

1-2-2007 By Tom Hamilton

Eight-year-old Brett Kessler of Montague caught his first steelhead on White Lake the day after Thanksgiving.

This was made possible with the help Kessler's school bus driver, Captain Pat Schiller, owner of Shelly Lee Charters.

Schiller had some fishing magazines on the bus leading young Kessler to ask, "Mr. Schiller, Can you take me fishing sometime?" What can a softy big-hearted captain say? Captain Schiller called Tom Hamilton of Montague who replied, "Forget deer hunting for a day. Let's give young Kessler a good time."

A fresh fall steelhead can be a jumping, hard running, fighting challenge for adults. To help the odds for an eight-year-old, Captain Schiller used his Lund Pro-V to troll high-lines with X-5 flatfish on White Lake. White Lake is an open play area for a youngster instead of getting into trouble with the river snags. Kessler was dressed warm, and nonstop with endless excited comments and questions. November 24 turned out to be a rare warm calm day for this time of year.

Captain Schiller uses the electric motor when trolling for shallow water steelhead. Trolling quiet allows steelhead to be caught closer to the boat same as when trolling for walleye after dark. The autopilot feature helped keep the boat in the desired path. Hamilton put out the first flatfish 70-feet using the reel line-counter. The other lures were set at different distances as short as 45-feet to avoid line tangles when making turns.

The first steelhead exploded to the air. Hamilton checked the hookup and made sure the drag was set light. Kessler could then reel in with minimum assistance and guidance. Captain Schiller got all the other rods out of the way for a clear playing area.

When the fish got near the net we noticed the fish was not hooked good. Captain Schiller quickly slipped the net under the fish just as the fish came off the hook. This was a great time to be lucky for Kessler. We now had an excited boy not sure how to hold up his first steelhead for a photo.

Captain Schiller and Hamilton changed positions for the next four hours each having a great time with Kessler cranking away and improving his timing with pumping the rod. Five steelhead were boated with one fish lost during a hectic double header. The day ended after four hours when the wind came up too strong for good boat control.

Young Kessler was all smiles for the trip photos, but not quite ready for cleaning the fish. "Yewah!" was Kessler's comment. Captain Schiller gave his mother some tips on preparing three fish for dinner. Two fish were cleaned by Hamilton for senior citizens. Young Kessler commented, "Mr. Hamilton gives fish to old people." Captain Schiller just smiled and commented, "I think our young Kessler just learned one lesson more than fishing."

