Arthur H. Carhart, *Fresh Water Fishing*, N.Y. 1949

p.211-230 **THE SPOON-SPINNER FAMILY**

There is no change of determining when the first man attached a bit of curved shell or fashioned bone to a fish hook so it wobbled or spun when pulled through the water and thus attracted fish. Anthropologists have found that primitive tribes used spoon or spinner types of lures before modern explorers appeared on the scene.

We know definitely that the artificial fly was catching trout eighteen centuries ago, since Aelian recorded that fact. But whether or not spoons or spinners were in common use before that is something I have not been able to determine. It is a good guess that this type of artificial lure was in use earlier than all others.

Captain James Cook, cruising the Pacific, 1772-1778, reported a "spoon" lure made of shell, used by the Sandwich (Hawaiian) natives.

A very old artificial bone-and-stone shrimp, made by Indians of the Northwest Coast, was featured in the collection of a Professor, A. M. Mayer, some three quarters of a century since. It is very much like some of the "new" lures we are using today, including red stone beads, jointed action and a hook fastened to the body.

From such indications, it seems likely that the spoon type of lure came into existence very early, and has been one of those common things, generally accepted among fishermen, ancient, primitive and modern, as matter-of-course tackle, just as the hook, with its antiquity, has been accepted.

The first patents in the United States issued on trolling spoons and spinning baits were secured by Julio T. Buel, born near Lake Bomoseen, Vermont, in 1812. Like Walton who was a linendraper and Meek, the watchmaker, Buel was a craftsman in another business, a furrier. Records show he probably spent as much time devising new lures as in the fur business.

There is an interesting similarity in fact and story concerning the "inventing" of new types of lures. They start with an angler idling beside good fishing water, tossing pebbles, bits of wood or some other bright fragment into the water, whereupon a fish rises and strikes. That gives the inventor surprise and an idea. He proceeds to fashion something resembling the bit of stuff the fish struck, and attaches a hook. Presto! A lure is born.

The story about Julio Buel follows this pattern. As a child he tossed bright pebbles into a stream and trout hit them. Then he threw bits of tin into the water. When trout rushed at these, he soldered hooks on other pieces of tin, and had an effective lure. It was some years later, so the story goes, when he was eighteen, that he produced the first "spoon" bait. This does have good evidence of being an authentic incident, for it would explain why the metal blade that turns or wobbles on a lure, is called a "spoon."

Julio was eating lunch while fishing on the lake and accidentally dropped a spoon overboard. He watched it sink, probably thinking what would be said at home about losing some of the family silver. As he watched the spoon sink, he noticed it wobbled and then a large fish suddenly slammed it. That led to a raid on the family silver for another spoon, the bowl was cut off, and a hook was soldered to it and we have this early record of this type of spoon made in America.

Buel still was in the fur business at Whitehall, New York, in 1854, but it was beginning to be of secondary importance, for he had entered the commercial production of some of his lures in 1848.

Another pioneer manufacturer of spinning lures was William T. J. Lowe of Buffalo, New York, the records showing that he was making his lures at least as early as April of 1883. The Lowe spoons still are on the market, the Enterprise Manufacturing Company having taken over the making of these lures after Mr. Lowe's death in 1915.

A story that resembles that of Buel's discovery of how a fish would strike at a wobbling spoon, surrounds the beginning of the Colorado Spinner, a spoon that established a type which has extended in use all across the world.

One summer day of the early 1880's, Paul Steuch had offered every fly in his book. The green-back trout, a subspecies of cut-throat, haunting the South Platte, ignored his efforts. He had given up earnest fishing and merely waded the stream, making half-hearted casts while he waited for the noisy narrow-gauge train that in those days, would halt anywhere along the Platte to pick up fishermen returning to Denver.

As he idled, Steuch took out a plug of tobacco, removed the small tin horseshoe trade-mark, and flipped it into the river. There was a swish, a swirl, and the mad drive of a striking trout. Steuch hurriedly removed a second little horseshoe from a plug, attached it to his hook, cast and caught trout. He had green-backs in the creel by the time the train rattled down the rusty rails. At home, Steuch fashioned a little spoon that would whirl about a hook, tried it, took trout when other lures failed, and this led to the manufacture of the Colorado Spinner.

If you are lucky with this type of lure, just remember that the first one was made out of a little horseshoe, so why shouldn't it be lucky?

Although we cannot fix the point of origin or the maker of the first spoons or spinners fishermen used, these incidents indicate very well how fishermen, perhaps many at wide-spaced points, very early in the history of fishing with a line, attached a bit of bright stuff that would wobble or whirl around a hook, and began the long trace of this type of lure that has culminated in so many useful, wonderful and unusual spinners and spoons of today. The use of pearl shell for spooner blades could be a direct and continuous inheritance from ancient lures of shell.

The simplest form of the spoons is a single blade of metal, dished in some degree, to which a hook is firmly attached, that will wobble when drawn through the water. Harold Dahl, who now tosses flies on Rocky Mountain streams, tells me of finding a spoon of this type, handmade, that must have been used as much as a century and a half ago by some Swedish fisherman.

That would antedate the commercial production of such lures. Harold lived in Stockholm as a lad, and about 1900 often went to a certain farm to fish for the northern pike. The farmer who had inherited the place from his father, was elderly. Prowling the old log barn one day, Harold found this old, brass-bladed wobbler spoon, hooked in a cranny. There was no recollection of any of the family living there having known about the spoon or of it being used, so it had not been in the water at least within the recollection of the Swedish farmer, and perhaps for years before his time.

The spoon is very like the modern Johnson single-bladed lure. This further indicates the evolution of these lures rather than their having been suddenly devised within recent eras by some specific individual.

Within this division of the single-bladed spoons with fixed position hooks, we find a number of rather venerable lures that still are made and used. The Canandaigua Lake spoon is representative of these. The Johnson Silver Minnow, with its weedless attachment added, is one of the best known contemporary single-blade, fixed-hook spoons.

There are many others, differing in outline, in depth of dish and other details. Although this style of spoon must be ancient beyond record, the fundamental action such a spoon produces has caught fish, and continues to catch them, in full competition with every sort of other spoon-spinner type on the market.

Essentially the same are similar spoons having free swinging single or multiple hooks usually attached through a hole at the "tail" of the spoon. The position of the hooks does not change their functional construction, nor their allure to fish. The hooks are in a position to be more readily engaged if a fish strikes as it follows the lure through the water. Beyond this modification, we have dished, single-bladed spoons that have outlines in the form of small fish, but still their wobble is fundamentally that of oval, egg-shaped or otherwise symmetrical spoons.

One of the most generally known and successful of all the single-blade wobbling spoons is the Daredevil, which is made either in the fixed hook style or with free swinging hooks attached. The Daredevil is a good illustration of how minor modifications of shape have appreciable effect on the action of this type of spoon in the water.

The basis of the wobble in a spoon of this type depends on the "planing" surfaces of the lure. In other words, a blade of metal that was oval in outline but perfectly flat, would slide through the water on a straight pull, without much side-to-side motion.

Dished, it has a sloping surface on the convex side of the lure, and the first pull through the water thrusts against this, throwing the inner or concave side to where its sloped surface at the rear of the spoon gets the thrust of the water, shoving it back. As this happens, the thrust is again on the first, outer, surface, and that pushes the spoon back and repeated this gives the "wobble" in such a lure.

In the Daredevil, just as an example, there is a slight flattening, and bending at the line end of the lure, that introduces other surfaces to receive the water thrust as the lure is in motion, adding the forces in these thrusts to the uniform spoon dish in the other portion of the blade. This adds to the erratic darting action.

In judging the action that can be expected from a lure of this group, reason out how the drag of the line will throw the planing surfaces against water in alternate pressures, and how the spoon will react. If you are judging between one spoon or another, similar in major construction features, but with the minor modifications of deeper dish or some feature such as that forward slight flattening and bending on the Daredevil, imagine how water thrust at such points will cause the spoon to act when it is retrieved.

You can come close to anticipating what you may purchase in a lure if you will forget the finish and some of the other features, and study the basic structural shapes.

It follows, that the deeper the dish, the more of an angle will be on the planing surfaces. The more angle on these, the more thrust will be put on the spoon at any given rate of travel through the water, and the more whipping from side to side will result. On a shallow dish you will have to retrieve faster to get the same amount of action that you will at a much slower rate on a deeper dish.

Fitting this to the fishing to be done, walleyes often strike somewhat slower than a northern pike for example. To get the action you wish and still give the walleye a good chance of being hooked on a slower strike, you would use the somewhat deeper dished spoon and retrieve more slowly.

Also, if you reeled in jerkily, making the lure wiggle and rush a few feet, then allow it to pause and flutter thus simulating in some degree the struggles of a small, wounded fish, the deeper dish spoon would give you quick, erratic action for the few feet it was pulled in swiftly while a much shallower dish spoon might barely begin to wobble as you pulled it only a few feet.

Because this type of spoon, with fixed or free-swinging hook, has been tested through long years and still stands in front rank among all lures, it is one of the first to be included in any tackle box.

If I could take only one lure with me into any fresh-water fishing territory, it would be a spoon of this type. If there were opportunity to take but one type but in several finishes, it would be this single-blade wobbler spoon, in a bright silver for dull days or slightly cloudy waters, a bronze finish for brighter days and clear water, and one with red and white stripes.

This spoon, in appropriate sizes and weights, can be cast for bass, walleyes, northern pike, muskellunge and trout. It can be trolled for lakers and all the other lake fishes. It has been only a few years ago that trout fishermen of the west began using this lure for heavier trout, but success with it has now introduced bait casting outfits on trout streams, where this type of spoon is used to get into deeper holes and catch heavier trout.

There is a rather interesting angle to such a use of this lure. This spoon is fairly large. While you may catch nothing but the smaller trout, a foot long or less, from upper levels of a stream or lake when using flies, this wobbler spoon will sink down to where the larger fish lurk, waiting for larger prey.

Small trout will follow it, dart toward it, but shy away. It is just a little too large for them to tackle. But the larger trout are attracted by it and will come head on, having big enough mouths to get around the lure, and see in it a pretty fair meal for the day. It is a good type of lure to fish deeper holes in trout streams, and while some may not consider it quite as sporting as using a fly, it does take larger fish, they put up a good fight on lighter casting tackle, and often it is the equipment which will assure a catch when other methods fail.

Just put down the single blade, wobbler type of spoon, as one of the simplest and best of all artificial lures. It is a No. 1 must in the bait casting tackle box.

The second main division of the spoon-spinner family includes single, simple blades that revolve in one or the other direction, circularly, around the lure. A fundamental feature of structure in such spoons that affects the action is the length of the blade in relation to its width. The longer and narrower blades turn more rapidly. Except in that subdivision of this group where the blade is held at a fixed angle to the shaft on which it turns, the longer, slimmer, flatter blades will spin at a greater angle to the shank than the more roundish spoons. A very deep-dished round spoon can have such thrust on surfaces as to cause it not to spin at all.

Two important structural features that should be noted, and create definite basis for grouping within the whirling spoon group, are the shape first, which is indicated above, and then second, the method of attachment of the spoon to the "bearing" on which it turns.

The Colorado Spinner is attached to a split ring, and because the twisting of the spoon thus attached and going round and round, will also whirl the ring, it is necessary to have a free turning swivel above

the spinner. Even then there is a tendency to twist the line. Any spoon-spinner lure should be swiveled but this is mandatory with the Colorado Spinner types.

The other method of attachment is on a shaft. There are two types in general use. The first is represented by the Indiana Spinner, which has a sort of "clevis" arrangement, a circular piece of metal wrapped around the shaft that forms the bearing. The other method of attachment is a looped bit of wire forming an eyelet, with this soldered directly to the shaft end of the spoon. Representatives of this eyelet attachment are the old Lowe and Buel spoons, and many, many others.

The single blade held in fixed relationship to the shaft on which it turns, is the next subdivision of this group of spinning lures. This is the type generally known to many fishermen as the June Bug. It is most often used with a bait on the hook below it, and in the lake country I have fished, is the No. 1 walleye lure from the latter part of the early season on until autumn.

The value of the fixed angle, with the arm extending out from the shaft to keep it in that relationship, lies in the spoon immediately being at an angle which will start turning without having to get up "speed" to cause it to revolve. Those spoons which hang free on the shaft, have to encounter just a little water resistance to thrust them out in position and start them turning. The June Bug does not.

In walleye fishing, where you have anchored over a bar, and are casting a June Bug over into deeper water with the expectation that the fish will be feeding up or down on the face of the sloping drop-off, you bait the single hook below the spoon with a minnow, and give a cast-toss over into the deep water. As the lure settles, swinging in toward the face of the drop-off, the spoon will flutter. But it will then come to rest when it has sunk to the end of the line. Now a slight lift, followed by a drop of the tip of the rod, or a movement of the rod from side to side, will have an immediate flutter result in the spoon.

This calls attention to the minnow bait, and does so without having to move the lure far or fast. The walleye often being a slow striker, doesn't have to chase the lure, as a bass, muskie or northern pike might do and yet there has been the flash of the activated spoon, even with the lightest line movement. That is the particular value of the fixed-angle single-blade spoon of this June Bug type.

The third main division of the spoon-spinner family is the propeller type. As the name indicates, a two-bladed propeller-like unit of metal is installed on a shaft, with the two blades set so water thrust will send it spinning like a simple toy windmill. Variation in the shape of blades and pitch of their surfaces will affect the rapidity of motion, but the fundamentals of action in any case remain the same.

Usually these propeller spinners are set up in pairs to offset the twisting of line that would follow if there were only one set of blades turning constantly in one direction. Equalized counter twist by the second propeller neutralizes the twisting effect.

Adaptations of the propeller type of spinner action must have been a wild challenge to some of the tackle makers, in the first quarter of this century. Both in old American and English catalogs of that period, there are spinners activated by the propeller principle that certainly are fanciful if not somewhat fantastic. Because they do have action, do flash reflected light to attract fish, no doubt they were and are, wherever still used, quite effective.

But they seemed to have reached rather strenuously toward something different-something that probably appealed to a man's interests in gadgets as much as something to cause a fish to strike. Perhaps any fish that struck was following the old principle that the best defense is attack.

The propeller and June Bug spinners are good examples to use in pointing out a main function of spinner-spoon lures. By no stretch of the imagination could anyone, including a fish, figure that a propeller whirling through the water could be something good to eat. But the flash of light from the turning blades throws darts of brilliance through the water, and attracts attention. This flash of the metal surfaces of this family of lures, might be called their "dinner bell" feature. Motion and flashing fragments of reflected light catch a fish's attention.

The division of wobbler spoons, does have some resemblance to a wounded fish in their action. That is why the single-blade wobbler can be used effectively without any other additional attachments. It is a self-contained lure. But when we go into the spinning types, all styles, the main function of the turning blades is to attract attention. The Colorado Spinner is an outstanding example of a spinning blade that often is used without adding some additional attachment, but even with this, many a fisherman gives this little spoon "body" by gobbing up the hooks with worms or salmon eggs.

The other spinner types of spoons usually require some additional attachments such as bucktails or feathered gangs, a strip of pork rind or in the case of the June Bug, a definite bit of bait in the form of a minnow. The well known Weezel lure, a spinner in front of a feather minnow, is an excellent example of the use of the spinner in front of a defined "body," the spinner being the "dinner bell" element of the lure, and the minnow-like body promising a bit of something edible.

Simply because the majority of spinning blades perform this function of attraction, while the "striking point" following the flash of the turning blades indicates food, we find most of spinning-blade lures are combinations; the blade ahead with something following. This leads to such combinations as the definite "plug" minnow, with a propeller on each end, and the Weezel lure has been cited as an example of a whirling blade calling attention to a body of substance following it.

The extreme in use of the turning spoon to attract fish is the gang flasher, used for deep trolling. As many as 7 blades are mounted on jointed piano wire, often with colored cut glass beads between blades and the whole series will string out for several feet. The end of this parade of plunder usually is a large gob of worms, liver or salmon eggs. The flashers attract, the "bait body" on the hooks supplies the point at which the fish will bite. Once attracted by the flash, it may be that food must be presented to "make a sale."

Since the spoon-spinner type of lure is first of all something to catch attention and attract, the shape of the blade and the planing surfaces which determine the action in the water are a first consideration. Secondary only to that, is the finish. As a general statement, if the surface will catch light that is penetrating the water, and reflect it, that essential is supplied. The degree of brightness of reflecting surfaces should be fitted to the water and the amount of sunlight; the brighter surfaces for murky water and dull days, the bronze or copper type of finish for brighter days and clear water.

Colors supplied by enamel may be most any combination in various lures offered. Just how much they register with a fish that sees either a wobbler or spinner and rushes at it headlong is questionable. It has been proven by exact and thorough laboratory tests, that red, followed by yellow, are seen as attractive colors by bass. I have proven to my own satisfaction that powerful orange, reds and yellows have attracted trout as against less forceful colors, using identical patterns in the test.

With these proofs in regard to the preferences for red and then yellow, color on any lure may be significant. But how much attraction by color may enter into the decision of a fish to strike a spoon of any design, is questionable, since action and reflection undoubtedly are the primary attractive values of this type of lure. There may be an added appeal in strong, simple bands of red and white on one side of a wobbler lure, flash surfaces on the other side.

The color bands are of sufficient size and brilliance to record themselves even under water. I have had some of my best results from the red-and-white Daredevil type of spoon, but whether it is action, or the flash of the inner surface, or the color combination is wide open to question.

When we get on into frog finish blades of spinners, or other fancy paint jobs, it is more than possible that we dull the reflection factor without adding any color feature that will be as alluring. When we add bucktails or feathered gangs or a bit of pork rind back of a spinner, color there, including white as a "color" may be a real factor in attraction. It stands more chance of being seen as color as it may rotate or flutter but does not whirl as a spinner blade.

One old head I fished with in the north woods insisted on a predominance of white in the feathered gangs attached to spinning lures used for lake trout trolling. That may approach simulation of a silvery fish following a turning spoon or it may suggest a wounded fish with some of the entrails dragging and ready for swift gobbling; that would simulate the food element with the spoon to attract attention.

The light-flash factor in the spoon-spinner type of lure has caused manufacturers to develop blades that have fluted or indented surfaces. One model of a muskellunge trolling bait I found good had the underside of the spoon bronzed, with a dull silver on the other side, but on that silvered side, there were bright "polkadot" points that would catch tiny bits of light, and reflect these at different angles because of the curve of the outer surface.

Just how effective these dots may be is somewhat uncertain, since every spoon or spinner has a curved surface and will catch and reflect light at different angles. Move a spoon in your hand and you will see this "lens" sort of curvature will give you one bright spot on the surface at various angles.

All this would bring us back to the consideration of the basic structure of the spoon or spinner blade as the first thing to weigh in selecting a lure of this class. The reflection of light rays is closely associated with the movement of the lure. The wobbler lure is self-sufficient while most of the spinners have to be supplied with a "point of strike" in some form of bucktails, pork rind, bait or similar addition.

The three fundamental forms found in this lure "family" then are:

1. The wobbler spoon
2. The blade revolving about the lure singly or in series of two or more
3. The "propeller" spinner

Starting with these divisions, we can chart, in some degree, the characters of each "genera" and then "species" and possibly some "varieties" of lures of this family. And while each individual "species," that is final individual lure with its particular variations, may have special value in some location, at some particular time, the more important line of approach is to recognize the basic structural features of a lure and how it will perform in use.

The spooner-spinner family

I. Wobblers: Single blades, twisting or turning but not rotating

Unsymmetrical wobbler spoon, resembling fish.

Attachment by eyelet in the end of spoon, LOWE STAR.

Attachment of spoon by split-ring, COLORADO SPINNER.

Attachment by "collar" or saddle around shaft, INDIANA SPINNER.

A. Classification by attachment of hooks

1. Hook fixed position on spoon

- Cayuga
- Canandaigua
- Johnson
- Some of Daredevils
- Many others

2. Hook or hooks free swinging, usually at far end of spoon

- Daredevils
- Finlander
- Old Lob
- Oneida
- Onondaga
- Many others

B. Classification by shape

1. Symmetrical oval-ellipse; identical taper and dishing from middle toward ends

- Cayuga

2. Symmetrical but with one or other end of the spoon wider; "egg-shaped" or "shoe spoon" outline, with deepest dish occurring in wider part

- Seneca
- Oneida
- Old Lob
- Daredevil

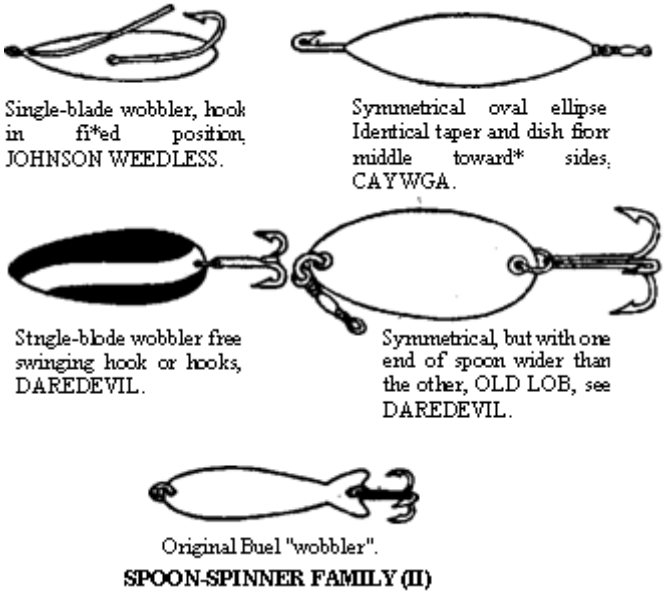
- Uncounted others

3. Symmetrical, but modified outline, often "fish shaped." Probably the first of this type offered was the old Buel "Wobbler," Style C, with many similar outlines following in its wake. Principle of planing surfaces activating lure on retrieve remains the same.

4. Slight modification in planing surfaces deviating from uniform "dishing" from all edges toward the deepest point of concave surface, usually at forward end of the spoon, to introduce more erratic action

- Daredevil
- Speed Barb
- Others

II. Spinners: Simple blade or blades in series, rotating around axis of lure



SPOON-SPINNER FAMILY (II)

A. Classification by attachment

1. Blade attached to split ring, lacking shaft. The Colorado Spinner is the universal example Original Buel "wobbler".

2. Blade or blades rotating freely on bearing fitted to shaft

a. Attachment by simple eyelet soldered to blade or by hole in blade

- Buel's Ontario and others
- Lowe's designs
- Pflueger Bearcat

Note: This method of attachment is used by many manufacturers.

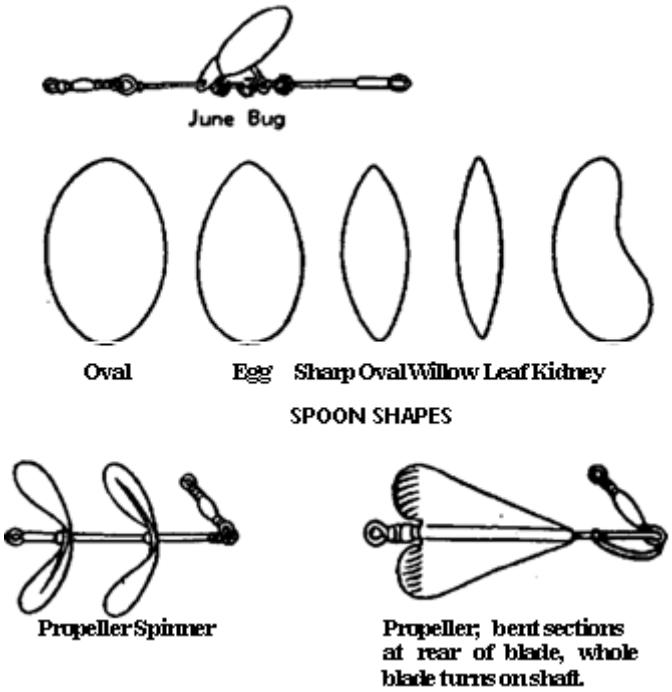
b. Attachment by "collar" or "saddle" around shaft. Indiana Spinners. This appears to be an accepted name designating a type of spinners with this typical attachment although the same method may be found in other "named" spinners in many sizes.

3. Attachment to shaft by bearing at upper end of the spoon, with the addition of an arm that holds the spoon out from the shaft at a fixed angle.
June Bug. This also is a generally accepted designation of this type of spinner. The upper bearing of the spoon is generally merely a hole drilled through the blade. B. Classification by blade forms

1. Fat oval or approaching circular
2. Egg-shaped, wider portion of blade near outer end
3. Basically oval, but with somewhat pointed ends
4. Willow Leaf
5. Kidney

Note: There is infinite variation between makes, slightly different action resulting from slightly different shapes. The depth of dishing also enters in. Thus, if we followed this classification to the last shape variation, practically every spinning lure might be classed as a separate variety. The point is, that these five general classifications embrace the type-forms that are basically sufficiently different to be segregated. There are gradations from one to the other, between each distinctly separable type.

III. Propeller spinners: Double-bladed, symmetrical propeller-shaped, rotating around shaft when drawn through water



A. Classification by shape

1. Simple propeller type blades, identical on either side, rotating independently of other portions of the lure a. Many, many adaptations of this basic design are on the market. Illustrative of the type is the Pflueger "Tandem Spinner"

2. Blades activated by the propeller principle, but designed with additional portions that also rotate

- a. Buel's Spinners
- b. Pflueger Cyclone
- c. Many modified forms, many makes

The main use of the spoon-spinner type of lure is associated with bait casting or trolling for the cool- and warmwater game fishes. Their earlier development was pointed at taking this sort of fish, the pike family, and the basses.

Simply because the elementary values of the lures in their action and attractive features are something to appeal to all game fishes modifications have been developed suited in weight for every class of sport fishing. Principally, the differences have been variations in weights of the lures to fit them to other units of tackle used. Trout size spoons that can be handled on a fly rod represent the midget lures of this type while there are heavier spoons made for use where lunker salt-water fish are taken.

So while we first think of the spoon-spinner lures as being associated with muskies, northern pike and the basses, we actually have in this "family" of lures, the most universal type that an angler can use. The flash-attraction principle and the action are such that any pugnacious game fish will become interested, if the size of lure is fitted to the tackle used and the fish to be taken.

The spoon-spinner lure, in some form and size, is available for taking any fresh-water game fish found in North America, and many other fishes in other waters as well.