

Having a Capt. Mack attack in the cold

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With January in full swing and cold weather looming on the horizon, many anglers choose to stay indoors until spring weather appears.

Other anglers, particularly those who love to fish for land-locked striped bass on many of South Carolina's inland lakes, look forward to this time of year. One of the most successful tactics for January striper fishing is umbrella-rig fishing.

According to renowned striped bass fishing guide Mack 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 that's when the fish get dormant and won't chase a bait.

"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."

Farr also said umbrella rigs are an excellent catch-and-release tactic because stripers are typically hooked inside the mouth or somewhere on the outside jaw. Combine that with cold water, and even the biggest fish swim away unharmed after release.

Another bonus is that "u-rigs", as they're often referred to, have multiple baits rather than a single hook. It's not uncommon to spur the competitiveness of other stripers in



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Umbrella-rig fishing for land-locked striped bass is a great wintertime tactic.

the school when a striper comes ripping by with other baits hanging out of his mouth. Reeling in two, three or even four striped bass on one rod is not a feat for the lighthearted.

Farr is not only a guide but the leading manufacturer of striped bass fishing tackle in the Southeast. He manufactures Capt. Mack's umbrella rigs, a product he makes in Gainesville, Ga., near Lake Lanier.

Pulling an umbrella rig requires the use of the primary motor on whatever boat you're using.

"I can teach anyone to pull u-rigs off of any type of boat so long as the boat will idle down to 2

or 3 miles per hour," Farr said.

Farr puts the rigs out on stout bait casting tackle with line in the 50-pound test class. He runs two rigs — one on each side of the boat — and cautions anglers when deploying rigs.

"Only let the rig out 20 to 30 feet at a time," he said. "Leaving the reel in free spool will send it to the bottom, where it will hang up. I keep my thumb on the spool as it goes out and then flip the level and pull the rig back up every so often until I have the desired amount of line out."

Farr will typically run rigs out an average distance between 60 and

150 feet behind the boat depending on the water depth, the weight of the rig and the speed of the boat. The product's packaging has a distance-out chart on the back that's a good starting point for learning how far out to put the rigs to reach the desired depth.

"I always space the rigs at least 30 feet apart so they don't hang if the lines cross, and it's wise to put the heavier of two rigs further back so it will run deeper and under the other during a turn," Farr said.

With two rigs deployed, Farr will maintain his boat speed between 2.5 and 3 miles per hour as measured on his combined sonar/GPS unit. A constant speed is not desired, and rpm changes in the motor will cause the rigs to veer and flair like a real pod of baitfish. The trick is knowing when to zig and when to zag.

"I'm constantly watching my sonar," Farr said. "I want to know what's under the boat so I'll know whether to speed up to clear the top of a hump or brush pile and when to slow down or even pop the boat in idle, which makes the rigs drop and flutter. This is a great tactic when pulling through a suspended school of fish. Drop that rig right on their heads, then put it back in gear, and the rig comes back up, usually with a fish in tow."

PHILLIP GENTRY is a freelance outdoor writer and the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at pgandboatgirl.com.