

Today's Coolest Hot Products for Hardwater and Easy Fishing

I have said it numerous times before in the last several years, but this bears repeating...we are experiencing an unprecedented revolution and subsequent evolution in Ice Fishing. Both in techniques and the equipment needed to perform said maneuvers. We are seeing advances that far outpace any of the other outdoor sports and this is exactly what is driving Ice Fishing's growing popularity...*actually the only outdoor segment that is gaining participants*. Long gone are the days of the stereotypical frozen image of an Ice Angler hunched over a five gallon pale exposed to whatever Mother Nature throws at him, *hoping* for a bite or two.

Thanks to all of this innovation, we can now reasonably and confidently expect good catches on every outing...and do so with ease and amazing comfort. If you haven't kept up with what has been transpiring, you owe it to yourself to take a trip down to your local retailer and see what's available. The real beauty of this is that compared to open water fishing, outfitting yourself with the best gear on the market is downright affordable. You can literally start from scratch and for under two grand have yourself rigged and ready with the greatest of everything: clothing, electronics, shelter, auger, and all needed tackle. Heck, that won't even get you a decent used duck boat for summer time fishing pursuits.

Space here is too limited to mention all the super new products available, but I will pass along some of the more noteworthy and helpful options that I have personally found will have the most impact on your ability to consistently ice fish of all species.

Electronics

Electronics, generically meaning fishfinders and underwater cameras have quite literally opened up the under ice world to those of us perched atop it. No longer are we forced to work a string of holes, all the while wondering if there is a fish within a mile of our chosen location. We now go out on reconnaissance missions and actually fish where there are fish. Sounds pretty elementary, but the best fisherman in the world will come home skunked every time if he can't present his lures to the intended quarry.

Vexilar (www.vexilar.com) is the name synonymous with finding fish through the ice and has led the way since they first burst onto the scene with their now famous three color flasher. Not content with the status quo of proven technology, they continually strive to raise the bar by building upon this base and have done so again with the introduction of the new FL-22HD. Easily the most advanced and functional unit to date with capabilities of less than one quarter

inch target separation achieved by matching power output and pulse length to the depth you are fishing. Good went straight to great with this one.

After extensive research and testing, Vexilar has now entered the world of underwater cameras and has come out with the FS-1000 Color Viewing System. What is happening beneath us has never been clearer as the action is brought to us in living color on a 7 inch screen neatly tucked into a self contained system that is ready for use right out of the box. This unit carries Vexilar's signature quality and reliability, complete with a full two year warranty.

Augers

Drilling holes was at one time the most arduous and dreaded task in Ice Fishing. It has now become nearly effortless and dare I say...almost fun. By making what was once a chore, merely a quick exercise, we are now able to be much more aggressive and mobile in our search for fish and catch rates undoubtedly have risen due to this. Today's power augers are light, smooth, and reliably bore through any amount of ice in a snap. StrikeMaster (www.strikemaster.com) has long been considered a leader in advanced auger design and continues the tradition with its' latest lineup of Solo powered units. The German Engineered Solo engine coupled with the proven dual Lazer blade tipped auger section makes the Pro Lazer and Lazer Mag the best on the ice. On a personal note: I ran the 10 inch Pro Lazer model last year and found it to cut as quickly and smoothly as any 8 inch auger I had ever used.

Shelters

This category can be broken down into two distinct categories. Soft-sided (portable) and Hard-sided (wheeled) Shacks. Each has their unique use for the modern ice angler. Numerous models to choose from in each category and personal choice will dictate what you eventually select from each. I will limit the discussion here to what I have personally found to be unsurpassed in comfort and function. I will start out with the extensive selection of Soft-Sided units from Otter Outdoors and then move on to the Hard-sided and aptly named Lodge Series from Distinct Builders.

The Pro Series portables from Otter Outdoors are unquestionably the finest Flip Over style units to date and are the result of continual refinements on this proven design. Rugged, reliable, and sets up in seconds. Standard features include a great sled base, super comfortable seating, coupled with quality fabric and design that keeps all the wind and cold outside...leaving you warm and cozy inside. Most noteworthy is the selection of cool accessories they have to trick

out and personalize not only your shelter-*but your ATV as well*. Truly can design a complete Ice Fishing system with everything you will ever need within arms reach and ready to go. A few minutes checking out www.otteroutdoors.com will be well spent. With seven models to choose from and the wide array of accessories, there is surely something that will fit your needs and budget.

If you want to truly make a statement and step into the pinnacle of comfort, style, and quality this season-there is no better way than to see what the craftsman at Distinct Builders (www.ice-shack.com) have been up to. Please make no mistake, these are much more than just Fish Houses. Undoubtedly, the very best four season RV/Toy Hauler/Ice House combination ever created. Multiple uses and the latest in advancements from the RV Industry make for unprecedented value and versatility. Many models and options to choose from and you can even have the boys customize one to your exact specifications. Once inside...unless there is eminent threat of a divorce or loss of job, you may just find it nearly impossible to leave.

Lures

This category is quite subjective with everyone having their personal favorites. Tried and true is always good as it lends some confidence to your presentations, but it also boring. Why not be adventurous and expand your horizons a bit and add a few new lures to your arsenal this season. JB Lures (jblures.com) has been a perennial innovator of Ice Fishing Lures as is evidenced by their ever escalating line up of lures that will cover every application conceivable. Often imitated-but never duplicated and made right here in the good 'ol USA- JB Lures is always a good resource to turn to. A personal favorite and a great do all lure is the Holie Angel and something hot off the press for this year and deserving serious attention is the Orca Diver.

A lure that is a relative newcomer and has garnered a great deal of well deserved attention the last several years is the Salmo Chubby Darter (www.salmofishing.com). Probably best described as a swimming lure, meaning a great deal of horizontal movement on the fall-but this bait offers so much more it must be seen in action to adequately appreciate the unique moves it imparts. On a personal note: I am anxiously awaiting using this lure in the "Viking" color scheme this season as this color in their Hornet Crankbaits was the hot ticket this past summer.

A number of lures work the best while suspended under a float and believe me, not all are created equal. For those in the know, neutral or slightly negative buoyancy has been the goal for a properly balanced float-just not so easy to do...until now. Check out Venom Floats (www.venomfloats.com) for a great solution. They are infinitely adjustable and require no

cutting of line or bobber to achieve desired results, thus one float does the job of many. They even glow in the dark for easy nighttime monitoring.

Tip Ups

This category is vastly overlooked by far too many anglers. Unfortunately a lot of you equate fishing tip ups as an affair strictly meant for Pike. Nothing could be further from the truth and with a just a little imagination; they can pay huge dividends for you. While not a “run and gun” tactic, certainly should be employed every single time you stop and settle in. Absolutely nothing will work better to trigger a big Walleye than a strategically placed chub. HT Enterprises (www.icefish.com) has been long known for its’ Polar line of tip ups and rightly so as they have been the most recognizable model for decades. Rest assured, they have many more styles to choose from with the Magnetic Pop Up being my personal favorite for many years. The Windlass model deserves some attention as well. It gives you the opportunity to keep a bait continually moving, thus increasing its’ attractiveness in many situations that run the gamut from big Pike, right on down to Panfish.

Rods/Reels

This is where we have gained the most ground concerning the equipment we use. For many years discerning hard-core Ice Anglers simply had no option other than custom built rods if they desired a truly good stick. This has all changed in the last few years with many great models available. In my opinion, St. Croix (www.stcroixrods.com) is at the top of the class with their Legend Series Ice Rods. They are based around a patented strike indicator system that if simply called a “Spring Bobber” would be an insult. Absolutely none of the drawbacks associated with traditional spring bobbers, but offering all the attributes...plus it is easily adjustable to fine tune your presentation.

Another unique rod worth a serious look is from Wristaverrods (www.wristaverrods.com). They employ the concept of a bent handle allowing you to keep your wrist straight and your finger on the line, affording you greater sensitivity.

Be sure and outfit your new rod with a brand new reel and don’t skimp on this item. Lots of quality manufacturers to choose from, with true anti-reverse being a must and never overload your rod with a reel that is too large. Bigger is definitely not better in this regard. A good tip is to replace the factory lubricant with one designed to resist stiffening in cold weather. Ardent

Reels (www.ardentreels.com) offers a product called Reel Butter and a full line of accessories and cleaning supplies to make the task a breeze.

Accessories/Clothing

Tons of really neat gadgets and goodies are now on the scene. Far too many to list here, but I will highlight a few of the preeminent ones. Ice Fishing obviously involves cold and there are two ways to combat it. One is by adorning yourself in the latest and greatest in outerwear. Numerous viable options to choose from and even more interesting is that you can now even find a good selection that is proprietary to various Ice Equipment Manufacturers. We can now make an On-Ice Fashion Statement by wearing the colors of our favorite Manufacturer. Vexilar and StrikeMaster quickly come to mind.

The other method of beating back the cold is to climb into your shelter and crank up the heat. Mr. Heater (www.mrheater.com) has been at the forefront for years with a great selection of dependable and safe heating sources, with their Buddy Series being the most recognizable.

Although not clothing, a must have item that should be worn anytime you encounter slick ice conditions is some form of additional traction for your boots. As one who has ended up on my butt more times than I care to admit, this should never be overlooked. Past problem has been that most offerings were just that...a problem. The majority of versions are constantly coming off and a major pain to put on in the first place. Problem solved with the full line of products specifically designed for this task by the folks at 32 North (www.32north.com). Do yourself and your body a favor by selecting the model that best fits your needs.

An accessory that I am quite fired up about using this season is the Lure Lightning (www.lurelightning.com) system for charging your Glow Jigs. This one is a cut above the rest that will make your jigs glow longer, more intensely, and across the full color spectrum...which will become readily apparent upon your first use. This handy little miracle is also ingeniously designed to be mounted right to your electronics for hands free use, allowing you to quickly get back down to the fish.

As great and as light as today's Power Augers have become, they still remain a bit cumbersome to haul around on your ATV or Snowmobile. Various solutions work moderately well, but most suffer from simply being in the way of all your other gear. Johnsons Cargo Systems (www.johnsonscargosystems.com) has addressed the issue by designing an Auger Rack that keeps you well above your other equipment and is easy to stow and deploy.

While on the subject of ATV's; All Terrain sometimes just does not apply to deep snow on top of ice...as we all know. Tracks are a great option, but are quite expensive and not necessarily what you want on your unit year round. The folks at J-Wheelz (www.j-wheelz.com) have come up with an imaginative, affordable, and award winning solution that falls somewhere in the middle. In a nutshell, they amount to light weight bolt on wheel extensions providing you with much more needed traction, *and potentially life-saving flotation*. Unique in the fact that they will not rob your machine of power, do not affect steering or top speed, and will fit most any ATV or UTV. They are a great accessory to enhance the usefulness of your ATV in all conditions and worth a serious look.

This should whet your appetite for what's out there. If you are new to the sport, do a little research and pick out what best suits your needs. Even if you consider yourself a salty old veteran, we should all continually strive to improve ourselves. The vast array of modern tackle and equipment that is now so easily accessible to us will do just that.

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