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ART  
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22

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RESURRECTION**

44

**SKINNY  
WATER  
KINGS**

48

**STRUCTURE  
FISHING FOR  
WALLEYE**

32

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# TACKLE AND TOYS *by Captain Mike Schoonveld*



## TOYOTA SEQUOIA

For us guys with boats which sit on trailers between fishing excursions, the major “toy” between the boat and the lake is the vehicle to which the trailer connects. The size of the boat dictates what size of tow vehicle is required, of course, but for most Great Lakes work, the vehicles need to be somewhat substantial.

The Toyota Sequoia I used to tow my boat through four states last May, on roads which varied from gravel to six-lane expressways was substantial. The Sequoia Toyota furnished me for this test was the Limited model, fitted with a 5.7L V8 engine and 4WD to pull my boat up algae-coated boat ramps. Equipped with a 6-speed automatic transmission this full-sized SUV ran through the “gears” effortlessly whether going uphill or down, on the highway or in stop and go traffic on Chicago’s Fullerton Avenue heading for Diversey Harbor. (Long story why that trip was included.)

As are most vehicles these days, the Sequoia is fully equipped with bells and whistles, lane change alarms, driving sensors to detect if you are driving unsafely or the guy in front of you is driving unsafely, bluetooth connections—in short, more on-board “toys” and other features than I was able to figure out how to use during my trip. I was more interested in how it handled my 5000-pound boat (and how my 5000 pound boat handled it) in real life driving conditions. Rated to tow more than 7000 pounds, it pulled my rig just fine.

I was also more interested in how it handled the gear and luggage I needed for extended trips away from home, especially when three other anglers were along with me. One of the coolers we hoped to fill with salmon and walleye fillets went in the boat. The rest of our duffle stored inside with a small bit of planning. The second row bucket seats added some interior room since we could stow items between the seats. I didn’t even realize the truck came with a third row seat until my wife pointed it out and our whole group of six (sans boat) headed to the Brat Stop in Kenosha for dinner.

All in all, the Sequoia is certainly a viable tow vehicle any on-the-go Great Lakes angler should consider when it’s time to upgrade. I certainly will. Rated 13 to 17 mpg on the mileage meter, it’s in the same league as other comparable brands and models.

If there was one item to pick at on the Sequoia I tested it was the gas-gauge/gas tank capacity. For one, the tank capacity is 26 gallons. Pulling the boat, my instant mileage read out on the dash varied from 9 to 14 mpg depending on conditions and speed so about 10 to 12 actual. With that size tank, regular stops for gas are going to be required. (My regular tow vehicle gets the same mileage but has a 42 gallon tank.)

On my trip to Ohio, I knew the next travel plaza was just ahead and a few miles before getting there, the low fuel warning light came on. We made it more than easily since the pump kicked off when 20 gallons were added. I’m sure once I got used to how

to gauge the accuracy of the fuel level indicator the smaller tank would be less disconcerting.

You can check out the Sequoia online (in various editions) at: [www.toyota.com](http://www.toyota.com).

## TROLLBUDDY ELECTRONIC TROLLING PLATE

When Brad Dupuie showed up with his 2019 826 Angler Qwest demo boat to fish my home waters a few days last April he had the new ‘toon outfitted with a few new options not available on the previous version. (See *Toon in to Great Lakes Fishing* in the last December/January issue of GLA). Among the new details was a 300 HP Suzuki four-stroke fitted with a Trollbuddy Trolling Plate.

As a long time trolling plate user, I was interested. Each of my last three boats were fitted with Happy Trollers to enable me to throttle down slow enough to fish sub 2MPH should I wish. Without the HT plate (and no other boat-slowing aid) these boats would only back down to about 2.5 MPH on a calm, windless day.

HT’s and other brands of trolling plates used on other boats I’ve been on, aren’t perfect. Most important, they have only two positions. They are up or down. When they flop down over the prop, baffling the forward thrust, the boat slows but then you have to adjust the throttle faster or slower to hit that perfect speed. Sometimes, depending on the boat, the throttle linkage, wind and waves, even that is a tough chore.

The Trollbuddy works the same, but different. It can certainly be positioned fully down or all the way up like any other troller, but it can also be positioned anywhere in between up and down, as well.

Here’s how we used it while fishing that morning. Our wind conditions were gentle, less than 10 MPH. Slow troll with the 300 HP at dead idle into the wind was an impressive 2.4 MPH with the TB all the way up. We found our best speed was about 2.7 so Brad nudged the throttle a little on our upwind troll. Once we turned back, the speed increased to over 3 MPH but instead of throttling back, Brad



simply lowered the Trollbuddy plate about a quarter of the way until the pontoon settled back to the trolling speed we needed.

Instead of the simple mechanical up or down most plates use, the Trollbuddy has an electrically actuated piston (similar to what are on most trim tabs) which raises or lowers the flap. (The manufacturer has been in the trim tab business since 1997).

The Trollbuddy looks to be built tough as nails strong and has a one year warrantee. The plate is heavier gauge metal than on my Happy Trollers.

The controller is designed to be mounted on the dash and operates with a simple on/off button, then by operating a rocker switch to move it up or down. There are two grades of switches, one has LED indicator lights showing the position of the plate. The other just has a simple up-down rocker switch.

As a final test we wanted to simulate how the Trollbuddy would work with a radically “too fast” boat such as happens with small boats with big engines which require a kicker motor or deploying trolling bags to hit reasonably low speeds. With the Trollbuddy fully up, we nudged the throttle until we were moving at 3.8 MPH. That’s a fast troll anywhere on the Great Lakes. Then Brad gradually lowered the plate a quarter of the way, we slowed to 3 MPH, then moved it to half and we were down to 2.4. At full down, no change in engine RPM, we were putting along at 1.6.



There are certainly situations both walleye trollers and salmon chasers need precise trolling speeds for success. If that’s you, check out [www.trollbuddy.com](http://www.trollbuddy.com).

## TROPHY HAUL LANDING NET

Fishing nets are one of the most underrated and overlooked pieces of gear in an angler’s arsenal. A net can make or break a day and

be the difference between winning and losing a big tournament. Frabill’s new line of Trophy Haul nets, help anglers get the job done, get the fish in the net, get both fish and net into the boat and then get the fish and lure out of the net.

Frabill’s new advanced series of nets come in three variants, the Standard Trophy Haul, the Power Extend, and the Bear Claw. Constructed from anodized stainless steel each variation is built

tough and made to withstand use in both fresh and saltwater. I had the chance to try out the Power Extend model with the large-enough-for-Great Lakes 24” X 27” hoop size.

More and more Great Lakers are heading out in smaller version, trailerable boats. Net size matters when your boat has limited space for people and gear. One way these guys cope is by having a net with an extendable handle. Shrink it down to a few feet in length when not in use, slide the handle out to full length when needed.

If you can do it. Most adjustable handles have a little round button to push which often requires a tool of some sort to push far enough to allow the telescoping action to work. The worst ones have a round handle and trying to line up the hole in which the little buttons have to nestle is nearly impossible.

Power Extend means just that. Push a button (a man-sized, no-tool-needed button) and the spring loaded handle extends to full length from three to six feet. That’s long enough to get the net way back there to scoop out the biggest laker, salmon or walleye.

If that the fish you just scooped is a big one, perhaps you need two hands to lift it up over the transom and inside the boat. If so, you’ll appreciate the yoke handle built into the rear of the hoop which gives a convenient grab-with-both-hands gripping spot to hoist the beast up and over rod holders, ‘riggers or across the outboard motor.

Conventional net baskets are simply a long round bag made of string or rubber. Millions of fish have been scooped with these so why change? Because thousands of fish have made last second escapes when the deep net, trailing behind the rim of the net grabbed a hook and pulled it free before the fish was over the rim. The Frabill net isn’t just a deep round bag.

It’s made of Frabill’s patented conservation netting, as much a rubberized fabric as netting material. It’s designed to



minimize the amount of slime removal and scratching of the fish's skin a knotted net can inflict—very important if the fish is destined to be released. More important for Great Lakers is the shape of the bag, while deep, it is only deep at the rear of the basket so when the net-wielder is reaching out for the fish, the bag isn't trailing out past the rear hoop. The rubberized fabric makes hook removal from the net an easy chore, as well.

The net is widely available at retail and online merchandisers or check out: [www.frabill.com](http://www.frabill.com).

## SEAQUEST GLOW SPOONS

Seaquest has been a popular brand of spoons mostly found on boats in southern Lake Michigan for more than a decade. Richard Holm makes each one individually and sells them online ([www.seaquestlures.com](http://www.seaquestlures.com)) and at winter sports expos in Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. A few area tackle shops stock them, as well.

He's always had a few models of standard and magnum-sized spoons with either glow-in the dark paint or scallop tape highlights. Now he has produced a line with extended glow body tape, adorned with either ladder backs or scallop diagonal highlights.

I like them because they catch fish and since Holm is a fisherman and no stranger to big fish, I know the hooks



and rings are made of the finest quality. I keep telling him he needs to call them XTs for extra tough!

The new extended glow models were solid producers for me in the summer, offshore deepwater fishing where I usually fish, as well as near shore when fishing in the dark or dawn's early light for staging kings. Check the Seaquest website for all the colors and patterns available.

## CHURCH TACKLE REVELATORS

No one knows for sure what's going through the mind of a salmon when it sees a fly, hootchy or other lure trailing along through the water behind a dodger or flasher. My guess is they see the flash and color of the attractor and think it's the flash reflecting off the flank of another fish as it is feeding. If there's food for one, maybe there's food for two. Then the fish spots the lure behind the flash and nabs it, thinking it's the baitfish the other fish missed or another baitfish in the school.

I'm probably over-thinking the ability of a salmon or trout to think, but if there's a modicum of truth in my theory, I guess there was a modicum of reason when Dreamweaver decided to make their version of the plastic flasher (the Spin Doctor) into a cartoonish-looking fish shape. Cartoon or not, the Spin Doctor is a

winner and soon other lure makers doctored up their own versions of the plastic rotating flasher.

Among those are the Revelators from Church Tackle. I had the chance to try out a few Revelators earlier this summer. (Actually, I'm still "trying" them as they've remained a solid choice the rest of the summer.)

The Revelators come in two lengths—5 3/4 and 8-inches. As with most flashers there's a choice of plastic color for the blade—red, white, blue, chartreuse, black, chrome, gold, purple, copper and green. Of course each color of blade can be ordered with a dizzying number of reflective tape choices applied to each side. You'll have to go to their website, [www.churchtackle.com](http://www.churchtackle.com) to see all the combinations.

I had no doubt the 8-inchers would match up well with other brands of flashers when I used them to pull full-sized flies for summer salmon and the occasional suspended laker. I was right. They performed flawlessly and many days I put one out at the beginning of the trip and it did its thing right on to quitting time. My best

were chrome blades with chartreuse tape patterns. Go with what works in your area.

When it came to testing the 5 3/4-inchers, I was a skeptic. Tens of thousands of cohos are caught using 6-inch metal dodgers trailing mini-sized flies every spring in southern Lake Michigan. Most of these are caught on the fluorescent red/orange models so I got the red shorty Revelators with orange tape. At least I had the right color.

The 5 3/4-inch Revelators produced right along side my regular dodgers and flies each time I tied one on. I usually ran it behind a Dipsey Diver. The fun thing about lure testing comes when "further testing is needed." The only thing more fun than testing lures is reeling in the fish they catch.

If anything, the Revelators shape is closer to the shape of a real fish than the other fishy-looking flashers available. If you think that makes a difference, you may or may not be over-thinking what's going through the fish's head when it strikes.

GLA