



Slingin' The Swim Jig by Jon Graham

I get a big kick out of learning and adopting a new technique into my family of tactics used to target riverine smallmouth bass. Matter of fact, I try to experiment with something new each and every year. Of course, some of my experimentations are tried with little success and those techniques fall off of my radar screen. In contrast, some of the new ideas I have played with have stuck and are still used to this day.

About this time last year I decided one day that a new technique was in order. I was perusing the Illinois Smallmouth Alliance's message boards and happened upon another report by an angler named Jim Kast. I had been following the exploits of Mr. Kast for quite some time. I had never met the man, but always found it interesting that he was always able to catch fish on a swim jig. The two words, "swim" and "jig" together really piqued my interest. I had a feeling that his swim jiggin' prowess was something that was totally new to me and I just had to find out more details. I knew a little research was in order.

I started with Mr. Kast, the guru of the swim jig here in Illinois. First, I had to see what the heck a swim jig really was. Jim steered me in the direction of Brovarney Baits out of Wisconsin. This small company makes a beautiful swim jig in many different color schemes. A swim jig, at first glance, looks like any other silicone-skirted jig. But upon further inspection, there are a few important differences. First, and maybe most importantly, a swim jig utilizes a 28 or 30 degree hook eye. This angle of the eye in relation to the hook, allows the eye of the hook to come out the front of the jig. Why is this important? Well, remember this is a "swim" jig. The whole premise behind the swim jig revolves around the angler actually swimming the jig through the water column, rather than fishing it on or near the bottom slowly, as you would with most silicone-skirted jigs.

Another important difference that sets a swim jig apart, when compared with a standard flippin' or pitchin' jig, is the amount of skirting material used to make the jig. A swim jig normally has a much sparser skirt when compared to a stout flippin' jig. Most swim jigs contain 20 -30 strands of silicone, while a normal bass jig will typically sport a skirt that contains at least 40 strands of silicone. The sparser skirt on a swim jig allows the bait to glide effortlessly through the water. The combination of a jig with a "thin" skirt, with the eye of the jig coming out the front of the head, and the effortless glide through the water makes the swim jig a deadly way to mimic a large baitfish.

A third difference you will find with a swim jig when compared to a standard bass jig is that fact that most swim jigs are hand-tied. Now, not all the swim jigs on the market are hand-tied, but the best ones are! When I say hand-tied I mean that the silicone skirt is attached to the collar of the jighead using actual thread. In contrast, most bass jig skirts are attached using that small

rubber ring that has a tendency to slide down the hook collar and shaft. In addition, rubber skirt collars will rot over time causing the silicone skirt to totally fall apart. But, when it comes to hand-tying the skirt to the jig, there are many advantages. First and foremost is durability. The thread and skirting will not slip down the hook, like rubber collars. Additionally, when a swim jig is tied by hand, the craftsman can make sure every single strand of silicone stays in place throughout the life of the jig. If an angler wanted a swim jig with black strands on top and white on the bottom, he could rest assured that if his jig was tied correctly, the black would always stay on top of the jig and the white would stay on the bottom. Now, a skirt that is attached onto the jig using a skirt collar will often move or slip causing the strands of silicone to tear or relocate. This relocation of strands can basically ruin the pattern and "flow" of colors on the jig. Sure, hand tying a swim jig takes much more time than simply slipping the skirt on with a collar, but for my money, it is well worth the extra effort.

Now back to my swim jig odyssey. After much research on the internet and talks with Jim, I was ready to try a swim jig. Upon checking out the jigs on Brovarney's website, I realized that I could make my own swim jigs if I could get ahold of some heads. I had the skirting material and the vise need to hand tie the jigs. Luckily for me the good folks at Brovarney allowed me to buy some un-painted swim jig heads. Upon receiving my first shipment, I went right to work on the vise. I created a few all white models, attached a four inch twister-tail grub as a trailer, and off to the river I went.

The neat thing about swim jiggin' is the simplicity in the technique. Basically the angler casts out the swim jig, allows it to sink to the desired depth, and then straight cranks it in. The technique is much like using a spinnerbait or crankbait. Matter of fact, numerous anglers on the internet remarked that one can use a swim jig in any situation where a spinnerbait and/or crankbait would excel. Upon reaching my flows with swim jig in hand, I was immediately rewarded with bass after bass. I was blown away with how hard the river smallmouth hit this bait. In addition, I was amazed at how the bigger smallies (my swim jig clients and I have caught tons of big smallies on the swim jig since last fall) would just simply inhale the jig while it was moving. Because of this, the hook-up and land ratio was outstanding.

Another outstanding aspect, of swim jigs, is their relatively snag-free nature. Due to the angle of the hook eye, most snags in the river simply pop out upon the first sharp snap of the rod. I was hooked! A lure that is simple to use, catches river bronzebacks right and left, is relatively snag free, and relatively inexpensive. What could be better?

As my experience with the swim jig grew by leaps and bounds in only a few short weeks, I began to sell a few of my hand-tied beauties to a few close friends. They took them out their local flows and reported the same results that I had experienced. Big bass pictures were coming in almost daily. I was thrilled. There is nothing like seeing a big bronzie (and even some Large-mouth up to six pounds) caught on a jig that you've made; of course, as the word began to spread on the Illinois Smallmouth Alliance's message forum, orders starting coming in rather quickly. I knew I needed a different approach. I was still purchasing my swim jig heads from the good folks at Brovarney. The cost on the custom heads was eating away at my profits. Because of this my father-in-law and I sat down and came up with a solution. At the time we were already making a few custom jigs, in which we actually owned the lead molds needed to pour the heads. We figured if we could get ahold of a swim jig mold and a decent hook, we could make our own swim jig heads for much cheaper than what I was buying mine from Brovarney.

Upon opening our jig supplier catalog, we immediately found the perfect swim jig mold: a bullet shaped head with a cavity to pour ¼, 3/8, and ½ ounce models along with a hole to insert a weedguard. Next, we needed a 30 degree hook. After a few prototype hook models, we settled upon a Mustad 28 degree, light wire, ultra point hook. We were set and ready to offer our own swim jig, which we call "The Scout".

All of this has happened since last fall and our swim jig business is still going strong. Since our inception, Warrior Jigs has introduced a smaller swim jig that we call "The Scout Jr.". This jig has a totally different head design and does not come with a weedguard. We designed its smaller appearance (due to lighter head size and hook size) to match the fancy of those smallie chasers who fish small creeks and rivers, or whenever a smaller, finesse swim jig is needed. I would say I have been getting about an order a week, on average, since last fall. I have even made swim jigs for anglers as far away as South Carolina. As a matter of fact, my South Carolina client has won a few bass tournaments on Lake Murray using my Scout swim jigs.....pretty cool.

In summary, a few more details need to be discussed concerning swim jigs. First, swim jigs need a plastic trailer. The options are endless, but most swim jiggers use a four or five inch twister-tail grub. Make sure when you rig your twister grub that you rig it with the tail pointing up. Another trailer option that I prefer over the grub is a swim bait. A swim bait is a soft plastic shaped like a baitfish's body with a tail that vibrates as it moves through the water. Many different companies manufacture swim baits, but, without a doubt, the best swim baits on the market are produced by the folks at Big Hammer. Hand-poured

in California, these baits are incredible. Soft, but durable and made in some of the most exciting colors you will ever find. In addition, what makes their swim baits truly unique is the idea that their tail design (square) creates a thumping disturbance in the water that truly rings the river smallie's dinner bell. Matter of fact, Big Hammer's active tail causes the whole swim jig to wobble back and forth much like a crankbait. You really have to see this wobble.....it is truly amazing. I prefer the 3 and 4 inch sizes. To check out Big Hammer's amazing baits, go to www.swimbait.com.

Though color seems to make little difference to a river smallie, I normally try to match the color of my trailer to the jig as best I can. Another key swim jig pointer is to always experiment with different retrieve speeds and cadences. I have caught bass while slowly swimming a swim jig and I have caught them by "burning" the bait as fast as I could reel. I have hooked up while keeping the bait near the bottom and have caught them while reeling the bait so close to the surface I could watch the bronze bomber crush the jig. Just keep an open mind and be willing to try different retrieve options. Yet another tip involves the type of line used when slingin' the swim jig. Now any line will work, but I strongly prefer (as do other swim jig aficionados) to use braided line when throwing a swim jig. The braid casts the jig unbelievable distances and provides an outstanding sold hook set due to its zero stretch characteristics. I normally throw a swim jig on casting gear, but spinning gear will work quite well.

In closing, I am yet to turn an angler onto the swim jig that has not totally fallen in love with the technique within a week. The technique catches fish nearly year around. As proof, after looking through my fishing log, I noticed that I was able to get smallies to hit the swim jig all the way through the month of November and as early as March. It is simply a great bait for covering water fast and catching the active bass quickly. The first strike you get on a swim jig will "hook" you forever. I know I owe Jim Kast, the Illinois swim jig guru, many thanks along with Brovarney Baits for getting me started. Anyone interested in purchasing some of my Scout swim jigs wanting to get more pricing information, or just to talk swim jigs, you can email me at grahamj@district87.org.

AS ALWAYS
HAIL TO THE SMALLIE