

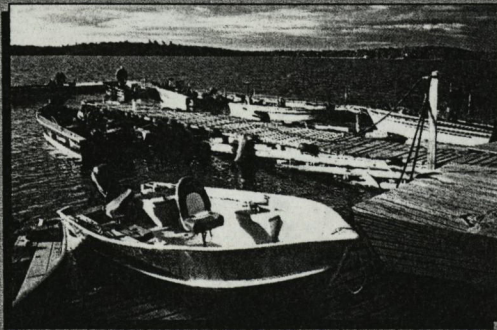
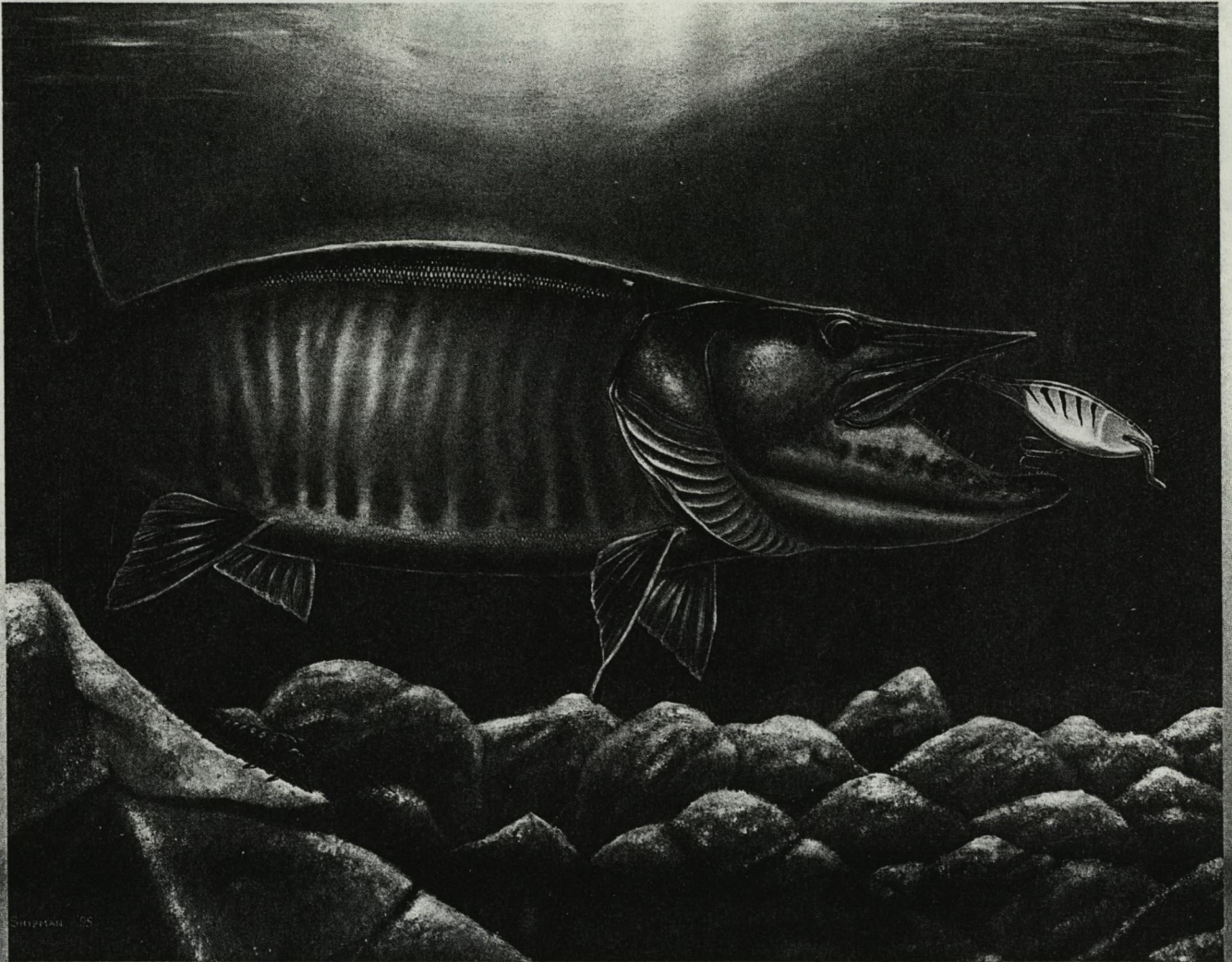
TOP TROLLERS
REVEAL SECRETS

WAS SPRAY'S 61-13 REALLY THAT BIG?

Musky Hunter

NORTH AMERICA'S MUSKY AUTHORITY

MAY 1996

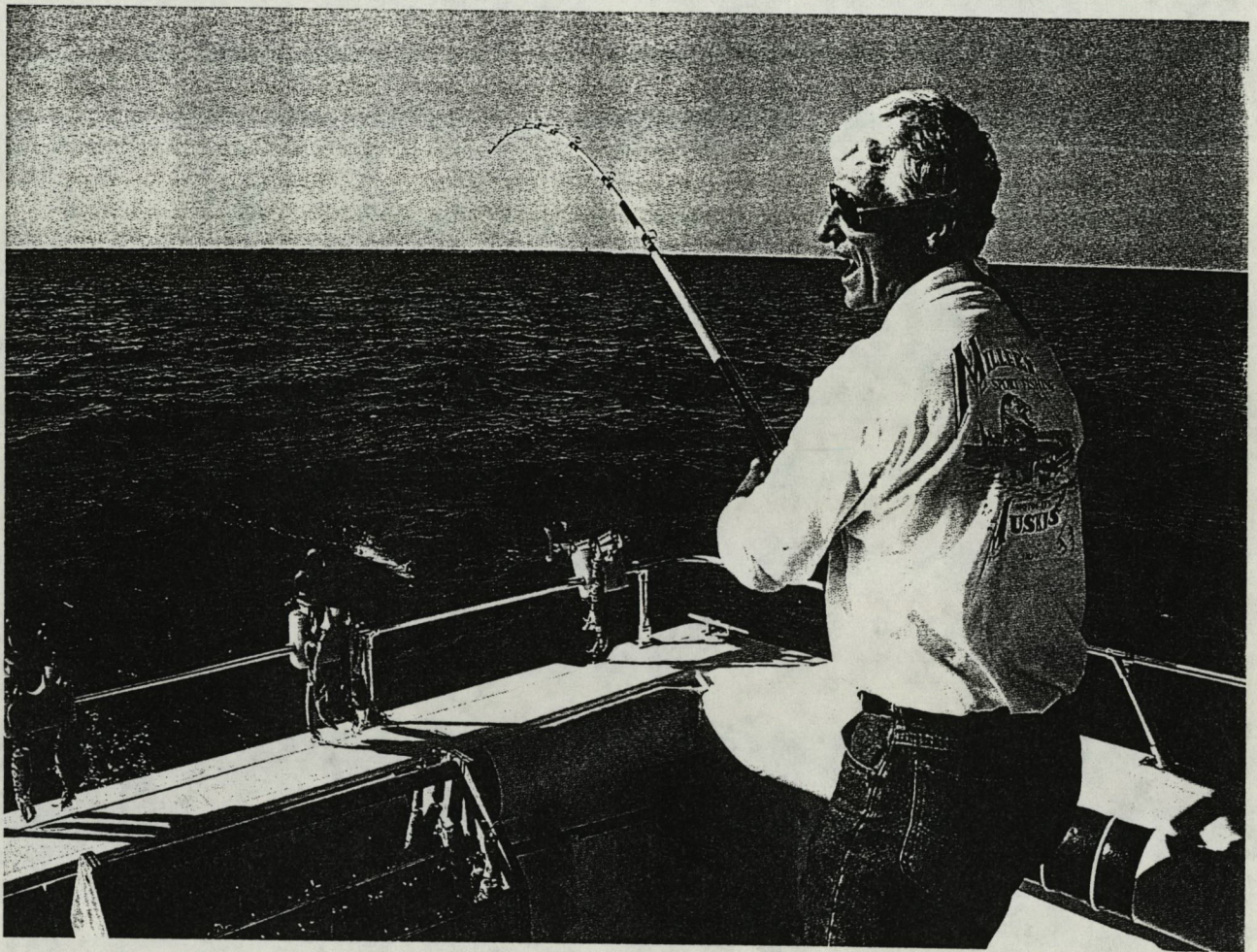


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By MIKE NORRIS
and JIM SARIC, Editor

POWERTROLLING

Five premier trollers from across the musky world offer their insights into this big fish technique

Mike Norris remembers well his first experience power trolling for muskies. "I was fishing Lake of the Woods in Ontario, Canada, and was cruising to another hotspot. I decided to toss my crankbait behind the boat and freespool the line until a minor backlash disappeared from my reel. I gently flipped the lure behind the boat and into the propwash, while letting the line out until the backlash disappeared. I felt a sharp rap on my line as I re-engaged the reel and immediately set the hook into a 46-inch musky which was quickly landed and released."

This type of situation is one that many casting anglers have heard on numerous occasions, and has given trolling a "no brainer" bad rap. Nothing could be farther from the

Captain Don Miller battles a Lake St. Clair musky that struck a lure while propwash trolling.

truth. Many a diehard troller has spent countless hours without a strike. There is much science to successful trolling.

While many musky anglers agree that muskies will suspend over open water, most musky hunters still spend most of their time fishing around structure and cover. And why not? Structure provides opportunities for muskies to use identifiable routes to follow when feeding. These are ideal routes to follow when structure trolling. Smaller waters may only have one or two "good" trolling routes, while larger waters may have many. On the other hand, structure is not the only area to troll. *Musky Hunter* Editor Jim Saric and many of the other editors have had

numerous outstanding days catching suspended muskies nowhere near structure.

In musky fishing though, only one thing is certain — you'll increase your odds for catching muskies if you cover as much water as possible in a day. Power trolling is simply a fast and efficient way of accomplishing this goal.

Power trolling works whether fishing the shield lakes of the north and east or the prairie potholes and rivers or reservoirs of the south.

To find out why this technique is so deadly, and for a better understanding of how to power troll for muskies, we interviewed five premier musky trollers across North America. The list included Marc Thorpe, a

JIM SARIC

Quebec guide who consistently catches his biggest muskies trolling large crankbaits; Terry O'Malley, a disciple of the Buck Perry Spoonplugging method who himself teaches Spoonplugging throughout the states and spends most of his time guiding for muskies on his home waters in Illinois; Don Miller, the protege of the late Homer LeBlanc, who guides on the famous Lake St. Clair; and MHM field editors Mark Maghran and Tom Slomka, who guide and fish the Niagara River in Buffalo, NY, and its confluence with Lake Erie.

All are accomplished fishing guides and precision trollers known for putting clients on both numbers and big muskies. Their tactics display some similarities, but also exhibit remarkable differences. Regardless, they all illustrate the effectiveness of power-trolling.

STRUCTURE TROLLING

Marc Thorpe, Terry O'Malley, and Mark Maghran are structure trollers, spending the majority of their time running lures in and around structural elements. Marc Thorpe prefers to power-troll crankbaits over and adjacent to bars, humps, rocky ledges or weedbeds, where muskies position them-

selves for an easy meal. "There's more to it than just dropping a lure in the water and going forward," says Thorpe. "I like to set up shoreline sightings so I can run a defined route. This allows me to keep my trolling passes right on the breakline. If I don't catch a musky on the first pass, I'll turn around and run the breakline again. But this time I'll change tactics in order to trigger a strike. I'll use a technique I call 'crashing the reef'."

"Crashing the reef" is nothing more than motor trolling parallel to the edge of a sloping dropoff and stacking lures so that they cover various depths along the dropoff (see diagram). Typically Thorpe runs his lures 10 to 80 feet behind the boat. "Muskies are sight feeders and their eyes are positioned so that they can only see out to the sides and above them," says Thorpe. "By running my inside lure shallow and outside lure deep I can zig-zag in and out parallel to the dropoff. When I troll shallower, both lures start to bump bottom (crashing the reef). When this happens, I'll turn back out and both lures will begin to suspend. I'll keep repeating this maneuver until I've triggered a strike."

"I do basically the same thing," says Terry O'Malley. "I bump bottom some time, but

usually I let the lure run free. Muskies have a tendency to strike a free-running lure more so than largemouth bass, so I avoid bumping the bottom too often. Fast-moving, free-running lures often agitate a musky and provoke a strike in shallow to medium depths. It's only when I get into deeper water that I'll try bumping the bottom more, as the water is cooler and I might only be dealing with neutral fish. It's here that a slower-trolled, bottom-bumping lure may be necessary to trigger a strike from a reluctant musky."

Mark Maghran also fishes structure in the Niagara River and the harbor area where Lake Erie enters the Niagara. In the river he focuses on trolling the breakline adjacent to depressions, holes or the river channel. In Lake Erie he concentrates his efforts on riprap breakwalls, discharges, and reefs. Maghran primarily keeps his lures in contact with bottom. "I've tried running lures suspended above bottom in both the river and lake but have only caught smaller fish. When I began working my lures on bottom I began to catch the 30-pound-and-larger class muskies." When Maghran talks fishing bottom he means it. He tries to keep his lures constantly bumping bottom, almost grinding

