

Spring King Fling

By Aaron Shirley

Starting in April on the Great Lakes, you can have some of the best action of the year for Chinook salmon fishing. Kings up to 22-pounds gorge on the abundant alewife that move into the shallower warming waters, and coho salmon, brown trout and lake trout are also hitting at this time of year. A variety of presentations will work, but there are a few key patterns that will help you put your fair share of these powerful silvery specimens over the gunnels of your boat.

Location

Look for surface water temperatures that warm up to the high 30's to low 40 degree Fahrenheit mark. Slightly stained water along a windblown shoreline will hold baitfish, as will mudlines and warm water discharges. The salmon will suspend in relatively shallow water early in the year, allowing anyone with even a small boat to take advantage of the great fishing. As the water warms and the season progresses, the fish will slowly move out into deeper water.

Techniques

Flat-lining stick baits behind planer boards can be a good choice when the fish are suspended high in the water column. Running up to a six line spread off of the planer boards early in the season can be deadly. I like to run shallower running

lures off the boards on the outside with long leads, such as the Rapala J-13, Husky Jerk, Lyman, Renowski and Storm Thunderstick. Mid-depth running lures like Shad Raps, and Tail Dancers work well in the middle, and deep-diving lures such as the Storm Deep Thunder and Deep Thunderstick, Rapala Deep Tail Dancers and Down Deep Husky Jerks are best on the lines closest to the boat. Lead core fishing line from a 2- to 5-colour can work really well off the boards on the inside lines to get your deep-diving baits even deeper, or allow you to use a spoon off the boards.

Generally, every colour of leadcore will take your lure down approximately 4-feet, plus the running depth of your lure should also be factored in.

Another option for those that do

not have a mast and planer board set-up, is to employ simple in-line boards. The in-line boards can also be used with leadcore or braided lines, and you can run up to three on each side of the boat if you like.

When you find a consistent lure type, colour and depth, you can start to duplicate the other lines to match the pattern of the day.



Andy Zaferis holds up this beauty

Utilizing Dipsey Divers with shallow running stickbaits or spoons can be a highly effective presentation early in the year, especially if the fish are located a little deeper. I prefer to use

smaller 3- to 5-inch spoons in the spring off the Dipsey Divers like the Williams Quick Silver and Wabler, Michigan Stinger, Mooselook Thinfish, the LK's Hot Pursuit, Yeck, Damn Ugly, Dreamweaver

and the Blue Fox Matrixx series, as all these spoons work well at the slower to medium speeds necessary for early spring. Make sure that all your lures run properly at the speed you are trolling at, as every spoon has a certain range of speed that works best.

Downriggers can also be effective when the fish are a little deeper in the water column, or in rough water conditions. It can be tricky to employ boards in rough water, and this is where I employ my Walker downriggers as a good alternative, as the fish are not as skittish in choppy conditions and will hit much closer to the boat.

Boat Speed

I like to troll approximately 1.7 to 2.7 mph in the early spring. The slower speeds may be difficult to acquire with a larger engine, and this is where it may be necessary to employ a trolling bag. Great Lakes Tackle Supplies offers a trolling bag that is quite durable and easy to use. I use one or even two King Troller bags to get the boat's speed to my preference. I attach each trolling bag to the front klet on the port and/or starboard side, making sure to keep a short lead so that the bag doesn't get caught in the prop. The trolling bags also work to slow the boat down when fighting a powerful salmon that strips off 500-feet of your line!

Spring Salmon Gear

I prefer to use a heavy action glass rod for the Dipsey Divers, like the 10' 6" Rapala Diver rod



The author displays a nice salmon that was taken a little deeper in the water column with a Dipsey Diver

Photos: courtesy of author

with 30-pound Power Pro line spooled up on a line counter reel. It is important to have reels with a clicker feature on them so you know the second a fish hits. I add a 6-foot, 15-pound fluorocarbon leader to the Dipsey Diver and attach a Stringease snapswivel to the tag end of the leader to finish things off.

Trolling flat-lined lures off boards with 8-foot medium heavy

rods and line counter reels spooled up with braids are ideal. I also like the 30lb braids for this purpose, as the thin diameter line will allow you to troll your lures much deeper than mono will allow, and you get a great hook-set with a lot of line out. I add a 6-foot, 15-pound fluorocarbon leader to the braid with a triple surgeons knot, and then add a small snap to the business end of the leader.

An 8-foot medium heavy fiberglass rod with a large capacity levelwind reel is needed for the leadcore. I spool around 500-feet of 30-pound braid on the reel for backing, and then splice the desired amount of 27-pound Cortland leadcore to the braid. I then splice in approximately 30-feet of 15-pound fluorocarbon to the leadcore for a stealthy approach.

So don't wait to long take your boat out of storage from the deep-freeze of "old man winter", as you can have some of the best salmon fishing of the year early in the season.

Aaron Shirley is Co-Host of the fishing show Getting Hooked with Aaron & Barry and editor of Getting Hooked Magazine.