

# SONAR

# Cruising

by Bruce Samson

An expert's tip on how to find walleyes quicker using electronics



## Would you like to find walleyes faster?

“Sonar cruising” is one way to go about it.

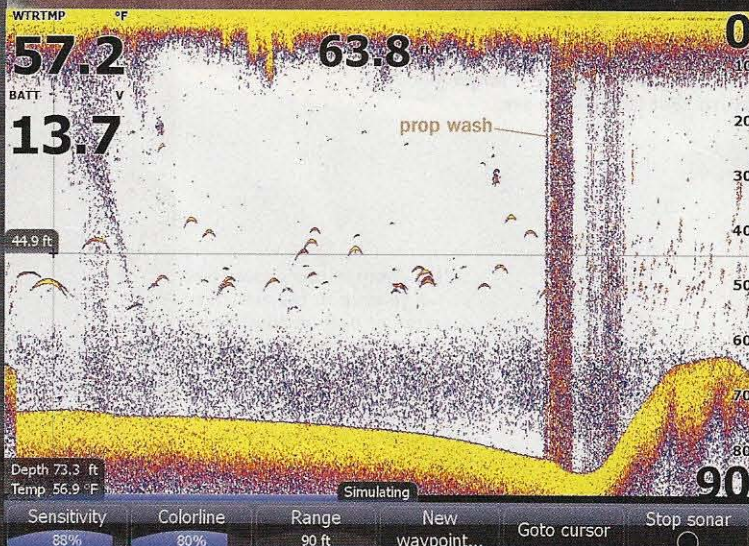
Lake basins often hold walleyes, but the fish are not everywhere. Searching for them by trolling is a slow process – far too slow for tournament anglers. The technique of sonar cruising is more than 10 times as fast, depending on trolling speed. It involves cruising the lake at a clip that allows for an optimal balance of covering water and achieving maximum sonar accuracy.

### The Details

Sonar will display fish at 30 mph if the fish are large enough, but around 20 mph is the optimal speed for sonar cruising. Start by getting the boat on plane and then maintaining the slowest speed that keeps it on plane. You could cruise for walleyes at 10 mph, but the boat won't “plane off” and the bow would be too high and might block your vision. Safe navigation is more important than staring into the sonar.

Target fish look different at 20 mph than at 2 mph because they are under the boat for a shorter time period. You should look for spikes instead of arches to indicate fish. Study the graph and screen shot at right to help give you an idea of what to look for when attempting to mark fish at different speeds:

*Here's a comparison of what fish look like at 3 to 5 mph (left-hand side) and 21 to 24 mph (right of the prop wash) on a palette white background. Notice the difference in the size and shape of the fish returns. Fish on the left are large, traditional arches. Fish to the right of the prop wash are smaller dots and more pointed arches.*



## Setting up

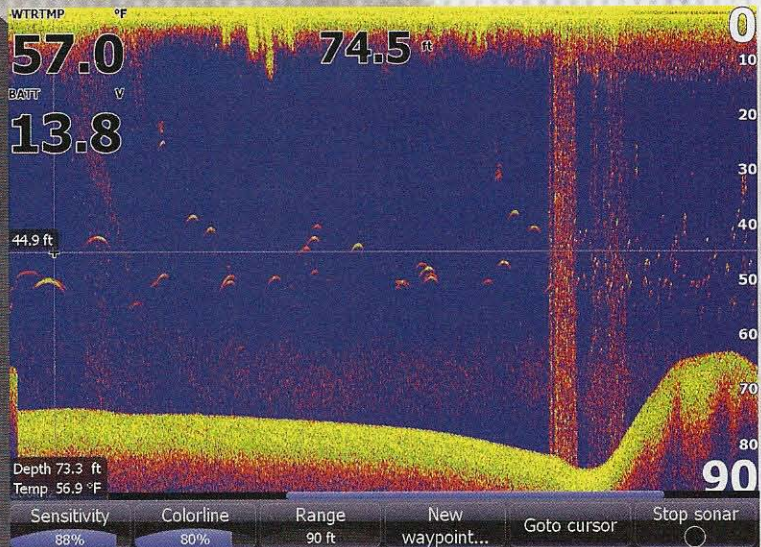
Now that you know what fish look like when you're running at different speeds, set up your sonar unit for maximum performance. Here are some suggestions.

1. **Use a blue background** – Blue noise blends into a blue background for better viewing of red and yellow fish arches.

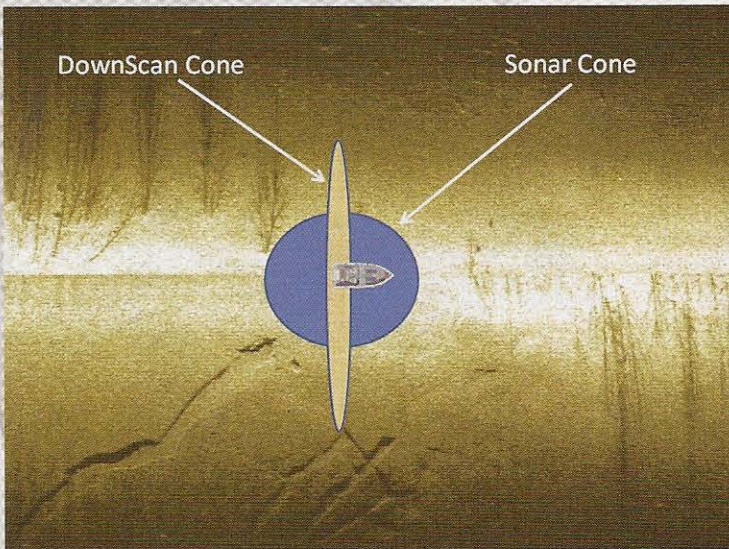
2. **Set ping speed at maximum** – Ping speed is the speed at which the transducer emits sound per second. You want the transducer to ping as fast as it can get when sonar cruising.

3. **Increase sensitivity** – Sensitivity should be increased slightly to display the fish brighter. There is no exact setting for this since each unit is different. Set yours to resemble the examples provided.

4. **Raise the color line** – Making the color line slightly higher makes the fish a brighter yellow for easier viewing.



Here's the same scenario as the previous image, with the same speed ranges, but with the palette set to a blue background. Notice how much easier it is to decipher the fish from other sonar "noise."



The sonar cone of traditional sonar is larger than that of Lowrance DownScan, so use traditional sonar to locate baitfish when cruising because bait will create a larger return that is easier to see.

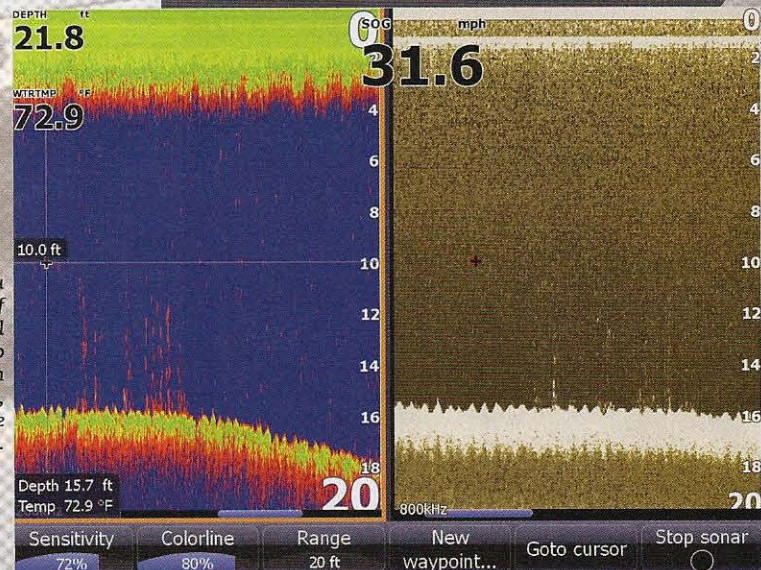
## Baitfish on DownScan and Sonar

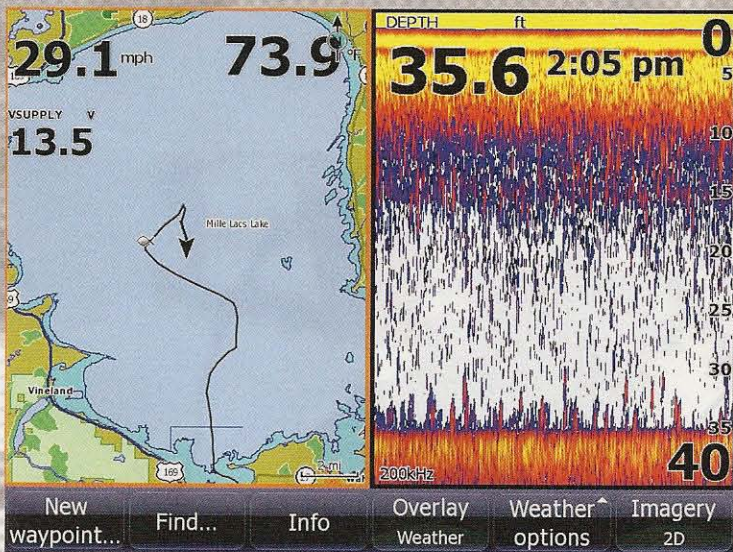
If baitfish seem to be everywhere in a lake, sonar cruising doesn't help much. But if baitfish are found here and there in specific locations, they'll concentrate the walleyes. In such situations, when you cruise around and find baitfish, you'll also find hungry walleyes nearby.

Baitfish schools are easily seen when sonar cruising since they cover larger areas than solitary fish, which means they are in the sonar cone longer. You can see baitfish with Lowrance DownScan at 20 to 30 mph, but DownScan is not the best choice for cruising since the cone is narrow and the fish are under the transducer for a short time. Instead, you want to use traditional sonar, which will result in a larger baitfish return.

Study the art and examples left and below to better understand.

This comparison shows you the difference in the return of a school of bait on traditional sonar (left) compared to DownScan. Notice how much easier it is to see the baitfish, especially when using the blue background.



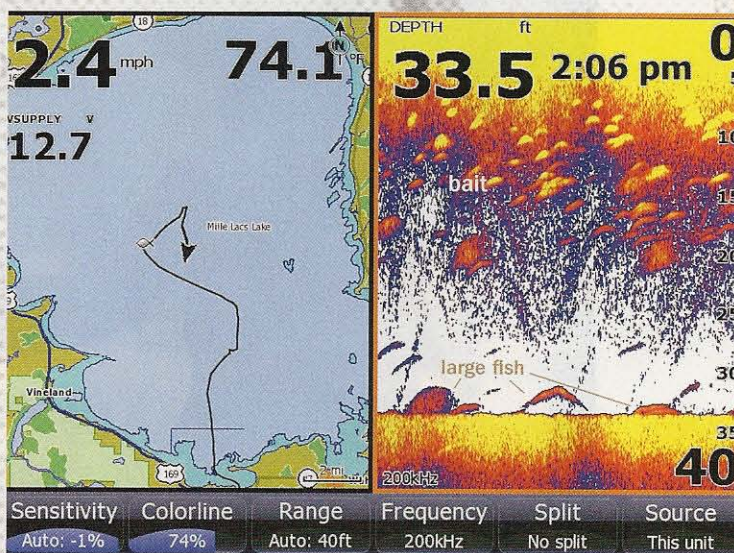
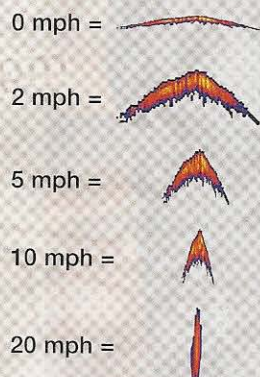


## Baitfish and Speed

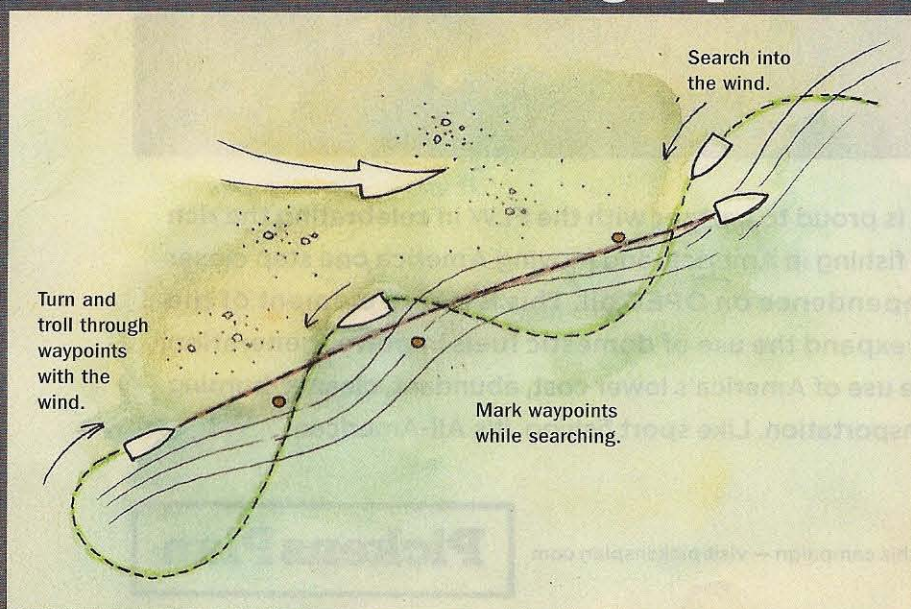
In the two images at left and below you can see the difference in sonar return of a school of bait when idling at a slow speed and sonar cruising at a faster speed. The bait is suspended and near the bottom, with large fish also present near the bottom.

The fish and baitfish seemed to be everywhere as I cruised at 29 mph (left), and I took the boat off plane to show the fish and baitfish at 2.4 mph (below). This gives you an idea of what to look for when sonar cruising at high speeds.

## Boat Speed Affects Fish Arches



## Final Sonar Cruising Tip



Using sonar cruising can help you locate fish in a hurry. But like anything we do on the water, the ultimate goal is to catch fish and not spend all day searching. To help you, it pays to have a system in place for searching and catching. With sonar cruising, it's easy.

Drive into the wind when cruising and create a waypoint when fish are spotted, but continue driving until you run out of fish or space. Now turn around and troll with the wind to the waypoint. Trolling with the wind is much easier for boat control than trolling into the wind.

Remember to navigate safely and always look ahead for other boats.

# Lowrance HDS Gen2

And the best keep getting better...new from Lowrance for 2012 is the HDS Gen2 sonar unit. It has all the features of the original HDS, but what makes it different and better is the new StructureMap technology. StructureMap overlays Lowrance's crystal clear StructureScan side-viewing sonar imagery onto a detailed GPS contour map in near real time.

Picture this: You're idling around a point on your favorite lake, following the contours on your GPS map. As you round the edge, your Gen2 unit is scanning the point and creating a highly detailed StructureScan image that reveals a rock pile, a bait cloud and a brush pile – and at the same time it's "painting" that image directly onto your map so you can pull up to each feature and start fishing it almost instantly.

Once you overlay a map, you can even go back and create a detailed 3-D image of the lake floor, with all its secrets revealed. You can even save it for review later off the water, a feature enhanced since Lowrance doubled the memory of the unit compared to the original HDS. StructureMap is possible because Lowrance made the Gen2 its fastest system yet. Charts update faster, images are relayed faster and startup is faster.

StructureMap is compatible with several Lowrance maps, Navionics maps and any mapping program compatible with the previous HDS unit. The technology is available in four of the nine Gen2 models. Several transducer packs are available for all models. \$549 to \$2,449 [lowrance.com](http://lowrance.com)



## StructureMap: A Potential Game-Changer On Ice

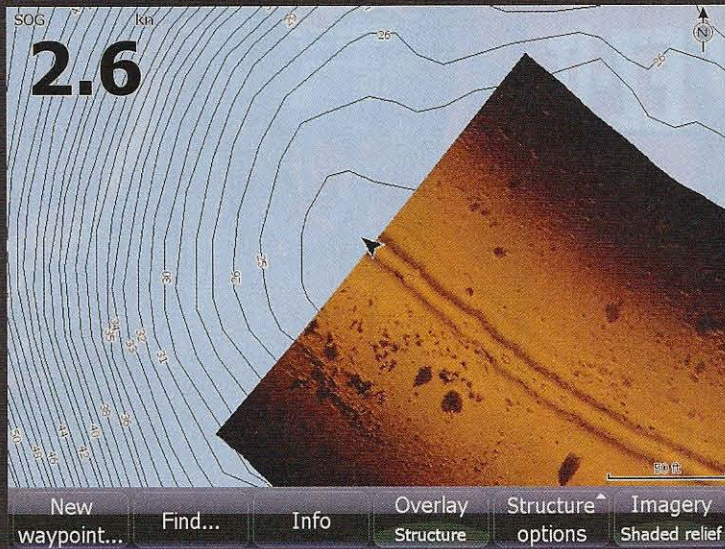
Obviously, StructureMap and StructureScan are open-water tools. However, the new technology can also help forward-thinking ice anglers.

StructureMap files are saved as .smf files. They are created from StructureScan files, which are known as .sl2 files. Once an .smf StructureMap file is created, the imagery can be opened on any Gen2 HDS unit.

So an ice angler could create a detailed underwater map of his favorite ice fishing lake during open water, create an .smf StructureMap file and then open that file on an HDS unit attached to his ATV or one of Lowrance's portable ice machine systems come hard-water season. Just use the image to park above a perfect boulder cluster and start drilling holes.

In those situations, a new "live" StructureMap image cannot be created, but the units will still open an existing StructureMap file. ■

## A Better Understanding



Probably the best feature of StructureMap is that it shortens the learning curve for anglers new to the StructureScan technology. Before, the left-right, side-looking sonar images showed what was out to the sides of the boat, but there wasn't much perspective as to where rocks, fish and other objects really were located. With StructureMap, you can see exactly where every object is on your favorite lake map. If you're new to this technology, give StructureMap a serious look.