

Co-angler Etiquette

19.Feb.2002 by Rob Newell

When I first started fishing as a co-angler, I never offered pros gas money because I simply did not know any better. At one particular FLW event, my pro partner on the second day was the roommate of my pro partner from the first day. At the end of a particularly good day of fishing he said, "Are going to give me gas money? My roommate said you stiffed him."

At first I thought he was joking. Unfortunately, he was not.

Since that experience, I have learned that offering a pro partner gas money is an act of common courtesy in the professional fishing world. Up until that point, I was completely unaware that it was a standard practice.

Within the pro/co-angler format, there exists certain etiquette – unwritten rules of behavior – that co-anglers should be aware of. Co-anglers who have been competing for a while are familiar with these conventions. However, it is unfair to expect new co-anglers to understand these unwritten rules. So this installment of The Co-angler's Clinic will spell out some of these unwritten rules.

* Be ready to go when the pro is ready to move. The most common complaint pros have about co-anglers is having to wait on co-anglers every time they want to change fishing locations. This is an issue of efficiency for pros. If a pro has to wait 30 extra seconds for their co-angler to get ready each time they move, 10 moves translates into five minutes of fishing lost during the day.

Even Mike Wurm, a pro known for his easygoing demeanor, finds waiting on co-anglers to be a frustrating experience.

"When a pro sits down in the driver's seat, that is not the time to start storing your stuff and putting on your life jacket," explains Wurm. "When I hit the driver's seat I am ready to crank up and move."

The easiest remedy for this problem is for a co-angler to ask for a warning a few minutes before an intended move. Many pros do this automatically.

"Before I move, I always say, 'I am going to make a few more casts here and then move,'" says Wurm. "That is my fair warning. It is a polite way of saying get ready."

Some co-anglers speed up their preparations by wearing SOSpenders life vests that are designed to be worn at all times. This saves them from having to pull a life jacket on and off each time the boat moves.

* Never throw on a pro's "raised fish." If a pro misses a fish, do not throw in on top of the location where he missed it. As most anglers realize, sometimes a missed fish will strike again. Trying to catch a pro's raised fish before he can cast back to it is considered an unethical cheap shot.

* Never throw over a pro's line unless he says it is okay to do so. Pros pay a much higher entry fee to control the boat and have the first casts. Intentionally casting over a pro's line undermines the principle.

* Try to keep talking to a minimum. Fishing is a fun and sociable activity; however, for those who pay the mortgage with tournament winnings, tournament days are serious business. If a pro is obviously focused, don't carry on about your brother's ex-fiancée's sister who caught a 10 pounder last weekend.

* If you have an area that you have confidence in and want to fish, tell the pro about it, but don't force the issue. Many pros are open-minded about investigating an amateur's hot spot, especially on tough lakes. However, the best time to tell the pro about your hotspot is when you are paired up. Be up front and honest about the specifics of the area. The more embellished it sounds (“We caught two dozen 8-pound largemouths in two minutes at that spot”), the less likely the pro is to visit it.

Along the same lines, do not mention your honey hole every five minutes or drop frequent hints like, “I bet they are just eating it up in Fishy Creek right now.” Making negative remarks about a pro's fishing location is not a good idea, either.

* Be respectful of a pro's water. If a pro catches a big stringer, it is expected that the co-angler will not tell every detail of his pro's area and pattern at weigh-in. In fact, it is against the written tournament rules to do so. Specifically, the rule states, “Co-anglers who share their pro partner's fishing locations with another competitor will be disqualified...”

Jim Tutt of Longview, Texas, says he has had co-anglers try to mark his locations on handheld GPS units for future use.

“There is no rule against it, but I think that is wrong,” says Tutt. “We (pros) work long and hard to find these places (and) that should be respected on some level.”

* Offer gas money as a courtesy. Pros spend anywhere from \$100 to \$500 on gas for a week of practice and the tournament. Giving a pro \$20 for gas money is the standard and usually is very appreciated.

Courtesy is really what co-angler ethics are about.

“Ask yourself if the situation was reversed, would I want somebody to treat me that way?” said Wurm.

This is a good article that all S.C. Bass Federation Co-Anglers should take to heart when they climb into someone's boat for a day on the water.

Jackie Stanford

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