

You don't hear much from the Elite Series these days about the Carolina rig. Some pros look down their noses at it, while others have forsaken the Carolina rig for the football jig when they work offshore structure.

But not all Elite Series pros have forsaken this proven rigging method.

Kenyon Hill, of Norman, Okla., remains faithful to the Carolina rig and always has one ready wherever he is. His devotion has paid off many times, such as when he won an Elite Series event in May 2008 at Georgia's Clarks Hill Lake.

Blueback herring were spawning on long, flat points during that event, and wolf packs of bass were marauding these baitfish.

"I caught a few bass on a pencil popper and a swimbait when they were actively feeding," Hill said. "When they weren't feeding, which was most of the time, I got them by slowly dragging a Carolina rig with a 10 1/2-inch Zoom Old Monster Worm."

Hill held his boat over points in 2 to 3 feet of water and slung his Carolina rig to the distant bank with a 7-6 American Rodsmiths Mag Strike Magnum Casting Rod. A 7:1 gear ratio Abu Garcia Revo baitcasting reel quickly eliminated slack line, while low-stretch, 20-pound-test Trilene fluorocarbon helped him feel each bite.

Many of Hill's bass came in less than 12 inches of water. This doesn't compute with anglers who regard the Carolina rig as a tool for combing deep structure only.

"The Carolina rig is a versatile, fish-catching machine. I've caught bass with it from almost zero water to 50 feet deep."

Hill fares especially well when he drags a Carolina rig through submerged grass during the postspawn phase. He concentrates on weedbed edges where the vegetation is thinner and the bass can see the bait as it floats through the greenery.

His basic rig is a long, slender 5/8-ounce Tru-Tungsten Peter T Finesse Carolina Weight and a Peter T Force Bead, a 3-foot, 12-pound-test Berkley Trilene fluorocarbon leader, and a 3/0 Eagle Claw offset worm hook.

When he needs a limit, Hill reaches for the Texas style rig. When he's searching for "heads," he always returns to the Carolina setup featuring Zoom's Old Monster.

PETER T'S APPROACH

Peter Thliveros, who endorses Tru-Tungsten's weights and beads, uses a Carolina rig that is identical to Hill's except for the hook. Thliveros favors a 1/0 Eagle Claw HP Tournament model. Usually, he attaches a Zoom Trick Worm.

This combination produced about 50 percent of Thliveros' bass when he won a Bassmaster Open tournament in January 2008 on the St. Johns River.

He found the bass 5 to 10 feet deep on main river sandbars. The most productive bars had shells and gravel on them. These were small, concise areas, and Thliveros had to determine which casting angle would trigger bites.

"There's a lot of tidal current on the St. Johns," Thliveros explained. "The 5/8-ounce weight kept my bait from washing out of the strike zone."

A heavy weight also helps Thliveros "feel" the bottom, which he claims is the Carolina rig's biggest advantage. That's the main reason he dotes on hard tungsten weights, which he says send more feedback than soft lead weights. With tungsten, Thliveros can distinctly feel the difference between a hard and soft bottom, and he knows without question when his sinker contacts rocks, stumps, grass or any other bass cover.

Also, a tungsten sinker lets Thliveros drop from the 1-ounce lead sinker he previously fished on a Carolina rig to the 5/8-ounce sinker he now uses.

"That 5/8-ounce tungsten sinker casts farther, sinks faster and transmits more information up the line than a 1-ounce lead sinker," Thliveros said.

A tungsten sinker also makes more commotion as it drags over the bottom, according to this Florida pro. This attracts bass, which are then seduced by the plastic bait swimming freely behind the weight.

"When I need a bite, the Carolina rig comes through for me. I sometimes fish it 65 percent of the time in tournaments."



KENYON HILL: Proving the Carolina rig is not just for deep strike zones, Kenyon Hill was Carolina rigging a big worm across a shallow flat when he scored a major victory at the Bassmaster Elite Series event earlier this year at Clarks Hill. He positioned his boat in 3 feet of water and was throwing the Carolina rig back into water less than a foot deep. He said the presence of blueback herring made this strategy successful.



PETER THLIVEROS: Although most anglers retrieve a Carolina rig down the slope, Thliveros believes strongly in the opposite approach when bass are positioned on the deep side of a steep dropoff. The Florida pro says the lure moves through the strike zone too fast going downhill. So he moves his boat to the shallow side of the drop and pulls his rig up the incline. "You get hung more when you pull a Carolina rig uphill, but you can also fish the bait slowly and stay in touch with the ledge throughout the retrieve."



Illustrations by Chris Armstrong

JARED LINTNER: Unlike most anglers who robotically drag a Carolina rig along bottom, Jared Lintner opts for diversity when it comes to retrieve motion. Yes, he scores with the standard pull-pause retrieve, but he also believes you need to show bass a variety of retrieves to make them bite. "I like to cover water quickly with a Carolina rig, so I generally keep it moving right along. When I feel brush, rocks or some other cover down there, I shake and pop the rod tip to make my bait look like it's trying to scurry away. I try to make the bass react to my bait. I'll also make repeated casts to any cover I find."

JARED LINTNER'S VIEW

Jared Lintner, an Elite Series pro from Arroyo Grande, Calif., regards the Carolina style setup as a search bait.

"You can fish it fast and really get tuned in to what the bottom is like," Lintner said. "We have great electronics now, but you can't beat actually feeling the bottom with a Carolina rig to find what's down there."

Before he began competing professionally, Lintner fished deep, clear, heavily pressured California reservoirs. Many of his competitors were casting split shot rigs with gossamer lines, tiny hooks and finesse plastics — standard California fare. Lintner wondered why a Carolina rig wouldn't work, too. After all, he reasoned, wasn't it essentially a split shot rig on steroids?

Lintner started probing California lakes to depths of 60 feet with a 3/4-ounce Carolina rig matched with a 6-inch PowerBait Lizard, and he won several tournaments doing so. He could fish the Carolina rig much faster than a split shot rig. And he could find clusters of deep boulders and other sweet spots that the split shotters couldn't feel with their light rigs.

Now, Lintner's favorite setup is 20-pound-test fluorocarbon line, a 3/4-ounce tungsten sinker, two 8 mm glass beads, and a 3/0 Gamakatsu hook knotted to the end of a 3- to 4-foot-long, 8- or 10-pound-test fluorocarbon leader.

"I tend to fish a lighter leader than most guys do," Lintner added. "I guess that's the California fisherman in me."