

TROLLING FOR STRIPED BASS ON THE CALIFORNIA DELTA AND SACRAMENTO AREA

Trolling refers to dragging lures in the water while slowly motoring your boat forward. The motion gives action to the lures, and it also allows you to cover lots of water while searching for fish.

There are trolling addicts out there who would never consider dunking bait or tossing lures. I personally use all three methods while chasing stripers, but I have to admit that the sound of a screaming clicker while trolling is hard to beat.

This paper is focused on fishing the California Delta, which generally covers the area from Sacramento down to the Carquinez Bridge. However, these methods will apply to some other areas as well.

Good Luck,



This 12 pound beauty slammed a trolled Yo-Zuri lure near Decker Island on the Sacramento River

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Seasons

Spring

Spring is the best time to fish the upper stretches of the Sacramento River system. This is the main spawning run of fish, which sometimes migrate from the delta up to Colusa, Knights Landing, or the Feather River. They come to spawn during full moons in April and May in water above 61 degrees. This seems to happen more often during years when we have high river conditions in March, April, and May. In low water years, the fish will often spawn on the San Joaquin River near Antioch, or in other locations closer to the delta like Clarksburg or Freeport.

During the springtime you will catch lots of small male 'schoolie' sized stripers that range in size between 18 and 25 inches. Trolling is a great way to locate these large schools of spawners.

Even in years in which the fish migrate upstream, the delta can also be a good place to catch fish while they are staging to spawn. The fish seem to stage in the Rio Vista area, especially in the West Bank, Decker Island area. They will sometimes stage further upriver near Clarksburg.

The spring can be somewhat inconsistent, especially early in late February or March. The fish usually start to stage around Valentine's Day on February 14. Try to get some up to date reports to track down the general area where fish have been caught. You might have to cover a lot of ground before you find a concentration of stripers.

Summer

Summer is the most challenging time to catch striped bass, partly due to the weather. The delta is really windy this time of year, and some places become rough and hard to fish. The main run of fish is in the bay during the summer, so there will be less stripers in the delta.

Fall

The fall is the most consistent season for striper fishing in the delta. Winds begin to die down in the fall. During September and October stripers start to move back into lower delta areas like Broad Slough, Collinsville, Montezuma Slough, and Sherman Lake to acclimate to the fresh water. Shad will get concentrated in dead-end sloughs, so exploring these areas may yield a jackpot of fish if you can find them.

My favorite time to fish the delta is from the last week of October through the first week of December. The Sacramento River side of the delta from Rio Vista to Pittsburg is usually a really good area during this time of year.

Winter

During the winter, fish are slow and lethargic due to cold water temperatures. The trolling bite slows down while bait and plugging take over as the main techniques. When the water clears up between storms, trolling is still a reliable option. Big fish move into shallow water during the winter, while the majority of fish will hold in deep water in the 15 to 35 foot range. They don't move around much in the cold water, so if you find concentrations of fish stay on them. Stripers concentrate when the water cools because the bait forms balls and slows down. If the water temperature is below 56 degrees, the trolling bite may be tough, but don't count it out. If the water temperature is below 46 degrees, I won't bother fishing at all, not even with bait.

Weather

As with all types of fishing, weather can play a major role in success. Besides any safety issues that weather can cause, weather actually affects how and when fish feed. Long periods of unchanging barometric pressure are good for fishing. It gives the fish time to settle down and resume their normal feeding activities. Weather changes and storm fronts pose a different situation.

A steady stretch of weather where the air pressure is stable is good. The fish will usually develop a consistent pattern during this time. When the weather is changing, things aren't as predictable.

A dropping barometer (low air pressure) is normally good. This is the time right before a storm. The fish will tend to feed during this time. They are gearing up for a possible period where they might not be able to find food because of a storm. Low pressure before or during a storm is a good time to fish.

When the storm begins to clear and the barometer starts to rise (high air pressure), the bite normally turns off. This is typically when we see north winds in the delta. This clearing stage right after a storm is usually the worst time to fish. If the north wind is blasting and you can't see a cloud in sight (bluebird skies), you may be in for a tough day of fishing.

Wind does not affect the act of trolling like it does bait fishing or plugging. With trolling, you are constantly driving the boat, so you can make adjustments for the wind. If I see a lot of wind in the forecast I will often leave the bait at home and focus on trolling.

Water Temperature

Water temperature is a factor when striper fishing. Sudden changes in water temperatures are usually bad for fishing, especially a drop in temperature. It may take a week or two for fish to adjust.

The ideal temperature for striper fishing is **between 56 and 64 degrees Fahrenheit**. Where did I get this? Well, I based it on experience. More specifically, I have experienced my best fishing when the water was between 59 and 61 degrees.

When water temperatures drop below 56 degrees, fish become slow and lethargic. Fish tend to school up more during colder months to chase schools of shad. Anything below 46 degrees Fahrenheit and the action will really drop off. 46 degrees is kind of my cutoff line. If the water is 45.9 or lower I won't bother fishing. However, it is still possible to catch stripers in colder water, I just prefer to chase trout in foothills reservoirs when the water is that cold.

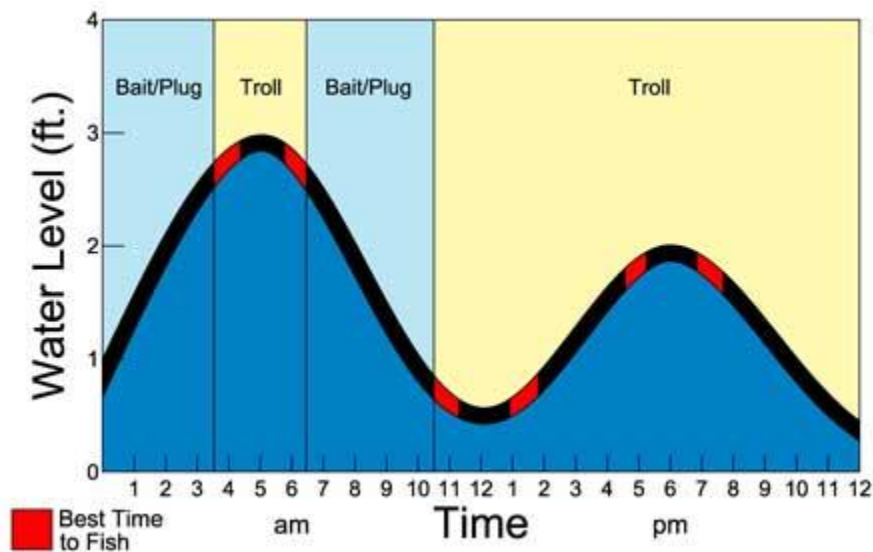
When the water gets above 64 degrees, the undersized stripers get really active. You will still catch keepers, but you will also get a lot of undersized 'shakers' and worm stealers. Fish increase their activity levels in warm water, and tend to scatter out during the summer months.

Stripers can be caught at any temperature, but keep the different temperature ranges in mind along with the tendencies that go along with them.

Tides

Tides cause water movement due to the gravitational pull of the sun and moon. Depending on the alignment of these heavenly bodies, tides will vary from day to day. Some tides cause the water level to drop or raise as much as six or seven feet at a time. Other tides may only move the water level a few feet at a time. The tides in the lower delta cause the river to move one direction, become slack, and then move in the opposite direction.

Tides are one of the most important factors while fishing the delta. The best bite window usually happens when the tide starts to change directions (see red areas on the chart below).



For example, if you are fishing a strong outgoing tide the current is usually moving pretty fast. When the current starts to slow down, the fish will bite like crazy. They normally slow down during the slack tide. When the tide starts to move again, they will bite again. Once the current picks up, the actions usually slows down somewhat.

Bite windows last longer during small tides with less change in water level. Really fast tides are usually better for bait fishing or plugging while slower moving tides are better conditions for trolling.

The tide chart above mainly applies to the delta areas where the tides move the current in both directions. Once you move above Walnut Grove on the Sacramento River system the current moves downstream all of the time. This will vary depending on the amount of water being released upstream by the dam operators. You will get a faster current on the outgoing tide and a slower current on the incoming tide, but the current never changes directions. The water level will still rise and fall due to the tides. Once you get above Verona the tides won't have much impact on the water flow.

In the areas above Walnut Grove, the tide still impacts the time that the fish bite. The outgoing tide seems to be better than the incoming tide. I've noticed that the best time to fish these areas is right around the tide changes. Right after the high tide seems to be the best time to fish areas like Clarksburg, Freeport, Sacramento, and Verona.

As with all factors involved in fishing, predicting action using tides is not an exact science. There will be days when the fish defy logic and bite during unexpected tides. I've caught fish during all tides, and I've also been skunked during all tides. I use the tides as a guide to plan my fishing trips around the times that I hope will be the most productive.

If you get stuck fishing a slow tide and you aren't getting any action, move to outside of river bends or deeper water. These areas will have more current.

Fish tend to favor different tides at different locations. You will need to keep track of which areas are most productive during incoming or outgoing tides.

Another trick is to chase the tides. Sometimes I'll plan my trip to start trolling in the lower delta, say near Pittsburg during a low tide. I'll fish the first part of the incoming tide until the fish stop biting. Then I'll race upstream above Rio Vista to hopefully catch the same tide change that I just fished down in Pittsburg. By changing locations, I'm able to fish the same tide change in two different locations. This extends my 'prime time' bite window and makes sure I make the best of my limited time on the water. It's always a good idea to check the times of tide changes at several locations before hitting the water. That way you can make moves during the day to fish tides that give you the best chance for catching fish.

Outgoing Tide (Ebb Tide)

The outgoing tide moves downstream towards the ocean. It is usually faster because it is aided by the natural downstream current of the river. Because of the speed, it is usually dirtier and more prone to stir up weeds and sediment. It is less desirable for trolling because of the decreased visibility, plus more weeds will collect on your lures.

Try fishing in deeper water during the outgoing tide. Food gets flushed out of shallow areas and rolls downhill - so look for areas downstream from shallow flats to locate feeding stripers. Try trolling deep divers in water that is 15 to 20 feet deep. I've noticed the best success while trolling deep divers against the current.

Incoming Tide (Flood Tide)

The incoming tide moves upstream away from the ocean. It is usually slower because it moves against the natural downstream current. Because of the speed, it is usually clean and less prone to stir up debris. Better visibility and less time wasted on clearing weeds off of your lures means more fish in your boat.

During the incoming tide, stripers will move up onto flats in shallow water to feed on prey that has been exposed by rising water levels. They cruise along tulles and weed lines looking for food. Try trolling in shallow water during the incoming tide, and especially at high tide. Troll water in the depth range of 7 to 10 feet.

Slack Tide

The slack tide is the time between the incoming and outgoing tides. The current will stop flowing and go slack like the water in a lake or pond. The slack tide is usually the slowest tide for striper fishing. Try speeding up to cover more water during the slack tide. Pull shallow runners 5-6 miles-per-hour.

Neap Tides (small tides)

The best tides for trolling are the Neap tides. These occur the day before, during, and after the first and third quarter moons (a three day period). Neap tides are small, or soft tides. They usually produce a slow current, less water level change, less sediment, and less weeds. The bite windows will usually last longer during these small tides, if you can find a spot that has some current.

Spring Tides (big tides)

The worst tides for trolling are the Spring tides. These occur the day before, during, and after the full and new moons (a three day period). Spring tides are big, or hard tides. They usually produce a strong current, high water level change, more sediment, and more weeds. You will typically have a very short bite window during big tides. When the current starts moving really fast, try moving to shallow water, or insides of bends.

Locations

One of the most important aspects of all types of fishing is location. If you don't present your bait to a fish you will not catch anything - it's as simple as that. In the middle of channels, deep holes, shipping channels and high traffic areas are *not* where you want to fish for stripers. I laugh when I see bank anglers casting out as far as they can, as if all of the fish are in the middle of the river. Ironically, I tend to fish right along the banks on purpose. This is where the biggest fish are staging an ambush!



When fishing from a boat, I like to find large flat areas in 12' to 19' of water. You want to fish an area that has a silt bottom, not rocky. You will often find stripers holding in deep water, but they aren't always feeding. Stripers tend to feed on flats and rest in holes. If you find them in shallow water it's likely that they are actively feeding. Fish rest in deep cool holes because there is more oxygen down there. They move into the shallows to feed.

Look for current breaks. If you see some fast moving water, a current break and some slow moving water, fish on the slow edge of the current break. If you see an eddy of swirling water, fish on the outer edge, in the main current.

Look for bends in the river. Slow moving water is good, but you want some current. You might have to move around based on the changing tides. When water gets cold (less than 56 degrees) go deep.

I strongly advise that you buy a map of the delta. There are several good maps available that show depths, fishing areas, and boat ramp access.

Safety

Delta winds can be annoying and in some cases dangerous. Winds can kick up very suddenly and catch you off guard. Don't get trapped! Always have a plan to get back to the boat ramp safely. In a small boat, head into the wind on the way out so that you can ride with the waves on the way back to the ramp. When winds kick up, head into safer water along protected levees and into sloughs. Summer time is the worst for wind, while the winter is usually calmer. When the wind and tides are running in opposite directions, rollers will start to form. Try to plan your traveling time to avoid these situations, or be prepared to catch some spray on the way in.



Fog can be a dangerous element in the winter time. Unless you have radar, be very cautious while navigating in the fog. Always use your running lights in the fog or during low light conditions. Make sure your horn is working, or keep an air horn handy. I can tell you how scary it is when you are sitting in the fog and you hear a boat running wide open...and the sound is getting louder. Time for a warning shot from your horn.

Currents can become very swift in the delta. Remember that current is always stronger in deep water and along the outsides of bends. Shallow water and the insides of bends have slower currents.

When navigating unfamiliar waters, stick to the shipping channels when possible. Always use a map or GPS to scout out the area prior to hitting the water. There are sand bars, rocks and submerged items that can get you in trouble. You might want to cruise an area during the low tide to see items that will be under water at high tide.

Wear a personal floatation device (PFD) whenever possible. I have a Stearns coat that has a built-in life jacket (see the first page of this paper for a photo). I wear it at all times during the winter months. During warmer weather I wear a self-inflating life jacket. It's small and light enough so that it doesn't really bother me while fishing. The river looks calm and peaceful, but anybody who has ever watched the news knows that people drown in the delta all the time. Be safe and use common sense! Get out of the water when you think unsafe conditions are present or on the way.

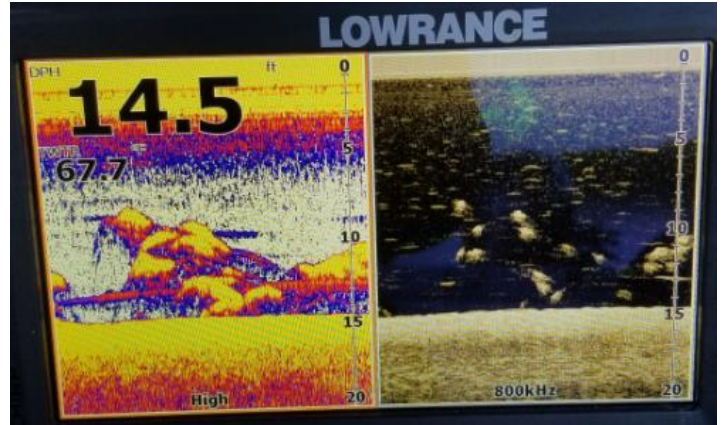
Boat

As long as your boat is safe and has a gas motor capable of trolling between 3 and 5 miles per hour, you can troll the delta. For years, all I used was a 12' aluminum boat with a 15 horsepower outboard motor. The advantage of having a big boat is that you can race around to lots of different areas and you can take on rougher weather conditions.

Sonar

Sonar is important for several reasons. First and foremost, you need to be able to see what depth you are fishing. The goal is to keep your lure close to the bottom, because this is where the feeding stripers hang out.

Another benefit of using sonar is finding fish. Look for fish right on the bottom, as these are most likely the feeding stripers. Each sonar unit is different. I use Lowrance, which shows stripers as seen on the right. If you are marking fish, make several passes through the area in both directions. If you can't get them to bite, return later on a different tide phase to see if they will bite later. Don't forget the old saying, "don't leave fish to find fish".



If your sonar unit allows fish symbols, turn them off. You want to see the raw data.

GPS and Contour Maps

If you have a sonar unit with GPS this is just another thing in your favor. There are shoals, or sand mounds, all over the delta. Many of them are located out from shore, and you would never be able to visually find them on your own. With a GPS unit contour map, you can troll around shoals using the contour lines on the map as a depth guide. This is not a requirement, but it will allow you to troll spots much more efficiently.

Tackle

Rod



The average striper isn't huge, so you don't need a big heavy rod. A medium rod rated for 8-20 pound test should work fine.

Find a rod that is limber enough to see action of lure. You don't want to use a stiff 'cue stick' that is too stiff to see the lure action. If you use a graphite rod, make sure the tip is fast. Graphite rods tend to telegraph the lure action right at the tip. Fiberglass rods have good limber tips, but tend to show the action about a third of the way down from the tip. Pick whichever you prefer.

Reel

Choose a bait casting reel with a nice smooth drag and a clicker. If possible, get a reel with a line counter.

Lefty reels are hard to find with line counters, so I sometimes use line counters that clip onto the rod blank in front of the reel. These are not the greatest things in the world to use, so get a line-counter reel if you can.



Line

I use Power Pro moss green Spectra 30 pound test braided line for trolling. The big advantage of using braided lines while trolling is the lack of stretch. You can detect the action of the lure much better with braid than with monofilament. This is helpful to detect when weeds or debris collect on your lure. It also makes it easier to clear weeds off of the lure by jerking the rod.

Run your main line straight to a duo-lock snap, and then clip it to your lure. You don't need to use a leader.



Needle-Nose Pliers

Ever had a size 1 treble hook impaled through your hand with a thrashing striper attached? Me neither, but I know several people who have. You don't have to be fancy here – any stainless pair will work. You don't want to spend the rest of your day in the E.R., do you?



Fish Gripper

While you're at it, get a fish gripper too. When the fish thrashes around at least your hand won't be in its mouth. You can get a cheap one without a scale or anything, just get one. It also helps keep the two sets of trebles out of your net.



Net

You can land a striper using a fish gripper alone, but I prefer to use a net. The netting style that uses rubber is easier on the fish, so if you plan to catch and release, this is a better choice.



Lures

There are lots of different lures available for trolling. My go-to lures are Rat-L-Traps and Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnows. Each lure has its own unique depth range and optimum trolling speed. I've listed some details on each lure below. Adjust your lure choice to the depth you are trolling.

Shallow Runners

1/2 Ounce Rat-L-Trap



Speed	4 mph (about 3.5 mph against the current, 4.5 mph with the current)
Line Out	75 to 100 feet
Diving Depth	6 feet
Colors	SY1 Chrome Shad, 53 Diamond Dust
Add Worm Tail?	No
Comments	Use these for trolling really shallow water like the tops of shoals.

3/4 Ounce Rat-L-Trap 'Mag-Trap'



Speed	4 mph (about 3.5 mph against the current, 4.5 mph with the current)
Line Out	75 to 100 feet
Diving Depth	8 feet
Colors	SY1 Chrome Shad, 53 Diamond Dust
Add Worm Tail?	No
Comments	This is my standard shallow running lure for fishing water between 7 and 9 feet deep.

Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow 5-1/4"



Speed	4 mph (about 3.5 mph against the current, 4.5 mph with the current)
Line Out	135' to 150' feet depending on depth and height of rod tip.
Diving Depth	7 feet
Colors	Chartreuse with green head, chartreuse with orange head, white with red head, sardine, pearl with rainbow dots
Add Worm Tail?	Yes
Comments	Another good shallow running lure for fishing water between 7 and 9 feet deep.

Deep Divers

YOZURI CRYSTAL MINNOW DEEP DIVER 5-1/4"



Speed	4 mph (about 3.5 mph against the current, 4.5 mph with the current)
Line Out	28 to 100 feet depending on depth and height of rod tip.
Depth	15 to 18 feet
Colors	Chartreuse with green head, chartreuse with orange head, white with red head, sardine, pearl with rainbow dots
Add Worm Tail?	Yes
Comments	My standard deep diving lure for trolling. Work water between 14 and 20 feet deep with these lures.

Lure Color

I personally believe that color is very low on the importance scale when choosing lures. I believe that vibration and action does most of the fish attracting work. However, you can increase your odds by adjusting your lure color based on the conditions. The following rules are probably listed in 'Bass Fishing 101' and can be applied to most types of fishing:

- Dirty or Muddy Water: Use dark colors (black, purple, dark blue)
- Cloudy Days, Twilight: Use bright colors (chartreuse, white, fluorescent)
- Sunny Days: Use shiny or sparkly lures (chrome, glitter, holographic)

Plastic Worms



You will want to add a white worm tail to your large minnow plugs, but not to Rat-L-Traps. Use the straight worms, not the curly tail worms. Curly tail worms will mess up the action of your lure. Some popular choices are Zoom brand 'Trick Worms' and 'Elaztech Finesse WormZ' by Z-Man.

Stripers will steal the Zoom worms pretty easily, while the Elaztech worms really stretch and tend to stay put when short-strikers grab the tail ends. When you attach the worm, thread the first 1/4" of the worm onto a hook and push it as far up as possible. Choose the hook which is closest to the centerline of the lure. This will assure that your lure won't pull to one side. If the action of the lure looks wrong or the lure pulls to one side adjust the



worm. Worm tails make lures run more shallow than normal. Use this as a tool to adjust depth when needed. If needed, use a drop of super glue on the hook shank to keep fish from pulling off the worm.

Trolling Technique

Setting up the Rods

Let's assume that you have launched your boat, checked the weather and tides, and are all geared up to fish. Head to a spot that you believe will produce fish based on the current conditions.

Put your lure in the water and make sure that it is running straight and moving properly. If they don't run straight bend or twist the eyes and hooks with needle nosed pliers. This is called tuning your lure.

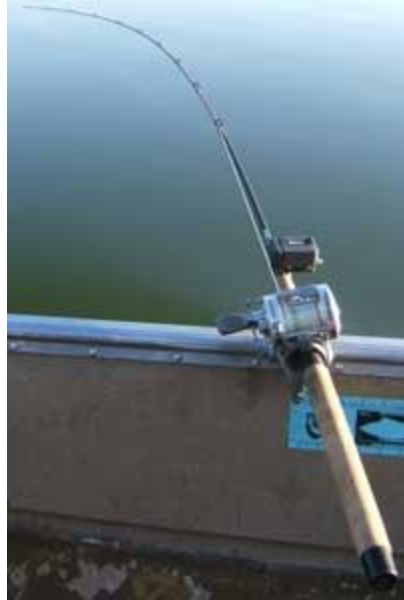
Now check the water clarity. You want at least six inches of water visibility when trolling. If water is too muddy switch to bait fishing. If the water looks good, then set your drag.

Keep a loose drag while trolling. You don't want to use a tight drag while using treble barbed hooks for striped bass. These hooks tend to hook the fish in the skin of the mouth. Pulling too hard will actually rip the hooks out. Just remember to keep steady pressure on the fish at all times and you should be fine. Your drag should be loose enough so that it slightly slips while reeling in a diving lure at trolling speed.

Once you have the drag set properly, get up to speed and let your line out the proper distance based on your lure. Once your lure is out, put the reel in gear and turn on the clicker. Do not troll in free spool mode, the fish should hook itself when it hits the lure. Your loose drag setting will ensure that when a fish hits your lure, it will pull out enough line so that you will hear the clicker.

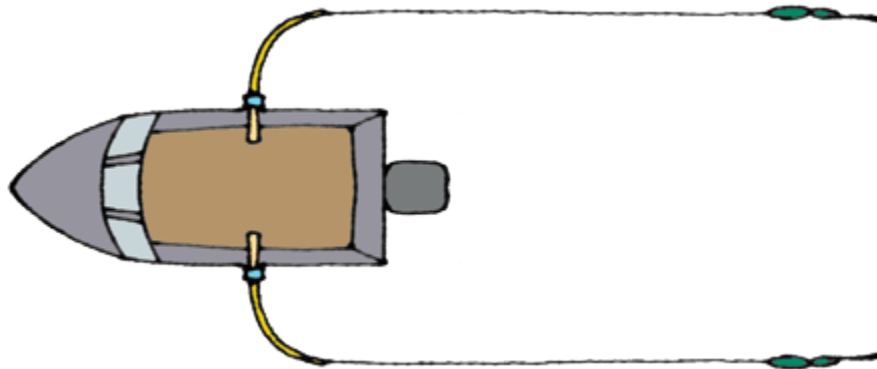
Now put the rod into a rod holder. I generally run three rods: two out the sides and one out the back right in the middle. This will keep you fairly tangle free unless a diving lure gets fouled up by debris and runs sideways. If this keeps happening, just go with two rods.

For the side rods, and keep your rods relatively low. I usually put mine out so that they are parallel to the water or pointed slightly downward. If you stick your side rods up in the air, you will have to let out more line to account for the depth change. You'll want the rod at a 90 degree angle to the boat. For the rear rod, I angle it just high enough to clear the motor when bent from the pressure of a fish.



You'll want to see a nice bend in the rod. Now check the rod tip. You should be able to see the shaking action of the lure. It should keep up a constant rhythm. If you notice your rod tip standing still you most likely have weeds or debris on your lure.

Start by giving the rod a few fast sharp tugs, as this will usually clear the debris. If the tip still doesn't look right, then reel up and check your lure. If you notice that your rod tip sharply jerks once in a while, you might be dragging the bottom. You will need to reel in some line until it stops digging.



Driving the Boat

Now is when the real work begins. If you are driving the boat, you have to pay attention to many factors at all times. Driving the boat can wear on you, so when I'm in the mood to relax, a bait soaking trip may be in order. While trolling, it seems like you will run too shallow or too deep after just a few seconds of not paying attention.

Speed

First off, you need to maintain the proper speed at all times. The speed you want to track is relative to how fast your boat is moving through the water. If you have a paddle wheel speed gauge that is accurate at low speeds then use

this by all means. It seems like most of the paddle wheels I have tried don't give accurate readings at trolling speeds, so I use by GPS speed as an indicator. With GPS speed, you have to account for the tidal movement. Generally speaking, add 0.5 mph when trolling with the current and subtract 0.5 mph from the reading when trolling against the current. With some experience, you will start to be able to gauge the proper speed by the action of your vibrating rod tip.

A good rate for trolling is from 900 RPM's (2-3 mph) to 1300 RPM's (4-6 mph). Sometimes current, winds, etc. can speed up or slow down the boat, so alternate the RPM's to dial in the correct speed as needed.

Depth

The next thing to monitor is the depth. **Watch your depth at all times.** Change your course if you are trolling the wrong depth. One of the biggest challenges with trolling is finding areas that are the ideal depth for your particular lure. Always troll near the bottom. Adjust your lure type to change depths when needed.

There are some other tricks to adjusting your lure's depth. Trolling with the current will make the lure run about two feet deeper then trolling against the current. The more water resistance that you add, the more shallow the lure will run. Keep this in mind when monitoring the tidal flows. Go slower to go deeper, go faster to run more shallow. Another trick is to add a rubber core sinker above your leader. This will add one to two extra feet of depth.

Besides the depth, you need to monitor the sonar for snags. If you see some structure on the screen, turn and move around the structure. You also need to be on the lookout for fish. When trolling shallow, spikes on the sonar might be fish. You will be able to mark fish depending on your depth and sonar unit.

When you encounter a sudden shallow area, raise your rod up in the air to keep your lure off the bottom. Speed up and veer out away from the bank into deeper water until your lines are clear of the shallow zone.

Fish Marks

Marking fish in the delta can be tough, especially when trolling shallow. You have to remember that your transducer is already about a foot under the surface to begin with. That means that in eight feet of water, your transducer is only seven feet from the bottom. That leaves a pretty small mall patch of area which you are monitoring, even if you are using the widest cone angle setting. None the less, you can still mark fish.

First off, make sure to turn the fish symbols off. You want to see the raw signals. Set the sensitivity so that you see some noise on the screen, but not so much clutter that you can't see fish marks. On Lowrance units, striper marks tend to look like round-shaped blobs with yellow color in the middle.

Trolling Pattern

When trolling shallow, follow a gentle "S" shaped pattern with your boat. This will slightly vary the speed of your lure. The rod on the outside of a turn will pull the lure more quickly and the rod on the inside will move more slowly. This speed variation will often entice strikes.

Hazards

Keep a lookout for hazards. You need to watch for debris, boat traffic, sunken pilings and any other dangerous conditions. If you see a snag on the sonar, gun the throttle and shoot out towards deeper water. The increase in speed will help to pull the lures up off of the bottom and hopefully avoid the snag. It also helps to raise the rods as high as possible when passing a snag.

Be mindful of other anglers. Don't cut off bank anglers or other trollers. When going head to head with another boat you always pass port side to port side (on the right, just like two cars going opposite directions would pass each other). Although this is the rule of navigation, most people aren't aware of this, so just keep it safe while passing another boat. You will be past the boat in less than a minute, so don't stress about going too deep for a few moments.

If you get snagged, go back past the snag and try to free your lure. Use a large lure retriever with a rope if your lure won't come out.

Landing Fish

When you hear the clicker screaming, it's most likely fish on! Remove the rod from the holder and keep a nice bend in the rod. **You don't need to set hook.** You are using treble barbed hooks, and too much pressure can rip them out of the fish's skin.

Drive the boat away from the shore when a fish is hooked. This keeps it away from structure that it could get snagged on. It also moves you out of the trolling lane in case there are others trying to fish the same area. If you are clear of structures and other anglers, keep trolling if possible. You stand a good chance of hooking a fish on another rod. Nothing beats a double hook-up!

Remember to keep steady pressure on the fish. Don't force the fish to the boat, or you could end up pulling the hooks out. When using a net, lead the fish into the net head first.

Handling Stripers

I like to use a Boga Grip to demobilize the fish so I can remove the hooks. I don't recommend using your hand to grab the fish's lower jaw like a black bass. If the fish starts to shake around, you might be headed to the hospital with a treble hook in your hand.



If you plan to release the fish, handle it gently. Keep it in the water if possible. If you want to weigh a big fish, weigh it in the net and subtract the weight of the net from the total weight. Don't lift large fish out of the water by their lower jaw. Studies have shown that this can damage them and they can eventually starve.

Storing and Cleaning Fish

If you decide to keep the fish, first knock it out with a club. Next, bleed the fish by cutting the gills with a knife, or by ripping them out with pliers. Then soak it in water for about five minutes so the blood doesn't clot. Smaller fish can be soaked in a bucket, while larger fish can be hung over the side of the boat on a stringer.

Beware: sea lions in the delta ambush stringers, so be on the lookout. Normally, you can hear them surfacing for air before you see them. If you see one approaching, you might want to pull in any stringers until the sea lion has passed.

After the fish is bled out, pack it on ice for the remainder of the trip. The best way to store a fish for eating is on ice - not a stringer.

I like to eat fish in the three to five pound range. The meat of these fish is firm and delicious. The meat on large fish is less desirable. I try to release all large fish because not only do they taste worse than smaller fish, but they are the breeding stock for the next generation of fish. Another factor to consider are the toxin levels of large fish in the delta. Please read the [State's advisory for eating delta fish](#). Basically speaking, you don't want to eat delta stripers more than twice per week, and pregnant women or children under 18 should avoid it altogether.

Tips for Catching More Stripers

- Pull your rod out of the holder and slowly pump the rod about one foot back and forth to vary the action. If you are not busy driving the boat and you do this all day, you will most likely pick up more fish than leaving our rod in the holder.
- I like to check my lure for weeds every 20 minutes at least. There is nothing worse than wasting an hour of trolling because you had some weeds on your lure.
- If you catch a fish, circle around and troll back through the same area in the same direction. Striped bass travel in schools, and the best way to catch a lot of fish is to work a school. This is your big advantage over bait fishing. With trolling, you search for fish and then you continue to catch numerous fish from the same school.
- Run to another area of the delta. The Sacramento and San Joaquin sides of the delta can offer very different conditions at any given time.
- Vary your speed. Sometimes fish will want really fast presentation. Other times, they want a slower presentation
- Abruptly slow down or speed up. I can't tell you how many times I've stopped to turn around and a fish has hit my lure.
- When reeling in your line, use a pumping action. You might be able to pick up fish while reeling up.
- Trolling against the current can be better because it gives them more time to strike since your ground speed is slower.
- If you troll for a while and nothing is happening, try a different color lure or different depth.
- If you are trolling with multiple people, use different colored lures on each rod. Once you start catching fish, switch all of the rods to the hot color.

Contact

If you have any questions about trolling for striped bass, feel free to shoot me an email.

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