

Today's Electronics - I Can't Survive Without Them

By Steve Welch

My grandfather took me fishing all the time when I was a young boy and gave me the love for the sport and the outdoors in general. We never used nor needed electronics to pursue the catfish just his magic dip bait.

I however couldn't leave home without them. Today with all the pressure of anglers and all the information they can get on the net and magazines and TV. You need the best electronics you can get. You need to be able to get off shore and really explore the old channels and hidden structure that lies beneath the lake.

On my twenty-one foot Ranger I have four systems a little overkill I know but you ought to take a ride with me. I can take you out to a five-gallon bucket in the middle of Kentucky Lake and return to it time after time for the rest of my life.

I have a color Lowrance depth finder in my dash and a color Lowrance GPS/Depth finder system with a hard drive beside my dash. Why not have just one system. A bass boat has space limitations beside the dash so the big Lowrance wouldn't fit. I can't see the screen well enough on my GPS/Depth finder if I split it but can see it fine on full screen.

I have my GPS/Depth finder mounted on a ram mount and under it I have a Hummingbird 797 side-imaging unit. Dash looks pretty busy but you should see how well they work together.

I currently have 397 waypoints in my Lowrance 26cHD and I have my unit up on my trolling motor networked to this unit. It is the Lowrance 111cHD. It is the biggest unit they make and I can split it and see both screens very well. My buddies keep asking me to turn the channel to ESPN the screen is so big. Anyway when I enter a waypoint on my dash unit it automatically enters the same waypoint on my front unit and vice versa. This is very handy for two reasons. I now can use my trolling motor to slide up over my next waypoint. You need to be moving kind of fast to get a good track on it though. I can now hold over my brush without having to drop a buoy.

I have all my waypoints loaded on to a MMC card so if my units were to break down I don't lose any of my information. I have two systems with a 30 gig hard drive loaded into them. These systems allow you to have mapping of every lake in the country as long as Fishing Hotspots has them available.

This mapping gives you detailed info of the lake such as contours, old roads, river channels, old house foundations, old stump fields, barge lanes, buoys, ramps, roads etc.

I have gained so much confidence to go out and look for structure in the middle of the lake. I especially look for ledges that have a tight turn to them.

First I have two seats up on the nose so two can work as a team and we run our jigs right under the trolling motor to stay in the cone. Here is how I set my depth finders up to see my jig and see fish in structure. I never use the automatic sensitivity mode or the fish I.D. feature. I typically set my system to where I am getting some surface clutter but not so much that I can't see the brush. I use the zoom feature so the brush jumps out at you better. I want to see my jig going down the screen so when I am over brush I can see it right on top of the brush. This is especially important if you are fishing over a stake bed down on Kentucky Lake. A typical brush pile won't be any higher than two or three feet off bottom but a stake bed will be six or more feet up and big fish usually are right on top of the stakes.

I can see the squared edges of the stake beds and I can see them color in very dark if fish are in them and I can see them lighten up once the fish leave. You got to love the new color systems.

With my two systems linked I stop short of a new spot and set my dead poles that are on the nose in my Tite Lok rod holders just above the brush or stakes. I then slowly move over the brush and the fish that are high on the brush will immediately get the dead poles. Then I get out my jig poles and fish them deeper into the thickest part of the cover all the while I am careful not to move around in the brush to quickly as I

still have the dead poles working for me.

This system is different than most would think when they see the spider rig set up on the nose of the boat. Most think of open water trolling. I call it saturating a brush pile and moving quickly to the next and doing it all over again. You must be a good trolling motor operator as you can not drift at all, no matter the wind, waves, boat traffic no distractions, just hover.

I have had years of practice at hovering and this set up is deadly on deep-water crappie wherever you go.

Now let's talk about the side imaging. First of all I am a big Lowrance fan but while at this years Crappie U.S.A. classic I noticed that all the other pros were running the side imaging units. Well since Lowrance isn't even trying to get on board with this I had to get a Hummingbird.

Here is why all those pros are running the Hummingbirds. I have been going down to Paris Landing for three years about six to ten times and each time I am finding new spots and entering them on my GPS. Finding them the old fashion way. Working an entire ledge and snagging brush and then marking it. This takes time.

With the side imaging you can be 150 feet off to the side of a brush pile and even if another boat is fishing it. You can see the wood and if it has branches on it and if it has fish on it. You can then freeze the picture on your unit slide the curser over to the brush and mark the waypoint from a 150 feet away.

Like I said three years finding all that brush and the pros at my lodge found just about all my spots in less than a week by just driving around and not even fishing.

Well I had to have one and believe me they are cool. I just got it and I have seen things that I only imagined. I know that baitfish show up as clouds that resemble fog so I saw a bunch of seagulls diving on them the other day and motored over to take a better look. I could see the baitfish and under them as clear as day I could see eight fish lying right on bottom. Don't know what kind but sure could see the perfect silhouette of eight big fish.

I have seen the steps at one of our boat ramps in perfect detail all the way out to the end of them. I have seen big trees lying in the water and can tell you how far out they extend and if fish are on them and if they still have any of their small branches on them. I can see scattered logs out in the middle of the lake and tell you how many and which direction that they lie. Search time on a new lake will be greatly reduced.

Any fisherman who chases a species of fish that migrate with bait should have one. I can see fish up on flats and when they move I can see where. Bass that love to lie in old logs or around old isolated stumps can't hide from this. I can see them. Catfish lying on bottom out on big flats you can see them. If they are close enough to the bottom they cast a dark shadow like image otherwise a fish shows up as a white spot like looking at a negative of a photo.

While at the classic I was shown an image of a refrigerator out in Kentucky Lake and you could tell the door was open. You can put an MMC card into the unit and record images for playback at a later time.

I kind of snicker to myself when I here others complaining about the price of their new 300 dollar depth finder. I am into Lowrance and Hummingbird now for about five thousand big ones and not complaining a bit. Like I said, you need to take a ride with me you will be amazed at the new technology.