

Hankins and Bilbrey Win Inaugural ACT Tourney at Grenada

Grenada Lake in Mississippi hosted the inaugural tournament of the American Crappie Trail over the weekend. 63 boats fished for \$55,000 in cash and prizes, including the top prize: a brand new RT188c Ranger Boat with a 115 HP outboard and Minn Kota trolling motor. An elite field of tournament anglers showed up to fight an extremely stingy Grenada Lake and deplorable weather conditions.



Tom Hankins and Ron Bilbrey took first place over the two-day tournament and won the new Ranger Boat, valued at over \$25,000, as well as a chunk of contingency money paid out by tournament sponsors to teams utilizing their products. The Crappie Crazy team from Indiana took a different approach than most of the field, focusing on secluded, shallow areas away from everyone else, rather than fishing the traditional “big fish” areas with the crowds. Hankins and Bilbrey led after day one with 14.97 lbs. and were one of only three teams to weigh in seven fish. They spider-rigged in a shallow creek on the west part of the lake and caught their fish on jigs tipped with minnows as well as straight minnows.

and Bilbrey returned to their spot to find that the fish had moved, but proving their abilities as elite anglers, they made the correct adjustments and grinded out a solid stringer to nearly match their day one weight. They moved out of the creek onto the shallow flats and caught their fish vertical jigging the stake beds in 14 inches of water. With 14.53 lbs. on the day, including a 3.01 lb. kicker, they bested the field by over 4 lbs. and took home the top prize.

Second place finishers were the local team of Terry and Cole Stewart. These Magnolia Crappie Club members fished in 7-9 feet of water, pushing large minnows from depths of four feet down to the bottom. They finished day one in sixth place with a six-fish stringer that weighed 10.94 lbs., and brought in seven fish for 14.39 lbs. on day two to secure second place and take home \$6450 in prize money.



The eight-time National Champions Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman took third place in the event by spider-rigging Capps and Coleman Minnow Rigs in various depths of water. Their seven-fish limit on day one, weighing 13.78 lbs., put them in second place, and although the Super Clean and B'n'M Poles team only brought three fish to the scales on day two, their 6.99 lb. stringer was good enough for third place and a purse of \$4400.

Big Fish for the tournament was a 3.41 lb. slab caught by Eddie Gilbert and Don Brooks, winning the team \$945.

By Josh Gowan, photos by Alex Rude