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September 2019
Volume 105

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FROM THE EDITORS

August saw another enjoyable month of Bassin' In The Boot, as we roamed the state turning over new content to bring to you. This month saw Bassin' In The Boot fish many new waterbodies, and with new partners as well. A little divide and conquer for the Amelia trip saw us teaming up with Tangi Rod's Patrick Engerran for a guided tour of some intercoastal and swamp waters. We got to hang out with Zachary Dubois of Cajun Lures and Jaryd Lane in Kaplan, and visit with the new owner of Pro Gator Boats for our follow up article on the new direction he plans to take the storied company.

Much our content was quite literally just given to us by readers like you. Please keep the story ideas coming and let us know what you want to see covered in Bassin' In The Boot!

Geaux Bassin'!

- Charles Anderson & Jeffery Anderson

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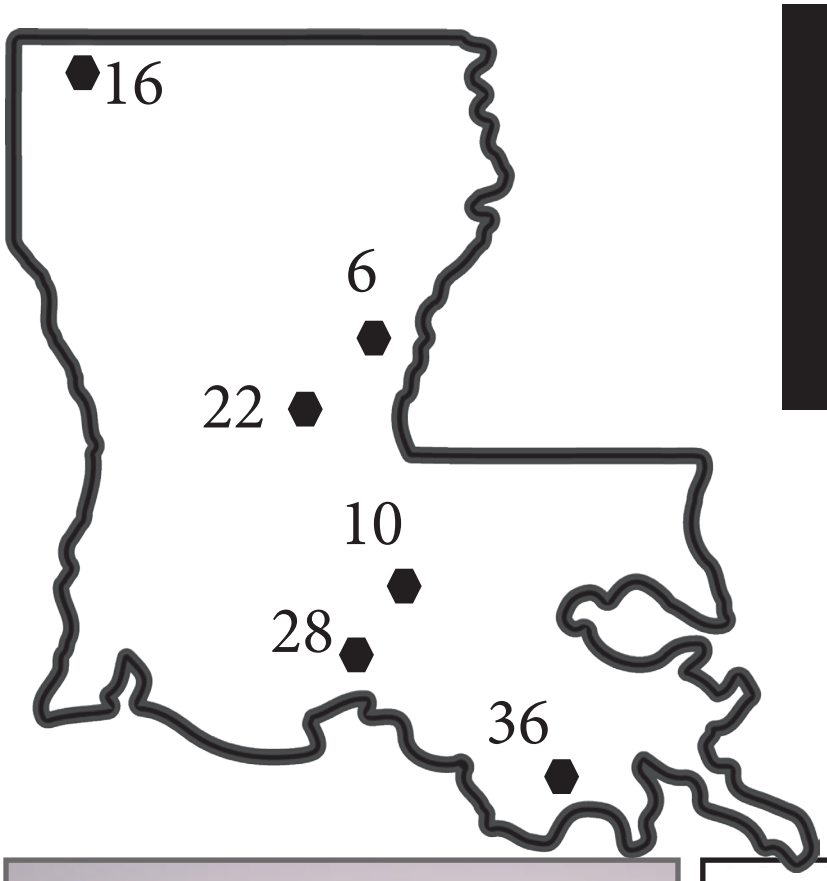

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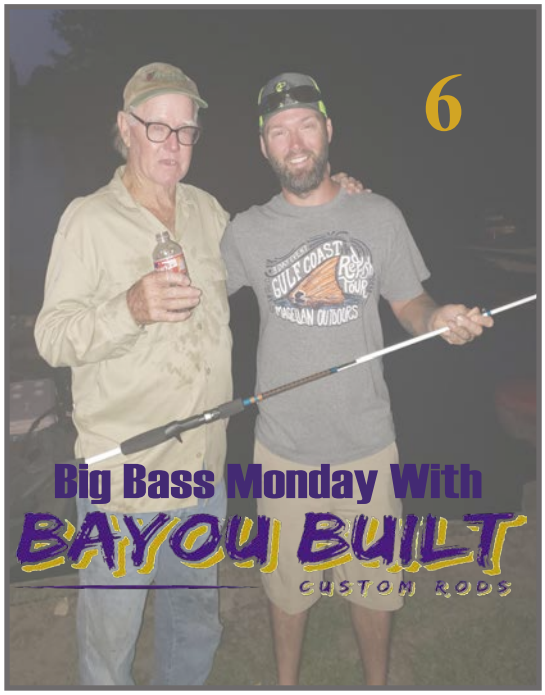

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Big Bass Monday With BAYOU BUILT CUSTOM RODS

Oftentimes here in America, especially in the Bible Belt we pray before sporting events. We pray for the safety of all of the participants, the fans, and all of those involved (even referees at the Saints' game). It was just such an event at the Bassin' In The Boot Big Bass Monday Tournament that Mr. Bobby Newsom told me, "I prayed for the person who needed the money the most to win this rodeo." Mr. Bobby in no way knew who his prayers would land on or that he'd be rewarded almost instantly for his prayers.

The event we were at was the Bassin' in the Boot Big Bass Monday Tournament which is held weekly, rotating between two bodies of water near Vidalia, La. Every Monday at 4:30 you can find a group of guys either at Lake St. John or, like on this particular Monday, Lake Concordia. There was a larger than normal crowd at the August 19th tournament because Mark Collins of Bayou Built was drawing for a rod built specifically for this event.

As with many small businesses, the largest obstacle of selling your product is simply letting potential customers know you have a quality product they may be interested in purchasing. Our mission at Bassin' in the Boot is to expose our readers and followers to the many companies that are creating products for the bass industry right here in Louisiana. Mark calls his business Bayou Built and like most things from the bayou you can expect his rods to be Louisiana tough with a flair you can only get in the Pelican State. Mark has been building rods for several years now and says he enjoys being able to supply anglers with a tool used to bring the joy of landing fish. Fishing has played a large part in Mark's life, growing up in South Louisiana fishing the bayous, barpits, rivers and The Mississippi River that makes up the many waterways of the state; he now hopes to transform his brand into a household name.

Started as a hobby, Bayou Built Rods was launched officially in January 2019. Mark's intro on http://www.bayoubuiltrods.com says, "I have always enjoyed fishing and also enjoy creating things. I toyed with the idea of building my own fishing rod as a way to join the two and to also get exactly what I wanted from a fishing rod." Don't think

Pictured This Page:
Mark Collins of Bayou Built Custom Rods presents Mr. Bobby Newsom with a custom-built 6'8" medium-heavy, fast-action, Bayou Built Custom Rods casting rod. Many thanks to Mark for the beautiful rod, and to Mr. Bobby for being a regular at our Big Bass Mondays!

Pictured Opposite Page:
Mr. Trey Buckles, the Bassin' In The Boot Big Bass Monday winner for August 19th on beautiful Lake Concordia. Mr. Buckles with his 3.57# winning fish that garnered him $500 on his birthday!

Be sure to check out Bayou Built Custom Rods on Facebook as 'Bayou Built' and on their website at: www.bayoubuiltcustomrods.com

these rods are made to just be pretty, no sir. Mark adds, "This not only goes for aesthetics but for performance as well. I was tired of the same 7' MH rod that was being sold in stores and saw an opportunity to create what I wanted……The beauty with custom rods is they can be whatever you want them to be. They can be as minimal or as wild as you can imagine." For more information on Bayou Built Rods give them a click and see what Mark can create for your fishing rod needs.

With Bayou Built Rods for raffle and the field generating $500 to the winner, it was sure to be a fun evening on the water, bassin' in the boot. As fate would have it, Mr. Bobby's prayer landed on Trey Buckles, who just happened to be celebrating his 20th birthday. Trey won the tournament with a 3.57# greenback and reaped the reward of $500 for his efforts on the evening. No doubt a 20 year old could greatly benefit from an added gift for their birthday. Perhaps it was divine intervention, luck, hard work, or a combination of the 3 but we are glad to have Trey as part of our tournament scene.

Mr. Bobby on the other hand is simply a pleasure to be around. He is 80 plus years young and has an immense storage of fishing knowledge, stories, and even a crankbait collection he will gladly show you pictures of but adds "no none are for sale!" Mr. Bobby lives in Gloster, MS but lives the life most of us only dream of, traveling with boat and camper to the area camp grounds and staying during the warmer months of the year. Thanks to Mark Collins at Bayou Built Rods, Mr. Bobby now has a little more gear to pack after winning the Bayou Built Rod raffle. As you can tell in the picture Mr. Bobby was extremely happy to win the rod from Bayou Built and we couldn't have hoped for a better guy to win it! Now he can fish with a rod built on the bayou as he goes throughout the area bass fishing!

We hope you will join us at one of our Big Bass Monday's on scenic Lake St. John, or bass haven Lake Concordia, to take in a little Bassin' In The Boot!

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First light over the Henderson swamp just north of I-10, awaiting the official time of first cast.

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"New Waters"

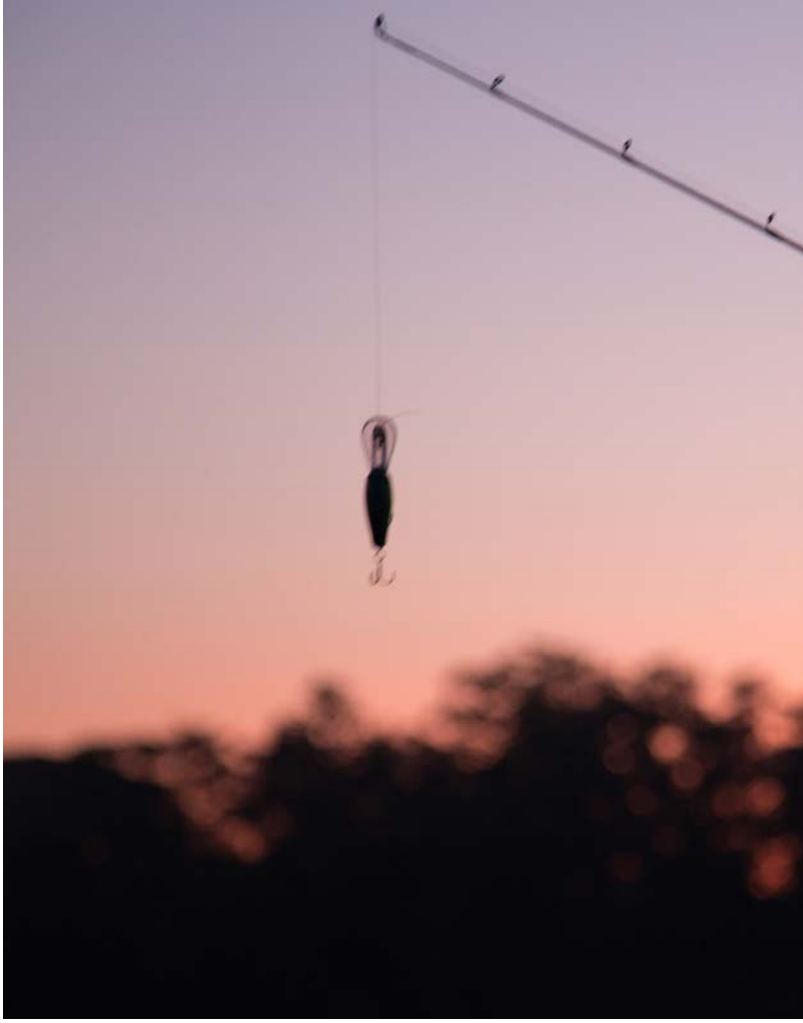
On a Saturday not unlike any other I woke up in Lafayette, Louisiana at 4 o'clock that morning. I jumped up and was packed and out of the hotel room in no time as the excitement just hung in the air. The anticipation had been building for weeks in prepping for this day. Today I was going to get to fish for the very first time in the Atchafalaya Basin, launching out of Henderson right between the I-10 bridges. For years I have drove over the basin bridges always wishing to fish down below, and thanks to one club, today would be the day.

You see back in January, my brother and I had decided to fish with Mid South Bass Club out of New Roads. We made this decision for one reason and one reason alone; we would get to fish unfamiliar, new, and different waters of the state. On the schedule were many different bodies of water, most we had never been on and a couple we didn't know existed. Now for the guys down south don't laugh, but Henderson, Lake Verrett launching at Doiron's Landing, Old River (not the one we grew up on), Saline Larto out of Woodson's Landing, and False River from Morels Landing grabbed our attention as all were waters we had never fished. The few safety nets were Lake St. John, Lake Concordia, and Lake Bruin; all oxbows we have fished and were familiar with the characteristics and the fish patterns. It was a no-brainer to join the club.

Mother Nature had a few tricks up her sleeve this year as you recall the water got high, stayed high, and just now is back to a semi-normal stage in most areas. This high water caused our club to move two locations and a tropical storm caused a two week delay in one tournament.

It has been a year at the mercy of weather and water. Although we didn't get to fish Old River or Lake Verrett, we were still able to see a few new bodies of water. The Lake Verrett tournament was moved to False River due to water levels. This was a disappointment because we had already fished False River in February and here we were right back in April. Boating fish in both False River tournaments proved to be a morale booster for Team Anderson, considering it was a new waterbody. Just after blastoff, as we ran out of a shotgun start, a front moved in just after safe light and the fish reacted accordingly by locking jaws, at least in the area we had planned to fish. Fish were harder to come by but we managed to weigh-in gaining those ever valuable club points. The second tournament on that particular oxbow the weather was bluebird clear skies, 150 mph winds (ok 10-12 mph), and blistering sunshine. The conditions could not have been more different barring a hail storm. Ever glad to add a few points at weigh in, we were happy to get out of New Roads, and gained a new appreciation for the guys that fish there and consistently catch big fish.

Between our two visits to New Roads we fished familiar waters launching at Spokane on Lake St. John for a non-typical Sunday tournament. The Sunday schedule was to avoid overlapping a major fundraiser tournament the Saturday of that weekend. The fundraiser tournament had a huge turnout and an early weigh in caused by an incoming late winter storm. We fished that tournament in preparation for the club tournament on Sunday. The pre-fishing did absolutely no good as the temperature dropped nearly 40 degrees from Saturday's weigh in to Sunday's blastoff. High winds out of the north made fishing anywhere but in the north trees a near impossibility. Most of the anglers headed north immediately for Harmon's (a bayou on the end of the lake



surrounded by cypress and known to be fertile spawning grounds). We followed suit knowing that if we could snag a few early before we froze to death we might could pull off a good sack and make some headway on a home lake. The fish and weather proved to be a bigger, tougher opponent than we expected. Again not performing as well as we hoped, we weighed fish and left Lake St. John with an idea. The idea? Launching Bassin' in the Boot as a magazine!

The month of May brought us back to a familiar water body in Lake Concordia launching out of Lakeview Lodge on the south end of the lake. Lake Concordia being a lake in my backyard, I fish it regularly. I seldom fish it however under the conditions we faced on May 11, 2019. The lake was extremely high, rainy, foggy, and to top it off, the lake was made "idle only" half way through the tournament! This caused a big change in the game

Cranking the sun up readying for first cast in the Henderson swamp.

plan and really affected the productivity of anglers on the water.

On to June and more tricks from Mother Nature. The Old River tournament was relocated to Black River Lake, a nearby oxbow system with bayous and runouts feeding two separate connected oxbows, Horseshoe and Black River Lake. These two lakes are joined by Workinger Bayou. Warm cooperative weather helped to yield good results for bags across the club with plenty of fish being caught. The weather for once was not a factor outside of moving the location to Black River Lake.

July, hot July, placed us on Saline Larto launching out of Woodson's Landing in Deville, La. The tournament, being delayed two weeks due to a tropical storm, was held under conditions of extreme heat and lower waters than the 3 week earlier pre-fishing trip presented. The day proved to be a scorcher with many teams heading to the larger bodies of water, Saline and Larto Lakes; although several teams stayed in the bayous and flipped the cypress trees lining the middle of the canals. Fishing was tough but we had an enjoyable day on the water. The highlight of the trip had to be Uncle Leon of Woodson's Landing. A colorful character, who has lived on the land surrounding Woodson's Landing most all of his adventurous life; one that includes a career with the sheriff's department and getting shot in the line of duty. He meets no stranger and immediately took to talking with us as if he'd known us our whole lives. He even put us up for the night at the campground.

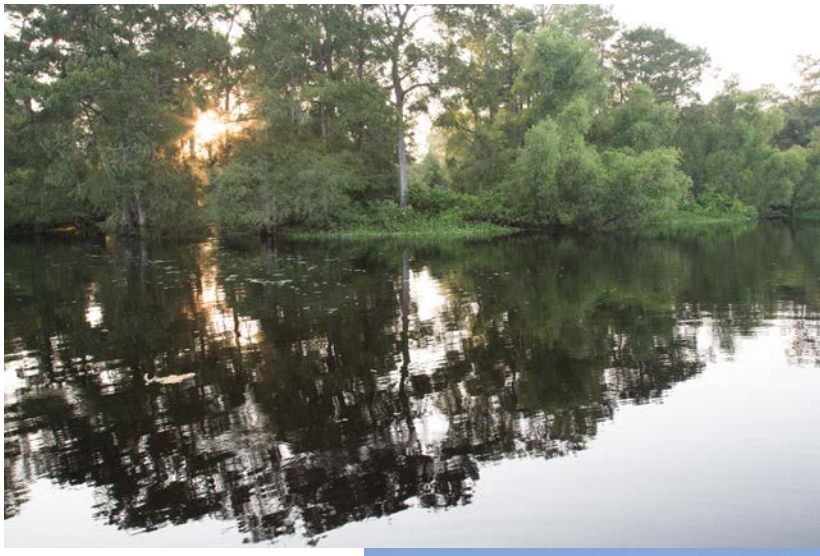
Now finally it was August and was the tournament we looked forward to for weeks. We were going to get to fish the famous Atchafalaya River Basin. A land of mystery, it offers a unique experience to everyone who ventures into the infamous swamp. The land of Amos Moses, alligators, nutria rat, cypress trees, and endless water and canals cut through the swampland over the years. The swamp on this day would not disappoint. As we launched at the public launch there between the I-10 spans we entered an area only seen from the distant lanes of traffic above for us, for years. I have always drove on the interstate above, wishing to fish down below. Every trip to south Louisiana I would dream of fishing down there. That dream was now a reality.

As we "blasted off" idling towards the channel marked with the green and red lights above on the bridge we decided to head north first. We took it easy out the gate just puttering along until a co-angler slipped by and opened it up, allowing us to follow a path in unfamiliar waters. We settled on a point we had picked out in our planning and waited on the time for first cast. We fished and fished. Throwing crankbaits up and down, parallel and across the point yielded nothing more than a gar. We turned to the customary black

and blue and junebug plastics flipping every tree we could find, cypress, willow and even an occasional pine to no avail. We had visited with area plastics manufacturer Zachary Dubois of Cajun Lures the previous day and he told us everything we needed to be successful. Everything but the fish's location! We moved around cautiously, not knowing the swamp like several of our co-anglers seemed to as they sped by full speed. Eventually we found some familiar looking terrain with trees and a bank and a point with several floating camps tied up. It looked like home lakes to an extent. "Let's catch some fish!", I thought; but within minutes of finding welcoming fishing in rolled the storm! It started to rain and the wind picked up with a much desired cooling of the day. Hoping to catch a top water bite we started throwing buzzbaits and frogs but the results were the same. No fish. We did manage to find a couple alligators way back in a dead end canal, reinforcing we had in fact been fishing in the swamp!

The day proved tough in the fishing category but by far a great day. We got to fish the heart of the south Louisiana swampland. The heartbeat of the Cajun Culture, the way of life and the marshlands that helped shape that way of life may have won this particular Saturday but we will be back. We will return to the swamps and we will catch fish and enjoy the land of Acadiana and the Cajuns!

Next month is the Mid-South Bass Club Classic and it will be held on Lake Bruin in St. Joseph, La. Lake Bruin is a familiar body of water; an old oxbow of the Mighty Mississippi, that should serve us well in our hopes to win the title of, if nothing else, "The Year of the Weather" tournament trail.



Early sights around the Henderson swamp. From a sunrise through the willows, to the lone cypress, and punching the mats, Henderson provided plenty of varying cover to fish.

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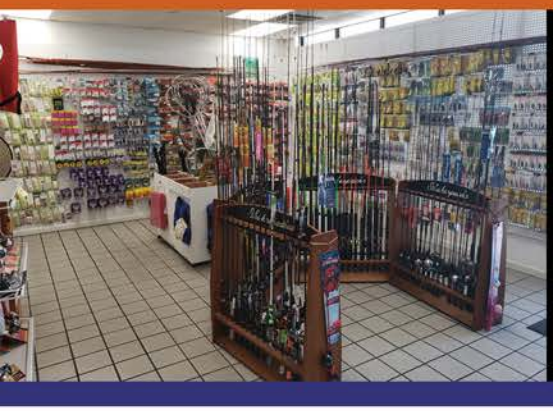

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CONTINUITY TO GROW

Last month we covered Mr. Leroy Moore and his beloved Pro Gator Boats. The brand has been quietly living on in northwest Louisiana since the 1960's, and continues to make some of the strongest, most well-built hulls on the market. The calling card of the Pro Gator Boat is its double hull design Mr. Leroy came up with about 50 years ago. This double hull design produces a boat so strong every Gator Bay comes with a lifetime structural warranty, while every Pro Gator bass boat comes with a ten year stump warranty. Riveting isn't it? What is perhaps even more riveting is the recent decision by Mr. Leroy to retire after more than 60 years building boats.

Now if you think Mr. Leroy is just going to ride off into the sunset and leave his company hanging, you don't know Mr. Leroy. As we covered last month Mr. Leroy has shopped around for a buyer that would be as dedicated and remain as true to his brand and loyal customers as he has been his entire career. He has found just that buyer in Mr. Lee Smith. Mr. Smith a career educator, musician, and band director fell in love with the Pro Gator brand. Lee grew up in the Bossier City, LA area, studied at Northwestern State, University of North Texas, and SMU. He was a drummer for the U.S. Army, and a long time educator and band director at several Texas high schools in the DFW area.

Mr. Lee's first experience with Pro Gator Boats came in the form of a boat he acquired from his mom. Lee says his "mom bought a Pro Gator Boat and wasn't using it." On one of his trips back to visit, that was his signal to take the boat back to Dallas with him to enjoy with his family. After a minor tune up to the boat that had set up, Lee was on the water in his new-to-him Pro Gator with his family for the majority of the next two summers. His first family outing in the Pro Gator was especially memorable for Lee as he took his daughter out fishing and "the first trip she caught 5 fish." With the boat in hand and a successful trip like that, it was off to the tackle store to buy more rods and fishing gear; they were hooked! The boat that started it all? Why it was a 1998 Model 170V that had set up for some years. To this day, "with only minor preventative maintenance, the boat handles big water well and is still rock solid," Lee says.

Over the years fishing his Pro Gator, there was of course the occasion the boat needed service or a minor spare part or repair. That is how he became acquainted with Pro Gator's owner Mr. Leroy Moore. Over time the two would discuss the history of the company and the reasons why the name carries the connotation of quality. With Mr. Moore's storied career, it left Lee wondering just what was his exit strategy? Mr. Moore is still in excellent health, but he has been building boats for over 60 years; everyone needs to enjoy the fruits of their life's work at some point. Lee figured that time was coming close for Mr. Leroy. Once he inquired, he was delighted to hear Mr. Leroy had agreed to sell the company to an excited buyer, looking to ensure the brand was carried on. The timeline was an approximate two year transition. Lee let him know if for any reason that deal did not work out, he would like to discuss what an alternate offer may look like.

At the beginning of the next year Lee called to check on Mr. Leroy and Pro Gator Boats. As it turns out, the deal to sell the company was one that couldn't be made, and Leroy was again looking for a buyer for Pro Gator Boats. Lee knew this was his chance.

For Lee, who grew up working dairy farms south of Bossier City, an opportunity to own a company in his old stomping grounds was something he just could not pass up. Lee says "I love the product and the people so I want to see the product continue on," so making sure the company is operated into the future was a no-brainer. Even no-brainers aren't challenge free however.

Lee is currently learning the ins and outs of the workflows, some 50 years in the making. The craft of building a Pro Gator is one carried out by truly skilled craftsmen. Craftsmen whose methods and skills have been developed with Leroy's leadership, and are integral to maintaining the brand's continuity. The passion to maintain both the highest levels of quality and highest of skilled craftsmen is a make or break thing for Lee. Lee says Mr. Leroy's son-in-law Troy "knows the ins and outs of building these boats" and will be staying on with the company. And of course Lee is making the most of his time with Mr. Leroy, and says "he is going to teach me as much as possible so that we can keep it true to the brand."

For Lee, owning such a storied company is both an honor and a challenge. Lee says he wants to "keep the ownership and pride of the product and stay true to the brand" while also "modernizing production, updating the tooling line, increase efficiencies, trim some cost through efficiency gains, and stay true to the process." That's no simple task when you are talking about the process that was quite literally a pioneering process in the industry. Much of the equipment used to build boats is the same equipment Mr. Leroy had to have custom made to accomplish his demanding production

procedures decades ago. Take for instance the resin gun. This particular resin gun still in use has shot resin for every Pro Gator Boat made since the 1970's when Mr. Leroy and a friend of his designed and built it. The special thing about this resin gun? It gives the exact spray required to produce the strongest fiberglass laminate possible. Sure it has to be adjusted, which is why the gun features a remote control that akjusts a solenoid to control the resin feed; a feature it has had since the 1970's! Unbelievable, and possibly unreplaceable.

The equipment can certainly be a challenge. Take for instance a 1,000 p.s.i. foam gun in use since the 80's that gives fits from time to time, but as Leroy says when asked if it needs replacing, "it still works." And while the equipment may offer some challenges, so do changing times and shifting markets. As we are all aware the fishing and boating industries are in a constant state of change. Keeping up with some 60 or so years of change is no small feat, but given the fact that things change faster the more they change, the next 30 years will see 10 fold the change of the past 60. With a product like Pro Gator, it isn't the inherent quality that is the challenge but the ability to keep pace with change while maintaining the highest of qualities.

That pace setting change is one thing Lee has hit the ground running with. Even before taking over ownership of the company, as he and Mr. Moore work through those logistics, he has taken an aggressive approach to tempering the impacts of change on the brand. Since being involved with Pro Gator, Lee has become the face of the brand on the sales front by forming new partnerships. With many of the dealership partners lost in the years following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina along the gulf coast, and the years of the Great Recession, the once thriving dealership network for Pro Gator has dwindled. Lee has seen to it that no stone goes unturned here. Having hit the road on numerous occasions Lee has met with and visited at least 30 dealerships, ever pushing the Pro Gator product. Rebuilding his network of trusted sales generating dealers is priority number two for Lee, narrowly behind that of mastering all that is production and manufacturing for Pro Gator. Along with his efforts on the road, Lee has taken an aggressive approach on social media pushing the new image and new logo of the Pro Gator brand. An image Lee is crazy about, and one, as we witnessed in our meeting, Mr. Leroy is still warming up to. And while a new face of the brand and new logo may be tough to swallow for Mr. Leroy, Lee's dedication to his brand has to comfort him that he's heading in the right direction.

For his efforts, Lee has recently acquired partnerships for Pro Gator with two huge names in the boating industry. In early August Lee cemented an agreement for Pro Gator to become a licensed and certified OEM dealer for Tohatsu engines. The Japanese company founded in 1922 has been producing quality outboards since 1956. In fact many of the outboards we have known under different names, have actually always been Tohatsu produced engines. For instance, all Nissan outboard engines which have ever been sold in the United States are actually Tohatsu engines with a Nissan nameplate. Since 2011, all Evinrudes smaller than 15hp were actually made by Tohatsu. So you can see the history and the quality that is being pursued in forming new partnerships.

Another awesome accomplishment is the late August partnership with Mercury Marine; a name needing no history lesson. This now brings the engine selections on your fully custom Pro Gator up to three giants in the industry; Mercury, Tohatsu, and Evinrude. Along with these great new partnerships, Pro Gator has expanded its dealership network,

Pictured Left: New owner Lee Smith shows company founder, Leroy Moore, the new Pro Gator Boats logo for the first time. The two had a great discussion regarding the new logo and the direction the brand is going.

Pictured Right: That new direction is more evident with Pro Gator Boats newly forged partnerships, growing the engine options from Envinrude to also include Mercury and Tohatsu.

making deals with a few new dealerships to carry or sale the Pro Gator Boat lineup. Lee continues to pursue dealerships, and is currently working with even more prospective dealers from the northwest corner of the state, and along I-20, as well as the I-10 corridor in southwest Louisiana. So check them out for the dealership nearest you!

But fear not Pro Gator fans, while there may be those of you thinking his time in education may not have prepared him to build one of Leroy's custom Pro Gators, you can rest assured he will rely on the continuity brought by the Moore family and their knowledge for years to come. As mentioned, Mr. Leroy's son-in-law will stay on with the brand, but the plans also call for Mr. Leroy himself to hang around; more so in a mentoring way but nonetheless to have a presence for as long as he wishes. As we said, Leroy isn't the type to ride off into the sunset, and because of the great relationship Lee and Leroy have, Lee welcomes the concept because he feels even now "Mr. Moore has a lot of teaching left to do [for me]. But the one thing I want is for Mr. Moore to be proud of this company [under my ownership]". As Mr. Moore says, "when you hear the customers over the years talk about Pro Gator Boats over other boats, that's what makes you proud." Based on Lee's full-fledged approach, we can say it appears he feels the same way.

Aside from the new pizazz and a new logo, what exactly is it that Lee Smith, a former educator and band director wishes to bring to Pro Gator? In his own words he "wants to keep ownership and pride of product and stay true to the brand" no matter what changes he may bring. He says the product is what drives him here, as he has "a desire to see the product continue and to see at the end of 30 years from now, being able to say 'hey, that's what we did; that's what we built!'" And although education has provided a source of pride like no other, with young people as the product it's simply a different type of pride and approach. For Lee "being from education, when the kids are the product and they have gone on and done their thing it's great, but it's their thing. Here we can, at the end of thirty years say 'WE Did That'. In education there are so many things out of your control, where here YOUR standard is what dictates the quality of the product." The quality of the product is certainly non-negotiable for the Moore's and for Lee Smith. As Lee's wife says, "Don't stop until you are proud." I see Lee breaking this rule a little from day one, simply because the legacy is something to be proud of immediately,

but don't let that fool you, as that also lets me know that on his watch, Lee won't stop until everything he has done with Pro Gator has made him proud. For one because that is what he has said he would do to make Mr. Moore proud, and two, because that's what his wife told him to do!

At Bassin' In The Boot we have certainly enjoyed our time with the Moore and Smith families, and have appreciated greatly the craftsmanship and quality we got to witness taking shape in their production facility. With the new branding, direction, and partnerships, the guys at Pro Gator Boats look to bring you the best quality boat on the water for years to come. So if you are in the market, take the opportunity to have a boat custom made from top to bottom just for you. After all, 'Nothing rules the water like a Gator!'

Interested in owning a Pro Gator, or want to learn more? Check out Pro Gator on the web at:
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Larto-Saline Complex

Sunrise through the lone cypress and parting clouds over the Larto-Saline complex on a warm summer morning.

Launching from any one of the Larto-Saline Complex launches, one would not think you would have access to such an abundance of over 8,200 acres of fishable waters. The complex actually consists of more than three separate lakes, interconnected by the many channels and bayous weaving their way across the vast wooded and agricultural lands surrounding the 175 miles of shoreline of the lakes. The largest of the three lakes is Saline Lake, and is characterized by a more expansive main lake branching out into many fingers and bayous. The middle sized lake is Larto Lake. Larto is a typical oxbow channel lake formed near the confluence of the Black River and the Red River. The smaller of the top three lakes is Shad Lake. Shad Lake is formed from the expanse of the backwaters of several of the larger interconnecting bayous such as: Buffalo Bayou, Long Branch, Big Slough, Big Bayou, and Cross Bayou. Adding to Shad Lake's area, is its interconnectedness into two smaller lakes, Burt Lake and Babays Lake.

The complex as a whole is all considered backwater to the Red River, Black River, and Little River. Over the years, the primary inundation waters have shifted from each of these three rivers, and with varying flood conditions, any of the three waterbodies could again become the primary water source for the complex. While a natural waterbody, the complex has been artificially stabilized through many, many man-made weirs, levees, dams, spillways, and diversion canals. The initial stabilization of the water levels was performed in 1959 with the design and construction of the Larto Lake Dam by the State of Louisiana. This original dam was intended to maintain the levels at approximately 36' above Mean Sea Level (MSL), and was raised about a decade later to 37' MSL.

Contributing to the water levels in the complex, the runoff watershed of the complex is approximately 142 square miles of surrounding forest and agricultural lands in Catahoula, LaSalle, Avoyelles, and Rapides parishes. To manage this runoff the earthen spillway is a 257' wide structure with four 4'x7' flapper gates. The structure contains one drawdown gate capable of lowering the complex approximately 1" per day down to a maximum depth below pool of 6 feet, down to a minimum elevation of 31' MSL. The management and maintenance of the lakes and the control structures is performed by the State of Louisiana through a partnership between LDWF and LaDOTD. The authority for enforcement on the lake rests supremely with the LDWF. However, the "lake authority" for Larto Lake is considered to be the Catahoula Parish Police Jury.

Pre-dawn preparing for blastoff out of Woodsun's Landing. With at least two tournaments launching there were well over 50 boats lined up and headed out of the bayou on this morning.

One challenge the complex is experiencing of late is one widely known across the state with giant Salvinia. Historically hydrilla was the primary vegetation requiring management on the complex. Over the years weirs and flood barriers have reduced the influence of many problem vegetations and overall had been successfully managed, until 2012 when giant Salvinia was first discovered in the complex. Since then, due to numerous high water events, Salvinia has spread and can be found in almost every extent of the complex, with some areas completely matted. The Salvinia is being targeted for management by LDWF but due to high water events, currents and winds, and extensive boat traffic, the spread of Salvinia has yet to be curtailed. When we visited this year there were some channels you could run through that looked like a field on dry land, but were in fact channels with boats running full speed. Quite the sight to say the least.

The waters of the complex play host to an extensive fish population with over 60 species commonly found across 17 families of fish. Most popular game fish and eating fish commonly found in Louisiana freshwater can be harvested in the waters of the complex. The complex is a favorite among pan-fisherman and routinely produces generous harvests of white crappie, black crappie, and various species of "bream" including bluegill and various sunfish species. While not as popular a destination for catfishing, the complex does boast a healthy population of channel, blue, and flathead catfish. The bass population includes white bass, yellow bass, striped bass, northern largemouth, Florida largemouth, and hybrid bass.

Bass fishing is likely the second most popular fishing that occurs across the complex. Due to increased popularity of bass fishing in the complex, in recent years the state has undertaken several bass stockings. Most notably in the three years following the 2014 complex drawdown due to a failed weir, Florida largemouth bass were stocked in 2015, 2016, and 2017 at a rate of approximately 80,000-85,000 fingerlings per year. This was in an effort to restore the genetic influence of FLMB to its early 2000's levels of over 10%, but was only 8.9% for the year with most recent available data.

A popular fishing destination, the complex is accessible through more than 10 launches. One of our favorites on the west end is Woodson's Landing. With access to the west end bayous and close access to Saline Lake, you'll find no better personality than "Uncle Leon" who owns and runs Woodson's Landing. Like much of

Running through fields of salvinia in the interconnecting bayous of the complex sometime left us wondering where the channels ended and dry land began.

the complex, the west end offers no shortage of types of cover to fish for bass. From flipping cypress to punching mats, cranking points, to worming flooded structure, there's an abundance of targets harboring bass. Popular color soft plastics in the turbid waters include darks like black and blue and junebug, but also maroons and plums. If cranking cypress knees, we would recommend a chartreuse-black back or bream colored squarebill with a little flash of color, or a blue-back silver combo.

Next time you are in the area go checkout this beautiful lake and bayou complex. Go see Uncle Leon at Woodson's Landing and get some of his famous Cajun seasoning, and take in a conversation with an absolute gem of a fellow. Enjoy your time Bassin' In The Boot on the Larto-Saline Complex!

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Once a Cajun...

Zachary Dubois was born and raised a Cajun. Raised at one of the major crossroads in Vermillion Parish, his upbringing in Kaplan, LA qualifies him to be full-blooded Cajun. His decision to memorialize that status by studying at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, forever emblazoned him a Cajun.

While in college at ULL Zach studied Industrial Design. When asked why he chose that course of study, ever the carefree nature, Zach responds: "I was in line for that at registration day and I ended up liking it, so I stuck with it." Now how he got in that line is story best told by his mom, but according to Zach her take on it was that he didn't want to be in the General Studies line and this was next on the list. However Zach truly wound up on this course, I believe we can all agree it was a great decision.

But even before his studies at ULL, Zach grew up a fisherman. According to an article in The Acadiana Advocate, a fitting name for where I first read some background on Zach and Cajun Lures, Zach has "been fishing since [he] was small, and [has] always had a fascination with bait." This fascination, now full blown passion, led Zach to fish competitively while at ULL for the Ragin' Cajuns Bass Fishing Team. In competitive fishing, even the best are always looking for an edge. It was just that pursuit of gaining a competitive advantage that first edged Zach into lure making for him and his teammates. They would fish on lakes across the country and would look to Zach for the competitive edge through is lure creations.

Cajun Lures has become a household name for bass fisherman throughout Louisiana and is quickly growing along the Gulf Coast. Zach's success was something as a community we nearly missed out on. Through his studies at ULL Zach entered a competition to gain admission to a competitive entrepreneurship program at ULL. His entry was actually a molded ice chest lid geared towards fisherman, with seats, rod holders, and other customizations to improve the ever pricier models of ice chest's usability for fisherman. The idea and his preparation with 3-D modeling and manufacturing plans earned him an overall second place finish in the pitch competition, landing him the desired admission into the incubator style program. Fortunately for us bass fisherman, the ice chest industry had just too high of

Pictured Left: Scale model of a bass boat completely designed by Cajun Lures owner Zachary Dubois in completion of his senior design project.

Pictured Below: Fresh Crackin' Craws hanging and awaiting packaging in the Cajun Lures workshop, a candy store for sure for any bass fisherman.

costs to make an entrepreneurial entry feasible for a college student from a small town. This was the first near miss for Cajun Lures potentially never being.

The second near miss came as a result of Zach's continued excellence in his educational career. As a part of his senior design Zach designed and created a scale model of a very snazzy bass boat. The hull design was completed with 3-D modelling software and offered sleek yet edgy profiles, along with features only dreamed of on boats from that time, such as a centered pilot seat in a bass boat, and brake/turn signals. Additional design feats included negative fiberglass impressions in the boat mold; a very tricky manufacturing process for fiberglass molding. Those had to be pleasing accomplishments, along with his ability to work with some of the best in the business thanks to a partnership with Skeeter Boats for his project. His design prowess and experience landed Zach his first job out of college, working for a marine design and manufacturing company that builds ships. Fortunately for bass fishing, it was this job that provided Zach the means and the time to dive headlong into what would become Cajun Lures.

From his time fishing for the Ragin' Cajuns, Zach had his lure making craft in development. What began as an initial design that was 3-D modeled and 3-D printed, then cast into a silicon mold, and filled with melted down retired soft plastics, has now blossomed into a full time career. Much like that first hand-poured, silicon mold creation, which caught fish on the first trip to the water, the attention to detail, pursuit of perfection, and efficient design process is still alive and well in the Cajun Lure lineage. From his days of competitive fishing, breaking down waterbodies to determine and design the most efficient lure for catching fish in that waterbody, to his time analyzing the production and packaging process for Cajun Lures Zach has never lost sight of efficiency and his roots in Industrial Design.

His roots, again something he would never leave behind, ultimately manifested in the name of his company. Growing up in Louisiana in and of itself does not make you a Cajun, no matter what pop-culture tells us. But for those on the outside that see the hype around the "cajun" persona in pop-culture, they expect us all to park our pirogue at the dock and pat our pet alligator when we get home. This over cajunization of Louisiana proved to be a hurdle for Zach in naming his lure making company. It was just this that Zach recounted to us in how he chose Cajun Lures. "Cajun Baits came to mind and I didn't want to do it because it is saturated…but I kept coming back to it," Zach told us. So what's in a name? For this one it turns out, quite a bit, and all that is Cajun about Zach and his lures meant abandoning the name to avoid what may even be a potential pop from pop-culture simply wasn't an option. Cajun wasn't simply put in front of Lures to "sell" a product, not with Zach. Through the process he says that he eventually just accepted the fact that a Cajun influence is what he brought to his craft and

Pictured Top: Racks and racks of Zydeco Shad in various colors including Purple Belly, The Juice, and others.

Pictured Below: Packaged Cooyan Croakers hanging on display inside the Cajun Lures workshop.

Cajun Lures was born. At least in mind; getting on paper would prove to be another story.

Once Zach had settled on Cajun Lures, LLC., he had to get the paperwork to make it official. To his dismay, when he searched the Louisiana Secretary of State website, Cajun Lures returned a hit; the name was taken! Or so it seemed. After an initial shock and recalibration, Zach dug deeper into the Secretary of State data. Ultimately he ended up having to call and get someone with the State on the phone to confirm it, but the prior Cajun Lures, first registered in 1982 had lapsed, and was again available for use. That cemented the process and gave Zach the formal acknowledgement that Cajun Lures, LLC was a go.

With the name picked out and armed with several molds and his honed craft, Cajun Lures became his second full-time job. From the beginning as his part time gig, Zach poured a full time effort into his company. This is evident in the logo and packaging design, all done in-house by Zach himself. With his talents and skills from his Industrial Design background, and his do it himself attitude, he has been able to build early success by keeping costs down and self-performing tasks that many other lure makers either couldn't make the leap with or had to outsource to expensive

design services. This is also the case with his workshop setup.

In the beginning his workspace was a corner of his father's shop that he would be in before dawn working before his full-time gig in the ship building industry, and then back at it until the late hours of the night and into once again the early hours of the morning. As life progressed, so would the Cajun Lure's workspace. Zach married Kayla and the two began their life together with a new home in the Kaplan area. This meant Zach got a new larger working area, albeit still modest at about 12'x16'. Zach and Cajun Lures still occupy this space, and there have been many changes to his production and his growth within this footprint.

With the larger footprint Zach has been able to grow from his manual injection of a single 4-6 cavity mold, to his semi-manual injection of many 4-6 cavity molds, and most recently to his production system allowing him to shoot 36-50 cavity molds in seconds. This new system has of course hampered his working space but the 600-700% increased productivity is worth the cramped environment he says. Ever the popular hangout for friends, Zach says his workshop can get a little crowded from time to time, but he enjoys having friends come by and even lend a helping hand from time to time. In addition to friends, Cajun Lures is a bit of a family affair when a big order or production run hits. Often times Zach's mom and wife can be found stuffing Crackin' Craws or Cooyon Croakers into his signature packaging.

On the day we visited, there was no production going on in the workshop, but Zach was busy giving back to his community and was shooting and producing drone footage and video work for the town of Kaplan. Coming from a meeting with the Mayor, to meeting with us, Zach was accompanied by longtime

friend and accomplished country-rock musician Jaryd Lane. As we hung out in the workshop, you could feel the genuineness of the whole thing. The cajun roots alive in the process, the passion in the lures, and the camaraderie behind the brand left no doubt that Cajun Lures was aptly and appropriately named.

Now that Zach has put his marine design career on hold, and placed his full career effort into Cajun Lures, there still isn't a single full-time job. The early-early mornings and the late nights into the next mornings still take place in the Cajun Lures workshop. With a passion and full time focus evident in the brand's success, we just had to know what is next step for Cajun Lures? Ever crafty and carefree, this gave Zach the biggest smile I saw all day. Never one to settle, there is still much to come from Zachary Dubois and Cajun Lures.

In addition to ramping up production with the higher production injector Zach says they may once again look into branching out. When he first started with making lures, Zach says he used to love making spinnerbaits. That too was a bit of a family affair, as he said he loved getting his wife Kayla to help. "Spinnerbait making is sort of like jewelry making with the beads and wires and stuff so that was something I could get my Wife to help with," he says. With the time constraints of running his own business, I can certainly understand the desire to add a product line that may enable him to spend more time with his wife, and get a little help carrying the work load.

With a full lineup including his Bayou Bug, Zydeco Shad, Bigeaux Worm, and Mad Minna, as well as his Slim Jimmy, Tee Minna, and Po-Boy Grub, and many, many more, one would think Cajun Lures may be maxed out. After visiting with Zach, we can assure you that is NOT a concern! With his Cajun Crawler, Lagniappe Worm, Cochon, T-Ned, Tee Jon,

Pictured Top Left: Just the scenery around the workshop at Cajun Lures while the master "dabbles."

Pictured Top Right: Racks of Cochons, T-Neds, Crackin' Craws, and much, much more await packaging in the workshop.

Pictured Bottom Right: The master himself, Mr. Zachary Dubois right at home in his workshop amongst racks of fresh shot plastics.

and others Zach continues to explore, tinker, and design. For instance, Bassin' In The Boot can now announce to you that the successful Boudin color, made popular in the Crackin' Craw, will now be available across many other worms and lures in the Cajun lineup! If you'd like to get your hands on some head over to www.cajunlures.com and fill your cart!

What else might be in store for Cajun Lures? Well folks, I would not put anything they are doing into a box and expect it to stay there. I fully expect Cajun Lures to break their own mold and continue to offer new products, new colors, and plenty of new catches for you

fisherman. Zach alluded to potential squarebill designs, merchandise, and some other things he is "dabbling" with, so keep your eye peeled on Cajun Lures to continue to evolve and offer new products with the same passion and of course the same Cajun ingenuity! Once a Cajun, Always a Cajun! Check out Cajun Lures the next time you Geaux Bassin' In The Boot!

More fresh shot plastics await packaging and shipment in the Cajun Lures workshop.

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Grow Louisiana Businesses With Us!

As always at Bassin' In The Boot we will serve as a digital print resource for all things related to Bass Fishing in the State of Louisiana. Everything from Louisiana Bass Tournaments, Tackle, Bait and Lure Companies, Anglers, and all things Louisiana Bass! In covering the many talented people across the industry in the Bayou State, we try to bring exposure to the people and products they provide to the sport. One way we are doing that is to help with making their products more accessible to you! We host on our website several companies' products to make it easier for you to find products from Louisiana companies. One example of this is Cajun Boat Balm, which we have hosted on our website for a couple of months now. A product we had to try to believe, but we now proudly support and host in our shopping area of our site.

New this month we have partnered with the man whose article literally spawned our magazine; none other than Mr. Larry Bryant of Bryant's Custom Jigs out of Alexandria, LA. Many of Bryant's Custom Jigs most popular colors are now available on our website. Additionally we have partnered with Bryant's Custom Jigs to supply you three Bassin' In The Boot EXCLUSIVE COLORS, only available through our website. Also available are the Bryant's Custom Jigs "TWT Buzz." In an industry first, BCJ has introduced a tungsten weight transfer (TWT) system that allows for explosive casts of the non-typical buzz bait. Additionally this cutting edge buzz bait features a pivoting hook allowing it to get into tight spaces, and even be skipped when used with an appropriate trailer.

Go check out the shop for some Bassin' In The Boot merchandise, Cajun Boat Balm, Bryant's Custom Jigs, and keep an eye out for more Louisiana based companies' products. We are always working to cover the industry and bring to you more access of quality Louisiana products to make your time on the water more productive while supporting local Louisiana businesses.

So stay tuned for more to come from us here at Bassin' In The Boot bringing you more access, more products, and more information from the industry!

Geaux Bassin! Bassin In The Boot!

6th Annual Labor D
Tournament - Amel

Fishing in the swamp where the line between land and water is barely discernable.

ay Bass
ia Boat Launch

There's just something magical about South Louisiana - the people, the culture, the way of life. Now I know there are several versions of south Louisiana that come to mind. There's New Orleans, Mardi Gras, Bourbon Street, beignets in the French Quarter, and then there is the real South Louisiana; the bayou country.

I love being on the lake, surrounded by nature, cypress trees, the wildlife - including cranes, pelicans, and of course the alligators. I see that all the time but not like I picture the swamps and marshlands of bayou country. On this trip I would see the beauty of the bayou and the swamp. The Louisiana Atchafalaya Basin is like no other place. The cypress trees, the marsh grasses, and the area wildlife possess an enchanting mystique like no place I've ever been. Spanish moss hanging in huge cypress trees, banks lined with willow trees marked with the evidence of storms buffered in previous weather extremes. These waters are connected by canals and natural washouts that flow all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Mother Nature's very own treatment plant, the marshlands filter the running water as it continues south to the ocean. The alligators, cranes, pelicans, and other wildlife benefit from the fertile waters teeming with fish, crabs, and crawfish for an endless food supply. An ecosystem like no other on the planet.

So what do you do when you want to see it? You say yes when your friend, the owner of Tangi Fishing Rods, Patrick Engerran invites you down to fish the 6th Annual Amelia Labor Day Bass Tournament.

Patrick Engerran is no stranger to Black Bayou having won 2nd place in the MediaBass Tournament on April 9, 2017 with partner Brandon Mohren. September 10, 2016 saw the Tangi Rod builder collect 1st place honors in the National Bass Anglers Association South

LA Bayou Bass Weekend Division. Countless trips to the bayou to go fishing, including one with Louisiana Sportsman's Writer Chris Ginn for a piece "Hot weather doesn't slow down Bayou Black bass bite" published in the well-known magazine. This trip it was me tagging along. Point being, he is no stranger to Black Bayou and catching fish there.

Let's give some background here on Patrick, he currently fishes with several clubs and open tournaments including Southwest Bass Club out of McComb, Ms and the Florida Parishes Bass Anglers. The guy is a stick and he builds great sticks too.

As the owner of Tangi Fishing Rods he builds what he calls "tools of the trade." "Our passion for fishing is strong and this passion has carried over to our rod building." On the website, which can be found at www.tangifishingrods.com, Patrick leaves no doubt about the nature of his rods when he says: "If you notice we don't have "custom" in our name. We do build custom; every rod is hand-made and the utmost care and passion goes into every build." Not into the fancy wraps and cosmetic enhancements Tangi Fishing Rods are all about catching fish. "We ensure each rod is built on the spine of the blanks and that the guides are placed in the correct spacing to make our rods some of the strongest, best casting you will ever own." Now that's a promise you can trust to get your money's worth and land big fish.

We left early Thursday morning headed to Bob's Marina on Bayou Black to launch and do some scouting. Soon we had reached our destination, boat launched, gear ready, motor cranked. It was then that

Launching into commercial trafficked waters, there was no shortage of visibility in the pre-dawn hours due to the navigation lights on all the ships.

Safe light takeoff, and the swamp was a blur of oranges, blacks, and blues as 70 mph seemed to be the only speed the Tangi Rods Skeeter knows.

I began to take in the beauty of the bayou. The tall cypress and the willow trees along the banks outlining the canal to the marsh and beyond. I could only take in the beauty of my surroundings momentarily as immediately turning right out of the canal Patrick, comfortable in his surroundings, opened throttle and away we went. At 70 mph the bayou became a blur as we headed to a few spots marked by waypoints on the Hummingbird.

"There are spots you can fish, but mostly you look for conditions here" Patrick told

Beautiful sunrise to start our day on the water with Tangi Rods' Patrick Engerran.

me, "you want moving water, water that is flowing or water that wind is moving; find moving water and you will find bass." We moved around the complex looking for those conditions but not finding the fish we knew we needed on tournament day. Seated with the Bayou Black angler back behind the wheel we would zoom off to another waypoint. Several stops and a few fish here and there, it was like watching a detective looking for clues. Running water here, grass mats with shade, surely a good spot? After putting over 80 miles on the Skeeter that day we called it quits and retired for the night. I had seen more of the bayou and marshlands in the last 8 hours than I could have imagined. Tournament morning couldn't come quick enough.

At 4 am I get a text message, "I'm up. I'll be ready when you are." This of course was from Patrick who had told me to set my alarm for 5 o'clock because there was no hurry since we were 10 minutes from the ramp. Needless to say, we were launched by the time my alarm was set to go off. On the way to the ramp I could sense a different attitude. It was show time.

We drew 5th flight with boat #21 and blasted off headed to some of the same areas we fished the day before. We elected first to throw some spinnerbaits and swim jigs in some grass mats where we had seen active fish; unfortunately it yielded no bites. With no hesitation Patrick picked up the trolling motor and we headed off to a canal where we had some luck the previous day, again just looking for moving water. Punching and pitching in grass mats up and down the sides of the canal got us on the board. Pitching and punching with a heavy tungsten punch weight rigged with various plastics, particularly sapphire blue, Patrick boated 3 fish fairly quickly and we begin to gain some confidence. Next stop was across a little lake to another canal to punch more grass mats. Quickly we added fish number four and five and so began the task of trying to cull fish to move up in weight. Time ticking and the sun getting higher pulled the shade closer and closer to the limited cover keeping us from culling up. More miles and more scenery landed us in the "pipeline" area looking for more mats and grass to punch or pull a swim jig through.

Ever confident Patrick explained, "Thing is you can fish these grass mats and catch nothing but if you keep fishing them you will run up on an area full of fish." I have no doubt we would have found fish but today just wasn't going to be our day. We headed out into the Intracoastal Waterway looking for another canal or area with favorable conditions and what did we see? A team fishing the cypress tree line landing a nice bass caught our eye and soon the big 250 Yamaha was slowing down to try a similar tree line. That stop gained us nothing but a "Shoepick" that tore my spinnerbait to pieces and with that we conceded that our 5 wasn't going to be enough to win that day.

Above: Patrick Engerran of Tangi Rods takes the time to make us proud by showing a little Bassin' In The Boot love and adding some stickers to his bass boat.

The 6th Annual Amelia Labor Day Bass Tournament was hosted by Wade Bourg. Wade told me he is "Just trying to build this tournament up for everyone in the surrounding area..." The tournament had 37 boats register and 24 of those weighed fish (we skipped out). The $1700 top prize was well worth the entry of $100 but with no one weighing under 6 pounds and the winners John Valdiva and Vince Gregoire bringing 16.09# to the scales (minus .5 dead fish penalty) our estimated 10# sack wouldn't have altered the outcome. The remaining top 5 weights were 13.71#, 12.89#, 12.16# and 12.08# and the big fish $370 payout went to the 1st place team.

Below: One of the few slow travels on the day marked by passing danger signs as we eased through some canals in our pursuit of 5 for the Labor Day Tournament out of Ameila.

This is a tournament I will put on the calendar and try to fish yearly. If for no other reason to get back to the magical place of the bayou country. If you haven't had a chance to visit the bayous of South Louisiana take the time to do so and if you are in the market for a "custom" rod give Tangi Fishing Rods a click. Whether you buy a rod or not Patrick Engerran will be glad to talk fishing, rod building, and you'll notice the enthusiasm that fishing in the basin brings him. Get out there and #geauxbassin, Bassin' in the Boot!

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