

Ready, Set, Wait...

By Scott Bickett

Ready...

For me the turning of the leaves means ice fishing is close, so close I can almost smell it. I like most dedicated ice anglers, start getting a little antsy to get back out and start punching holes. To help cure my itch I start getting things ready early, well before the upcoming season. Being prepared not only helps me scratch that itch, it ensures my first trip out on the ice will be successful.

Step 1-Ice Auger: Get the Strike Master fired up again. Nothing will ruin a trip faster than getting to your spot and not being able to cut a hole open. I have started my auger once a month throughout the off season, so when it comes this fall, I know it's all ready to go. I put fresh gas/oil into the tank and change the spark plug. For the small cost of a new spark plug, I feel it makes sense to do this. Secondly, I check the blades for any wear. We finished last season drilling lots of holes chasing walleyes and jumbos, therefore its time to make a call to Strike Master for a new pair of auger blades. There is nothing that can beat the feel of drilling a hole with a new set of Lazer blades. Once the blades are secured, it's on to the next step.

Step 2- Electronics and Batteries: make sure our electronics are in order and batteries charged. I tend to charge my batteries a couple times a summer. Storing batteries with a low or no charge is a quick way to ruin them. While the batteries are off the unit and charging, I check all connections and wiring to make sure they're good for another season of hitting the ice running. One thing I have learned is ice fishing is very hard on your equipment. Simple preventative maintenance is a lot easier when it's warm in the fall versus the harsh conditions of winter.

Step 3- Ice fishing rods: make sure to spool new line on the rods used most often. For the rods I might not have used as often the previous winter, I will reverse spool on those reels. Reversing the spooling is something that can be done when preparing for either the open water or ice fishing season. Let me explain how this works if you have not done it before: just tie your line from the current reel (reel #1) to another reel (reel #2). Open the bail from reel #1 and begin reeling the line over to reel #2. By reversing the line that was on the reel, you now have fresh line that hasn't seen all the elements at the end of your poles and you save a few bucks.



One more step with the rods, I always give them a quick once over and make sure to check the eyelets and give each rod a fish-like bend. It's easy to miss a minor flaw, and could make all the difference in landing the big one.

Step 4-Tackle: now for the fun part. Organizing tackle and getting rods set up for the first trip out, this by far is my favorite part of getting ready. My tackle box gets pretty unorganized over the course of a season. We tend to drill lots of holes and "fish fast"- by this I mean, move quickly. Locating fish for clients on big water, we are always moving. In doing so, my jigs tend to get thrown where ever there is space left in my box. Before every season I like to pull all that stuff out and take inventory. I want to make sure I have all my favorite sizes and colors before it is time. My go to tactic for early ice walleyes is 4 or 6 lb. line with a 1/8 to 1/2 ounce Northland Buckshot rattle spoon. I like using light line for low visibility, and I like upsizing my spoons. I do this for two reasons. One, early ice walleyes are almost always aggressive. I am truly amazed, at times when even small fish will inhale a large spoon. Two, I can cover a lot more water. When I am in search mode a larger spoon allows me to drop quickly, jig fast, and move on. This eliminates unproductive water fast. One final tip, I set up my jigging rods with a small barrel swivel 18 to 24 inches above my spoon. The swivel will eliminate the spinning of your jigs when they come to rest in front of the fish.

Final Step-The last thing I do for the upcoming season is to get my ATV in the shop before it gets busy. Change the oil and make sure it is in good operating conditions. If you get stranded out in the middle of the lake you will be kicking yourself and possibly put yourself at risk. This is a good habit to get into to make sure your equipment is taken care of so that it will take care of you out on the ice. This is also a good time to take a second to add any ice fishing options you have wanted on your ATV. Chains for the tires, a windshield, hand/thumb warmers or any bucket holders.

Set...

Fall is here already, so take a weekend and get your ice fishing gear set out so you don't waste quality ice time messing around in your garage and organizing when you could be jigging up those early ice `eyes.

Wait...

Now that you are ready, all you have to do is wait for those lakes to finish icing up. For me, it will not come soon enough. Enjoy your fall and I hope to see you on the ice!