

Knockout Punch!

Richard Chave has an enviable record with breadpunch on his local southwest canal circuit and has put a great deal of thought into the method. We got the Garbolino Blackmore Vale rod to reveal all...

ANGLER PROFILE

Name: Richard Chave
Age: 41
Occupation: Firefighter
Team: Garbolino Blackmore Vale

VENUE PROFILE

Name: Kennet & Avon Canal
Location: Pewsey, Wiltshire
Controlling club: Pewsey & District AA
Day tickets: Available from the self-service box at the Wharf



Richard is a breadpunch master!

Background

I'm proud to say that my Garbolino Blackmore Vale team has now qualified for the AT Team Championship Final for the third time in four years, thanks to a great result on the Kennet & Avon Canal, in Pewsey. Bread was undoubtedly the key to our result, so this article will hopefully highlight how we fish the method here in the southwest. Although we did also catch on other baits and methods it was the punch fish, and the ability to keep them going throughout the match, that were vital.

Breadpunch is definitely not just a winter method any more. I've won matches and picked up loads of times on the K&A using the same tactics in summer. A few years ago I even won with bread on the first day of the season!

I have fished at Pewsey, where we are today, for 25 years, and until last year the venue had been a regular fixture in our local winter league. However, we didn't fish it last season so a bit of practice was in order. Eight of my squad booked in for the first open over the New Year period to see if anything needed changing in our approach. Five hours later and five of us picked up a brown envelope, so we knew we'd be okay! Ben Dukes did best with 10-2-0 for third, Bob Gullick had 9-10-0 for fourth and Will Bohne, Jason Randall and I all chipped in with section wins. I drew Peg 67 on the Wharf and had 5-14-8 of roach – 180 fish on the punch, mainly on a top-three rig with two extra sections added.

The canal was frozen on the second practice match, where I drew Peg 180 above Wilcott Road bridge. Here it's deeper closer in, so I only needed to

fish four sections out. I only had 96 fish, mostly on the punch but a much better stamp, and registered 6-4-0 on the scales, enough for equal third overall.

On the semi itself I drew in the 190s in a decent area the locals call the 'sunken barge'. I started on the close-in bread line and very quickly had 20 fish, including an 8oz skimmer. Given the extra width of this section and bread standing out as the killing bait, I made an early decision to add some more sections and plumb up another swim further across the canal to find the same 4ft depth. This was at 11 metres and slightly to my left. My thinking was that the fish were happy sitting in four feet of water on the inside and the peg was wide enough for two swims, which would therefore give me an extra place to catch whenever I needed to rest a swim.

By feeding and resting each swim I was able to keep catching off both right to the end. I actually ended with a real spurt close in for the final 30 minutes after I began to throw in a small, thumbnail-sized nugget of liquidised bread every cast. My 140-odd fish went 9-7-0, which was good enough for second in the 13-peg section, behind Sensas Bathampton's Leon Hubbard. Incidentally, he also caught a lot of fish on bread and included a few skimmers in his 11lb bag to make it a southwest one-two in the section!

So, thanks to the punch we made it back to the final. I must add that this year's event has a good representation from my region, with Thatchers, Bathampton and ourselves all involved – and don't forget half of Dorking are from the southwest too!



Garbolino Blackmore Vale.

Depth And Distance

Where exactly to fish to catch for the longest period of time has always been one of my team's biggest post-match discussions. An inside line that corresponds to a top-three kit plus one or two extra sections added seems best, plus another line about three-quarters across towards the far bank.

The main factor is the depth. We have found four feet of water on the inside is the key, while two and a half feet is the best depth on the far line, which

Everyone's 2½ft rigs were different! Is it because us blokes aren't used to guessing length?

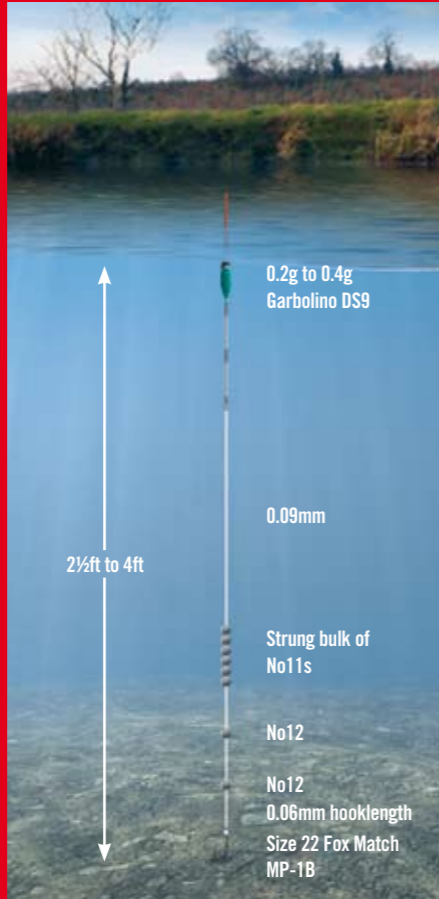
could be anywhere between nine and 13 metres out. These depths seemed crucial, but after one team line-up we found that everyone's 2½ft rigs were different! How could this be? Is it because us blokes aren't used to guessing length? The solution was to get a tape measure out and permanently mark 2½ft, 3ft and 4ft depths on our top sections with Tipp-Ex. This definitely makes for more-accurate plumbing.

Rigs

For the 4ft swim I use a 0.4g Garbolino DS9, with a smaller, 0.2g size for the 2½ft swim further across. This is a relatively new pattern, with a fibre tip plus a wire stem for stability. The main advantage with these floats is their slenderness, so they come out of the water smoothly on the strike – there seems to be a big swing towards slimmer floats over the last year or two. A lot of my team originally used thicker, cane-tipped floats but have since moved over to these and the slim DS14 pattern after realising that the bite detection was miles better.

Each rig is shotted with a string of No11 shot starting about 14 inches from the hook, with a No12 dropper three inches from the hook and two more No12s sitting just above the 6in hooklength. As most of the bites come just touching bottom or a couple of inches off it, the strung bulk gets the bread down quickly to the catching area and also picks up any flow, rather like a Topper float on the river. You definitely seem to get bites quicker with the float tripping through with any water movement. By the way, the natural flow on the canal at Pewsey, which is in the middle of a stretch of 11 miles without a single lock, is towards Devizes. It's always worth trying to find out information like this as the surface skim on canals can be deceiving and could wrongly influence where you place your feed.

I make my rigs up on 0.09mm Garbo Line to a 0.06mm hooklength. The hooks I prefer are size 22 Fox Match MP-1B barbless, which are brilliant for baiting up and unhooking thanks to their long shanks. The barbless versions also don't tend to bend as much when unhooking compared to the



three rig plus one section of pole, because you can swing a lot of fish directly to hand without breaking down by shipping half of the No4 section behind you. In effect, you can fish with the speed of a whip

By shipping half of the No4 section behind you, in effect you can fish with the speed of a whip but with the presentation of an unshipping rig.

microbarbed ones, which offer a bit of resistance and need the disgorging more often than not. However, these are not everyone's choice and my team uses a mix of Gama Greens, Kamasan B511s and Preston PR 31s.

I use 0.7mm latex on the inside line and a fairly long line of about three feet above the float. This definitely speeds things up if you're fishing a top-



Richard rates barbless MP-1B hooks highly.

but with the presentation of an unshipping rig.

The rigs for fishing across use the same line and hooklengths but with a softer, 0.6mm latex. This means you can really throw the pole back when unshipping without the fish coming to the surface. The lighter elastic also stretches more, which helps with swinging in closer to your hand despite the shorter length of the shallower rig.

Slim, fine-bristled floats improve sensitivity.



Punches

Most people probably have one set but I have two types and swap between them to find which the fish prefer. The first is the Drennan brass punch. These are fairly shallow and compress the bread to a fairly firm pellet that's robust enough to not come off when shipping out and will stay on the hook for quite a while before it really swells up. The Drennan punches also have a slot that locates the hook into the middle of the pellet of bread.

The second type is the discontinued Preston Q-Punch, which has a brass head and a little button on the end of the handle to eject the bread. To bait up I simply shove the hook point into the middle of the bread and press the button. The Q-Punches are deeper than the Drennans, so the bread swells quicker as it's not compressed as much.

Different compressions really can make a difference at times. On the second practice match at Pewsey I was waiting more than 30 seconds for a bite with the Drennan punches, but got bites almost straightaway with the Q-Punches. I deduced that the bigger fish on the day wanted a really soft pellet



of bread and, because the bread pellet was swelling up quicker with the Q-Punches, they were having it straightaway.

Equally, if you're on a lot of smaller fish you could perhaps use the harder, more robust pellet, which could withstand a few missed bites.

I always start on a 4mm punch, but also have 3mm and 5mm versions close to hand to ring the changes. Very rarely do I use the smallest punches in the packet, only when fishing well off bottom. I'm always trying to get on a bigger punch in an attempt to sort out a better stamp of fish.



Two types of punches and an old Image Punch Board are indispensable.

Feed

There is a debate among bread anglers about which is better – punch crumb or liquidised bread. My team are all in the liquidised camp, as I think everyone is in the southwest. I feel it's good to feed exactly what you're fishing on the hook, and with hardly any flow on most canals you don't need the binding power of crumb.

To prepare it, I buy a thick-sliced white loaf on the Tuesday or Wednesday prior to the weekend (normally a Tesco value loaf) and leave it in the bag in the kitchen until Saturday – it has normally dried out nicely by then. Next, I cut the crusts off and whizz a slice at a time in a small coffee grinder. The liquidised bread is tipped onto a Sensas joker riddle, and any that stays on top of the riddle is reground. I then tip the bread back into the bread bag and take it to the match like that. Any left over from the match is frozen, which makes it even finer. I don't add any water to it and it only needs a squeeze to enable it to be chucked in.

The initial feed – about the size of a kiwi fruit – is cupped onto the inside 4ft swim, straight in front of me. On the 2½ft swim across I like to feed

at a slight angle downstream, which gives me the option of feeding another bait slightly upstream.

Topping up is initially done with cupped balls about the size of a walnut. I top up when the stamp of the fish gets smaller or when the fish drop down the peg. Sometimes the fish definitely respond to a bit of extra feed going in, and on a good day you can end up chucking in a small ball by hand every cast.

The interesting thing about liquidised bread is the way it sinks. A firm squeeze sees it float for about a second then plummet to the bottom, sending out a cloud on the way down. Next, and this is the interesting part, because it's very light some of it seems to hover just off the bottom, while other bits never get closer than a few inches from the bottom – see for yourself by chucking some into a bucket of water. This is why I never fish bread laying on the bottom. I vary it from just touching to, more often, two to three inches off bottom. Generally, two inches off is a good starting point but I have won more than one match on the K&A by fishing at half depth with a very small punch, replicating the larger bits of liquidised bread.



Liquidised-bread feed is preferred.

Hook Bait



Warburtons medium-sliced in the blue, waxy-paper packet is my choice for the hook. I used to be a 'non-believer', using any fresh bread, but after it was mentioned several times in Match Fishing that it's the best stuff I gave it a try, and haven't looked back!

I tend to buy a fresh loaf and bag it up into lots of three slices and store them in the freezer. This way you always have fresh hook bait, even if you forget to buy some the day before a match.

I've never used more than two slices in a match – and that's even when catching a fish a bung! I keep it fresh while fishing by storing the slice I'm punching in an old Image Punch Board, with a sliding lid. By only exposing about 6mm at a time it stays fresh for several hours. It's also very satisfying to have nice lines of holes in your discarded slice – yes, I'm that sad!

One last thing is that I never roll, steam, microwave or compress the bread; it's used just as it comes from the loaf. If you have to compress it to keep it on the hook you're using bread that's either too old or has dried out. I believe bread is much more appealing to the fish if it's soft and almost hanging off the hook. Maybe on the Fens, where there are massive weights of roach caught on the punch, a more robust pellet of bread is an advantage, but I feel a soft hook bait is better for canal fishing.

A fine, bread-tempted catch.

