



Most salmon anglers live for the summer, and there are many good reasons why fishing for these powerful specimens can be so popular during the warmer months. For one, it is a nice time to be out on the water catching tackle-busting Chinooks, and they are easy to catch for the most part. There are many tournaments and derbies that also attract thousands of people hoping to catch a big enough fish to land them cash, prizes or even a new boat. If you don't have a boat, there are many charter boats available to take you out for a fun day of fishing, and many charters include derby tickets in their price. Even if you own a boat but haven't tried salmon fishing, hiring a local charter can be a worthwhile endeavor to learn good strategies before trying it yourself. The biggest reasons that summer salmon fishing may be so popular, is that salmon are normally cooperative, large, thrilling to catch, and close to urban sprawl. Families or a group of friends can have an exciting morning or evening of salmon fishing and still have the day available to do whatever they want.

### **The Importance of Location**

In my opinion, the location one chooses to fish is the single most important equation for success. I'm not just talking about which part in the lake salmon are located at certain times of year, but where the fish are located within those specific destinations.

Prevailing winds, currents and water

temperature all play a significant role in fish movement. I have witnessed many times where fish that have been in one specific area for days move several miles overnight with heavy winds. I know a few really good salmon anglers from the US that don't put any lines down until they find good water with their electronics.

So what makes one spot better than another and what constitutes 'good water' to start fishing?

This is where good quality electronics come into play. I use a high quality Humminbird colour high resolution sonar\GPS and fine tune the sonar in manual mode. I start by adjusting the sensitivity to at least 80 percent, and even take it up to 95 percent in really deep water. I then adjust the speed of the sonar signal to also increase with depth, and have it set to maximum in the deepest water. I then set the depth of the bottom to manual mode, just enough to see a few feet of the bottom, although I rarely set the bottom depth deeper than 130-feet. This system will always allow you to not only mark hooks (fish), but also baitfish, the thermocline, and fine details on how dense the markings are.

Another incredibly helpful tool is a temperature probe at the downrigger ball. Salmon relate heavily to water temperature, especially during the summer. Ideally, I like to find 47- to 55-degree F. water temps at the ball, combined with lots of baitfish and hooks on the sonar. I get so excited when I find this combination on my electronics, my good friend Darrell would tell me "it's as if you just discovered plutonium!".

To give you a perspective on how important it is to locate good water, I will share a story with you. A few years ago, a good friend of mine Tony and my girlfriend Kristi and I went out for some salmon and did so well, we had to get out the next day. Unfortunately for us, strong south winds had been blowing from the evening before and lasted overnight, causing turmoil in our honey hole. We couldn't find any good water to fish for miles. 68 degree water temps plagued our entire area from top to bottom. Since we only had a few hours to fish, we finally decided to just put out our lines, troll and enjoy the nice day. After 2-hours of trolling without moving a rod, I

was shocked to notice a huge temperature drop on my Walker Downrigger Tempsense to 54 F., and lots of bait and hooks on my sonar. Before I could even say "look at the sonar", we had a double header on. I quickly marked a waypoint on my GPS and we boated two nice salmon. We ended up fishing around that cold pocket of water for almost two hours and boated 13 Chinooks up to 28-pounds.

I know this is a lot of fiddling around with electronics when moving into various depths of water in search mode, but when you do find that golden spot and hit multiple fish consistently, you will be glad you worked your sonar with vigilance.

Once you do find a spot that holds a good amount of fish, quickly mark an icon or waypoint on your GPS for reference so you don't inadvertently lose your gravy spot. It can happen easier than you think while having fun fighting double headers of line-peeling Chinooks. The small pocket of water in my short story was only a little larger than a football field, but held a lot of bait and salmon. If I hadn't of marked a GPS waypoint immediately, we would have had a very tough time finding that spot again.

## **Productive Lures and Trolling Speeds**

If you are anything like me, you have hundreds of lures on hand and an excessive amount of choices to make when deciding what to use on any given day. It can be overwhelming at times to try and pick just a few lures. So... what should you try first? Maybe that hot spoon from last year hasn't been producing well this year, or that flasher and cut bait isn't getting a bite, when obviously it should be, because let's face it... if you were a fish, you would eat it! How many times have you said "that looks so good in the water, I can't believe that is hasn't produced a bite!". I have a few basic methods that may work well for you when you head out from your port. I'll break it down into two categories, early

and mid-summer, and late summer and early fall.

### Early to Mid-Summer

In the early summer, it can be hot and cold fishing depending on temperature, so it is important to pay attention to small details. After I find a good spot with the right conditions, I like to start off my day using something I have confidence in, and putting out the same presentations on all my rods in various colours and depths. For me, this is usually Spin Doctors and Action flies, as I can vary my speeds from 2 to 3mph and they are easy to put out and try. I will usually know in a short period of time if they are hitting this type of presentation, so it is a great choice to start with. If I find they are hitting at a certain depth, I will make adjustments on my other lines. If I further learn that they are hitting certain colours, I will make further adjustments to my presentation until all the rods start firing off.

If I troll for a half hour in good water without any action on a particular method, I will start switching presentations all together. It is possible that the fish want a fast presentation, and I can't think of a better lure than spoons for this application. Your speed is especially important for spoon fishing, and I like to run a spread of all spoons that act well at the same speeds. When you are in search mode, trolling at an average of about 2.8- to 3mph works well

while doing S curves. If you find fish are hitting the lures on the outside rods on the turns, this indicates that you should speed up, and if they hit on the inside rods on the turn, you should slow down a bit. I increase my speed as much as 3.5mph at times to try and trigger bites. This may seem fast, but I have had good days trolling spoons quickly when nothing else seemed to work. It is important to choose lures that work well together at certain speeds, as not all spoons will react in the same manor while trolled at various



The author releases a typical salmon over 20-pounds that he caught on a flasher fly combo in the middle of the summer

speeds. This is why many anglers use the same spoons on all their lines in various colours and depths, and when they switch to a different type of spoon, they will switch all their spoons up at the same time. Again, I pay attention to depth and colour to replicate success. I like to

try lures about 4- to 5-inches in length to start, like the Williams Quickfish, then try really large spoons if I don't have success on the smaller spoons.

I can't forget about flashers and cut bait. This is a method that not only catches a good amount of fish when other lures aren't doing the job, but it takes big fish. I like to put out a mix of small flashers with cut bait, and big flashers with cut bait to really draw the fish toward my boat. I like to use quality flashers such as Spin Doctors and Coyote flashers from Luhr Jensen. I like to vary my homemade 40-pound Maxima fluorocarbon leader lengths from 30" to 70" long with

Photos: courtesy of author

Gamakatsu hooks to seal the deal with any salmon that may want to flirt with my baits. I have had days when a very short leads works best, and other times when a long lead works better, so it really pays to experiment. This is not a speed trolling pattern, so you will need to be in a good area and slow your speed down with the big flashers and cut bait.

As far as presentation methods go, this is no time for planer boards. Although I have had success trolling lures with clip weights off planer boards in the summer, Dipsy Divers and down riggers work much better and are easier to use. I like to run two downriggers and four Dipsy Divers. I will run two large Dipsy Divers on a 2.5 setting and keep them shallower than the other lures and the furthest from the boat, then run two

magnum Dipsy Divers on a 1.5 setting a little closer to the boat, deeper than the other Dipsys and shallower than the down riggers. I will then run my Walker down riggers deeper than all the Dipsy Divers to create a V from my boat. This will allow me to cover a lot of productive water. The guys with larger boats and more than three anglers have a much better work area and can utilize a multitude of riggers and Dipsy Divers to get an even larger spread out.

There are times when the fish are really deep, and the downrigger bite is best. In this case I like to use either four downriggers or stack two downriggers to use four rods off the two

riggers and only run two magnum Dipsy Divers. This is also a great set-up when the spiny water fleas are bad. Stacking four rods off two riggers will enable you to maximize your riggers if you only have two of them.

## Late Summer to Early Fall

The late summer to early fall period is a time when salmon are starting to stage or are in the process of staging at river mouths to spawn. This is a great time to utilize flashers and cut



**Aaron Shirley proudly poses with this nice chrome fish that was caught early on a quick morning trip from a local port**

bait, and plugs, such as Lymans and J-Plugs. Both are very effective choices, and I normally start off with flashers and cut bait during late summer. As the season progresses into the early fall, I start to move into shallower water off river mouths and try plugs. J-Plugs now have a variety of clear realistic looking plugs with holographic type finishes that work well in the gin clear water conditions of the Great Lakes. In the early fall, salmon will not relate to water temperature as much, and can be active in much warmer water than the summer months. I normally like to start off really shallow with flashers and cut bait, flashers and flies, large Williams Whitefish or plugs really early in the morning. I will move out into deeper water as the days wears on and the sun gets stronger.

In the early fall, I start to utilize planer boards into the mix, as they can be the most productive method in shallow water. I mix the boards with Dipsy Divers set at a 3 setting and

riggers set from 15- to 60-feet, depending on the depth of water I am fishing in, and where the fish are located in the water column. This is when obscure lures can really shine, like bright chartreuse flashers with bright red polka dots, or big bright and ugly plugs. These gaudy lures can work extremely well to tick off shallow staging fish that are aggressive in the early fall. Sometimes I like to dig through my tackle to find the most ugly, loud and obnoxious lures to use at this time of year, and they usually work well!



**Tony Bolger happily holds up a nice fish caught on a fly**

## The Right Tackle

As many of you know, having the right tackle and presenting your lures properly will ensure you will have success on the water with minimal problems. There is nothing worse than breaking a rod because it is under powered, tangling lines or trying to guess at how many feet of line you are letting out on a Dipsy Diver that has been getting bites. In the summer, I like to run riggers with traditional Walker downrigger rods and the uniquely designed trigger drag inverted level wind reels. It took me a bit to get used to not flipping the rods upside down to fight a fish, but I really enjoy using these reels and the trigger drag to assist while fighting a big fish. I spool up these reels with Cortland Flea Flicker line to combat the heavy summer clouds of the invasive fleas sticking to ordinary line.

For the Dipsy Divers, I like to run 10' 6" Rapala Dipsy rods on the outside to get the lures away from the boat even further and

have the power needed while using hard-pulling Dipsy Divers. Downrigger rods are much too soft for Dipsy Divers. For the inside magnum Dipsy Divers, I like 8' Dipsy rods to keep the lines away from the outside Dipsy rods. For reels, you must use a line counter reel for Dipsy Divers if you want to replicate success. I use Walker Line counter reels spooled up with a braided line straight to the Dipsys. This is the best set-up for

Dipsys, but the fleas will stick to braid when they are bad, and you will need to clear your lines often or use Flea Flicker line and put up with the stretch in the line. I always use fluorocarbon 30- to 40-pound leaders from 6- to 8-feet in length to a Stringease snapswivel due to the clear water conditions.

For planer boards, I really like using Cortland leadcore line in 2, 3 and 5 colour configurations for lures that do not dive much or dive at all like flashers and spoons, and plugs. When I want to try really shallow, I will use 15-pound Maxima Ultragreen line off in-line boards with plugs.

The next time you are sitting around your house during the dog days of summer, think about hitting the big water in the Great Lakes for salmon for a morning or evening with friends or family... you may just get someone hooked on tackle-busting salmon!

*Aaron Shirley is a co-host of a television fishing show called Getting Hooked with Aaron and Barry, an outdoor writer, seminar speaker and Editor of Getting Hooked magazine.*