

This Month with a Susquehanna River Guide

By Lance Dunham

With the river iced over my boat stays in the warehouse, no chance of getting a line wet. It's time for me to get my rods and reels back in shape for the next season. My personal reels now are all Pflueger Supremes, mostly in the 8030MG size. No, I'm not on their pro-staff and they are not one of my sponsors so I have nothing to gain by telling you this. They have been one of the few reels I can say that take my daily abuse for over 200 eight hour charters a season. But every reel needs maintenance at least once a year. Now is the time that I carefully take off the side plate and lubricate the gears and replace any worn parts. The bail spring seems to get weak after about 1300 to 1500 hours of use. It's a 25 cent part and easy to get so I replace all of them each winter. I replace my line each winter with new 10 lb Stren Magnathin, It gives me 10 lb strength with about a 6 lb diameter. There are many good lines out there and this is just a personal preference of mine. It works for me so I don't change. I did experiment with some of the new braided lines last season, but found I needed a clear leader tied to it when the water cleared up somewhat. It worked well, but like a smart old Italian friend of mine always says, "Don't argue with success". When putting new line on be careful not to over fill or under fill the spool, both will give you troubles. Filling the spool up between 1/8" to 1/16" from the top seems about right. Also be sure that when you wind new line on make sure to put the line on your reel spool the same direction it came off the line filler spool, this way the line won't twist as easily when you cast. I check the eyes on my fishing rod for any nicks or scrapes on the inside ring. If I detect any, they get replaced. I use all cork handles on my rods, they are light and give me a good feel to the rod if it was made correctly. I also like the traditional look and feel of cork. But they get dirty each year with fish slime and general dirt and need to be cleaned. I use a Brillow pad and lightly rub the grime off using hot water, it makes them look new again. This pre-season I will make my own custom cranking rod. This rod will be made from the highest grade graphite blank that St Croix has to offer for this type of specialty rod, it will be 7ft long with titanium guides, a custom cork handle and will feel light weight to the touch. It will be a medium weight rod strength with a moderate action, meaning it will bend first about half way down the rod. You see with a cranking rod, you are constantly reeling your lure back to you, most of the time non stop. When a fish hits or strikes your lure you want the rod to bend easier and give somewhat so you don't rip the lips of the fish thus keeping the fish on the hook. You will catch many more fish with less effort by having the rod action match the lure design.

The ice fishermen are having a good time with the walleyes on the river. It's a much easier time of year to catch them through the ice with jigging Rapalas or live minnows under a tip-up. I don't ice fish anymore since my ice fishing buddy passed away but many of my friends do.

The allure of catching easy big walleyes seems to make river fishermen do things they wouldn't ordinarily do. It's called "The Walleye Bug", a mild sickness if you will that affects anglers in the winter. They take the risk of going on river ice when they know the under current can take out a foot of ice at a moments notice and the ice cold water can kill you in just a few minutes. They also take the risk of trespassing across private land or driving along the railroad tracks just to get to the honey walleye holes. Too often we never think that somebody might actually own the land we've used "forever" to get to our favorite fishing hole. Let me tell you what happened to one of my friends this winter. My friend is the nicest, most considerate fellow you would ever want to meet. He practices selective harvest meaning he sometimes takes a walleye or two for supper but mostly returns them to the river to catch again another day. He just likes to go fishing year around and this winter it caught up to him, "The Walleye Bug". In early winter he parked along the road and was walking through the woods he has used since he was a kid, oblivious to the no trespassing signs he went by only to be confronted with an armed man telling him he is now on private property. After a calm and civil conversation, the guy gave him a verbal warning and let him go with the understanding he wouldn't return. The lesson, if learned here is that if you don't personally own the land find out who does and ask every year! Land control changes hands quite often. Call the land owner up or better still go talk to him. The worst that could happen then is that they will say no. Big deal, my wife tells me that all the time. Better to find out if you are welcomed before you have an embarrassing confrontation in the field or on the water. Now a few weeks later at another location, he and three other trucks drove past a no trespassing sign put up by the railroad company going to a favorite walleye hole a mile or so down the tracks. Everybody does it right? Been doing it for years right? Heck, the train never uses the track this time of day or time of the week right? It's got to be safe right? Well along comes the railroad police, (yes, they really do exist), and gives all the drivers citations for being on railroad property. With the cost of the citation and court costs, they could have taken their wives out to a really fine restaurant, bought a great fish dinner, along with a good wine to match without the hassle. The walleye bug was more of a plague to him this winter.

Since this month had Valentines Day in it, let's talk a little about that. Guys tell me "what's that got to do with fishing Lance, get back on the subject of fishing". Listen up fishermen, I'm trying to help you get a little more water time. Some say that Valentines Day was created by the card, florist, and candy companies to help their bottom line. I say a savvy angler invented it so he could mess up at home and still go fishing. Lets face it guys, the women control if your life will be smooth and easy going or a living nightmare so you might as well get along and keep them happy so you can get back on the water. It's a proven man fact that ladies just remember certain days much better than men. Those being Valentines Day, her birthday, Christmas, and your anniversary. Most guys can remember Christmas, but the rest gives us some trouble. You need to remember those four sentimental days, because each one is worth at least four minor screw ups at home and a few fishing trips. Mark them down on the calendar in big bold red letters. I keep mine right in front of my computer, I really do, ask my wife. When Valentines

day comes and you surprise her with candy, card, flowers, or what have you. You say, “here darling for the love of my life” , (say it ya darn fool). Then she’ll say something like “thank you dear, but I didn’t get you anything”. “That’s alright darling, maybe I’ll just go fishing when the weather is nice”.

OK,OK, before I get strung up, maybe I’m having a little too much fun here and I’ll apologize if I’ve offended any ladies out there. I know you can’t be fooled, it’s us guys that sometimes need the help. But since I’ve known my exceptional wife over 38 years now, I’ve never missed one of those special days yet and this will be my 29th season as a fishing guide. Think about it. Maybe, just maybe, I’m right on the mark.

Well that’s all for this month, next month I’ll finally be fishing on the open water and not too soon if you ask me, and probably my wife. For further reports, photo’s and fishing information, please visit me on my web site at www.ldguideservice.com. Fish safe, and I’ll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance