



Stephen Browning is a Bassmaster Elite Series angler who's found recent success in Opens. (James Overstreet photo)

Browning Opens Up

Arkansas bass pro shows what he throws

By Steve Bowman

Stephen Browning may need to figure out a way to put "Open" in his name.

Lately, he's virtually been the King of the Bassmaster Opens. The quiet Elite Series angler from Hot Springs, Ark., has been on a roll of late.

Browning not only won the Bass Pro Shops Open on the Red River in Shreveport, La., in 2013, but he finished second in the Bass Pro Shops Open on Ross Barnett in Jackson, Miss.

To add to the list, he opened (pardon the pun) the 2014 season with a second place at the Bass Pro Shops Open on Lake Amistad.

The two-time Open champion and nine-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier started his career by winning the 1996 Red Man All-American. Browning has been a top professional ever since, topping \$1 million in earnings with B.A.S.S.

Pardon the pun, again, but we just had to open Browning's tackle box and get an idea of just what he's packing.

TURN THE PAGE FOR A LOOK AT SOME OF HIS FAVORITE BAITS. →



Browning won the Central Open on the Red River and was runner-up in two recent Opens. (James Overstreet photo)

Stephen Browning's Tackle Box



1 3/4 oz Jewel football jig with ElaZtech Flappin CrawZ: Earlier in my career I was known as a Carolina Rigger. I believe the football jig gets a few more bigger bites, and I fish it around the same type cover.

2 9/16 oz Stephen Browning Magnum Casting Jig with an Old School Living Rubber Skirt: I was tired of not having a good casting jig in my box so I designed this one for Jewel Bait. The hook is a medium wire so it ensures I have good hook penetration on a long cast. I don't see the need for a heavy wire hook in a casting jig. The living rubber skirt takes us back to the good ole days and black and blue is always true.

3 War Eagle 3/8 oz black buzzbait with a yellow Trick Worm trailer: The buzzbait is standard if you want some great topwater action, but when you add that yellow trailer it becomes some explosive topwater action. Prespawn all the way to winter, this combination is a player.

4 War Eagle 1/2 oz Screaming Eagle: This "little" dude has changed the way spinnerbait fishing is done. I can burn it or slow roll it. I will fish it around grass, wood, rock or open water. It is a killer in the current on rivers! Smallmouth love it as fast as I can reel.

5 Live Target 64S in Chartreuse Black back: It's the bait that introduced me to the Live Target Team. I have so much confidence in this bait I literally have one tied on all the time. Being a "river rat," I can fish this bait around wood or main river rock, in the current or out. This bait will put fish in the boat when water conditions are at their worst. I used it on the Mississippi River in Ft. Madison when there was about two inches of visibility. A limit every day put me in the top five.

6 Lucky Craft 3.5: When it's time to go big or go home — enough said!!

7 Mann's Baby 1-Minus: This is a standard shallow water river crankbait. I start when the water temp hits 50 and will throw it all year. It is a great bait for prespawners when they are roaming around super shallow spawning areas. The red is a killer when the water temps are in the low 50s.

8 Cordell Baby Big O in Harbor O color: Can you say \$100,000. During the Red Man All American in 1996, I used this finesse crank bait to lure enough bass out of the Arkansas River to win. That victory allowed me to start a career that I dreamed of for many years. When I get in a bind and need a keeper, this bait has proven to be the deal.

9 Z-Man ZinkerZ in black/blue with blue flake: I honestly can't put my finger on why this color catches them when most others will not. In the water it has an iridescent color that I haven't seen before. This is a great flipping bait rigged Texas style. Florida waters have proven to be just the right clarity for this bait to be a player.

10 Z-Man Turbo CrawZ: This is a mainstay flipping bait for me. The action that this bait has is perfect for flipping heavy cover. I will use the Turbo CrawZ as a jig trailer as well. It seems when the fish are fairly aggressive, the action of my Turbo CrawZ keeps them fired up.

11 Live Target Bluegill Wakebait: Here's a true shallow-water big fish bait. When I'm covering water looking for spawning fish, I will throw this super natural looking bait. Bluegill are a staple food source year round. Nothing frustrates a bass more than a bluegill when the bass are trying to spawn. I also will throw this wakebait around bluegill beds. There always seems to be a bass playing payback when the bluegill are spawning.

12 Live Target Blueback Herring Double Prop: This bait is one I had made to use during the post-spawn and dog days of summer. When I was in my teens, I fished tournaments with older guys on the Arkansas River. They always had one tied on when it was 110 degrees outside. Bass will migrate, along with shad, to super shallow water during the hottest times of the year. There is no better bait than this double prop that mimics shad being hammered on top by bass.

13 Live Target Hollow Body Frog: Here's my go-to frog in heavy cover. Lily pad fields or milfoil beds are prime areas for this frog. I will also use it when I need to skip a topwater bait under structure whether a boathouse or laydown. If you are fishing pad fields, listen for the bluegill sucking insects from the pads. These are the areas the bass will be using as well.

14 Z-Man ElaZtech DieZel Minnows: Rigged on a Jewel Swim Gem head, this is a player during the shad spawn. I like to run this rig right under the shad when they are around float- ing boat stalls. I will also use this setup on an Alabama rig.

15 Z-Man ChatterBait with ElaZtech MinnowZ trailer: When everyone else is throwing a spinnerbait, this is my go-to lure. The vibration and noise from this bait will draw the biggest fish out of heavy cover. Anytime I'm around submerged grass, I will have a chatterbait tied on. It also is a great choice when I'm fishing eddy pockets on river systems.

16 5/16 oz. Beetle Spin with a single-spin 4 1/2 Colorado blade: To me there is no better cold-water spinnerbait than this one. Growing up fishing the lower Arkansas River, this bait was the one that would catch fish when no other bait would during late winter and early spring. Heck, it even catches big redfish. Just ask the guys from the Oberto Redfish Cup days about two bass fishermen winning the first ever redfish tournament they fished.

17 Loctite Super Glue Gel: This stays in my box. I glue my ElaZtech trailers or swimbaits on with this glue for all-day use. The glue will hold these baits up so that I don't have to do anything but fish.

18 1/4 oz Red Strike King tungsten weight and 5/0 Mustad KVD Grip-Pin hook: These are a must with the ElaZtech products. I had to run through many different styles of hooks to find the best one for ElaZtech plastics. The red weight just seems to draw a few extra strikes by day's end.