

Members Article - By Matthew Perdrau

PART 1 – Lipless crankbaits and how to keep them out of the snags.

Over the last two years I have acquired a lot of knowledge and experience in the use of lipless crankbaits. In stating that, what I aim to do over this two part article is pass on some information that I have learnt through the use of these very effective lures. In this first instalment I will focus more on the lipless crankbait lure itself, as well as some tips on outfits and rigging. Next month, in part two, I will share a few of my techniques targeting a freshwater favourite - the golden perch – at Lake Windamere and Googong Dam with lipless crankbaits.

Firstly though what is a lipless crankbait and how do they work? Lipless crankbait is the generic name given to a multitude of generally slender profiled, minnow shaped, sinking lures. Although the physical appearance of almost all lipless crankbaits may vary slightly (usually associated with brand or manufacturer) almost all of them have internal rattles, hence the nick names rattlin spot, rattle trap and vibration minnow. The slender profile coupled with the internal rattles and usually some sort of frontal positioned weighting system allow these lures to be cast like a bullet, whilst on the retrieve they exhibit a noisy, nose down, tight shimmying action.



A selection of the author's favourite lipless crankbaits rigged with single hooks for snag resistant fishing.

Although lipless crankbaits have been commercially available for decades, it's been over the last few years that the Australian fishing scene has seen a boom in the use of, and fishing success associated with, this type of lure. The Australian Bass Tournaments (ABT) are probably responsible for most of the lipless crankbait hype and while, as its name suggests, Bass are the main target these lures are just as effective when chasing Golden Perch and Murray Cod. In recent times, the reports of success surrounding these lures have been phenomenal, to the point where I (like many others anglers I'm guessing?) was convinced that I'd catch more fish just by tying one on! Well unfortunately it's not that easy but it's a start, and together with practice and developing confidence in your ability to use these lures you will see more fish coming your way.

There are many different brands of lipless crankbait and whilst each of them differ slightly in physical attributes they will all catch fish. The two attributes I place the most

importance on are weight and length. Lipless crankbaits range in size from about 35mm (2.5g) all the way up to big 340mm (500g) versions used for Tuna. When targeting Golden Perch I tend to stick to the 50mm(~10g), 60mm(~14g) and 70mm (~17g) sizes, with the 60mm being the best all rounder. When fishing shallower areas (1 to 2.5 meters) I use the lighter lure so as to keep it up off the bottom under a steady retrieve. Use a heavy lure in shallow areas and you'll have to speed up your retrieve to prevent the lure hitting the bottom and becoming weeded or, even worse, snagged. When fishing deeper areas (6 to 10 meters) I'll go for the heavier lure so I can keep the lure down near the bottom whilst under a steady retrieve. If you use a light lure in deep water you'll find it'll rise up off the bottom (and out of the strike zone) when steadily retrieved, and if you slow your retrieve down to compensate the lure will lose a lot of its action due to the lack of water pressure acting on it. As I said, I find myself using the middle size most of the time and while it's best suited to depths between 2 and 5 meters it's a great compromise for any shallower or deeper situations.

Most certainly one of the biggest disadvantages with lipless crankbaits, being negatively buoyant, is their unfortunate ability to get snagged. Let's face it, lures aren't getting any cheaper and the simplest way to stop losing them to snags is to stop throwing them out there! Right? Well not entirely. To prevent snagging and minimise lure losses I started rigging my lipless crankbaits with single hooks. At first I replaced both treble hooks with single lure hooks and my snag rate definitely decreased, but so did my hook up rate. So to combat the decrease in hook ups I further modified the lure to what I now believe is the best compromise. It consists of a single lure hook at the front and a small 'jig style' or 'assist' hook at the rear. It doesn't affect the action of the lure, the hook up rate is excellent and I haven't lost a single lure to a snag since I started rigging them this way.

Whilst lipless crankbaits can be used on either spinning or baitcast outfits, I prefer the latter. Given these lures have plenty of weight casting them on a baitcast outfit isn't as difficult as some other smaller lures and the accuracy gained through the use of a baitcaster is invaluable in areas of heavy structure. Generally I use a 100 sized low profile baitcast reel on a fairly stiff 1-3kg graphite rod spooled with braided line and a fluorocarbon leader. Line size is generally determined by the situation and I'll include specific examples in part two. Given lipless crankbaits don't have a lot of resistance and their action is only slight when compared to a bibbed lure the use of braided line is a big advantage. To be able to feel when the lure is working properly, as opposed to being fouled or weeded, plays a big part in becoming confident in the use of these lures and catching fish.

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PART 2 – Golden Techniques for using lipless crankbaits

My first memories of successfully fishing with lipless crankbaits goes back to the mid 1990s when I watched a good mate of mine absolutely clean up on the golden perch at Googong Dam on a lipless crankbait I had abandoned to the bottom tray of my tackle box. Since that day I have always carried at least one of these lures in my arsenal. However, over the years they have been less favoured to bibbed lures and spinnerbaits.



An average Windamere Golden taken on a lipless crankbait

Eager to reacquaint myself with the success of lipless crankbaits I pretty much exclusively use them at two very established yellowbelly impoundments; namely Lake Windamere and Googong Dam. At Windamere I focus my efforts around standing timber and rocky drop offs in deeper water to about 10 meters with the heavier 14 to 18 gram lures, whilst at Googong I pepper the abundant weed edges around shallow bays and points in water less than 3 meters with lighter 10 to 13 gram lures.

When fishing the vertical rock faces and standing timber at Windamere I simply cast my lipless crankbait to the base (at the waterline) of the structure, click the reel into gear and allow the lure to sink down beside the structure under tension. If there is a fish there it will usually hit the lure on the drop. However, there are some instances when the fish doesn't hit the lure until I've started retrieving it away from the base (underwater) of the snag. In these instances I believe the fish follow the lure to the bottom and is simply waiting for the lure to make a get away attempt before hitting it. During my morning and afternoon sessions I notice the fish prefer to hang out on the shaded side of the structure so this is where I concentrate my efforts at these times. During the middle of the day when the sun was high the fish seem to move into deeper water, particularly around underwater drop offs. I actually noticed this by accident whilst trolling a gently sloping bank at the dam wall end of the lake. Through the use of my sounder I discovered a stack of fish schooled up on the edge of an underwater gully that dropped from 4.5 meters to 8 meters. The gully runs parallel to the bank for about 500 meters, so using my sounder I simply follow the gully up and down, positioning my boat above one edge of the gully and casting my lipless crankbait across the gully and into the shallower water on the other side. On touchdown I pay out about 2 rod lengths of line and let the lure sink completely to the bottom. Once the lure has reached the bottom I engage in a slow and constant retrieve back to the boat, no jigging or twitching was required. My aim is to keep the lipless crankbait as close to the bottom as possible, especially as it approaches

the drop off at the edge of the gully, so every 5 or so meters I stop the retrieve, let the lure sink back to the bottom and then continue the retrieve. The schooled fish seemed to be cruising up and down the gully edge, just as I am in my boat, so it's usually only a matter time before my lure passes them and I'm hooked up.

Closer to home, my technique for fishing lipless crankbaits at Googong Dam differs considerably to that at Lake Windamere due to one main factor...water depth. Its common knowledge that Googong's Golden Perch shelter, cruise and feed amongst it's prolific weed edges. So instead of casting past the fish, letting the lure sink to the bottom and bringing it back into the strike zone, I now cast (from my boat) directly into the strike zone, commencing the retrieve immediately aiming to lure the fish out from the weed edges. Given I concentrate most of my efforts in water between one and three meters deep my first move is to downsize to a lighter lipless crankbait. This aids in my ability to keep the lure off the bottom and out of the weed, whilst maintaining an adequately paced retrieve that has the lure shimmying seductively.



James 'Kooka' Morgan with a nice Googong Golden

I also incorporate a slow lifting and lowering of the rod tip which serves two purposes. The first is to help the lure follow the downward sloping contour of the weed edge and bottom, and the second is to give the lure a little more of an erratic action. A slowing of the lure decreases its movement and resonance, whilst an increase in speed kicks the lure back into gear and increases its presence – mimicking the sort of characteristics displayed by a wounded or distressed baitfish. Using this method, assisted by either the wind or my electric

motor, I cast my way around some of Googong's shoreline catching (and releasing) up to a handful of golden perch and the odd Murray Cod each visit.

Regardless of whether I'm fishing at Windamere or Googong, my line and leader set up doesn't differ a lot. One baitcaster outfit is spooled with 15lb braid and a 15lb fluorocarbon leader and the other loaded with 20lb and a 20lb fluorocarbon leader. I tend to use the 15lb outfit in most situations, however I will upgrade to the heavier 20lb gear for added abrasion resistance when I'm fishing around hard structure like timber and rock. If the fish are a bit shy, following the lure but not committing, then I'll usually downsize my fluorocarbon leader to as low as 8lb. If they are in an opposite mood, hitting everything and anything, then I will revert to the heavier outfit for the shallower water situations at Googong. The slightly thicker diameter of the 20lb creates extra drag and helps to keep the lipless crankbait up off the bottom and also allows me to slow my retrieve a little.