

## BY CARL MALZ, MANAGING EDITOR

**Y**ears ago the true facts of fishing were neither known, believed, nor desired. The same holds true in many areas, even to this day.

In this exclusive interview, *Fishing Facts* Managing Editor, Carl Malz, attempts to reach into the past with Education Editor Buck Perry. In Part Two of this two-part article (originally published as a single-feature article in the June, 1976 issue of *Fishing Facts*) Malz and Perry discuss many of Perry's early-day experiences and the varying attitudes encountered at that time.

**QUESTION:** *After you finished your promotional work in Minnesota, where did you head next?*

**PERRY:** I think the next place I went was

## Part Two of Two INTERVIEW WITH

# A TRUE LIVING LEGEND

## The Father of Structure Fishing talks about his early days of bass angling and how things differ somewhat today. Or do they???



Fishing Facts Education Editor, Buck Perry, displays a big bass that gobbled up a deep-running, bottom bumping lure (#100 series Spoonplug).

to Cleveland, to fish Lake Erie, because at that particular time Lake Erie had gone to pot. It had been a great fish factory previous to that time, but around the '60s it was getting pretty bad. So, this again gave me an opportunity to show what Spoonplugging was all about. The fishing wasn't great (as it is again today), but there were enough fish there, and there was enough structure there. So people in that area were anxious to listen because their fishing had really gone to pot at that time. And so, many of them listened.

**QUESTION:** *You also went out to California, didn't you?*

**PERRY:** Oh, yes, I went to about every state. In California I had to start all over again; every lake from one end of the state to the other. I even had to fish saltwater. This was in the early '60s. But I had to do it all over again, and the reaction of the writers in California was about the same as it was in other places.

I remember some of the headlines said, "Found! A New Way To Fish." Well, even to this day people are amazed. "Where has this information been? Why haven't I heard about it be-

fore?" I made every effort in the world to get the message across. The skepticism and the abuse were considerable. They often belittled my efforts. They thought I was a con artist and they had no reservations about letting it be known that they thought I was a con man, because I was preaching things they had never done.

They accused me of catching fish in other areas. They accused me of everything in the book. And all during those years, this meant "show me." But between the lines you could just about see what was meant, "I'm going to show him up for what he is." That was the main reason most of them got into the boat with me. Especially those with big fishing reputations.

There is one little incident that stands out in my mind. It is typical of some of the things that I ran into and I think it makes for a pretty good example.

I was doing some fishing in the area of Memphis, Tennessee, and I had caught a lot of fish out of this one particular area. The fellow that owned the boat dock was one of the very few who were receptive to my message. Of course, he had to be pretty receptive

because he could stimulate his business through fish being caught. Anyway, through this man's effort and after taking a few of the writers in the Memphis area out fishing . . . it wasn't long before fishermen were standing in line to be taken out fishing.

I'd take them out and let them catch 3 or 4 bass, or a limit of fish, and then I would bring them back in. Then I'd take out another one. Now this went on for days and days. And everyone who I took out I explained *what* we were doing, *why* we were doing it, and *why* we were catching the fish. The boat dock owner was selling the tools (lures) and the lines that I made.

It just happened that one time the fish were about 8 feet down and they were scattered. There were quite a lot of fish. The way to quickly get the fish was to troll a number 250 size Spoonplug and (in certain areas) bump the bottom so that this person would catch his fish. The whole time I would be talking about depth and speed control, the importance of structure and how the fish move with weather and water conditions. In fact, I was hoarse after every

one that I would take out. But I would take them out, let them catch a few fish and then take them back in. I couldn't give them a whole education in fishing, but that's what I was talking about.

I remember this one particular fellow. I took him out and talked to him. He seemed to be a pretty nice guy so I took extra effort and went through everything. By talking and telling him what Spoonplugging was all about . . . he caught some fish and when he came in he was all excited. It was more fish than he had caught in a long, long time.

We went back up to the boat dock and the place was full of people, full of fishermen. And they were standing in line saying, "I'm next to go out." They were looking at the tackle that this boat dock owner was selling and I heard this fellow, with whom I had just spent extra time, go over to several of the other fishermen and say, "You don't have to buy a thing except a size 250 white lure with a red head. Don't listen to a thing. That's all you really need." And there I had just talked myself hoarse to this guy explaining why that lure was catching them and why the fish happened to

*continued*

## A TRUE LIVING LEGEND

be in that particular zone. That's just one of the instances. They didn't *hear* what I said. They wanted a magic shortcut. They wanted a shortcut to fishing success. I had come up with a piece of tin (a lure) and they expected it to provide them with a shortcut.

**QUESTION:** *You also spent a lot of time in Indiana, didn't you?*

**PERRY:** I think it's one of the finest fishing states in the Union. I know because I spent a lot of time mapping the lakes and fishing the state. In fact, one year I spent practically the whole summer fishing from lake to lake, and mapping it and making movies of an area where I was going to start my school. We had a fire that destroyed, momentarily, my material and my manufacturing plant, so I had to call my school off.

Indiana has a variety of water. It has a lot of natural lakes in the north, and all types of water conditions, water clarity, weed conditions, and so on. And it has quite a few reservoirs. So the fishermen in Indiana have a choice of both natural lakes and reservoirs. I think it has some of the finest *big* northern pike fishing anywhere (outside of the border states) and lots of good bass fishing, too. But Indiana is just like any other state. Very few people really know what makes a fish tick.

**QUESTION:** *When you were traveling in Wisconsin, you found there were an awful lot of walleye fishermen in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Did you find you had to devote more of your efforts toward catching walleyes?*

“**M**any (anglers) are accepting the word ‘structure’ and the fishing methods today, and never knew there was a time when none of this was known.”

**PERRY:** Yes, due to the interest in walleyes. But . . . I also found this; that I could catch the walleye, northern pike, musky and the bass, but in order to get the *attention* of fishermen, it didn't make any difference how many pike, walleyes or muskies I caught. This wouldn't attract their attention because they could catch these fish. I found that I had to do the same thing there as I did in other areas. I had to take the species of fish they were having problems with: the bass.

In a lot of areas around the globe, they have introduced bass, and the programs weren't successful because the bass is a very difficult fish to catch consistently. It is affected by weather and water conditions very much, and so it is still the fish to catch. So in order to get their attention, I had to fish most states for bass.

There were a lot of areas where I caught bass that they didn't even know they had any. But I had to catch the walleyes and the other fish, too. I don't think I could have gotten many people in Wisconsin to listen to what I was talking about, instruct them in weather and water conditions, if I'd just fished for those particular fish. I had to fish for the bass, and that gave me a chance to show them and to talk to them about the walleyes and northern pike.

**QUESTION:** *When was your first trip to fish the state of Michigan?*

**PERRY:** I believe that was in the very early '60s . . . the first time I went there. I had fished all those states years before I actually went in to “preach the gospel.” I fished many of

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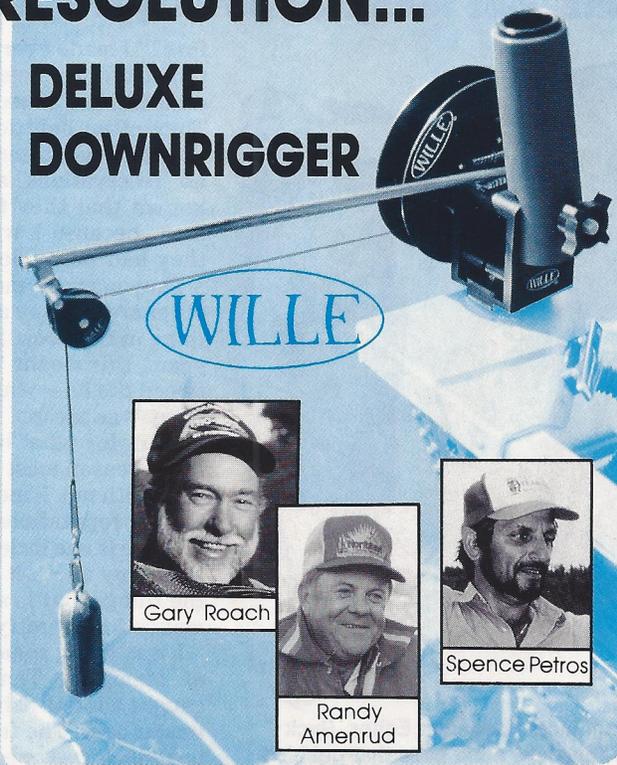
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these states years ago while obtaining my data on Spoonplugging. I had to go all over the country and really look at it, so I had fished these states before I went in to promote my ideas and methods. So it was in the early '60s that I went into Michigan.

I picked out a very difficult area . . . I picked out Detroit, which had a lot of pollution in many local lakes. And I fished within just a short radius of Detroit. I had to pick out parks, lakes, things of this nature. They had a lot of fish in them and it was typical of most places, they just weren't catching them. So there was no problem of creating interest.

I remember one time I was making a TV show for Michigan Outdoors and they picked the lake. This happened to be a lake up in the middle part of the state . . . kind of north of Grand Rapids. But when I got there, they had a cameraman who lived in the area and he wanted to fish a particular lake. This particular lake had a reputation as the *best* bass lake in the area. So I said, "Let's fish another lake that has a *bad* reputation." I remember I had a chance to map the lake with the "bad" reputation. It wasn't a very big lake, but it was one of those so-called polluted "fished-out" lakes. And I recall his skepticism was very great. But I know when we finished up the film that day, we had caught 20 bass that weighed 107 pounds out of that "bad" lake. So that woke up a lot of people, too.

But I still say that the mass of the people, even with all that fishing and all the stringers of fish, didn't get my message. Every time I gave a talk I'd have cooler chests full of smallmouth, walleyes, northern pike and bass. But I'm

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**“Y**ou know, fishing can be awfully hard at times. It can be very tiring, and you sometimes feel like you're just spinning your wheels.”

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quite sure that most of the people who heard the talks and saw the fish didn't hear what I said, because when the talk was over, there was always a stampede to buy the lure that they saw in the film.

**QUESTION:** *You mean a particular size lure?*

**PERRY:** Size and color, especially color. They again didn't hear what I said.

**QUESTION:** *If you caught fish on a white with red head (lure), everybody bought white with a red head?*

**PERRY:** Everybody bought white with a red head. If I caught them on something else, a certain size, that was the one that they would buy. And not two minutes earlier I told them that it was merely a tool. That what *I did with it*, was what counted. What was on the

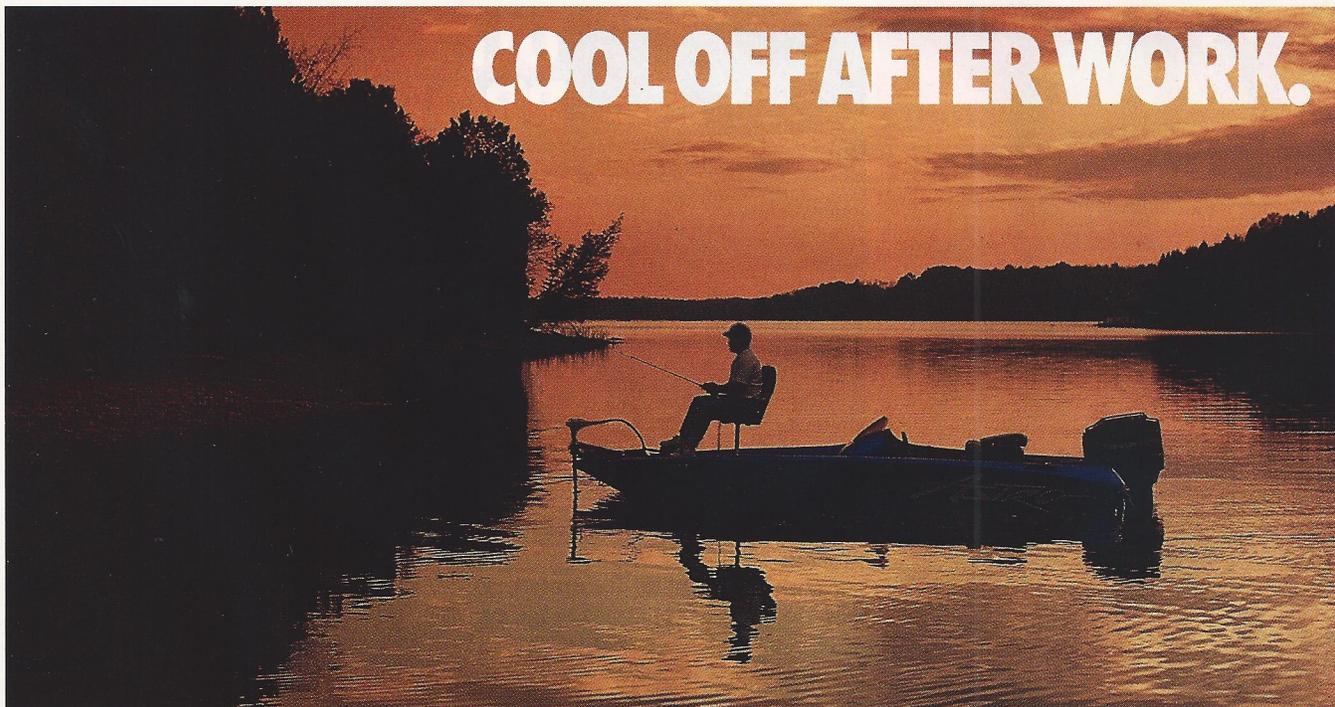
other end of the rod is what counted.

**QUESTION:** *Years ago you also spent considerable time fishing on the East Coast. What did you encounter in that area?*

**PERRY:** Well, by the Eastern States, I imagine you mean to say, Washington D.C., Maryland, New York, on up into the New England States, and so on. A lot of that area has salt-water tidal slough areas that I had to fish, which takes in the ocean striper which, as you know, is a big fish. But in New York and those areas, I fished from the St. Lawrence River to every reservoir that they would let me on, taking pictures and talking to people.

**QUESTION:** *What do you mean "that they would let you on?" Are there a lot of private waters in that area?*

**PERRY:** There are a lot of lakes that provide water for the cities. The mass of the reservoirs that you might see on a map in a lot of the New England and New York *continued*



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## A TRUE LIVING LEGEND

States and so on up, you are not always allowed to fish. It's drinking water. They allow little or no boating and no recreational activities whatsoever. On a few of them they will let you fish, but you may still have restrictions. On a lot of them you can't use a gasoline engine, for instance. You have to use an electric motor in order to hold down pollution. Of course, this eliminates many types of lure presentation, and limits just how good a fishing job you can do.

There are other things involved, too . . . laws . . . the fisherman is restricted a great deal by laws, closed seasons, how many fish he can catch, what type of equipment he can use, when he can fish, what hours he can fish, when he has to be off the lake; just a multitude

of things. In one state I counted the regulations. This one state had 700 laws applied to the fisherman.

I recall one time in one of those New England States I had done some preliminary looking over the lakes; no fishing, just looking. I found some lakes where I felt the people might listen because the fishing was difficult. I went to buy my non-resident license and I found that besides paying for a license, I had to wear a big sign on my back. A big poster with numbers on it. That's one state that I left. I think that's going a little bit too far.

**QUESTION:** *They aren't going to hang a sign on you, huh?*

**PERRY:** No, they are not going to hang a sign on me like a common criminal. I'm a *fisherman*, not a criminal. I got on one lake one time and the place looked good, so I bought my

“**T**hey weren't expecting the other information. They weren't looking for it. They were looking for a magic lure . . . just like they had always done.”

so happened I was “preaching the gospel,” so to speak, in the area. I had not gone there because of the tournament; I was just fishing there. Then I noticed the contest was being held . . . and I didn't have enough money to get back home, so I entered the tournament.

**QUESTION:** *Did you win enough to get back home?*

**PERRY:** I collected the \$1000 and went back home.

**QUESTION:** *Way back in the early days when you started out, you were mostly living out of the trunk of your car, weren't you?*

**PERRY:** You're not kiddin'. You know fishing can be awfully hard at times. It can be very tiring, and you sometimes feel like you're just spinning your wheels. The money was going out instead of coming in. Nobody will ever know how many

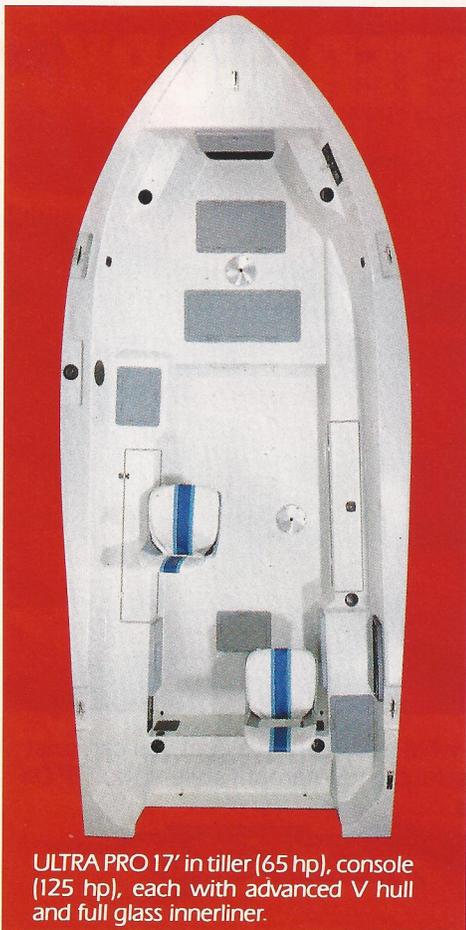
license. But then I found they wouldn't let me use a casting rod; that I was limited to a fly rod only. I had a fly rod, and I caught some fish. But I caught the fish on a *casting* rod, when he wasn't looking.

**QUESTION:** *Have you ever entered a fishing contest or a tournament?*

**PERRY:** Yes, I did enter a contest once. But it was primarily due to *necessity*.

During all my travels, money was running out. When I got through with a trip, I would have to come home and go back to work to get another nest egg to go fishing again. I got in the Midwest one time and . . . it was still in the South, but west of the Mississippi River . . . and they were holding a fishing tournament. At that time, the first prize . . . this was quite a few years ago . . .

the first prize was \$1000. Well, it just



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hamburgers I ate and how many times I slept in the car during those years.

**QUESTION:** *Your other business interests have been highly successful and there was really no need to keep "spinning your wheels" all those years. With all the difficulties, why did you stick with it, and why do you still bother?*

**PERRY:** I think it probably is partly due to my training as a teacher, but maybe it's the way I'm built. I feel that fishing is a great recreational sport. I think everybody should get the most out of their sport, whatever their hobby is. And I am thoroughly convinced that the only way in fishing that you can get the most out of it is to be knowledgeable.

**QUESTION:** *What led you to the development of the Spoonplug lure?*

**PERRY:** As you know, I call it a tool. In order for you and I to catch fish consistently, we have to do certain things. In other words, we've got to get the fish in the boat, and normally we have to use a lure-type thing, live bait or something.

**QUESTION:** *Did you make any other type lures?*

**PERRY:** I made lures almost from the time I was big enough to walk. I often say I "cut my teeth" on leadhead jigs. But most anyone can build a lure. And most any type of lure will catch fish. I had all the lures as a person would know them today. If I didn't have 'em, I made 'em. I often get quite a chuckle out of the fact that I am often asked, today, if they had any good artificial lures back in those early days. In those times I would say there were actually more. I have seen the modern day so-called "hot" lures come around 2 or 3 times in my lifetime.

**QUESTION:** *You mean to say, this is about the second or third time around for the "hot" lures of today? You've seen these before?*

**PERRY:** Yes, most of them have been around quite a long time. Today, I can just about predict what the next "hot" lure is going to be. Even back in the early years, in the very early years, I looked at lures as tools to allow me to do what I wanted to do. But still, with all these early-day tools, I didn't have the tool for mapping, the interpretation, depth and speed control that was necessary at times. But also, I didn't have the time to go through my tackle box and try to find all these different types of lures or designs of lures to help me do the job. I just didn't have the time on the water, and I had to have something that I had the utmost confidence in, that would give me absolute depth and speed control, and allow me to do what I wanted to do to locate the fish.

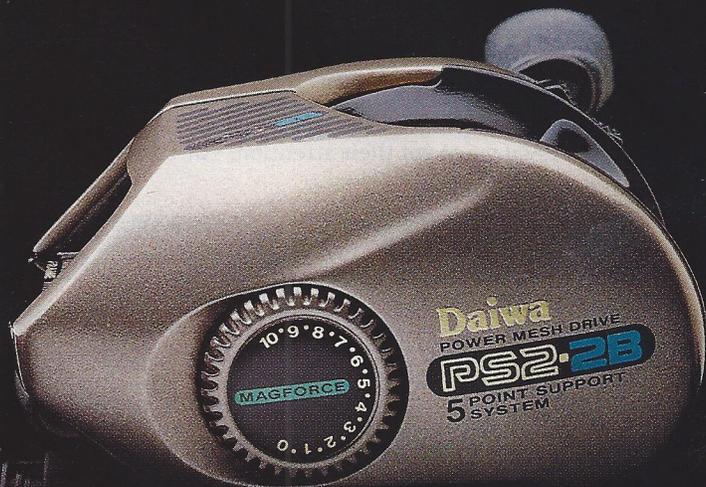
I have always felt that once the fish have been located, then it's not too much of a chore to catch them, because the action, the sizes of lures and their colors, as far as I am concerned, play a minor role once the fish have been located. These things do play their part, don't get me wrong, but I had to have a tool that would do the things that I felt necessary to do in order to become a good fisherman.

**QUESTION:** *You had to have a tool that would perform regardless of the regional area or type of water that you happened to be fishing. It had to perform North, South, East or West, or anywhere else?*

**PERRY:** That's right; everywhere I went; regardless of the type of water, a reservoir, or the type of bottom, or where it was located, in the South or in the North or anywhere else. People have a tendency to go to a lake and they will often buy the lure the fish are being caught on at that particular time. I had to have a tool. So this is the reason the Spoonplug was built. It was a basic tool.

I knew what the lure had to do. It took a lot of work to design the lure to accomplish what I wanted. It took a lot of work on the water, but it was designed in a relatively short period of time. I knew what I wanted that tool to do and I had had enough engineering background to know what surfaces and controls should go into the design. So I came up with a tool. This tool, as you see it today, has been around quite a long time and the first commercial *continued*

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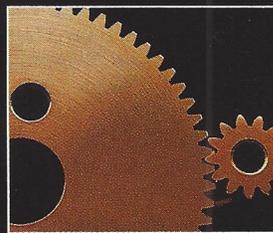


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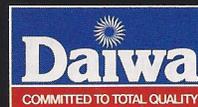


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## A TRUE LIVING LEGEND

venture, you might say, was after World War II when I went on the road "preaching the gospel." I had to have a tool to prove my point, and this was the only way that I could get the fisherman's attention.

We talked earlier about getting their attention. I could get their attention, but they wanted that shortcut, and if I wouldn't have had what they *thought* was a shortcut, two things would have happened. First, I would have starved to death. The second thing is, they were waiting for me to tell them what I caught the fish on. Not *how*, but *what* I caught them on. And if I hadn't had a tool, I would never have gotten the message across. I wouldn't have had *anybody* listen to me because that was the one ingredient that they were looking for and what they expected. They weren't *expecting* the other information. They weren't looking for it. They were looking for a magic lure . . . just like they had always done.

So the lure played two important parts. One was the fact that it helped me to get their attention. The second is, it gave

comes in, to allow a fisherman to *know* what to do. So to sum it up, Spoonplugging is . . . it's what makes a fish tick, and what must a fisherman *DO* to catch fish consistently.

**QUESTION:** *What was the first size bottom bumping lure you developed?*

**PERRY:** First, I developed the larger size, the #100 Spoonplug. Problems in fishing do not present themselves greatly when fish are shallow. You still have to be a good fisherman, and you have to have certain controls, but basically, shallow water or shoreline fishing doesn't present a great many problems. If the fish are there, you catch them.

The problem exists *away* from shore, when fishing is *not* good, and when fish are in deep water. So when I made the first tool, it was to take care of this latter condition, deep water. And so I built the size that would reach the area where I thought would be a good place to catch fish consistently; that was in the range of 12 to 15 feet, which is the #100 size lure. It becomes a little more difficult below that depth, but . . . in the beginning to do my mapping, and promoting, I had to get away from the shoreline, and away from the shallows to prove my point.

It wouldn't do much good for me to go into an area and catch fish around a stump. Everybody can catch them around a stump; sometimes. I often felt this was about 5% of the time you could catch them there. I was not interested in 5% fishing. I was interested in 95% fishing. I wanted to take most all of the zones into account. Where the difficulty occurred was in the deeper water. So the first bottom bumping lure built was the #100 series Spoonplug.

**QUESTION:** *And, of course, this was all long before the modern day depth finders came along.*

**PERRY:** Oh definitely! I had to have this particular lure (tool) to do the mapping because . . . there was no other way. In fact, you couldn't even get contour maps of the lakes at that time. The use of contour maps has been an outgrowth of Spoonplugging. I could even go so far as to say that the *success* of the depth sounder has been a result of structure fishing. However, let me add that even *today* we *still* have to get a tool (lure) down there in order to get the *final* interpretation as to whether or not a



**Buck Perry addresses a large audience of sportfishermen at one of the hundreds of fishing seminars he has conducted over the years.**

me the tool to do my job while going onto strange waters and, in a short period of time, come up with fish. Then it gave me something that the fisherman wanted. I could give him a tool. I could get his attention by having a tool.

**QUESTION:** *You could get him to listen?*

**PERRY:** Yes, I could get him to listen. But I will say this; this lure still hasn't been changed. It will still perform as I expect it to perform. I think it will always perform. It will always catch fish. It will never get out-of-date.

**QUESTION:** *Buck, for our newer readers, how do you define the term "Spoonplugging"? What does Spoonplugging mean?*

**PERRY:** Well, Spoonplugging is a very broad term. Spoonplugging actually means: "How does a fish live? What makes him tick? How does he react to weather and water conditions? How does he move about? Where is he? What will we expect from him? Where would I expect to catch him? How will he react?" That is part of it. The second part is: "What I must do to catch him?" Not so much what I must *use or buy* to catch him, but what I must *do* to catch him. The things that you and I have to *do*, we have to use different things to accomplish the task. That's where your tools, and your lures and your rods and reels, your boats, your motors and your depth sounders and all your equipment, your "fishing gear"

spot will produce fish.

I know that in the very early years, the jig was a tool that was used a great deal. Back in my teens, we didn't have the soft plastics that you have today. But we did have rubber. We did have pork rinds, and we did have the real thing (live bait). These particular things, such as your soft plastics today, didn't come into their own until people got away from the shorelines. Until they began fishing on structure. Most of the equipment that you see today, such as the depth sounders, and contour maps, the graph recorders, the sinking type jigs, the deep running plugs, have been a result of these many, many years of my talking. Subsequently, other people have gotten the knowledge and have carried it on.

But I will still say that the mass of the fishermen today do not know what it was like yesterday. Many are accepting the word "structure" and the fishing methods today and never knew that there was a time when none of these were known. It took a lifetime of pioneering by people who believed in these concepts to get it to the point where it is now. Spoonplugging has helped fishing as an industry, you might say. All you have to do is look in the magazines of today. But most of the younger fishermen today don't know the background that brought this about. 