



# The School of Fish

by Duane Ryks

## Summer Speed Trolling For Big Pike

By Duane Ryks

This is absolutely one of my favorite patterns for mid- to late-summer northern pike in deep clear lakes. Hold on tight to your rod for some exciting action. We catch a lot of big pike and some of our largest walleyes each season employing this method.

### Equipment

You can leave your wimpy rods at home. You are going to need to ramp up your equipment before you go. I suggest a stiff, heavy action bait casting or trolling rod. Almost any heavy action musky rod will work. You don't need an extremely sensitive graphite rod for this. Cabela's carries a good selection of inexpensive composite trolling rods. Choose a rod with plenty of backbone. The big-lipped lures, coupled with the speeds we run, pull hard. That means you may want to use a rod with a large comfortable handle. The rod must also be able to handle the sudden shock of a big fish.

My favorite is an eight-foot, Fenwick® Elite Tech Flipping Stick. This is not a sales pitch for Fenwick. I do not have any equipment sponsors that I am obligated to. This rod is one of the most sensitive heavy action rods I have ever held in my hands. It has the backbone to handle to tug of a big lure, but still has a fairly soft tip. For speed trolling, you don't need to have a rod this sensitive, but once you hook a fish, this rod lets you enjoy the fight.

Next, you will need a good sturdy bait casting or trolling reel. These reels have superior drag systems and large handles. Line counter reels are great because they let you know exactly how much line you have out. Generally, these are not as expensive as the high tech reels used by bass fishermen.

Good electronics are a must. I use a Lowrance® color depth finder and GPS with a LakeMaster® chip installed. Boat control is critically important. The GPS with a lake map allows me to anticipate turns.

### Line

Spool up with fairly heavy line in the 20-30 lbs test range. The new super braid lines are awesome. Berkley® has a new Fireline® Tracer line that is designed to keep its round shape and not dig into the spool. The super braids are great because they have a small diameter compared to their test strength. The smaller diameter cuts through the



Summer speed trolling for pike requires stout rods and big-lipped deep diving lures.

water cleaner allowing you better depth control for your lure. Plus, the ultra sensitivity reports back to you when you contact weeds.

### Baits

There may be any number of baits that will work. I have trolled with spoons, spoon plugs, bucktails, and spinnerbaits. The best lures for this method are deep diving crankbaits. In general, the bigger the lip, the deeper they will run. However, not all deep diving lures will run well at high speeds. My all-time favorites are the Bagley® Bang-O-Bs. It may take a little exploring to find these. Few small bait shops stock them. Some catalogs carry them or go to [www.bagleybait.com](http://www.bagleybait.com). These big lures run deep and attract fish with their amazing swimming action. You will have to match the lure size with the depth you need to run. I use the 5-1/4 inch model for depths down to 18-feet. The 8-

inch models work best to get down to 30-feet deep. I like the fire tiger, orange tiger, and chrome patterns on bright days; and the white, or shad colors on overcast days.

### Speed Trolling Method

This is not an easy technique to master. Speed trolling involves moving along at a faster pace than most anglers ever thought to go. Start at 3-1/2 mph and then go faster. My best action is usually in the 4-1/2 to 5 mph range. The best action on deep clear lakes is close to the sharpest drop-offs. This means very precise boat handling. Expect to dredge up the bottom occasionally.



Bagley® Bang-O-B lures run deep and troll well at high speeds. Match size and color to conditions. The fire tiger pattern tends to work the best on clear lakes under bright light conditions. The shad colors tend to work best under low light conditions.

Most of the lakes I speed troll have deep weed edges. The weeds may end at 18-20 feet or as deep as 30 feet. Lakes that have big stands of cabbage weeds are the best. Start trolling closest to the deepest weed edge. Your lure choice will depend on the depth you want to run.

You will need to experiment with the amount of line you let out. I usually start with about 100 feet of line back. Speed trolling in deep water means you won't spook fish by running over them with your boat like you do shallow water trolling. Less line out means better control running along a weed edge.

Set your drag so that the line will slip when a fish hits. Too little drag may mean a poor hook set. Too much drag is also bad. I have pulled right through the lips of big fish because the drag was set too tight. You can adjust the drag once you have the fish on.

I don't like to put my rod in a rod holder. The sudden jolt of

a fish adds a lot to the experience. If you are holding the rod you can control the fish on hook set much better. Hold the rod under your arm next to your rib cage. Keeping your life vest on may save you bruises or even a cracked rib.

Watch your electronics closely. Try to anticipate turns. A GPS with a lake map will help. Maps are not always perfect, but they provide a good starting guide. Once you have made the initial run, the GPS trail will help you make even better runs the next time. Be sure to mark fish on your GPS when you catch or miss one. Pike don't school tightly like other fish, but they do often swim in loose packs. Look for schools of baitfish. Several fish may be working the same school of baitfish. Big pike feed on big bait like panfish, perch or even walleye.

Early morning, late evening, or on cloudy overcast days the fish will probably be relating tightly to, or above, the weed line. Pike tend to cruise higher off the bottom than other predators. Most fish will be located near sharp inside turns or points. Inside turns and cuts are the most difficult to navigate. You need to get as far into the cut as possible and then back out again. One technique I employ is to turn the boat sharply and speed up to get out of cuts. This will not allow the lure to get all the way into the cut. Generally, I troll past a long point and then swing around and go back rather than try to make a short turn.

On bright days, or after a cold front, pike may locate out away from drop offs. Don't be afraid to run out over open water at times. Many of these deep clear lakes have tullibees. The larger pike may be chasing schools suspended over deep water.

Finally, hang on tight. Strikes are sudden and powerful. Even a small pike will provide an initial jolt. Smaller fish will come skipping across the surface. Big pike may stop your lure in its tracks. Be ready to throw your outboard into neutral or reverse. I have had to chase really big pike with the boat.

This trolling method will often injure the fish. Don't throw back fish that may not survive. Pike caught in these colder lakes are excellent for eating all year long.

To give this method a try without a lot of investment, contact Duane at [www.ifishmn.com](http://www.ifishmn.com).