



»» LIVID LARGE

Ten years of persistence in both musky fishing and lure making is starting to pay off...big.

by Corey Nazer

When I tell people that I “make” musky lures, I imagine they envision me huddled over a pile of wood shavings in a dark corner of my basement, whittling away at an indeterminately shaped creation. I am always happy to explain that Naze Baits is a business that has evolved into something a bit more.

Though the basement is still an integral part of the romance associated with our small company, we are finding ways to grow, scale the lure making process, and reach customers around the world.

Our flagship lure, the Livid Fish has seen a surge in interest in recent years. More and more musky anglers have turned to this lure as their go-to crank bait, and even more so the trolling bait that provides the perfect set of characteristics for trolling big water for those solitary monsters.

Originally a wood lure, over time we found enough interest in the Livid Fish that it warranted seeking out a Wisconsin-based injection molding company to manufacture our lure. The ease and durability of plastic allowed us to take the critical next step in the growth of the business.

As more lures sell and my connections with customers grow, I have occasionally had the good fortune of fishing with anglers who use the Livid Fish. On a recent trip to a big water lake in the upper Midwest, I finally accomplished something I have personally been wanting to do for a long time--land a true trophy fish on a "Livid"

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Dave, a customer and now friend, had been trolling the Livid Fish for almost two seasons with a few truly noteworthy catches. In 2014, he had landed about a dozen muskies on the Livid Fish, all measuring 46 inches or more. The largest was a jaw dropping 55 incher that was taken in late fall. 2015 was off to an equally fast start. Dave had a streak of several weekends with at least one musky measuring 50 inches or more in the boat. When we finally set plans to fish together, it was late July, and the fishing was great. In eighteen hours of trolling, we landed four muskies. A 36-inch, a 43-inch, a 47-inch and a 50-inch all caught on a Livid Fish and released to fight another day. There was no doubt I would come back to fish with Dave again.

Dave graciously invited me back for a September weekend to troll with him, giving me an opportunity to not only land another big musky, but also to employ the Livid Fish during a full moon—a situation that Dave had seen success with over the past couple years. For a bait maker, this was both valuable research and time on the water. I was excited to say the least.

Saturday at daybreak, we found ourselves set-up and trolling open water in an area that Dave had confidence in. I am not a troller by nature, so at times I can find my mind wandering. An angler can let the monotony of the landscape and the hum of the outboard lull him to a numbed and careless mindset. This, however, was not one of those times. Knowing that the biggest fish of my musky career could bite at any time kept me focused and alert. Because of the full moon, we felt it

was worth our time to continue fishing into the night. Having a monstrous lake almost entirely to yourself for a day and into the night might give a novice fisherman the feeling that their approach is flawed. An underconfident musky fisherman can talk themselves out of the tactics they know are best. Dave, and subsequently I, knew better.

Our attempt in the end, however, was fruitless. Saturday came and went without a bite. As many anglers know, this is the reality of musky fishing; though it is never easy to accept a fishless day. We knew that the next day the winds were going to be upwards of 20 to 25 miles per hour, potentially keeping us off the water. For me, there was a bit of a sinking feeling that I would not get another shot in 2015 at a monster musky. Dave and I agreed we would assess the weather conditions in the morning and determine what we would do then.

Peering outside in the morning, the wind had the American flag in camp standing straight out. I suspected Dave would call it on account of wind and I would have to start packing for my four-hour drive home. Instead he suggested we attempt to avoid the wind by trailering the boat to the other side of the lake and fish where the waves were bearable. As long as it got us on the water, I was game for anything.

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After a half hour drive, landing the boat, and getting the baits dragging in the water, I was happy to be trolling and still watching the sun come up over the horizon. That meant we were still potentially able to take advantage of those precious few minutes remaining between the full moon that just set an hour earlier and the sun that was making it's way higher by the minute. Suddenly the drag screamed, stopped, and screamed again. Having landed fish together in the past, Dave and I had some assemblage of a routine, so we went about our business preparing to land our first musky of the weekend. As soon as I grabbed the rod, felt a tug, and started to reel to gain some tension, I could tell this was not an enormous fish. When it surfaced, we both saw a healthy mid-thirty inch pike that had courageously consumed a Livid Fish for breakfast. We landed it, snapped a picture, and released it. Though it was the wrong species, it broke the ice and got us both thinking that this multi-day dry spell was coming to an end.

We set up once again and settled in, now fighting bigger waves. The sun was over the horizon as we watched the poles pulsate with Livid Fish swimming behind and below the boat. The outboard revved as Dave steered the boat back into oncoming waves, preparing for another loop. The drag screamed again. We quickly replicated our previous routine, preparing the boat for another fish. The drag

continued to sound off, letting us know this was a fish that had size. I grabbed the rod as Dave very selflessly managed the boat and the wind. It was difficult to stand in the boat as the waves lifted us up and down. The drag continued to scream. We both cautiously speculated on the size of the fish, knowing that only big fish continually pull line out for this length of time. Finally the drag slowed, indicating on the line counting reel that I had nearly 200 feet to retrieve. I felt the far off head shakes immediately. They sent a message loud and clear that this was a powerful fish. Each time the fish gave me any indication it was coming my direction I turned the handle quickly. I knew it was going to be a lengthy fight and that any slack in the line could give the fish an opportunity to shake free. The angle of the line also indicated that the fish was starting to get closer to the surface. Perhaps he would break through the waves and perform one of those somersaults that muskies are so well known for. I prayed that it stay down, though I desperately wanted to see the fish. I could control slack in the line, but not if he was flying through the air. Suddenly, he made another run. The drag screamed again. The careful work of getting the fish closer to the boat had been lost as the line once again quickly left the reel.

AN EPIC FIGHT

Musky fishermen always envision an epic fight. They can see it in their mind's eye. It is as big a deal as holding the fish itself. Understanding what might be on the line, both literally and figuratively, I wanted this fight to be over and this fish to be in the net. Again, I started the slow job of getting this fighter back to the boat while trying to maintain my balance, as the waves had not subsided. The story unfolded as it had the first time; a few feet at a time, pausing for head shakes and another brief ten foot run. I began gaining on the brute, and I could feel it was starting to tire as well. Little by little the fish was both coming up and getting closer, but there was still no sighting. Each time I thought I would see a flash of a tail, the reel counter indicated I had plenty of fight left before that would happen.





Finally, I got the line counter down to less than 50 feet and knew I would see it soon. I also was getting cautiously confident that we had the hooks squarely in the fish's mouth. Internally, I started to recognize that I had never before fought a fish this long.

I saw a streaking flash beneath the water a ways from the port side of the boat, then a violent head shake still not showing itself fully nor breaking the surface. Again another submerged flash, this time revealing much of its profile just below the surface of the water. This was a very large fish. The adrenaline began pumping. Selfishly, I wanted this fish in the net.

The boat side struggle that so many musky fisherman are accustomed to began in earnest. Back and forth it swam, seemingly dodging attempts to move the net in. Nervous about additional runs, I thumbed the spool and gave the fish back some line. Reeling again, I tried to pick an end of the boat so Dave could net at the other end. I knew Dave would pick the right moment to put the net in the water, but getting the fish to the side of the boat was the problem. Working with only about 15 feet of line out and attempting to tame a thrashing fish that was breaking the surface more than it was swimming, I pulled the rod tip awkwardly to my left. Dave, on the deck of the boat to my right, timed his movements well. The fish slid past boat side, and

the net quickly emerged out of the water and surrounded the fish. It was done.

I knew it was the biggest fish of my angling career.

Just observing it in the net, we knew it was heavy. The belly was so much bigger than any I had ever seen. Bringing it into the boat was a two-man job. As we laid it on the bump board to get a measurement, its belly was as impressive as its length. Almost 52 ½ inches! Easily the biggest I had ever landed. Dave and I congratulated each other and continued to marvel at the size of the fish. It was almost impossible to lift the fish for a picture. I struggled to get the slimy, heavy creature out in front of my body. I made several attempts to hoist it, struggling with the girth and pouring belly. I had to brace it against myself before I could muster enough sustained energy to support the weight and manage a grimacing smile.

Before I knew it, my time with the fish was done, and we had to get it back in the water. The satisfaction of catching my biggest musky on my own lure was starting to set in. Dave stopped me briefly, "Let's get a girth measurement quick." He hurriedly grabbed the flexible tape measure and pulled it tight around the largest portion of the musky's belly. 27 inches! Even Dave, who had caught many large muskies before, was impressed. "You might catch a longer fish in your life, but you won't catch a fatter one," he exclaimed as I hung over the boat, placing the giant musky back in the water.

I always take stock of my blessings as I hold the base of a big musky's tail, releasing it back to its home. It happens so infrequently that you have to be in awe of the moment.

As I drove home that evening, I reflected on the decade of lure making that was behind me. I was so excited about that fish, the weekend, the sport of musky fishing, and the Livid Fish with teeth marks on it as it lay on the passenger seat next to me. My hope is that the lure brings other anglers the satisfaction it brought me that day. I think it will.