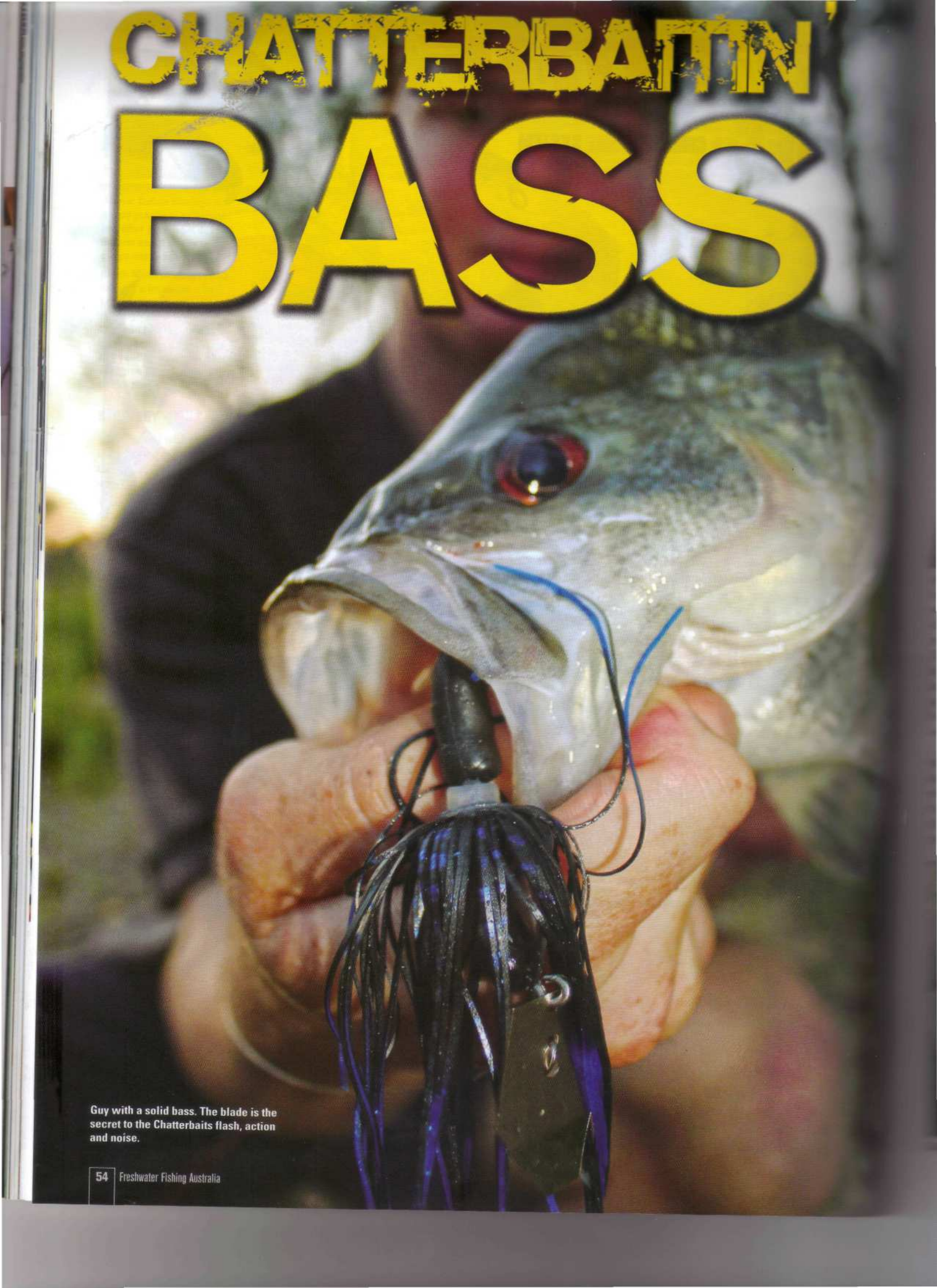


# CHATTERBATTIN BASS



Guy with a solid bass. The blade is the secret to the Chatterbaits flash, action and noise.

**BASS ARE POPULAR TARGETS ON A VARIETY OF LURES AND TECHNIQUES BUT CHATTERBAITS ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED. JUSTIN WILLMER EXPLAINS THAT THEY CAN OFTEN COME INTO THEIR OWN WHEN OTHER LURES SIMPLY AREN'T CONVERTING.**



A stinger hook can increase the hook up rate when the bite is timid, unfortunately it does lessen the snag resistance of the chatterbait.

**A**bout fifteen years ago a friend and I picked up a couple of strange looking lures off the tackle shop wall, shook our heads and asked each other "what are these and what would use them?" The lures were spinnerbaits and we now have a box full of them and wouldn't dream of heading off on a freshwater mission without having them in our arsenal. They are extremely snag resistant, trigger strikes when many other lure types won't and they are dynamite on bass, cod, golden perch, saratoga and a variety of other freshwater species, as well as producing results for switched on anglers in the salt.

A couple of years ago we stumbled onto another strange contraption and after the success of those first couple of spinnerbaits we picked up many years ago, we were keen to give this new lure a swim. The lure was a chatterbait and they too now have a place among our go-to lures. Chatterbaits are built

on a lead head jig, with a skirt fitted much like a spinnerbait, but instead of an arm and spinning blades, like those found on a spinnerbait, chatterbaits have a flat blade mounted sideways on the eye of the jig. A snap clip is mounted to a snap clip and that is where the line is attached.

My first cast with a chatterbait saw it land among a cluster of fallen timber and with the first turn of the handle it came alive. When retrieved a chatterbait has a swimming action much like a hardbody, combined with the pulse and water movement of a skirted jig and finished off with the flash and vibration of a spinnerbait. That's one deadly combination!

That first cast had the lure chattering away, hence its name, bouncing over structure and I could see the occasional flash below the surface as the sun bounced off the blade. On the second cast I allowed the chatterbait to sink deeper into the

snag, twitched it a couple of times and then commenced a slow roll. I felt the chatterbait bump a log, then another and as it moved away from the snag pile it was crunched by what felt like a solid bass. I swung the rod sideways, pushed the rod tip underwater and cranked hard to ensure the bass didn't return to the structure from which it appeared. After a short but stubborn fight I slid the net under a bass of around 45 centimetres.

Before making that cast I had positioned the yak a cast distance from the snag and turned side on to make it more difficult for the bass to pull the yak toward the snag, in turn giving me more leverage to extract the fish from its snaggy home. I sat and admired the solid, healthy looking fish that had smashed this crazy contraption, before sliding it back into the glassy water and watching it cruise back toward the snags. More bass followed soon after and I had found another favourite lure that I wouldn't head to the freshwater without.

#### CHOOSING A CHATTERBAIT

Chatterbaits are available from some big name brands, as well as several boutique backyard brands, but the general design principles are the same. I fish with two main weights, 1/4 oz mini for fishing the small water and for when the bass are finicky and 3/8 oz when the bass are feeding aggressively or when targeting larger fish and fishing larger systems. There is a wide range of





Matt with a solid chatterbait bass. Mix up your retrieve from a slow roll to a few hops and drop back to the bottom, until you find what the fish want.

## RETRIEVE TECHNIQUES

There are four main retrieves I use when fishing with chatterbaits, however I think it's important to mix up the retrieve until you find what works for you and what works on any given day. Weather, water temperature, season, water clarity and many other variables can affect the way fish feed so it's important to have a few different retrieve techniques up your sleeve and mix them up until you find what the fish want.

### Slow Roll

A simple slow roll (slow wind) can often be all that's needed to encourage a strike when using a chatterbait due to the amount of action and noise built into the lure. Simply cast the chatterbait, allow it to sink to the desired depth and commence a slow retrieve. We have found that different brands, weights and sizes work best at different speeds and some chatterbaits also need a couple of quicker winds to start the blade chattering, then you can drop the speed back to a slow roll. Experiment with the speed of the retrieve until you find what the fish want.

### Burn & Kill

A burn and kill (quicker wind, followed by a pause) retrieve is also extremely effective when using a chatterbait. The burn creates plenty of noise, flash and water movement to attract any fish in the area and the kill allows the fish to find the lure, while also creating the illusion of injured or struggling prey. By varying the speed and duration of the burn and duration of the pause you will soon find what works for you. Hang on when using this retrieve, the hits will often come during the pause or just as you recommence the retrieve and they can be bone jarring!

FACT BOX

## WHERE ARE THE BASS?

There are three main things I look for when targeting bass: structure, bait and fish.

**Structure** – Bass are a structure orientated species and often the best structure will hold the biggest fish. In creeks and rivers structure may include snag piles, lay down timber, weed beds, ledges, rock bars, overhanging vegetation and undercut banks. It may also include shade and shadow lines where bass can hunt food and ambush it from the shadows. In impoundments structure can include all of the aforementioned, as well as riverbeds and channels.

**Bait** – Keep an eye out for bait moving on the surface, around structure and on your sounder. Bait attracts fish and at some point the fish will switch on to feed. If you locate schools of bait in impoundments it's worth marking them on your sounder and returning to them throughout the session as there may be no bass with the bait at one point in time and an hour later a school of bass may have moved into the area to feed.

**Fish** – The other way we locate bass is to look for fish themselves. If you see a swirl or bait getting smashed on the surface, get the chatterbait in there! Locating schooled fish on the sounder is also extremely effective in impoundments, again mark the schools and work them systematically until they switch on.



It's not all about the solid take and stubborn fight, for many it's just the magnificent areas where you find these fish.



Owen lays a solid chatterbait bass on the bragmat.

#### Twitch & Roll

We've discovered that adding a few twitches to a slow roll can trigger a strike when straight rolling retrieves aren't working. If the rolling or burn and kill retrieves aren't working, get that chatterbait deep into a snag and twitch it a few times while you're slow rolling it out. That small increase in action can be enough to make the difference and whether it represents a skittish baitfish, twitching shrimp or yabby it doesn't really matter once that rod tip loads and the drag starts screaming!

#### Hop & Drop

Another retrieve that has also proven effective is a hop and drop, or lift and drop retrieve. Cast the chatterbait and allow it to sink to the bottom or the desired depth, lift the rod with a series of hops, or one long hop and then allow the lure to fall back to the bottom or the desired depth. If it makes it there of course! Many hits come on the pause, as the lure falls back down through the water column, so stay in touch with the lure, while still allowing it to fall naturally.

Varying the length and speed of the hop, or hops, and duration of the pause can switch on fish that may not respond to other retrieves. This technique has been especially effective when fishing a chatterbait down a drop off or when targeting shutdown fish schooled on the bottom. A favourite retrieve of mine consists of one long hop, followed by a drop, then three small hops and a drop, repeated, ensuring that you watch the line and stay in touch with the lure – ready for a strike.

#### GEARING UP

When fishing chatterbaits we carry a selection of colours from dark to light but also bright colours, often with some chartreuse strands in the skirt. Darker



Jade with a solid bass from the upper river reaches.

colours are a good starting point in dirty water, natural lighter colours in clearer water and the bright colours in case the others aren't attracting strikes. Like any rule when it comes to fishing though, mix it up until you find what works in the waterway you're fishing, as effective colours can vary depending on the preferred food type, time of day, season and other variables.

Most freshwater anglers will have their favourite spinnerbaits for different waterways and often the skirts can be easily removed from the spinnerbait. Simply slide the spinnerbait skirt onto the chatterbait in place of the original and you have a colour

that has worked for you previously and that you have confidence throwing. Spinnerbait skirts are also available separately from some brands and they are relatively inexpensive. This allows you to have a wide selection of skirt colours in your kit without having to carry a box full of chatterbaits.

Chatterbaits are also available with a variety of blade colours. This may not seem as significant as the skirt colour, but can make a big difference when the bite is tough. We carry a selection of silver, gold and black bladed chatterbaits as the amount of flash can influence the bite. Some anglers prefer a gold blade in dirty water, silver blade in

The action, flash and noise of the chatterbait is a favourite for bass.



FACT  
BOX

### MIX IT UP

- Carry a selection of different coloured chatterbaits, including light, dark and fluoro colours.
- Blade colour can make a difference, so include silver, gold and black blades, or bring a permanent marker to colour in the blade and remove the flash.
- A spinnerbait skirt can be used in place of the chatterbait skirt, opening up a massive range of additional colour options.
- Adding a trailer, such as a paddle tail soft plastic, can add bulk and action to the chatterbait, while also changing the profile and colour.

clear water and black blade when the fish are spooky or feeding less aggressively. Carrying a permanent marker in your kit can also be an effective alternative, if the flash is putting the fish off, simply colour the blade black.


Some chatterbaits come fitted with a trailer to add bulk, realism and action to the lure; alternatively you can simply add your own soft plastic. The most effective trailers we have found are paddle tail plastics, a soft plastic style that is often considered to be effective on bass and other freshwater species when fished on a standard jighead. Our go-to paddle tail is the ZMan 3inch

MinnowZ and there are a few reasons why. The tail action is extremely subtle, so it doesn't work against the action of the chatterbait. The profile size of the 3 inch MinnowZ is also perfect for bass and there are nearly 20 colours in the range, so there are natural, dark, light and fluoro colours to complement your chosen chatterbait or suit the conditions you're fishing. Finally the ZMan is buoyant so it keeps the tail up and moving with the water even when at rest on the bottom, attracting fish while also avoiding snags. The trailer adds bulk, action and can completely change the colour and look of the lure. We have even had successful sessions with no skirt and just a paddle tail plastic on the chatterbait.

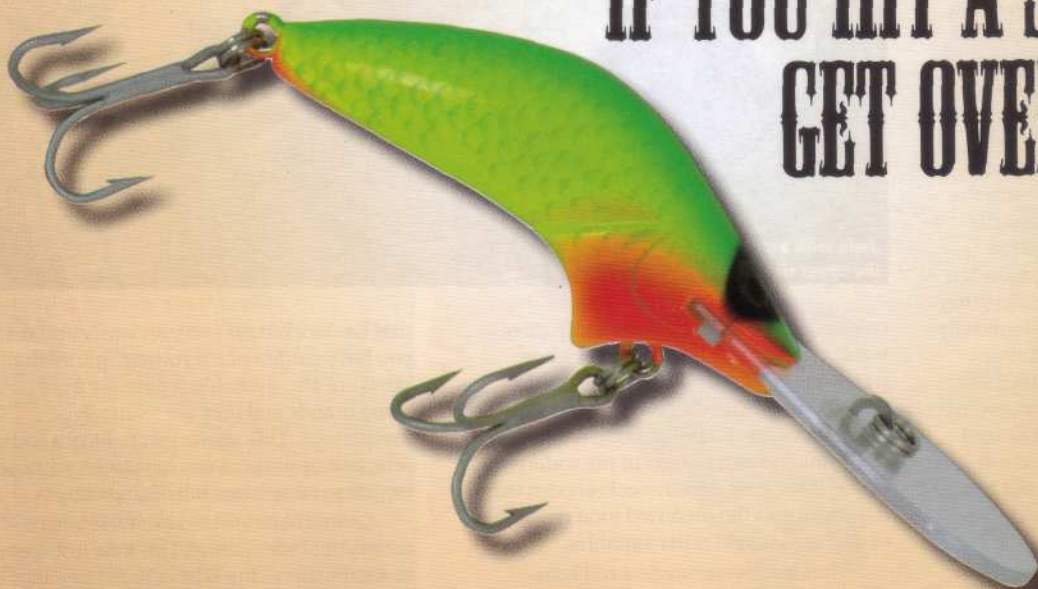
By carrying a selection of chatterbaits with different blade colours, a range of skirts and a variety of trailer styles and colours you can effectively be carrying dozens of lure combinations in a single tackle tray.

### GET SOME

If you chase bass, or other freshwater species including saratoga, cod and yellowbelly, keep an eye out for chatterbaits in your local tackle store. They are a dynamite lure option, with a unique action and noise. Chatterbaits also resist snagging and produce the fish when other lures fail to raise a strike. Just like spinnerbaits, those strange contraptions I stumbled on some 15 years ago, chatterbaits now have a permanent place in my kit and I wouldn't hit the freshwater without them.

See you on the water... 

ITS MOTTO IS:  
**IF YOU HIT A SNAG,  
GET OVER IT!**



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