

TACTICS

The Day-Session Approach

After a very successful day session spent shooting a feature with **Shaun Harrison** for issue 200, we got him to outline how he achieves so much success in such a short space of time.

During February I had a photo shoot booked with editor James; after writing in the very first edition of *Crafty Carper*, I had been asked if I would contribute to the 200th edition, 17 years on from my first article.

After checking what I had written the first time around, it seemed fitting to talk about rigs because I still use ones very similar to what I mentioned all those years ago. I have been writing regularly for various magazines for over 25 years now and usually do all the writing and photography myself, but I must admit it takes me a while to get close-up macro shots sorted on my own. So I took advantage of the offer to have a cameraman alongside me to do some close-up rig and rig-tying shots.

Knowing that it's always good to put a fish on the bank for the cameras, I arranged to meet James on a productive water I had not previously fished. Bearing in mind we were still in mid-February, I thought it sensible to have a drive over to the venue on the afternoon before the shoot and have a quick look. I wanted to cast around with a lead to give me a better idea of where to head the following morning, and form a plan of attack, so I did just that. I drove over there but I'd made a major mistake. The venue was rammed - I'd forgotten it was half-term and the kids were off! I drove to one of the other trickier waters on the complex and sat and watched. I was there for a couple of hours but saw nothing, and then the phone rang to confirm everything for the next day. I explained the situation and the fact that we would probably be better off shooting the pictures on the harder but quieter venue. I was quick to add that I definitely couldn't guarantee a carp in mid-February, although

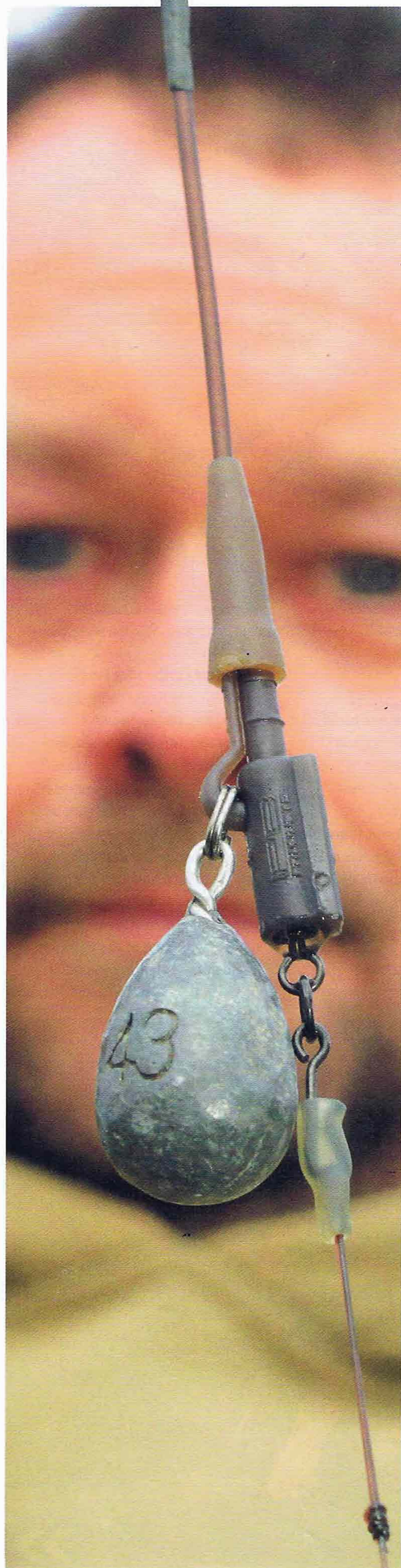
on the quiet I had caught a few over the past few weeks. I'd managed to go unnoticed, despite not seeing another fish caught whilst there.

I returned home and logged on to all the weather report sites I could think of. The next day everyone was forecasting warm weather - well, warm for February. I'd been receiving a little action but never felt as though I had got the location sorted, but with the way the weather was turning I was sure there would be a few fish starting to congregate in the slightly shallower water out of the wind.

The following morning I walked the dog and had a leisurely drive to the pits to meet up with James at 9.00 a.m. I'd said there was no rush because the bit of action I'd been receiving had been during the afternoon period. It was just about 9.00 when I made my first two casts with a Mini Spomb on my soft Free Spirit ES rod, and the third cast had the Spomb removed and replaced with a 1.5oz lead and baited rig, which was soon sailing out to land amongst



RIGHT Shaun bagged this 27lb+ mirror on his day-session tactics before I even turned up!



Small Leads

Once the bait is in, the rig then follows. Last month I wrote about my preferred combi-rigs so I won't bore you with those again. I guess though, to the casual observer the main thing you notice different about my rigs compared to most is that I tend to use much smaller leads. If I can reach the spots I don't often use more than 1½oz, particularly during the colder months.

The reason for the relatively small lead is to cut down on disturbance because I really don't want to crash a big lead in above the fish. If you have the watercraft sorted you should be casting amongst fish, so why on earth would you want to cast a big heavy lead amongst them and risk spooking them? The other thing, and a vitally important thing, is

LEFT It's small leads for me because they cut down on disturbance and give greater bite indication.

"If you have the watercraft sorted you should be casting amongst fish, so why on earth would you want to cast a big heavy lead amongst them and risk spooking them?"

aiding in bite indication and knowing what is happening. The only way you know anything is happening, apart from receiving liners (which only indicates there are fish somewhere between you and the rig) is when the lead is moved. If the lead isn't moved the indicator won't move. Try clipping a 3oz lead on one rod and a 1oz lead on another, and play around with the rigs on the bank. See how much you can get away with on the heavy lead without moving the lead. The smaller 1-1½oz lead will trundle about all over the place, thus signalling indication back at the rod/indicator end. This is really highlighted in the colder months when the carp's metabolism and the speed at which they do everything is slowed right down.

If I Can't Reach Them with a Light Lead

If I can't reach them with a light lead I simply incorporate running setups. I particularly like the PB Products' Hit and Run system, which gives twice the amount of indication at the indicator end than what has happened at the rig end, with it working on a pulley-type system.



BELOW I find that the Hit and Run system from PB Products gives amplified bite indication compared to normal lead clip setups.

Backleads and Slack Line

I very rarely use backleads other than flying backleads, and I don't like to have too much slack line out there. I guess I am in a minority on the issue of not getting the line totally out of the way. In fact, for the amount of time it takes some before they are happy with their line lay, I would have missed out on a few chances. The day of the photo shoot for last month's magazine was a classic example of this, with several of the takes coming quickly after casting, and none of the takes were screamers.

I went through a phase of paying off lots of line and sinking as much of it out of the way as I could, and found my catch rate never improved. In fact it created bite indication problems, and also meant more of my line was draped over sharp and potentially troublesome mussel shells. I got thinking about this a lot,

RIGHT Another one at 24lb 12oz, and they seemed to be responding well to the addition of a few Spombs of bait.



ABOVE Using a flying backlead ensures the final few yards are pinned to the deck.

and the thing that has made me revert to my old ways of only worrying about the last few feet of line around the rig is when I think of the typical floater-fishing scenario; the carp have sussed the line and the hookbait, but are more than happy to continue feeding on the free baits, and they don't spook out of the area because of visible line. CC





ABOVE I turned up to see Shaun hoisting out his third of the day, and it was only around 9.30 a.m.!

LEFT Shaun cracked on with the weighing and it was another 20.

BELOW This was the sight for the majority of the day, but who's complaining?

the spread.

I placed the rod on the rests while I let the line settle before clipping the indicator on, and the next rod was ready with a Mini Spomb clipped in place.

Suddenly the first rod was away and fish number one was hooked. I couldn't believe my luck - but the cameraman wasn't there yet. The fight was quite protracted and I was really careful because it was the first carp I had hooked on the PB Anti-Eject hooks. I needn't have worried; the hookhold was as good as it gets, and the fish wouldn't have fallen off even if I played it for a week!

I folded the net over an obvious upper-20 and never lifted it from the margins, preferring to give it a breather after the long scrap. I didn't want to retain the fish longer than letting it get its breath back, so I told James I would weigh it and get the pictures done. The scales read 27lb 1oz and soon it was swimming away. The two Pimple Pops (pink on top of white) I had caught it on were still intact, so I recast

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without topping back up with the Spomb (which proved to be a mistake).

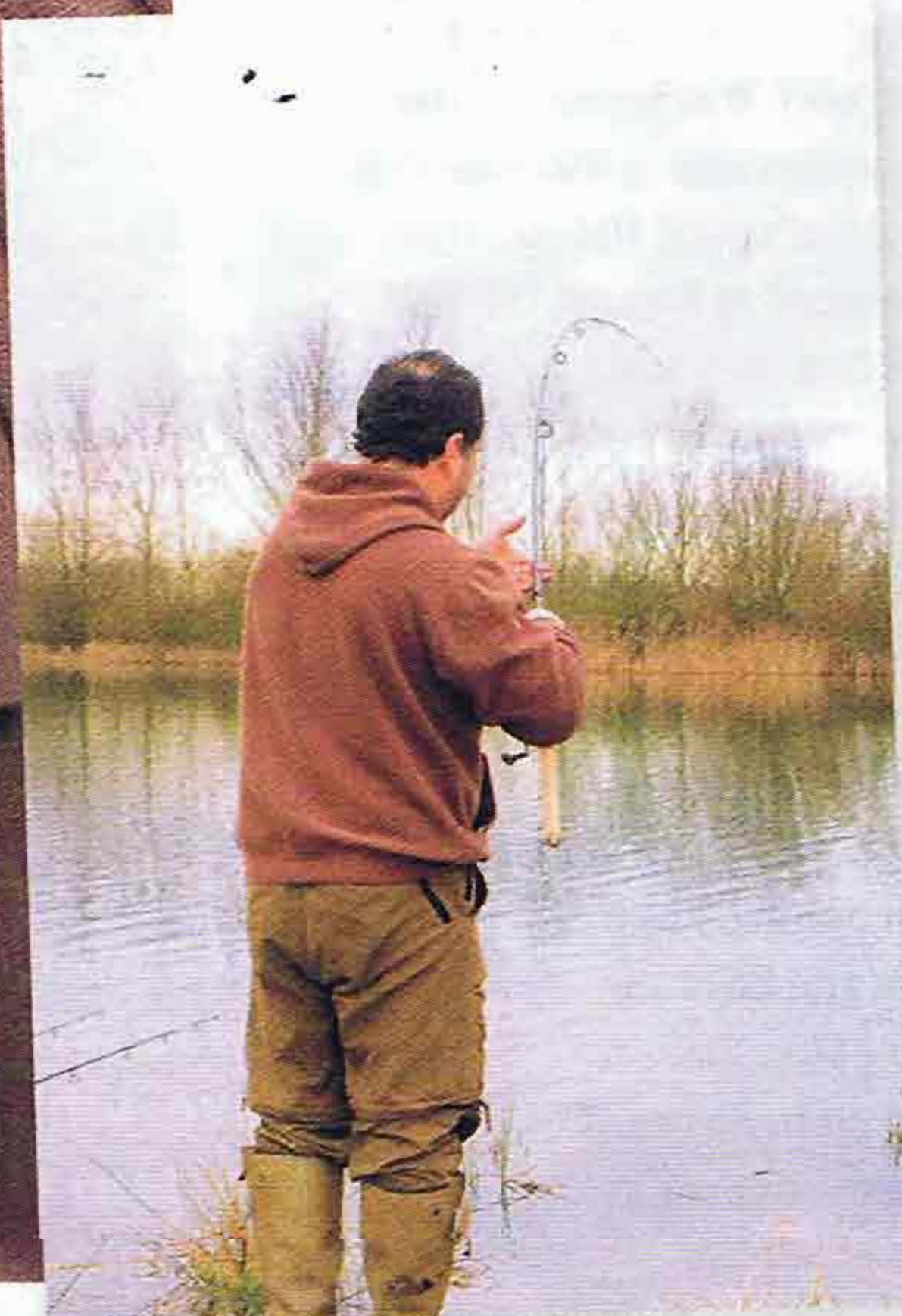
I had prepared the second rod with a Mini Spomb, which was cast twice to scatter bait to a silted

area I had found. The third

cast was with rig and bait. I was just removing the hooklink from the third rod so as to be able to do the same with the Spomb, when the second rod required urgent attention. A 19lb 15oz specimen took a liking to the double Pimple Pop offering, this time purple and yellow over a scattering of Magnum Duo and Magnum White bits. I could hardly believe the action I was getting, and could hardly believe it even more when a third carp was hooked before I managed to get my third rod out. The third fish was weighed at just over 20lb as James arrived.

He seemed impressed that I had a second fish on the bank, and even more so when I looked at him with a sly grin and mentioned it was my third and I still hadn't got the third rod out yet! Eventually, all the rods were out on the most productive approach I used last winter; two or three casts with a Mini Spomb on the rod followed by a rig replacing the Spomb.

I won't detail each individual capture but I managed to land seven carp during the



8-hour photo shoot. I did momentarily hook an eighth fish, but never hooked it properly due to playing another one at the same time. It was possibly a good job that one came off quickly really, otherwise I may have lost both. The other fish weighed 24lb 12oz, 21lb 8oz and a couple of 17s, so I guess it's safe to say I got it right on the day from a water that had been very reluctant to give up its fish this year.

I haven't mentioned the fish as a 'look how good I was' scenario, but more to show that what I am going to follow on with are hard proven methods, not some sort of armchair theory that should work. These are methods that work and have worked for me for a very long while. In fact, as James wrote in last month's magazine:

In this day and age, people chop and change rigs like they do their shirts, but one person who has used the same rig far longer than most have been living is Shaun Harrison. It's worked for years, so why change something that's not broken?

Now the rig can be critical to success, but in reality it is a combination of lots of other things that turn a mediocre day into a rather special one. I know, when I am finally on a few fish, how not to spook them and enjoy a multiple hit rather than just one or two.

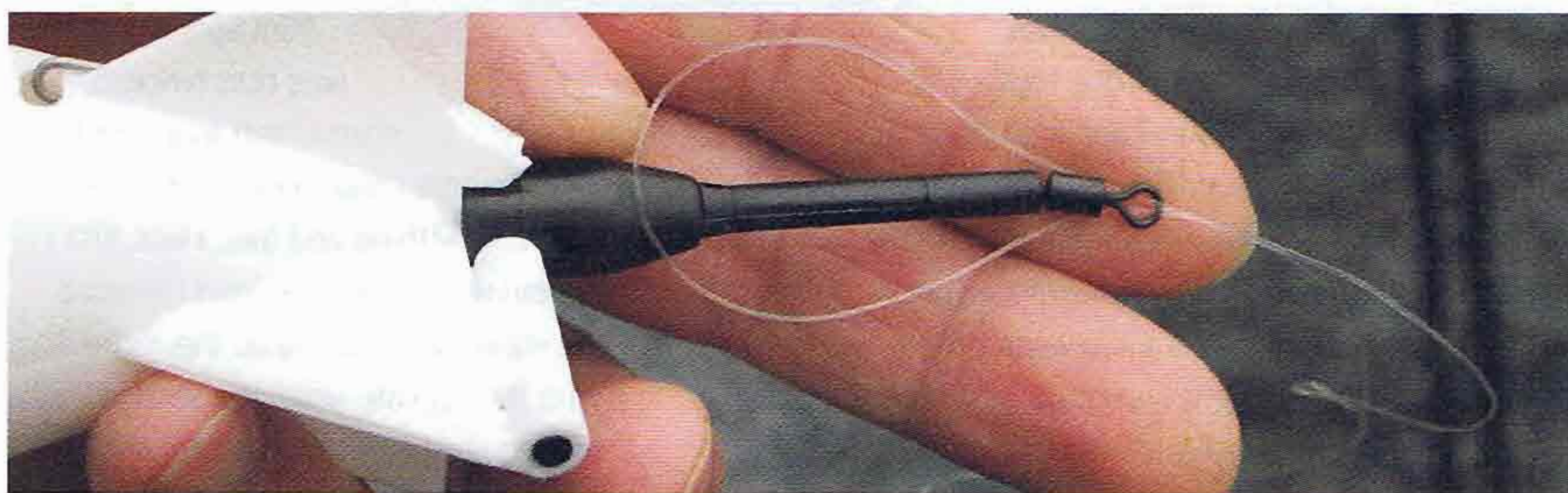
So, here's how I caught those fish,



ABOVE My old trusty combi-rig did the business, as ever. I have no need to change my rigs because they work.

RIGHT These little beauties were the hookbait of choice, and it didn't matter about the colour combination because they all seemed to work.

the nitty gritty of the bait, the baiting, the rigs and the tackle used, as all can make a difference to an extra fish or not. There were several bits that seemed different to what I generally see being used, and which certainly can be instrumental in putting a few extra chances your way.



Spombing and Following it up With the Rig

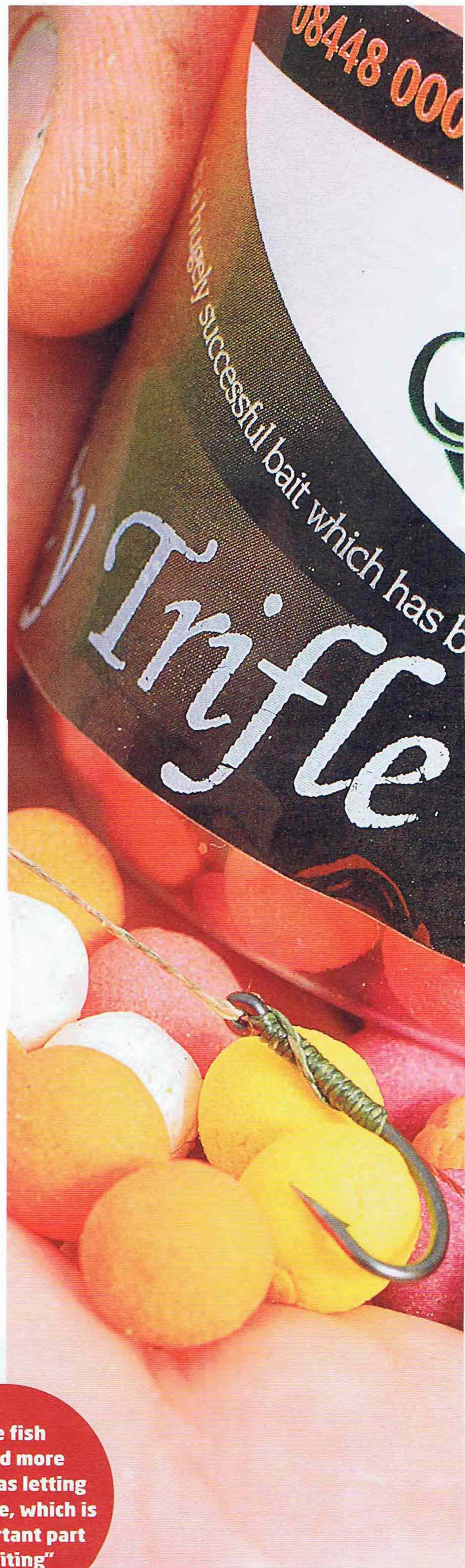
The session started with a couple of quick casts with the Mini Spomb. Now I absolutely love these Mini versions of my 'product of the decade', and this last year they have become a standard part of my approach. As you can see from what I wrote above, I use them on the actual rod I am fishing with. I make a few quick casts with the Spomb and then follow it with the rig, remembering to let it go a little further to compensate for deep water. Not too much further though, as I want my hookbait on the nearside edge of any free bait to minimise the chance of the fish noticing or spooking on the line while I'm trying to gain their confidence.

On the day of the photo shoot the takes were coming shortly after Spombing and then casting, so I set up my marker rod with a Mini Spomb, and when things had gone

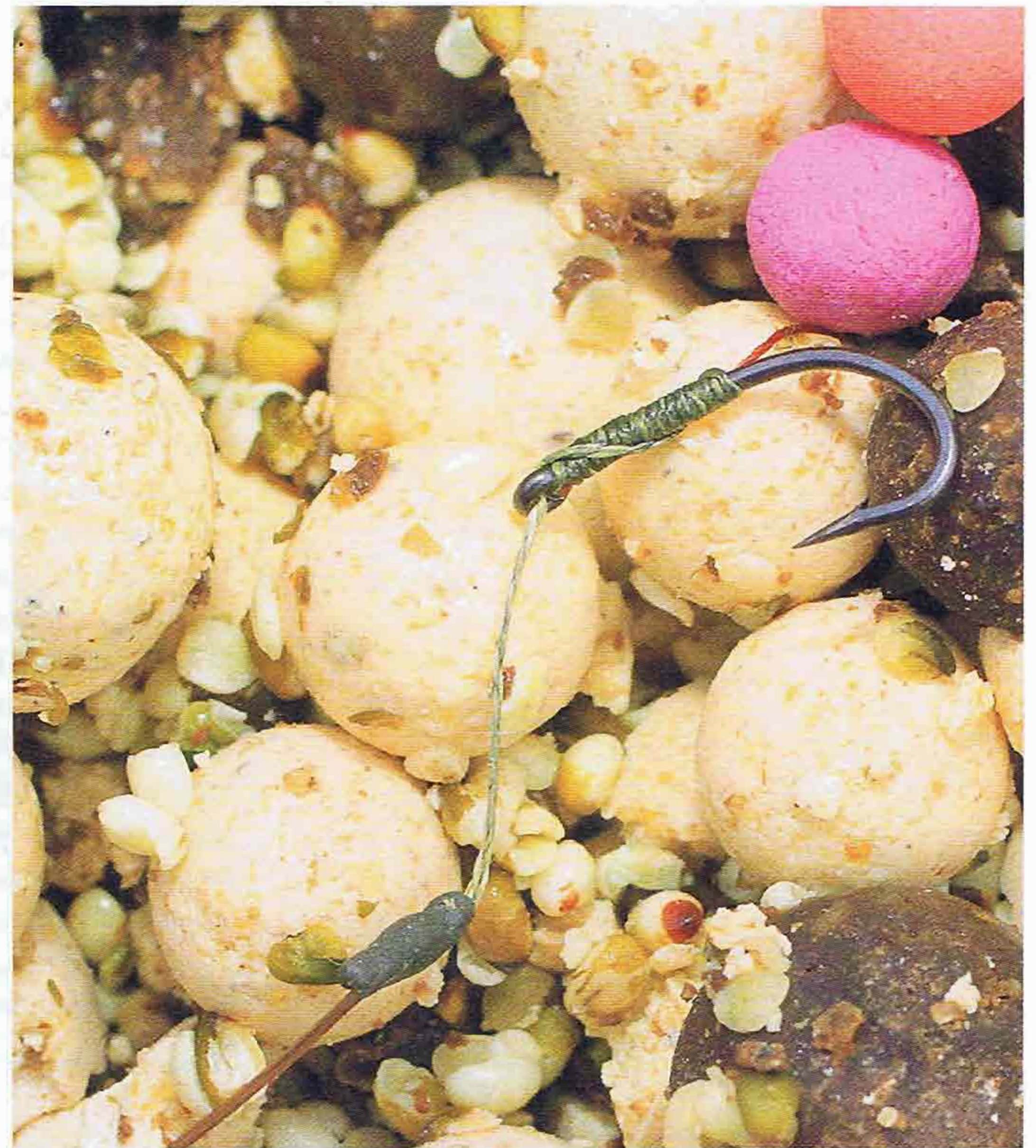
ABOVE The rig is removed, and replaced by a Mini Spomb to create a spread of free bait around the spot Shaun is fishing.

quiet for an hour or so, I simply made a couple more casts with the Spomb on the marker rod without disturbing the rigs. This gained me a couple of bonus fish during a period when it seemed as though the fish had moved on; in fact they were there all along and another couple of Mini Spombs had been enough to get them foraging again.

Had I committed all my bait at the start of the session, I doubt I would have been able to keep them picking away through the day. The fish wanted more than I was letting them have, which is an important part of baiting. Keep them competitive and have the fish really wanting it, rather than giving them plenty to stuff themselves on and move on.



"The fish wanted more than I was letting them have, which is an important part of baiting"



ABOVE My mix for use within the Mini Spomb - I don't give them too much though.

The Free Bait:
The Confidence Builder

The bait I use in the Spomb is always mixed. I want a good spread of differing sizes of food particle, as well as different attractor leak-out rates. My current recipe has been the same for some time and consists of equal amounts of the following:

- Whole boillie
- Broken and crumbed boillie
- Maximum Action Pellets
- Micro Feed

The only difference I make is which type of liquid I add, as I like soft boilies simply because I am sure carp prefer soft baits. Sometimes it's the juice from cooked hemp or other particles, and sometimes it's simple lake water with a glug added. It might be one of the flavoured waters you can buy everywhere or it could be a host of other liquids. The supermarkets are full of possibilities, and I have enjoyed success with a lot of the products found in the Oriental cooking aisles.

BELOW At 20lb 1oz it meant that two of the first three fish were over the 20lb barrier.

RIGHT And away she goes.

