MUSKIES = SPEED MERCHANTS

by Larry Ramsell, Muskie Guide

I'm sure we have all asked or been asked the question: "How fast can muskies swim?" I ran across an article in a promotional paper by fellow Guide Dave Rhyner, that attempted to answer the question. He had decided to find out after the question had been put to him by a first-time musky angler/client.

He asked other fishermen, guides and fisheries folks from the DNR. The general consensus was about 30 to 35 miles per hour, but it was not based on fact. Dave said that he thought that this was about right, but he didn't know of any studies that had ever been done to validate it.

He allowed as how speed in miles per hour didn't mean much until broken down to the range used in fishing. He decided to do some calculations based on 35 miles per hour. He multiplied 35 times the number of feet in a mile (5280) and came up with 184,800 feet per hour. He further said that if that number were divided by the number of seconds in an hour (3600), it would mean that it would equal 51.33 feet per second.

In order to relate that number to something meaningful, he then related it to musky fishing. He then measured an average cast and determined it to be 60 feet. He then determined the average time of 15 seconds per retrieve, which would come out to 4 feet per second.

His friend had slowed his retrieve when he had a musky follow, thinking that he was reeling faster than the musky could swim. As noted from the above calculations, there would hardly have been the need to slow down, since the musky could likely cover over 51 feet in the same amount of time that the retrieve would be moved 4 feet! In fact, his thought was that if a bait fish was being followed by a musky, the last thing it would do is slow down and wait to be eaten.

Dave further determined that a musky could swim the length of his 17 foot boat in 1/3 of a second. He reasoned that most muskies that are a boat length away from a lure are not noticed and therefore the figure 8 maneuver after each cast becomes very important.

Dave took the "speed thing" a little further. He stated that an eye blink is one-tenth of a second and that a musky could travel 5 feet in that length of time!

Dave said that "the distance muskies can travel in a short period of time was a surprise," but when he thought back, that, "many times it was proven," to him, but that he hadn't paid attention to the details. He had no doubt in his mind that muskies can swim that fast.

Dave concluded by saying that, "clients in my boat will be getting my sermon on figure 8's with some numbers to back up their importance, then maybe I won't hear that other question I hate to hear, 'what did I do wrong?'"

Now, as incredibly fast as muskies are using the calculations above, I would like to quote from another publication regarding the speed of Pike, the muskies cousin. It would stand to reason that since they are the same shape, their "speed" should be the same. After reading this, you will want to do some "homework" (I can't do everything for you), and relate "this" information to Dave's calculations and see how fast muskies really are!!

This quote comes from the article "Pike Facts" compiled by Bill Little. It was published in 1995, by The Glasgow & West of Scotland Regional Association of the Pike Anglers Club of Great Britain & Ireland.

"...the tail area of the pike is quite unlike most other fish in that the dorsal fin, caudal fin and anal fin are all grouped together at the rear of the spear-like (hence its name) body. This cluster of fins gives massive thrust and allows tremendous straight-line acceleration, over a relatively short distance, from a standing start. The speed allows it to strike a prey from a considerable distance away, doing away with the need to stalk it.

"The speed of a pike strike has yet to be measured scientifically but observations have been made of large pike striking at up to 30 yards per second, or approximately 60 mph! There is a famous piece of BBC film footage showing a pike striking at normal speed and in slow motion, in BOTH sequences the pike is moving so fast that the image is just a blur. It should be noted however that this speed cannot be sustained for very long (similar to the Cheetah) and is only obtainable in a straight line..."

WOW! 60 miles per hour!! That is nearly twice as fast as was used in the calculations in the examples above. Grab your pencil and calculator...should be interesting! Guess you can't reel too fast!!

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