



Bandit 200 Series

The Best Crankbaits Under \$5

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Although you can spend a near fortune on a crankbait, you don't have to. Here are the best baits for anglers on a budget

Cheap Stock Options

Bandit Lures
www.banditlures.com
Bass Pro Shops
www.basspro.com
Berkley
www.purefishing.com
Bill Lewis Lures
www.rat-l-trap.com
Bomber
www.bomberlures.com
Cotton Cordell
www.cottoncordelllures.com
Luhr Jensen
www.luhrjensen.com
Mann's Bait Co.
www.manns bait.com
Norman Lures
www.normanlures.com
Rebel
www.rebellures.com
Strike King
www.strikeking.com

THAT BIG OL' BASS in your favorite lake or pond really doesn't give a hoot how much you pay for your fishing lures.

If you run a crankbait past his nose and it appeals to his senses, he's gonna eat it.

No matter whether it costs \$4 or \$25.

Sure, there are days when a \$25 hand-carved, custom-painted crankbait is more appealing than a plastic el cheapo.

Or, if the fish are being finicky in clear water, the superb finishes and precision performance that \$15 plastic plugs provide may be worth the extra cash.

But not everyone can afford those baits, or fishes seriously enough or, worse yet, can handle breaking one off on an underwater snag.

How much fun is that?

That's why we set out to find the best crankbaits that frugal anglers can buy and not have to hide the receipt from a not-so-understanding spouse.

We set \$5 as the maximum price for an everyday crankbait and used the 2007 Bass Pro Shops Bass Book catalog as our price-point benchmark.

You may find some of our top choices being sold for more or less in your local store.

We included lipless lures in with the diving crankbaits for our informal study. Here's what we found. *(Continued)*

The Best Crankbaits Under \$5

SHALLOW AND MID-DEPTH



Luhr Jensen Speed Trap, \$4.99



Bomber 6A \$3.99



Bandit 200 Series, \$4.29

SHALLOW AND MID-DEPTH (2 TO 8 FEET)

Bandit's 100 and 200 Series (\$4.29) got the near-unanimous nod as the best of the best when it comes to fishing shallow. The 100 Series runs to about 5 feet, while the 200 maxes out around 8 feet.

"Without a doubt, the Bandit is the best selling crankbait in Arkansas," says Elite pro Scott Rook, who worked as a tackle shop salesman for 15 years. "They run true right out of the box." Oklahoma pro Jeff Kreit, who owned the Outdoor Headquarters retail outlet in Ardmore for a number of years, says the Bandit 200 was easily his best seller.

"Bandit offers its baits in just about any color a bass fisherman could want," he explains. "For us, the splatter back, chartreuse/blue and root beer were top sellers every year."

Pros and retailers also frequently mentioned Bomber's Models 6A and 7A (\$3.99) as traditional favorites. The 6A dives to about 8 feet, while the 7A goes a bit deeper.

"You can't go wrong with one of those sizes in Tennessee Shad, firetiger, or crawdad colors," says retailer Ray Halter of the Rodmakers Shop in Strongsville, Okla.

"That's probably our top seller and about as reliable a mid-depth crankbait as you can get."

Other inexpensive baits mentioned in our survey include Strike King's Pro-Model Series 3 (\$3.59), Norman Baby N and Deep Baby N (\$3.99), Luhr Jensen Speed Trap (\$4.99), 5A Bomber (\$3.99) and Cotton Cordell Big O (\$3.99).

DEEP RUNNERS



Strike King Series 5, \$3.59



Norman DD22 \$3.99



Bomber Fat Free Shad \$4.99

GOING LIPLISS



Rat-L-Trap \$3.99



Cotton Cordell Super Spot, \$2.89



Berkley Frenzy Rattl'r, \$2.99

DEEP RUNNERS (9 FEET AND DEEPER)

Norman's Deep Little N (\$3.99) tops the list of preferred baits that run 9 to 12 feet.

"It is definitely my go-to bait when cranking around stumps and brush on dropoffs," says Arkansas pro Kevin Short. "You can throw it around anything."

Short said shad colors top his favorites list, but noted that fried green tomato, splatter back and root beer can be very good at times.

Gary Klein says the Rebel Deep Wee "R" (\$3.49) is a staple in his tacklebox and one he'll throw in all types of water. The lure runs 8 to 10 feet deep on a long cast, but he likes to fish it around rocks in shallow water.

"You can really maintain bottom contact with a slow retrieve, and the

bait catches the fire out of the bass," Klein insists.

Norman's DD22 (\$3.99) was another near-unanimous choice for crankbaits that reach maximum depths. It is said to run as deep as 18 feet.

"You probably will find a few of those in every pros' tacklebox because we all know they catch fish," offers Short.

Strike King's Pro-Model Series 5 (13 feet) and Series 6 (15 feet) are worthy alternatives (\$3.59), especially in the new Sexy Shad color pattern that Kevin VanDam used to win two 2007 BASS events.

"It doesn't run as deep as the DD22, but it offers a bigger body," notes Short.

Bomber Fat Free Shad (\$4.99), sizes 6 (8 to 14 feet) and 7 (14 to 18 feet), were mentioned as other big bodied crankbaits with widespread appeal.

"A lot of Lake Erie anglers will crank them down to catch big smallmouth," says Halter.

Elite pro Brian Snowden says Bass Pro Shops' XPS Nitro Deep (\$3.99) has a strong following around Table Rock Lake.

"You can get it down to around 15 feet, and it has a lot of the characteristics found in more expensive crankbaits for about a third of the price," he describes.

GOING LIPLISS

You can't go wrong by filling your box with Rat-L-Traps (\$3.99), considered the staple of lipless lure tactics.

However, BASS pros have learned that subtle performance differences in other inexpensive lipless crankbaits make them worthy of your attention, too.

For example, Rook and Klein often prefer the Berkley Frenzy Rattl'r (\$2.99) for cranking over flats, while Snowden says the Cordell Super Spot (\$2.89) is ideal when the grass grows closer to the surface.

"The Super Spot runs shallower than the Rat-L-Trap, so it stays on top and snags less easily," the Missouri pro explains.

Another factor is sound. The Trap, Frenzy and Spot produce different sounds, any one of which may appeal more to the bass on a given day.

"That's why it pays to carry a sampling of each," says Rook.

Best colors? Rook says if you don't have chrome with a blue back, you're in trouble. In clearer water and bright skies, more subtle baitfish colors can be better.

Halter says a newcomer that created quite a stir last summer is Strike King's Red Eye Shad (\$4.99).

"It's selling well, and my customers say the fish really like it, too," he offers.

