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Lake St. Clair's Hot Muskie Action

Michigan is blessed with the best muskie lake in the country. Lake St. Clair's muskies are the king of freshwater fish and fear nothing. But to catch them you must fish hard.

by Mike Zielinski

“One thing about muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair,” said Capt. Don Miller, as he set a giant plug to work in the wake of his charter boat *Musky Hunter*, “when the season opens, you’re only one strike away from a new world’s record. Thinking about that keeps me going when things are a little slow.”

Through plain old hard work, lots of hours on the water and mentor muskie fishing legend Homer LeBlanc, Miller is fast gaining a reputation as the top muskie guide in this corner of Muskiedom. Combining many of LeBlanc’s famous trolling techniques and theories with modern technology and equipment, plus a few special twists of his own, Capt. Don Miller continues to build a storehouse of knowledge about these freshwater tigers.

When the assignment came down to check out Lake St. Clair muskie angling with Miller, I jumped at the chance. I headed east down Nine Mile Road from Jefferson Avenue to meet Miller. Lake St. Clair shimmered in the distance, the rising sun lighting up her emerald water with streaks of red and yellow.

The odor of water, seaweed and

fish permeated the onshore breeze where Miller keeps his 22-foot Starcraft moored along a canal behind the home of LeBlanc’s widow at the foot of Nine Mile Road. On the horizon were several fishing boats crossing the lake, heading into the early sunrise.

When I boarded Miller’s boat, I was introduced to charter Capt. Bill Hoch, a Canadian from Leamington, Ontario. Hoch had been a participant in the muskie wars of the 1970s, running boats out of St. Luke’s Club as one of Jack Miner’s hired guns. He has a lot of muskie lore wrapped in his short, compact frame.

“Back then,” Hoch said, “Miner was in competition with a few other muskie charter outfits and our only job was to put muskies in the cooler for customers. We weren’t concerned with catch and release. We figured there were enough fish to go around. Boy, were we wrong!”

As Miller eased us out of the canal and onto Lake St. Clair, the stately lakeside mansions of Grosse Pointe passed to our south. All three of us looked at them, and it was obvious our thoughts were the same, “Just where does all that money come from?”

We planed off and headed out into the lake for several miles

before Capt. Miller slowed to trolling speed. I took the wheel, while he and Bill began setting lines.

Miller adheres to the method of running two five-foot rods in the prop wash with the lures only four feet astern, and only inches below the surface. He has also added planer boards to his muskie hunting arsenal. They take the place of the outriggers and the heavy 12-foot long rods once utilized to keep the lures spread. Most of his reels are spooled with 50-lb. test braided dacron line with 100-lb. mono leaders, though Miller uses the new Kevlar lines off his planer boards.

Both Miller and Hoch depend on Believer lures as well as Spike’s Spoons to catch muskies. These lures have the size and color patterns necessary to catch big muskies. They are also durable and handle the stress of landing a large, hard fighting fish like a Great Lakes muskie.

One thing I noticed about Miller’s technique was the amount of time he spent cleaning and changing lures. He and Hoch started with the planer board rod on the port side, removing weeds from each lure being trolled, only to start all over again when the last rod was replaced on the starboard