

by Tom Johnson\*

# DEAD IN THE WATER

## DEADSTICKS LIVE THE ACTION

### A DEADSTICK IS:

- A. WHAT YOUR DOG CHASES.
- B. THE FISHING ROD YOUR PARTNER STEPPED ON.
- C. YOUR UNEMPLOYED BROTHER-IN-LAW.
- D. NONE OF THE ABOVE.

**T**he correct answer is none of the above. In fishing jargon, a deadstick is a second or third rod you're legally allowed to fish with in most (but not all) states and provinces. Most folks, not being ambidextrous, put the second or third rods in rod holders in hopes that a fish might grab on.

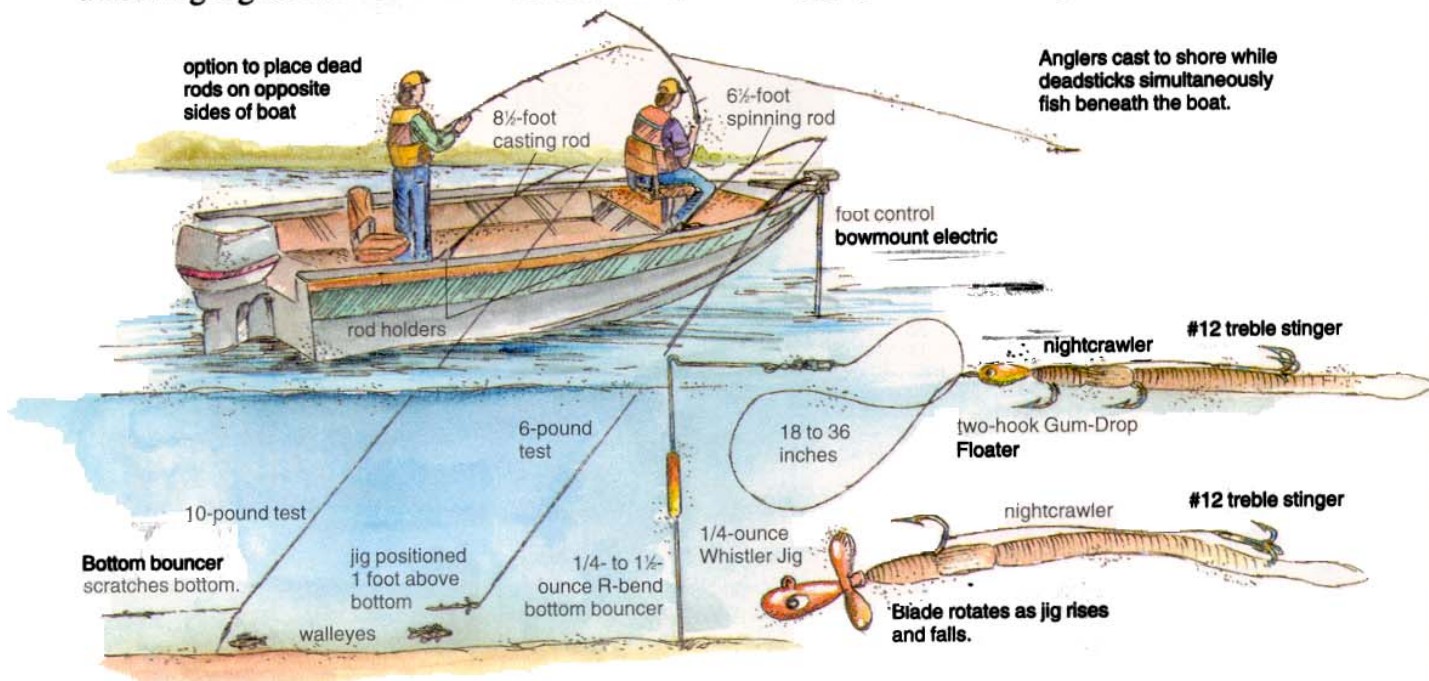
Many people don't view deadsticking as an important or even legitimate technique. Whaddaya mean, bonus or suicidal fish don't count? They sure do. Deadsticking is, in fact, a legitimate and important system, rather than just a place to put a rod you're tired of holding.

### DEAD OR ALIVE?

Have you ever seen a walleye angler operating a bowmount trolling motor while holding a rod in each hand? These are called livesticks. Some tournament anglers are coordinated enough to make two-fisted angling an art form. Have you ever tried jiggging two

rods at the same time, for an hour or two at a time? I have, and frequently find that when I set one of the rods in a holder and leave it alone, I catch a fish on it. The second live-stick only became effective when transformed into a deadstick. This is particularly true anytime walleyes prefer a bait presented in a natural manner, rather than the action you impart by retrieving or jigging.

Using a deadstick also allows for casting a lure on one rod while drifting or trolling another, combining the best of both worlds to simultaneously check shallow and deep water, or to present a variety of lures. Even if you're not catching fish on the cast, many times



---

walleyes will follow your lure or bait to the boat. Upon seeing the naturally appearing bait on the dead rod, they grab the free meal.

## DEADLY DOUBLE

I use two deadstick combinations, which I find to be particularly deadly on walleyes. My favorite technique incorporates a 1/4- to 1½-ounce bottom bouncer with an R-bend to the angled wire arm. I experience fewer line tangles with this style of bouncer, while still obtaining the rocking motion a fixed-arm bouncer imparts to the bait. Even subtle changes in speed and direction trigger fish.

To the bouncer I tie a snell with a Northland Gum-Drop Floater—a single hook version for a leech or minnow, a double hook model for a nightcrawler. If the crawler's tail is being bitten off by fish that hold, then drop the bait, I tie a stinger hook behind the second hook of the floater, for a total of three. I prefer a small, lightweight treble like a #12 Eagle Claw #L754 Featherlite to minimize any loss of bait action. Color isn't critical, though I'm partial to orange-chartreuse and green-chartreuse.

I use 10-pound-test Trilene Ultra Thin on both the main line and the leader, which is heavy enough not to break too quickly when snagged, allowing a little time to move the boat back to the snag, grasp the line, and try to pull it free. Also, deadsticking provides

surprisingly big walleyes, and 10-pound provides a little cushion when a hooked big fish suddenly pulls against the drag while the rod's in the holder. Use about 18 to 30 inches of leader because any longer tends to tangle on tight turns.

I use a long medium-action rod to prevent tangling lines on tight turns, to impart a natural pulsing motion to the livebait every time the bouncer touches and hangs, and to avoid

## I FREQUENTLY FIND THAT WHEN I SET ONE OF THE RODS IN A HOLDER AND LEAVE IT ALONE, I CATCH A FISH ON IT.

spooking fish when they bite. A rod must give sufficiently to let the fish grasp the bait without feeling resistance and spooking. Using rods that are too stiff alert the fish, and they often drop the bait. My favorite combo for this approach is an 8- or 8½-foot medium-heavy Eagle Claw Crosswings casting rod with an Abu-Garcia 5500 C-3 reel.

My second favorite deadstick tactic involves spinning equipment and lighter line to present a jig—an often overlooked technique. I spool 6-pound test on an Eagle Claw XR 120 spinning reel on a 6½-foot Powerlite spinning rod, and attach a 1/8- or 1/4-ounce Whistler

Jig. A propeller near the eye spins easily as the boat moves, imparting flash, vibration, and action. Keep the bait fairly vertical. Don't fish the jig on bottom. Keep it about a foot above bottom, letting it rise and fall, flashing and spinning, as the boat rocks in waves. My favorite jig colors are chartreuse, gold, and silver.

The Whistler's single hook is designed to be fished with a minnow, leech, or half-crawler. But the hook is sufficiently long to allow adding a plastic or Power Bait Grub, which often adds to the productivity of the jig and livebait. When I'm using a half-crawler, I thread the broken end on first, with a small piece protruding past the end of the hook. When I'm fishing a whole crawler, I add a small stinger hook to the jig and insert the stinger near the crawler's tail. Use light line like 6-pound test, with a small, lightweight treble—#12, #14, or even #16.

Deadstick walleyes aren't accidental fish. Deadsticking is a deadly tactic that at times can outproduce more aggressive tactics, and at the very least, add to your catch. Just watch for the rod to bend, then slowly and gingerly take it out of the rod holder and gently sweep forward to make sure the walleye gets the point. The 'eyes will do the rest. ■

---

*\* Tom "Doc" Johnson is a Professional Walleye Trail touring pro from Denver, Colorado.*

---