

Bit by a Black Mamba

Gord Pyzer



Outdoors

I never watch fishing infomercials. OK, hardly ever. When I am waiting for one of my hunting or fishing buddies to pick me up in the pre-dawn darkness, after I've caught the local forecast on the Weather Channel, I'll occasionally watch one. Usually for the comic relief.

I mean, really, hands up if you've ever purchased a Helicopter Lure? Better yet, hands up anybody who has ever caught a fish on one? So, naturally, I was a skeptic when Dave Wraxall called me out of the blue.

Wraxall is the president of the Canadian-based, Black Mamba Fishing System. He explained that he and his partners had spent several years developing a new type of soft jerkbait. He wanted to send me a few prototypes and an infomercial he had produced for upcoming television. Oh, no, I thought ... the dreaded "i" word.

"Hey, Dave," I said, levelling with him. "I'm not your best choice. I prefer to watch and see what the pros on the top walleye and bass circuits are using to win money to put food on the table. Besides, I know better than most that there is no such thing as a secret lure. And that most of those infomercials are designed to catch two-legged suckers, not fish."

"That is why I want you to look at the video and use the baits," Wraxall explained.

"You're the critics critic. (Hmmm, I wouldn't have gone quite that far.) Black Mambas are different."

He must have heard me thinking, "Yah, right," when he added the zinger. "Rocky Crawford's one of my partners."

Now, that was something else. Rocky's a good friend of mine. He is also an incredibly talented angler. The only four-time winner of the Chevy-Mariner Pro Bass Classic. If Rocky was involved, maybe there was something to the claim.

Besides, what harm could it do? "It's your dime," I said to Wraxall. "If you want to send them, go ahead."

Imagine my surprise a week later when Wraxall's care package arrived. The soft plastic baits, indeed, looked interesting. More amazing still, when I popped the video into the VCR, the first thing I saw and heard was Wraxall explaining that there is no such thing as a "magical bait." Not even his pet Black Mambas.

What was this? Honesty in an infomercial? Isn't that an oxymoron?

Then I fingered the four members of the Black Mamba family ... the Slick Willy, Ribbed Willy, Fat Willy and Atomic Wedgie ... (Do you ever wonder how bait companies come up with names?) The concept behind the lures was interesting. Most soft jerkbaits are designed around a fishy looking profile that resembles a minnow when you look at it from the side. The Black Mambas, on the

other hand, resemble and behave like forage fish when you look at them from below. Which is where most bass, walleye, pike and muskies are positioned. So, the lures look like the under bellies of food fish.

By the way, if you aren't quite sure what a soft jerkbait is ... it's easier to explain what it isn't. It's not a crankbait. It doesn't have a metal or plastic lip, and it doesn't wiggle or wobble. Nor does it flash and flicker like a spinnerbait. And it's quiet, unlike a noisy buzzbait or twin-prop chugger.

Fact of the matter is soft jerkbaits don't do much of anything. Except catch fish. They have no built-in action of their own. And that is precisely their attraction. They look, feel, and if you splash some fishy cologne on them, taste and smell so good that bass, walleye, lake trout, pike and muskies can't resist them. They're one of the few lures that fish cannot become conditioned to avoid. So when they turn up their noses at everything else, they lick their chops when they spot a soft jerkbait.

Spot, by the way, is the operative word. Precisely because soft jerkbaits aren't adorned with a whole bunch of frills ...

plastic lips, shiny blades, noisemakers and the like ... you need to pitch, flip and cast them into places where fish can see them.

Now, don't ever tell Wraxall I said this, but out on the lake and up on the Winnipeg River this fall, his Black Mambas did everything he said they would. I found I could erratically skitter and walk-the-dog with them along the surface. And when I twitched them quickly, I could make them leap out of the water and perform a perfect double axle, as though they were terrorised by hidden predators about to eat them. Indeed, I could make them look like young figure skaters leaping across the arena ice with Tonya Harding in hot pursuit.

Pegged on a worm weight and fished down deep, I caught walleye and sauger. And when I pitched an Atomic Wedgie ... a speciality bait that holds its position ... against a fallen tree and pumped it back and forth. I'll be darned if I didn't catch some beautiful largemouth. I am not sure who was more surprised. The fish or I.

When Wraxall called to get an assessment, I could only think of one thing to say. "Dave, I'd hold off on the infomercial for at least a year."

"Why?" he asked, sounding down in the dumps. "Didn't you catch any fish?"

"It's not that," I confessed. "I was just hoping I could have these things all to myself ... for one tournament season."