FISHERMAN INTERVIEW

DON MUSSO

Creator of *Super Strike Lures*

As Interviewed by Doc Muller

Don Musso, a master carpenter by trade and profession, has been making plugs for quite a few years. Like many of us, Don was prompted to begin making his own plugs years ago because of rising prices and inconsistent quality. Then, too, he is quick to point out there is nothing like the thrill of catching a fish on a plug that you made. But that's where the similarity ends. For the majority of fishermen, the job of making good quality and consistent action plugs is beyond our abilities. There are a few guys who succeed, especially with easier plugs like the darter and once in awhile, a guy like Jack [The Professor] Frech comes along who has the persistence, skills, and disciplined time to both design and make a wide variety of plugs that he develops, not for the marketplace, but for the purpose of catching fish. This was Don Musso's purpose too, but before too long the demand for his plugs grew well beyond his ability to keep friends supplied. It was time to go into production.

The following is an interview that took place at Don's house where he still produces the product. It was my intention to find out something of the philosophy with which Don approaches his job and to find out how and why the plugs are designed the way they are. In the end, after loads of questions and gracious answers, the best testimony to the fish catching ability of the plugs lies in the fact that they are in great demand and last fall his plugs were THE thing at Montauk. The plugs are currently in only a limited number of stores. We have had many inquiries about where they could be purchased. They are sold at Kronich's Tackle Store, Merrick Marine, Larkfield Sports, Lon Wanser, and Santo's Tackle. Check our ads for addresses.

Q. When did you first start designing and making plugs?

A. You may find this hard to believe, but in 1962 I made a plug that looked and swam very much like the Rebel. It caught fish and the success encouraged me to try other designs. I wanted a plug that was buoyant, but with good balance so that it would cast.

Q. Did you reach a point where you knew exactly what you wanted out of your plugs?

A. Sure! After a little experimentation I realized that the key ingredients were a blend of castability and an effective vibrating action. The positions of the hook, weights, and wood cuts have to conform to this idea.

Q. Could you explain what you mean?

A. Take the hooks, for example. On my plugs they are placed so that they won't hang up. Now you can't just set your hooks any old place; so you have to experiment with the positions of the weights so that when you place the hooks in an advantageous position that you don't lose either action or casting distance. You strive to strike a balance of these factors.

Q. All of your plugs are made with through-wire construction. How important is the position of the wire?

A. Very important. The wire must come out straight. If you are just a

Don Musso explains how these plugs will require several more layers of paint before they will look like the plug in his hands.

fraction of an inch either above or below the correct and planned for position, the plug's action is altered tremendously. These are the kind of details that most people can't take the time to standardize, yet it is essential if you want the product to have a consistent quality.

Q. Can you describe the ideal action you are looking for with your plugs?

A. I have designed plugs that produce a lot of vibrations. I'm convinced and I have been for many years, that plugs should produce a lot of vibration. Fish can pick up the vibrations from a good distance with their lateral line system and thus a plug that sends off a lot of vibrations will attract more fish and catch more fish. All plugs put out some vibrations, but I believe that many do not put out enough. Thus, it may be that unless you drag a "quiet" plug in front of the nose of a fish he may not know that it's there.

Q. Well, if you believe that noise is important, have you given any thought to loading your plugs with BBs?

A. Yes, when I saw how loaded plug produced at Cape Cod, I decided I try and do it. Unfortunately, it is to expensive for me to do it right no with wood, but when I go to plastic, will be feasible.

Q. How about Leo Cooper's Husk Dude? That plug puts out a lot wiggle.

A. Some plugs do wiggle a lo However, I do not simply design plug with maximum wiggle. Tha would be easy, but it might not be th best thing to do. Again, balance important. I strive to have a plug tha wiggles with a two to three inch swin of the tail. If the swing is less tha this, then I think that the action unnatural and if the swing is greate than this, then the amount vibrations that the plugs throws is n enough.

Q. How important is color?

A. Also very important. Color is, can be, one of the most importa factors. Fish may not be able to se color, but they can tell the differen between one color and the next.

Q. Is color also important at night?

A. A great many times, yes. Look, l me answer you this way. Last year the Cape, yellow was worthless—ca you figure that—with yellow s popular at Montauk? I know fro experience that color makes a world difference.

Q. How do you fish colors?

A. I always stick with white at th start. It is the most consister producer. If white doesn't work, the I'll first switch to yellow, then blu then green, and so on. The percen ages are better if the fisherman stick with basic colors. However, there a those times ...

Q. Yes, I've had my share of thos times! How about the design of th metal lips for your swimming plugs

A. I started with a variety of lips and tested each one of them. When found one that worked I had die made so that every lip would be close to identical as possible.

Q. What about the wood? Is th quality important?

A. Yes! You have to pick wooc carefully. I go through the wood that buy and discard all the pieces tha don't make the grade either becaus of flaws or other inconsistencies that don't like. Some American companie have had a lot of trouble when the had the plugs made overseas becaus the wood that was used wasn't an good. If the wood is of differer density or quality, both buoyancy an action change.

Q. Okay! Weve covered color, wooc

wire, basic design objectives ... How do you make the plugs?

A. For consistency, all the plugs are made by hand, one at a time. The plugs are pre-drilled, weighted, and filled before they are turned down. It is easier to be exact if these things are done before the plug goes on the lathe. This was a lot easier to do before 1974 when I started to market "Super Strike" lures. This year, I'll make six models: the Little Neck Popper (TM); The Rattler (TM); The Little Neck Surface Swimmer (TM); The Torpedo Surface Swimmer (TM); The Torpedo Deep Swimmer (TM), and The Zig-Zag (registered). All of these will be produced in several sizes and in a variety of colors. In all, I expect to make about 4000 lures this year. With this kind of quantity produced out of a basement operation, I have had to develop exact production standards in order to make plugs that have consistent action.

Q. Do you have any plans to outgrow your basement operation?

A. Things have been moving right on schedule and I hope to be able to move the operation in the future. Right now, the demand is so great that I can't take on any more orders and I don't want to cut corners in order to make and sell more plugs, because the quality will suffer.

Q. Could you tell us something about the shape of the plug?

A. Both the front and the back of the plugs are tapered. This means that the buoyancy is centered and the plug can wiggle about a pivot point that is located at the center of the plug. I can use a smaller lip because of that design feature. For this reason the plug doesn't push as much water from side-to-side as it wiggles. Less water push, smaller lip, and greater casting distance.

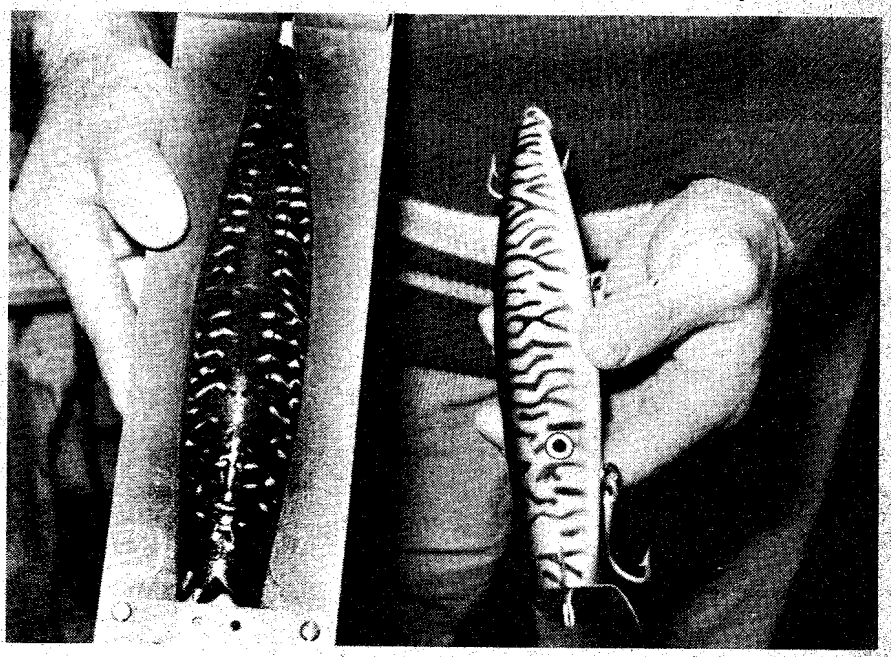
Q. What procedures do you use to finish the plug?

A. Again, I'm a stickler for detail. I dip seal the plugs with two coats of acrylic sealer and then two coats of epoxy paint are used. The last coat is clear epoxy. I think that because of all the layers of sealers and paint, the plugs are very durable. The swinging hooks are bound to tear up the plugs, but at least it won't happen immediately. The plugs are rugged!

Q. What kind of hardware do you use?

A. I use brass grommets and stainless steel wire. Some manufacturers use screw eyes, but I think that the through-wire is stronger and more reliable. Better hardware adds to the life of the plugs and through-wire with swivels makes it harder for the fish to get leverage against the plug and tear free. Let's face it: a quality plug has to be expensive because there are a lot of man-hours and a lot of high quality materials that go into the construction. We may have no choice about that, but if a guy spends a good buck, he has a right to expect that the plug will work consistently and that it will stand up to some punishment.

The plugs are drilled, weighted and epoxied before they are turned down on the lathe. The plugs are suspended *(above)* from a rack while the paint dries.



Don has developed a special painting template to achieve the mackerel finish on his swimming plug.

Q. Wood plug making is almost a lost art. Why?

A. Because plastic is better. Well, let me clarify that. Plastic can be better if the production methods are top drawer. There are a number of advantages to plastic. Wood plugs pick up water and this changes the action. With plastic, it is easier to be more consistent and exact if you take the time to try. Wood varies in weight no matter how careful you are when you select it; while plastic will be the same all of the time.

Q. If that's the case, why not switch to plastic?

A. I will when I can. As I said, plastic is only better when the manufacturer maintains quality production methods and good quality control. Good quality molds for making plastic plugs are extremely expensive and I'm not ready for this yet. I don't want to jump headlong into plastics now and settle for an inferior quality mold. That would defeat my original objectives and goals. I'm experimenting now with plastic because when I make the switch, I'll have to make adjustments in design and weight distribution in order to achieve the same action, since plastic is a whole 'nother animal. If I work on it now, then I'll be ready with a high quality lure when I'm ready to make the switch. In the meantime, I'll make them out of wood.

Q. It has been very interesting. I've heard these theories before, but you have shown us how you make them work. Thanks.

A. Thank you.