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After going back to doing my own thing, this was the reward.



SHAUN HARRISON

Thanks for inviting me back again to contribute to this month's Rotary Letter. I really enjoy reading these pieces and find it quite stimulating seeing how different minds attack different problems. It would certainly be a pointless exercise if everyone agreed with everyone else. In fact, if we all did agree on a subject then we would be wrong anyway. There is very little in carp fishing which is totally black and white. Once we think we have something sussed, the fish change their habits and turn everything upside down again. I guess this is the great attraction of carp fishing. Well, it is for me anyway, along with the fact that there are so many different styles and methods of carp fishing.

As I have written on occasions before, the two words 'carp fishing' are so very vague and the thought that the two words are used to describe someone fishing 300 yards out on a huge inland sea and 1ft out with a floating bait illustrates this scenario. I can't think of another species where so many totally different styles of fishing are used in

an attempt to hunt down and set traps to catch the humble carp. As Dave Moore correctly pointed out, we are all indeed hunters in one way or another.

Ali raised an important question and one which is quite close to my heart and has

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once again raised its ugly head in my own fishing this year. I'll ask the question first. *'I wonder what the other guys think about tinkering? Do you mess about with a new approach on a new water or do you go in on a tried and tested approach even if you know the lake has seen it all before?'*

Do you tinker with different methods?

For the past 28 years I have worked in the angling trade and obviously over this period I

have spent every day of it talking to many different anglers. Now every so often you speak to an angler you have a massive respect for and every once in a while you are given the nod and a wink on a particular method which is taking a water apart.

For years I found myself adopting these tactics – after all why wouldn't you? But it took absolutely years for me to realise that these wonder methods that all sounded so good when explained to me rarely became part of my long-term methods and after a few weeks playing around with the tactics on one or two rods I soon found myself back to my original

methods until the next thing came along.

It was Lee Jackson who changed my way of thinking on this one when chatting one day and he said, "The problem with working in this trade is that you get shown and told too many useful tips and before you know it you find yourself crawling up your own a***." Or words to that effect and immediately massive alarm bells rang in my head. It had taken to this point in my carp fishing for me to realise I was more than capable of sorting out most of the problems I came up against and was indeed hampering myself and my

Dawn on
Grenville.

own chain of thought listening to others.

I hope that doesn't come across in the wrong way. Basically by taking too much on board from others I find all it does is sidetrack you from getting totally focussed on your own fishing and your own fishing problems. Every lake is different and most groups of carp are different. Methods which prove to be the downfall of some very difficult carp on one particular venue can often work very much against you on another. What Lee had said made me make my mind up there and then to listen to what I was told but to simply get on with my own fishing. Here I am many years later still using the same couple of rigs and adopting my preferred lines of attack. Yet this year I again allowed myself to

become totally sidetracked and listened to others a little too much.

I joined a new water in Cambridgeshire last December called Grenville. This is a large water with much deeper water to that which I am used to fishing. I caught a fish and lost a fish on my very first trip last December. Obviously doing 'my thing', but then started to rack the blanks up – as you are likely to do when fishing a water you know nothing about and starting in the middle of winter. Now there were a couple of anglers on there doing really well, catching on a regular basis.

When you are blanking and others are catching you can't help but watch their approach and foolishly I started to fish methods which were pretty much alien to me. Still I blanked. As the weather started to

warm a little in late winter but still with a frost on the ground, I managed to catch my next fish. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, it was on my only rod fishing on 'my type of methods'.

The penny didn't drop and still I found myself messing around with PVA bags and or single hookbaits

and I started to pick up odd fish in this manner – but nowhere near as many as some of the anglers who were naturally good at these methods. The problem was that I like to fish over bait but most were telling me that the carp didn't like beds of bait and the bag methods were far more successful as the fish moved a great deal (no surprise there as there was little bait to hold them in an area anyway).

Eventually the penny dropped that I had once again fallen into the trap of watching and listening to others. Something I had promised myself all those years ago not to do again. Next trip I did what Shaun Harrison has done for years: I pumped the bait in and fished more than one rod over the same patch and totally avoided PVA. I sat there and felt quite content. I was doing what I am comfortable doing and what is more, I caught three fish!

Since then I have been steadily catching carp at a rate comparable to the more successful anglers on there. A very long answer to Ali's question, but in my experience flog your own preferred methods to death until you are absolutely sure they aren't going to work on the water you are fishing. Stay in your own comfort zone for as long as possible – you will definitely fish better and with more confidence. Whoops, I've nearly done my work count on one subject – must move on.

One of a Mangrove brace of 29lbbers – taken after I'd baited and rested the swim.





The second half of the brace.

PVA thoughts

[Question: I will throw in a little question here of my own based upon the above 'fishing out of my own comfort zone'. It's regarding the use of PVA bags, both solid and mesh. I have done more bag fishing this year than ever before and have formed my own opinions on things, but would be interested to hear the views of others.]

It comes down to the deepwater scenario I have found myself fishing in this year. My major concerns have been getting the bags to the bottom before they open up. I have long held the belief that most of the stocking mesh type bags come off and discharge their contents almost as soon as they hit the water. Be it on impact or literally fractions of a second later. I know you can wind back with a bit of PVA still attached but was the bait in the bag when it hit the deck – particularly during the warm water conditions of summer. Now this is no big deal in shallow water as the bag contents will still be close by anyway

but not necessarily how we see the methods illustrated in some of the magazines in a nice neat clump. Cast into 30ft of water and the contents are going to be nowhere near your hookbait allowing for the diagonal drop through the water on a tight line.

As far as solid bags go, I got around the problem by double bagging then binding the bags up with PVA tape too. I'm just interested in anyone else's thoughts on this – the problem is the bags need to be tight to cast the distances, but the tighter the bag the quicker they open. I was still getting double bagged and taped bags opening up on the descent. I knew this by the hard donk I received at times as the lead hit the bottom a little too quick for it to be attached to a bag.

Bait

This whole baiting up scenario is an awkward one. Fortunately for others but unfortunately for myself I was born with a strong conscience and can't bring myself to bait up on a lake if others are fishing and I'm not. If I am there with lines in then I have no problem pumping the bait in, but will only do

it when not fishing when I know there is no-one else there.

Getting the carp confident in your bait is a massive thing in my book and the more I can get them to eat the better my mind. This is one of the reasons I so much like to rest the swim of lines for periods. I will leave the lake and go and have a meal so as to let the fish have a munch without fear of getting caught. I remember Frank Warwick being amazed at me winding in on the Mangrove after catching a couple of 29's to go for a meal whilst fish were still showing on my bait. My answer was something along the lines of, "The more they get down them now the easier and more confident they will be next time." My view is that good baits will always work if presented where the carp wish to feed, but get carp confident in a good bait and that good bait suddenly becomes an incredible bait! I would be interested to hear the views of others on this one. I guess most will think I'm a bit of a prat winding in?

Seemingly clear spots suddenly becoming weedy overnight – weedy undertow

Seemingly clear spots suddenly becoming weedy overnight. I read this with interest and a few things came to mind straightaway. The first is a natural phenomena that I have never seen mentioned in print before. 'Weed' as we like to term all plants growing from the bottom of the lake are just that – plants and just the same as our plants in the garden they move and lean during the day to follow the sunlight. I have fished waters where I have only been able to hit clear spots at certain times of the day. The longer the weed the more of a problem this natural weed movement becomes.

Another thing which came to mind is the fact that it is quite possible the carp are getting away with it but moving the lead. It becomes even more essential to match bobbin weights to the conditions than ever when fishing in weed. There is a lot of friction on the line between you and the lead. Will the bobbin lift or fall as effectively as you would hope? I find myself altering the weight of my bobbins constantly in order to keep them at half-mast, which in my own humble opinion is the best place for them to be sat.

I will add here that fluorocarbon line exaggerates all indication problems. You need much heavier bobbins with fluorocarbon than you do with straight mono in order to drag it back along the bottom to show drop backs quickly.

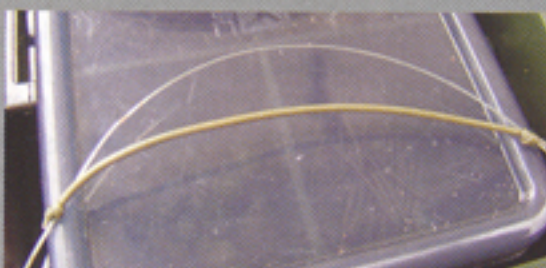
If the weed is drifting on the line and moving the lead you can get around it to an extent with a little trick of mine for putting a little bit of elasticity into your line which also helps to stop false bleeps. Simply tie a piece of pole elastic to your line attaching both

Stop False Bites

By adding a little bit of elasticity into your line



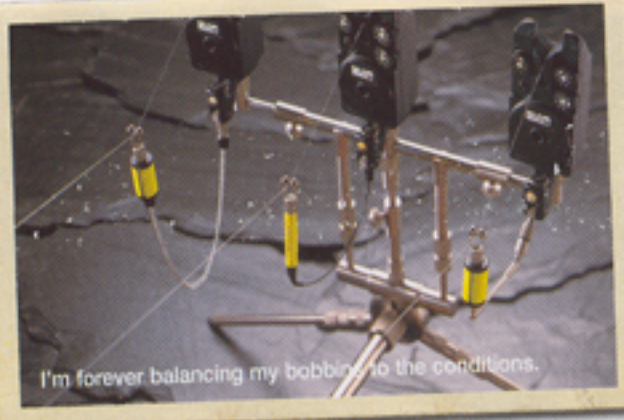
The Bungee Knot. Simply tie a piece of pole elastic to your line attaching both ends.



Stretch the two knots apart then let go again. This gives you an elasticated loop in your main line.



I like to use small leads when I can reach the fish, but rarely less than 1oz.



I'm forever balancing my bobbin to the conditions.

ends. Stretch the two knots apart then let go again. This gives you an elasticated loop in your main line, which will give a cushioning effect to any debris on your line rather than putting the main force on moving the lead. Another thing I get into the habit of to help keep the tackle a little less obvious and to also aid bite detection is to 'bounce' the rod to shake off any build up of sediment etc on the line. This is something I tend to do the moment I get up in the morning.

Chod issues

As Dave again rightly said, we were all using Chod Rigs or variants of it in the early 80's, it's just that in those days it was called a Rotary Rig then got re-invented as the Helicopter Rig and lo and behold it's now referred to as the Chod Rig!

Personally I don't like to use rotary type rigs, but accept they cast remarkably well without tangling and account for an awful lot of carp. I don't like the way they tend

out on relatively easy waters but if the truth be known, the fish tend to slip up on most presentations offered. I much prefer the one rod on the main water for experimenting but giving that rod a chance in each area being fished so if you start experimenting on the left-hand rod, swap that rod onto the middle rods spot for a while and then the right-hand rods spot to make sure you aren't presenting a better rig in a poor area or vice versa.

Lead sizes

Interesting one raised by Jed when he mentioned Graham, his dad, out-fishing him on a 'easy' water using small leads. I tend to use smaller leads than most myself. Working on using as big as I need to reach the fish and hold everything in place although these days I rarely drop below an ounce.

The simple fact is the smaller the lead the less the carp can get away with – without dislodging the lead and thus causing bobbin movement. During the early 90's during the winter at Patshull most of the anglers were using the

obligatory 3oz leads and struggling. I had the idea of using 1/2oz and 3/4oz leads still on semi-fixed bolt rig set-ups. This totally turned my fishing round. The bobbins would twitch up and down and I would strike the hook home. I am sure those fish like most of the fish today almost 20 years on have learned that so long as they don't move far after accepting a food source there is little chance of them getting hooked back off slowly and wait for resistance of a tightening of line across their lips. They did this to me and the small leads trundled across the lakebed and I got indication back at the rods.

Hooklink breaking strain

I can see exactly where Dave is coming from with his safety advice of using a hooklink of a lower breaking strain to the

main line, but I am very much against using fine braided hooklinks as I am sure they cause more mouth damage than a thicker diameter one. I couldn't tell you the last time I used a braid less than 22lb.

It's a difficult one this one. I do use a knot which reduces this breaking strain to about 16lb. Perhaps this is the way forward – the development of weak but consistent knots or one for you tackle companies out there. For years there has been something available to the boat sea anglers called 'Positive Poundage Links'. These were links you put into your set-up to open up at a certain strain to make sure you only lost your hooks on a wreck rather than expensive Pirks and associated tackle. A link which opened at 6lb, 8lb, 12lb and so on would have so many uses.

Safety rigs

Rig education is far more important than banning this that or the other, but this education is very difficult to get across. We forget that there are thousands out there who never buy carp magazines, books, DVD's or anything else – but they go carp fishing. Some of you would totally freak out if you spent a busy Saturday afternoon behind a tackle shop counter and listened to some of the requests you get. I have been asked loads of times for safety lead clips where the lead doesn't come off.

Dave Lane rightly said that certain rigs require heavy breaking strain lines to work effectively and mentioned stiff rigs. Now I fish a lot of home tied combi rigs but found myself on a water where the hooklink had to be of a lower breaking strain to the main line. I got around this by using a very stiff nylon called Tynex from the game-angling specialists Tom C Saville in Nottingham. The 10lb in this was as thick and as stiff as anything I required and sorted the problem out. Useful to have in your armoury and comes into line with Dave Moore's view as well.

Dave Lane (too many Dave's here – I'm confusing myself) rightly said a quick flick of the wrist should be enough to tell you if your rig is really safe or not. If everything fails to release then it could be safer. It really does amaze me how tight some anglers jam everything into place. Please remember that any self-hooking rig only needs to semi support the weight of the lead to work. All it has to do is lift the weight off the bottom. Even with massive 5oz leads you only need to lift that. You don't need 2lb of pressure to make it work. Those soft beads sound real useful Dave. Hat off to you for insisting on those.

Shaun Harrison



"I find myself altering the weight of my bobbins constantly in order to keep them at half-mast, which in my own humble opinion is the best place for them to be sat."

to trap extra weed when playing fish and I don't like the line-weakening scenario if you end up with the hooklink swivel up on your main line whilst playing a fish. Each to their own I guess. I can achieve similar presentations to the now commonly used rotary rigs by simply lengthening my bomb link – something I so rarely see done these days.

Rig testing

Jed mentioned experimenting with rigs on easier waters to the ones you maybe spending most of your time on. Good for boosting your own confidence in a rig, but not necessarily the way to find out if it will help with the fishing at your main venue. As has been touched upon before, carp and carp habits are often so very different from one water to the next. I have gone down the route myself of testing things