



Cliff Soward

By Dan Basore

One of the perks in covering the Bassmaster Classic is the old friends one sees and the new friendships forged. A true gem of a gentleman met and friended over the last couple of years is Cliff Soward.

His college thesis was titled "The Hydrodynamics of Crankbaits." Building many designs of his own, with his engineering background, artistic talents and fishing ability he produced a number of great fishing products.

In 1975 at the fifth Bassmaster Classic, Cliff gave five lures to Jack Haines who won the event using one of Soward's baits. His artistic abilities are amazing showing a real gift evolved from his youth. While talking with him to illustrate a point he will quickly sketch out an illustration that's very detailed.

In addition to developing lures he also worked to make a special scent to add attraction to his baits. Cliff's work in the chemical area of the petroleum business gives him valuable background knowledge utilized in making these attractants.

When Billy and Bobby Murray the great tournament anglers learned of the fish catching power of the scent Cliff had produced they brought it to PRADCO. After testing this fish attracting liquid they completed an agreement to add this product to their line naming it YUM! Yum was still the featured product at the American Sportfishing Association's, International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST) convention last July.

As Cliff was leaving the meeting after selling YUM to PRADCO, their executive and Cliff ran into Billy and Bobby Murray. When they got through telling the exec about Cliff's lure making ability, his proficiency and understanding of what attracts fish not only with scents but his artificial baits that were so productive, they hired him to be their Senior Lure Designer. In addition to new lures they reissued classics for which the molds and finish designs were lost. Cliff rebuilt these lures and placed secrets in the finishes that reveal the newer models.

One of his special baits blended what looks like a simple crankbait's modest diving lip into the lure's sloping forehead to make a large diving plane. Thus, the lure runs a lot deeper than baits of comparable size and shape and is a real producer.

Bobby who won the first B.A.S.S. Classic and brother Billy, Zell Rowland and others couldn't say enough about Cliff as we visited at the Classic, ICAST and in subsequent phone calls. These longtime friends who have been associated with PRADCO for up to 30 years told many stories of some of his great lures that they still treasure.



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DESIGNING A LURE

Cliff describes the steps he takes in designing a lure. The first consideration is to decide on the fish you want to catch. What is the depth desired and the action? Should the lure imitate nature or cause reaction strikes? Will the bait float, suspend or sink? These are only the start of his thought process.

Cliff has done extensive studies on fish vision and understands their distant and close perspectives.

Now begins the drawings of these concepts followed by building wood prototypes. "I may have to build a dozen different wood models, testing them and modifying them until I'm satisfied," Cliff shared.

Then it's time for the engineers to build plastic models carefully adjusting the balance and action to work in the finished plastic baits. These models are then sent to the field testers for their input.

Once all are satisfied with the lures performance the next step is to develop complimentary finishes for the bait. A spectrum of nature like finishes plus trendy colors are developed. Then production begins along with introductory promotions.

Hopefully a market is established and copiers will be prevented from marketing similar lures. Marketing lures in a very competitive field is another story for another time.

Cliff was scheduled to make a presentation at our National meet in Ft. Wayne but a health scare prevented it. I'm happy to report that he's doing great now and looks forward to giving that presentation at our 2013 National.

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