

FOR MOST EXPERTS, shallow water with fair visibility in the early spring means one thing: Throw a spinnerbait.

For Elite Series pro Bill Lowen, however, those same conditions call for a jig. But rather than the standard flipping or pitching presentation, the Elite Series pro from North Bend, Ohio, goes "swimming."

Swimming a jig has been catching bass for years, but the technique has been a closely guarded secret of its practitioners. So outside of those in the know, few understand the practice. For Lowen, the discovery of its effectiveness came by accident, as many innovative applications do.

"It started on the Ohio River mainly by mistake," began the Bassmaster Classic qualifier.

"We used to throw finesse jigs to get bites in cold water. Once, when I made an errant cast and was burning it in to cast again, a 5-pounder ate it. So I started trying to duplicate it."

Thus began Lowen's love affair with swimming a jig.

Lowen said the technique is at its best from early spring through early summer – then again in the fall once bass return from their deep off-shore haunts.

"I love a shallow flat with 1 foot of visibility that has brush or grass on the first drop. Then I cast and retrieve as I would with a spinnerbait, imparting some action into the lure."

A major component of the swimming presentation is to keep your eye on the lure itself, he emphasized. Lowen estimated that 90 percent of the strikes are visible.

Also, the strike response gives vital clues about the effectiveness of the lure's color and trailer. His experience is that if the fish are taking the lure solidly, then the color and trailer combinations are perfect. If, however, they nip at the lure, the color might be right, but the trailer is not producing the right action. And if they follow but don't strike, then the color is wrong.

Once he gets the color combination figured



out, the veteran pro will deftly place casts around cover. He retrieves the lure by holding his rod in a 10 o'clock position while maintaining contact with the bait on a semi-tight line.

"I catch fish on a straight retrieve, but it's usually best to add something by shaking the rod tip," he advised.

A major part of a successful swimming presentation is using available cover as an advantage. "Bass respond to commotion, so I make contact with the brush or grass as often as possible. A lot of strikes come after the bait breaks free from cover."

Once the strike occurs, Lowen said the hook set should resemble one normally used with a crankbait or spinnerbait. It is better than a cross-their-eyes set, he said.

"I sharply snap the rod to the 12 o'clock position and let my rod, braided line and sharp hook do the work," he explained. "When it's done right, the hook will stick in the top of the mouth. If I sweep it, or apply too much force, the jig will either catch the side of the mouth or come out altogether."

This jig presentation has been a key factor in 75 percent of his Elite Series success. It produced his fourth-place finish at Sam Rayburn during his rookie year, as well as a 15th-place finish at the 2008 Sunshine Showdown on Florida's Harris Chain. His 21-pound, 10-ounce limit grabbed the opening round lead, and his limit included the biggest fish he's ever caught with a swimming jig – a 10-pound, 6-ounce giant.

"I've seen the effectiveness of this technique too many times to not at least try it," he said. "I've always got three swimming jig rods up on my deck, and once I figure out the right combination, I can pretty much count on it to produce the results I need to compete on tour."

"With the right equipment and a little practice, most anglers can experience the same across the country."

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Diving In

Hundreds of jigs are on the market today, but not just any jig will work with the swimming presentation. Thus, Elite Series pro Bill Lowen outlined the things to look for in a good swimming lure.

"I use 1/4 ounce in water [depths] to 4 feet, and 3/8 ounce to get as deep as 8 feet," he revealed. "The line tie must be at a 28- to 30-degree angle, and the head must be balanced so the hook rides straight up and down so it doesn't snag or miss strikes."

Lowen uses the Bill Lowen Signature Series Swim Jig made by D&L Tackle.

"I want a round bend hook in my jigs. I've been able to hook and land more fish with this configuration than with the wide gap version."

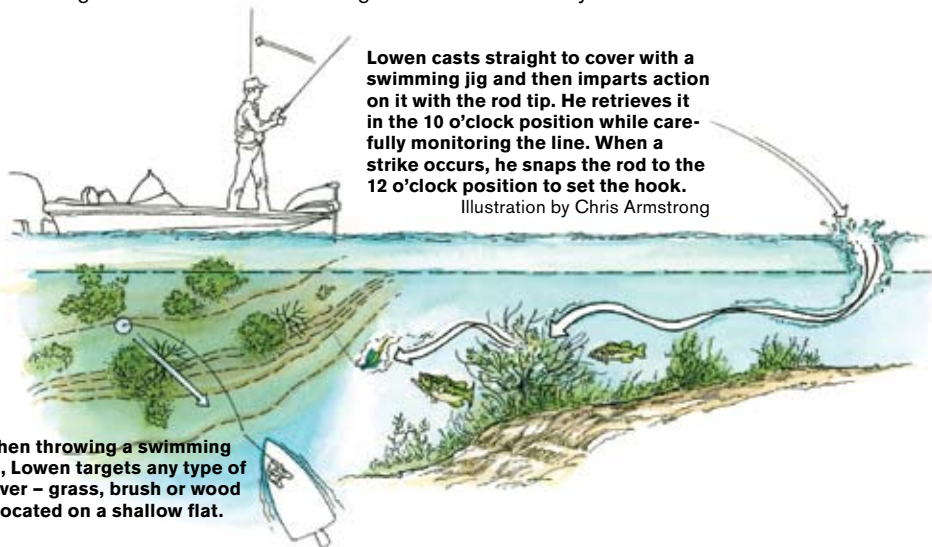
Lowen also prefers silicone skirts because they add bulk and action without taking away from the trailer.

His color choices are designed to take advantage of what nature presents him: black/blue craw, green pumpkin crawfish or white. "I always start with black/blue but let the fish tell me what they want from there. I play with colors and trailers to get the right reactions."

"Black/blue is a great color for early season after crawfish come out of hibernation in the muddy bottom with a grayish-blue appearance. Green pumpkin crawfish mimics a bream or a late season craw, and white is a good all-around baitfish imitator. These three colors give me everything I need to draw strikes, when matched with the right trailers."

While matching colors to his jig is important, the type of trailer is a major consideration, as well. "I always start with a medium action, like a Berkley Power-Bait double-tail grub, and then I will try an action tail like a Chigger Craw or paddletail worm," he added.

"If that's too much, I will use a Berkley Chunk or even a pork chunk for subtlety."



Lowen casts straight to cover with a swimming jig and then imparts action on it with the rod tip. He retrieves it in the 10 o'clock position while carefully monitoring the line. When a strike occurs, he snaps the rod to the 12 o'clock position to set the hook.

Illustration by Chris Armstrong

When throwing a swimming jig, Lowen targets any type of cover – grass, brush or wood – located on a shallow flat.