



BASS ANGLER'S Notebook



TIPS, TRICKS AND ADVICE...

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AUTUMN CRANKING BY CHRISTIE THOMAS

Autumn is the time to start cranking for bass; this is the time of the year when bass start migrating out of their deeper summer haunts to start feeding heavily in the shallower water in preparation for the coming winter. As bass move shallower and 'rest' along the first shallow breaks in open water they also become more accessible to bass fishermen armed with crankbaits.

Staging – When those bass first move up from their summer habitat they will hang around ledges in the 12- to 15-foot range before venturing shallower as the weather cools. Once bass have moved into the ultra shallows you can easily catch them using shallow-diving cranks around vegetation and cover. Autumn is the one time of the year you can comfortably crank the shallows without having to worry about bass in deeper water.

Wood vs. Plastic

There is nothing that beats the consistency and out-of-the-box performance of plastic moulded crankbaits; they can be used straight off the shelf and seldom need tuning. Plastic crankbaits have definitely proven their mettle in tournaments across the world and deserve a very prominent place in any bass angler's tackle box. However, there is a time when wood crankbaits surpass plastic and when the season is right (autumn), fishing ultra shallow cover with wood instead of plastic will really pay off. Wood is more buoyant than plastic and allows the crank to be fished efficiently in places you would not normally fish with a plastic crankbait. Balsa also has a wider wobble than plastic which is preferable in the warmer water of late summer and early autumn. Balsa crankbaits, in general, are very effective when fishing in anything less than 5-foot; any deeper than that you would need to turn to plastic.

Balsa wood is the material used most often to craft wooden crankbaits. Even though most wood crankbaits



In the autumn when bass have moved up to feed, shallow-running square-lipped crankbaits - such as this Bomber Balsa Model B and XCalibur XW6 Wake Bait - become the lure of choice amongst many professional bass anglers. See Autumn Cranking. Photo: Luren



are machine crafted the nature of wood will ensure that no two crankbaits run the same. According to the top crankbait pros in the United States the best wood crankbait is the one which is on the verge of not running straight. Every now and then this crankbait will flare off to the side as though it just hit some object; this erratic movement will trigger strikes even when the bait runs free. When buying balsa cranks test them in a pool before hitting the water; look for the one that will occasionally dart to the side and keep these for tournaments. Use the others for social fishing outings or practice.

Prime Autumn Cranking Structure

Riprap is a prime area to crank for bass in the autumn. The rocks have algae on them and this attracts baitfish; baitfish attract bass. Riprap close to the dam wall and bridge structure is mostly in close proximity to the main channel; if there is water flowing into the dam these areas will be the most likely to have a bit of current. Your primary strike zone could be anything between 1- and 5-foot of water so make parallel casts along the rip rap to make sure your bait bounces along the rocks. Pay special attention to structure breaks and any areas where there is a change in the wall such as corners, larger rock or laydowns.

The beginning of **creek channels**, right in the back of the bays where the banks are shallow and drop into the channel, are great places to crank for bass. The most productive depth changes to look for would be anything from 2- to 4-foot which drops down into 8- or 12-foot. Look for cover such as brush, laydowns and aquatic vegetation right on the edge of the channel, just before it drops down to the deeper water. Fish it with a shallow running, square-billed crankbait which should run right through the cover. Position your boat in the deeper water and fan-cast the shallow flats making sure your crank hits the cover.

Steep, rocky banks which offer quick access from deep water to shallow, is another good place to crank in the autumn. Position your boat so that you can cast parallel to the bank; making sure you cast as close to the bank as possible so that your bait stays in the strike-zone longer. Most strikes should occur as your crankbait passes over the first breakline where the water depth drops from about 3-foot to the 12-foot region.

When you find **scattered clumps of vegetation** in shallow water during autumn it is a good time to take out your crankbait. Try to keep your boat positioned in the open channel and cast your crankbait so that it will come across the points and along the edges of the vegetation.

If you can find some good **stump fields** in shallower water, toward the back of bays and along the edges of the creek channel where it becomes really shallow, you should fan-cast around the cover to determine how the bass are relating to the cover.

One of the most successful places to fish a crankbait is along a **windblown bank or point**. As the wind continuously blows in a certain direction plankton is driven along with the current and eventually ends up concentrated along the windy bank. Baitfish feed on plankton and will follow the drift right up into the shallows, with bass close on their heels. Wind always tends to make bass feed more actively.

As summer gives way to winter and the mercury starts dropping you need to take the time to play around with a couple of shallow running crankbaits. If you have never fished with balsa before do yourself a favour; go to your tackle store and buy a couple of wood baits. Get into your boat and go out into the shallowest, cover-infested water you can find and have the time of your life. Go catch some autumn bass.....

Ask a PRO...

In 'Ask a PRO' three different anglers will each month answer a selection of relevant bass fishing questions sent in from you, our readers. If there is anything you would like to ask us please send your questions to my email address at: twcchristie@aol.com

The following three **Questions** were put to each **Pro**.....
I am a young bass angler and sometimes I lose confidence when I am fishing and think I will never be any good. Are there any mental steps I can take to boost my confidence?
Is it true that by using bigger baits you increase your chances of catching big bass?
Can you explain the difference between a Florida-strain and a Northern-strain largemouth bass?

A PRO'S TIP... BY PIET HATTINGH

Piet Hattingh – 2007 National Champion (South African Bass Angling Association) is a North West Province resident but travels the country extensively in his quest of the 'green' fish. He has agreed to share some of his experience and tips regarding the venues he fishes and/or the techniques he finds the most successful.

When fishing plastics at Hartbeespoort Dam do not set the hook at the first indication of a bite; give the fish a couple of seconds to pick up and swim off with the bait



**THIS MONTH'S
PANEL OF
EXPERTS:**

Andre Ackerman
Western Province



DEAN DE WET
Western Province



KELVIN LLOYDS-ELLIS
Natal



I am a young bass angler and sometimes I lose confidence when I am fishing and think I will never be any good. Are there any mental steps I can take to boost my confidence?

Confidence:
When fishing bass tournaments mental strength and confidence are elements you should arrive with at the venue. How do you do this? By doing proper planning; **Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance!** In this planning there should be gathering of information about the venue you are about to fish such as current dam level, type of structure you will be fishing, water temperature, lures with proven local success and the bonus, a map with areas marked which regularly produce good results. With all this information and your experience you can then put together a game plan to execute on tournament day. This game plan, with proper tackle preparation, should give you the mental strength and confidence to become a better fisherman because you are not going blind into this venue when it comes to information.

Confidence:
My mental preparation starts by reading up on the venue I am going to fish, then I will spend time preparing tackle for the venue and most importantly I will fish a venue where I know I can catch many fish. By fishing a venue that allows you to catch lots of fish you will feel confident in your abilities and your tackle. Remember if fishing is tough, it is generally tough for everyone.

Confidence:
Believe in yourself and the bass you catch will boost your confidence. Always ask questions. We are all forever learning new techniques and baits for catching bass and never be closed minded. Even us "older" bass anglers lose confidence so it is important to believe in what you are doing and persevere.

Is it true that by using bigger baits you increase your chances of catching big bass?

Big Bass:
No, small baits as well as big baits will catch big bass. The advantage of fishing big baits is that they can eliminate smaller fish from biting them.

Big Bass:
Bigger baits definitely catch bigger fish, but you will also reduce the amount of bites you get. If you are looking for a bigger bite, commit an hour or two to throwing the bigger baits; do not put them down after 10 minutes just because you feel they are not working.

Big Bass:
As a rule of thumb bigger baits do catch bigger bass, but remember big bass have got that way from being smart. I personally feel though that more emphasis should be placed on the area you are fishing rather than the size bait you are using. Try to concentrate on the areas where the big fish tend to hang out at that particular time of year in those particular weather conditions and use bigger baits there.

Can you explain the difference between a Florida-strain and a Northern-strain largemouth bass?

Largemouth/Smallmouth:
Florida-strain bass are bigger in size with a rounder shaped body. The head is smaller with much bigger eyes and the colour pattern on its body is diamond shaped. The bodies of the Northern-strain bass are smaller and longer with a larger head.

Largemouth/Smallmouth:
I am not too familiar with the different strains so I will leave that question to the other pros.

Largemouth/Smallmouth:
The only real difference between a Florida-strain and a Northern strain largemouth is the number of scales on the lateral lines. The Florida has 69 to 73 scales on it and the Northern has 59 to 65 scales on its lateral line.



before setting the hook. Harties bass have always been slow to swallow the bait and I experienced this phenomenon again last weekend when I fished a cast-4-cash on the dam. I believe the fish are satiated and not really in the mood to actively feed. They may bump the bait but not swallow it immediately so you need to give them time to decide to eat. It is common to find this pattern in dams that have an abundance of baitfish.

HEALTH MATTERS BY CHRISTIE THOMAS

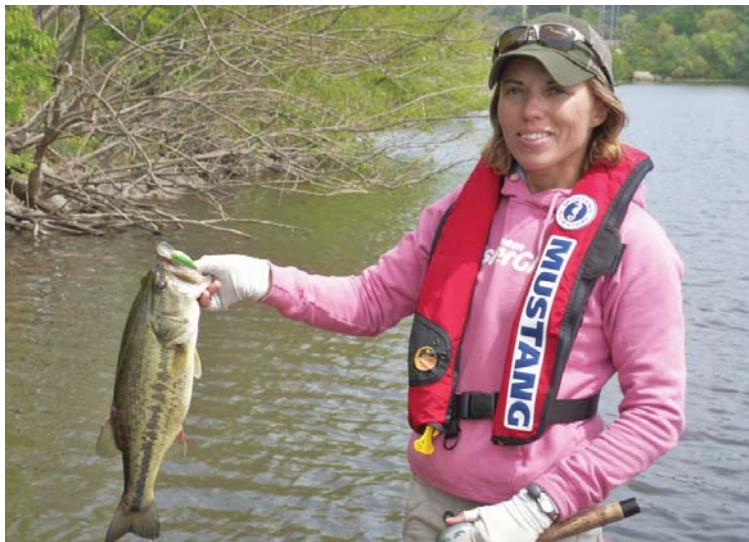
SAVE YOUR LIFE – Wear A Lifejacket!

Eighty Five percent (85%) of people who drown whilst boating or fishing die because they were not wearing a life jacket, also known as a Personal Flotation Device (PFD). This is a very alarming statistic and one needs to question why people who regularly spend time on the water can be so negligent with their lives.

Problem - When asked why they were not wearing a life-jacket whilst in a boat on the water the majority of the people replied that they found it extremely uncomfortable to wear a bulky jacket for long periods of time, especially during the heat of the summer.

Problem - The second most common reply to the question was that the majority of the people felt comfortable with their ability to swim. This is a very dangerous assumption that has led to more than its fair share of death by drown-

ing. Accidents happen in a split second and you have no control over the situation whatsoever; you could fall overboard, bump your head and be rendered unconscious during the process – how will you swim now? You have fallen overboard, the wind is howling and your boat is drifting further and further away. You are several kilometres away from the shoreline; tired and unfit your exhausted muscles start to spasm and cramp and you are unable to keep your head above water – swim? I don't think so.....



Don't gamble with your life – wear a life jacket when out on the water. This suspender-style of PFD (Personal Flotation Device) can comfortably be worn the entire day and does not interfere at all with casting and manoeuvrability on the water. See Health Matters. Photo: C Thomas



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Solution – Perhaps many people are not aware of the fact that there is a new class of inflatable PFD available on the market which is lightweight and comfortable. This is a suspender-type jacket which is automatically activated as one falls in the water or can be manually activated with a rip-cord. Professional bass anglers particularly like this style of PFD as it can comfortably be worn for the entire day and the lightweight design does not interfere at all with casting and manoeuvrability on the water (see Elite bass fishing tournaments on ESPN2, Saturday mornings).

BASS FISHING WORKSHOPS

During my travels across the country I have been asked on more than one occasion whether I would give bass fishing lessons to individuals. After all the enquiries I have decided it may be a good idea to offer a couple of bass fishing workshops around the country. I will host an intensive one- or two-day workshop designed at improving your bass-catching knowledge no matter what your skill level may be. A variety of different topics will be covered; from popular bass fishing techniques, "how-to" basics on various lures and baits, understanding your tackle set-up (how to rig the right rod with the right reel and what line to use) and understanding seasonal patterns. With knowledge comes skill, with skill comes ability and with ability comes strength. Add all of these together and you find a well-rounded consistent angler - let me help you become a better bass fisherman.

Should you and your friends, your local fishing club or tackle store owner like to make arrangements for a workshop to take place in your area please contact me via email: twchristie@aol.com

HANDY HINTS

Stop the Slip – Braided line has really revolutionised heavy cover bass fishing tactics and has definitely made the task of hauling in big trophy bass a lot easier. However, there is one problem with braided line...it slips on the reel spool under pressure. There are two ways to overcome this problem; 1). Put a small length of monofilament backing on the reel first and join the braid to the mono with a secure knot. 2). Wrap a strip of double-sided carpet tape around the centre of the spool before tying the braid around the spool. Both methods will stop the braid from slipping on the spool.

Clean Carpets – Boat carpets are always a pain to clean and sometimes, no matter how hard you try, no amount of vacuuming will pick up all the ground-in dirt, sand and small pebbles from the carpet. Try using strips of duct tape - about 30cm long - stamp it firmly down on sections of the carpet with the worst mess and lift. The tape should pick up a lot of the debris the vacuum cleaner leaves behind.

Buzzing Buzzbait – To make your buzzbait sound more alluring drill two holes through each blade. The holes will allow water to pass through the blades during the retrieve, gurgling and creating a trail of bubbles in its wake, a commotion no self-respecting bass could resist.



How to make your buzzbait sound more alluring.....see Handy Hints. Photo: C Thomas

