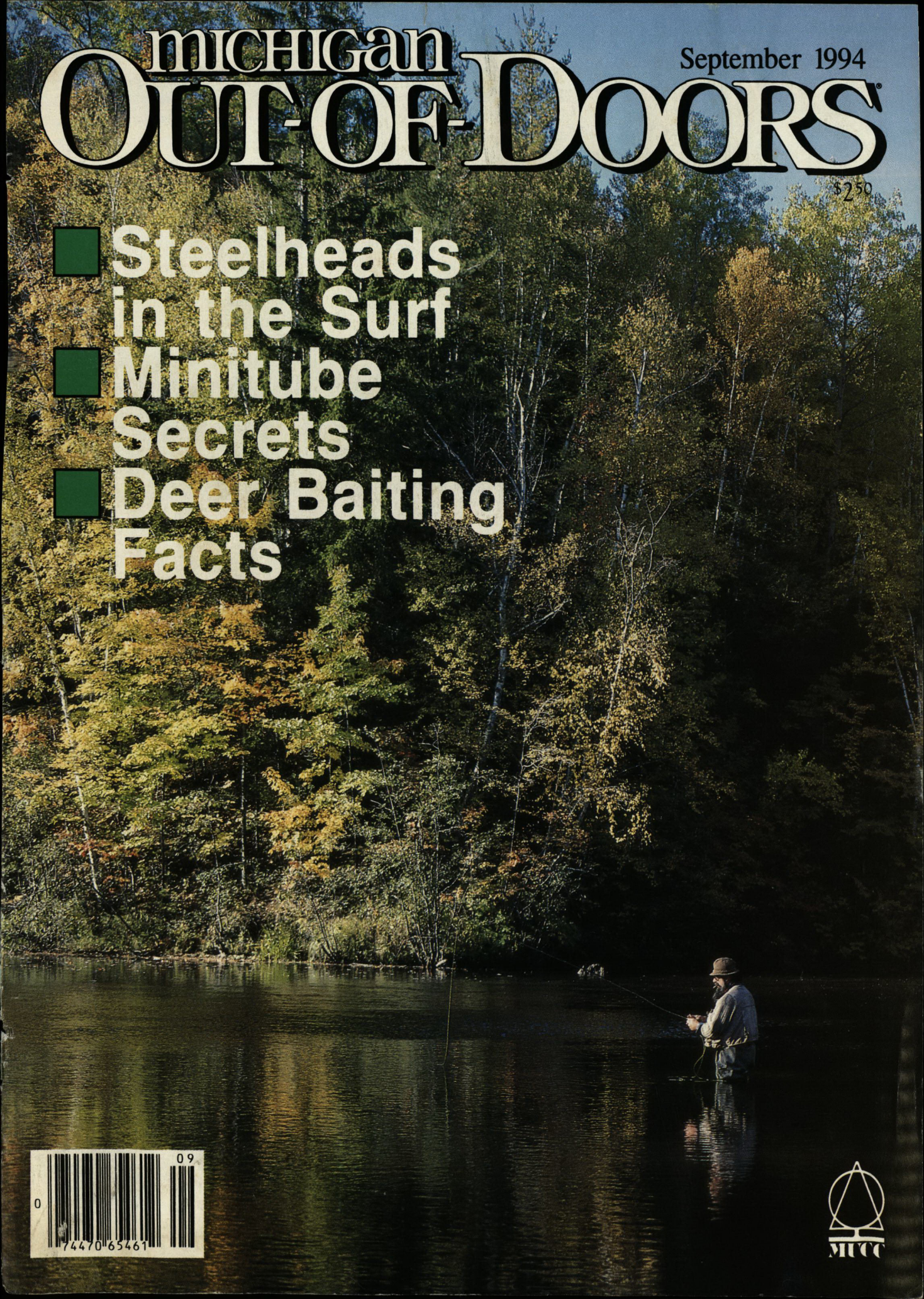


# michigan OUT-OF-DOORS

September 1994

\$2.50

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Facts



There have been numerous outdoor celebrities that Michiganians have had the honor of knowing, either personally or through their television pro-

grams or articles. The likes of Mort Neff and Ben East who spent the better part of their 90-plus years roaming Michigan in search of outdoor adventures are two well-known examples. Both died in recent years, leaving behind a legacy based on respect and concern for our natural resources.

Another I feel fits into this category, who like both Neff and East was over 90 years old when he died, was Homer LeBlanc, often called Mr. Muskie.

LeBlanc lived in St. Clair Shores, only a short canal trip to his beloved Lake St. Clair, where he fished for muskies for the better part of his life. LeBlanc, who was inducted into the Freshwater Hall of Fame and was a legend in the fishing fraternity, was always ready to teach others the successful methods he developed for catching muskies. I would like to share some of his techniques in this account.

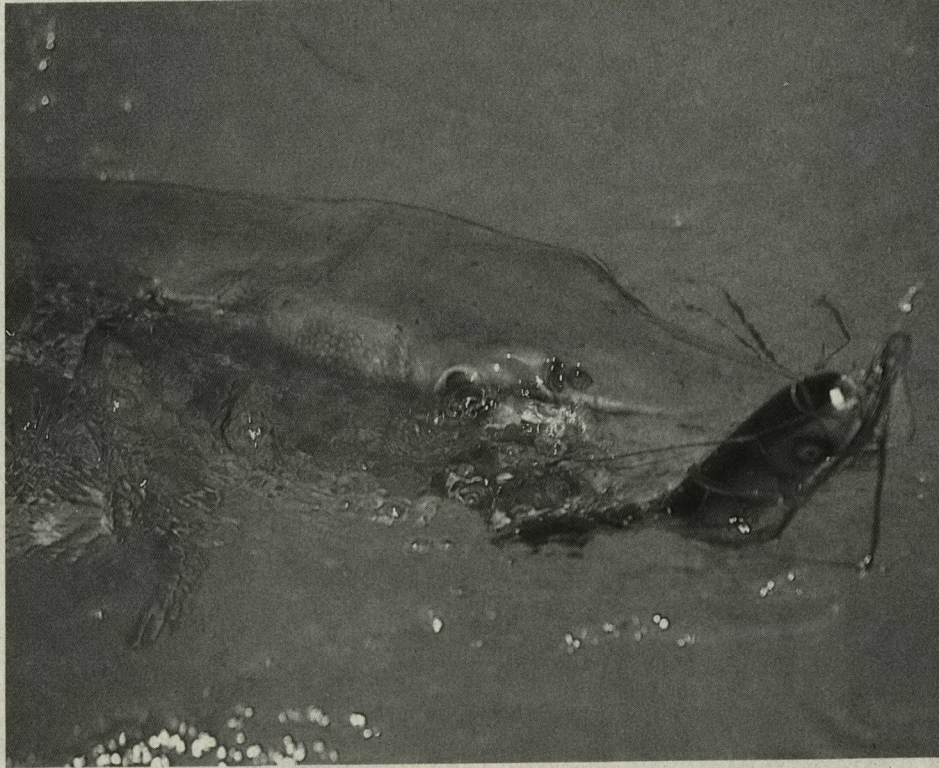
Over the past decade muskies have undergone changes in Lake St. Clair, including the average size and weight. This change apparently is in response to the progressively more restrictive regulations imposed not only by the Department of Natural Resources but by local muskie groups on both sides of the lake.

A catch-and-release approach has been advocated and promoted by both

**Homer LeBlanc (left) poses with Mike O'Hara, who won the first Homer LeBlanc Muskie Classic last September.**



# Mr. Muskie's



Michigan and Ontario muskie clubs as well as by many of the charter captains. Along with an increase in the legal size limit to 42 inches from the previous 40 inches (30 inches before that), a significant change has taken place in this 450-square-mile lake, to a point where it now is not unusual to pick up two or

## Fishing

*By Chuck Lichon*  
Photos by the Author

three of these Great Lakes muskies on any given day during the season.

There are at least two distinct groups of Great Lakes muskies in this shallow body of water, one of which spawns in the north region and then disperses southward to inhabit the entire western side of the lake. These postspawn muskies move progressively southward throughout the summer season. Another group resides and apparently spawns in the southeastern (Ontario) part of the lake. Great Lakes muskies are all native to this area, as well as to any part of the Great lakes, and since there are no

### The late Homer

MICHIGAN OUT-OF-DOORS

plantings involved, their survival relies on natural reproduction.

Muskies have been an integral part of the massive fisheries program within Lake St. Clair, having been fished primarily as a trophy species rather than a food source. This probably has added to the survival of the species since most

**The Believer is one of the most popular lures used on Lake St. Clair for muskies, as this photo attests.**

# Tips

anglers, unless they expect to mount one of these toothy monsters, will release the fish back to the water in order to insure the continuance of successful natural reproduction and adequate future populations.

Although a good-sized muskie can range upwards of 30-plus pounds, some may reach twice this size. The St. Clair record is still on hold from 1940, when Percy Haver landed a 62-pound, eight-ounce monster.

Muskies present a remarkable challenge for those who pursue them. Once you hook a trophy muskie and

land it, you will never forget it.

A popular method used to entice muskies into attacking your offering on Lake St. Clair is trolling. Although they will feed most anytime of day, the best time to troll is during midday, between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. It's an ideal sport for those who do not enjoy rising at 4 a.m. to catch their fish. Try trolling at a speed of about four to five miles per hour, using one of several lures, including the popular Believer, which is a takeoff of LeBlanc's Swim Whizz.

LeBlanc wrote a very comprehensive book titled "Muskie Fishing Fact and Fantasy, Lore and Lures." It contains almost anything you want to know about the sport and then some.

LeBlanc describes a typical setup for muskies consisting of five- to six-foot heavy-action rods, with reels capable of holding at least 250 yards of 40- to 50-pound test line and four to six feet of 100-pound test leader. The lures can be set anywhere from several feet to a maximum of 40 feet behind the boat. Fifteen to 20 feet is about average.

Muskies are fearless and will readily strike a lure even in the prop wash. When they hit their target, they can reach a speed from 25 to 40 mph.

Noted charter Captain Don Miller states that the three most important considerations when "hunting" muskies are trolling speed, lure color, and presentation.

The trolling speed is aggressive due to the nature of the species, and the lure color may vary. However, natural colors such as perch or bass are good starters.

The presentation is important in terms of rod placement. Miller says that good rod placement maximizes strike potential. The "down rods" can generally be the most productive. The idea is to keep the lure just at the top of the weeds, hoping a muskie will see it from the depths below. These inside rods are placed with the tip facing down. The outside rods can be more flexible (in the area of six to seven feet long) and will add more challenge if a muskie elects to hit one of them.

LeBlanc had a simple rod setup that allows several rods (two per person) to be used to fish various depths and distances from the boat without fouling up lines. Starting with the right, or starboard side of the boat, he would use a long 10- or 12-foot hollow glass rod set in on a rod holder amidship with the rod pointed outward and upward. He

## If You Go

### BOAT LAUNCHES

Metro Beach (Black Creek), five miles east of Mount Clemens.

Selfridge, four miles northeast of Mount Clemens.

Brandenburg Park, one mile southwest of New Baltimore.

### CHARTER CAPTAINS

Don Miller, 471 Canterbury Drive, Saline, Mich. 48176, phone 313/429-9551.

Don Oke, 3644 Hughes Drive, Warren, Mich. 48092, phone 313/751-3757.

Bob Bingle, 8997 Anchor Bay Drive, Fair Haven, Mich. 48023, phone 313/794-3854.

### MOTELS

Contact: Chamber of Commerce, Mount Clemens, 313/463-1528.

called this the No. 1 rod. With this rod, he would let out approximately 75 feet of line and use a two- or three-ounce keel sinker along with a smaller-sized lure with fast action. He would then troll the lure just one or two feet below the water's surface. On sunshine days, a spinner blade and bucktail lure could be very effective.

The No. 2 rod, consisting of a 4 1/2- or five-foot length, will be located amidship, but pointing downward at an angle toward the stern. The lure will be fished just four feet back of the starboard quarter, using enough weight to get it down about two feet deep.

LeBlanc noted that muskies are very cautious when the water is clear and are wary when there is much light. If you have a lure about two feet down and it is clearly visible, you may need to use a heavier weight to send it deeper until you can barely see it.

Since LeBlanc's book was written, the infamous zebra mussel has invaded Lake St. Clair, resulting in a much clearer water quality. This in itself may force you to fish deeper than LeBlanc suggested.

The No. 3 rod (a 5 1/2- or six-footer) will be at the side of the stern of the boat and pointed straight outward. LeBlanc would use a No. 4 or 5 keel sinker with a Swim Whizz snapped onto the front eye so that it would run near the boat wash, letting out about 30 feet of line.

The No. 4 rod (a 5 1/2-footer) would

## LeBlanc had the right medicine for Lake St. Clair