

Introduction to Inshore Deep Trolling With Wire and Other Types of Lines

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There are a variety of methods that make trolling below surface or near surface depths possible without the use of downriggers or planers. Anglers are able to accomplish this, in descending order of effectiveness with wireline, leadcore, braided gelspun line, Dacron, and monofilament.

Wireline trolling is a time-tested method for catching striped bass as well as bluefish, however other species are also targeted with wireline, such as jacks, king mackerel, and others. This method of fishing is so named because the reels are spooled with anywhere from 150 to 300 feet of wire on the spool. This allows the angler to attain relatively deep trolling depths without the use of sinkers, downriggers, or planers, as the wire has significant mass but a low diameter, allowing it to sink rapidly without displacing a large volume of water and in so doing creating drag.

First, a few words about wire. Wire is usually made of one of two materials, single strand stainless steel, or single strand monel. Stainless steel is the older of the two materials, and is not as frequently used now as it was in the past. Single strand stainless wire is not very pliable, making it break relatively easy when kinked and more difficult to twist a haywire loop in. Additionally, the line is much more springy, making the risk of backlash greater and it less friendly to wind on the spool. The advantage of stainless is the price, it is considerably less expensive than monel.

Nearly all wireline trollers opt for monel line. Monel is a nickel alloy, making the line considerably softer than stainless wire. It is much easier to retrieve on the spool, and far more easy to twist a haywire loop in. While it is more apt to kink due to its increased pliability, it is relatively simple to manage and prevent kinking. Regardless of the material, nearly all wireline is between 30 and 50 pound test. Most anglers trolling in the waters around Long Beach Island, NJ choose 30 pound monel.

Before putting the monel on the reel, a backer has to be put underneath it. While some anglers use mono, it is not recommended due to the fact that the mono has a lot of stretch compared to Dacron. This lack of stretch also enables the rod to load more easily when pulling a lure, producing the pulsating action that is of paramount importance for trolling bunker spoons. The new braided Spectra lines also work well as backing, providing low stretch and the use of smaller reels due to the thin diameter of the line. Many anglers opt for 50 pound test Dacron line, specifically the high-visibility orange or chartreuse as the bright color allows for easy tracking of the Dacron in the water in order to prevent tangling of rigs and makes it easy to notice when all of your wire is in the water. Most often, between 200 and 300 yards of backing are wound onto the reel.

Before going further, it is necessary to discuss the haywire twist. A haywire twist is the method used to make a fixed loop in single strand wire. Double back about 12 inches of wire after passing it through the eye of the swivel, making the tag end and mainline intersect at 90 degrees, with each 45 degrees from the center point. Then twist both lines simultaneously, preserving the ninety degree angle between the tag and main lines, making at least 3 ½ twists. After the 3 ½ or more twists are done, hold the tag line at a 90 degree angle to the main line with the main line parallel to the loop. Make at least five tight, abutting twists (called barrel wraps). After the barrel wraps are done, pinch them tight and continue turning the tag line around in circles as though you were turning a crank (not twisting it around the main line). This will result in a clean break flush to the barrel wraps that will not cut your finger as you pass it over the knot. Make sure to test this knot. If it is not smooth, make sure to redo it.

After your backing is installed, it comes time to join your wire to the backing. There are two methods of doing so. What method you use is one of personal preference, but please keep in mind that the swivel connection works best when using rods with all ring guides. If using a roller-tip rod, the knot connections are the best choice. The first method is to use a small barrel swivel (the new Spro Power Swivels are particularly good for this), using a palomar or uni-knot to tie the Dacron to the swivel. The wire is then haywire twisted to the swivel. After winding the wire onto

the spool, attach another small barrel swivel to the wire via a haywire twist, then add a 10 foot leader of 50 to 80 pound test, using a uni-knot or clinch knot to attach it to the swivel.

The second method is to use modified Albright knot connections. The backing is attached to the haywire twist in the wire via the first modified Albright knot. The modified Albright is formed by placing your Dacron backer through the haywire twist loop. Pinch the Dacron and the wire together where the twist begins in the haywire. Then wrap the tag end of the Dacron around both strands of wire and the Dacron running line at least 7 times, wrapping toward the end of the wire. After these wraps are completed, wrap the Dacron tag end around only one strand of wire and the Dacron running line 3 times, this will lock the knot. Draw the knot tight slowly and evenly, making sure that the two strands of wire wind up parallel and nearly abutting each other. The knot should be relatively slim in profile with an even diameter throughout its entire length. The same thing is repeated after the wire is wound onto the reel, only using a 12 to 15 foot or so leader of 50 to 80 pound mono. Please note that all your knot connections should be redone every couple of trips in order to preserve their integrity.

Regarding how much wire to use, it must first be ascertained how much water you will be doing your fishing in, and how deep in the water column you wish to make your presentation. As a general rule, for each 50 feet of 30-pound test monel (the line most local anglers choose), you will get down about 5 feet in depth at a 3-4 knot trolling speed without the assistance of drail weight. For each 4 ounces of drail weight you use you will get down an additional 5 feet or so. Running more than 300 feet of wire will usually result in planing up (the wire will start to come back up toward the surface after reaching its maximum depth) due the cumulative drag on this much line. Anglers who fish wire in very deep water (over 75 feet) usually opt for 300 feet of wire. Some anglers also mark the wire by using waxed dental or bait rigging floss, tied in a series of overhand knots alternating them above and below the wire, drawing each one very tight. The markings are usually done at 50 or 100 foot intervals in order to facilitate depth estimation. If trolling just off the front beaches, say in 40 feet or less of water, 150 feet of wire will suffice, and it is usually unnecessary to mark the wire.

The next topic of conversation is reels. The long favored reel for wireline trolling is the Penn™ 113HSP. This is a special 4/0 Senator with beefy drags and gears that has a chrome over bronze spool. This reel is favored due to its 3.25:1 gear ratio (faster than most older-style conventional reels), but primarily due to its spool. The chrome over bronze spool will prevent electrolysis between the wireline and the spool metal. The Newell™ 440-5 is also a popular reel. It has heavy stainless gears and double stainless anti-reverse dogs, but the spool and frame are graphite, making it lightweight, durable, and corrosion resistant. The 5:1 gear ratio allows you to gain line efficiently. Wireline requires a winching style of retrieve given the relatively stiff nature of the line and its lack of stretch, however it does not necessarily require a high-torque, low gear ratio reel. Many anglers find it ideal to have a higher gear ratio and a long reel handle, making the recovery of line most efficient without proving too difficult. The Penn™ 114H reel is a 6/0 Senator, much larger than necessary for wireline, but does have a chrome over bronze spool. You can use a reel with an anodized aluminum spool, but if doing so, make sure to use a water displacing lubricant (such as WD40™ or CRC™) on the wire in storage to put a film on it. This will help to prevent electrolysis. If storing the line long term, it is best to strip the wire off the reel. One other word about electrolysis. It can also affect the swivels if using swivel connections. Make sure to replace your swivels a few times during the season and at the beginning of every season.

In terms of rods, there are numerous styles available. The most important thing to look for is the guides. Make sure all ring guides are tungsten carbide (also known as Carboloy or Carbide). This hardened alloy will prevent guides from grooving. If you use a standard issue chrome over stainless guide, the wire will wear a groove in the guide ring in short time. Some anglers have used Fuji™ silicon carbide (SiC) guides, but tungsten carbide remains the best choice. If using a roller tip-top, it is preferred to use one of the Aftco™ hardened roller variety. Aftco™ makes a special hardened roller specifically designed for wireline use, as wire can also groove a standard

roller. Anglers have also had success using standard oversize Aftco™ rollers with the softer monel line, although the risk of grooving the roller is higher.

Rod material is almost exclusively tubular fiberglass. However, the actions and lengths of rods vary greatly based on the application. Most wireline trollers troll umbrella rigs, and most 6 to 8 foot rods do this ably. Obviously, the longer the rod is, the more distance there will be between your trolled lures, and the risk of tangling will be lessened. Most of the 6 to 8 foot rods will be rated for 20 to 50 pound line. The short length gives the angler more leverage over the fish, with an increasing leverage advantage with rods of heavier power (heavier line ratings). However, leverage isn't everything. Remember that wire has no stretch in it. That means that the only give in your presentation is in the short mono leader just before the rig, and in the rod tip itself. If using lures that need to have a lot of freedom and also have heavy drag, such as Bunker Spoons and deep-diving plugs (Mann's™ Stretch Lures and Rapala™ Magnums, etc) a soft tipped rod is the only way to go. The rod need not necessarily be long, but the increased length will allow for an even softer tip, as the taper is spread out over a longer length of the rod. Accordingly, most anglers trolling bunker spoons use 8 or 9 foot rods. The lure gets a large amount of its action from the rod tip, as only a soft tip will allow a bunker spoon to swing from side to side (often as much as 5 or 6 feet), and pulsate when the rod loads and releases, the very action that makes this lure so effective for striped bass. Another thing to look for in a wireline rod is a gimbal butt. Nylon gimbals suffice, aluminum are even better. The butt of the rod is also something to look for. A Slick butt allows for easy placement in and removal from gunwale mounted rod holders and is a nice plus. Hypalon (foam) butts do not prove too difficult provided they are not overly thick. Excellent wireline rods are available from Seeker™ and Penn™.

In terms of accessories that come in handy for wireline trollers, perhaps the foremost are offset T-shaped rod holders (commonly referred to as outrodgers). These units have a gimbal notch on their base, allowing for installation into a gunwale mount rod holder, but hold the rod at a raised angle away from the sides of the boat, increasing the width of your trolling spread and making it less likely that your rigs will tangle. If using bunker spoons, they are all but a necessity. Most also incorporate a safety line and snap allowing attachment of the outrodger to the rings on the top crossbar of your reel. If uncomfortable with tying haywire twists, a product called a Dubro™ EZ Twist is available that more or less does it for you. If your boat does not comfortably troll as slow as 3 knots, a sea anchor is an ideal option. A sea anchor is a cloth or vinyl "bag" with holes in it that slows your drift. Most often they are attached to a cleat. A 5-gallon bucket with holes drilled it may suffice as a "poor man's sea anchor".

Lure selection for wireline is quite varied. The rage at the current time is the shad umbrella rig. Most of these rigs are from 15 to 20 inches in width, and come with 3, 4, or 6 arms. The most common choice is a 4-arm 20-inch. These are rigged with 6-inch or so shad bodies on the four arms, and usually a 9-inch shad body run off the center on a short mono leader. Some rigs also have a middle ring on each arm to which a small teaser shad is attached, furthering the illusion of a school of bait fish. They are available both rigged and unrigged, but even if purchasing rigged umbrellas, make sure you have extra shad bodies, Mustad™ 3407 O'Shaughnessy Hooks in size 9/0 or so (larger for the 9-inch shads), and split rings or heavy monofilament (to connect the swivels from the umbrella arm to the hooks) in order to perform on-the-water repair or replacement, as bluefish can tear these rigs up in a hurry.

Umbrella rigs are also made with surgical tube lures of various lengths and sizes.. These lures imitate sandeels very well, and are often the best choice when these baitfish abound. Additionally, these lures are more bluefish-proof than shad bodies. Nonetheless, you should have spare tubes and hooks (available as replacement-ready units) on hand. Lures called bananas are also highly effective. All they are is a weighted surgical tube covered head with a swivel joining the head to a surgical tube trailer. There are also umbrella rigs available rigged with metal spoons that are highly effective. If willing to rig your own, there are no limitations to the types of lures you can use on umbrella rigs.

Another popular lure is the long surgical tube. These rigs often have multiple hooks in them, and are between 18 inches and 30 inches long, with tubes of up to an inch and a half in diameter. When trolled slowly on wire, the lure sweeps in a S-curve through the water, imitating a large eel.

Parachute style or ponytail jigs are also excellent bass catchers when trolled on wire. A parachute jig is a large bucktail (usually 4 ounces or so) that has hair both in front of and behind the head. This lure pulses a bit in the water, an action bass find enticing. A ponytail jig is a leadhead with about 8 to 12 inches of chain running from the head to the hook. The hair from the bucktail is as long as the chain. This type of jig also sweeps well in the water.

Single plugs are also often trolled on wire, and often allow for great depths, as some of these lures are capable of attaining depths of 25-feet without the assistance of weight or wire. Using these lures on a wireline outfit often makes it possible to attain depths of 40 feet or more without the assistance of drail weight. Popular lures of this variety include the Mann's™ Stretch 18, 25, and 30 (the number indicates the depth the lure will get down to without the assistance of sinker weight on monofilament line) and the Rapala™ Magnums. These lures can prove quite effective on trophy sized bass that go after the large bunker and herring that these lures imitate.

Perhaps the most effective trophy striper and slammer bluefish trolling lure is the bunker spoon, so named due to its large size-it imitates an adult bunker (pogy, menhaden) as well as sea herring or shad. Bunker spoons vary in size from around 6 to up to 12 inches in length, but are usually referred to as size 9/0 (around 5 ½ inches), 11/0 (7 inches), or 13/0 (9 inches), etc. A bunker spoon is a wide profile, gently curved spoon, often with a keel (especially on larger lures) to which a fixed hook is attached. Many lures have a stinger hook attached to the shaft of the fixed hook in order to facilitate a higher hook-up percentage. Bunker spoons come in a variety of colors, with polished stainless, white, gold, and chartreuse all popular. Many enterprising anglers customize their spoons by painting them or adding prismatic self-adhesive with tape in order to add flash. Coating the spoon with epoxy will add to the life expectancy of a customized spoon finish. Popular brands of spoons are the Crippled Alewife, the Reliable Lupo Style Spoons, and the larger Huntington Drone Spoons. If large baits and large stripers abound, the bunker spoon is often the lure of choice. While already mentioned, it is important to note that a rod with a very soft tip is required to impart the sweeping action that makes spoons catch fish, and due to this motion, outriggers are a necessity in order to prevent your lines from crossing, especially when turning the boat.

Anglers also have success trolling artificial rigged eels. Rubber eels from 6 to 12 inches or even longer are usually rigged on a tin squid. A tin squid is a block tin head that is often shaped like a miniature bunker spoon. A tin squid can be bent in order to impart the desired action. When slow trolled at night, especially near inlets, these lures often prove quite effective, allowing the angler to cover more ground than would be covered if simply drifting live eels.

It is very important to pay attention when paying out a wireline rig. It is easy for many of the umbrella rigs to become tangled, and if you should backlash wire, it is not too easy to get out, and the line will most often be damaged from kinking. You want the boat to be moving at 3 knots or more when you pay out an outfit. There is nothing at all wrong with running faster than your trolling speed in order to get the rig in the water, and then return to trolling speed after letting out the line. The most consistently effective method of getting rigs going without fouling is to put the reel in free spool and clamp the spool with your hand. Then point the rod tip up toward the bow of the boat, putting the rig into the water firmly, then begin to allow the dragging lure to take line off the spool. However, be very conscious of the fact that pressure must be maintained on the spool. Try to avoid pumping the rod, as doing so will put slack in the line and make it easier for the rigs to tangle. The rod should be held out away from the boat a bit, at an angle around 20 degrees above parallel to the water. Make sure to let the line out at an even clip, usually you stop letting line out when the wire to backing connection is just below the surface of the water. Make sure not to turn the boat when letting wire out to avoid cut-offs and wrapping wire around your props. After placing the rods in the holder and double checking that the gimbals have locked into the pin, put

the reel's clicker on, and adjust the drag so that line can be taken off the spool without too much difficulty. If the drag is too tight, it is easy to rip hooks out due to the lack of stretch in the wire.

If fishing shallow water, some anglers simply pay out line until the Dacron backer to wire connection is just past the tip of the rod. As you get into deeper water, let out line so that all the wire is in the water and the backing to wire connection is just below the water's surface. When trolling, it is important to let out or take in a foot or so of line every 15 minutes or so in order to prevent fatigue and wear on your line, be it the wire or the Dacron backer.

Most anglers fish two wireline outfits, although if your boat has a very wide beam, you may be able to fish one off the transom's center rod holder and two out of outriggers, although this is easier when using lures that track relatively straight (umbrella rigs, etc—not bunker spoons). If trolling three rods, make sure to add more drail weight to the rod in the middle, and run the outside rods longer in order to minimize tangling risks. Clipping the middle rod's line low to the transom with a release clip or rubber band will also help the situation. At the beginning of the day, some anglers will put different amounts of wire out on their rigs. This is most practical if you are fishing in deeper water (greater than 40 feet) with 300 feet of wire. When beginning the day, it is ideal to troll while making gradual S-turns. When turning, the inside rigs will go a little deeper and the outside rigs will rise up a bit in the water column. If you notice you are always getting hit on your inside rigs when turning, then let out more wire or add some drail in order to consistently troll at the greater depth where the fish are. Conversely, if you are getting hit often on your outside rigs when turning, retrieve a little wire, as you could be trolling below the fish.

If trolling tight to the beach, it is often ideal to look for bait activity and troll on the outside edges of it (don't troll through it—you'll often drive the fish down). In the absence of bait activity, trolling over inshore structure such as lumps, drop-offs, submerged rocks, etc is often productive. Typically, you will tend to find larger volumes of smaller fish near the beach. If trolling bunker spoons or plugs for trophy bass, it is usually ideal to do so in deeper water, particularly near significant ridges or drop-offs. During the fall southbound migratory run, often times the larger bass will be further offshore and swimming alone or in small groups, whereas the smaller fish will be taken nearer the beach. Trolling violent rips is also usually quite productive.

For the most part, trolling wire for bass and bluefish is very similar. The one major difference is in trolling speed. The blues are far more responsive than the bass when pulling your spread at speeds of 4 or more knots, the bass will be more responsive at slower speeds. One other trick used by anglers fishing in deeper water to get additional depth, albeit temporary, is to bump the boat out of gear and reengage it after 4 to 5 seconds. The lack of momentum will cause the lures to sink more. This method is very effective if you are trolling over a large drop-off. Bumping the boat out of gear just after clearing the ledge can give you a free-fall, and allow you to get down deeper into a hole.

After hooking up with a fish, make sure to turn the clicker off on the reel. You may find the need to increase your drag setting a bit, but keep in mind that there is no give in the wire, and only a little in the heavy mono leaders at the end of your terminal tackle. You don't want to pull hook out of a fish's mouth. It's best to leave your drag too loose rather too tight. Additionally, although the retrieve can be laborious, it is best not to pump the rod too much, and any pumping done should be very gradual, making sure to retrieve the line as fast as you are relieving pressure on the line on the downswing of the pump. The reason for this is to prevent putting slack in the wire and giving the fish the opportunity to throw the hook.

One final note regarding wire. Some anglers also jig using wireline and heavy bucktail type jigs. This method of fishing is particularly effective in violent rip areas that have heavy currents, even up to 10 knots. The style of jigging is similar to yo-yo jigging for tuna fish. The rod is held down and away from the boat by the angler, who is to be facing the stern, and is jigged by sweeping it up and toward the bow. Many skilled anglers continue to have excellent success with this method of fishing.

As with any method of fishing, there is no single right answer. Feel free to experiment with different lures and trolling methods. Just make sure not to catch the new world record bass on wire, as the International Gamefish Association (IGFA) does not recognize wire line. Its use as a running line would disqualify the fish under IGFA rules.

There is another type of "weighted" line that some anglers use in lieu of wire. This is leadcore line. Leadcore is a Dacron line that has lead wire running through the middle of it. Leadcore does not have as aggressive a sink rate as wire due to its increased diameter, as the increase in drag causes it to ride up the water column. Nonetheless, leadcore can prove effective for trolling umbrella rigs and other lures in depths of 40 feet and under. Leadcore comes in 27, 36, and 45 pound test, and changes color every 10 yards. Some anglers opt for leadcore due to the fact that you can use it on rods with standard chrome over stainless, ceramic, or hardloy guides. In addition, it can be used with larger levelwind reels such as the Penn 330 GTI™. Leadcore line is most often sold in 100 yard spools, and usually the whole 100 yards is wound onto the reel. With 100 yards of leadcore out, you can expect to attain a depth of about 15 to 20 feet. Adding a 6-ounce drail will usually get you about 5 additional feet.

In order to rig with leadcore, 200 or more yards of 50 pound Dacron backer are put on the reel. There are various ways to join the backer and the leadcore. The strongest connection is to splice a loop in the backer and another at the end of the leadcore line after first removing a section of the lead wire from the end of the leadcore spool. In order to remove the lead wire, push the Dacron up away from the end of the spool, then grab the lead wire and pull out as much as you need. Simply kink the lead wire and snap it off. Make sure that the loop in your backer is large enough to pass the leadcore spool through, as you are making a loop to loop connection. In order to make a loop to loop connection, pass the spliced loop in the backer through the splice loop in the leadcore, pulling a decent amount through. Then pass the leadcore spool through the loop in the backer. After doing so, tighten the loop to loop connection, making sure it winds up looking like a square knot, not a larks head configuration. A properly done loop to loop connection has four crossing points, not just two as the larks head does, making for a better distribution of weight and friction and therefore a better connection. The mono leader can then be attached via loop to loop as well, splicing a loop in the leadcore, and tying a bimini twist, spider hitch, or surgeon's loop in the mono leader, which should be between 50 and 80 pound test, and around 10 feet in length. The loop to loop connections are by far the best choice if using a levelwind reel, as they allow for the easiest clearance of the levelwind guide on the reel.

Alternatively, the backer and leadcore can be spliced together, but this is best done if using 27 or 36 pound leadcore and 30 pound Dacron backing, due to their similar diameter. Albright knot connections also work well, make sure to use the Dacron as the wrapping line and the mono as the interior line. Remove the lead wire from the section of the leadcore used in the knots in order to reduce knot diameter. Leadcore gains its tensile strength from the Dacron, not the wire inside, so removing the lead wire will not sacrifice tensile strength. Swivel connections as described in the wireline rigging section above can also be used, but only with chrome over stainless guides. The swivels can easily pop the inserts out of other types of guides. Otherwise, fishing leadcore is similar to wire, the disadvantage being that you have to let out a lot more line to attain the same depth and the absolute depths you can attain is much more limited than with wire. Additionally, lead core has a lot more stretch, around 15% (from the Dacron) than wire, which has virtually none, making it less effective for bunker spoons and large plugs. However, leadcore is much easier to handle than wire, and spools onto the reel without as much resistance.

Anglers have also been fishing shallow water for years using mono or Dacron running line and drail weight to get down. This is most practical in depths of 20 feet or less. With the new braided Spectra lines (Power Pro™, Spiderline™, etc.) this type of trolling has become a little easier. The braided lines do not absorb any water, so they are negatively buoyant. They are also thinner in diameter, allowing you to use less sinker weight to get the same depth. Their lack of stretch can also help in the hooksetting function, just make sure to keep a loose drag to prevent ripping

hooks out. Smaller reels can be used, with monofilament backing of around 30 to 40 pound test, attached to around 150 yards of Spectra braid of 50 pound test or greater. Greater amounts of braid can be used, but please note that braided line cannot be tied directly to the spool arbor. Due to the lack of stretch in the braid, an arbor knot will not bite the spool. A mono backer at least long enough to cover the spool arbor must be used. A mono leader of at least 10 feet should be attached to the end of the braided line. Albright knots can be used to join the Spectra to the mono backing and leader. It is ideal to first tie a bimini twist, spider hitch, or triple surgeon's knot in the braid in order to form a loop of 12 to 18 inches. Then use the doubled braid as the wrapping line in the Albright knot. When trolling with braided line, Dacron, or mono, it is easiest to tie a 125-pound test or so coastlock snap swivel to the end of your mono line or the mono leader attached to the Dacron or braid. Your drail weight can be attached to the snap. Then run a mono leader of at least 12 to 15 feet between your sinker and lure.