

# Trolling For Giant Suspended Fall Walleyes

By Aaron Shirley

Every year starting sometime in October, giant walleyes begin their annual migration route from Lake Ontario to the infamous waters of the Bay of Quinte in Ontario. They travel through a large section of water known as Adolphus Reach; the narrowing section of Lake Ontario that connects to the Bay of Quinte. It is this narrowing walleye-filled waterway that attracts anglers from all over the world with the hope to possibly catch the next world record walleye. Nobody knows the areas potential for record-class walleye better than Steve Close. This Bay of Quinte walleye guru spends countless days and nights targeting trophy-sized walleye every fall, and doesn't blink an eye (pardon the pun) at a fish weighing in the low teens. He has caught countless walleye over 12-pounds, and his personal best is over 16-pounds! When Steve told me about all these giant walleye many years ago, I couldn't hook up my boat quickly enough and get out there. I was not disappointed, as I got into numbers of large walleye from 8- to 13-pounds with Steve's 'insider info' on my first trip. I got bitten by the 'giant walleye bug' and have been traveling to this destination every fall to target these amazing species ever since.

## Planer Boards for Suspended 'Eyes

In most traditional walleye lakes, the fish relate to structure like points, reefs, islands and hard to soft bottom transitions. Walleye in these traditional lakes also normally hug close to the bottom. This isn't the case in Adolphus Reach, as the walleye suspend in the water column and chase pelagic baitfish such as shad.

There are many ways to catch these suspended walleye, such as downriggers, Dipsy Divers and flat-lining; however, planer boards are the best approach to present your lures by far. Due to its notoriety for numbers of big walleye, the Reach receives a lot of angling pressure. Walleye get skittish easily by overhead boats in the gin-clear water, and they will hit your lures with less reservation without a boat over top of them. This is why planer boards are such great tools, as they assist in taking your lures far off to the sides of the boat.



**The author displays a true Bay of Quinte hawg walleye approximately 13-pounds taken on an 8-inch Storm Lure**

Since the Reach is still considered a part of Lake Ontario (up to the ferry), each angler is allowed to utilize 2 rods in the open water. I like to stagger my presentation so that I start my day covering the water column from 20- to 30-feet deep. I pay close attention to my sonar, as I will mark bait

and walleye, and can make small changes according to where I mark fish. I like to put out the two furthest lines to run 20- to 25-feet deep with 180- to 250-feet of line out before I clip on the boards. I then let out an additional 150-feet of line to my furthest boards. I run my two inside lines 25- to 30-feet deep with 120- to 160-feet of line out. This method may seem excessive, but it is a highly effective presentation and you will not tangle lines, even on tight turns. If I am running 6 boards, I will run two more lines in closer to the boat 30-feet deep with 80- to 120-feet of line out.

There are a few good techniques that work well off the planer boards, such as trolling deep-diving stickbaits with braid, utilizing clip weights with braid or leadcore line with shallower running stickbaits or spoons. Active walleye suspend about 20- to 30-feet deep over 50- to 180-feet of water. It may seem strange to fish for walleye in such deep water for newcomers, but rest assured, that is where the giants are roaming.

## Slow it Down to Hook Up

Whether you choose a minnow-imitating stickbait or small spoon, slowing down the speed of your boat is critical for a higher success rate. If you have a large engine without a kicker motor, don't fret. I have a large 4-stroke engine and utilize 2 trolling bags (sea-anchor or drift socks) on both bow cleats on the port and starboard side to slow my boat down. Having trolling bags deployed on both sides of the boat helps to keep an even force of pull so the balance of the steering is stable. I



**Court LaRose and Barry Pringle trolling the Adolphus Reach area with a typical six rod spread of braided line and leadcore line**

prefer to run both bags off the bow rather than the traditional stern location, as it frees up 'walleye fighting' space and you will not have to worry about the hawg you have on your line getting tangled in the bags. Although it is a great system, precaution must be taken to shorten the ropes so the bags can't get caught in the prop. I have found productive trolling speeds of between 1.4- to 2-mph are best for fall walleye, with the slower speeds working better as the water temps plummet late November into December.

## Ginormous Walleye Tackle

Having the correct 'tools' for trolling up big walleye, and knowing how they work with precision will make a big difference; even down to the rod holders and placement. I use a high grade stainless and aluminum triple rod holder from Trojan Tackle, as I can easily adjust them for any application. I point the tubes at a 45 degree angle toward the stern and a slight angle down for the mast style boards. If I am running in-line boards, I angle the holders slightly more parallel to the gunnels.

### **Side tip for in-line planer boards:**

When using in-line planer boards, add a bead to your main line, then a swivel and a fluorocarbon leader about 3-feet in length, as this will prevent the board from sliding all the way down to your lure and knocking the fish off.

As for the rods and reels, they will differ slightly for the application and user preference. I personally prefer a longer 8- to 9-foot medium to medium-heavy action graphite rod for most applications, but a heavier rod will be necessary for heavy clip weights or leadcore line. One very important tool is a line counter reel, such as the new Rapala line counter reel with use of braided line. Productivity will depend highly on repeating a successful setting or amount of line out, not only to the lures, but also to the boards. I also strongly recommend 20-pound braid with a fluorocarbon leader for several reasons;

- you will notice hits much easier with long leads;
  - you will get a much better hook-set with long leads;
  - you will have a much better feel for how the fish is reacting during the fight;
  - the fluorocarbon leader will help get you more bites in clear water, and will act as a bit of a shock absorber with the no-stretch properties of braid;
- you will not go through as much braid with the fluorocarbon leader, and your braid will last for years of trolling enjoyment



**Aaron Shirley holds up a typical 12-pound walleye caught in Adolphus Reach on a Rapala 30' Taildancer**

While the old standard 'Dr.Death' stickbait by Manns still catch BOQ walleye, I have found some of my most productive lures for trolling up trophy fall walleye are Rapala 20' and 30' Taildancers trolled with braided line. Other good lure choices with straight braid are Power Dive Minnows, Storm Deep Thunders and Thundersticks. Rapala F18's, Husky Jerks, Taildancers and Storm Thundersticks can also be good with 3- to 4-ounce clip weights or 3- to 7-colour Cortland lead-core line. Several years

ago, Barry Pringle tried spoons off leadcore with great success, and we have both been capitalizing on this technique ever since. Williams Dartee and Quicksilver spoons and the Mooselook spoons with 3- to 7-colour leadcore can be dynamite. Barry and I have experienced days when the spoons out-number stickbaits 3 to 1 for hook-ups.

Fishing for suspended fall trophy walleye isn't just isolated to the Bay of Quinte, as other overlooked spots on the Great Lakes produce big walleye as well, such as the St.Lawrence River, Niagara River and Saginaw Bay to name a few. Just about when most people are thinking about winterizing their boats is when the hottest action of the year for trophy walleye is just beginning. Although October, November and even December can be great fishing, you must exercise some common sense with unstable weather conditions and make safety a priority over catching fish. Have a safe and walleye-filled fall this year!

***Aaron Shirley is an outdoor writer, seminar speaker and Co-Host of the television show Getting Hooked with Aaron & Barry.***