

Fishing Techniques for Striped Bass

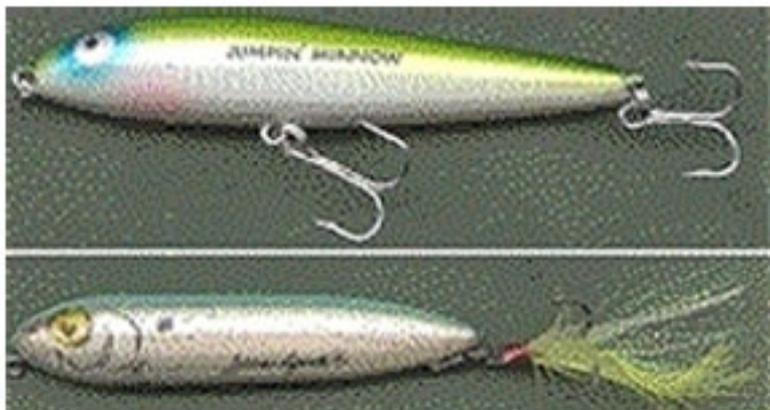
Written by Wayne Gustaveson

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ANCHOVY RIGGING TECHNIQUES

Use fluorocarbon line as this line is almost invisible in water and has been proven to be effective in catching fish than monofilament. A short leader of fluorocarbon attached to braid or monofilament line will increase your catch rate when using bait.

Select a firm frozen anchovy. Soft thawed anchovies can be used most effectively as chum. Cut the anchovy into 3 pieces any of which can be used. The head stays on the hook best with the tail being fairly resilient. The trick to making the frozen bait stay on is to only run the hook in one time. Do not attempt to turn or reposition the barb. Push it in once and leave it for best results. Yes the bait will fall off when it thaws but I want to have a fish by then anyway. It should work long enough!



Do not use dried bagged anchovies as the preservative that keeps them viable will also send stripers running in the opposite direction.

If the bait is partially thawed I sometimes run the hook all the way through the bait (especially the head) and then turn the hook and draw it back to position the bait so that it is cradled in the bend of hook. Again, do not reposition hook location more than once.

I use either a Yamamoto circle hook (spit shot hook) but have had good luck Owner octopus hooks. I prefer size number 2 or 4 hooks depending on current size of striped bass. Hook size may be more important than brand or style. (DO NOT USE ANCHOVY HOOKS - THEY ARE MUCH TOO BIG FOR 2 POUND FISH) When fish get bigger, then a larger hook may be better.

With circle hooks it is important to set it with a sweeping motion instead of a jerk of the wrist. It is possible to just start reeling when a bite is felt with a circle hook but don't jerk. If you jerk, then

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use a lead head jig and your style will match your terminal tackle.

The best anchovy rig is the carolina rig with the bait hook 18 inches below the weight in Spring time and 6 inches below in Winter. (Yes it does make a difference. Winter stripers lay on the bottom and may not rise up to grab a bait 2 feet off the bottom. Spring stripers are suspended and more willing to eat a bait that appears to be unrestrained by hook, line or sinker. Peg the weight in place with a swivel (preferred) or use a rubber core sinker or regular split shot. The inherent problem with this rig is terminal bait tangling with the sinker/weight. Using heavier line reduces foulups but I think also reduces bites so I just deal with occasional tangles.

I prefer the same jighead used for fishing plastic grubs as an alternate. Use a short swimming head to reduce profile as much as possible (lead is my normal color but I have had good luck with white). Hook the anchovy tail or head one time through the back so it is in-line with the jig head much like a grub would be. Hook it so the bait swims with the head instead of twirling on descent and retrieve.

Once at depth move the terminal bait as little as possible but always maintain positive contact with the bait. That means keep the line tight. With the subtle winter bite a gentle lift on the bait will offer a certain feeling of resistance when just the bait is felt and another magnitude of resistance when a fish is there. Being able to judge the difference is the whole key to catching or missing. The "bite" is seldom felt in the winter. A sense of "perhaps a fish is holding on" is what makes the fishing fun in December. Sometime you strike at nothing and other times you catch a fish that was never really detected. I enjoy the challenge!

CHUMMING

You can get the school to eat anchovies by cutting up 4-6 anchovies in 1/4 inch slices and broadcasting them in all directions around your (hopefully) stationary boat. Watch the bait descend and see how slowly it moves. It will take well over 5 minutes to reach 50-90 feet where resting schools may be. If the school takes the bait then they all look for food and will eat your baited hook too. They move shallower when one fish starts to feed.

So fix the carolina rig (above) and attach a one inch chunk of bait which covers as much of the hook as possible. If fishing at 60 feet it is okay to use one-half ounce of weight. Sometimes a quarter ounce is enough. Experiment and see how much weight is preferred by the fish on each individual day. They will let you know.

SUMMER - Chumming

In summer I suggest a slow descent rate. Put out 20 feet of line. Let it go down another 2 feet every minute. When you get to 80 feet start reeling in one foot every minute. Another method of simulating sink-rate of chum is to put half an anchovy on a weightless line and just let it sink naturally. I usually do this after I have hooked a fish or two and know that the school is in the

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area and interested. Heavy line will only let the bait go down about 30 feet before line buoyancy equals anchovy sink rate and gravity quits working. Really technique is not quite as important as finding fish. Read reports and keep a log or mark on a map where the action was.

Summer temperature forces striped bass adults into deep water and separates them from shad. Deep trolling with down riggers, jigging at 60-90 feet or bait fishing at 40-60 feet is the secret to finding summer time stripers. Trolling with monofilament is effective if fish are willing to come up from the depths when they see and feel prey 10-25 feet above them. Use a Deep Thunderstick Jr, Wally Diver, Shad Rap, Excalibur Fat Free shad or other deep diving plug trolled at 3-5 mph for best success.

SUMMER SLURPS- Young shad migrate out of murky water in June and July. If shad schools are large then stripers of all sizes (up to 4 pounds) begin feeding on the very slow swimming shad. Stripers group so tightly they seem to be touching each other. Stripers swim in waves resembling a mowing machine as only mouths and foreheads break water. The disturbance is minimal but a tiny splash may be a 3 pound fish. Even though bigger stripers are feeding on inch-long shad they will hit full-sized surface baits or shallow runners. Yearling stripers may be so in tune with small bait size that presenting an inch long offering (crappie jig) is the only effective means of capturing them. I often tie a curly tail jig on an 18 inch monofilament leader to a hook on my surface lure. That way I can cast the big lure a long ways and still have a small offering to catch the smaller stripers.

FALL

Fall is the most exciting time. When shad are available stripers drive them to the surface creating surface feeding frenzies or "boils" (Click on Striper Boils). When feeding on the surface, stripers are constantly looking to the surface for food. Lures that stay on the surface and swim side-to-side making a V-wake, most resemble shad and demand attention from striped bass even when not actively feeding. It is common to retrieve the stick bait and see striped bass come up to look - then swirl as they head back down. This swirl is guaranteed assurance that stripers are in the area and can be coerced into feeding. Prospecting for stripers in the back of the canyon with a stick bait is a quick way to locate active fish.

WINTER

Winter patterns for stripers make them more vulnerable to anglers. In Fall stripers chase shad into brushy flood plains and feed shallow early and late. When temperatures plummet shad go deeper and stripers follow after them. During fall stripers were found chasing shad into submerged creek channels (40-60 feet) which led to shallow flood plains. In Winter stripers have pulled out deeper to the main channel where the canyon is wider. Bottom depth will be near 60-100 feet. Suspended at 70-90 feet shad schools which appear as a mass of grey fog may be seen on the graph. Stripers lay below the suspended shad in a dormant state, but when hungry will rise to the 45-60 foot range to capture a shad meal.

Stripers appear as a moving mass with individual fish shapes apparent around the edges of the

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school. Striper schools will often have "X" shaped marks on the perimeter while shad schools have a smooth perimeter. The resting school may appear as a black tower growing from the lake bottom. The tower is often accompanied by scattered unevenness which are fish laying on the bottom. In the excitement of hooking a fish remember to take a moment to glance at the graph and see the lines emerge from the tower as stripers go into feeding mode overdrive. This active school mode is the goal of every fishing trip. Memorize the line pattern so every active school seen in the future will translate to more stripers being caught.

Graph for fish traces about 1/3 the way out from the back of the canyon. Find the traces which are usually concentrated in Winter, but widely scattered in Fall. As the winter pattern solidifies shad schools and adjoining stripers get closer together and easier to find.

The best technique is to use a hammered silver jiggging spoon, a shad colored slab spoon (wally lure- shad minnow), a half ounce or heavier white marabou jig or anchovy bait. Drop the lure into the striper school at the depth indicated on the graph. It is important to measure line as it drops so fish suspended at 50 feet can be targeted. If fish are 10 feet off the bottom then start at the bottom and reel up 10 feet so the lure is inside the school. If no response, try bait fishing at the same depth that stripers are marked on the graph. Stripers will feed all winter long but are less active when water temperature is colder than 55 degrees. The winter catching peak is from November 15 to December 15.

Most fish in Lake Powell are accustomed to seeing some green flash in their daily travels. Chartreuse is very visible in low light conditions that prevail at 40, 60 and deeper depths where the spoon is so effective. A chartreuse bucktail completes the total package in deep water. A shad colored (hologram) spoon with bucktail looks like a shad at depth in low light. It has the characteristic movement of a wounded shad as it sweeps toward the bottom on slack line. It creates a vibration and a resounding "thunk" as it hits bottom. We surface dwellers discount the very different properties that sound waves have in water versus air. Fish can hear for very long distances. More importantly they have the lateral line sensory organ that allows them to FEEL vibrations. Swimming motions of a fish in close proximity are felt by other fish.

A spoon at depth must be a sensory overload for striped bass that are still hungry but have to left the shallows. They hear and feel a spoon hit and rush over to take a look. The wounded shad tries to swim off the bottom as it is jigged by the angler. It doesn't have enough strength to get away and falls back. The green flash is added incentive. The spoon is inhaled. FISH ON!