

With water temperatures rising rapidly, soon to be stalled at their peak for the remainder of the hot season, we're entering the time period in which I discovered how effective "prop-baits" can be. Last year, during the summer and early fall, floating plugs carrying propellers on them produced better than anything else in my box. On many days, these lures turned a slow bite into a steady one, on others they allowed me to scratch out a few quality fish in tough conditions.

On several occasions, they also brought in the biggest trout of the day. Mostly, I was using MirrOlure's MirrOprops. These are small, shad-shaped lures similar in shape to a MirrOdine XL, with a fatter profile and, of course, counter-rotating props, one on the nose and tail. I also dug out and deployed some old Shaggy Dogs I had tucked away in the dark corner of a tackle box.

These plugs are longer, about the size of a One Knocker, and the props on them are bigger. I had discovered them back in the mid-1990s, using them primarily in the surf when the menhaden were thick. They beautifully mimic the flitting noise the oily baitfish make when striking the surface. I caught some solid trout on the beachfront with them back then, but had never really tried them in bay waters much.

After discovering how effective the MirrOprops could be (when Jesse Arsola told me he'd been having great success on them in windy conditions in the spring) I put some hooks on an old Shaggy Dog and stuck it in my wading box. I probably carried it around for about 4 or 5 trips without using it. Finally, I tied it on, during a lull in the bite on an otherwise steady day.

The noisy plug had been silent for well over a decade, sitting idly in the shadowy box. When I resurrected it, I slung it off the edge of a flat around some scattered rocks in deeper water and activated the props with a couple of vigorous twitches with my rod tip. The old lure sent a sheet of water up each time it moved, the whirring blades pushing up frothy foam with a sloshing noise.

It had covered no more than six feet before it was attacked by a 23 inch trout weighing over 4 pounds! 15 years dead in a box, then 15 seconds on the water and it was already connecting me with a fish. Though the trout wasn't a monster, its dimensions are solid indeed for August, when dinks are plentiful and catching a 20 inch specimen is often a challenge.

To say the least, I was tickled with the events, and chastised myself for allowing such a productive plug to go unused for so long. I now keep prop-baits closer to hand at all times. And I'll likely be using them plenty in the near future. Recently, I discovered a little "trick", or key, to making good presentations with them.

The obvious point of presenting these plugs is to make the propellers turn and displace water. The speed and force with which they are moved will affect the amount of water displaced and consequently, how much noise and commotion they create. Adjusting the intensity of the twitching of the rod tip will allow for some control over how much splashing and sloshing noises the lure makes.

I like to use a slower-paced, more muted presentation when it's calmer and the water's surface is flatter, speeding up and adding intensity and irregularity when it's windier and choppier. This concept I apply to all kinds of plugs, not just

floating ones carrying props.

What I discovered, though, is the most effective way to maintain control over the movements of the props and consequently over the amount of water they displace. Before twitching the rod, it's important to hold it in a stationary position and take all the slack out of the line. Once the weight of the plug is perceptible and the blades can be felt turning slightly, the rod tip can be lifted up forcefully to generate an enticing splash.

When done this way, the lure tends to dig right into the water predictably. Conversely, if the rod tip is yanked around with slack in the line, the lure will often be pulled off the surface without making a splash; the front hook also becomes tangled in the line at times.

As with all lures, maintaining control over the movements of the plug without inhibiting those movements is critical. I believe this technique of slowly reeling out all the slack before twitching is the best way to achieve control with these plugs.

These lures are like all others in another important way. In order to catch fish most consistently with them, it's important to alter the presentation to match the conditions of the day, and also to properly meet with the feeding mood of the fish. Altering the presentation with these lures basically means adjusting the speed, rhythm and intensity with which the rod is twitched.

On one end of the spectrum, the rod could be held still while the reel handle is slowly turned to cause the plug to move almost like a "buzz bait", where the slow steady turning of the blades creates a bulging sheet of water which passes up and over the plug. This would, of course, be most effective on still waters with a relatively flat surface.

Conversely, in bigger waves, the lure could be yanked forcefully to create a high, noisy splash, two or three times in rapid succession, then paused to bob enticingly in the chop. Often, when it's windy, strikes occur while the plug is stationary; significantly, the blades slowly turn and twinkle in this scenario.

A whole range of presentations are possible between these two extremes. The variables open for experimentation are, again, the speed of movement, steadiness of movement, and the intensity with which the props are made to turn. As is true with all plugs, experimentation done in a systematic and thoughtful manner will likely lead to the discovery of the optimal movement pattern for the moment.

These productive plugs are simple and easy to use, but they can also become part of sophisticated and artful efforts. They work well in floating grass, and entice reaction-strikes from finicky fish in the middle of the day, under bright, hot skies, when winds are wailing. For these reasons, they should be tried on most outings during the summer time.

Sadly, MirrOlure's MirrOprops have not caught on like they should have, given how well they work! Still, they can be ordered directly from MirrOlure at [www.mirrolure.com](http://www.mirrolure.com). Their product number within the MirrOlure system is 10MR, and they are listed within the floating twitch bait family. I prefer bright, shiny, natural looking colors.