

OUTDOORS

Go deep for bites on Upstate lakes

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

The recent string of hot weather has sent water temperatures at Upstate lakes soaring into the upper 80s and low 90s. It's at this time of year that fish tend to head for the deep-water haunts they can find, and they'll be deeper now than at any other time of year.

In order to catch these fish, you need to go deep.

Trolling open deep water is a lethal tactic for a number of different species of fish, but problems develop in trying to place a bait at a specified depth on line that ultimately ends up in the hands of an angler at the surface. Heavy weights are often used to help sink fishing line but also provide a hindrance and require heavy tackle that removes much of the "sporting" qualities of sportfishing.

The principles of downrigger fishing are simple — attach a weight heavy enough to remain vertical even at moderate trolling speeds while allowing the release of the fishing line when a fish takes the bait. The application seems simple enough, but the practice is a little more difficult, as it requires some innovative gear and designs.

Downriggers work by suspending a heavy weight hydrodynamic ball from the stern of the boat. A heavy boom allows the ball and cable to hang free over the boat, while the length of cable — and subsequently the depth of the ball — is controlled



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Anglers can fish deeper using a variety of fishing tactics that include downriggers and lead-core line.

by a metal spool. The spool is equipped with a depth counter to give the angler precise control over the depth of the ball. The final piece is a sturdy line clip attached to the cable just above the ball. The release has rubber pads that hold the fishing line tight enough to troll the bait, yet release when a fish takes the bait. This allows the angler direct access to the fish without having to hassle with the added weight of the ball.

One of the leading manufacturers in the downrigger industry is Cannon Downriggers.

"Cannon stands as the leading brand across the country because of our innovative thinking through the years" Cannon product manager Dan Bennett said. "High speed retrieve rates, clutch brakes for safer

weight descent and telescopic booms are just a few of these innovations."

Downrigger trolling is obviously more equipment intensive but yields better controlled depth fishing. Another advantage to downrigger fishing is that standard fishing gear — 7' MH casting rods and medium baitcast reels spooled with 20-pound test mono — can be used.

Once the fish strikes, the downrigger releases the line, and the fish can be fought without the additional weight and drag of lead core line.

Experiment with different baits behind the downrigger — crankbaits, spoons, spinnerbaits, swim baits and jigs. Some anglers even have success trolling live baits if they are fished slow enough to resist tear off.

For those wanting to avoid the expense or hassle of using downriggers, using lead core line from a standard, but beefier, levelwind rod and reel is a less expensive tactic for deep-water trolling.

Spool at least 100 yards of lead core line — 10 colors — on a 30-series reel such as a Penn 330 or a Shakespeare Tidewater 30. Attach a 50-foot leader of 20-pound test mono and experiment with which bait and/or color combinations work best.

The trolling rule of thumb is to put out one color for each 3.5 to 4 feet of depth needed at an average trolling speed of 2 to 2.5 miles per hour.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of the PG & Boatgirl Outdoors podcast. Download the podcast at pgandboatgirl.com.