

Scents Make Sense

Scented baits—this time, they're for real.

By ARIEL CABRERA

There have been a lot of artificial scent baits on the market over the years, but most were not very effective for anything other than pinfish. That seems to have changed. Some of the new generation scents are at least as deadly as live bait, and have blurred the line between artificial and natural bait.

The new "synthetic" baits are said to be biodegradable, so there's less concern about them passing through a fish's digestive tract, or that they will remain in the habitat for years like some types of expendable soft plastic. They're clean and convenient—you can buy them today, store them in your tackle box for months, and they're still effective so long as the pack is kept sealed.

Scent strips and lures work by "melting" in the water due to their porous composition. Their composition reportedly includes natural bait-fish enzymes. Once synthetic bait comes into contact with water the scents begin to dissolve, releasing a scent trail just like natural bait. Fish passing downcurrent from the scent can home in on it and follow it right to your hook—and with many of these lures, they do it, bigtime.

What's more, the moment of the hookset is not critical at all, as it is with conventional artificials, because the fish are not going to spit the scent bait out—they will swallow it nearly every time. In fact, that's the one concern with scent baits; it's necessary to set soon enough to prevent fish from being gut-hooked, or to use circle hooks of the right size to avoid the problem.

Many models of the scent baits are tough, and have enough density to allow long casts, much farther than you can fling an unweighted shrimp or sardine. You won't throw them off the hook with a power cast, either. What's



Scent strips and lures disperse scent into the water column. They also taste "real."

more, you're less likely to lose them when you get a nibble. In fact, some are tough enough to allow you to catch a dozen fish and then stow the baits in an airtight plastic bag, ready to catch a dozen more on the next trip.

You can fish most scent baits either affixed to a jig or other lure, or on their own like natural bait. For bottom feeders, including redfish, using a chunk on an unweighted bait hook can be a good way to go, especially if they're in shallow water and spooky. Cast it and bottom fish as you would any natural piece of cutbait. Pre-packaged baits come in all types of salt- and freshwater flavors and colors. They require no refrigeration so you can take them with you anywhere. Allow the bait-stealers to peck and peck at the baited hook, but they can't get it off; the big fish will eventually come along, push out the dinks and grab the bait.

To use on jigs, you can either use a large chunk in place of the jig body, or add a small sliver as a scent "tip." I like to carry scissors so I can trim and adjust the strip into smaller pieces so it doesn't change the action of the jig. This will also work on spoons and hardbaits.

Berkley Gulp! and Fishbites are currently the most visible scent bait labels,



From squid imitations to cut "shrimp," manufacturers offer pre-packaged products for every fishing application.

at least in Florida coastal waters. Fishbites specializes in products called "Fish'n Strips" and a similar Pro version for cutting any desired shapes and size. Fishbites strips have a built-in mesh to keep the bait intact, making it long-lasting and durable. Synthetic bloodworms and other patterns are also available from Fishbites. They're packaged dry in locking plastic bags and they do not smell bad—in fact, they have a pleasant fragrance.

The Berkley Gulp! products are more varied and have a few different features. They have scent as well as action, like the popular 3-inch shrimp. They are also packed in resealable baggies, and they have an oily "juice."

LIGHT TACKLE continued

Approximate average cost for a bag of scent baits is \$7.

Make sure the plastic bag is sealed securely, because this juice stinks! The Gulp! "Stripz" have a flaky, scale-like surface giving more defined detail in the finished product. Berkley products like the Swimming Mullet, Jerk Shad and Sand Eel can be rigged with a jighead or sinker/swivel rig for multiple applica-

tions. Offshore anglers even have a great selection of squid scent lures.

Foodsource Lures promotes a line of salt- and freshwater lures composed of protein and nutrient-rich ingredients. The company cites a study showing fish can actually metabolize these all-natural lures—which is encouraging, as oth-



Scale-like surface on Gulp! Stripz.

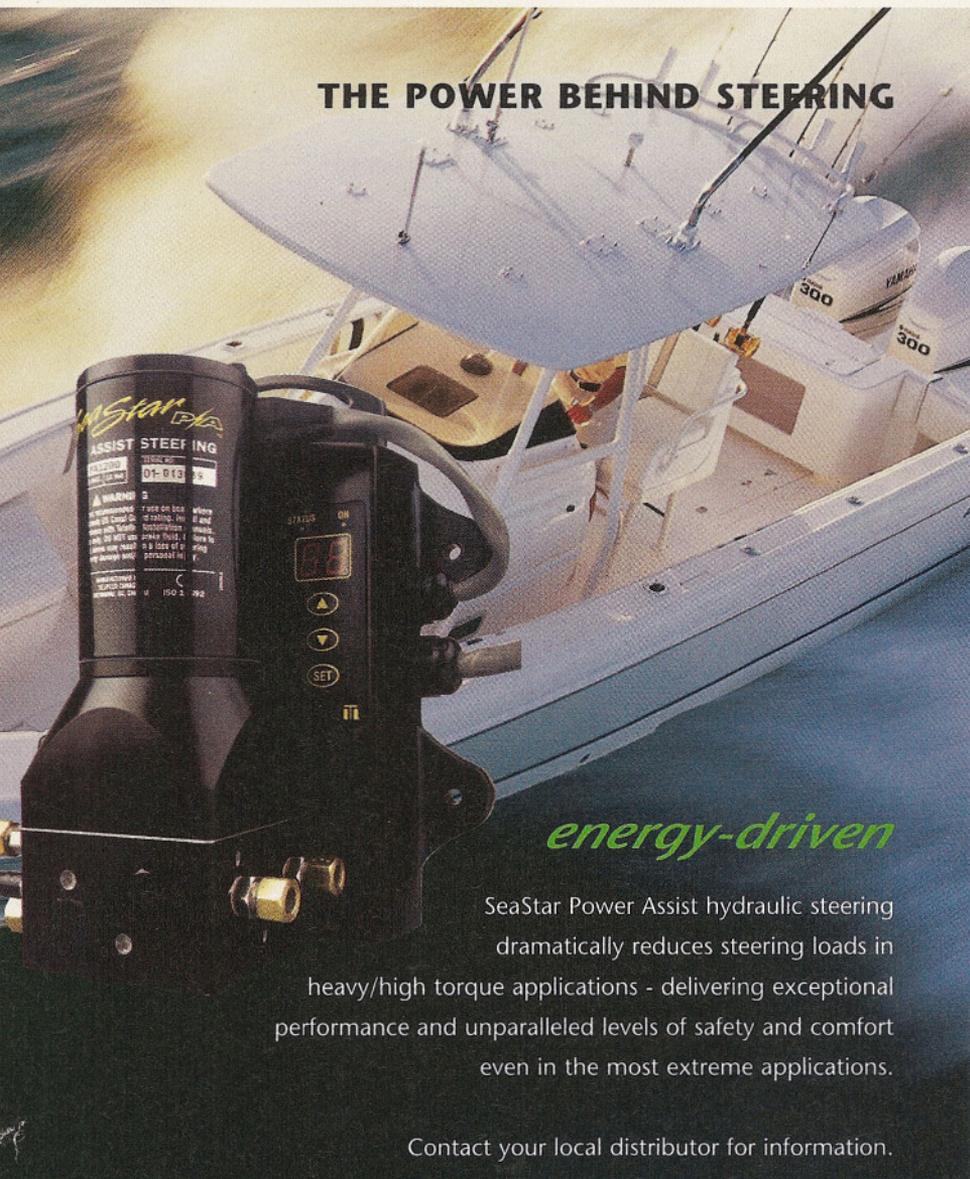
er studies have shown that fish may die if plastic becomes entrained in the digestive tract. The company also claims the lures won't melt tackle boxes. Among the Foodsource offerings are 4-inch minnow tails and 3-inch shrimp tails.

One other company called Ultrascent makes solid wafers that look like beads. You use these by inserting fishing line through them, much like an egg sinker. The idea is they add a scent trail to whatever lure you choose.

There are few downsides to synthetic baits like Fishbites and Gulp!. One is that they gradually lose their scent and

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Biodegradable Foodsource species.

after prolonged use will safely biodegrade, so occasional replacement is needed. But some advocates say the artificial baits are cheaper than live bait considering that you rarely lose one and that they can survive landing a number of fish, and even multiple trips. The approximate average cost for a bag of scent baits is \$7.

Two final tips: One, do not put used baits back inside a bag of unused scent baits because this can cause new baits to start dissolving prematurely. Secondly, remove the scent bait from your hook when you're done for the day; otherwise, it will dry into a hard, leatherlike mass that is tough to get off. 