

dad colors. The list goes on, and is a good start—but ask another walleye angler and I guarantee you'll get different choices.

Action is the next factor to consider. I used to pick long, thin crankbaits with slow wobbles for cold-water periods. But I have since discovered that short cranks with aggressive actions will catch walleyes in cold water, too.

The Hornet has the most aggressive action of my crankbait choices. Shad Raps have a tight, aggressive action. Both

Basic Shapes



Samson breaks walleye crankbaits into five categories based on profile: long and thin (Rapala Original Floater); shad—round and long, with tapered tail (Cotton Cordell Wally Diver); shad—flat (Rapala Shad Rap); curved back (Reef Runner Deep Diver); and short and fat (Salmo Hornet) .

Starting Colors



To keep color choices manageable, Doc Samson often begins experimenting with four basic patterns, ranging from ultra-natural to high-vis and bizarre. In the Salmo Bullhead family, for example, a good starting palette would include (from left) the patterns Pink Tiger, Hot Bullhead, Bullhead and Clown.

work just as well for me as Original Rapalas in cold water. In short, both types of action can be used all season.

Body shape is also important, and there are many from which to choose. A Reef Runner has a curved back, the Sting and Floating Rapala are long and thin, and the Wally Diver is round, long and has a tapered tail like the Reef Runner. Hornets and Fat Raps are short and fat. Shad Raps are flat shaped.

We have lots of choices, but what makes it difficult is all of these profiles will at times catch fish in almost any set

of conditions. On the other hand, they can flop in virtually any conditions, too. You have to be a master at letting the walleyes tell you what's really going on.

Scratch The Hatch

One thing I don't consider important when selecting crankbaits is a lake's forage base. The same goes for live bait. If I


age is shad. So, should your bait look like a perch, smelt, shad or an alien? I don't think it makes any difference.

For example, Salmo's Bullhead looks like a willow cat. Of course I really wanted to test it on the Mississippi River, where anglers fishing willow cats have won Cabela's Masters Walleye Circuit tournaments. I found the Bullhead

fishing. But despite my efforts, I keep failing, so I have simplified the selection process by using one of each and letting the fish decide. For example: I may chose a Salmo Sting and a Reef Runner as my long, thin bait selections and a Shad Rap and a Wally Diver as my short, fat lures.

I use lead-core line, FireLine, mono, snap weights or in-line weights to get the crankbaits to my target depths—remember, that's the most important factor—and keep changing lures during the day to find what the fish prefer.

One final tip: If you don't have boxes filled with crankbaits, don't despair. For most anglers it is too expensive to have all the models, sizes and colors from the different manufacturers. Pick two sizes and four colors of your favorites as a starting point and work up from there.

In the end, such simplicity is often the best way for you to prevent the entire crankbait selection process from becoming a frustrating and unmanageable exercise in futility—and catch more walleyes in the process. 

“One thing I don't consider important when selecting crankbaits is...forage base.”

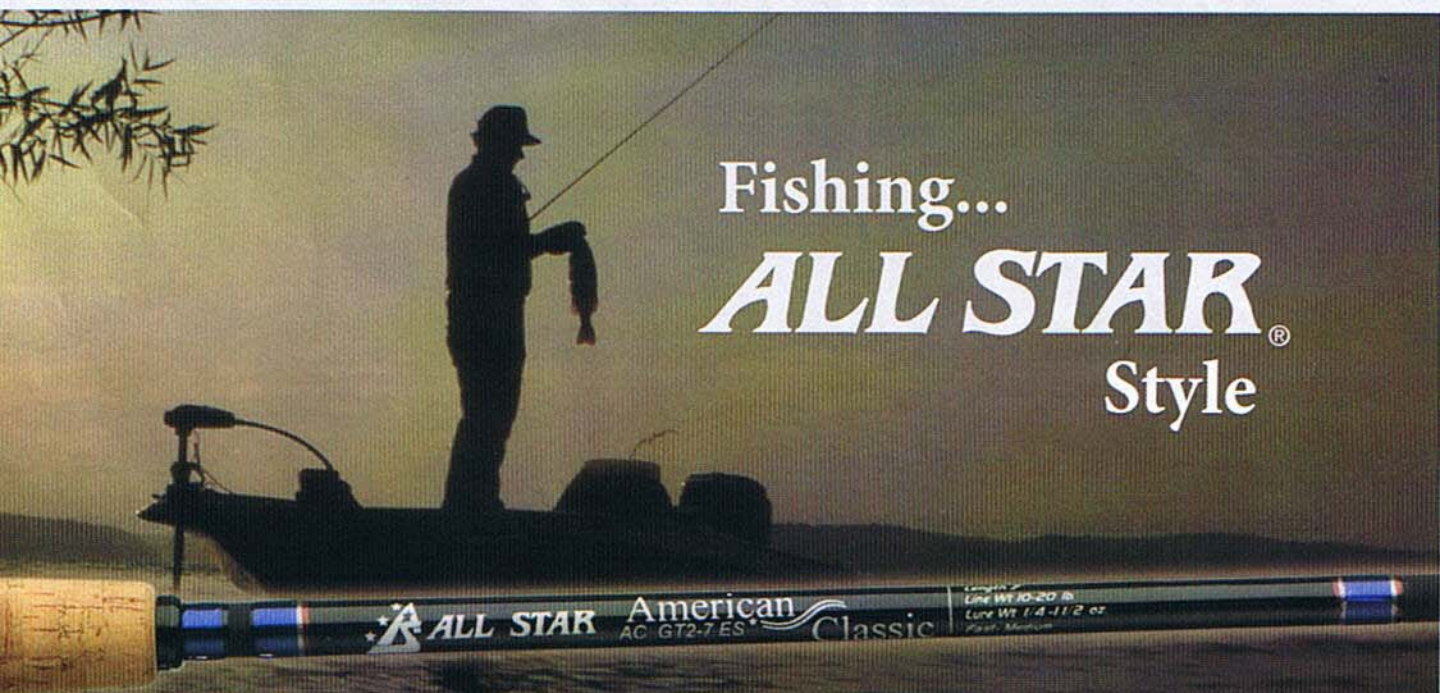
tried to “match the hatch” with live bait, I would never use nightcrawlers—and I would miss out on many fish.

In fact, long, thin crankbaits often outfish shad-style baits on systems where shad are the main course. But I also have seen only shad-bodied lures work on waters where the dominant for-

works on the Mississippi—but it also works on Lake Erie—where walleyes have never seen a willow cat!

Keep It Simple

I have devoted a great deal of study to predicting which crankbait will work best on a given day before I even start



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Crank Calls

Sort through the confusion to choose the right crankbait, anytime

by Dr. Bruce Samson

Experimentation is the key to finding the right combination of crankbait running depth, speed, color, size and action.



Choosing a crankbait for trolling is tough. Where do you start, given the nearly astronomical number of options in lure size, profile, action and color? To complicate matters, walleyes in different waters have varying preferences, so the hot bait on one lake may flop on another.

Unfortunately, there's no silver bullet for determining which crankbait will work best, when. I've analyzed my fishing records, tested new theories, interviewed other anglers—and found no rules of thumb that always hold true.

In short, walleyes make the rules and you have to experiment to learn them. But with countless baits to test, that could take forever. Fortunately, there are ways to simplify the search for the perfect crank. Following are some key factors to consider, and my methods for quickly deciphering the day's hot bait.

Depth Perception

First off, I believe the most important factor determining whether a crankbait catches fish is the depth at which you run the lure—remember that everything else comes second. If the walleyes are suspended at 12 feet, lures that run there will be your top producers, even if they aren't the fish's preferred presentation.

Size is next—and who says it doesn't matter? Size does matter to walleyes, which tend to prefer smaller baits in the spring and larger sizes in the fall. All sizes work in the summer.

Speed is the third consideration. In general during cold-water periods, walleyes prefer crankbaits slow (1.3 to 2.0 mph) and faster during the warm water periods (2.0 to 3.5 mph). However, I experiment with speed until I catch fish.

Lures enter the equation because some run to the side or spin out at 3 mph, making them poor choices when the fish want fast food.

Reef Runners tend to need tuning but will run true at higher speeds if you fine tune them. Wally Divers are difficult to run at higher speeds but work very well at 1.3 to 2.5 mph. Shad Raps, Bomber Long As, and Salmo Hornets and Bullheads tend to run straight at all speeds.

Color comes next. Some anglers try to match the preferred forage, but I'm not sold on the strategy. I do use naturals a lot but I also run pink, orange and chartreuse. More importantly, I keep an open mind to all colors—walleyes are the boss.

That said, I have noticed some patterns to color selection. Missouri River walleyes like white. Mississippi River and Illinois River saugers like pink. Devil's Lake walleyes like orange bellies or red. Mille Lacs walleyes like craw-

