

The Crankbait Chronicles

By Bernard Williams
Magnolia Crappie Club



Introduction

In my past articles I shared some of my tips, tricks, and techniques about trolling crankbaits for Crappie. The article will be a continuation of that article. Let me first say I had no idea there were such a demand for information on this topic. Trolling crankbaits has become an addiction for several of us in the Magnolia Crappie Club. Some of us have taken this to the extreme, I will call no names.

Let me first say this is not an economical way to fish, it costs. However in my opinion it's worth the expense because it extends the crappie catching season on into the fall, shoot, in central MS we pull cranks till Christmas. My focus in this article will be on selecting the areas, the time-of-day, boat speed, equipment, crankbait preferences and the crankbait colors.

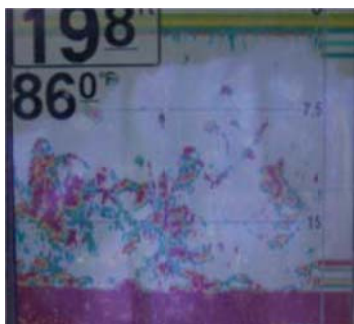


I use the Navionics Lake Maps for both my android smart phone and the chip for my depth finders as my primary source when choosing a location. The smart phone app cost approximately \$14, while the SD-Card runs around \$100. Both allow you to study the lake contours from any location. I call this doing my homework. My parents use to make us read ahead when our teachers didn't give us any homework for that day, this prepared me for what was coming the next day. By studying the maps before you get to a lake you can ask questions or you already have knowledge of what you are getting into.

I fish mainly the COE Lakes in central and north MS. I really think the next record crappie will come from one of the big four (Grenada, Enid, Sardis, or Arkabutla), seeing how Enid and Sardis already have the world's record for black and white crappie. Rumor has it that some 6+ pound crappie were shocked up at Arkabutla by the MWFP biologist in the past year. I can't verify that as fact but I did get it from a reliable source, "a fisherman".

Areas to Fish

The first area on any lake to check should be the primary river channel(s) that flow through the lake. These areas are known to hold fish, sometimes they are the only areas they do hold active fish. These are also the areas that receive the most pressure from others. My favorite area is a flat off of the river channels that has some kind of structure. Brush-piles, stake-beds, or stump flats offer the perfect locations. If you can find a ditch, creek or old lake-bed you have the picture-perfect combination.

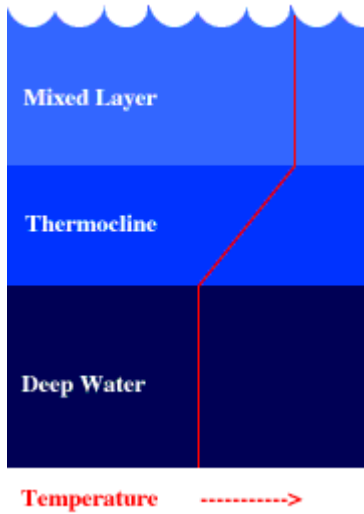


I scan the area first with my side-imager split between the map and the side scan. The map view is usually around 200' to 500' above, with the side-imaging set to 100'. I don't have the big screen yet, so I have to look closely at the screen

for the structure that I'm searching.

Next I look for schools of bait fish. Sometimes I'm lucky enough to see them work top-water; other times when the wind is blowing I use the sonar selection to find the large schools. With these steps behind me I let the crankbaits do the rest of the searching.

Another factor to consider is the thermocline; this is caused by excessive heat in the summer creating an area of the lake that contains no oxygen. During the summer, warm water, which is less dense, will sit on top of colder, denser deeper water, with a thermocline separating them. One result of this stability is that as the summer wears on, there is less and less oxygen below the thermocline, as the water below the thermocline never circulates to the surface, and organisms in the water deplete the available oxygen. As winter approaches, the temperature of the surface water will drop as nighttime cooling dominates heat transfer. A point is reached where the density of the cooling surface water becomes greater than the density of the deep water, and overturning begins as the dense surface water moves down under the influence of gravity.



In my home lake of Ross Barnett this usually occurs around the middle of July and continues until late October. Remember, there is absolutely no need to fish at or near the thermocline unless you want catfish. I try to determine the thermocline by setting my depth-finder's sensitivity at or near 100%. If the lake has a thermocline an almost solid line will appear on the screen. I like to fish 12" to 24" above this depth. The thermocline in my home lake is usually around 13' for most areas. The river channels will have a deeper level if the flow of release water is sufficient for an underwater current.

Time of Day

I've fished lakes from daylight to dark and each lake is a little different. On mainly shallow lakes fish tend to bite somewhat early. I think one reason is the warm water causes them to start feeding earlier in the morning. On these lakes I like to start in areas that lead to shallow flats. I'll use shallow running crankbaits, preferably Bandit 200's and run them around 4' to 6' feet in 8' to 10' feet of water. If it's going to be a bright clear day I use bright colors, if it's an overcast day, I stick with the blacks, blue, dark greens, and dark reds.

On deeper lakes like Sardis, Enid, and Grenada, it can be a hit and miss type of deal. Sometimes the fish will bite well early, depending on the moon stage, while other times they may wait until the mid-morning to start feeding. Yes, I mentioned the moon stage; it has an effect of the feeding times during the summer months. My belief is that the fish feed heavily during the night and early morning during a full moon because of the bright moonlight, so early morning would not be a good time for them for this technique.

On my home lake during the summer months I refuse to start fishing before 8am. I've watched the water temp rise and then see the shad ball up and the fish become really aggressive around 9 to 10am. When this happens all I do is try to stay on the same pattern until it changes.

Boat Speed

I should not touch this topic for obvious reasons, because everybody has their own fondness. However, because I have my own preference I will try to shed some light on the subject. My main starting speed is around 1.5mph to 1.7mph. The first rule to pulling cranks is there is no precise speed. A tip I would like to share is vary your speed and direction. Don't just pull straight at one constant speed. Make curves, vary your speed, I use

unorthodox methods. Occasionally I turn the trolling motor off for a few seconds and let the speed drop to 1.2 or 1.3 mph then turn it back on to the speed I was pulling and look and see 3 or 4 poles hookup with fish.

Trolling Poles and Rod-Holder



On lakes without a pole limit I pull 8 poles when I'm fishing by myself or 10 poles when I have a partner. Using 8 poles tends to be some work when the fish are actually aggressive, but it helps me find a pattern quicker. I must tell you the gear I use for pulling crankbaits; it's your liking, but I know what works best for me. I use strictly B-n-M ProStaff Trolling Poles (2-PST16, 2-PST14, 2-PST12, 2-PST10, and 2-PST8). I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel all I'm saying it these poles were engineered for trolling crankbaits. They have the proper tip action as well as the backbone needed.



I use strictly DriftMaster Rod Holders. The lakes I fish have stripers, gar, and large catfish. It's a sad feeling when you look around and see 3 or 4 rods being pulled in the water caused by off-brand rod holders. That's why I chose Driftmaster. They allow you to raise the pole tips much easier and spread the rods without wrenches.

I spread the rods from front to back with a 2' to 3' spread between the tips. I use braided line that allows me to direct the fish between the poles. Vicious makes a great braid that fairly reasonable considering the price of other vendors. The braid allows me to get deeper with less line out, and it works great when I hang up. With crankbaits costing nearly \$5, you could lose a small fortune with a couple of hang-ups.

Crankbait Preference

My brand inclination for crankbaits is no other than Bandit. I say Bandit because I my experiences, I've not found a crankbait that run more accurate than this brand. I've tried 10 or more brands, but I always come back to what I started on. It catches fish 2 to 1 or 3 to 1 over the other brands for me. Bandit has even added a line of crappie colors. I don't like some of the names he gave them (Hotty-Toddy) but other than that they work fantastic.








Another good feature about Bandits is the super sharp hooks and the right size hooks. Some vendors have large hook for walleye, bass, and other fish, bandit has the right size hook for crappie. The hooks don't hook to each other causing a lot of missed strikes. If a crappie gets close to a Bandit it gets hooked.

The rattle chamber is different on Bandits, the rattle has a different pitch from other baits. This causes a lot of reaction strikes. Strikes that occur when the fish wasn't hungry just didn't want that intrusion in their territory.

Bandits have a tight wobble or wiggle that cause a different vibration coming though the water. I sincerely believe this causes the fish to take notice of the bait.

Crankbait Colors

Let me mention a few of my favorite “Fish-Catching” colors. I’ve tried these colors on many lakes in numerous weather conditions. I will rank them by their catch ratio.

#1		Awesome Pink - I catch more crappie on this color day-in day than any other color in my box
#2		Orange Crush – Excellent for early morning in the 200 series. Mid-Day 300 series work great
#3		Grenada Shad – Excellent for big Grenada Slabs
#4		Chart Sparkle – Excellent bait for dingy water, fish see this color greate
#5		Sardis Gold – Just what the name says, it works excellent on lakes like Sardis and Enid
#6		Chrome Clown – This is a new color that’s catching on fast. Its excellent for overcast days and early morning.
#7		Hotty-Toddy – Great combination of two hot colors. I like this color on gloomy days.

Conclusion

The Crankbait Chronicles will be a continuation series of articles about the Crankbait method. In my articles I try not to give too much material to digest at one time. I try to lead you in the direction you need to go in and let you find you way. That way you learn most of the material on your own and you never forget what you’ve learned. If you have questions or comments, please don’t hesitate to drop me an email or message. Contact Bernard Williams, Central MS Guide Service, email:bwilliams27@comcast.net or mobile:601-454-0196.