

## GETTING TERMINAL



# Beef Up Your Gear As You Hunt 'The One'

By John Bette

If you are still fishing during this time of year, one thing is for certain — you're looking for "the one." It's big fish time and nothing else matters. And if there is one type of bait that goes along with chasing big muskies late in the year, it's big rubber.

If you are going to be casting big rubber late in the year and want to be effective with it, one thing you should consider is beefing up your arsenal. It will not only help you boat more muskies but will reduce fatigue, as well as eliminate potential failure that could cost you lost equipment or the fish you are hunting.

Large rubber baits can really take a toll on equipment, regardless of whether you have a fish hit or not. Having the right fishing rod allows you to cast with less stress to your body and the rod. Using an 8-foot-6 or nine-foot extra-heavy or double-extra-heavy rod is something to consider if you are going to take throwing rubber seriously.

Also, using a bigger, heavy-duty reel and 100-pound test braid will benefit you. Lighter braid works for most of the fishing season, but going with heavier line in late fall just helps pad your odds — it only makes sense. And, as we had discussed in a previous column, late fall is a great time to re-spool your reels with new line before your last few trips. This will keep your hands dry longer, since fishing line is most water-resistant when it's new out of the package.

Double-check your gear on a daily basis. Again, you want to do everything you can to keep the odds in your favor and prevent failure. If you are using snaps on your leaders, change them out more regularly than usual. Again bigger baits equal more stress. A solid ring connection is something to consider for extra strength at this time.

As for leaders, you will want to beef them up, too. Why? During the extreme late season, more than any other, big muskies tend to go for headshots with larger profile baits. The lures are big so leader sensitivity doesn't really come into play, so bigger and longer is definitely better.

If you prefer fluorocarbon leaders and you typically use 100- or 130-pound test, I would suggest bumping up to the 150- to 200-pound test range and not use anything shorter than 12 if not 14 inches. Such leaders are not only heavier but thicker, so they help with abrasion resistance.

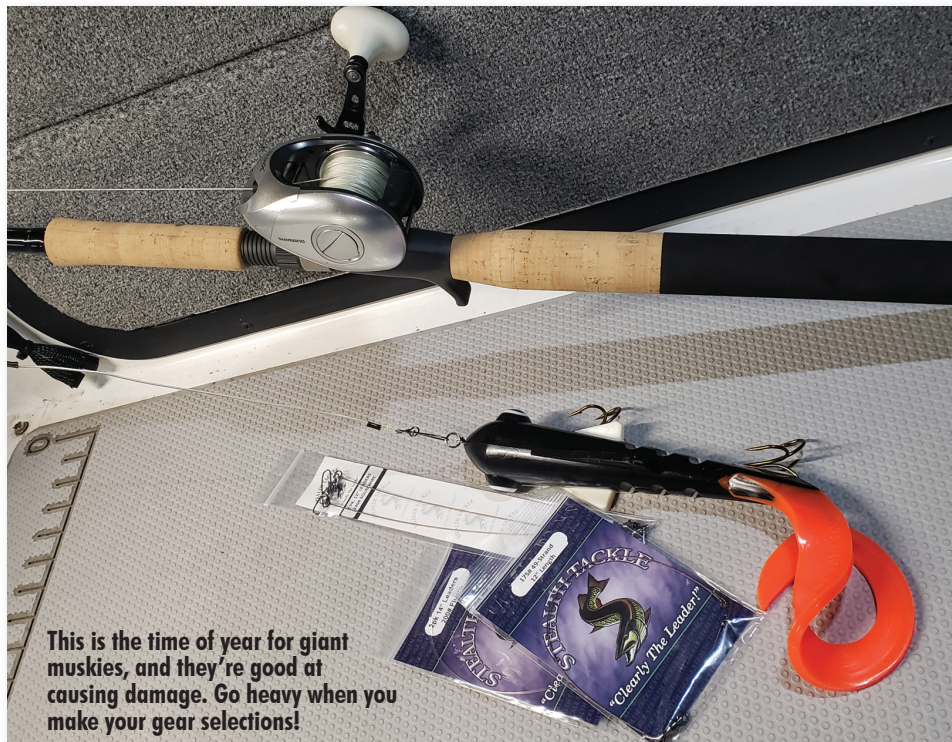
Many anglers shy away from fluoro-

carbon leaders this time of year and want to use wire, which is perfectly fine. When considering solid wire, 174-pound test has become an industry standard for most situations throughout the season with various types of lures, but again you are doing yourself no harm by upsizing to something over 200-pound test, and 240-pound test is a good recommendation. Occasionally when using such heavy rubber baits, you get a "dawgball" where the bait hangs up on the leader and can cause a kink. Using 240-pound test wire will minimize that.

Another option that has become more popular the last few years is using a heavy stranded wire leader such as 49-strand. If you like the flexibility that fluorocarbon provides but prefer wire, these will work well for you, but again don't be shy about going heavier. These leaders are available in 175-pound test, which is a great pairing for the bigger profile baits.

Make every cast count. Most of all, be safe and cautious on the water this time of year. Bulk up, bundle up, and be ready for anything!

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**This is the time of year for giant muskies, and they're good at causing damage. Go heavy when you make your gear selections!**