

THE Fisherman

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Denise Marie beams at this fresh fall bass after it inhaled a Maja bunker spoon trolled enticingly behind the transom of Capt. Kenny Gallop's *Big Kid*.

Tom Pagliaroli photo

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Tony Maja with a spoon-fed bass caught in the fall.

Courtesy of Tony Maja

Tony's Tips on Playing the Spoons

A feature issue on trolling could not be complete without some thoughts and input from the master of the bunker spoon.

I learned more in three hours fishing with Tony “Maja” Arcabascio than I had the entire previous season of trolling. He uses all the products he sells and does so because they work, not just because they have his name on them. The system is used by top charter captains who make up his pro staff. Not only is he a pioneer in trolling for bass, but he is also a conservationist and treble hooks are not found on any of his spoons. He respects the quarry he seeks and wants to ensure that the fish are still there for his grandchildren.

Arcabascio used to fashion his own spoons out of aluminum, even fabricating them out of old stop signs. He always kept two pairs of pliers and a hammer onboard his boat for minor adjustments, bending them until he got the action that he wanted. Arcabascio was always manipulating, twisting and experimenting with the spoons and he soon discovered that making the spoons move very erratically wasn't the right thing to do. Mimicking an injured bunker, he started to get the spoons to run with a lazy side-to-side swing and the hits came instantly. Lazy,

big bass wanted an easy meal, not one that was healthy and could easily swim away.

The following is a Q&A with Arcabascio and he shares his top tips and answers some frequently asked questions. These proven tactics have led to a line of products and a score of monster bass for everyone that uses them.

Q. Tony, what are the must-haves for successfully targeting bass with spoons?

A. You need to have the right tools for spooning and that means a good spoon rod. It should have a soft tip to enhance the action of the spoon, yet a good backbone to handle a nice-size bass. Second is a good quality bunker spoon. It should have the right action to imitate a wounded bunker and it should also be made of extra thick or strong stainless steel in order to swim the same, fish after fish, without bending like they used to. The third item is an outrigger that sits horizontal to the water in order to give you a good spread. Lastly is a good reel. The reel should have a lever drag in order to pre-set the strike and then the retrieve.

Q. At what speed do you troll spoons?

A. This is the most asked question and I respond by telling [anglers] to watch the tip of the rod and get it to pulsate in a steady rhythm, and go as slow as you can but keep it working.

Q. What about direction?

A. Spoons work best going cross current [since] you don't have to adjust your speed. When seas are very rough, I recommend trolling in a following sea. If you are catching going in one direction then you should reel in your lines after you made your pass and go back and start all over. This will save you a lot of time.

Q. What size spoon should fishermen use?

A. You must match the hatch. If there are small herring, butterfish or peanut bunker, then use a smaller spoon. If there are adult bunker or large ocean herring, use the larger spoons.

Q. What is the best depth to troll?

A. I always like to get as close to the bottom or structure as I can without getting snagged. If there are schools of bait, I like to get my spoons five feet below the schools where the big ones are.

Q. When is the best time to fish?

A. I like to fish at first light, close to the shore and in the deep as the sun rises, especially in the spring. Remember [that]



Tony and The Fisherman's John DeBona with a spooned-up double.

Courtesy of Tony Maja



A selection of Tony Maja bunker spoons.

Courtesy of Tony Maja

bass are very light-sensitive in the fall and the angle of the sun is much different and not as important as the spring.

Q. How do you fight fish on wire?

A. When you are hooked up, never pump and retrieve when using wire or braid, you must keep the line tight at all times. There is no stretch and the spoon will fall out on the down motion.

If you have yet to make an attempt at trolling for fall stripers, use the above as a guide when jigs and bait are drawing blanks. You just may put a bend in the rod and a smile on an angler's face. (And of course, a sweet striper in the boat.)