



CAROLINA



TEXAS

RIGS OF DISTINCTION



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PHOTOGRAPHED BY
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CAROLINA AND TEXAS RIGS ARE ICONIC, EFFECTIVE AND BORN IN THE SOUTH

Texas and North Carolina have a few things in common in a distant sort of way. Texas is a football state, and North Carolina leans toward basketball. Texas has rodeo, North Carolina has NASCAR. They have Willie Nelson, we have James Taylor. They like beef brisket, we prefer pork barbecue.

The two state's monikers are associated with two of the most iconic soft-plastic rigs for bass fishing, but that has a slight twist as well. The Carolina rig was originally dubbed the South Carolina rig in the mid-'70s; see sidebar on page 18.

The Carolina rig and the Texas rig are two of the most popular techniques for largemouth bass. In a sport that is fraught with "the next big thing"—the shakey head jig, the chatterbait, and now the Alabama rig—the iconic Texas and Carolina rigs are mainstays.

Bass fishing—especially competitive bass fishing—seems to be a game of speed these days, with fast boats racing across reservoirs and anglers self-described as "run-and-gun" casting and cranking at a frenetic pace. If that's what you want to do, knock yourself out. I fish for relaxation as much as anything, so the Carolina and Texas rigs appeal to my slower pace. I also enjoy the "connection" the rigs allow

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with the lake bottom. Maybe not Zen-like, but more ethereal than deep cranking. I don't care if the Carolina rig has been dubbed the "idiot rig" and the "ball and chain" for its simplicity. It works.

If memory serves, my first exposure to any rigged soft plastic bait was a Creme worm in my youth (I think it was the red beads and little propeller in front that got me). Then my late uncle Leon Lyczkowski of Raleigh showed me how to fish a Texas rig at Santee Cooper in the mid-'70s, instructing that the tell-tale "ka-thump" meant set the hook!

From there I learned more of the slip-sinker Texas rig, and for years a moccasin-colored Original Culprit worm with a 3/0 offset hook and a 3/8-ounce bullet weight was my favorite most of the time. Over the years I've had the opportunity to fish with some fantastic bass anglers (perk of

the job), and two of them are Maynard Edwards of Lexington and Jeffrey Thomas of Broadway, both tournament veterans and guides. In this era of what's new, they both find time for these timeless rigs. In a very general sense, the Carolina rig is used more often in deeper water, and the Texas rig in shallower water. Depth is relative, but in North Carolina, anything more than 8 feet or so can be considered deep. The Carolina rig is more often a "search" technique, while the Texas rig is often used to target specific structure and cover.

"They're both a big part of my arsenal," said Edwards. "The Carolina rig revolutionized deep fishing. On High Rock, I'd often throw a crankbait to start and get the quick, easy bites, then follow with a C-rig to give them something else to look at and get some of the bigger bites. To get the follow-up, I'm bad to use 10- or 11-inch worms.



I did that when I had a limit or felt good about getting one.”

When Edwards is guiding, especially with novice anglers, he downsizes some and often goes to a creature bait.

“I want to get that guy bit, and the creature bait has tentacles and stuff that creates more action, so the client doesn’t have to do anything,” said Edwards. “I use smaller hooks and a smaller bait. Bass tend to hit a smaller bait more.”

For tournament fishing, Edwards resorted to the Carolina rig under certain conditions, such as “if you couldn’t get a bite on anything else,” he said. “It was painstaking. I used to get a headache doing it. Some days you have to fish it so dadgum slow.”

On a seasonal note, Edwards said that for years he’s fished a black trick (“floating”) worm on a Carolina rig during the fall. “I don’t know why a black worm, straight tail,” he said. “I don’t know why. If it ain’t broke, I won’t fix it.”

Edwards’ typical Carolina rig is a 16-pound test main line with a 3/4-ounce bullet sinker and bead above a No. 7 swivel. He’ll use about a 22-inch leader of 16-pound test mono with a 6/0 hook at the business end.

Edwards employs the Texas rig mostly for targeted structure — brush piles, docks and the like. Most of the time, he crawls it. “I don’t fish it deep a lot, and I’ll often flip it to cover,” he said. “I heard a quote a few years ago that more money has been won using plastic worms than other bait.”

Edwards uses the Texas rig more in the fall and spring, saving the Carolina rig mostly for post-spawn bass. He uses a 7-foot rod for leverage on the hook set.

“A great rod is key,” he said, “especially for fishing deep. I use a 7-foot, medium-heavy Falcon. And don’t go chintzy on your hooks. I like Gamakatsu.”

Jeffrey Thomas, who guides Jordan, Falls and Harris mostly, often employs the Carolina rig as a search technique. “The Carolina rig is good for covering a lot of water because you can put a heavy weight on it,” said Thomas, who has fished the national tournament circuits for 21 years. “The



When the soft plastic Carolina and Texas rigs aren’t working well, the spinner bait is always a good spring offering, as Jeffrey Thomas demonstrates.

heavy weight gets it to the bottom quick and keeps it there. As a guide, I don’t know what I’d do without the Carolina rig. I can cast it out, hand them [the client] the rod, and they make it work.”

Thomas typically fishes smaller baits on a Carolina rig, and usually in 10 feet of water or deeper. In the spring, he usually uses a 5-inch Deep Creek lizard. In the summer, he goes to a 10-inch Deep Creek Henry worm.

When fishing the Carolina rig, Thomas uses a 1-ounce bullet weight and drags the bait with a sweeping motion of the rod. Sweep left, retrieve line with reel, sweep right, retrieve line with reel,

always maintaining tension. The hook set is a combination of rod movement and reel cranking.

A typical Carolina rig set-up for Thomas is a baitcaster on a 7-foot medium-heavy Wright-McGill rod. The reel is spooled with 17-pound test Viscous monofilament. There's a 3/4- to 1-ounce bullet weight ahead of the swivel. The leader is 12-pound mono tied to a TroKar wide-gap hook—3/0 for lizards and 4/0 or 5/0 for worms. Thomas will fish a straight worm like a Danny Joe Humprey floater in shallow water and in post-front conditions, but prefers a curl-tail worm in deeper water, presuming that the undulating tail helps the bass find the bait.

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His shallow-water Texas rig for casting to cover and flipping bushes is often a creature bait with a 5/16-ounce bullet weight (pegged) and a 3/0 TroKar flipping hook. For deeper fish (over 10 feet) it's a 10- to 11-inch worm and a 1/2- to 3/4-ounce bullet weight.

“I keep it simple. A lot of it is confidence,” he said. “I don't worry much about color. In clearer water, it's green pumpkin; darker water, Junebug. I'm not saying color doesn't matter, but in deeper water it matters less. Just keep it dark.”

☞ VARIATIONS ON THE THEMES ☞

I fished as a press observer at the Bassmaster Classic in 1996. One day I was paired with David Fritts of Lexington, one of the best crankbait anglers ever. But the crankbait bite was tough, and toward the end of the day he pulled out a Carolina rig with a jig ahead of the swivel instead of a barrel or bullet weight. Why not have two lures instead of one?

Another time I was “fun fishing” with Rocky Mount pro Dustin Wilks in a backwoods farm pond in Halifax County. He was pitching a Texas-rigged tube bait, and I had my trusty Culprit worm. At the end of our trip, I had landed 12 nice bass. He had landed 48. It was like shooting “H-O-R-S-E” with Michael Jordan. He could fish that tube shallow or deep and was deadly accurate, while my flip-tail worm would splash about and sometimes wrap around shoreline cover. I've read where some anglers will put Alka-Seltzer pieces inside a tube bait hoping the bubbles attract attention. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, indeed.

☞ SOME THOUGHTS ON CAROLINA RIGS ☞

Remember that the longer the leader, the harder it can be to detect a strike. A 2-foot leader means the bait can be anywhere within 2 feet of the weight: behind, ahead or beside it. But a longer leader can

cover more water, especially using straight-tail worms that dip and dart. The flip-tail worm and creature baits are more “straight line” due to the drag they cause, but that’s better where stickups and brush can cause line wraps and such.

I almost always fish a Zoom or Danny Joe Original floater trick worm on a Carolina rig (confidence) and more variations with a Texas rig. If I had to choose my No. 1 confidence bait for shallow largemouth bass, it would be a 4-inch Zoom Junebug finesse worm with a 1/0 hook

and a 1/8-ounce bullet weight. I’ve caught bass, crappie, catfish, bowfin, white perch and myself with that setup.

The Carolina and Texas rigs may not be as sexy as the latest “lure de jour,” but beauty is as beauty does. Just remember, whether it’s Texas or Carolina, low and slow is the way to go. ♦

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Information on the history of the Carolina and Texas rigs is tough to come by on the Internet, so I contacted Ken Duke, senior editor of publications at B.A.S.S., and he did not disappoint.

“As you know, bass fishing history is a bit sketchy at best—especially when you’re talking about something as old and venerated as the Carolina and Texas rigs,” Duke stated in an email.

“I’ll do my best to take them on in turn here. While a lot of folks might tell you that the Carolina rig came to prominence in 1985 when Jack Chancellor won the Bassmaster Classic using his Do Nothing worm, it was actually 1973 when it really came on the sport’s horizon. That was when Bill Dance used it to finish second in the Classic on Clarks Hill Reservoir. The full name of the rig is/was the South Carolina rig, but I haven’t heard anyone call it that in decades. Dance learned the technique from Georgian Junior Collis right before the ‘73 Classic, but it appears to have been around for some time before that.”

While the Carolina rig is better documented, there is almost nothing out

there on the Texas rig, so this next bit is probably news to most.

“The Texas rig is also shrouded in some mystery. Most early commentators and anglers agree that it originated in Oklahoma, perhaps by an unnamed Oklahoma fire fighter, for use in the brushy waters of Texas,” stated Duke. “Until the 1970s, the rig was termed the ‘slip sinker rig’ more often than the ‘Texas rig.’ Longtime Texas bass guide Dave Hawk deserves considerable credit for spreading the word on the technique. Not only does he detail the rig in his 1970 book “100 Years on Bass,” but he talks of cutting egg or pear-shaped sinkers to come up with early versions of worm slip sinkers.”