

By Dan Durbin
Contributing Writer

There comes a day when you have to sell that sports car and pick up an SUV. They ride better, you can take half the baseball team, and they're probably more comfortable. That's kinda what I felt like a few days ago when I joined Brad Dupuie on one of his Angler Qwest (AQ) tri-toon boats for a day of trolling on Lake Michigan.

Yes, I said trolling.

On Lake Michigan

From a pontoon boat.

"It's really starting to take hold," he said. "Back on Saginaw Bay, where I fish a lot, more and more people are opting for tri-toons because they troll great and offer so much more room than your average fishing boat."

Joining us was Chase Baker, of Delafield, an avid angler who focuses much of his time on using a kayak for bass, and Roger Niesen, of De Forest, a regional sales rep for Angler Qwest.

"My dad started me off fishing," Baker said. "Kayak bass fishing is top of my list nowadays, but I do manage to get out bowfishing at night targeting rough fish. Bowfishing is a great time, but it also helps me scout new areas that might hold bass for me to target a different day. I don't fish Lake Michigan very often but I am looking forward to it today. Being on a pontoon boat is a new experience for me."

The plan at first was to try Port Washington, but some networking led Dupuie to switch ports. It was in early June, so the fish had not spread north to every port in high number.

"From what I've been hearing they're getting mostly lake trout up there so we're going to hit Oak Creek," he said. "I have nothing against lakereels, but I like the silver fish better - coho and steelhead and a possible king are my preference for eating. You have to love when steelhead jumps on the surface, too."

We fired up the 200 hp Suzuki and hit about 40 mph which is quite quick when pushing a 24-foot rig. The ride was smooth and comfy. I was surprised that there was no kicker motor and that an outboard of that size could idle down slow enough to troll.

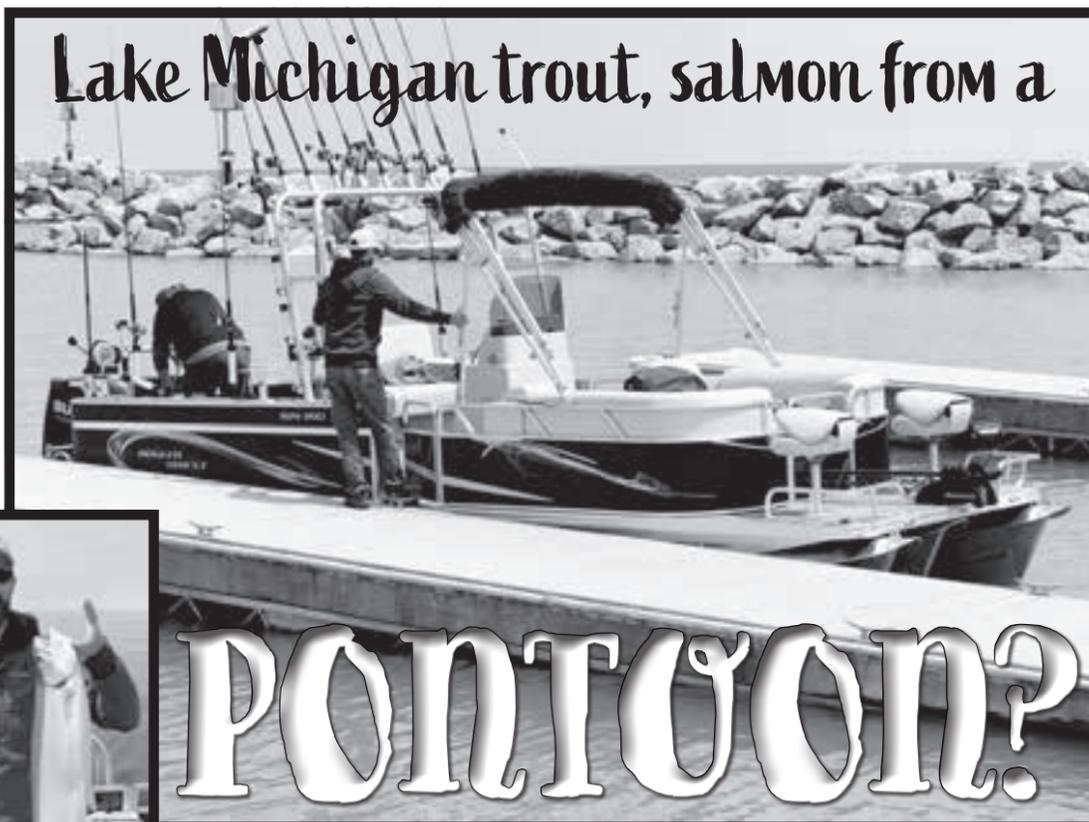
"I have a new trolling plate system allowing me to get the 200 horse engine down to 1.6 mph, or I use two 38-inch drift bags off each side to get down to 1.4 mph," he said. "Outside each door is a U-bolt attached to the boat chassis for clipping on drift bags. You'd be surprised, most of the folks who buy our boats don't need a kicker motor."

Dupuie is used to fishing the Michigan side of the big lake, so while he is a very experienced salmon-man, it's a bit different deal over here.

"For one, by us, it gets deep a lot faster," he said. "Yesterday we were getting bit in 130 feet of water but we were 12 miles out. Back in my area you could hit that depth in less than three miles."

We started out fishing right outside the breakwall as some locals were already coming off the dock with a limit when we pulled up at 6 a.m.

"We might be able to cash in



Lake Michigan trout, salmon from a PONTON?

on this school and not even have to run out," he said.

We got lines set, all eight of them, and started trolling. After about 20 minutes Dupuie was convinced the school had moved on and we had to get out to deeper water.

"These fish are very nomadic," he said. "In general, especially the cohos, they will bite when you find them but you have to find them and to do that you

have to cover water."

Dupuie decided on going with horizontal spreads with eight lines - all but one were on manual planer boards, the same style that walleye anglers use. We were using spoons, mostly in orange and chrome.

"The love the flash, that's for sure," Dupuie said.

About as soon as we hit some waypoints they had saved the day before on another trip, Baker hooked up. And then I had a fish. And then Baker was back

to work.

"The fish are still here," he said.

One thing that was really handy was the aluminum arch system that kept all eight rods in storage or in trolling position. Everything was out of the way. There was also a high pressure

Brad Dupuie, of Angler Qwest, launches one of his company's boats for a day of salmon fishing along Wisconsin's Lake Michigan "coast." Pontoons and tri-toons can give die-hard anglers more room and the comfort of a bigger rig. Inset, Chase Baker, of Heartland, with one of many steelhead caught while trolling Lake Michigan from a pontoon.

Photos by Dan Durbin

wash system onboard that was perfect when salmon slime greased up the deck.

The biggest bonus was just the space. Each time we'd land a fish we'd back up so a person could take off the planer board. The center console and extra room let the angler fighting the fish back up without bumping into anyone or anything.

We landed nine fish - a mixed bag of cohos, steelhead, and one interloping laker.

"I just wish it was rougher out here today," he said. "I'd have loved to show you how the boat handles really rough water."

I was fine with the fairly calm seas. It was a quick, dry ride - a unique experience. The smoked coho was very welcome on my plate that night, too.

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