

Fishing the Dream

One Lure at a Time

by Capt. JP Morel



The BASSMASTER CLASSIC has been called the super bowl and the holy grail of bass fishing all rolled into one giant three day show culminating in the crowning of a champion as the crowd cheers the one victorious angler. If you are even a semi-serious bass guy, then you have probably dreamed of fishing the Classic and winning it all. It's a normal aspiration amongst most bass fishermen but realized by only a few.

Local angler Lee Hillman is one of those guys that live to catch bass. Every waking moment is spent either fishing or thinking about fishing. Give him a crank bait and chances are he can make it better, a handful of jigs will keep him busy for a night, and who knows what he does with a bag of worms. One thing is for sure, Lee Hillman is a die-hard bass fisherman.

Having been a pretty serious bass guy years ago, I naturally jumped at the chance to spend a couple of hours with Lee and try to fool a few largemouth. We met at Indian Village and in short order were flying down the West Pearl in his Bass Cat boat pushed along by a smooth running Mercury engine. Be very careful when going down river after crossing Highway 90. Bear to your left as there is a rather large sand bar right in the middle of the river. If you have not been in this area for a while, take your time as one could run aground or worse.

After a spirited ride, it was a bit cool; we arrived at our destination on the lower river. Lee pulled out a bag of craw worms that I had not seen before and for good reason, they were hand poured by him. These fake crawfish were as real looking as anything I had ever seen and the claw action was quite realistic. I think one of them actually bit me. Maybe that's why he named his bait company Nasty Baits. Then again it could have been the hook as I'm a little out of practice when it comes to rigging bass baits. I tried hand pouring my own baits once. The results were less than appealing due to quality control being non-existent.

We started out fishing drains on the lower river and managed to catch a few bass pretty quick despite the almost dead tide. Although we weren't hammering the fish the bite was enough to keep us busy. This was wintertime fishing so the bites were not bone jarring but more perch like in nature. A couple of pecks here and there and set the hook into a bass was the order of the day. River bass seem to like Nasty Baits Crawfish.

Most of the bass we managed to fool were out a bit from the mouths of drains off the main river as the water was much like the weather, cool. Bass simply do not like cold dirty water and canals off the river were clearer and a little warmer so the bass were willing to cooperate. After catching a number of fish on plastics

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...e decided to try other techniques. He picked up a crank bait and I started with a spinner bait and in short order we were catching fish. Our conclusion was that the fish would hit a number of lures but slow-moving plastics seemed to out perform all others. But as Lee said "you have to experiment sometimes to see what they really want."

Our other producing lure was a hand poured 6-inch finesse worm with a small white tail. As Lee explained, he pours the white tail to give you the option of fishing it white or dipping the tail in a dye to whatever color you desire. For our purposes the white tail worked just fine as the bass seemed to enjoy the finesse worm as much as the craw worm.

Hand poured baits come and go and I suspect the main reason is that the pourer realizes how much time and effort it takes to produce a quality bait. For Lee Hillman hand pouring his own baits is just another facet of bass fishing that he enjoys to the fullest. He started making his own plastics about 3 years ago and after some urging from a few local anglers formed Nasty Baits about a year ago. Now, it seems that Nasty Baits is gaining a following as Lee is selling his baits not only to locals but also to a few folks outside of Louisiana. Lee is also the tournament director for Team Trails bass tournaments here in Southeast Louisiana in addition to fishing many other tournaments. He started fishing in local events about 16 years ago and has never looked back. He now travels to various tournaments including the Bassmaster Weekend Series. Did I mention that he really enjoys bass fishing?

As we continued picking up a fish here and there, I realized how much fun I was having catching bass again. Our bass fishing has taken a major hit over the last few years courtesy of Mother Nature but seems to have bounced back, at least on the river system. I'm looking forward to having marsh bass at catchable numbers once again and hopefully getting back to pre Hurricane Georges days type of fishing. Even if we never get back to late 1990's fishing, it sure would be fun to have bass back in our marshes once again.

After catching more than a few bass I decided to sit back and watch Lee fish. Even though we were just playing around he was as intense as if he were fishing a major tournament with big bucks on the line. This is a guy that truly loves the sport of bass fishing and enjoys finding new and innovative ways to catch his favorite fish. And who knows, with dedication like Lee Hillman has, we may one day be in that crowd cheering our local favorite to the title of Bass Masters Classic Champion.

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