



Flashy Flatware Still Finding Fish— *HOPKINS LURES*

by Alex Zidock Jr. photos by the author

During the 1970s, illusionist Uri Geller was astonishing television audiences by bending spoons and forks with his psychic powers. But, 30 years before Geller's fete, R.L. Hopkins beat and bent the handle of a butter knife into a saltwater lure. Few remember Geller's kitchen connection, but Hopkins Lures are still as popular as ever.

"R.L. Hopkins was an angler living in Virginia who wanted to design a lure he could use in saltwater," said Joseph Cipriani, President of Hopkins Lures. "R.L. had a friend who owned a forging company that made kitchen flatware. He took a butter knife home and cut off the blade end and began beating the handle into the shape he wanted. He came up with what he called the NO=EQL®. That was in 1948 when the company began, and that lure started as our three and a half."

Under the Hopkins banner is the NO=EQL®, the NO=EQL+®, and the NO=EQL Smoothie®. Then, there is the Shorty®, the Shorty+®, and the Shorty Smoothie®. The profile of the NO=EQL® is longer and more slender, and the Shorty® is fatter and squatter in the same weights and same basic design. Lures designated with "+" and some Smoothie lures have holographic tape applied and sometimes eyes for realism. Lures come with treble barbed hooks with or without bucktail enhancement. Single hooks on lures feature feathers or tubes for an extra dimension. Hopkins Lures also produces Hammered Spoons® that have a unique "port" in the "gill region" to permit passage of water as in a living fish.

Cipriani is also president of Keystone Forging Company, Inc., a 100,000 square-foot foundry established in Northumberland,

in 1893. Cipriani has worked there for 43 years. His forging company makes a myriad of products including jackhammer blades, high-pressure valves, aluminum valves, products for horse and buggies, and valves for SpaceX.

The process came full circle about 14 years ago, when R.L. Hopkins' son-in-law approached Cipriani, who had been forging stainless steel lures for him. "When Robbie was 82 or 83 years old, one day he looked at me and asked, Joe, do you think I should retire? I told him not if you are happy, stay with what you are doing. He said, No, I think its time, and he asked me if I would be interested in Hopkins Lures. However, it was only last year that we moved the lure company here, right next to the forge," said Cipriani.



Joseph Cipriani, President of Hopkins Lures

"I have been an avid angler since I was 5 years old," said Cipriani. "While I am a freshwater angler, he was a saltwater guy, but Hopkins does both freshwater and saltwater, so no problem to take it over."

"The original dies were made by hand with a process called hobbing, where they cut the impression into the metal," said Cipriani. "For the effect on the lures that have scales, they would take a hardened nail-set and whack it with a hammer for each scale."

Cipriani's Keystone Forging foundry is producing the same original lures, but they are now designing these lures with computers and a CNC machine. "We took all his original designs and do it that way now. We can tweak the design and make them more consistent, since weight is an essential factor, said Cipriani.

Hopkins Lures are made from 304 and 420 stainless steel. For the NO=EQL®, the stainless steel rod is cut into specific lengths and then heated to 2,250 degrees F. A massive press forms the lures, the excess is removed, and the lures are put into a medium to achieve the high gloss finish. Next, holes are punched so split rings and hooks can be added.

Hopkins Lures has about 700 different SKUs. "We distribute in Japan and the Middle East, and people are using Hopkins Lures all over the world, but the primary business is in the United States. Originally, people thought we were a saltwater lure, but the fact is we do about 60 percent saltwater and 40 percent freshwater. Size does not matter. While a heavier, larger lure may be used in saltwater, it may also be used in the Great Lakes trolling for big trout. Many times, an angler will find a ledge and drop the lure down and rip it up 5 or more feet and let it flutter down. It is on the downfall that the fish will come in and take it. These lures are so sturdy, the only dimples in the lures are put there by machine and not by bluefish teeth," said Cipriani.

"My wife Marlene is involved in the business, and our daughter, Phoebe, does the assembly. We also have another daughter, Elizabeth, who helps Phoebe. We build everything to order. When any of the big sporting goods stores place an order, we fill it then. We do not have finished lures sitting on shelves," said Cipriani.

"Since we feel one tackle shop cannot carry 700 SKUs, we also offer our lures online. We have something we call 'build a lure' on our website, where you can build a single lure using anything we have at our disposal," said Cipriani.

"Field & Stream magazine named Hopkins Lures in the top 50 greatest lures of all time a few years back, and Salt Water Sportsman magazine said Hopkins Lures were one of the top 25 greatest saltwater lures of all time," said Cipriani.

"We want to maintain it as a United States owned and built product," said Cipriani. We have much pride in what we do, and while people have suggested that we knock ourselves off and go for a lower-priced lure, we want to keep the integrity of the lure and keep it in stainless steel," said Cipriani. □



Hopkins Lures offers about 700 different lure choices. But, if you want a custom lure, you can design it on the company's website.



Joseph Cipriani's daughter, Phoebe, is responsible for managing lure production and filling custom orders.



A worker in the Keystone Forging Company grinds finishing touches on a mold.

Hopkins Lures
www.hopkinslures.com