

Angler Profile

Shaun Harrison

Age: 43

Hometown: Stapleford, Notts.

Occupation: Bait company director

UK PB: 40lb 6oz



EDGE NO.1 Check Your Hook

This is something we used to have to do with every pack of hooks purchased, and many of them would end up in the bin before use. To be fair to the hook manufacturers these days, the modern-day hooks are generally of a very high and consistent quality. This in itself becomes a problem though, as it is easy to take for granted each hook that comes out of the packet and tie it onto a rig regardless. My main concern with hooks is their sharpness. Check each hook in a pack and I will guarantee you will find that some are sharper than others. In many cases we are reliant on the hook to do the first part of the job for us. The hook has to nick home slightly before we even know about a take. I use a sharpening stone an awful lot to keep touching up my hooks – even from new the sharpness of most hooks can be improved upon, and in fact some anglers have this off to a fine art. The sharper that hookpoint becomes, the more chance of it catching in the fish when it is inspecting the bait. But be warned, the finer you make the hookpoint, the easier it will turn over and blunt, which makes it absolutely critical to check each and every time you wind in. Even if you make a bad cast, check the point before recasting, and I guarantee that in the long term you will catch many more fish. Believe me, it is well worth the effort of ensuring you have a very sharp hook at all times, even if it does mean tying on a new rig in the pouring rain at 2 o'clock in the morning.



Shaun always checks his hookpoint for sharpness before casting out.



If the point doesn't feel sharp enough, simply use a sharpening tool to improve it.

EDGE NO.2 Barbed or Barbless?



Personally, I dislike using barbless hooks and only use them when I really have to. There is a lot of debate on this issue and everyone has their own view, but personally I do like a small barb to be there. Having said that, there is an instance when I do actually choose to use barbless hooks, and that is when presenting my hookbaits on, or in, silkweed. Try a little experiment for yourself the next time you wind in a ball of rig-clinging silkweed. Drop your rig on it a few times and pick up your hookbait. You will find that the barb catches on the silkweed continuously and makes it quite difficult for a carp to be able to suck up the bait. Try the same simple test with a barbless hook and you will be amazed at the difference, even after burying the hook. I like silkweed and find more natural food in it than I do in any other type of weed, so to me it is a very logical place to fish. However, many other anglers I see try in, silkweed. Try a little experiment for yourself

EDGE NO.3 Hair Material Choice

Whilst still on the hook side of things, I guess I need to make mention of the actual Hair attached to the hook. It really does amaze me how many anglers fish with a Knotless Knot setup and carry their hooklink through to the Hair. Now this is fine if you like to have your baits tight to the shank of your hook, and yes, it will, and does, catch carp, but I can assure you a finer, softer Hair will work more efficiently and actually help to hook/prick more carp if the Hair is used in the manner for which it was originally intended, and that was to keep the hook independent of the bait and allow the bait to behave more like a free offering, untethered by the hook (more of which in the next section). I have tried many different materials

over the years for the actual Hair part of the rig, from ultra-fine monofilament through to different floss-type materials, as well as some of the purpose-made Hair braids, but have found nothing which I feel works as well as plain old rod whipping thread or unwaxed fly-tying threads.

Many different materials can feel, and behave, very similar when dry. It is when you soak water into them that the vast differences become apparent. Some materials become much softer and vastly more supple when wet. For many years now my two main choices have been the Gudebrod 'D' for most of my fishing, and the much finer Gudebrod 'A' when I feel I need every little edge I can get. These are available in an assortment of colours, although I feel this to be relatively unimportant provided it is pretty drab. The colours can be useful, however, for colour-coding your rigs. Perhaps brown for 10lb, green for 15lb and black for 20lb, or even one colour for a certain size of hook, etc. The choice is yours.

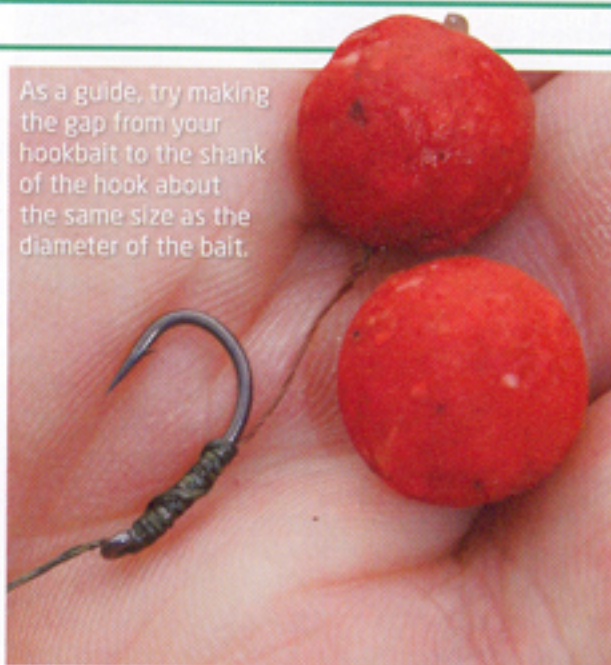


Try tying your Hairs using this extra-supple Gudebrod material - it will make a massive difference!

EDGE NO.4 Hair Length

I have touched on why the Hair Rig was so effective in the early days, and it is something that seems to have been forgotten over the years. Once you actually separate the bait from the hook you give the carp all sorts of ejection problems. If set up correctly, with a very limp Hair, the hook will follow the bait into the carp's mouth but separate inside the mouth, so when the bait is ejected, the hook won't necessarily be. With the bait tight to the hook it is much easier for the carp to eject both together. This one comes down to a confidence thing regarding how long you make your Hair, particularly if you have been used to fishing with baits very close to the hookshank. I would suggest as a starter to make the gap a similar diameter to your bait, and then experiment from there. You might be pleasantly surprised how large you can go with your hook once you give that little bit of free movement to the hookbait in the first place.

As a guide, try making the gap from your hookbait to the shank of the hook about the same size as the diameter of the bait.

**EDGE NO.5** Dissolving PVA Rig Foam

This follows on very much from the previous section. The use of longer Hairs often results in the Hair spinning around the hook and becoming tangled. To help prevent this I like to use the dissolving PVA foam nuggets on the Hair and hook. This gives the added benefit of giving you an instant marker over which to spray bait with the catapult. By using dissolving foam you also have a short period of time to manoeuvre a rig once it hits the bottom with less chance of fouling up the hook. A word of warning here though, in deep water the foam often comes off whilst the lead is still sinking. I get around this by wrapping the foam nugget in PVA tape to slow down the dissolve rate.

HOW TO...

ATTACH A PVA FOAM NUGGET

1 Shaun starts by selecting a nice fresh fat PVA nugget just like this one.



2 Insert one blade of your scissors in the middle of the nugget and cut along it.



3 Cut to the end of the nugget and then open it up, just as illustrated above.



4 You will now need to place your hook and Hair into the exposed centre.



5 Add some saliva from your tongue to the central section of the nugget, like so.



6 Gently squeeze the nugget closed so that it sticks back together and it's complete.

**SHAUN'S TIP**

Try using different colour Hairs for your different strength rigs. This will help you remember which is which when selecting one from the tackle box.

**SHAUN'S TIP**

If you are fishing in deep water it is well worth wrapping some PVA tape around your nugget to ensure it doesn't dissolve as it descends through the water.

At this time of year discreet hooklink materials can make a big difference.



EDGE NO.6 Discreet Hooklink Materials

These come into their own at this time of the year when most waters are much clearer than any other time of the year. With the carp being cold-blooded and movement being generally much slower, the sediment, which is generally present in midwater throughout the warmer months, finally settles onto the bottom of the lake, thus giving greater clarity, which can often make a lot of the commonly-used hooklink materials stick out like the proverbial sore thumb. Yes, we can buy Weed Green and Gravel Brown links, but do they really blend in on the type of lake bottom you are fishing? In many cases I know they won't! The weed will have died back and turned a much darker colour than it was during the summer, so that nice fresh Weed Green hooklength could look very much out of place. It can be difficult enough trying to tempt a fish into picking up a hookbait during the cold winter months without making it easy for the carp to see there is something wrong. Don't ignore the use of normal nylon line as your hooklink, particularly at this time of the year. It seems to blend in more than most other hooklink materials in common use. Similarly, for extreme clarity you could go the whole hog and use a fluorocarbon hooklength. You will find that most fluorocarbon links are a little stiffer than your average nylon, so take this into account and decide if the stiffness may work for or against you, depending on the type of presentation you are trying to achieve. I quite like combi-rig presentations but tie up my own, utilising materials which blend in more than a lot of the coated braids available these days.

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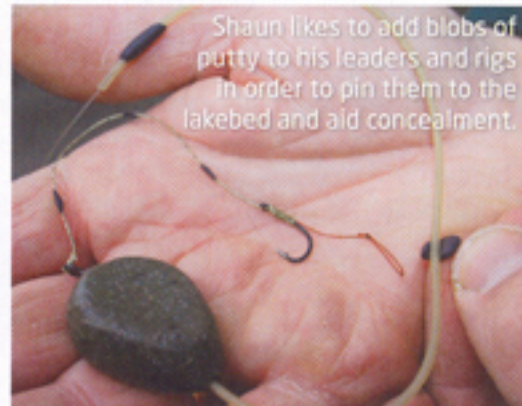
EDGE NO.7 Extra Concealment

It isn't just the hooklink you need to concern yourself with. Many safety lead clips and associated tubing can also stand out and make your rig look so obvious lying there on the bottom. I really can't emphasise enough the importance of trying to get your tackle to blend in as much as possible. Try the different types of lead available these days with the many different colours and coatings. If shockleaders are allowed, try a fluorocarbon leader to anchor your last few yards of line to the deck. Utilise rig putty – I put it on hooklengths, ends of tubing, and anywhere else I feel I need to pin everything down. Think about hiding your end tackle then think again. Those prepared to go the extra mile often reap the rewards with extra takes.

Carry a selection of leads with you so you can match the lakebed you are fishing over.



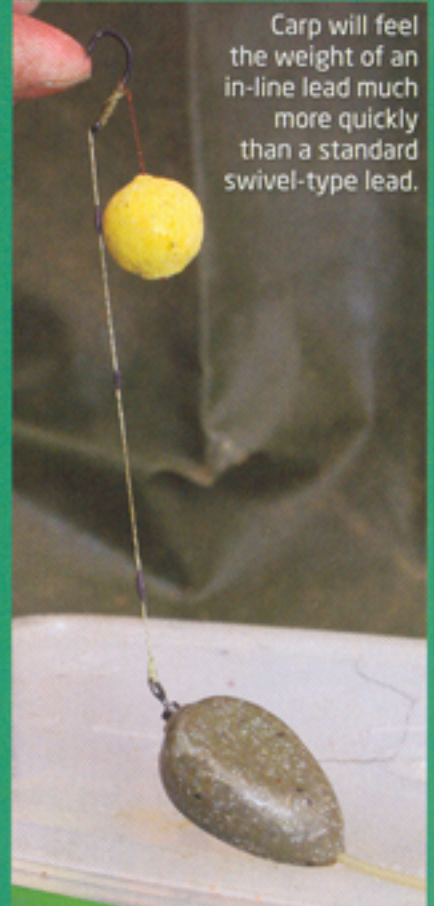
Shaun likes to add blobs of putty to his leaders and rigs in order to pin them to the lakebed and aid concealment.



EDGE NO.8 In-Line Leads

Again, as with barbless hooks, I don't like in-line leads, but if I am absolutely desperate I will use them. I don't like the fact that you are stuck with most in-line leads on the line whilst playing big fish, but they do have one massive advantage over a conventional pendant (swivel) lead, in that they don't offer so much chance for the fish to feel a slight resistance and allow it to drop the bait. Do the experiments yourself – tie up two identical rigs, with a conventional swivel lead on one and an in-line lead on the other, then play about with them and see how much room the carp has to play with on the swivel lead before it hits the full weight of the lead compared to the in-line lead. It's quite shocking to see. There are ways around this with conventional swivel leads on lead clips, and my favourite method for this is one dreamt up by Dave Booth. He simply wraps a piece of plastic tape around his lead, trapping his hooklink to the lead. This is a superb method and very simple and quick to employ. Once a fish is hooked, the line pulls free from the wet tape, which allows lead discharge in the conventional manner.

Carp will feel the weight of an in-line lead much more quickly than a standard swivel-type lead.



SHAUN'S TIP

Wrap a small piece of tape around the lead and hooklink of a standard lead clip setup, to create the same effect as an in-line lead. Once a fish is hooked, the rig will come free from the wet tape, reverting back to a standard leadclip setup.



EDGE NO.9 *Scaling Down*

A trick that can often produce a few more takes is to simply scale down the hooklink and hook size. Remember, during the colder months there is generally less weed about so the fish can be played more gently without the fear of them getting stuck. Just like fishing for roach on the river, something as simple as dropping a hook size can mean all the

difference between having a fish on the bank and suffering a blank.

During the winter months it can pay dividends to scale down to small hooks and light hooklinks.

EDGE NO.10 *Vary Your Bait Presentations*

Try pop-ups, Snowman baits and bottom baits. Try fluoro baits and dull drab baits, and when you have tried everything, try them on different rods. You may have the right presentation on the wrong spot. Work at your fishing and you will definitely benefit in the long-term. I mentioned fishing a new water recently and I had gone through a whole repertoire of different methods trying to induce my first take. I knew the rigs were good enough and was certain I was presenting them in the right places, but I simply couldn't induce a take. That was until I tried a straightforward bottom bait straight out of the bag. Now it doesn't come any simpler than this. After a few blanks I suddenly found myself getting action each trip, which just goes to show – definitely don't ignore the basics.

Make sure you have a big selection of hookbaits and keep experimenting with different combinations until you hit the nail on the head!

**Conclusion**

Once again I have run out of time so all that is left for me to say is please take on board my pointers, because I'm sure if you do you will notice the difference in your catch rates.

Best fishes.

Winter success by getting everything right.