



USE

LONG POLES

To Reach The

Sweet Spots

Story and Photos
By Mark Hicks

rods with a medium-sized spinning reel, such as an Abu Garcia Cardinal 4. He claims that smaller reels cause too much line coiling.

Heaton uses all four of his poles for dipping, trolling, dead-pole fishing and bobber fishing with jigs, minnows and jigs tipped with minnows. If he's dipping visible cover where there are no overhanging limbs or branches to interfere with his pole, he opts for an 11- or 12-foot length. A longer pole lets him fish farther from the boat, which reduces the likelihood that he'll spook the crappie. It also reaches tough targets that are beyond the range of a shorter pole.

When Heaton fishes where overhead branches are present, such as in flooded trees and bushes, he drops to a 9- or 10-foot pole to avoid banging into the cover.

Casting a bobber with a regular spinning rod works well in open water, but it can't compete with a long pole when crappie hold close to edge cover, such as bulrushes, or in small holes in brushy cover or matted vegetation.

"Let's say I've got an 8-inch sweet spot in a brushpile where I'm getting a

Crappie authority Sam Heaton has been using long poles since he was 4 years old. He started with canepoles and now fishes with the Sam Heaton signature series line of crappie poles that he designed for B'n'M. Canepoles provide the advantage of length, but they're cumbersome and insensitive. Heaton's 9-, 10-, 11- and 12-foot B'n'M poles combine length with lightweight IM-6 graphite rod blanks.

"A crappie pole needs to be super-sensitive because there are many fishing

applications where you don't use a bobber," Heaton says. "You have to be able to feel the strike or see the rod tip dip. The pole has to be light so you can hold it all day without getting tired."

Though the pole's tip must be limber enough to show subtle bites, its butt section must be strong enough to lift a slab crappie out of thick cover. A long handle that braces under your forearm reduces fatigue when fishing with a long pole, and it gives you extra leverage for hauling aboard a heavy crappie. Heaton favors a fixed reel seat and matches his



A long rod helps Kentucky angler Dale Kirby reach tough targets with precision.

the drop-off. This setup lets him pick off crappie that are hanging on the lip of the drop-off and those that are suspended just off the drop.

A big advantage with long poles when dead-pole fishing, trolling or spider rigging is that they spread the lines for greater coverage. When he trolls, Heaton sets out 12-foot poles on either side of the boat, followed by 10-footers. He then sets a 7-foot rod out over each gunwale, plus two more rods out the transom. When you add in the width of the boat, Heaton's spread covers a swath nearly 30 feet wide. If there are any crappie in the area, Heaton will run an offering past them.

Oklahoma crappie sensation Todd Huckabee has developed four crappie poles for Quantum's Xtralite Todd Huckabee Crappie Rods that are designed for specific fishing applications. These lightweight HSX62 high-modulus graphite poles have limber tips, strong backbones and long cork handles. Huckabee matches them with 8- to 12-pound test monofilament.

When he wants to pitch a jig to cover and swim it past the crappie, Huckabee chooses the 9-foot Dippin' Rod, which is the shortest of the four poles. Its balance and quick response let you deftly pitch light jigs to small targets. It also doubles for vertical dipping presentations.

Huckabee calls the 10-foot Dippin' Rod the perfect crappie pole because it's ideal for his favorite technique, which is dipping jigs close to visible cover. The extra foot in length lets him reach more distant targets. Both the 9- and 10-foot models feature lightweight Fuji Hardloy guides and a ferrule just above the handle that makes these two-piece rods perform like one-piece poles.

"You can't believe how much stron-

bite every time I get a bobber in it," Heaton says. "I can drop a bobber in there every time with a long pole, whereas if I were casting with a shorter rod, I'd miss it half the time. I'd snag so much I'd probably run the crappie off."

If he fishes several poles at one time without bobbers, which he calls dead-pole fishing, Heaton uses different length poles set at varying depths. For example, if he anchors his boat over the edge of a drop-off that's 10 feet deep, he sets a 12-foot pole with 9 feet of line and places it over the top edge of the drop. Then he rigs an 11-foot pole with 10 feet

of line and sets it just off the deep side of the drop. A 10-foot pole with 11 feet of line hangs a jig or minnow deeper over

HEATON'S JIG TIP

When Sam Heaton dips a jig into cover with a long pole, he wants the jig to hang in a horizontal posture. He claims that this looks more natural and makes for a better hook-up.

"That knot has to be cinched tight right at the top of the line eye," Heaton says. "You need to check it every time you snag or catch a crappie because the resistance can pull the knot forward. When that happens, the jig hangs straight up and down and doesn't work as well. Just pull the knot back to the top of the line eye, and you're back in business." — Mark Hicks

ger and sensitive these poles are because the ferrule is close to the handle,” Huckabee says. “The poles also have Tennessee reel seats so you can place the reel on the handle wherever it balances best for you.”

A long pole gives noted Oklahoma crappie expert Todd Huckabee extra leverage for hauling aboard a heavy crappie.

Huckabee matches his Dippin’ Rods with a small Quantum Energy E10PTI spinning reel to hold the overall weight to a minimum. He says the reel nicely handles the 8- and 10-pound test lines he uses when pitching and dipping jigs.

The 10-foot Riffin’ Rod that Huckabee designed for spider-rigging is a stiffer, heavier pole for anglers who use weights up to 3 ounces to maintain vertical lines when the boat is moving. However, the tip is limber and painted orange to ensure that you can see the strike.

The final Huckabee pole, the Pullin’ Rod, measures 11 feet and is designed for flat-line trolling small crankbaits and jigs. Like the Riffin’ Rod, it has a painted tip, but is lighter in action. Both of these two-piece poles join in the middle of their blanks and come with fixed reel seats that are better suited to baitcasting reels. Many crappie fishermen prefer baitcasting reels for trolling or spider-rigging because they don’t hang up in rod holders as spinning reels can.

Zebco’s 8-, 10- and 12-foot Slab Seeker crappie rods continue to be endorsed by Huckabee.

“The Slab Seekers have a lighter action than my Quantum poles,” he says. “I recommend them for fishing 6- to 8-pound line and jigs that weigh from 1/128- to 1/8-ounce.”

Kentucky crappie expert Steve McC-



adams doesn’t endorse any particular poles, but he does agree with Huckabee regarding the length of a pole for jig and minnow fishing.

“I normally use a 9- or a 10-foot pole,” McCadams says. “If you get much longer than that, the tip gets too flexible for lifting a good-sized crappie over the side of the boat.”

However, the rod must combine stiffness with sensitivity. If the rod is too stiff, it loses sensitivity, according to McCadams. Just like Huckabee and Heaton, McCadams also favors a light,

sensitive graphite pole that he can hold all day without becoming fatigued.

“I’ve used some 9-foot G. Loomis fly rods that made fine crappie poles,” McCadams says. “You need to get a heavy-action rod rated for a No. 9 fly line.”

McCadams has fished a fly rod with a fly reel filled with monofilament and claims it works well. But he usually tapes a Tennessee-style spinning reel to the fly rod’s handle because he prefers a spinning reel’s drag. 🎣

MANUFACTURERS MENTIONED

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Zebco
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PITCHING vs. DIPPING

Pitching involves making a short, underhanded lob cast, while dipping is dropping a jig or minnow straight down into the water. Though Todd Huckabee is skilled with both methods, he uses the dipping approach 90 percent of the time when he fishes with one of his signature Quantum Dippin’ rods.

“A lot of people pitch a jig to, say, a standing tree and let it fall in a pendulum swing,” Huckabee says. “They’ll throw 5 feet past the tree, and the jig swims by the trunk 5 feet deep. I catch more crappie by dipping the jig straight down the trunk and holding it next to the cover. Not every crappie will chase a moving jig.” — Mark Hicks