

May Walleye/Crappie Combos

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville in my opinion is the crown jewel of Illinois for walleye/sauger fishermen. It has long been a destination for anglers to catch the tasty crappie in May but a combo trip for both has my clients getting in line for these red hot trips.

I tell potential clients that want to get in on this you better nail down your trip before I start my winter fishing show circuit in January. These trips which run from about May 10th on through mid-June or slightly longer if we get high water. For the last three years these trips are the first gone, well before the best spawn crappie trips.

It is partly due to all the fish we have in the lake now and the introduction of sauger a few years back which have had successful spawns, Not to mention the altering of past practices of releasing fry into the lake and first raising them in the rearing pond until they reach several inches long. Thus insuring a better survival rate. Last year we had the largest ever number of fingerlings raised in the rearing pond to further our claim as the best walleye/sauger lake in the state.

Another reason is my purchase of my first ever walleye boat. A tiller boat made by Bass Cat which they acquired Yar-Craft a couple years ago and I have the first one they ever built. It is a 2095BTX. This boat gets all kind of strange looks since it has a 200 horse power Mercury Verado. Simply the biggest tiller they have ever seen and then their comment is man how can you turn that thing. It has hydraulic power steering is my response. There is no torque and it steers with one finger.

This boat has many options for walleye fishing over all the bass boats I used to own. Bass boats are great casting platforms and run real fast but if you don't bass fish they lack function. With this walleye boat my customer feel safe since it is deeper and has more freeboard. I can run the boat from the front or back since I have a 36 volt trolling motor on each end. We usually pull in-line spinner rigs on bottom bouncers with line counter reels from all four corners of the boat. We target stumps on huge flats and points. With the 1 1/2oz. bottom bouncers we don't have much line out so we can turn quickly and get back on the stumps.

The boat is loaded with Lowrance electronics and currently I am running two HDS ten-inch units side by side on the transom with both side imaging and down scan as well as sonar and GPS with mapping. Then on the bow I am running two HDS eight-inch units with all the same capabilities as the transom units. So we have down scan and side imaging on front as well. All four are networked so they share all GPS waypoints.

Since we use so much bait I run a big bait tank and two smaller ones. We ran air lines all over the boat and terminated them with quick change disconnects which are installed anywhere you might want to sit and plug in your bait tank. Then we installed two 12 volt air pumps so we have ample air for all three tanks. This is something you will never see in a boat but I can keep fifteen dozen minnows alive even in the middle of summer.

We pull the spinner rigs with minnows simply because crappie love minnows and when we turn around on the end of a big flat we tend to catch nice crappie. This allows my customers to go home with a nice bag of walleye and crappie. If we were to run crawlers your other fish would more than likely be drum perch or yellow bass.

With the line counter reels I took all the headaches out from clients running way too much line out and causing their bottom bouncer to lie flat and snag. A client now gets in the boat and is handed a line counter reel and an eight-foot rod and instructed where to sit and they never have

to move all day. With the 36 volt system I can pull these spinners all day long in no matter what wind speeds we have to deal with.

The action is red hot because I have learned how to drag these spinners right through standing timber to catch even more post spawn crappie. We break up the action and target crappie for a while then walleye for a while.

What makes us very successful is I have done my homework and placed each stump I find on my GPS so I can make a milk run on these big flats and go from stump to stump. I have hundreds of waypoints dedicated to just this pattern. Plus I am running side imaging and if any school of fish show up out to the side of the boat I can throw a waypoint on them and quickly turn and run right through them.

For the customer this is as brain dead of fishing they will ever see. Let out the line on my line counter reel, guide tells you how much to let out and then when the rod bends over reel in the fish. Guide nets fish and repeat. They don't realize just how much preparation to both the boat and to their rig to make it that easy. But that is OK. These are the hottest ticket I have all year and routinely book six months in advance. This year they are all booked and I have a waiting list and they have been booked since January.

My summer crappie trips are filling and this is also a very fun outing. We use slip bobbers to drift over deep brush and Lake Shelbyville is by far the best summer crappie lake in the state. Just go to my website and check the front page for availability. www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com.