

*Place this rocky "breakline" (sudden increase in depth) in 12 to 14 ft. of water, as it normally would be when water levels are high, and you can see why game fish might snuggle up to it. It's an "edge" used by the fish when they pause or migrate here.*

# LURE SPEED

## *It's More Important Than You Think*

*The majority of fishermen don't know or understand why controlling lure or bait speed is important. Here are the facts.*

*by Buck Perry, Education Editor*

**F**or years I used "speed control" as a major aid in catching fish consistently whenever and wherever I fished. It soon became apparent that this control could help me catch fishermen (the important one) as well. From coast to coast the general thinking seemed to be I was some sort of nut by the way I controlled my lure speed at times.

Thirty-plus years ago, a writer of a large city newspaper was telling his readers about a fishing trip he had made a couple days before. Parts of his story went something like this:

"How," I exploded, "do you expect a bass to catch this lure without rocket equipment? My grumbling ceased when something almost tore the rod out of my hand. Buck also connected."

About 20 years ago, in another area, the following is part of a dialog with a boat dock operator, as I tied my boat up at the ramp.

Dock Operator: "Say, Mister, are you a stranger around here?"

Me: "Yep!"

Dock Operator: "Have you ever fished this lake before?"

Me: "Nope!"

Dock Operator: "Well, friend, I've

been watching you out there, and you've been fishing way too FAST!"

Me: "Is that right? You mean I've been doing this thing all wrong? Guess I'd better start over!" (With that, I pulled the unobserved stringer up and released a limit of fish back in the lake.)

Dock Operator: (Bug-eyed) "Well, uh—uh—uh—uh—"

About 6 months ago, in another area, a fisherman said, "For the life of me, I can't see how you caught those fish as FAST as you were going."

(It's the same old axiom—you don't

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care what they say, just as long as they spell the name right.)

At times the term "speed" is not fully understood. Quite often it has been asked why I used this word instead of the word "velocity" when talking about how fast the lure is moving through the water. There's no doubt the term "velocity" would be a more accurate word, but those who have studied our material (books, Home Study Series, etc.) should recall it said: *"FOR THIS STUDY, we will use the term 'speed' to denote how slow or how fast we move the lure through the water."*

Many fishermen have a tendency to fish too slow at times. This is especially true during the hotter parts of the season and when working the shallows. Most of them have been told so many times in the past to fish "slow," they give no thought that a lure moving faster may do the trick

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when all else fails. One thing for sure, most of the food a game fish takes isn't "lounging" around!

In order to get the fishermen thinking "faster," I figured the word "speed" would do the trick. When hearing or seeing "speed control" in fishing, many would be thinking of a lure moving at a FAST rate. (Although he should know if he worked a lure in such a way as to let it remain still for a spell, without movement, the speed would be ZERO!

Do not get the idea when I talk about "speed" it means you and I are

to go out and race around like some maniac. When I'm talking about speed, I'm talking about speed CONTROL. *This control should be from zero to the point where you may think the fish can't catch the lure.*

It is important to keep in mind, in order for our speed to be effective, we must control our "depth" AT THE SAME TIME. If we try to check out speeds in a particular depth, and a different speed causes the lure to leave that depth, we haven't accomplished very much as far as "speed control" is concerned. To put it another way—if our speed (how fast our lure moves through the water) is so slow or so fast we lose control of DEPTH (where the fish are), then our speed is "off" one way or the other.

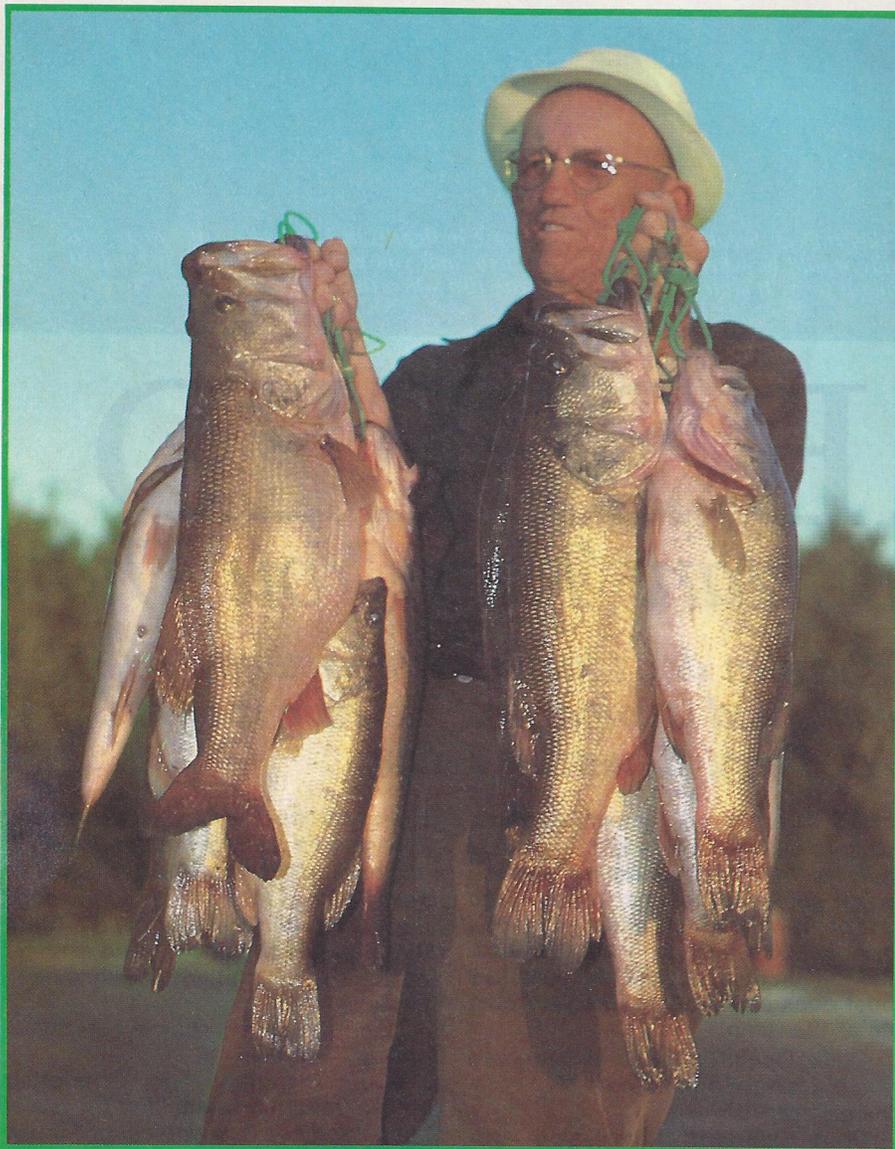
Most lures will fail to maintain a certain depth long before the speed is too fast—or fast enough. Some lures will not keep a desired depth if moving too slow. To handle speed and depth control, you and I must select the right fishing gear and learn to use it in such a way that the CONTROL of depth and speed (at the same time) becomes automatic. We never forget that all our questions about fishing successes and failures should be answered in terms of depth and speed control—NOT in terms of size, color and action of lures or baits.

The majority of fishermen do not know or understand WHY controlling lure or bait speed is important. The answer is very simple—"speed" is the thing we control to make the fish "take" ("strike," "smack," "grab," "pop," "inhale," etc.).

When we consider speed control, we are not only talking about what makes a fish finally take the lure, we are also talking about HOW MANY FISH CAN BE CAUGHT. My thinking in this last reason for "speed control" is as important as the first one.

The guideline that separates the Spoonplugger (structure fisherman) from the run-of-the-mill fisherman is his efforts AT ALL TIMES to find a "school" of big fish and CATCH a limit on consecutive casts. This is his driving force; he must NOT be satisfied with "stragglers." He may have to settle for stragglers (one fish here, another there) at times, but he is relentless in his efforts to fill up a stringer in short order with big fish. He may not accomplish this very often, but he never stops trying. He knows this effort (guideline) IS THE BEST "TEACHER" HE HAS IN BECOMING A BETTER FISHERMAN. He also knows a major key to accomplishing his goal (a catch of big fish, caught quickly) IS HIS KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IN CONTROLLING THE SPEED OF HIS LURES AT THE RIGHT DEPTHS.

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*"The guideline that separates the avid structure fisherman from the run-of-the-mill fisherman is his efforts at all times to find a 'school' of big fish and catch a limit on consecutive casts." — Buck Perry*

At this time I do not want to talk about "fishing" or "testing" a feature in a lake THOROUGHLY. In other words, we are not going to discuss how to go about the presentation of lures to be sure no fish are missed, if they are around. We have talked about covering a feature "thoroughly" in past issues of *Fishing Facts*—and we'll talk about it again in the future. Right now, I want to talk about how to control "speed" (and maintain depth effectively) to get the fish to "take," and to catch more than one fish—if they are around.

In our talks (and study material) we set up guidelines for SPEED vs. LURE TYPES. We set them up this way:

1. Free-running, bottom-bumping lures—faster group.
2. "Jump" type lures—slower—below the free-running.
3. Live bait—slower still—below "jump" type.
4. Dead bait—slowest speed.

At this time, let's talk about controlling our speed when CASTING. We need only talk about the first two lure types, as I see no need to discuss "speed control" on the last two (3 & 4).

Motor "trolling" doesn't present as many problems in securing good speed control as does casting. But it does entail some effort to control depth at the same time. (This is no

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worry when using "Spoonplugs," as they were designed to maintain their depth regardless of the speed involved in casting or trolling.) We'll talk later about control of depth and speed while trolling.

**Figure 1** is a top view of a "bar"—known to be productive at times. The shape is shown by the "breakline" (sudden increase in depth or a drop-off). The boat is positioned so both the shallows and the deeper water can be worked effectively by "fancasting." Let's say we are anchored in water that is 8 feet deep.

We first check out the shallow water. If the extreme shallows contain weeds, they can be checked with top water or weedless lures. (There is no reason to include these in our speed vs. lure types.)

In working a surface lure, we work it slow or slower with a "stop and go" type retrieve. Then we work it faster with a steady retrieve. Then still faster across the top of the weeds with rod

action and faster retrieve.

When checking speeds with the weedless lure, we slowly crawl it through the weeds with a steady retrieve, or we can use a "stop and go" retrieve, letting the lure sink into all open spots (weed-free holes) in the weeds. Finally we "skitter" the lure fast (and faster) across the very top of the weeds.

If there are no weeds, or we decide to check the outside of the weeds first (we figure if there are no fish outside the weedline, it is not likely there are any good fish in the weeds), we would start with a sinking, free-swimming, bottom-bumping lure on a steady retrieve. If the temperature is rather low, we would start with a normal, slower retrieve (enough to get action in the lure). After 4 or 5 casts ("fancasting"—see figure), we would begin to increase the speed of the retrieve. After a few additional casts, a good fish takes the lure. The next cast to the same area produces another fish. This second fish indicates a good movement is in progress, and we must assume a goodly portion have migrated into the shallows. It is at this time "speed control" comes into its own. It is at this point the fisherman INCREASES his speed still further. He should keep increasing his retrieve speed until it is about as fast

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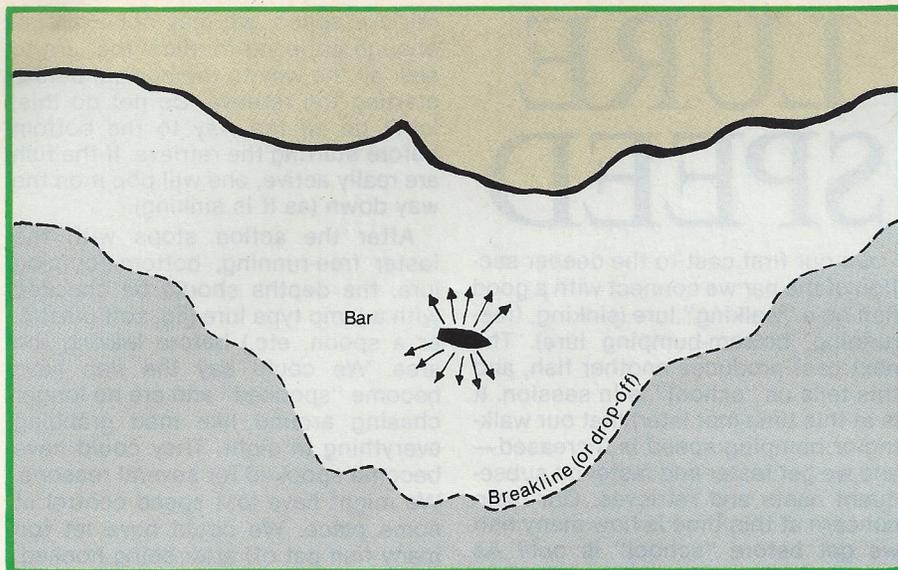
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**FIGURE 1**—Top view of an underwater “bar.” The boat is positioned so both the shallows and the deeper water can be worked effectively by jancasting.

as he can crank the reel. If he doesn't increase the speed he is not likely to catch many of the fish that may be present.

The purpose of increased speed is to make the fish more active, and to keep them in a “frenzy” or competitive mood LONGER. Speed control is the only thing I have found that will do this. If we slow down in any way, the

fish “cool” off. (This means not slowing down when “fighting” the fish.)

Let us suppose we did not start checking the shallows with a free-running, steady-retrieved lure, but started our casting with a “jump type” lure (jig, soft plastic, spoon, etc.). Let's also suppose that after a few casts a good fish is hooked. The next cast to the same area catches

another fish. Then we draw a blank on a bunch of casts. What then?

The skilled fisherman would know (after catching the second fish) he has to increase the speed of the lure without losing his depth control (where the fish are). If he had been checking his depth and speed correctly (with the jump type lure) he had let the lure sink to the bottom after the cast. Then with a twitch of the rod, he made the lure jump a short distance and then let it settle back to the bottom, etc., etc. . . . To increase the speed, he would twitch (or jerk) the rod more and take up line faster. If he thought he was losing too much depth control as he jumped the lure farther and faster, he could remedy this to a certain degree by switching to a heavier, faster sinking lure (heavier jig, etc.). But he knows his speed control is going to be limited with a “jump type” lure. If he increases his speed too much there is no way he can maintain depth control (where the fish are). Without too much time lost, he would switch to a free-running, bottom-bumping lure and really wind it up. If the shallows did not produce with these two style lures (after checking speeds with both types) the deeper water should be checked out.

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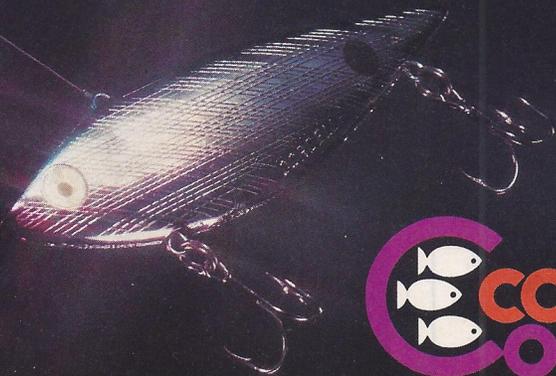
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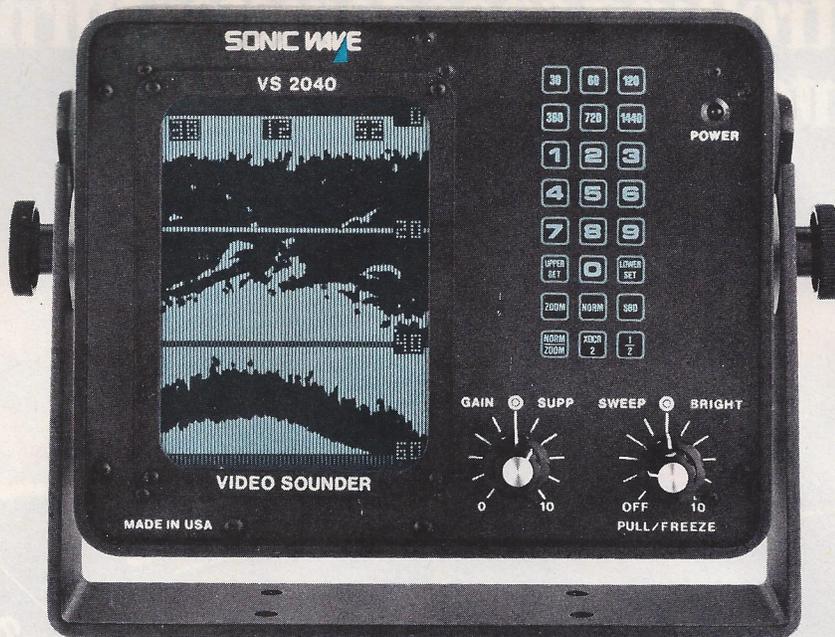
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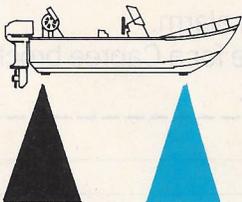
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action stops in a situation like this, it usually means the fish have dropped off the structure.

Now let's assume we did not start the deep water presentation with a free-running lure, but started with a slower jump type lure (which we shouldn't). We make our cast toward deep water, and let the lure sink to the bottom. We take up the slack, and twitch the rod tip to make the lure "jump" a small distance. We let the lure settle back and then twitch the rod slightly again, etc., etc. During these short jumps of the lure, we try to keep minimum slack in the line by taking up line on the reel. We also watch the line to see any "take." Here again, we must keep our "speed control" in mind. We watch the line and take up slack, so we are ready to set the hook IMMEDIATELY after the "take." Some people would have you believe you should let the fish "run" with a jump type lure—say a plastic worm, before setting the hook. My reaction to this advice is to say a fish can "inhale" a worm so fast you can hardly see the action. He can also "exhale" it just about as fast! If he runs with it, he is already hooked, but may be hooked so lightly he can get rid of it during the "run."

To increase our speeds with this type lure in the deeper water, we do it as before (as in the shallows). We move the rod farther and take up the slack faster. We can also go with a faster sinking jump lure—such as a heavy jig. However, anytime we stop taking fish out of a school with a slower jump type lure, we should immediately switch to the faster free-swimming, bottom-bumping type (and vice versa).

Maximum speed *before and after* we hook a fish should occur during the warmer weather and water conditions, or when the fish have moved shallow. However, we must keep in mind when we increase speed we may start losing depth control at an increased rate. Therefore we never forget that the "tools" (lures and/or baits) we use, and the way we use them to control our speed, may be the difference between great fishing success and no fishing success at all.

After all, catching a lot of big fish is the reason most of us are out there, so why reduce our chances by refusing to observe the rules of speed control while casting?

