

GETTING TERMINAL



Leaders For Short-Line Trolling With Shad Baits

By John Bette

We often talk about how different leaders can affect the action of different lures. In most cases, we are talking about this in regard to casting, but it can also apply to trolling. Early in the year, short-line trolling can be very effective and is a lot of fun.

Short-line trolling, or “short-lining,” consists of running lures quite close to the boat on very short lines; hence the name. In a lot of cases, the most effective way to do this is to have nothing but a three-foot leader out with your rod tips buried in the water. This is often done in shallow areas where navigating may require sharp turning. Running planer boards or a wide trolling spread can be difficult in this type of situation.

Lures that really shine in this application are smaller, shad-type crankbaits. When you are targeting fish coming out of the spawn, they may not be enticed by a large profile lure but may be triggered by something small that resembles a meal they can digest fast and easy. Sometimes these baits are so small you may even question whether they are big enough for musky fishing, but they can



A thin, stranded wire leader is perfect for running shad baits close to the boat.

be very effective.

Of course, if you use a standard, bulky musky trolling leader with these small baits, you may not be optimizing their action. You'll want to use a lighter leader set-up to best trigger a reaction strike. Many short-liners run lighter fluorocarbon leaders in the 60- to 80-pound test range. The drawback to this, of course, is the higher risk of the leader being cut by sharp teeth.

An alternative is to try a stranded wire leader which provides an advantage because the wire is thinner. This not only

helps provide the full action of the lures, but prevents bite-offs. A wire leader will also get the lures down a bit deeper because their diameter offers less resistance in the water. When running baits so close to the boat, achieving a little more depth can make a huge difference in getting muskies to bite.

There are various stranded leaders on the market available to you — Seven-Strand, 19-strand 49-strand, etc. with Seven-Strand the most popular. It offers just the right amount of stiffness needed to keep the lures down yet allow flexibility. Stranded wire leaders are also a great option for trolling in situations with lots of debris or sharp rock shelves, which could cut fluorocarbon line.

It's wise to choose coated wire for trolling wire leaders because it will protect the fish from being cut should they roll in the leader. Short-lining can be both fun and chaotic, but we want to care for these fish as much as possible.

Give stranded wire leaders a shot when short-lining. They will help your presentation, eliminate failure, and give you peace of mind, getting you that much closer to your goal of catching a big musky.

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