

WALLEYES...

– Way Past Ordinary

By: Gord Pyzer



Secret lures, never-fail presentations, magical tactics – when it comes to walleye fishing I’ve heard and seen it all. Trouble is, when I finally arrive at the scene of the supposed awakening, to get a first hand look at the revolutionary new bait or hot, watertight technique... well, you know the rest of the story.

“You should have been here last week.” Shoulda, woulda, coulda – it is always the same recurring theme. That is why I felt like Phil Connors, the weatherman played by Bill Murray in the movie *Groundhog Day*, stepping into Jeff Matity’s boat. You know the movie tag line: “He is having the time of his life... over and over again.” The only thing missing was Andie MacDowell.

Still, if you had asked me, “If you could be anywhere in the world, where would you like to be?”, just like forlorn Phil, I would have deadpanned, “Prob’ly right here”. That is because Jeff is not only a good friend, but one of the hottest walleye sticks in Canada. So when he told me he was onto a “finger lickin’ good walleye pattern”, I knew I had to check it out. Still, my alter ego, Phil, the weatherman was nagging me.

Finger Lickin’ Good Fergie

Phil, was especially running unbridled inside my head when Jeff opened his tackle box, picked out the lure he had been wetting his pants about – as though he was selecting a diamond bracelet for his wife – and handed it to me to examine. I coughed and choked back the words, “Are you kidding me?”

What graced his palm was something called a ReelBait Fergie spoon, a lure that resembled nothing I had ever used before to catch walleyes. Especially, big, fat,

super-smart, highly conditioned tough, trophy size fish.

I mean, it is a heavy, compact, painted, slab of solid lead with treble hooks at each end and a four-inch wire leader at the nose, through which a bright glass bead is sandwiched between two free sliding brass “clackers”.

Hello... is this February 2nd and am I stuck in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania? You can’t catch walleyes on this thing. Well, ah, yes we did. Over and over and over again. In fact, Jeff and I walloped so many husky walleyes hopping, popping and jigging the uniquely designed lead spoons, including a gorgeous 13-pound goliath Jeff’s brother Jason landed when he joined us one afternoon, that I am now convinced this is one of the best big walleye techniques no one is using outside of a handful of skilled Saskatchewan anglers.

And lest you’re wondering, Matity confessed that he, too, had the same initial reaction I had the first time he saw Fergie spoons dangling from the rods of his two American guests. One hundred and thirty seven walleyes later, however, he had an epiphany.

“The Fergie program’s a trophy tactic,” Matity says, “designed to push way past the traditional namby-pamby presentations most anglers associate with walleye fishing. It requires you to get out of your comfort zone and into a new world – the one where top-end trophy walleyes are found.”

Why Is It So Effective?

Indeed, once you get past your initial impressions and start carefully studying the lure style it begins to make sense. Being a modest 3-inch mouthful, yet weighing a hefty one-ounce in weight, spoons like the Fergie let you precisely pick apart deep

water structures and cover, even while you are drifting in strong wind. You always know where your bait is and what it is doing.

At the same time, you can position your boat in deep water, cast the lure up into the shallows and efficiently pick apart the immense area in between. Come to think of it, there are few other lure styles that offer you this kind of versatility.

How and where the weight is distributed is another key element. Because the slab spoon is tail-heavy, when you pop it off the bottom and let it fall on semi-slack line, it scoots out to the side, tail first. Not only does this let you reach out and touch someone, the erratic planing action excites the fish. Walleyes crush it.

Then, there is that blasted wire leader with the brass-and-glass clacker sending out a steady click-clack-click sound every time

(Continued on page 4.)





A Line From "Big" Jim

Wow... I am doing something I don't do as well as I used to... sitting in a hotel room at a show! I can't believe we are back to this time of year once more, but you know I really do love it when it all comes down to it. I have been very blessed in this industry from every direction possible and I never forget the great things it has done for me and I never will.

One thing we have done at Just Fishing this year is get our website up and running. Check us out at - www.justfishing.ca. Here you can read current and past issues of Just Fishing online in our Flip Book format or download the complete issue for future reference. You can follow me on the Where's "Big" Jim page or our Facebook link. You can also link to our many advertisers and more.

I have tried to spend as much time as possible on social media sites that have large sport fishing followings and my fat fingers are working the keyboard a little faster and more often. If you send me a message to Facebook page I will respond to you personally... even if it takes several days because I might just be out fishing. Another site that I have become active on is www.nationalprostaff.com and I would strongly recommend that you check it out when you get a chance... and be sure to follow me if you would like.

As for this issue, we have some awesome stuff once more with industry leaders such as Al Lindner, Gord Pyzer, Bassmaster Elite angler Bernie Schultz and who's who of others that makes me happy to have their names on our pages. Knowledge is the key to fishing success and these guys have it from top to bottom, inside out and it is all here for you. Please fish safe this summer and take a kid fishing for me! "Big" Jim

Unsolicited articles are accepted and will be considered for publication provided they are original and have not appeared in other publications.

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IN THIS ISSUE SPECIAL FEATURES

Walleyes... Way Past Ordinary	2
Made In Japan—part 1	14
The Magic Walleye Lure!	20
What's My Line?	24
Bass, Grass & Flash	28
What's Hot/New—part 2	38
The Deadliest Rig	48
The Many Moods of Shallow Pike	52
Persistence for More Spring Crappie	54
Spring Pike Tactics	56
Spring Perch Fishing	58

DEPARTMENTS

A Line From "Big" Jim	4
Tubman's Tips & Techniques	29
In the News	34
Classified & Community Events	62

(WALLEYES... Way Past Ordinary continued from page 2)

you move the lure. At first you're inclined to think it is a bit hokey, that it would tempt no self-respecting walleye, but you'd be wrong. At least 60-percent of the fish Matity and I caught were hooked on the top treble positioned beside the clacker. Clear evidence the fish are tuned into that frequency.

Indeed, I found it so intriguing; I was reminded of the time many years ago, when walleye legend Mike McLelland was developing the first "dive curves" for crankbaits. To determine the maximum depth that each lure dove, Mike positioned a diver on the bottom of the lake beside a giant submerged vertically standing ruler.

Now remember, catching walleyes was not the aim of the experiment. It was designed to establish the running depth of different lures with various amounts of line trailing behind the boat. But, as you might expect, Mike occasionally hooked an "accidental" walleye. For fun, he kept track of the lures that caught the fish.

To his astonishment, when he analyzed the data, Mike discovered that he had hooked almost every single "accidental walleye" on a lure that had a rattle inside it. That so few anglers know walleyes are attracted by certain sounds and frequencies, and fewer still use it to their advantage, astounds me.

"The rattle on the Fergie spoon is shrill," says Matity, who also has a degree in fisheries management. "I've recorded the lure underwater and the auditory "click-clack" is the loudest I've ever documented. I think the reason the lure is so effective is that it represents the foods big

(Continued on page 6.)

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(WALLEYES... Way Past Ordinary continued from page 4.)
 walleyes eat: namely juvenile ciscoes, whitefish, perch, suckers and shiners. The planing action, noise and flash of colour somehow short circuits their brains and causes them to attack. I don't know whether it's annoyance, conditioning, a reflex response or a combination of these factors, but I can mark a big walleye on my sonar unit, drop down a Fergie spoon on its head and catch it." He can do it too. I watched him several times.

Extreme Run-And-Gun

As a matter of fact, the highly unique run-and-gun method that Matity employs is frighteningly similar to the way U.S. Air Force technicians based in California control drone bombers in Afghanistan half way around the world. And it is just as lethal.

With his eyes glued to his sonar unit and his motor purring along at a brisk six to eight miles an hour, Matity selects a specific band of water, for example, the 25- to 35-foot deep range between two points, and zigzags along looking for balls of baitfish. When he finds one, he slows down and looks for single, big fish targets. When he spots one, he pops the engine into neutral, then into reverse, and backs up over the fish. By kicking the motor into and out of gear, he remains on top of the walleye. Then he drops down a Fergie spoon, pops it off the bottom, lets it freefall back down and slams the hooks into another giant fish.

"It is shocking," Matity says, as I watch him work his magic, "how a monster walleye is possessed to slam a hard bait like the Fergie,

(Continued on page 8.)



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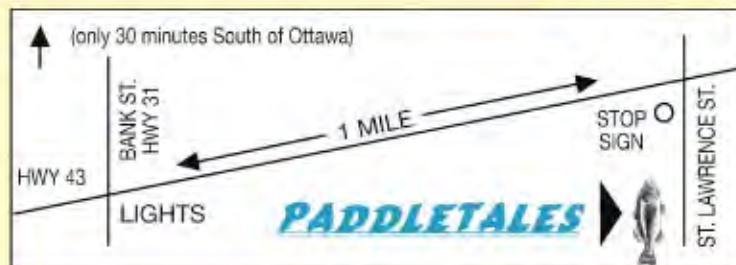
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especially after you chug a boat over its head, stop, rumble back and then noisily hover in one place. Why would a trophy walleye with its razor-sharp instincts, crush an all-metal lure that zips down past it, then rockets skyward, making a racket that most seasoned walleye anglers would consider blasphemy?"

It is a good question, but as a steady parade of walleyes came wallowing over the gunnels, I have to confess, I, too, began caring less about the "why" and more about the "here" and "now". If this is Groundhog Day, don't let it end.

Rigged and Ready For Action

Typically, with breakthrough fishing techniques, it is usually essential to use very specific rods, reels and lines to ensure optimal success. That is not necessarily the case, however, with Matity's slab-spoon innovation.

For certain, he has his personal preferences, starting with a 6-foot 6-inch, medium-heavy action baitcasting rod with a trigger stick and extra long handle that he tucks up under his arm to reduce fatigue. The rod also features

a spiral guide arrangement so there is less chance he will inadvertently wrap his line around the tip and snap it off.



His baitcasting reels, on the other hand, always feature flipping switches, so he can fish with one hand. The other hand is typically wrapped around the tiller of the kicker motor, as he backs the boat into the wind and the three and four-foot waves that frequently crash over the transom.

Twenty to 30-pound test, brightly coloured, PowerPro braid is Matity's line of choice. He

(Continued on page 10.)

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 believes the stretch-free characteristics of braid provides vastly increased sensitivity and allows for much more positive hook sets. The high viz colour, meanwhile, lets him monitor his guests, keeping their lines away from the propeller, as well as tracking the action of the humongous walleyes they routinely bring alongside the boat.

By the way, while Matity is compelled out of necessity to fish one-handed, he says you'll catch many more walleyes if you keep both hands on the rod and reel. That way, when you feel the lure hit bottom you can either retrieve it, or vertically jig it, in short deliberate hops.

Each short rip should scoot the bait up off the bottom about two feet. Eventually, you'll discover a cadence the fish like. The only disadvantage with this method, however, is that many folks have yet to master casting with baitcasting outfits, so they're limited to vertical jigging Fergie spoons and miss out casting to the shallow water targets routinely holding fish.

If you find yourself in this group, don't despair. Matity says a 6-foot six-inch medium or medium-heavy action spinning rod, spooled with 10-pound monofilament will work just as well. Indeed, Matity's brother Jason prefers this arrangement and matches him hawg walleye for hawg walleye.

"Jason uses a spinning outfit exclusively," explains Matity. "When he vertically jigs a Fergie spoon, he typically does it with one hand on the rod and lifts it higher and pops it off the bottom harder than I do. Even though the lighter action rod absorbs much of the snap, the spoon still pops up about three feet. And it is propelled in a different way. The lure builds up speed throughout the jigging stroke, as the spinning rod loads and unloads under the weight of the lure. It can be devastatingly effective."

Devastatingly effective indeed. Once you try this amazingly unique trophy walleye technique, you'll be wishing every day on the water was Groundhog Day. Indeed, you might even consider changing your name to Phil.

(Continued on page 12.)

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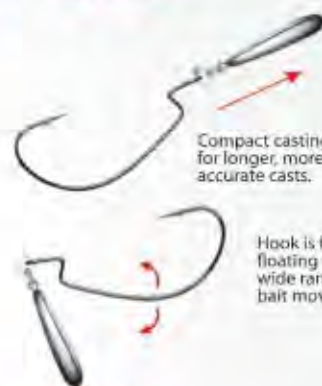


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(Sidebar)

Get Into A Rhythm

The biggest mistake an angler can make is fishing a Fergie-type spoon like a standard walleye jig baited with live bait. You must be aggressive. Cast the bait out, or drop it over the side of the boat, and let it fall to the bottom. Pause. Then rip it up aggressively before letting it fall back to the bottom under controlled slack. Then pause again. While the technique is assertive and demanding, it is also important to develop the finesse to follow the lure back to the bottom with a semi-taut line. This is important, as you'll feel many walleyes hit the spoon as it is plummeting. Also, when you develop the proper cadence, you'll prevent your line from becoming slack, wrapping around the rod tip and costing you a trophy fish or worse – the snapped off tip of your favourite rod. 

About the Author – Gord Pyzer: 2009 Inductee, Canadian, Angler Hall of Fame, Fishing Editor, Outdoor Canada Magazine, Field Editor, In-Fisherman Magazine and Television, Co-Host, In-Fisherman Ice Fishing Guide Television, Co-Host, The Real Fishing Radio Show, Host, Fish Talk With "The Doc", Outdoor Journal Radio, President, Canadian Angling Adventures Ltd.




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