



## Trolling for Gold Country Steel at Lake Amador

by Jack Naves

**I**'ve been fishing at Lake Amador for over twenty-five years, and it's been interesting to watch the evolution of the young lake.

Back in the early days, trolling Ford Fender flashers in front of night crawlers was the way to go. Several years later, I was introduced to fishing for trout under floating headlights at night – what a blast!

These days, the lake features a mix of different trout hybrids, most of which contain steelhead genes in the mix. They include Donaldson trout, cuttbows, and a steelhead/rainbow strain. It's basically a hotbed for steelhead fishing tucked away in the foothills outside of Ione.

In a recent issue, Cal touched on some Amador trout techniques aimed at bank anglers. This time around, I'm going to cover some basic trolling tactics that will help to bring fish over the rails of your boat.

During the popular winter season, trout at Lake Amador like to cruise the top five feet of the water column. When the fish are up high, top lining is the method of choice for trollers. If the water temperature is below 54 degrees, a slow approach is usually best. Try trolling at .9 to 1.5 miles per hour with your lures 50 to 120 feet behind the boat.

My favorite winter trolling lures are 3" grubs, trolling flies behind clear wiggle-discs, plain woolly buggers, and pea-sized balls of PowerBait. I usually run my lures at Amador without adding any dodgers or flashers in front of them. I do, however, make some changes to the lures once I get them out of the box.

With woolly buggers, I trim off the tails so they look like little black dots moving through the water. I like to add a pea-sized ball of PowerBait or a Power Egg above my grubs. I'll use a contrasting color – so with a white grub I'll use pink, green, or dark brown. Sometimes with plain PowerBait I will add a 3" Power Worm, as a trailer and upsize the ball of dough so it looks like a mutant pollywog. Sci-Fi trout fishing!

For trolling flies, I like to pin a half-inch section of a night crawler on the hook just to give it some scent. And speaking of scent, I always smear my lures with a blend of oils and gels. My favorite scents for Lake Amador are shad and krill.

During the spring season, the fish will go deeper as the water temperatures rise. Faster presentations can be used since the fish will be more active. Try using Needlefish, Cripplures,

or Rapalas. You will be able to cover more water since these lures can be trolled at 2 to 3 miles per hour.

As the water warms, you can start to employ downriggers to get your offerings deeper where the fish are. Be sure to ask where the fish are currently holding when you check in at the Amador café. The staff are always courteous and willing to give you the latest fishing conditions.

Early summer trout will be found down as far as 25 feet deep, so downriggers can be very helpful. Once the temperatures get really hot, it's time to hang up the trout gear and focus on summer species like bass, catfish, or crappie.

I've covered some basic seasonal trout techniques in a nutshell, but make sure you ask the Lake Amador staff about the current trends. They have a nice selection of bait and lures in the shop just in case you need something. I recently got the chance to visit the shop on my way to the boat ramp.

I headed to Lake Amador with Mick Berklich to put some of my winter trolling techniques to the test. On the way to the lake, we spoke with Sandy Lockhart about Lake Amador's hatcheries and the high protein diet they feed their fish.

Don't expect to see classic round-tailed truck trout when you visit Amador. These fish are full-finned freight trains. They look and fight like steelhead you would expect to find on the lower reaches of the Feather River.

After briefly visiting with Sandy, Mick and I were on our way. To say we had an adventure filled day would be an understatement. Snapped leaders, bent hooks, and birds-nest tangles added to the day's entertainment right from the get go.

Mick nailed the first fish of the day on an orange trolling fly. Our next fish snapped the leader before we could get the rod out of the holder. Shortly after, I hooked a bruiser on a 3" white grub. At most lakes that feature planted trout, you can pretty much reel them right to the surface and horse them into the net. Don't expect the same at Lake Amador.

These fish will leap, head shake, and make three or four drag-peeling runs when you get them close to the boat.

My fish went crazy and tangled in one of the other lines, but we finally got it into the net. It went about eighteen inches and weighed just under three pounds. The coloration was just beautiful, featuring an olive-hued back, silvery sides, and a faint rose-colored stripe down the lateral line.

The 'reel them in while you keep trolling' approach didn't work very well for us, as we encountered multiple fish that went on power runs and tangled in our other lines. After a while, we decided to slow the boat down when we hooked fish so we could land them. This is not something you have to worry about with the stubby-finned planters found in most lakes. Despite the 'slow-down' approach, we still experienced some follies worthy of a Monty Python skit.

Early in the afternoon, Mick netted a fish for me that had wrapped up in his line as well as my second line. Behind the tangle of lines, I still had about fifty feet of line out to a trolling fly that was still in the water. We couldn't free the tangle, so I started to bring in the line by hand. I felt a couple of bumps and instinctively yanked the line to set the hook.

Now I had one fish in the net, a huge tangle of line on the floor of the boat, and a newly hooked fish being controlled by hand. Somehow I got it to the boat without slicing my hands to shreds, although I do have a small cut on my forefinger. Note to self: next time use a fishing rod – not a human hand.

Despite dubious landing techniques and line-tangling antics, we were able to land eight trout while losing just as many. We should have had our limit, but it was a fun-filled trip nonetheless.

Our best producers were white grubs and orange trolling flies fished just below the surface at 1.3 miles per hour. We called it a day at 3:30 pm with a heavy cooler packed with trout. Looks like I still have the touch for hooking fish at Amador, though my line management skills need some improvement.

If you are looking for hard-fighting trout that act like spring-run steelhead, then Lake Amador is your foothills destination. Their

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aggressive planting program begins each fall, so get out there while the water is cool. You might just tie into a landlocked steelhead right in the heart of the Mother Lode. No jet boat required!

