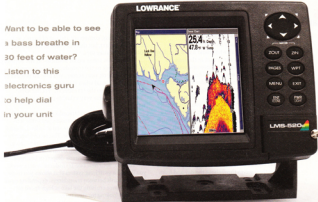


Want to be able to see
a bass breathe in
30 feet of water?
Listen to this
electronics guru
to help dial
in your unit



Top 5 Sonar Tips

By KEN DUKE
Senior Editor

If you set ping speed at anything higher than 50 percent, you run the risk of blowing up your transducer."

—Wilson Frazier

WILSON FRAZIER IS "The Professor." A Lowrance senior pro staff member for more than 30 years, he's helped to teach some of the finest bass fishermen in the world about sonar and GPS. His students include Roland Martin, Bill Dance, Michael Iaconelli, Gary Klein, Mark Davis, Larry Nixon, Shaw Grigsby, Greg Hackney, Skeet Reese, Edwin Evers and too many more to name.

When the professor talks electronics, the best anglers in the business listen. After all, Frazier picks up where the owner's manual leaves off, and everyone wants an edge when it comes to catching more bass. Here are his best tips.

(Continued)



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1 AUTO IS YOUR FRIEND

For decades, many so-called electronics "experts" have advised all who would listen that they needed to operate their sonar unit in the manual mode. For them, running it in automatic was for rookies, amateurs and wannabes. Though they may have had a point years ago, with today's electronics, these "experts" are absolutely wrong.

"Think about it," Frazier begins. "No one wants you to have a good experience with your sonar unit more than the company that made it. They spend a tremendous amount of time and money establishing the very best settings to cover 90 percent of an angler's needs and fishing situations. For most fishing conditions — and this includes those faced by the top pros in major tournaments — the power button is the only one you need to use."

"Today's sonar units are extremely adaptable and will adjust themselves throughout the day and from moment to moment as your conditions change. That's why you see them adjust the screen scale when you move to much deeper or shallower water. These modern sonar units are pretty smart."

By way of illustration, Frazier saw a well-known fishing pro on television just days before the interview that led to this story.

"He was telling everyone to take the unit out of automatic and adjust the sensitivity to 65 percent," Frazier says, shaking his head. "He should know better than that. The unit he was using is set at the factory to run at 97 percent sensitivity, and if he's adjusting it that much, he's missing a lot of valuable information on his sonar unit."

2 A SECOND TRANSDUCER

Is your console sonar unit relying on a "shoot-through-the-hull" transducer? For most of us, the answer is "yes." After all, that's what boat manufacturers generally install on their boats before they leave the manufacturing plant.

They're easy, convenient and out of harm's way for the most part, but there is a cost to the serious fisherman, Frazier says.

"When that sonar signal bounces off the bottom and comes back to the transducer to be converted into a readout on your screen, you lose 20 percent or more of that signal when it has to penetrate the hull to make it back to the transducer," Frazier says. "You can lose some very valuable information that way."

The answer is a second transducer mounted on the outside of the hull — on the transom, just to the starboard (right) side of the jackplate and at lip level, about 6 to 12 inches above the drain hole. This second transducer will be safe from obstructions while you're running, but in the water when you slow down and start idling around in search of that miracle dropoff or breakpile.

To make your new two-transducer system work, you'll need a switching system that allows you to go back and forth between transducers, depending upon whether you're cruising the lake at high speed or idling and looking for structure.

"In a Lowrance unit, we call it a transducer switch box," Frazier says.

3 BOW-MOUNTED SONAR TRANSDUCER

Have you got one of those newer model trolling motors with the transducer built right into the foot? They're great, aren't they? So convenient — you just plug your transducer cable into it and you're ready to go, no wires and no mess.

But there's a trade-off, and it's a big one.

If your sonar unit is not line-balanced with the transducer in the trolling motor (and it almost certainly isn't, according to Frazier), you're losing power and sensitivity that you want and need. Frazier analogizes the situation to two pipes that are not quite



matched up. Sure, some water goes through, but a lot is spilled on the ground, too.

The fix is simple, but defeats the purpose of the built-in transducer. Frazier recommends that you get the transducer that was made for your unit and mount it on the foot of the trolling motor.

"Just pretend that built-in transducer isn't there," he says. "It's no good to you anyway. But with the right transducer and a good sonar unit, you can see a lot more detail and even watch your drop shot rig fall to the bottom."

4 IGNORE "PING SPEED"

Ping speed increases the frequency of "clicks" or soundings to determine depth and bottom composition. The truth is, though, that the factory settings are more than sufficient when it comes to ping speed. After all, the unit is sending out a signal at the speed of sound and sending out another one as soon as the last signal has bounced back. When they're coming in at 769 mph, more simply isn't necessary.

"If you set ping speed at anything higher than 50 percent (the factory setting), you run the risk of blowing up your transducer," according to Frazier. "By increasing ping speed, you are seeing more return signals, but what you're really getting is just the same signal more times. This feature is really only for when you're moving at 60 mph or more. It's not for the speeds you're going when you're looking for structure or cover."

5 USE RAM MOUNTS

Ram's custom-made cradles not only make your electronics more maneuverable, they have other advantages, according to the professor.

"When you mount your electronics on a Ram mount, they are no longer a part of the boat that has to

COMMON MISTAKES YOU CAN AVOID

1. Don't clean your screen with dirty fingers and dirty rags. You'll damage the screen and never be able to read it as well again.

2. Don't mount your bow transducer so that it can be pushed backward. Position it so that the transducer is pressed up against the trolling motor skag, and try to mount the hose clamp behind the motor shaft.

3. Don't leave your bow unit on when the transducer is out of the water. If you wait to turn it on until it's back in the water, it won't take several minutes to find the bottom.

4. If you insist on running your sonar on manual settings rather than auto, at least remember to turn the sensitivity down when you're in shallow water. This will help to prevent crazy readings like 274.8 feet deep when you can easily reach the bottom with your rod tip.

take a beating on the water or on the road," Frazier says. "That's not true if you mount to a regular bracket or use built-in electronics."

"With the Ram mounts, you can adjust for glare or just to get the best angle to see the screen. Built-in bow sonar and GPS units are potential trouble. They're bowls that collect water, and with the heat and cold shifts, that water is eventually going to seep through and create problems."

PARTING SHOTS FROM THE PROFESSOR

"A lot of people send their sonar units back to the manufacturer, thinking that the problem is with the unit rather than the transducer," Frazier says. "If you think that's you, there's a simple test to find out whether your transducer is working."

"First, if the transducer is on the trolling motor foot, lower the motor so it's in the usual position as though you're fishing. This should put it 18 inches to 2 feet off the floor of your garage. If you're checking the transducer on the transom or in the hull, you don't need to do anything extra," he says.

"Turn on the sonar unit and see what kind of reading you get. If it gives you a reading of about 6 to 8 feet, your transducer is just fine."

The reason it doesn't show 18 inches to 2 feet is that sound travels four times faster through water than through air so the transducer thinks it's actually four times farther away than it really is."

If you want more of the professor's words of wisdom, check out his blogs on Bassmaster.com or his Web site at www.bassmaster.com.

