

Rising water temperatures typically push bass toward the deep offshore contours in a reservoir, making them more difficult to pattern. However, two well-known fishing guides from Toledo Bend Reservoir have developed an effective way to maximize search time for these productive areas.

"I'm not saying you can't go down the bank and catch fish, but your schools will be on the ledges and humps," Glen Freeman told *BASS Times*.

Freeman regularly teams up with former BASS pro Harold Allen to work these elusive strike zones on Toledo Bend and on neighboring Sam Rayburn Reservoir in East Texas.

"People will miss a lot of these," Freeman said. "They're looking for dramatic changes, but these small contour changes will hold fish. It's one of my secrets."

Another "secret" that Freeman and Allen have held tightly for years is the bait they use to find these bass — an out-of-production bait known as the Rinky Dink.

Norman Lures has reintroduced the lure as the "Knock Off," and Freeman and Allen say it works just as well as their stockpiled Rinky Dinks.

Both tailspinners are similar to the famous Little George. The Rinky Dinks are little more than painted 3/4-ounce lead weights rigged with small treble hooks. What sets them apart from the rest, however, is the fact that their bodies are detached from the hook.

"You thread your line through the body and tie directly to the hook," said Allen, a 15-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier who's now become a well-respected field reporter for www.basszone.com, where he's affectionately known as "The Legend."

According to Allen, that subtle rigging alteration allows the heavier lure body to slide up the line when a fish strikes, minimizing the chances of a bass shaking the hook.

"The Little George was great in its day, and it caught a lot of fish," continued Allen, "but it also lost a lot of fish. That's not a problem with these baits."

Freeman and Allen use Rinky Dinks and Knock Offs because of their proficiency at landing fish once they're hooked. And the lures are extremely versatile in the species they attract.

"It catches everything — white bass, black bass, stripers, everything," Freeman said.

"A lot of times, white bass and black bass bunch up in the same area," he said. "Sometimes we'll catch two white bass and then two black bass."

And, because the anglers are targeting contours only after seeing fish on their electronics, the Rinky Dinks and Knock Offs become perfect scouting tools.

"You don't have to guess what you'll catch," Allen said. "If there are fish there, they'll eat these little baits."

The Freeman/Allen team begins by idling over contours, watching their depthfinders closely. And they don't overlook any ridges or humps, no matter how shallow they are.

"Let's say you've got 5 feet of water on top of a hump: That's plenty of water," Freeman said. "Whether it's 5 feet dropping into 20 feet of water, or 20 feet of water dropping into 40, the contour could hold fish."

After pinpointing a school of fish, the anglers back off to work the area.

"I'm keeping my boat off the edge of the structure and fancasting on top of it," Allen explained.



Small tailspinners like the Norman Knock Off are ideal "search tools" for summertime bass. But presentation is the key, according to the experts.

Photo by Andy Crawford

The trick, he added, is to make long casts without allowing the line to go slack on the fall.

"If you give it slack, you can't feel the bite and the hook will get tangled in the line," Allen said.

And Freeman said a tangled hook equates to a wasted cast.

"A fish won't touch it if it's tangled," he said.

Once the lure hits the bottom, it's worked by raising the rod tip before tight-lining it back to the bottom.

"Instead of popping it up off the bottom, you want to pull it off the bottom," Freeman instructed. "If you pop it, that hook will wrap."

The strike usually comes when the lure pauses before falling.

"Believe it or not, the fish won't hit this bait free-falling," Freeman said. "When you tight-line the bait, it's running straight and that blade is turning. When you're running that bait, the fish is looking at it. When you pause it, that's when they nail it."

Allen is careful about rod position to ensure he's prepared for the subtle tick that signals a strike.

"I never go above the 10 o'clock position," he explained. "If you do, you don't have any way to set the hook."

While Allen and Freeman usually use tailspinners to locate bass on bottom contours, they also use it to check out suspended schools.

"If I'm seeing a lot of fish at 10 feet, what I'll do is count down to about 8 and fish it just like I do on the bottom," Freeman said. "I'll just count down and pull it up; count down and pull it up. I let it fall a second or two before pulling it up again."

When it's time for competition, the two anglers trade the diminutive baits for large lures.

"I go to another bait because I can work it much slower," Allen said. "With that [tailspinner] you've got to keep it moving or there's no action at all."

Freeman said larger lures, such as crankbaits, jigs and worms, also help define the bite.

"I might use a crankbait or something so that I don't catch the other [species of] fish," he said. •

Rigging tailspinners

Rigging the Norman Knock Off is simple: Thread the line through the body before tying on the hook.

Line choice among the tailspinner crowd is a different matter, however.

"I usually use 12-pound line," Freeman said. "I think using lighter line makes a difference in the number of bites."

His line preference is fluorocarbon.

"I can feel that spinner a lot better," Freeman said. "I can feel when it stops."

Allen, on the other hand, prefers heavier monofilament.

"I use no less than 16- or 17-pound line," he said. "It's a vibrating bait like a Rat-L-Trap, and when you bring it in front of a fish's nose he's going to eat. He's not going to take the time to look at the line."

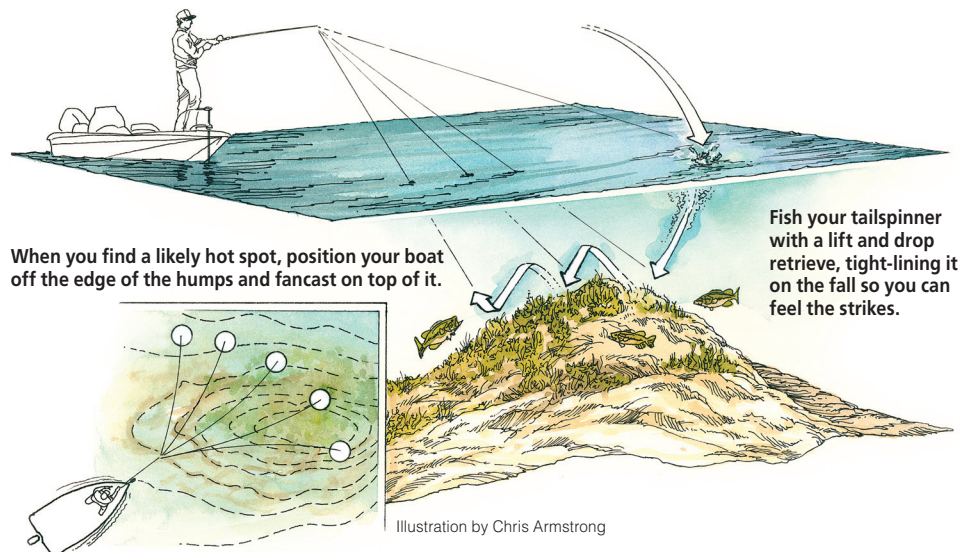
While Freeman ties his line to a small split ring, Allen said he's found there's no real advantage to it when using heavier line.

"I haven't seen it impair the action at all," Allen said. "It's a little rough on the knot, but when you're using that heavier line it doesn't make that much of a difference."

Both Freeman and Allen agree that using medium- to medium-light rods is best.

"When the fish hits, with that lighter rod you can get a better hook set," Freeman said. "You can't rip the lure out of its mouth."

— ANDY CRAWFORD



When you find a likely hot spot, position your boat off the edge of the humps and fancast on top of it.

Fish your tailspinner with a lift and drop retrieve, tight-lining it on the fall so you can feel the strikes.

Illustration by Chris Armstrong