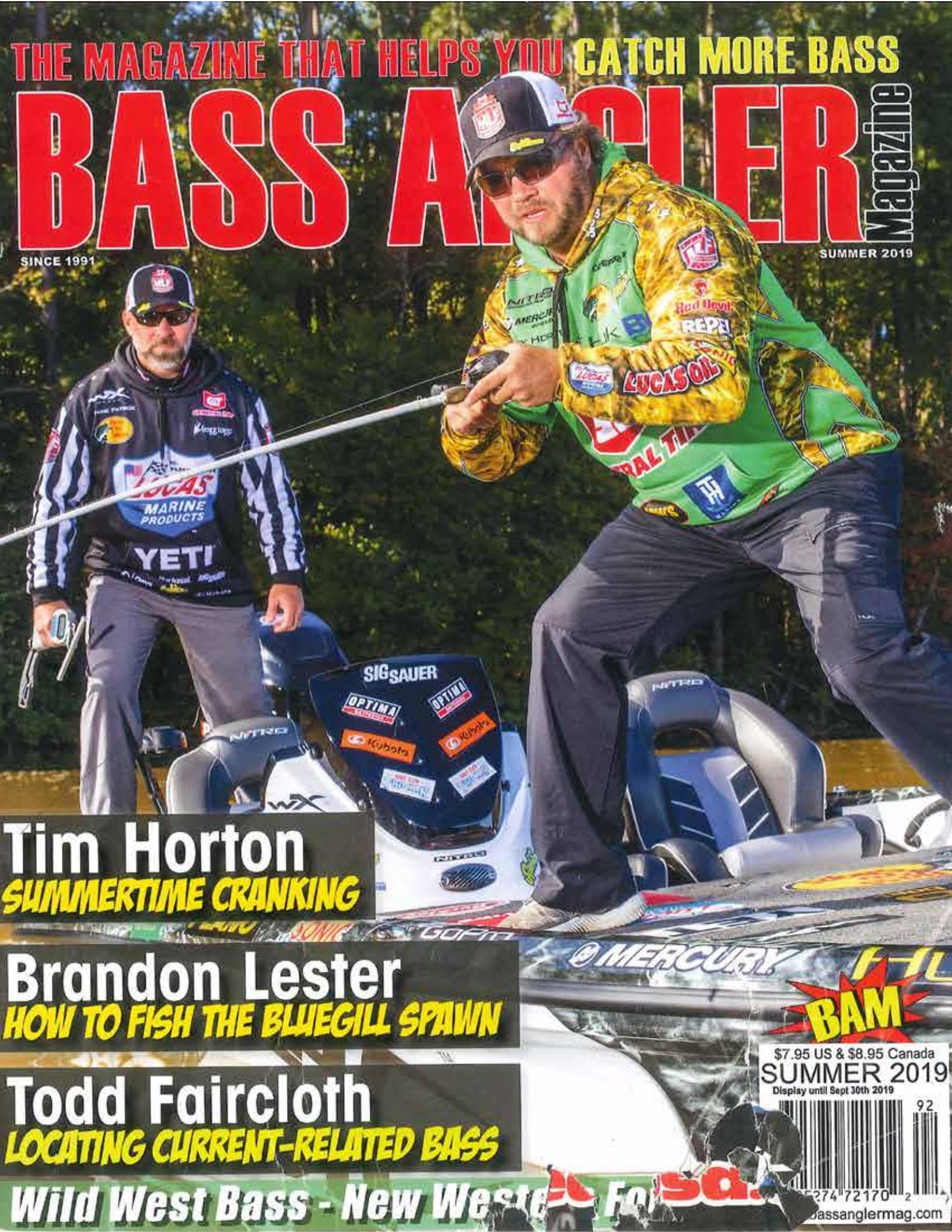


THE MAGAZINE THAT HELPS YOU CATCH MORE BASS

BASS ANGLER Magazine

SINCE 1991

SUMMER 2019



Tim Horton
SUMMERTIME CRANKING

Brandon Lester
HOW TO FISH THE BLUEGILL SPAWN

Todd Faircloth
LOCATING CURRENT-RELATED BASS

Wild West Bass - New Western

BAM!

\$7.95 US & \$8.95 Canada
SUMMER 2019
Display until Sept 30th 2019



92
27472170 2
bassanglermag.com

Weekend in Mexico

Images and story by Riley Love

Outside some white patches of the unreasonable, unseasonable snow persisted. Wet and cold, leaves plummeted down like lumps of plutonium. Not Robert Frost swirling, but more like Charles Bukowski depression poetry. Raking them would be like pulling up iron ore.

And what about my regular fishing trips to Central and South America? Business was too good, it was ... dictatorial. Then there was the sudden image of the outdoor fridge—nothing but my wife's organic health drinks, pushing me over the edge.

It was late, work still piled on the desk. Without the tell-tale clock cadence in this age of AI, an unmistakable and macabre Edgar Allen Poe-like electronic hum persists instead. No time for a week off, but what about a tight three-day surgical strike to an accessible location? The powerful magnet of destination fishing pulled my hand toward the cellphone; there were others, as "enlightened" as myself. Its screen blazed alive, and there was my son—my truest comrade and fishing partner. Just over a year ago ... taken by cancer. It only took a moment to make the calls.

MAZATLAN, MEXICO

At the edge of the Sea of Cortez, evolving modern banking transformed this fishing village into the largest port on the Mexican Pacific coast. Translation: "Place of deer," in Nahuatl [Aztec.] During the golden age of Hollywood, it became a popular fishing destination for many famous movie celebrities. Nearby is some of the finest bass fishing in the world and with dry season commencing, opportunity for saltwater combo. Borrowing from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "the game was afoot."

PICACHOS RISING

"El que con lobos anda, a alular se ensena," goes a famous Mexican dicho. Meaning: "He who runs with wolves will learn to howl"—mental note as we staggered to the van on morning one of our commando fishing raid. The Mexican night had favored a long strategy session in the bar.

Of the two dozen Mexican bass lakes, Picachos is the newest crown jewel, and most accessible. Completed in 2009, Presidio dam created the 38 square mile agricultural impoundment. The government stocked it with tilapia for commercial purposes, then Billy Chapman, Jr. stocked it with Florida strain black bass from nearby all-star big fish lake El Salto.

On the way up it's nice to see the countryside, hamlets and the lovely artisanal town of La Noria. Slowing for a traditionally-dressed Mexican farmer coaxing his burro along the road the driver quipped, "Mexican John Deere."

Perched above the water is Chapman's Angler's Inn. He also has other facilities in Mexico, the Amazon basin, as well as a new project in Idaho. Over the last four decades he has brought tens of thousands of anglers to spectacular fishing destinations. He is a member of the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame.

"We have excellent spawns every year," Chapman said, reflecting that female largemouth lay between 2,000 to 7,000 eggs per pound of body weight.

"Lakes have magical periods with flourishing bass stocks, but are fished so little that the bass strike with a wild abandon. It's insane. It vanishes as fish get used to seeing fishing lures repeatedly. This lasts about five years—it's just before us here." He gazed wistfully across the water, "this is the top lake in the

world for 3- to 8-pound bass right now."

Opening my luggage—Bass Pro Shops must be stocking a Mars landing expedition. The box on top contained lures my son had ordered just before he died. Whopper Ploppers, still in their packages. Not liking their looks, I'd shoved them in during a moment of sentiment.

The scenery was breathtaking. Just two weeks post rainy-season, the surrounding forest burst with life. At the end of a cove, pushing right into it; I wondered how this milieu would have stimulated the imagination of Michael Crichton or Edgar Rice Burroughs.

The birdlife was spectacular. There were water predators: Great Heron, cormorants, storks and immense White American Pelicans. Raptors including eagles, osprey, Caracara and a variety of hawks flew everywhere. The trees echoed calls and wingbeats of dozens of species including green Amazon Parrots, Yellow-winged Cacique and magnificent blue feathered Black Throated Magpie Jays with tails an arm's length.

I'd fished this country before. Soon it would dry golden brown for the rest of the season and increasingly reveal escarpments and sharp rocky features of the nearby mountain. Picachos is Spanish for peak, but no one knew which one this alluded to. No sign of man; this country articulated the minimalistic stoicism of a Cormac McCarthy novel.

Old medical school chum, Dan Marino expounded philosophically. "This ..." he exhaled coarsely, "is thirsty country." We reached for the beer cooler. Earnest Hemingway said Key West was a good place to write. Well, this was a good place to fish.

We were a month before December's pre-spawn cycle.

Spawn runs through January and February, then it's time to target post-spawn lunkers. Our modus operandi was power fishing points, creek beds and brush in front of coves without depth finders. I planned on utilizing multiple techniques for the sheer fun of it.

By midday, this evidenced these fish possessed sensitivity for color, speed and presentation, as their kindred elsewhere. They weren't line shy, even for braid without a fluorocarbon leader.

Among softbaits, watermelon red magnum lizards and critters prevailed. Wanting a big fish, I tried a Carolina-rigged worm that could have swallowed a Chihuahua. But Texas-rigged

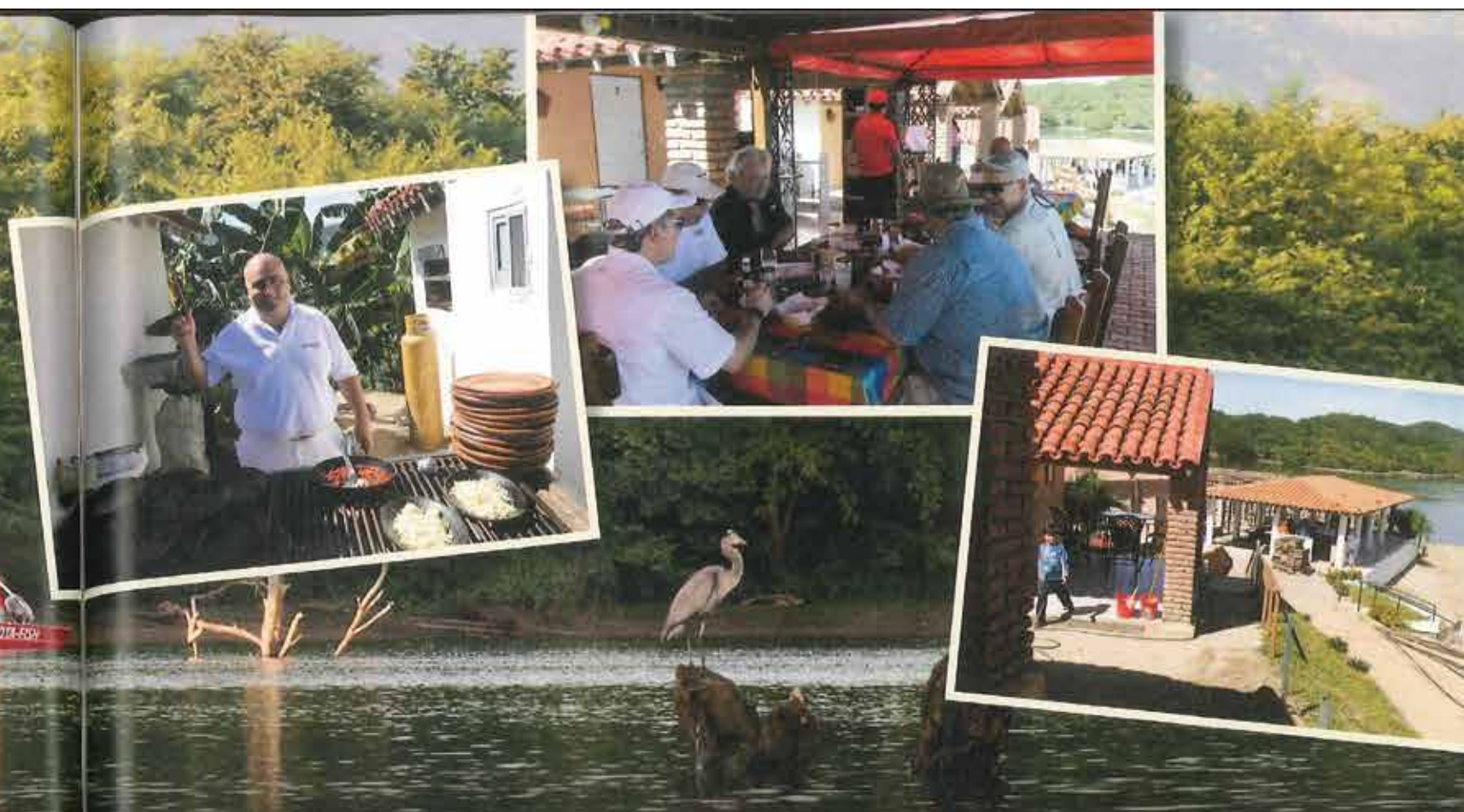
Senkos performed better and large shaky head finesse worms were very popular. Craws and flukes were also on the menu, but surprisingly they disdained the dropshot rig, a true skunk buster at home.

With hardbaits, large cranks produced where spinnerbaits and rattletraps didn't. Best colors were citrus and Tennessee shad.

As the monsoon dissipates, prolonged hours of morning cloud cover mean topwater action. Starting with my fly rod at first light on day two found easy fly fishing with good targets ahead and open water behind—an excellent venue for the fly fisherman. Using a Popper fly and Puglisi Minnow left over from Brazil peacock bass fishing, I lit 'em up.

Pushing out where trees reached through the surface, we switched to conventional topwater lures. There were reaction strikes, but the fish failed to engulf the baits. Back into a cove we encountered a couple of anglers also trying topwater fishing.

"We're doing good. But yesterday one of our guys caught 67 bass in two hours using one lure," the man in front of the boat said. "It's called a Whopper Plopper." He shook his head at





his tackle box. "You guys got any Whopper Ploppers?"

The water, the air became very still ... for a moment it seemed like my lost son was with me. The lake, the forest, the surrounding mountains were like a cathedral and the peace of the fisherman in untouched nature came to me. Then the never-healing wound could fade again for a while.

This morning's partner, Guthrie Allen started on the Whopper Ploppers.

It turned red hot. With literally every cast the surface exploded, the baits vanishing down bucket mouths like convicts on their last meal. The hook-up rate neared 100%. Passing 50 fish in an hour with double hook-ups, we went through midday despite a cloudless sky.

We saw Picachos' potential realized. Well before peak season we had the best topwater bite I can remember anywhere with bass to 7 pounds. I have fished other Mexican bass lakes, and this was ... world class.

About Angler's Inn, there are more buildings going up, but it is remarkable and the most accessible lodge of any on surrounding bass lakes. The staff are a marvelous group of personalities, sharing a common prejudice: regarding an empty Margarita glass as the enemy of man. The food was part of the adventure, a Chernobyl-grade reaction of diet-crushing culinary and mixology dynamics. The dreary offices and cold weather were forgotten dreams. I can't wait to return.

We made it back for the combo saltwater fishing, but the bass fishing was simply much more fun. There is something unbeatable about a torrid topwater bite and I won't be happy until I get back in that zone. This is truly unspoiled bass fishing.

Short on time? The weather dreary and cold? Even now the sun shines golden and warm above Lake Picachos and the lodge stands on the hill. You can go lean and mean, amigo mio, a destination trip that turns on a dime.

Now what's it going to be ... desk work and raking leaves, or topwater explosions and Margaritas that never end? **SAM**

