Lures

These days I use artificial lures such as spoons only in saltwater. Even then, I use them rarely. I repeat that my preference for the fly arises not because I’m that most baleful thing, some sort of fly-only snob – far from it – but because fly-fishing is usually so effective and efficient. Therefore what I have to say about artificial lures is limited, though I’ve included what I hope are some realistic ideas for experiment.

Artificial lures include

- *narrow-bladed spoons* of the kind sometimes called ‘wobblers’ or ‘coastal wobblers’
- *spinning lures* such as Mepps spinners and various kinds of minnow- or small fish-suggesting lure
- *plugs*
- *softbaits*

On estuaries, under certain conditions I sometimes enjoy fishing narrow-bladed spoons on a spinning rod and reel. 12-20lb. braid is good for the reel-line, with a short (three-foot) trace of 8-10lb. mono. I place a BB swivel between braid and trace. For colour of lure, blue and silver, or vivid green and silver – something stylising a sandeel – seem fine, and a light lure of around 7-12g may be fished high in the water, above or around beds of seaweed, with relative ease. One of the best lures for this form of fishing was manufactured in Tobermory (Mull, Scotland) and was called the Bridun Lance. It’s no longer manufactured. Sometimes I replace the fitted treble with a debarbed single hook.

Useful commercially-available lures that can fish almost as well as the Lance include the 12g Abu Toby and several other similar designs. Entirely suitable lures may also be home-made from teaspoon handles: drill two holes top and bottom, add split-rings; place a swivel at the top and a hook at the bottom, and away you go.
Lures for saltwater: A small plastic Devon, a Bridun Lance and two coastal wobbers’

Home-made spoons usually need polishing before or after use. I use either silver polish (Silvo) or a preparation unpromisingly called ‘Peek’. Rub on with a soft cloth and then polish off.

On the Erne estuary, it’s customary to fish the main channel with sandeels on the last of the ebb and first of the flood. As the tide floods, however, sea-trout will spread out as the water rises and will quest into various bays and along different shores. Because some of the bays and shorelines come equipped with copious beds of seaweed, fishing the sandeel becomes tricky if an up-trace lead is used. The solution is to freeline the sandeel, though the drawback there is that a sandeel is relatively light to cast, particularly across or against the wind. A more efficient solution is to use a light spoon, working this
between seaweed beds as the tide rises through them. Sea-trout can on these occasions be
found in shallow water and fishing with a spoon is a good way to cover the ground.

An Erne estuary sea-trout hooked on a spoon’

Another Erne sea-trout on a coastal wobbler’
Other lures I carry include a selection of Mepps spinners, usually in sizes 2-4 and with blue-and-silver motifs. The Mepps Comet is reliable, as is the Mepps Aglia (silver, size 3). Various designs of Flying C (around 10g) may also be used, as may smallish Devon minnows. Of the last, I favour – or used to favour, since it’s years since I’ve fished them – weighted Devon minnows around 2 inches long, again in blue-and-silver or green-and-silver colours. From memories of fishing dwindling floods on Scottish Border rivers thirty years ago, various kinds of quill minnow (or imitation quill minnow) may also be tried.

Blue-and-silver Mepps, size 4, are great saltwater lures’

If a spinning lure is used, some form of anti-kink device should be employed to deter line-twist. I attach a standard anti-kink vane between the reel-line (braid) and the trace.
**Scope for experiment with artificial lures**

(a) On estuary marks and on open coasts where bass are found along with sea-trout, plugs may be used. Smallish Rapala plugs (jointed or unjointed, 7g or 11g) are useful, as are surface-running lures such as the Storm Thunderstick or Chugbug, though these last are slightly too large for the typical size of Irish sea-trout. If surface-running plugs are used in saltwater, it’s worth trying them for sea-trout at dusk or in the full dark.

(b) Softbaits are worth a trial both for sea-trout and for bass. Worm-like soft plastics, under the brand-name Culprit, are favourites among bass anglers and I see no reason why such lures (in the first instance, white and blue versions) shouldn’t work well for Irish sea-trout. They should be rigged on a weighted single (a 5g weighted size 2 hook would be adequate) and if wished, a stinger treble can be mounted.

The weight of such a rigged plastic is 5g (the weighted hook) plus the weight of the lure itself and any minimal weight – swivel, snap-link – on the trace. Inclusive weight around 7g – heavy enough to cast across the wind and efficiently handled on a light spinning rod teamed with a fixed-spool reel.

It will be readily apparent from the foregoing that I use spinning gear relatively rarely in Ireland (though I use a huge variety of spoons, spinners, jerkbaits, surface-running lures and softbaits for pike and zander fishing in the Netherlands and elsewhere). Nevertheless, there have been many days over the past five years, usually days spent on Irish estuaries in brutal winds, when fishing for sea-trout with spinning gear would have been far more efficient than trying to combat the gales with a 7-weight fly-rod. I well remember, for example, a July week spent on the Donegal coast when a combination of limited access to the angling marks and continual storm-force westeilies made fly-casting over my right (normal) shoulder impossible and I was obliged to spend five consecutive days double-hauling over my left shoulder. That was tiring at best (though in retrospect quite good for improving casting technique) and I’d have done better to use a light spinning rod and a variety of spoons and spinners.
It can be a bitter business, spring fishing on the estuary….

...but the rewards of persistence can be great