with two new Yamamoto baits, the Fall Shaker and pointy-tail Pro Senko.

Buoyant baits have a place in wacky-rigging, since the head and tail ride up as the jig falls or is worked on bottom. Strike King's 3-X material is tough and buoyant, and their Finesse Worm makes a good wacky-jig bait. Berkley's latest Gulp! additions include the Floating Dover Crawler, a thin symmetrical worm and the Floating Crawler, a bulkier finesse-style worm, both infused with Gulp! flavor.

Some anglers new to wacky-jigging have employed Senkos, Zeros, and other soft stickbaits, a natural switch since they work so well when wacky-rigged on a hook. They exhibit a throbbing motion on the fall, though their stubbier shape limits the amount of wiggle that can be imparted by shaking, a key component of many presentations. Moreover, standard stickworms require jigheads with a larger gap than those available from Japanese makers.

Pro anglers including Fukae and Yanase also use small shad-like worms featuring a thin tail that wiggles as the rig is shaken. Yanase rigs Yamamoto's Shad Shape Worm, and Fukae uses Castaic's Baby Jerky J on a jig.

Jighead Design: Wacky jigheads lack collars or barbs, since they're intended to hold a bait straight on the shank. When wacky-jigging, the worm should set in the bend of the hook and not slide to the head. Jackall and Zappu heads are crafted of tungsten to reduce profile.

Hook shape is important for holding a worm in place. Jackall's Wacky-Jig Head is a custom-built 90-degree Owner with a curving bend and point. The Zappu Jighead Wacky sports a special Japanese hook with a 60-degree eye. Matt Paino of Optimum Baits, which imports Zappu products, says that eye position promotes wobble on the fall, as well as solid hook-sets.

Ross Evans notes that the 60-degree eye invokes better worm action, though not everyone agrees. Knowing the appeal of wacky-rigged, full-sized stickbaits, Evans worked with Big Bite Bait Company to design their Wacky Head, with a 60-degree eye and a heavier gauge, wider-gap hook to accommodate 5- and 6-inch soft sticks.

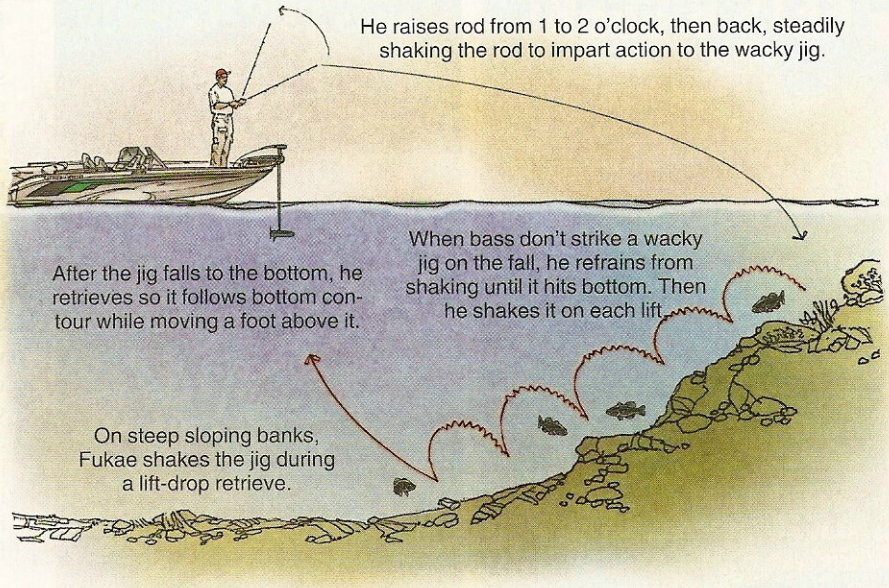
Rod and Line: Since shaking is a critical element of many wacky-jig presentations, rod action and length can be important. At this point, two schools of rod choice exist. Japanese experts including Kato and Ono favor short spinning rods (6 feet to 6 feet 4 inches), rated for 1/16- to 1/4-ounce lures. They feel shorter, supple rods impart better shaking action to the worm.

On the other hand, many American anglers prefer longer, somewhat stiffer rods that allow greater casting distance and can put additional pressure on bass in cover. From poolside observations, Evans concludes that the more supple the rod, the more dramatic the worm movement. Light dropshot rods from 6½ to 7 feet in length fill the bill.

Evans favors Falcon's Cenderi 7-foot model SSti-7L, a light dropshot rod that's well-suited for 8-pound test. I've fished Kistler's 6-foot 9-inch Drop Shot Special (KDSS69), St. Croix's Avid 7-foot medium-light power (AVS70ULF), and All Star's Platinum Inshore 7-footer (P843C-TR1), rated moderate power and light action. Models with similar action are available from many top manufacturers, none of which has yet released a specific wacky-jig rod.

In Japan, anglers have primarily used 4-pound-test fluorocarbon line to disguise the presentation in their clear and hard-fished waters. Thin line also allows maximum worm movement. David Swendseid agrees that 4-pound line is best, if you can get away with it. That is, you get more bites, but bigger bass may

Fukae's Horizontal Approach



Shaking