

## ... and Super-Size It *Bigger the better in the world of fishing*

By Dick Ellis



Jim Tostrud poses with a jumbo largemouth before releasing the fish to fight again in Walworth County's Lake Geneva. (Jim Tostrud Guide Service)

There's a good side of Wisconsin's big water like the Great Lakes, Trout, Big Green, Winnebago Green Bay or the

river systems to name a few prominent state fisheries. Big water, big fish...or so the good fishermen tell me. And there's a down side of

big water; like where to begin fishing it, or how to begin learning the big water secrets to memory-making fish. Most of us average anglers feel more than just a bit intimidated when first dabbling in the big blues.

So when I wanted to fish Lake Geneva Thursday to target big fish, I did what any self-respecting professional outdoor writer with no angling talent of his own would do...I piggy-backed near one of the most talented guides I know on Geneva with his permission and the approval of his clients. Jim Tostrud is a professional guide, wildlife artist and videographer with some of the most extraordinary footage of turkey and deer hunting and fishing for numerous species of gamefish as you could hope to see anywhere.

Tostrud has fished Lake Geneva for 43 years, including many years as a licensed guide. Thursday, he worked Geneva's post-spawn bass with father and son clients Charlie and Tony Orsini.

Randy Rothenbueler and I launched and found their boat at mid-morning and hung within 100 yards, moving in closer for photos when they battled a good fish. By the time we rendezvoused, Tony Orsini had already caught and released a largemouth bass measuring 24-3/4 inches and pushing seven pounds and his father had caught and released a 21-1/2 inch smallmouth with many more smallies over 20 inches yet to come. Tostrud had recorded the monster catches with his digital and video cameras. I'd have ample opportunity to capture my own shots.

"We're targeting post-spawn bass with a simple live-bait Geneva rig," Tostrud said. "It's a full nightcrawler on an Aberdeen hook with a split shot. Lake Geneva is two weeks behind other southern Wisconsin lakes just because of its immense size and depth. It's well over 150 feet deep and 5200 acres. Right now the Geneva bluegills are still in pre-spawn."

Tostrud said he does not like fishing spawning bass on their beds due to the vulnerability of the fish, and strongly recommends that anyone who does target them practice proper catch and release. To avoid fish still on the beds, he personally did not begin bass fishing until 10 days before this trip and the result was encountering very few fish still on their spawning nests. Those gravel beds made by bass using their tails as a sweep in pre-spawn are easily seen in particular on clear-water lakes like Geneva.

“We practice 100 percent catch and release,” he said. “If anyone is fishing spawning bass that’s okay but they need to practice catch and release. Especially on Lake Geneva with this gin-clear water, sight-fishing for spawning bass is like taking candy from a baby. If you know how to provoke a spawning bass, well, anyone can do it. But some fishermen will catch the fish, put it in the live-well, and release it later somewhere else. You can’t do that because he is there to protect the eggs from predation. If you catch a fish on its bed it’s so important to practice CPR....catch....photo.....release.”



Charlie Orsini was fishing with Wisconsin Guide Jim Tostrud when he caught and released one of many smallmouth and largemouth bass better than 20 inches on Lake Geneva June 10. A total of 16 smallies and three largemouth up to 6-3/4 pounds were caught and released (Jim Tostrud Guide Service)

We would experience several hours of fabulous fishing. With Tostrud’s expertise and experience leading the way, their boat would probably have four times as many strikes as we had. When we lost two nice smallmouth that would have broke the 20-inch mark, Tostrud’s good natured voice carried over the water:

“You’re horsing those fish in...you can’t horse them....”

The man knows Geneva and its often-nightmarish structure well and I’ve fished with him enough to know that from ice to spring and summer, and into fall he adjusts to target the fish where they are....now... with what they want to eat...now. The result without exception is always the opportunity to put a real hog in the net, from paper-plate gills to 40-inch class northern pike. His largest is a 49 inch pike.

Calling the combination of clear water, depth of the water and heavy boat traffic “unique”, he said the angler has to adjust to the migrating fish. As the air temperature rises and recreational use on Geneva escalates with the summer, the fish move to deeper, cooler water where they won’t contend as much with human disturbances.

“Fishing on Lake Geneva changes,” Tostrud said. “It’s a traditional, transitional lake where patterns and locations of the fish change with the water temperature and the time of year. Today we’re fishing in 11 to 14 feet of water but the bass are moving deeper. Even though we caught 19 bass today (16 smallmouth and three largemouth) the water temperature is moving up and the fish are moving out to find their comfort zone. We have to adjust with them.”

“As the summer progresses the people who are fishing here today are still going to be fishing here and not catching much. We’re going to be out in the deep water putting some hogs in the boat.”

The bass we caught or lost and watched our mentor catch verified that those hogs are here. And when Rothenbueler fought and reeled in a bluegill that we measured just shy of



This 6-3/4 pound largemouth bass measuring almost 25 inches was caught and released by Tony Orsini fishing with Wisconsin Guide Jim Tostrud on Lake Geneva June 10. (Jim Tostrud Guide Service)

11-inches with the weight to match taken on a full crawler Geneva rig to end our morning we were already making plans to return to target just those gills. Rothenbueler catch, as a point of reference, is 1.5 inches longer than a paper plate. Tostrud’s comment that his largest Geneva bluegill exceeded 13 inches did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm.

“Lake Geneva is just a wonderful fishery,” said Tostrud. “A lot of people don’t realize it because a lot of people can only fish it on a weekend when the recreational traffic makes it a nightmare. On a weekday, you can see what a wonderful place it is and what wonderful fishing is here. You saw what happened today. I was beautiful.” <sup>OWO</sup>

Connect with Jim Tostrud, including superb hunting and fishing videos at [www.wildlifevisions.net](http://www.wildlifevisions.net). Call him at 262-496-5178.

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