

**W**intertime temperatures generally push bass to the depths until spring. At least that's the conventional wisdom. But Marty Robinson knows that fish on deep, clear reservoirs often spend time in the backs of drainages.

"For some reason, the bait gets in the backs of pockets with drains coming into the lake and the bass follow that bait," said the Elite Series pro.

The best part of this pattern is that the bass he finds in these areas are usually solid specimens.

"Most of the time, they're 3- to 4-pounders, and that's hard to come by on a lake like that," he said.

Robinson has witnessed this phenomenon in many reservoirs, and the key factor is always a slightly higher water temperature.

"Usually those drains have a little current flow, and that water is a couple of degrees warmer than the rest of the lake," he explained.

The drains Robinson looks for aren't deep, steep-sided creeks. Instead, he keys on drainages that enter flat pockets.

"Mainly what I'm looking for is a fairly flat-looking drain. They taper into the center of the ditches," he explained. "The center of the ditch might be 20 feet, which is relatively shallow for that type of lake."

However, not every such drain holds fish. "You've got to have that green-looking water," Robinson said. "On these clear, superclean lakes, the fish are more apt to bite when the water has a little color to it."

While any of these green-stained drains with bait will hold spotted bass, Robinson said he keys on pockets that are filled with shad.

"The whole deal to finding the big ones is finding big balls of bait. If you can find that [with your electronics], you'll catch a lot of spotted bass. But you'll also have largemouth bass [in the same area]."

His lures of choice are 3/8-ounce Buckeye Su-Spins and Ditch Blades, spinners on which he threads a standard Zoom Fluke. Pearl and green albino flukes are best, he added.

"You need that small body to mimic the shad the bass are feeding on," Robinson said.

Retrieval speed dictates which of the two blades he uses. "Most of the time, I throw that Ditch Blade in warmer water. It's made for speed. I throw the Su-Spin when I want a slow presentation."



**Bassmaster Elite Series pro Marty Robinson usually begins a cold, wintry day in the pockets, dredging big bass out of submerged ditches by ticking spinners along the bottom.**

Photo by Andy Crawford

While Robinson often runs these blades right down the middle of the ditch, he said it's surprising how shallow big largemouth bass will move onto the surrounding flats.

"There are times when I pull into 5 feet of water and throw up on the bank and have to burn my Su-Spin to keep it off the bottom, and I'll catch a 4- or 5-pounder," Robinson said.

Generally, however, the key is keeping the lure close to the bottom. "These fish aren't suspended," he explained. "They're on the bottom."

He therefore works to maintain contact with the bottom. "I let the bait drop down to the bottom, and then I pick it up and tick it along the bottom," Robinson said.

The real difficulty to this pattern is knowing when to set the hook. "It's a funny bite," he said. "When you're winding that thing slow, you'll feel ticks when they just run up to it and hit it."

Making solid hookups means resisting the temptation to set the hook on these taps. "You just keep rolling it along," Robinson said. "It's amazing how many times they run up and tick that bait and you miss it."

A solid bite is indicated by the rod loading up, much like a strike on a Carolina rig. "You don't have to jerk hard when that happens. Just pull the rod to set the hook.

"In fact, if you jerk on it, you'll usually pull the bait out of the fish's mouth."

Although one might think the bite would only get better as the sun warms the water, Robinson said shade is absolutely critical.

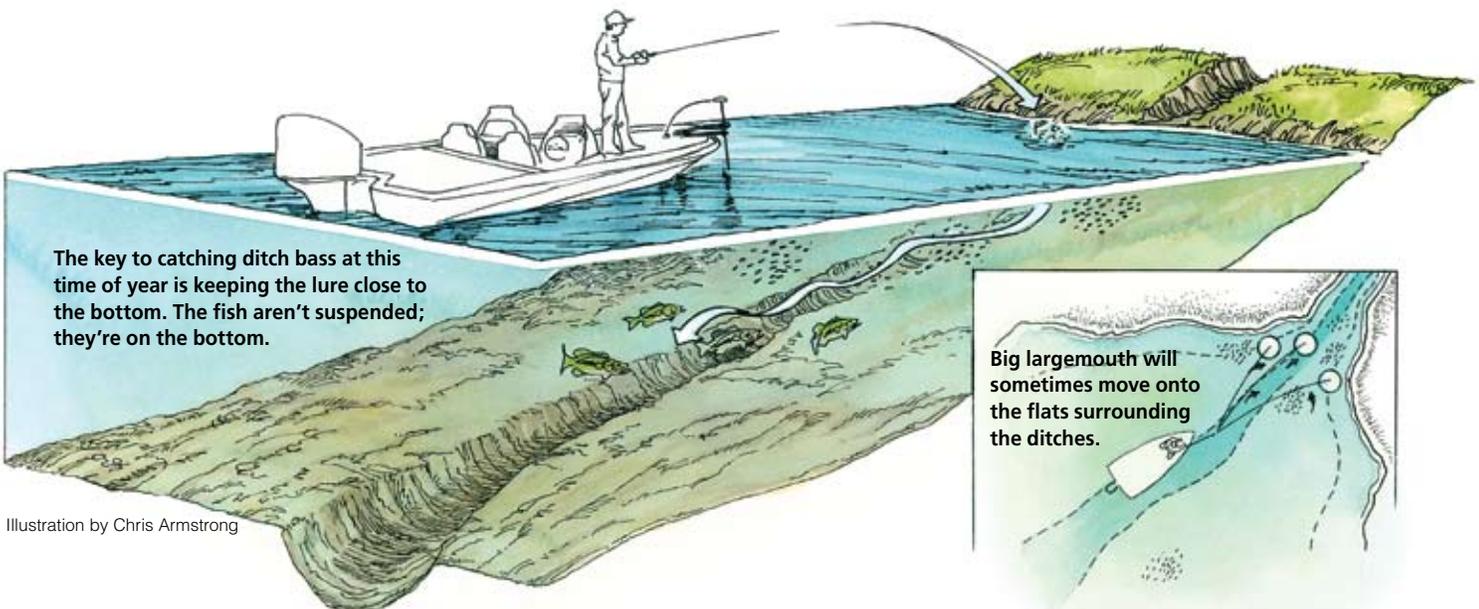
"Once that sun gets up and shining, they seem to move out," he said. An exception is if any portion of the drain remains covered with shade.

"I can get over in that shade, and all that bait will be stacked up," Robinson said.

Once all the sun beats back the remaining shad, the bite is over.

"I guess they get full and lay there," he said. "A lot of times I can see them just sitting there in that clear water, but it's tough to get them to bite."

By that point, however, Robinson usually has a hefty sack. •



The key to catching ditch bass at this time of year is keeping the lure close to the bottom. The fish aren't suspended; they're on the bottom.

Big largemouth will sometimes move onto the flats surrounding the ditches.