

Leadcore & Drone Spoon Fishing at SML

Content by Earl Walker, Tom Bovee, Paul Bisbee, and Paul Lautermilch.

Written by Jon A.

One of SMSC's main reasons for being is to help members learn more about catching freshwater striped bass in Smith Mountain Lake and Leesville Lake. The club's website has many documents and video links, and our Facebook page livestreams and in-person meetings and events are other examples of the resources provided to members. In 2023, the free GroupMe chat software from Microsoft was launched. It enables SMSC members to chat with each other in real time using either their cell phone and a mobile app, or their computer and a web browser.

The app has enabled the 60 or so members who use it to share info with each other, recognize each other on the water, exchange notes on fishing conditions, and be more successful in catching (and releasing) those big beautiful SML stripers. The tool also allows folks to read messages from home and catch up on posts as their time and schedule permits.

A recent post by Earl Walker about fishing SML successfully with leadcore line and drone spoons received interest from several members. Some of the tips and pointers from that discussion thread have been collected here. Thanks to Earl and others listed above for their great input.

Leadcore line is color coded every 10 yards (30 feet). It consists of an outer wrap of braid and an inner section of lead line. Different weights are available, with heavier gauge lines having a faster sink rate than lighter lines. At SML, anglers have found 32 - 36 lb test leadcore to be a good choice. The leadcore line can be either connected directly to the reel, with a mono or fluoro leader, or a backing line can be used in conjunction with the leadcore and leader. Below are some additional pointers.

Earl Walker

My reel is 4/0 size with a line counter. It contains about 150-200' of 50-pound test braid for backing tied to 300' of 32 lb test leadcore (=100 yards=10 colors), then 60' of 25 lb test fluorocarbon line. The last step is a high quality ball bearing swivel to connect the fluoro to 3' of 20 lb test mono leader, and then a heavy-duty line clip (not a snap swivel, just a clip) which replaces a lure's split ring (except with certain drone spoons that use a solid ring).

To attach the fluoro to the lead core, I pull the braid sheeting back off about 3 inches of the lead and clip the lead off. Then insert the fluoro line into the hollow created by removing the lead and tie a simple single overhand knot in the 3- inch piece of lead core. That's it – the line feeds good and you cannot break it at the connection. This is known as 'willis knot'.

[Fishing Tip - Knot for Leadcore Trolling S12E05 - YouTube](#)

When fishing I put out seven colors (=70 yards =210 feet) plus the fluoro and mono lines, around 320' total on the reel counter.

For spoons, I use Probersos spoons in the 1-ounce size, but 2-ounce 3 ½ in also work well.

[Amazon.com : PROBEROS Fishing Spoons Lures Bass Baits Jigging Bait Tackle with Treble Hooks Hard Metal Spoon Fishing Lure Weight Pick 10 Pcs/Pack Silver Gold : Sports & Outdoors](#)

These are very similar to Acme Kastmaster. [Amazon.com : Acme SW121/CHNB Kastmaster XL Spoon 2 3/4", 1 oz, Chrome & Neon Blue : Fishing Topwater Lures And Crankbaits : Sports & Outdoors](#)

I change the hooks from treble hook to Gamakatsu five ought (5/0) Octopus Circle hook (in-line point) in double strong model ("2x" on the package). Changing the split rings to 2X is also good, but upgrading the hooks is essential.

Tom Bovee / Paul Bisbee



ORIGINAL DRONE SPOON SIZE CHART (shown to scale)

DRONE Baits are the original saltwater spoons. They were designed and tested in the early 1900's by a fisherman for fishermen. Because of the impressive fishing record of DRONE Baits, it is little wonder that this is one of the most copied lures in existence. But in spite of this copying, there is no other lure with quite the erratic, strike-bringing action of the DRONE.

This feature alone has made it a world standard since 1918. ORIGINAL DRONE Spoons are made of solid, highly polished stainless steel that is totally unaffected by water conditions anywhere in the world. There is no plating to corrode, chip or peel. Replaceable hooks are of the highest quality forged Mustad O'Shaughnessy pattern, with filed hollow points, and Duratin plated. We guarantee these hooks against breakage. The solid nickel silver rings are hand silver soldered for greatest strength.

As you'll see below, ORIGINAL DRONE Spoons in sizes 0 - 4 1/2 are available in 18 powder coated colors with or without one of 15 flash scale colors. Scroll left or right below to see all the Flash Scale Colors and click on any one to "apply" to the Spoon Finish Colors. Make sure you check out our

NEW Flash Colors -- Orange, Sky Blue, and Mirror Gold. Sizes 0 and 000 are available in stainless or 24k gold plating over solid brass. You can take a closer look at our **NEW "Electric" Series Finish Colors** on a separate page (see above). Once again, ORIGINAL DRONE Spoons feature stainless steel blades, hand silver soldered rings, and replaceable hooks. Replacement hooks (4 pk) and replacement flash colors (5 pk) are available for all sizes.

Size	Blade Length (in.)	Hook Size	Weight (oz.)
000	1 1/4	#6	1/16
00	1 3/4	1/0	1/12
0	2 1/4	3/0	1/6
1/2	2 3/4	5/0	1/4
1	3 1/4	5/0	3/8
1 1/2	3 3/4	7/0	1/2
2	4 1/4	7/0	5/8
2 1/2	4 3/4	8/0	3/4
3	5 1/4	8/0	1
3 1/2	5 1/2	10/0	1 1/8
3 1/2 Z	5 1/2	9/0	1 1/8
4	6 1/4	12/0	2
4 1/2	8 1/8	12/0	3 7/8

The 'drone' spoons that Paul Bisbee and I use are made by LB Huntington spoons. The link below contains a size and color chart for all their products. The two spoons we use are stamped with "3 1/2" or "2" for indicators, in silver color and very light weight. I like the one with a #2 on it: about 4 1/4" long, 7/0 hook. Silver and silver flash do pretty good. I'll be running the #2 from now on.

<http://www.dronespoons.com/original.htm>

The day we ended up with 20, one of best days ever, we fished in Craddock near H1 marker. We caught them on the #2 LB Huntington 5 1/4" silver drone spoon. Six colors of lead core line and trolling speed 3 mph (SoG). We have found this works to keep us just above and out of the treetops at 20' down. Note this is for a single drone lure – pulling Alabama rigs (A-rigs) or umbrella rigs on leadcore requires less line because these rigs are heavier and sink deeper. We never fish A-rigs with more than 4 colors (=40 yards=120 feet). Your actual troll speed directly affects your actual sink rate.

We troll with LB Huntington spoons and lead core line, 6 colors (=60 yards of line) out at 3.2 mph. Probably 20-24 feet down, works well on fish that are 25-40 feet down. The guy who taught me puts out a bit more, at 75 yards. Any deeper than that will probably mean jigging. We trolled this past year till about mid-December in water temp about 50 degrees. Switched to jigging till March. We really didn't have much luck in late spring. March/April/May was very unproductive as was early summer till about July 4th.

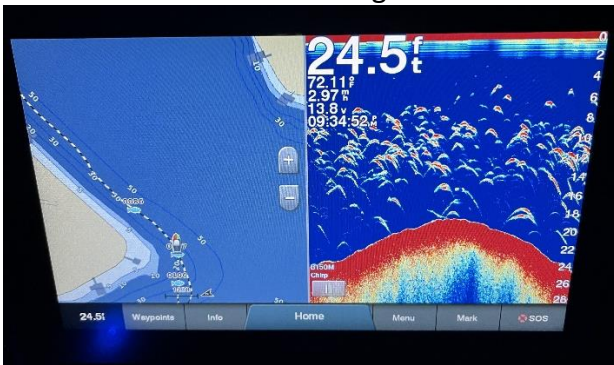
Paul Lautermilch

I'm fairly new to the fishing scene at SML. This is my 2nd full year of boat ownership at the lake. Learning to fish for stripers was pretty much DIY. Most of my fishing is solo. I kept hearing about the difficulty of keeping live bait. Finding it is also a problem if you live almost an hour away and can't get to the lake much during the night or pre-dawn hours. I bought gear suitable for trolling umbrella rigs and spoons but soon tired of losing \$30 umbrella rigs and started trolling spoons almost exclusively. I use lead core line for trolling spoons. I've bought a couple brands, most recently Suffix 36lb test. It has great color contrast between the different sections that are 10 yards each.



I use ultra-light weight spoons (0.21 oz) that I buy from someone local. They are 3 1/2" hammered stainless steel with a single hook. I was told that these spoons will fish 20' deep when trolled with 7 colors of lead core at about 3 mph. My "snagging" experience seems to confirm this. Heavier spoons will always require some trial and error to get comfortable with trolling depth at various speeds. There's no single answer for all.

My boat main engine will troll at about 2.8 to 3.1 mph depending on the usual factors...wind, chop, boat wakes, etc so this speed works great for me. During summer and early fall I have caught fish with bottom/tree depth as little as 20' or out to 100'. I've had much better success recently fishing shallower with most fish caught < 35'.



I use my Garmin GPSmap in split screen to follow bottom contours (and help avoid snags). I mark spots where I catch or see schools then repeat my track a number of times. I pull very light spoons and may lose a couple per year. If I see shallow trees or cross a point, I accelerate to raise the rig a bit.

Earl Walker

Yes, if you see a tree to at 20' or less depth pop up on your screen just speed up from 3 mph to 4-5 mph to raise up the drone spoon and miss it. If you see fish deeper, slow down from 3 mph for a few seconds to let the spoon to get deeper. I'd say that at 3 mph your drone is down about 25-30' deep. It's extremely effective way to troll but a pain to work with. It has out fished every method I've tried since learning it this time of year.

Paul Bisbee

I am using Tuf Line 36 LB Lead Core.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0084EGY6I/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&psc=1

I think the weights of our drone spoons are 1/2 ounces and 5/8 ounces. We have two different spoons- one has silver "flash" and the other is plain stainless. The fish seem to prefer different spoons on different days. The spoon with flash is 3 1/2 inches long and the plain one is 4 1/4 inches long. Not sure

if it is the appearance or the length that makes a difference, but they definitely prefer one or the other on given days, so trolling both is useful to see what works best.

I use 24" of 20 lb fluorocarbon attached to the lead core line. I then attach a swivel and another 24 inches of fluorocarbon tied to the spoon. The swivel is necessary to prevent twist in the lead core line. The only other thing I would mention is that we have found the need to increase our speed when doing a sharp turn. The line sinks a fair amount as it slacks in a turn, and this is when we have snagged an occasional tree and lost our lure.

I hope this is helpful. I cannot stress enough how much the SMSC GroupMe app has helped with real time information on finding fish!

Tom Bovee

The only way to get to trolling speeds between 3-3.5mph when trolling is by using the big engine. Using a trolling motor at those speeds quickly eats up the battery life. I have started using my trolling motor as a autopilot when I fish by myself. I found that if I run trolling motor at low speeds, it can control my direction without affecting the overall speed. My Minn Kota Terrova lets me make and record "tracks" for trolling a given area. So I can program a track, then engage my big engine, and the trolling motor will keep the boat exactly where I want to go. That allows me to put out more rods and tend them better. For the other lone fishermen out there like me, I highly recommend giving it a shot....it is like having another person in the boat.

One more tip - those spoons have a lot of action so the rod tip really dances. When the tip isn't dancing, you've probably picked up some trash or a leaf so check it when that happens.

Paul Lautermilch

I only troll two lines when fishing alone. More lines are too hard to handle when fish hit or a line snags. When I get hit, I retrieve the other line first to avoid snags and getting tangled with the 'fish-on' since that's usually got 200' of line out. I leave the boat in gear while retrieving the first line to let the boat fight the fish until I can get to that rod. I haven't lost any fish with this method.

Thank You! to the fine folks above for these great tips - let's keep these SML chats going!