



**REGIONAL SECTION**

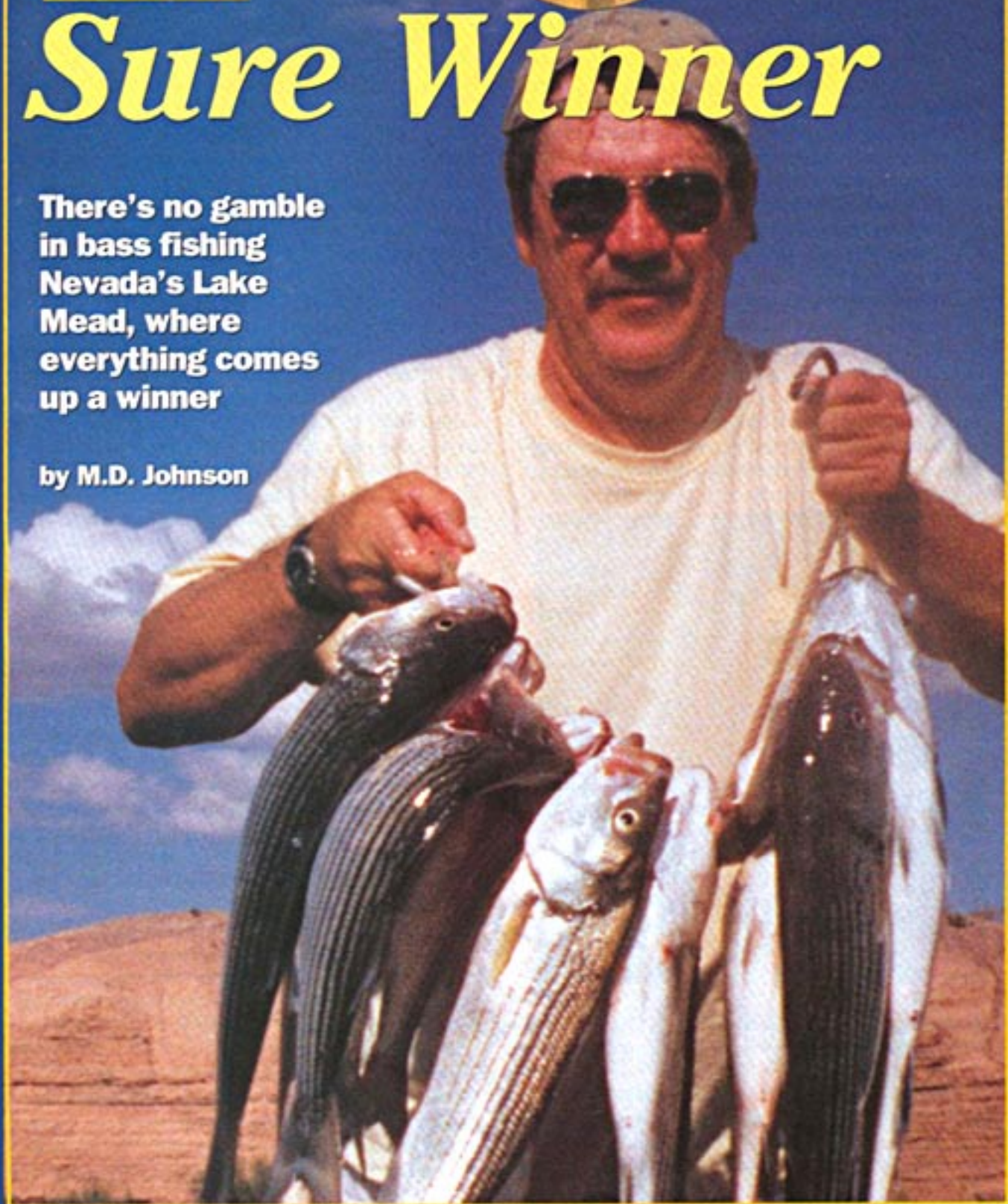
*Points West*



# *Sure Winner*

**There's no gamble  
in bass fishing  
Nevada's Lake  
Mead, where  
everything comes  
up a winner**

by M.D. Johnson





**L**as Vegas. Every daydreamer comes to this adult playground with high hopes — to win big, to seek fame, or maybe even to see Elvis.

One of the many who have journeyed to this oasis in the Nevada desert is Minnesota native Mike Swartz. But when Swartz relocated to Las Vegas six years ago, he was searching for bass — and he hit the jackpot at nearby Lake Mead.

When it comes to finding trophy largemouth bass, Swartz, 55, has a long track record. After a stint as a tournament bass fisherman, the former cabinetmaker has earned the title of full-time fishing guide since moving to Nevada from Colorado in 1995.

"I'd been fishing Lake Mead for many years before I moved out here. When I did move here. . . I learned to make a living doing it," he said.

What entices Swartz's clients away from the bright lights and glamour of nearby Las Vegas? Quality

ated by the construction of Hoover Dam on the Colorado in 1936, and gets its name from Dr. Elwood Mead, the United States Reclamation Commissioner who served from 1924 to 1936.

At 726 feet in height and containing more than 4.4 million yards of concrete, Hoover Dam is the second-highest dam in the nation today. Appropriately enough, Mead, with its 28.5 million acre-feet of total storage capacity, ranks as the country's largest reservoir.

This abundance of bass fishing habitat presents both opportunities and problems for the bass angler. Although there are plenty of places to fish, you must also decide where to begin.

One of the best places to start is to find a seasoned fishing guide. A huge body of water with thousands of bays, coves, creek channels, and other good structure, Mead is capable of frustrating even the most experienced angler. Also, fishing the big lake can be uncomfortable, if not downright dangerous, if you don't know what you're doing.

Lake Mead supports a fine assortment of freshwater gamefish including crappies, big bluegill, channel catfish, and, below Hoover Dam in the swift waters of the Colorado River, an excellent population of rainbow trout. But it's the big lake's trove of largemouth and striped bass that attracts the lion's share of the angling attention.

"I would rank Lake Mead as a good largemouth bass fishery," said Swartz. "A lot of professional fishing tournaments are held here. And BASS [Bass Anglers Sportsman Society] has come out West again over the past couple of years and is holding tournaments on Lake Mead. As far as size goes, the tournament weigh-in for five fish probably varies between 10 and 18 pounds.

"The stripers have been in the lake for a little less than 30 years. There are a tremendous number of stripers in Mead — probably more than we can use. They have a tendency to eat all the forage, which for them is threadfin shad. We had a very good year in 2000 for the shad. As for weights, the stripers probably average from 3 to 4 pounds, and growing." Swartz's clients catch a minimum of 3 or 4 these hard-fighting battlers a trip, and up to as many as 30 or 40.

As is the case on many waters across much of the country, opportunities on Lake Mead for both large-

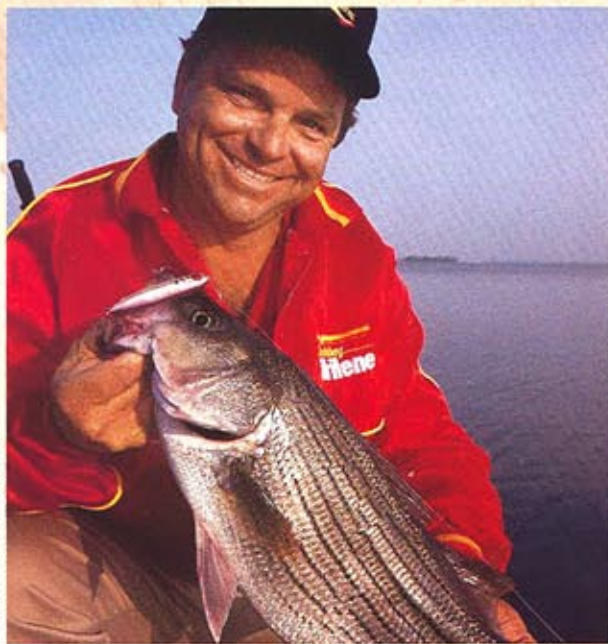
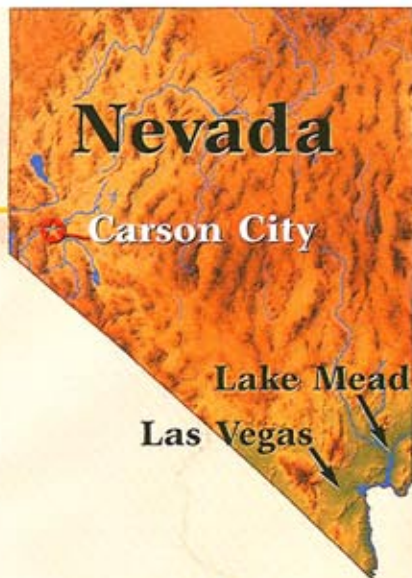


PHOTO BY TODD WOODARD

angling opportunities, on more than 247 square miles of surface acreage ripe with prime largemouth and striped bass habitat.

Lake Mead has over 550 miles of shoreline, and can store within its five separate and distinctive catch basins the equivalent of almost two years' worth of water flow from the Colorado River. The lake was cre-



mouth bass and stripers are dictated by the calendar.

Wintertime largemouths, for instance, can be found holding in 20 to 40 feet of water off of main and secondary points. Swartz recommends that they be fished very, very slowly with plastic worms or grubs.

As December and January give way to the warming temperatures of early spring, Mead largemouths begin to migrate into the backs of the coves that pock the lake's shoreline. This process, says Swartz, is done in stages: The bass leave the deeper water of the main lake, stopping at various secondary points, cuts, and channels before reaching their shallow-water spawning areas.

"This lake is so large that spawning season can be spread out over a month or a month and a half, depending on which section of the lake you're fishing," Swartz said.

After the spawn, as summer water temperatures increase, the bass reverse their migration and slowly fade back into the deeper sections of the lake.

Water temperatures begin to fall in September, with a rapid decline during October. At this time, the guide and his clients look for fish where the bait is, often working the actively feeding fish both morning and evening using topwater plugs and jerkbaits.

"Mead can be a difficult lake to fish because of the shad movement. They can be in one place today and miles away the next," said Swartz.

From December through early February, striper anglers should focus on targeting deep-water structure, using very slow presentations. At that time, Swartz finds most fish holding from 100 to 150 feet down. He takes the majority of his winter catch by vertical jigging cut-baits such as anchovies or sardines. In March and April, Swartz continues using the same methods at water depths of 75 to 100 feet.

During the summer months, June through August, Swartz and his anglers move from place to place in an attempt to keep pace with the enormous clouds of fingerling shad and the clouds of ravenous stripers that follow the swarms of baitfish. In the early fall, the

## Gear

During May and June the weather on Lake Mead can be unsettled and windy, but it's generally hot at some point during the day. Guide Mike Swartz, who begins his fishing day at first light, says that although air temperatures usually fall between 60 and 70 degrees at daybreak, they will often rise to 90 or 100 degrees by 11 o'clock.

Anglers should wear shorts and a light T-shirt, and should include a light jacket or windbreaker in their on-board bag. A billed cap and sunglasses are advisable.

Swartz also recommends a good sunscreen in the 25- to 45-SPF range.

## License and Contact Information

A single-day nonresident Nevada fishing license will set you back just \$12, with another \$3 required for an Arizona Special Use stamp. That's pretty cheap, compared to the amount of money you could drop at the slots. Daily bag limits on Lake Mead are liberal, with a 6-fish, 13-inch-minimum-size restriction on largemouth, and a 20-fish limit (no minimum size) on stripers.

Anglers wanting to contact Mike Swartz for additional information on a Lake Mead largemouth or striper fishing trip can visit his website at [www.fishvegas.com](http://www.fishvegas.com), or phone him at (702) 293-6294.

Fishing regulation information and details on other outdoor opportunities in southern Nevada can be obtained by calling the Nevada Department of Wildlife at (775) 688-1500, or by visiting the agency's website at [www.state.nv.us](http://www.state.nv.us).

guide puts clients on some of the hottest topwater action of the year, not to mention some of the heaviest striper stringers that Lake Mead has to offer. 🇺🇸

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*Full-time freelance outdoors writer and photographer M.D. Johnson has worked with his wife and partner, Julia McClellan-Johnson, since 1992. Johnson and McClellan are regular contributors to Heartland USA.*