



# TECH BULLETIN

## GREAT LAKES

# FLASHER & BAIT SALMON SYSTEM

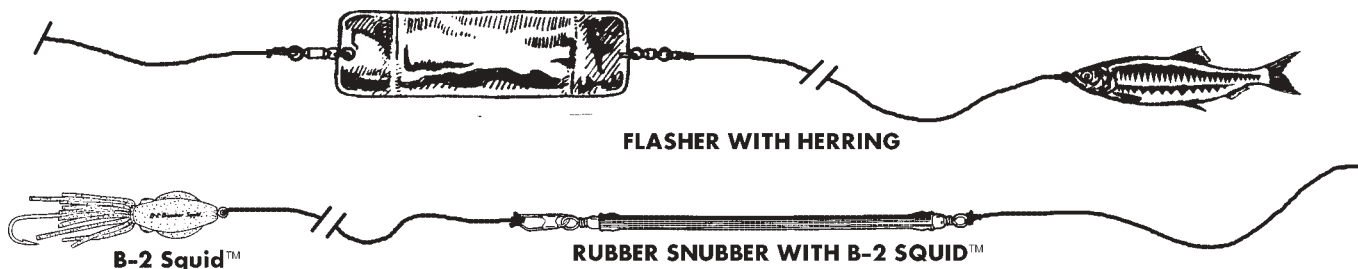
Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.

By Ernie Lantiegne

Fish Doctor Charters / RR 4, Box 73A / Mexico, NY 13114 / 315-963-8403

Rotating flashers trailed with bait long have been recognized by West Coast trollers as one of the most effective fishing techniques for coho and chinook salmon. The same technique, properly applied, is deadly on the Great Lakes and large inland reservoirs where Pacific salmon have been transplanted.

Chinook and coho salmon, along with a variety of other species, including lake trout, brown trout, steelhead and Atlantic salmon, have been stocked in the Great Lakes since the 1960s. Today these vast fresh water lakes, located in northeastern and north central United States produce some of the finest, easily accessible trout and salmon fishing in North America. Because of their large size, fighting ability and fine eating quality, Chinook and coho salmon often are placed at the top of the premier gamefish list by Great Lakes anglers. Over the years since Pacific salmon were introduced, increasingly effective angling techniques have evolved. Today, anglers have found that trolling rotating flashers and bait is one of the deadliest Great Lakes salmon angling methods as well. Flashers also are effective for lake trout and brown trout.



FLASHER WITH HERRING

B-2 Squid™

RUBBER SNUBBER WITH B-2 SQUID™

A flasher is simply an attractor designed to sway from side-to-side at slow speed or full rotate when trolled at medium speeds. It reflects light which makes it visible to salmon and produces sound detected through the lateral line. The flasher is trailed by a bait or lure on a monofilament leader of varying lengths. Although there are many good lures, such as *Coyote™* or *Diamond King™* spoons, whole bait, plug cut herring, herring strips or plastic squids baited with herring strips are often the most effective.

The principle is simple. The flash and sound of a flasher slowly rotating at optimum trolling speed mimics a feeding salmon. The trailing bait, with either its own action, and/or action imparted by the flasher, is easy salmon pickings, perhaps a crippled bait from a school of herring or alewives just attacked by a marauding coho or king salmon. Responding to the stimulus of the flasher, the salmon moves in closer to investigate the sight and sound. It spots the flicker of the trailing bait, swings behind it, senses the smell of fresh herring, moves forward, mouths the tasty bait and . . . wham! To a predatory fish such as a salmon, the flasher and bait system appeals to all of its senses - sight, smell, sound and taste.

### FLASHERS

Rotating flashers such as the spring brass *Abe & Al®* and the plastic *Coyote™* flashers were designed specifically as trolling attractors for trout and salmon. The larger size flashers like the 10-in. #010 *Abe & Al®* and the 11-in. #003 *Coyote™ Flashers* generally work best for Great Lakes salmon. They are most effective when trolled at speeds allowing the attractor to just barely roll in a wide arc. However, the metal flashers in sizes #010, #001 and #002 also are effective when trolled ahead of bait at slower speeds, which produces a wobbling, dodger-type action. This slower movement is especially good if the bait is cut so as to produce its own rolling action.

Proper trolling speed is critical. What you're looking for is a slow roll alternating with an occasional wobble and then a roll in the reverse direction. Avoid high trolling speeds which make a flasher constantly turn over. Hard spinning flashers may take occasional cohos and small chinooks, but they usually are avoided by big kings. The trolling speed required to produce optimum flasher action varies with the size and type of flasher and the size and/or profile of the trailing bait. Flasher action also varies with the length of line between a sinker or downrigger release and the flasher. The

longer the distance between, the slower the flasher will spin. Most Great Lakes anglers troll flashers from downriggers.

To determine optimum trolling speed, watch the action of your flasher in the water, and adjust your trolling speed until the action is right. Large metal flashers, particularly the #001 *Abe & Al®* have a heavy action that is transmitted to your rod tip if a "soft" downrigger release like a rubber band or Offshore release is used. At slow speeds when the metal flasher is only wobbling from side-to-side, your rod tip will bounce erratically. As the flasher begins to rotate, rod tip action will change to a rhythmic bobbing motion. The action of plastic flasher cannot as easily be detected through rod tip movement.

One of the greatest aids to flasher trolling is the use of a downrigger speed/temperature unit such as the Fish Hawk, which radios trolling speed and temperature at the downrigger weight back to the boat as a digital readout. Knowing speed at the downrigger weight is especially important when dealing with subsurface currents in the Great Lakes.

All flashers, especially the metal ones, should be fished with a 30-in. length of 50-lb. test leader attached to the forward end. A liberal coating of herring oil increases success.

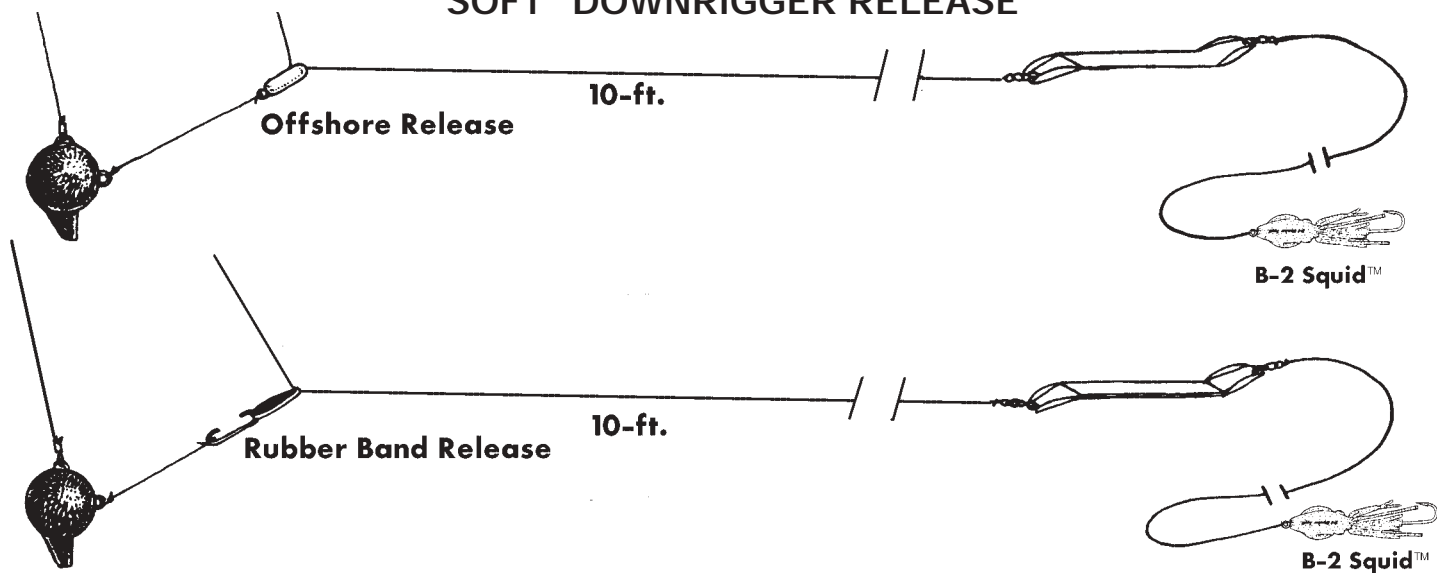
The following is a chart of the minimum trolling speed required to rotate different sizes and types of flashers trolled 10 feet back from an Offshore downrigger release:

#### MINIMUM TROLLING SPEED TO ROTATE FLASHERS

| Flasher                | Size | Squid/Bait  | Herring Strip | Whole/Cut Bait |
|------------------------|------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Abe & Al®              | 010  | -           | 1.7-2.5 mph   | 1.7-2.5 mph    |
| (Wobbling Action Only) |      |             |               |                |
| Abe & Al®              | 001  | 2.2-2.3 mph | 2.5-2.6 mph   | 2.5-2.6 mph    |
| Coyote™                | 003  | 1.3-2.2 mph | 1.5-2.3 mph   | 1.5-2.5 mph    |

At the speeds listed above, the #010 *Abe & Al®* does not rotate, however, it is effective with a wobbling action when trailed by bait which has been tuned to roll. The #001 *Abe & Al®* begins to roll at the speeds shown, however, they are also effective with a wobbling action at slower speeds when trailed by a rolling bait. The #002 *Abe & Al®* has a wobbling/rolling action at the speeds shown, but is very speed tolerant and effective over a wide range of speeds. The *Coyote™* begins to rotate at the speeds shown, but is effective up to 0.3 m.p.h. faster.

## "SOFT" DOWNRIGGER RELEASE



### BAIT

Chinook and coho salmon in most of the Great Lakes grow to trophy size feeding primarily on forage fish like alewives and smelt. Alewives, a species of herring native to the Atlantic Ocean, invaded the Great Lakes when the canal system was constructed. Even though Pacific herring don't reside in the Great Lakes, experience has shown that this bait, favored by West Coast salmon trollers, is equally effective in fresh water.

The most productive baits for trolling with flashers in the Great Lakes are whole herring, plug-cut herring, herring strips and plastic squids baited with a herring strip. Fresh frozen Pacific herring are available for bait at select Great Lakes tackle shops. Resident alewives, which also are effective bait, are available, but generally on a more limited basis. A frozen herring should be thawed just prior to fishing with it. All baits work best when liberally coated with good quality herring oil.

Proper rigging of bait is critical to successful flasher/bait trolling for chinook and coho. Rigged correctly, a whole herring will roll in a slight arc at a rate of 1 - 2 revolutions per second. Fast spinning or pinwheeling baits are not as effective, however, baits which do not spin at all are effective if fished correctly, generally at lengths 1/4 to 1/3 of the leader lengths used with rotating baits.

Baited plastic squids also are extremely effective fished with flashers. To bait a squid, trim an elongated, diamond-shaped strip of bait from the side of a herring or alewife. Place pre-cut strips of herring in a container of canning salt to firm them up. Slide the squid body up the leader, away from the double hooks. Insert a 6-in. piece of light gauge wire through the eye of the leading hook on the squid leader and snug it up with several wraps until about 2-in. of each end of the wire remains along the hook shank. Then lay the short end of the diamond-shaped bait, skin down against the hook and secure it by wrapping the light wire firmly around the bait. Slide the squid back down over the hook and the bait. Properly adjusted, it should lie inside the squid with approximately 1 inch of the tip of the bait extending beyond the skirt. **B-2 Squids™** in *Triple Glow/Green Flake, Emerald Green/Flake* plus others are effective when baited. Squid leaders should be 50- to 60-lb. test.

### FLASHER AND LURE SELECTION

As all fishermen know, lure selection varies as a result of many factors including inherent behavior and color preference of individual species. One of the most important factors, however, is prevailing light conditions and the penetration of light into the water depending on depth, water turbidity, etc. Experience with flashers has shown some colors to be more effective for coho and chinook salmon than others in certain conditions. For instance, if you're fishing plastic flasher, try *Chartreuse with Silver Mylar* on sunny days and *White with Silver Mylar* or *Green with Glow Ice Tape™* on overcast days. *Chrome* flashers generally work best in bright light, especially with a combination of *Pearl/Fishscale™*.

### FISH LOCATION AND LURE PRESENTATION

The best combination of flashers and bait or squids will not produce unless presented properly. This includes proper trolling speed as well as proper depth. Downriggers, combined with modern day electronics have made deepwater trolling with flashers and squids easier than ever before.

The formula is simple. Locate the preferred temperature of 54 degrees for coho and chinook and the active temperature zone of 44 to 58 degrees using a dependable unit such as the *Fish Hawk®*. Control depth fished using the downrigger counter. Control trolling speed, again, by utilizing the *Fish Hawk®*, producing optimum flasher action.

Use a dependable, heavy-tension downrigger release such as the *Offshore®*, or simpler yet, double size #12 rubber bands. Top quality 10-lb. test line, a good level wind reel with at least 300-yd. capacity and a 8 1/2-ft. medium-heavy action rod will do the job.

Generally, a flasher should be fished about 10 feet behind a downrigger weight, but for certain situations, distances up to 40- to 75-ft. behind the weight will take fish.

Utilize a good fish finder and a hydrographic map, along with experience and local information to locate concentrations of salmon.



For non-rotating baits, reduce leader length one to two feet.

### LEADER LENGTH

Length of leader between the flasher and squid or bait is critical to the success of salmon trolling. The following is a list of approximate leader lengths for fishing bait and squids with rotating flashers:

#### LEADER LENGTHS - Baited Squids:

1. Average chinooks - 32"
2. Active chinooks - 30"
3. Lazy or prespawning chinooks - 34" to 36"
4. Cohos - 24" to 30"

#### LEADER LENGTHS - Whole herring, herring strips, plug cut herring:

1. Average chinooks - 48"
2. Active chinooks - 42"
3. Adult or prespawning chinooks - 60" to 72"
4. Cohos - 30" to 36"