

Trolling Streamers.....*The Need for Speed*

One of the most frequently discussed topics among those of use that troll for Landlocked Salmon and Rainbow Trout is what is the best speed to troll. Should I go 2 mph or 2.5 or maybe 3?

Let me set the premise first that no speed is too great for a salmon or trout to catch a bait that it wants to eat. These fish can swim 20mph so going too fast for the fish to “catch” the bait is not the issue.

Many trolling anglers want control of their boats to go as slow as 1.5 mph and will do things like change props to a smaller diameter or pitch which will give them a lower trolling speed but sacrifice top end speed for cruising. A word of caution heredo not make the pitch too shallow or you can over rev your motor at cruising speed. Others control speed by using trolling “socks” or even dragging a five-gallon pail behind the boat to slow them down.

Personally, I prefer to go fast. 3 mph is nice 3.5 is even better. But at times I do go 2.7 maybe even 2.5 although seldom.

I recall an event once that really firmed my opinion about more speed is good. My sons and I were fishing Winni one day and out between Welch and Diamond Islands we were having action catching some nice salmon in the 19-22” range. We had planned an all-day trip, so it was early afternoon when the weather started turning a little aggressive. Coming from the west, our direction back to port, the storm clouds were building and moving quickly towards us. Not wanting to fight 3-4 footers on the way back I started thinking about heading for the barn. Suddenly the sky, at the cloud ceiling, started showing a display of a tremendous amount of lighting streaks but they were like spider webs across the sky. First time I had seen that, so I got a little anxious, told the boys it was time to pick ‘em up but immediately took it up to 4-5mph slowly increasing speed along with an increasing chop on the water. Suddenly Bang-Bang-Bang-Bang all four rods went off and we were pushing 6 mph...slowed down and we netted four fish. Amazing that these salmon struck streamers moving that fast. What a good lesson.

Because of this event I now work diligently at tying streamers that will run true at higher speeds although I doubt those streamers were not spinning at 5-6 mph but still, they triggered strikes.

Speed while trolling is about the lure, bait, or streamer you are running. Bait fishermen know the secret is to drift and move slowly counting on the wandering fish to find them and suck it in. Trollers running big spoons go 2 mph to get that just right action of the back and forth of their lures. Some lure manufacturers offer high speed lures that you can run at any speed and they will perform well. I recall years ago working with Brecks International of Canada, manufacturer of Williams Lures, did extensive in-field speed testing so they could recommend just the right speed for their wide variety of good trolling spoons.

With streamer flies you can troll at any speed you prefer, and a well tied streamer will run true while maintaining the form and function of a rainbow smelt. Aggressive fish like landlocked salmon feed on instinct and will viciously strike a streamer when triggered. A streamer best imitates a smelt when it is moving quickly changing speeds and even stopping. And if you can get the streamer to look wounded, which happens while jigging, the fish is triggered to strike.

Years ago, I watched a video by Charlie White doing underwater filming of salmon striking a trolled bait. The salmon would swim past the bait rather closely, turn, come back, and strike the bait from the side. The salmon was moving very fast during this strike and it seemed like they never took the bait slowly, always a vicious strike. A side strike. I am convinced most of the big salmon and trout I catch strike from the side and are triggered quickly if the streamer is moving fast. See the picture attached to this article of a 5lb rainbow trout with the hook penetrated from the outside of the mouth. A definite side strike.

Streamer flies are tied to imitate smelt and the more they lend themselves to the form (look like a smelt) and function (act like a smelt) of the salmon's preferred food, the more they trigger a strike. The

function part has to do with how they swim. Smelt swim quickly, darting like, and they swim in schools. A Salmons instinct to feed is not triggered by hunger it is triggered when they see their preferred food acting like it always does. Hungry or not they have no choice but to hit this smelt like imitation swimming in their domain. Speed not only makes the streamer function like the real thing, but it blends all the materials of the streamer together looking even more like the elusive rainbow smelt, flashing to distract predators.

Tying streamers to be high speed tools requires attention to a few special techniques. My preferences are for tandem streamers, so I start by making sure the two hooks of the body are in line and straight. Next, I want the body to be heavy enough so that it sinks when stopped, like in the drop back part of jigging. A few years back I went to all glass, or brass beads for the little extra weight. I no longer tie any underbody material like deer hair or synthetics which will change the center of gravity on the streamer having an impact at higher speeds. The underwing material, bucktail, synthetics, herl and so forth is tied on top of the tandem hooks and beads. The underwings' purpose is to create the specific look of the pattern and to bring all the dominate colors of the pattern together and most importantly, to create an even and firm base to settle and tie the featherwings onto. The featherwings are four hackles, I use saddle hackles, married together. It is these featherwings that do the most work to support the form and function of the streamer. Made from two pair of married feathers, a left curve set, and a right curve set married together and tied on top of the hook so that the quill or rachis of the feather, aligns with the hooks and bodies. When jigging these pairs separate at the ends creating a tail like look and fluttering like a smelt would do when acting erratic. If the streamer does not run true and spins when you first put it in the water, it will not perform to its full potential. IF it is leaning or spinning simply bring it back in and twist the head near the hook right or left to align better. Often this is required after landing a good fish and will not hurt the streamer.

For the trophies I want to fight the need for speed is paramount. Streamer flies are most effective when trolling fast. Trust your equipment, use streamers that track well so you can enjoy the strikes. Action slows down. Pick it up a few hundred rpms and swing by those spots you marked fish earlier in the trip. Get ready for the bang!