



Fishing History

Keith Bell

Helin Fishcake

Open any vintage tackle box in the Midwest and you will likely find at least one, if not a half-dozen Helin lures. The Helin Tackle Company was founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1933 by Charles Helin. They would go on to sell tens of millions of baits over the coming decades. The vast majority would be their famous Flatfish lure (the one almost guaranteed to be in every tackle box you find). Despite their fame, you probably don't know that their name is pronounced "Hee-lin" not "Hell-in," and you probably never heard of their second-most-popular lure, the Fishcake.

Fishcake dessert

Charles Helin first applied for a patent for this lure in 1956 and it was granted in 1961. The "Fishcake" is a topwater lure with a front spinner which caused considerable disturbance when retrieved. The Fishcake was made from 1956 to 1971 and was only made of wood. It was marketed as the

"Favorite Dessert of All Game Fish," playing off the "cake" in the name of the lure. They came in three different sizes and, like the Flatfish, were offered in different treble hook configurations. The #7 spinning size was 1 3/4" long, 1/4 ounce and came with a two treble hook configuration. The #9 light casting size was 2 1/4" long, 3/8 ounce and was offered in a three treble or four treble hook configurations. The #11 standard casting model was 2 3/4" long and 5/8 ounce and came in a three or four treble hook configuration. A single treble hook variation was also offered primarily because some states, (especially on the East and West Coasts) limited the number of total hooks to three and counted a treble as a full three. An illustration of the different Helin treble configurations on a Flatfish is shown in one of the photos.

Charles himself introduced the Fishcake in the 1956 catalog: "I have a new bait in production and being distributed. This new bait I have named 'THE FISHCAKE.'"

"This is really quite a lure and no doubt whatsoever exists in my mind that it is destined to be a top seller. And why not? The FISHCAKE produces such a lively and delightful variety of sound effects when properly worked that we found ourselves laughing out loud just from listening to this wonderful new lure work its way back to the boat. We laughed when Bass and Pike struck this bait. We laughed because we knew the poor fish just couldn't help itself." He even goes on to claim that if you, "Return the gamey fish to the water and it will take a FISHCAKE again." Now I'm not sure if that last part is true or not, but he sure did know how to talk up his baits!

New FISHCAKE
Top-Water lure

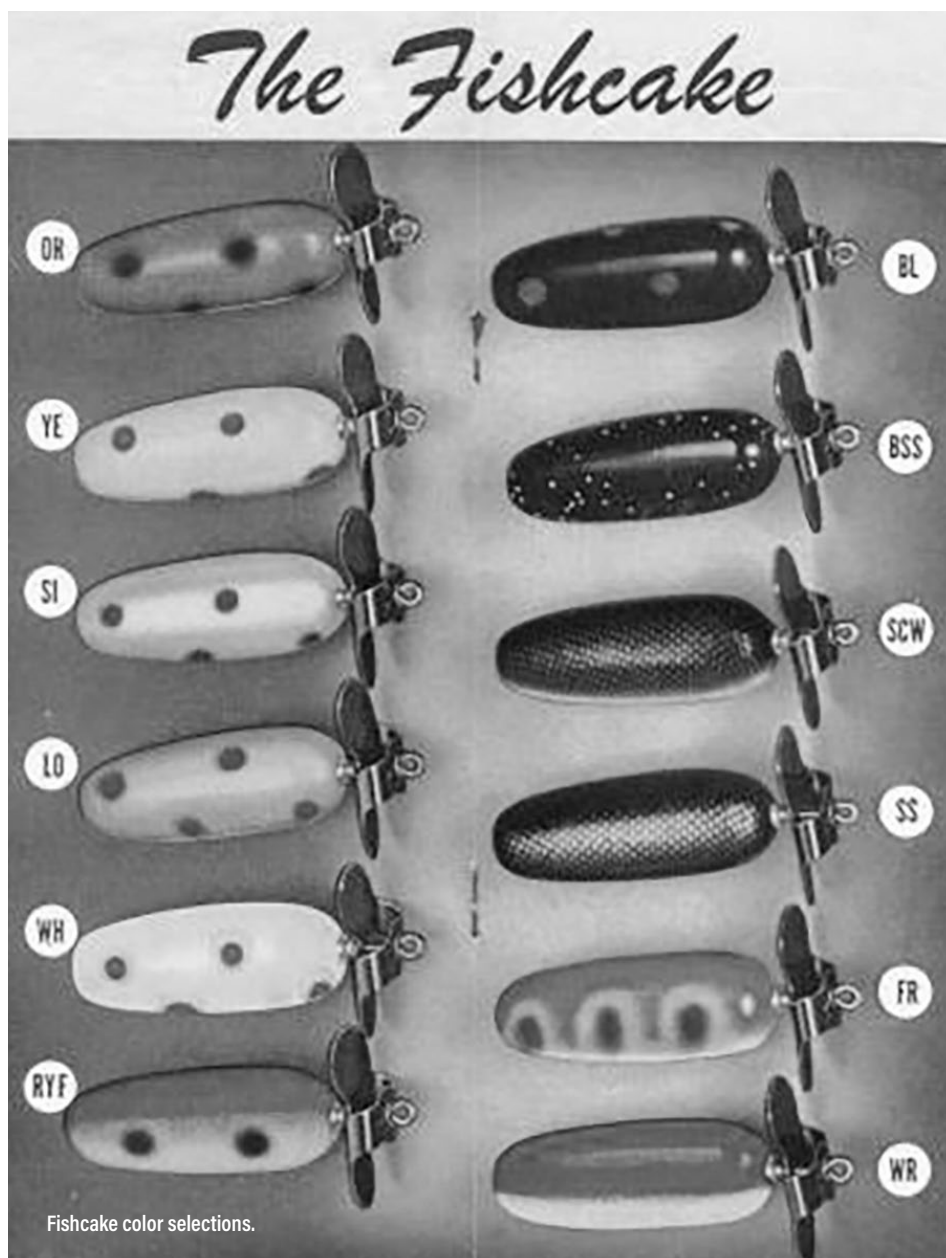
Gives you the right colors, sound effects, and off set hooks, to catch top-water strikers at night and all day long too!

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HELIN TACKLE CO.
4099 Beaufait • Detroit 7, Mich.

A 1958 Helin Fishcake ad.



Fishcake color selections.

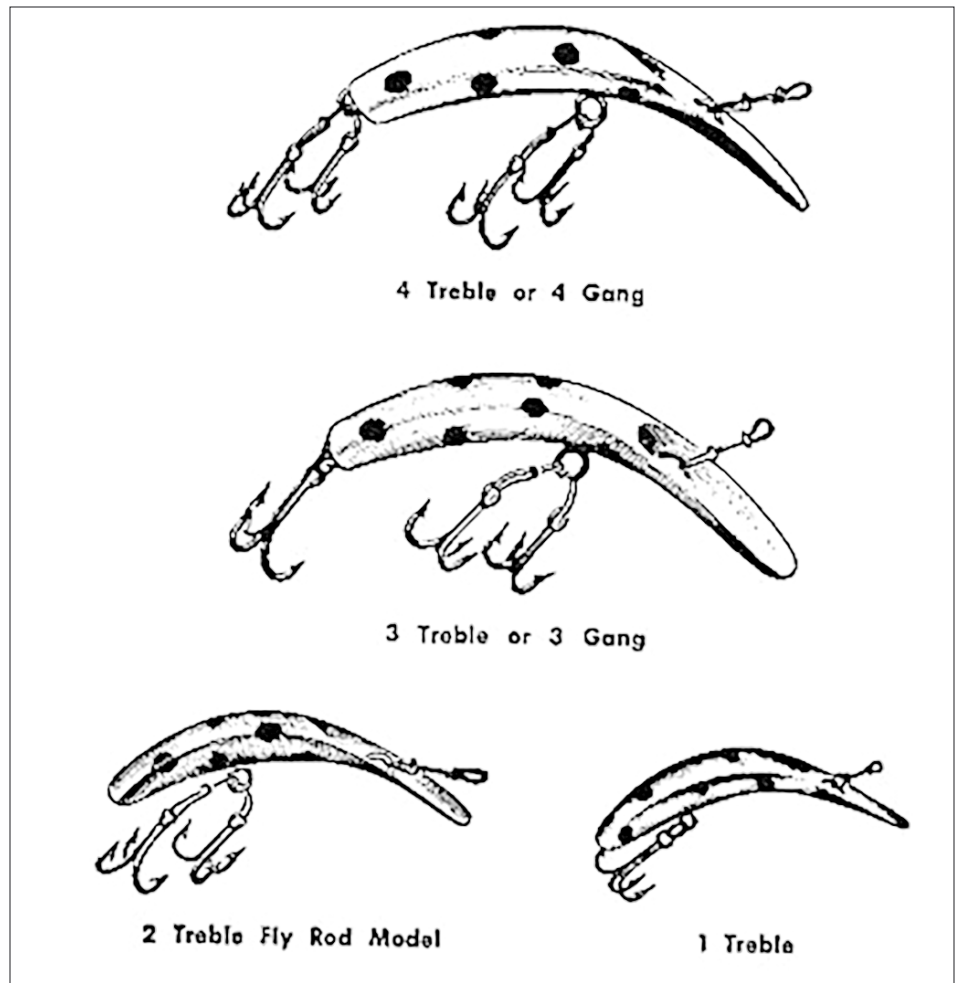


Illustration of different hook variations on a Flatfish.



Helin Fishcake SCW color with box.



Helin Fishcake WR color with box.

Charles Helin was known to be an interesting character, a world-class salesman and one that pushed the edge to market his products. An example is the annual semi-nude Helin Tackle pin-up calendar—quite risqué for its time and quite a rare collectible today. In an interesting bit of political commentary on the Fishcake, the 1958 Helin catalog states, "The red spinner, like commies, turns left; the black spinner turns right...!" The idea of the different spinner was to combat line twist, and it was suggested that you fish in the morning with one spinner and the afternoon with the other to avoid line twist. This was before swivels were used as frequently as they are today.

Colors and packaging

The Fishcake was made in 12 catalogued colors as shown in the pictured color chart. They were: OR – Orange, YE – Yellow, SI – Silver, LO - Light Orange, WH – White, RYF – Red and Yellow Fluorescent, BL – Black, BSS – Black/Silver Specks, SCW – Scale, White Belly, SS – Silver Scale, FR – Frog and WR – White / Red. Additionally, there have been some uncatalogued colors found in this

bait such as silver with black dots. They are uncommon, though.

The box for Fishcakes remained the same throughout its production period. The box had a green and yellow cardboard bottom with a clear plastic top. The dealer box was a plain yellow box marked "Fishcake."

Collector's value

A Helin Fishcake in excellent condition without the box sells for about \$5 to \$10, making it a very affordable vintage bait to still fish. With the matching box in excellent condition, the price jumps to around \$20 to \$30. Still a reasonable vintage bait to get you started on a nice collection. Uncatalogued colors would be around double these prices.

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Keith Bell and his family live in Neenah, Wisconsin but spend a lot of time fishing northern Wisconsin. Keith has been an avid angler and outdoorsman his entire life. His passion for fishing is matched only by his passion for fishing history and preservation. He is the founder and owner of MyBaitShop.com, the world's largest online vintage tackle and history website. You can reach Keith at his website or at keith.bell@mybaitshop.com