

## **Peak Trolling Season is here.....I plan to win the Derby.**

May marks the month when us trollers seeking Salmon and Trout have fine-tuned our equipment, done a few shakedown runs and now are ready for some serious fishing. Fishing for the big boys. Hoping we get something that we can mount or at least brag about. Running our tried and proven streamers or maybe planning to run something new that we know will work because it caught our attention.

Plus, and it is a big plus, we have the Winni Derby this month. And Derby Fishing is trophy fishing! Talk about an event that gets us all excited. Not only the chance to win a nice prize but a chance to fish with many others like us with the same kindred spirit. Restaurants are full of guys talking fishing, boat landings are full of excitement where we can all see what the competition has. The tackle shops have the latest and greatest and we get a spring weekend away from the ho-hum of spring cleaning around the house, working and so on. But derby fishing has its own unique challenges too. It can be tough fishing.

In this article I am going to share some of my ideas and techniques, how I fish competitively and share some experiences. I tell fishermen using our Sammee and Skijiggers that it is serious fishing with equipment like this and you must commit time to gain expertise. Serious fishermen are committed to success and accept nothing less. And being serious does not mean you cannot relax and have fun. You can fish the Derby for just the fun of it and the experience which is great, or you can fish it to win like most boats on Winni will be doing May 14-17th. Focusing on big fish takes commitment to not only your equipment before you start but a constant focus on what is happening when on the water. Your mind's eye must see exactly what is happening underwater at the point of attack. The vision should be of your setup running true and triggering fish instincts.

First, I make sure my equipment is tuned in. Meaning I have confidence that my leader, 6' of 8 lb. fluorocarbon is in perfect shape and I will change it after a couple fish have worked it. Next, I have 25' of 10 lb. fluorocarbon which will last a few days if it doesn't get tangled or obviously nicked but I do change it frequently throughout the season, but never while trolling. If this long leader gets fouled, I change rods so that I have streamers back in the water as quickly as possible. I fish with braided wire line to control my depth. I have tried about every rod and reel combination there is over the years and this year my preference is the Okuma White Diamond rod and the Okuma SLV 10/11 reel. The rod is the best I have ever used because first it has 12 stainless steel eyelets which is really good, the lower section has great backbone for turning big fish and the tip has such great action it will bend right to the water when a big fish dives right at the boat. I do not worry about leader breaking because the rod action and the good tight reel drag will hold and tire the fish in a tough fight without over stressing the leaders. The rod and drag cushion the explosive runs. I trust my equipment when I want to put the pressure on a big fish (which in my case happens the minute I grab the rod).

I recall a derby my father and I were fishing 10-12 years ago. We had a little action going on when suddenly my rod went off with a screamer. As expected, and in my case welcomed, there were other boats pretty close to us and soon they all knew we were tied into a good one. I bring big fish as close to the boat as I can as quickly as I can because I prefer to have the toughest part of the fight up close. And a fight it was. I lost count how many jumps, but I remember one. The fish leaped so high he cleared my motor from one side of the boat to the other. Chet was at the back with the net when this happened, so I had to hold my rod high to get over his head and follow the leap. Then the SOB screamed under the boat. Do not ask how but somehow, I hung on and netted a 4lb Landlocked Salmon. It was a great show put on by the greatest fish in freshwater, the Landlocked Salmon. How did we do in the derby? Chet had not registered. I did not feel too bad that time but then in one Derby we fished my son Ben landed

a 4.5 lb. salmon off Rattlesnake on Sunday at 11:45 am and I felt bad because we could not make registration in time. But I did win the pride that goes with Ben landing that fish.

Back to the setup. Next, I commit to changing my streamers every ½ hour max if not getting any actions. I never say the “fish are not biting” or “there are no fish here” etc., no bad karma on my boat. I firmly believe at any minute I could nail the trophy. Part of pre-derby fishing is to find out what pattern is working but you also need to develop a winning spread during the derby as well. But a solid strategy going in is paramount for success. Assume nothing.

Then comes the most powerful tool on board and that is the fish finder. Spare no cost in getting the best you can afford because when you really target trophy fish you have an advantage if you know where they are, and today’s sonars are very good at showing fish. Learn to use it and trust it. If I am not marking fish, I am moving and searching at all times. When I do mark them, I work that area hard from every direction and if no strikes I will change patterns every 15 min because I know they are in the area and believe they can be triggered.

There is one other tactic that I employ. I swear by the Solunar Tables and this year’s derby happens during the best moon phase possible for fish and game action. The app I use, Fishing Times, grades action from 1-4 fish with icons in the app. All derby days show four fish on the Solunar clock. Nine times out of ten when fish 4 fish days occur, we put a lot of fish in the boat. I will let you discover the prime feeding times. This year could deliver the largest Salmon ever in Winni Derby’s history because the 5–6-year-old fish are prominent right now on Winni. I cannot wait to catch him. There will be a lot of nice fish caught this year during the derby which creates pressure on the fishery. If they are not bleeding heavy put ‘em back.

Adam and I will be launching out of Alton Bay this year so fishing that end of the lake. On Thursday we will be at the **Tackle Shack in Meredith** giving an informal seminar on how to fish with our jiggers and

sharing other tips, answering questions and so forth. Swing up and say Hi if you have a chance, Jason and Dale have a very nice tackle shop, are very accommodating and seasoned experts at fishing Winni.

During the derby fish your style, trust what you believe. There is no secret depth or perfect speed. Big Salmon own the water and will go anywhere for food. Almost every streamer or lure used in these waters will trigger action so the one you are using has a good chance. Do not concern yourself with what others are doing.... fish your boat and believe in your setup and you may just get on the board...for second place.