

# ***"Business End" Lure & Equipment Tips and Techniques-101***

by Larry Ramsell, Muskie Guide

I would like to pass on a few tips that have served me well over the years. To some seasoned veterans they will be automatic. To some they will seem to be common sense. While in many cases these statements are true, with the tremendous influx of new musky anglers to the sport in recent years, I find as a full-time guide that it is often the most seemingly simple things that these newcomers need help with. I will cover the two lure categories that I feel are the most important and misunderstood, and any special equipment that works best with them.

## ***Jerk Baits***

"Jerk baits," are lures that are designed to imitate a wounded or crippled bait-fish, and are my "go to" lures when the muskies are in a neutral or negative mode. When muskies are in an aggressive and feeding mode I prefer to use lures that can cover a lot of water fast and are good hookers, like bucktails. But when things turn "tough" I slow down and rely on the "triggering" aspect of jerk baits. There are many fine jerk baits available in both the "dive and rise" and the "slide and glide" categories. The important thing, regardless of which type or make you choose, is that you are familiar with how to "work" it and how it reacts to different strengths and lengths of the "jerk" that you impart. Also the ability to work it around cover is important. When you know your lure it helps tremendously with the **confidence** that you will have in it.

There are also some important tackle considerations to be aware of when using jerk baits. Your rod, length relative to your height and comfort, should have a tip section stiff enough to move your lure without too much flex, and allow a good strong hook-set which often requires moving an 8 or 10 inch wooden lure through a very strong, toothy and boney mouth.

The reel should have a high speed gear ratio, important for picking up slack line at the end of the jerk, where the strike often occurs. In addition to the high speed gears, the reel spool should be completely full of line. Spools less than full reduces the gear ratio and adds to the time required to collect the slack line.

The line used should be made of a good minimal or no stretch material such as dacron or one of the new dyneema "super lines" such as Cortland Spectron. Minimal or no stretch line in combination with a good stiff rod are required for good hook-sets. When I used dacron, I used nothing less than 36 pound test. With the new super lines, I use nothing less than 80 pound test. No, these heavy test lines are not required to subdue average or even the larger sized muskies,

but rather to withstand the constant abuse of casting lures that weigh up to five ounces or more, especially when the occasional "professional overrun" (backlash) occurs. The dacron, with its limited stretch, is more forgiving the shock of a backlash than is superline with its zero stretch, hence lighter pound test may be used. In addition, superlines are of a much smaller diameter than a comparable test dacron, and I find the higher test superlines have a diameter easier to manage and remove backlashes from, and I also find that it doesn't cut into the line on the spool as easy as do lighter test superlines.

One additional consideration if you choose to use the new superlines is that of the hook-set. Because they have absolutely no stretch it is possible to **"over-set."** Yes, I know that may sound contradictory to my previous admonitions about a stiff rod and minimal stretch line, but they are not the same. A good solid hook-set is often required to move the lure in a muskies mouth, but beyond that initial "move," too much setting can result in tears in the muskies mouth that could allow the hooks to come free. Use one good sharp-short hook-set, and then concentrate on keeping the line tight.

One thing I do to my jerk baits is to remove the tail hook, unless it screws up the action of the lure. Rare is the musky taken on the rear hook of a jerk bait. More often, this hook does damage to our prized quarry, like hooking eyes or gills. In addition, it makes the unhooking process more dangerous to both angler and fish.

I like my hooks to be attached by split rings. Not having this done at one point in my career, cost me a fish in the five foot range! I usually remove factory hooks, even if I have to cut them off, and replace them via either the new Wolverine super split rings, or two sizes of stainless split rings one inside of the other, such as a #5 inside of a #7. I now have a set-up that is solid, and one that will not allow a musky to get leverage on the hook as can be done on lures without split rings.

I use a solid wire leader when casting jerk baits, such as the new one from Wishin Lures ([www.wishin-lures.com](http://www.wishin-lures.com)). This leader is specially made for use with jerk baits, and connects the lure to the leader via a loop and a spring rather than a standard snap swivel. With this leader, there is NO WAY lure and leader will ever part ways! Also by eliminating the snap, there is a direct connection between the lure and the line, eliminating the slack of a dangling snap swivel between jerks. Additionally, due to this direct connection, the leader is less likely to swing back into the hooks, as the head of the lure should keep it pointing out away from the body of the lure.

### ***Bucktails***

Bucktails catch more muskies than all other lures combined. Why? Well for one simple reason, they are used more. But more importantly, they can be worked fast when the muskies are aggressive and hitting, and allow the ability to cover much more water more quickly. It is the Pro's lure of choice when the fish are going.

Ah, but which one to use? There are literally hundreds of different sizes, colors, blade types/weights, hook arrangements and hook dressings to choose from. Over the years, there are many different ones that I have had success with. Almost without fail, quality bucktails that consistently catch muskies are the ones that stay around. Names like Mepps, Eagle Tail, Wishin Lures, Llungen Tales and a few others, usually grace the experienced musky hunters tackle box. If we include spinner baits (hairpin spinners) in this category, we would have to add Fudally Tackle and others.

I believe that there are two simple reasons that there are so many different bucktails to choose from. One is quite simple. That is bucktails are easy to make if quality is not a foremost concern, and there are probably hundreds of musky anglers that have or do make some for at least themselves. Occasionally one of these is good enough to make the grade and join the list of "preferreds." The primary reason that there are so many different bucktails is versatility. When one takes into consideration the different blade shapes, weights and colors/materials, it gives infinite flexibility in selecting a combination that can adapt to any musky angling situation, especially when we add the mind boggling number of options available today in the different materials and colors for the hook dressing. The term "bucktail" is generic as applied to this lure type and it was the early day dressing used almost exclusively in the post chicken feather era.

Blades are the main ingredient/tool in selection of which bucktail to use. The Colorado blade creates "lift" and is the blade of choice when the angler wishes to keep his bucktail close to the surface. It is especially effective for use of the technique called "bulging," which means keeping it just under the surface without breaking, and creating a rise or "bulge" in the water behind the lure. Willow leaf blades are used more for obtaining depth during the retrieve, blade thickness adding to or subtracting from depth. Fluted "Indiana" blades run a medium depth, as do French blades, made popular by Mepps, which have created their own niche in the musky world. Naturally the quality of the material used to make the blade and its thickness also are a consideration.

The most productive bucktail blade in history has been the "fluted" Indiana blade. It has produced more muskies over 50 pounds than all of the rest combined! There are a couple of very good reasons for this. During the 30's and 40's, when a good portion of giant muskies were caught, this was the blade most commonly made and used. Second, tests have shown this style blade to create the most "noise" under water of all the blade types.

Bucktail dressings are a matter of angler choice and confidence, and that includes the color. I truly believe that it is the blade that calls and fools the muskies.

Bucktail hooks are a different matter. Here again, as is the case with blades, the hooks are "tools." The majority of bucktails are offered with one or two treble hooks of different sizes and styles/manufacture. Some are offered with only single hooks, such as Wishin Lures Weedless Bucktail ([www.wishin-lures.com](http://www.wishin-lures.com)) and the Eagle Tail which has accounted for more muskies over 50 inches in the 33 year history of the Muskie's, Inc. members only fishing contest than any other bucktail or lure of any type for that matter.

Am I advocating single hooks with that last paragraph? Well, the record speaks well for the Eagle Tail, and my personal records, as well as the experiences of others, with the Wisher Weedless Bucktail from Wishin Lures, precludes me from ever leaving the dock without a good assortment. Because I find it such an invaluable tool, I would like to elaborate a little about it.

The Wisher Weedless Bucktail was specifically designed to be used in weedy situations (however they work equally well in open water). It is built "light" to help it stay "up." The most important aspect of it is its weighted shank-forged single hook. The weight causes the hook to ride thru the water tilted down and back with the hook point protected by the shank and tilted away from trouble. It comes thru all but the thickest milfoil remaining weed free most of the time, allowing you to fish "into" the weeds, not just to the edge. I have found it to be a tremendous hooker. Very seldom is a strike missed, and when they get hooked, I have never had one get free! They just can't throw it. I believe the weight is working against them and keeping the hook buried. When used in timber situations, the hook rides over obstructions easily, unless retrieve speed is too slow. The only drawback to these bucktails that I have found is the light weight makes them more difficult to cast against the wind. Their new model, the "Ramsell Spin" has a weighted shaft, and works well in the wind.

However, in situations where the water is free from weeds or other obstructions, I don't feel that single hooks are a total necessity, but there are many anglers who feel that treble hooks often work against themselves in the hooking process. Having said that, I know that there are literally thousands of muskies caught each season on treble-hook bucktails!

### **Surface Lures**

Surface lures are just plain fun! And there are dozens to choose from; slow one, fast one; noisy ones. All catch muskies! Try them, particularly in the summer and after dark. You'll get "hooked" on them!

Be sure to use a good quality leader ahead of all your lures.

All tackle mentioned here can be obtained at Pastika's Sport Shop in Hayward. Get some "good tools" and learn how to use them properly and at the most opportune time! Best of luck!!

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