

Super Finesse Baits

By MARK HICKS

When the going gets tough, many anglers reach for 4-inch finesse plastics. Here are some even smaller options when the going gets tougher

IS THERE SUCH a thing as a soft plastic finesse bait that's too small to tempt a bass?

I couldn't help thinking that when Bassmaster Elite Series pro John Crews, of Virginia, showed me the skinny, 3-inch Drop Craw he designed for his lure company, Missile Baits. I had to hold the bait close, don my reading glasses and squint my eyes to bring the miniscule bait into focus.

"You serious?" I asked.

"Absolutely!" Crews said. "I've seen many instances where I needed something super finesse to coax a bite."

One of those instances happened at Virginia's Smith Mountain Lake. Crews could see a school of bass suspended off the side of a point 15 feet deep over 40 feet of water. They repeatedly ignored the 6-inch finesse worm that he put in front of them with a drop shot rig.

When Crews switched to the bitty Drop Craw, he immediately caught a 2 1/2-pound bass. Then he proceeded to hammer more bass of that size with the super finesse bait.

The Drop Craw also came through for Crews during a Bassmaster Elite Series tournament at the St. Johns River in March 2012. On the first day of the event, he desperately needed to catch a bedding 3-pound largemouth to cull a 12-incher in his livewell. Whenever he pitched a "normal" finesse bait into the bed, the skittish bass darted off and would not return until Crews reeled in.

"Then I cast the Drop Craw into the bed on a drop shot rig," Crews says. "The bass moved off 2 feet, came right back and ate the bait."

The Drop Craw produced two or three skittish spawners every day for Crews and carried him to a 27th-place finish. He rigged the bait on 6-pound Vicious Pro Elite Fluorocarbon with a 3/16-ounce weight and a No. 4 Gamakatsu Octopus hook.

The pincers on the Drop Craw are so tiny, they look deformed compared to other plastic craws. Crews made them that way because small crawfish typically have small pincers. Also, the little appendages waver when the bait is barely moving.

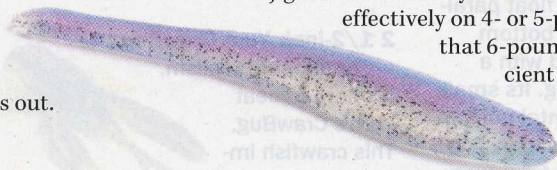
"Less action is more, especially when you're drop shooting a super finesse bait," Crews says.

3-INCH ROBOWORM ALIVE SHAD

Alabama transplant Aaron Martens began fishing super finesse baits while growing up in California and continues to use them while competing in the Bassmaster Elite Series. He downsizes to Roboworm's 3-inch Alive Shad when bass key on an abundance of small baitfish and ignore everything else.

"That can happen even in dirty water," Martens says. "The bass follow the bait and suspend close to the bank and near vertical structure like bridge pilings."

The Alive Shad's bitty minnow shape resembles the baitfish the bass are feeding on. It is also available in exceptional baitfish colors that allow you to closely "match the hatch," Martens points out.



SUPER FINESSE IN A PINCH

If Michael Iaconelli needs a super finesse bait while fishing a tournament but doesn't have any onboard, he makes one by cutting off the end of a worm or some other soft plastic lure. He did this when he fished an Elite Series tournament at Lake Guntersville.

It was getting late on the final day of the event, and Iaconelli needed one more bass to clinch the victory. He spotted the bass he needed guarding fry. After the bass ignored a 5-inch shaky head worm, Iaconelli bit off the first three inches of the worm and

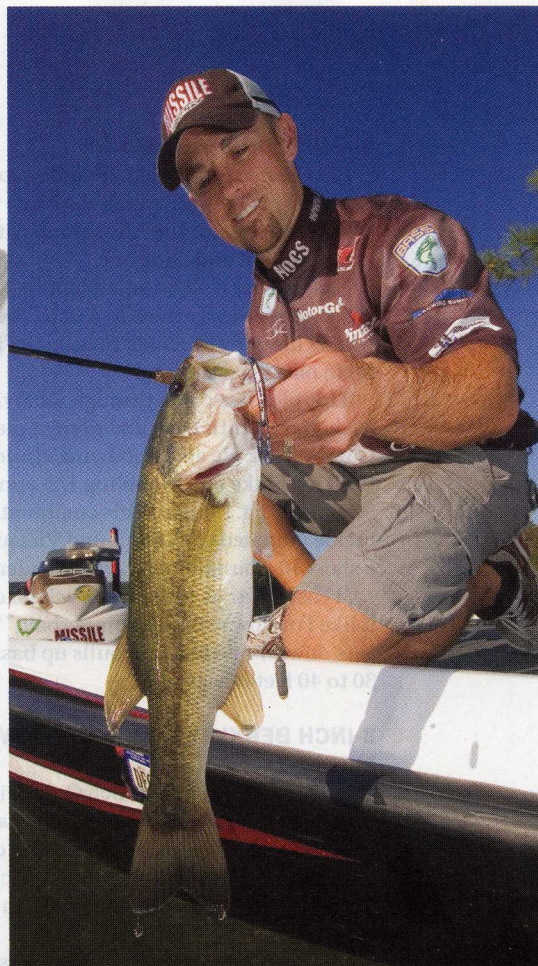
rigged the tail weightless on a 2/0 hook.

The bass inhaled the 2-inch makeshift super finesse bait on Iaconelli's second cast.

"That was the winning fish for me," Iaconelli says.

John Crews designed the Missile Baits Drop Craw to excel when bass are feeding on tiny forage.

Photo: Mark Hicks



3-INCH ZOOM TINY FLUKE

Elite Series pro Gerald Swindle drop shots Zoom's Tiny Flake in much the same way that Martens does the Alive Shad, with a light weight and light line.

"When bass feed on small bait in clear water, they're hard to catch," Swindle says. "That's when I have my best luck floating a Tiny Flake down to them on a drop shot rig."

This ploy has come through for Swindle many times at Alabama's Smith Lake and even at places like Lake Guntersville. He also hoodwinks finicky bass by rigging the Tiny Flake on a wobbling 1/8-ounce Luck "E" Strike Scrounger jig. He casts this combination with spinning tackle matched with 10-pound Vicious braided line and a short 10-pound fluorocarbon leader.

"I cast as far as I can over a school of fish and retrieve it like I'm slow rolling a spinnerbait," Swindle says. "It gets down 7 or 8 feet and pulls up bass suspended over 30 to 40 feet of water."

3-INCH BERKLEY POWERBAIT TWITCHTAIL MINNOW

Berkley's 2 1/2- and 3-inch Gulp Minnows and 3-inch Gulp Fry have been go-to super finesse baits for New Jersey's Michael Iaconelli since their debut. The Elite Series pro is also big on the new 3-inch Berkley PowerBait Twitchtail Minnow, which has a thin, supple needle tail.



"I drop shot these baits to match small forage fish,"

Iaconelli says. "At some fisheries, like the Ohio River, the baitfish always tend to be small because they live in such a harsh environment."

When he's fishing the Ohio and other industrial rivers, Iaconelli will drop shot these lures next to vertical structures, such as sea walls and bridge pilings. He also pitches them under the noses of parked barges to pick off



bass suspended beneath these huge vessels.

When bass guard fry in shallow water,

Iaconelli Texas rigs the little baits with a No. 1 or No. 2 worm hook and fishes it weightless. He pulls the bait into the fry, kills the retrieve and lets the lure flutter down. Few bass can resist the easy target. Six- or 8-pound fluorocarbon line lets these baits work with the most appealing action, Iaconelli says.

3-INCH JACKALL SUPER CROSSTAIL SHAD

Alabama's Kotaro Kiriya aptly demonstrated his finesse fishing ability when he used a drop shot on his way to an Elite Series victory at Lake Erie in July 2008 with 93.6 pounds of smallmouth bass.

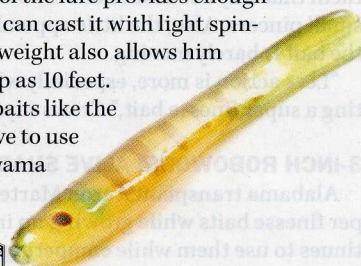
Kiriya is also a lure designer. His latest creation is Jackall's 3-inch Super Crosstail Shad. It combines the cross tail design of the original 4-inch Crosstail Shad with a more realistic body shape that features multidimensional colors, molded scale patterns and 3D eyes.

"I like the Super Crosstail Shad when I share a small area with a lot of people," Kiriya says.

Heavy fishing pressure scatters the bass and makes them lure shy, Kiriya adds. This is when the Super Crosstail Shad works its magic.

Kiriya fishes the tiny bait with a drop shot rig in most instances. He will also Texas rig it with a 1/0 Owner offset worm hook. A Lunker City Nail Insert Weight shoved into the body of the lure provides enough weight that Kiriya can cast it with light spinning tackle. The nail weight also allows him to fish the bait as deep as 10 feet.

"Everybody fishes baits like the Senko now, so you have to use something else," Kiriya says. "I fish the Super Crosstail Shad the same way and catch more bass."



MORE SUPER FINESSE OPTIONS



3 1/2-inch Attraxx Drop Shot Shad

If you want to add a feeding stimulant to up your odds, this tiny worm includes Sci-X, which the manufacturer says produces a feeding behavior. The worm is very slender with a bulbous tail, giving it good action on a drop shot.

2 3/4-inch Dry Creek Drop Shot Tube

This tube's slim profile helps it float parallel with the bottom when fished with a drop shot rig. Its small size, horizontal posture and subtle action tempt bites from wary bass.



2 1/2-inch Yum CrawBug

For ultimate realism, it's hard to beat Yum's CrawBug. This crawfish imitation boasts three-dimensional features, super detail and superb crawfish colors. The tail is curled under so it looks precisely like a fleeing crawdad.



3-inch Strike King Rage Baby Craw

With its hyperactive pincers and lifelike crawfish shape, the Strike King Rage Baby Craw is an especially versatile super finesse bait. Fish it with a drop shot or split shot rig, or on a light jighead.

3-inch Zipper Hand Poured Lil' Thumper

This supersoft, hand-poured bait excels with drop shot and split shot presentations when heavy fishing pressure turns bass off. The hand-pouring process makes each lure one of a kind.



2 1/2-inch and 3-inch Damiki Spoon Tail Miki

Designed for swimming and hopping retrieves on a finesse jighead, the Spoon Tail Miki is named after its cupped tail. The unique tail shoves water down when hopped, causing bottom silt to be pushed away in a natural motion. You can easily separate the tail portion to give the bait a crawfish profile.