits it was brought to my attention that trolling is lazy fishing or not really fishing at all. Quite the contrary, I realized these opinions came out of bliss, or at least that is what I will call it for now so as not to offend any of my audience.

One of our most productive techniques was introduced to me just prior to the 2002 PWT Championships held out of Bismarck, ND. The Missouri River was low, and the quality fish were at the top of Oahe, near the border. Fortunately I was fishing with a seasoned pro and he was willing to show me the way he fished for river walleyes under these conditions. Coming back to New Mexico, I made some modifications to the presentation of my own and spent a lot of time experimenting with different lures. The ones I discuss below will prevent you from donating too many of those “steep” lipped cranks.

After the spawn and the fish have retreated to somewhat deeper water, the big fish much deeper, and they are somewhat harder to locate than they were just a month ago. There are going to be numbers of fish that are hanging in the 10-20 foot range and we have found that they are often holding in cover...or what we call the “trees”. There is a significant amount of sunken mesquite and other wood in most New Mexico reservoirs...for that matter most reservoirs. We target areas that are thick with this brush for our trolling pattern. Yes, you heard me; we are targeting areas that are thick with wood to troll this spring and early summer presentation.

First, it is essential to have a trolling combo that is soft enough for pulling lead yet sensitive enough for you to “read” the baits through the rod tips to see if they get fouled. Running four lines is not recommended at first, but we have discovered an effective way of running four lines without the use of planer boards. This technique is almost impossible with the use of planer boards; you will constantly be resetting boards. We run 2 different rod lengths off flat rod holders directly off the boat, two per side. The outside or forward rods are 12 foot in length and will handle either an Abu Garcia 6500 or Shimano Tekota 500 linecounter reel. The 12-foot rods are generally used for spider rigging crappie, but are very useful for this technique as most rods of this length are too heavy. The inside or back rods are 6’ – 6’6” in length and provide a nice spread between the rod tips so sharp turns will not tangle all four lines. We run Tekota 600s on the inside rods as they will accommodate a full 10 colors of 27# leadcore line. The Tekota 500s and Abu Garcia 6500s will accommodate 7-8 colors. The leadcore also aids in keeping lines straight, it tracks the boat better than mono.

Some people will tell you that 18# leadcore is enough for fishing walleyes; it may be in open water, but not fishing cover. You will discover very quickly with 18# leadcore that you break your mainline more often than you would with 27#. Once you have your reels spooled and your rods ready to go you need to attach a leader to the leadcore. There are a variety of different methods to do this, but since we are running short leaders (2-3 foot),

we have sensitive limber rods for reading our baits and fighting fish with no stretch line, and we want to impart the most action to our baits, we utilize braided line leaders that we attach with a uni-to-uni knot. The test of the leader line should be less than your main line; we utilize leader line in the 14-20 pound test range and prefer Power Pro for this application. Be sure to remove some of the lead from the main line and have an adequate barrel on each side of your not so the braid does not cut through your leadcore line. After attaching a 2-3 foot leader on your main line, tie on a Berkley crosslock snap size 1, this will make changing baits easier and also prevent you from having to retie your leader after several lure changes.

Ready...not yet...lure selection at this point is critical. You want to select lures that have almost zero degree in the bill or a "shallow runner" both of which will have a tight wobble. This presentation is done at a fairly high speed and wide wobbling lures will tend to run in or out and also snag much easier. Our choices for lure selection are Reef Runner 200 Ripshads, Reef Runner Little Rippers, Reef Runner Scooters, Wally Divers (CD4) or Rapala JSR-4 and 5s. The Reef Runners come in an endless selection of colors and also have custom colors available from select dealers; in general we tend toward the crawdad or fluorescents depending on water clarity and time of year.

Now we are ready, you have your rods (2 or 4), leadcore spooled, leader and crosslock snap, and lures selected. At this point, we would recommend starting out with one or two rods so you can get used to what you are in for. We target 10-20 feet of water and our starting speed will be 2.5 on the GPS. We let out 3 colors of lead (or roughly 100 feet on the counter) and set the rods. Holding to various contours, one at a time, we try to make passes directly over the trees. Your lures will bang around in the brush and occasionally become snagged; this is where a second person comes in handy. Before grabbing the rod and trying to "yank it free" try flipping the rod tip to send a wavelength through the line potentially flicking the lures lip from the branch that it is most likely caught on. We will downsize our hooks if the lures come with something too large. Hooks in the 6, 8 or even size 10 will still hook a fish, but not a tree branch...as easily. Triple Grip or similar style hooks tend to be less "snaggy"...they also help keep the hook pinned in the mouth of the fish as they almost always surface immediately with mouth open thrashing about. You now have 100 feet of no stretch line to fight this fish to the boat that is surfing across the water at the back of the boat. The good news is that the fish has a low likelihood of getting caught in a tree while bringing them in...the bad news is that they have a higher likelihood of throwing the hook. Keep even steady pressure on the fish and slow the boat. We utilize a Trollmaster which has an idle button, once pushed the boat will slow, but this will also drop your other lines in the water column, most likely into thicker cover increasing your chances of snagging your other lines. If you have a bigger fish our best suggestion is to slow the boat and head to deeper water...if you can. We have a Minn Kota Terrova with CoPilot that allows us to steer the boat from the back keeping both people (if you are fishing with two) monitoring the lines while the boat holds its path. With almost no effort (pushing a button on the Trollmaster and steering the CoPilot from our wrist) we are easily heading out into open water and still monitoring all our lines. These two items are almost essential for trouble free trolling in the trees; without them you will almost always be one person short on the boat.

Experiment with your speed, if you find yourself unusually shallow off your intended contour, raise your speed, it is not uncommon to catch fish this way up to 5 mph or faster, the faster you go the higher you will raise your lures...leadcore line is very speed dependent on how it sinks. We have two ways of instantly raising our speed, one that is easy from wherever we are in the boat and the other that is not as easy. First, the new Terrova CoPilot has a full throttle option on the wrist transmitter. Hit the button once and you are full throttle on the trolling motor, the 80# version pulls our Ranger 620 about 3.5 mph on the GPS without the kicker, hit the button again and you are back to your original speed. The other option from the console is to push and hold the MFT button on the Trollmaster, not as easy as the Terrova option, but it will also do the trick. We find that running the Terrova on 3 is good for steering the boat while using the Mercury 9.9 Pro Kicker is best for propulsion.

That is it, EASY, no problem...LOL...I'm guessing even the best from the BASS crowd would have trouble mastering this technique, but then again, I can't flip under a dock to save my life.