

Be a Control Freak



Figure 1: Allen Chantry with a 36" Lake Chelan laker

I guide year round on Lake Chelan in North Central Washington, primarily by trolling for Lake Trout. I mostly fish at depths ranging from 100 to 300 feet. I am fishing for very well fed fish that will not compete for food, and most certainly will not pursue a meal aggressively. These are almost always neutral to negative fish. When people ask me about how to fish this lake effectively, I always, always emphasize two factors. They are depth control and speed control. These factors, in turn determine two of the most important components in the formula for catching fish. These formula components are location and presentation. Depth control allows you to troll at the precise place in the water column where the fish are, voila', you are in the correct location. Speed control allows you to fine tune your location, but also, determines the effectiveness of your presentation. There are a lot of ways to spend your money to allow you a lesser or greater degree of precision in depth and speed control in trolling. As someone whom people depend on day in and day out to produce fish, I have come to rely on six tools and their interaction to be very precise with my depth control and speed control. In order of expense from most to least, they are: a Nautamatic TR-1 kicker autopilot & throttle control; Scotty electric downriggers; a Lowrance X-85 Depthfinder; a Lowrance Global Map 100 Global Positioning System (GPS); a Luhr-Jensen Luhr-Speed Indicator; and the book: **Precision Trolling:** by Mark Romanack. With these tools, even fishing at great depth in highly variable conditions I can control my location and presentation very precisely.

I use the Nautamatic TR-1 Autopilot to control my direction and the speed of the engine. This device connects your 4-stroke outboard kicker motor to a remote control through a gyro and hydraulic system. I am clueless as to how it all works. All I know is that it works, and so far, trouble free for three years. The beauty of the directional control with this device is that it doesn't just hold the motor at a certain angle, it steers the boat towards a distant object, constantly making minute adjustments. The throttle control allows you to control the rpm's of your motor very precisely. Additionally, it interfaces with my GPS allowing me to lock into a waypoint that I have marked with my GPS so I can hit a concentration of fish over and over again with a high degree of precision. I know of no other product that does this as well.



Figure 2: Nautamatic TR-1 kicker autopilot remote control

My Scotty electric downriggers allow me to place the 15-pound cannonballs that I use at specific depths. It has proven to be able to lower and retrieve the heavy weights that I use very precisely. I use electrics rather than manuals because I fish at depths in excess of 100 feet almost 100% of the time. If I fished less than 100 feet deep the majority of my time on the water, I would probably stay with the manual downrigger based on initial expense. I selected Scotty's after watching what guides and serious fishermen use here in the West. I make hundreds of adjustments a day as I am constantly working to keep my lure working perfectly at 5 to 10 feet off the bottom. They have proven reliable and virtually maintenance free. Not only do these units lower and retrieve 15-pound cannonballs all day long. But once, I retrieved the tow hoop that had broken off of a ski boat (made of 1/2" stainless steel) and ski rope (with handle still attached) that weighed an additional 20 pounds along with my cannonball when I snagged that mess from the bottom in 185 feet of water. The downrigger was not damaged at all.

One cautionary note is that the digital readout on the downrigger is merely a counter of revolutions of the spool and should serve only as reference point. It does not tell you how deep you are fishing. How much cable is out in feet is a function of how much cable you started with as well as the number of revolutions of the spool. In my case, since I spool up with 500 feet of cable, the diameter of the spool is larger, so each revolution is actually more than one foot. Additionally, how deep you are is a function not only of how much cable you have out, but is also dependent on the speed you are going which determines the amount of blowback, or more clearly, the angle your cable is

dragged back from the vertical plane due to water resistance on the lure, fishing line, downrigger ball and downrigger cable.



Figure 3: Scotty electric downrigger

My Lowrance X-85 Depthfinder with its 3,000 watts of power allow me to track the bottom in deep water and mark fish in deep water. I point my transducer approximately 5 degrees forward of vertical so I can anticipate depth changes since I am fishing very close to the bottom almost all the time. When I upgraded to this higher powered sonar unit, my confidence improved dramatically, I began marking fish much more consistently at over 150 feet of water or even over 250 feet depths. I am ogling Lowrance's more powerful color unit the XM-16, but so far, the X-85 has performed very well for me.



Figure 4: Lowrance X-85 depthfinder

My Lowrance Global Map 100 along with its accompanying mapping software, is a GPS used to locate, exactly where I currently am, to mark waypoints that I can return to and to track my route so I can see graphically where I have been on the lake using satellite and computer technology. This unit interfaces with my autopilot and allows me to “lock onto” a specific point, which is usually where I have marked concentrations of fish with my Depthfinder.

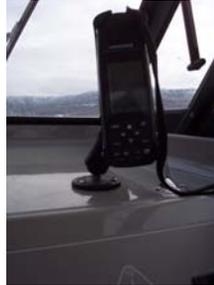


Figure 5: Lowrance Global Map 100 GPS

Probably the most overlooked and low-tech tool in the arsenal of the troller's toolbox is a mechanical speed indicator. My Luhr-Speed trolling speed indicator is the tool I check the most. I call it my “Fred Flintstone” speedometer. Basically, it is a ball in the water dragged backwards by water pressure attached by a string to a needle that is in turn pulled across a graduated faceplate. I determine the speed that a lure needs to be trolled at by watching it in the water next to the boat. I then note the speed on my indicator. Then, it doesn't matter what the wind does, what the drag is from the downrigger balls and cable, I can precisely duplicate that speed. This is so important! It is particularly important with speed sensitive lures that are designed to be pulled at less than 2 knots. Sometimes missing your target speed by one tenth of a knot can reduce your bite rate by half! It is the difference between consistently hooking fish and taking a long slow boat ride with an accidental fish every so often. The speed indicators on my Depthfinder and my GPS simply are not accurate enough at speeds under two knots. There are other speed indicators on the market that I have not used and just can't say whether they are better or not. This one costs about \$45 retail and is very simple to install. Once you get used to it, you will feel hamstrung when you fish on a boat without it. The one circumstance where this tool is not as useful would be where the speed of the boat over the water is different than the speed of your downrigger balls at depth due to different currents at different depths. Then, a device like the Sub-Troll 900 would be better.



Figure 6: Luhr Jensen - Luhr Speed Indicator

Finally, the book: **Precision Trolling** by *Mark Romanack* is a tool that I consult regularly. It tells me, the distance my lure is below my downrigger ball based on my speed, the diameter of the line I am using, how far the lure is from the downrigger ball and what make and model of lure I am using. This book provides the troller with a wealth of information.

Using these tools I routinely connect with neutral to negative lake trout that are anywhere from 120' to 280' deep with a high degree of certainty that the lure I am trolling is right where I want it to be doing just what I want it to do. Do you need these tools? I can tell you that my bite rate has increased with the addition of each of these tools.



Figure 7: Sandra Jones and Granddaughter Mikayla Wilson with an 18# Lake Chelan Lake Trout