

No Place Like Home for Hengst

By: *Pete Robbins*

WBT pro Debra Hengst is never at a loss for words, especially when it comes to her favorite topic – Falcon Lake. She's been singing the praises of the big pond on the Texas/Mexico border for twenty years, through low water and high water, but no one outside of Texas seemed to care.

Now the word is out....big time.

After Paul Elias won the BASS Lone Star Shootout with nearly a seven pound average per fish, the bass world would be turned on its collective ear if it wasn't keeping that ear up to listen to the next prophetic words from the diminutive Texas blonde.

The messages, whether they be phone calls, emails or smoke signals, are arriving by the dozens, and they all seem to ask her the same thing: When can we hire you to guide us to some of those hot sauce swilling donkeys?

As a stalwart of the pro side of the women's tour, Hengst is used to calling the shots, running the trolling motor and having first crack at the active fish, but this year she made the curious decision to see how the other half lives – and signed up to fish the co-angler side of the BASS Falcon slugfest.

Her realization? "When you're used to being at the front of the boat, it's hard to go to the back."

That reality was exacerbated by the BASS no-info policy, which prevented her from sharing any information about the lake with her pro partners. They could have been a hundred yards from the mother lode of all mother lodes and she would be powerless to tell him about it. No verbal indications, no body language, no batting of the eyelashes in Morse code. It was like being a Jenny Craig customer with her nose pressed to the glass outside glass at KFC.

Both of her partners were seasoned professionals, but neither was on the caliber of fish needed to make the Top 12, and she was powerless to do anything about it. "I had to hold my tongue," she said. "I couldn't say anything and it was very frustrating. Anyone who knows me knows that I like to talk and I couldn't open my mouth."

If you're wondering, the much-discussed topic of "bathroom breaks" in mixed-gender pairings weren't a problem. She was there to fish, not to dwell on matters of hygiene or anatomy. Besides, "the women on tour call me 'Speedy,'" she said. "I just go back there by the cowling and from start to finish I'm done in less than a minute."

She stayed for an extra day to run a camera boat for Mark Zona, Tommy Sanders and James Overstreet, and there's no official word on this, but they may have packed a rod or three along with them. Lest we get anyone in trouble, we here at Wired2Fish will just plead honest ignorance as to whether they were tempted to make a few casts on some of her typical milk-run spots, but let's just say that surely the media types were frustrated by watching all of those eights, nines and tens parade across the stage and not being able to get in on the fun.

While her co-angler experience didn't result in a win, it reenergized Hengst for the rest of the WBT. She wanted to fish the BASS Opens, but couldn't get in, so the WBT is where she'll focus her efforts. But don't think the tours aren't alike.

Contrary to the opinions of more than a few hairy-legged, testosterone-driven men, the women's tour is no tea party. "The women are just as cutthroat as the men," Hengst reported. And the talent is strong as well. She believes that eight to ten of the WBT regulars could be competitive on the BASS Elite level.

So she left Falcon and headed to Lewisville and lo and behold, on the last day of the tournament she was assigned a male observer instead of a co-angler.



"We had high wind, hail, rain, muddy water and a chance of tornados that day," she said. "He was surprised that when things get tough, there's no difference between us and the men. We're not just a pretty face out there."

"We put our underwear on the same as them, just sometimes it happens be pink or a little frilly."

Hengst also dished out a little dirt on how the women (be careful if you're tempted to call them girls) operate:

Who is the best angler in the WBT?

There are so many good ones, it's hard to say. There's Juanita Robinson, Patti Campbell, Tammy Richardson, Pam Martin-Wells. I'm sure I'm forgetting a few.

Who is the Gerald Swindle of the WBT (an outspoken personality)?

Probably Dianna Clark. She'll tell it to you like it is and she doesn't care what she says.

Who is the Denny Brauer of the WBT (best flipper)?

Angie Douthit.

Who is the Paul Elias of the WBT (best deep cranker)?

Me.

If you have one key area, but draw a late boat number, which woman do you least want to see in that area when you arrive?

Sherri Glasgow, because you know she's probably picked the water completely apart.

Who is the best finesse angler in the WBT?

It's hard for me to say, because I'm a power fisherman, but probably Judy Wong.

Who has the best boat wrap in the WBT?

We're not required to have one, and right now there are probably about ten of them. I like Penny Berryman's Z9 wrap and Mary DiVincenti's Yamaha wrap. I'm going to have the best in a few weeks. I got a non-endemic company, a manufacturer of theft deterrent systems called Foxfire Alarm Systems. My wrap will be the face of a fox, and the dual consoles will be the eyes.

Which WBT pro would look best in Kevin Short's (pink) wrap?

Maybe Tammy Richardson. She's a pretty girl.

What is the best lake the WBT has already visited?

I really liked Guntersville and Dardanelle.

Which lake or lakes on the schedule are you most excited to fish?

The only ones on this year's schedule I've already fished are Lewisville and Neely Henry. I've never been to Old Hickory, but I have a feeling I'm going to like it.

Where would you like to see the WBT go in the future? (Did we have to ask????)

Falcon, of course.

Who would win there? (chance to brag about yourself, Debra!)

I think I would stand a good chance, but there would be lots of Texas girls in the field. Patti Campbell, Juanita Robinson, Judy Wong, so I have to be careful.