

OUTDOORS

Better than live bait for striper fishing?

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

For striped bass anglers across most of the Southeast, Captain Mack Farr is pretty well synonymous with umbrella rig fishing.

Farr is a fishing guide on Georgia's Lake Sydney Lanier who's been fishing professionally for more than 30 years. During that time, he took the concept of trolling umbrella rigs — which originated as a saltwater fishing tactic — and adapted it to freshwater fishing for landlocked striped bass.

According to Farr, umbrella rig fishing is at its best on just about any lake that has a sizeable population of stripers when water temperatures drop to the low to mid 50s. He said at this point, the fish get dormant and won't chase live bait. In fact, Farr has compared the two side by side under winter conditions.

"It's an impulse bite" Farr said. "The fish are in a neutral or even negative mood, and this big screaming rig comes through, and their first instinct is to kill it."

Admittedly, the one big drawback that most an-



COURTESY OF MACK FARR

Captain Mack Farr has perfected the umbrella rig for inland striped bass fishing and has now downsized a version of his popular rig to make it easier to handle.

glers have with umbrella rigs is the weight. One rig can weigh as much as 2 pounds by itself. Trolling two or three of these can be unwieldy.

Having made and sold umbrella rigs for striped bass fishing, Farr closely watched the rise and crest of umbrella rig fishing for black bass. He acknowledged the utility of a lighter weight U-rig that could either be cast to schooling fish or slow-trolled under more controlled conditions. His concept was the Mini-Mack.

"When we designed the Mini-Mack, it was for casting to striped

bass," Farr said. "It's a lot sturdier than some of the more recent rigs that have become popular with black bass anglers. I actually realized how well it would work for slow trolling by mistake."

While filming a television show for striper fishing, he set the rod in a rod holder while the film crew was moving down the bank to another casting spot. The rod bent over with a nice-sized striper.

"That set off a lightbulb, and when I got home, I started experimenting with trolling these rigs instead of casting," Farr said.

The first plus is light-

er weight — the entire Mini-Mack weighs a little more than two ounces. Accordingly it can be fished using conventional striped bass tackle — 20-pound class tackle versus the 50-pound class. With lighter weight and lighter tackle, the rig can be fished slower.

"The big rigs work on reaction, but this is more finesse, if you can say that about a rig that has five hooks on it," Farr said.

The other added feature is the ability to slow troll a Mini-Mack behind a planer board. This begs a comparison between the effectiveness of rigs versus live bait.

"I've put them head to head," Farr said. "Don't get me wrong. I'm still a big believer in bait. I'm going to have live bait with me on just about every trip I take, but I've had slow days when I'm free-lining six live bait rods with little success, and I swapped one out for a Mini-Mack rig and started catching fish."

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors Podcast. This week's guest on the podcast is legendary big-game hunter Jim Shockey. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at pgandboatgirl.com.