

Although black bass follow seasonal rules, uncertainties and exceptions are always involved. Even the world's best bass fishermen struggle to stay on top of where fish will be on any given day. But Elite Series pro Tim Horton believes that shoreline bluffs represent the best guarantee in bass fishing.

"A bluff is really a 'given to get bit.' I can't think of a month when you can't find fish on them," said the well-known pro from Alabama.

But the months of fall and winter are when bluffs provide their greatest rewards.

"It's really hard to beat," Horton said. "You can catch numbers and size."

Several factors explain the productivity of bluff-type structure, whether it's inside a reservoir or river. Top among them is the water depth. Other reasons range from temperature stratification to forage availability.

"[Bass] can really push the baitfish against the ledge, and the bait can't go anywhere," observed Horton, who emphasized that the real challenge is knowing which areas along a bluff bank will yield the greatest rewards.

"What you're looking for is something that's different — the little juts, washouts, things like that."

Other key spots might be where timber has fallen over a bluff, providing a well-defined and sometimes obvious strike zone for the angler.

Horton, who will compete in his 10th Bassmaster Classic in February, said his first step on any steep shoreline is to pay attention to water movement.

"You want to focus on where the current is hitting the bluff face. That's where the bass are going to take advantage of baitfish being pushed on the bluff."

To simplify the process, Horton said the best starting point is to pinpoint the location where the bank transitions from a sloping contour to a steeper drop.

"It provides a change for bass, where the water moves from the shallower, flatter water to the deep water of the bluff. [This transition] provides that ledge effect."

The upcurrent side of any bluff will be best, according to Horton, because the bass can find refuge from the current along the transitional edge and ambush any forage that might be moving between the shallow water and deeper water.

Once he has explored this key point along the bank, Horton begins slowly moving down the bluff and with the current, paying close attention to any differences in bottom topography or unique cover features.

"If there are laydowns along the bluff, those are definitely worth fishing," he said.



During the fall and winter months, bluff-type banks are almost a guarantee for experts like Tim Horton.

Photo by Andy Crawford

Horton always prefers wind-buffeted bluffs because they provide distinct advantages.

"Not only is the wind breaking up the surface, it's also pushing bait [often there to feed on lower items in the food chain] against the bluff," he explained.

A steady breeze is one thing. Strong winds, however, are problematic with this type of pattern.

"Sometimes you have to get out of the wind and find areas where it's still blowing but not pushing you up on the bluff," he said.

As Horton explained, everything relates to maintaining proper boat position.

"I don't like to stay right against the bluff because if fish are on that bluff, you can spook them. I usually keep the boat positioned so that I'm casting at a 20- to 30-degree angle to the bluff," he said.

"I'm trying to keep my bait in the [strike zone] as much as possible without staying against the bluff."

Bluff banks are perfect ambush spots for black bass in the fall and winter months, especially in those areas where water current creates a hot spot.

Ledges and dropoffs are common features along steep and deep banks. As forage moves along this structure, bass are often ready to strike.

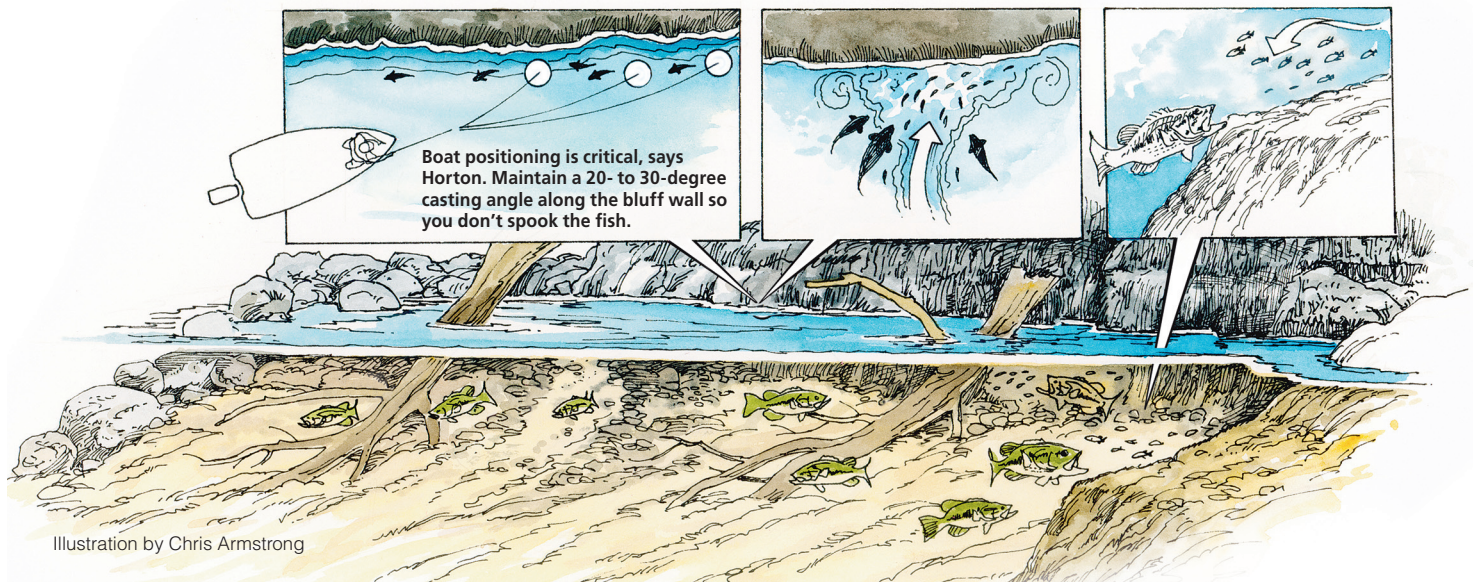


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