

Dropback

February 1997 - Issue 10



Joint RO
Dave Fish

Joint RO
Neil Depledge

RO's lines

As I sit and write this it is the day after Boxing Day, the weather has been extremely cold and this morning we have had snow. Yesterday I was over Bushey Park with my family and all the ponds were frozen over completely. On our drive home we came through Hampton and Lower Sunbury and I noticed that even the Thames backwaters were partially frozen. The lake at the rear of my house is today completely frozen over and the snow has settled on it. It is many years since I can recall the never freezing over, and this has set me thinking about my fishing of past and present.

For sometime now I seem to have been stuck in a rut with regards to my fishing and it has not received the time that I had previously devoted to it. This is in part due to my son, I dearly cherish the time I spend with him and do not begrudge him this time.

But there was something else, and after giving it some thought I have realised what it was. For about the past 5 years my fishing has been focused very locally and on a few small waters. This I have realised is not right for me. In the past I fished far and wide on a diverse selection of waters, many of which were huge and you could fish the winters rarely seeing another person, let alone a pike angler.

I have looked back over my catch records and these have seriously suffered as a result of this restricted fishing and I propose to change this next year. I have, already, this year improved my catch rate by giving the summer lure fishing a serious try with good results, not in size offish but in numbers. I have caught more pike in the last 6 months than in the previous 3 years.

I hope that this has not bored you and that it will make you look more closely at your own fishing and perhaps help you if you are stuck in that same rut.

Now on to other matters regarding the "Region". Once again this year we have increased our membership with many new faces at the monthly meetings. The number of fish-ins was reduced this year and so far have been fairly well attended, with some nice fish being caught also. The venue for the meetings appears to be secure for the foreseeable future, and we have a number of things planned for the meetings in the New Year but we are always open to suggestions.

That is all from me, all that is left is to wish you all a Happy and Prosperous New year and may old Esox keep pulling your string.

Tight Lines - *Dave Fish*

Lake Bala - a tale of two winds

It had been some weeks since Dave had phoned to see if I was interested in a trip to fish Lake Bala in North Wales, but the time passed quickly and on the Friday evening twelve of us met at Dave's house. Four cars were to be taken, driven by Dave, Chris, Neil and Steve. The mountain of gear was soon stowed away and we set off in convoy for North Wales, a journey that was to take nearly 5 hours to complete. Dave had booked three 4-berth caravans, which proved to be both comfortable and extremely good value at only £10 each for the weekend. We retired for the night, looking forward to the next day's fishing.

Saturday dawned and I was woken by Dave, who is never one to linger in bed when there is fishing to be had. As I rose from my slumbers I noticed an odd whistling sound that I soon realised was the

wind swirling around the caravan. This did not bode well, as Lake Bala is a considerable expanse of open water. After coffee, we piled into the cars and made our way down to the lake.

Dawn was just breaking and in the half light we could see that the wind was coming straight at us down the whole length of the lake, causing a considerable swell and a mass of white horses. We had intended to fish from boats, but after a democratic vote of 11 to 1, the decision was taken to fish from the bank. The aim now was to find a sheltered area that would comfortably accommodate 24 rods. We drove round the lake and stopped at several access points where Dave, Ian and John charged off to look for suitable swims, at least that's what they said they were doing. I did notice, though, that the sheep by the lake looked decidedly worried as they approached.

We eventually found an area of rocky beach that could accommodate all of us. The disadvantage was that you needed to be a mountain goat to negotiate the steep rocky path that led down to the water. We fished there for the rest of the day without success. The only pike taken weighed about 11lb and fell to one of Jeff's lures.

We returned to the caravans about 6 o'clock and Dave set about cooking enough chilli to feed us all, no mean feat considering caravans do not have the largest of cooks. The meal was excellent and much appreciated and after the plates etc were washed, we sat around making lewd comments about the contestants on 'Blind date'. It was at this point that Chris appeared from the kitchen area, having dried the plates. There was no room for him to sit down so he stood by Dave's shoulder and dropped what sounded like a rather innocuous fart. The smell, however, was pungent (an understatement if ever I heard one) and as it pervaded the entire caravan, there were groans from every corner of 'Oh God' and 'Get the window open'. Ian clasped his jacket to his nose and looked as if he was about to pass out. Not content with the mayhem he had caused, Chris went for a repeat performance, at this point I vacated the 'van and listened to the ensuing groans from outside.

The rest of the evening was spent in a local hostelry, downing a few pints, which was very enjoyable apart from the fact that the place was full of Welshmen. Bill and I got the distinct impression that when we went to the bar, some of the locals were less than pleased at our presence. We returned to the caravans at closing time and after coffee soon retired for the night, knowing full well that with Dave in our caravan that we would be up and about before dawn.

Sunday came and no whistling sound. On reaching the lake we found a good ripple but no white horses. Everyone was keen to get out in the boats but the equipment provided left a lot to be desired. Most of the oars had no collars and consequently were a poor fit in the rowlocks. Also there were no anchors or mud weights and no balers. Nevertheless the rods and gear were put aboard and the boats cast off.

Those with fish finders soon discovered that the lake was indeed very deep, in some places going down to over 100 ft and that in the main the fish were close to the bottom. I was sharing a boat with Neil and Paul but despite our best efforts with both lures and dead baits we failed to get a take between us. Around lunchtime we pulled into the shore and beached the boat. Steve and Jeff joined us and we proceeded to fry up sausages and bacon for lunch. We each put out two baits to continue fishing whilst we ate.

After about fifteen minutes my left hand indicator dropped off and line started to slowly pay out. Both Steve and I stood there looking at it in disbelief, neither of us daring to hope that a fish could be responsible. I picked up the rod and hit the fish which succumbed after a spirited fight. It weighed about 8lbs and proved to be the only pike caught that day. The accolade for the best catch of the weekend must go jointly to Jeff and Steve. On their way back across the lake they managed

to hook a sailboard which, after a lengthy fight, snapped the line before it could be brought to the net.

Overall, the weekend was a great success with everyone appearing to enjoy themselves, the only thing missing were the pike.

Footnote:

A special mention must be made of Jeff and Steve's navigational abilities.

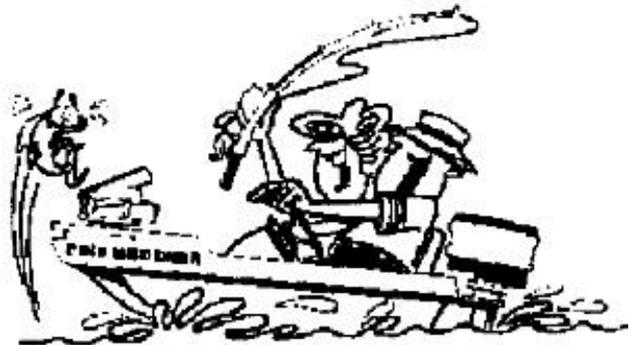
On the Friday night they zoomed past Dave and Nell's cars at about 90 mph to miss the turning onto the M56. Then, on the way back to London they took the wrong turn off the M5 and ended up driving back to London down the M1.

Ron Parker

Messin' about on the river

In June of this year Paul Smith and I purchased a small dinghy, by small I mean seven foot and it fits in the rear of my Carlton estate car (admittedly you have to tie the tailgate down). The boat cost us £50 and it came with two oars and two seats (planks of wood). The only other items we had to buy were collars for the oars and rowlocks. We intended to use a mud weight for the anchor and only one at that.

Our first trip out was an evening sortie to Chertsey weir, we did not row the boat as the oar collars were still on order; instead we paddled using the war canoe technique. The boat was licensed as we had previously purchased an unpowered license at a cost of £15.50 for the year (January 1st to December 31st).



The boat was launched by carrying it down to the river and throwing it in. We then paddled up to the weir pool. We anchored easily in the slight flow and fished lures cast towards the weir sill. Pike were caught almost immediately; Paul had a fish on before I had even had my first cast. We had planned to hand land all fish due to the lack of room in the boat for even my cut down fast net, and also the net tends to get caught in the flow in the weir pool and make its use difficult.

It was at this point that we encountered the first of a few problems. Firstly the pike, no matter how big or small managed to pull the boat around in circles; this was due to the fact that we only used one mud weight. This caused the anchor rope to twist and tangle when it was retrieved; it also caused the rope to come untwined. Secondly when I lent out to hand land the fish the boat tipped over, somewhat alarmingly.

Both these problems were subsequently overcome, the first by using two mud weights, the second (almost immediately) by the person playing the fish sliding across to the other side of the boat to balance the weight of the other who was landing the fish. I then adopted my role as ghillie, as Paul hooked fish after fish. As each fish was landed we became more organised, all the fish were unhooked at the side of the boat and then held until they recovered and swam off. This was most important as all the fish fought very hard and if immediately released would have been swept away in the flow, possibly to die.

We moved about the weir pool but it was noticeable that all the fish came from right in front of the weir sill. We fished for about three hours and caught about 12 fish between us. Nearly all these fish fell to tandem spinnerbaits. Fuelled by our immediate success we returned the next day again we had success in the weir pool with several fish up to about 9lbs. We also caught a couple of small perch.

Each time we used the boat we became more organised, all our tackle was kept to the minimum and once in the boat was kept tidy and tucked under the seats or in the small storage area at the front of the boat. We invested in a self locking cleat for the front of the boat, this meant that to secure the front mud weight you just lowered it down and then pulled the rope into the cleat and it locked in, very simple and efficient. The rear mud weight was tied off to one of the rear lifting handles. After each use the ropes were straightened out and allowed to untwist and then neatly coiled this avoided any problems next time out. The oars were eventually fitted with their collars but we then experienced problems with the rowlocks where they were mounted in the boat. This problem was overcome by the application of liberal amounts of fibreglass, and has not reared its head again.

We have now fished Chertsey, Shepperton, Sunbury and Penton Hook weirs. At Shepperton we have fished the front weir, the back weir, the Wye weir and the canal overflow weir. We have caught fish from all these locations and have never yet blanked. Between the two of us we have had over a hundred fish to low double figures, all on lures, mostly on spinnerbaits.

After our initial successes in the weir pools we started to fish other likely looking spots that we had previously passed over. Often we get a take first cast. At the end of our sessions we would up the anchors and drift with the flow just casting to likely looking areas and pick up fish. The fishing was great fun and very relaxed.

As the season wore on we noticed that our catches were dwindling, we discussed this at length and decided that maybe the fish had moved away from the weir pool and on one session at Penton Hook we caught no fish at all in any of the three weir pools with all of the fish, including several large perch, coming from either under the trees or the boats,.

Paul and I had great fun on these outings, all of which were fairly short, never more than four hours. The reason for the short trips was due to the fact that it was extremely cramped in the boat and it soon made your legs and back ache.

We found all the fish to be in excellent condition and all fought very hard, often tail walking. We are now both dab hands with small multiplier reels and the short single handed lure rods. I have now managed to catch fish on spinnerbaits, something I have been trying to do for three seasons, although I have still to get a still water take on a spinnerbait. We lost a few fish, which shook the lures and we lost more than a few lures in the abundance of snags in the weir pools. We gained some valuable experience and we can not wait for the start of the season next year.

Dave Fish

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A short guide to Pike on the fly

Fly fishing for pike is enough to send a trout man over the edge and has done quite often. If you decide to read on I hope you will find it interesting enough to give it a try, its guaranteed excitement. All fly-type casting is a balance between rod and line (the reel is just somewhere to keep the line), so let us say your rod is 10ft, 8 weight with a fast-tip, coupled with an 8 weight-

forward floating line. From line to hairbug (fly) is 5ft of 'Tynex' (Teflon coated nylon) 15lbs BS plus 6" of 20lbs wire as a clip to the fly. The 'Tynex' being very springy throws the last 5 1/2 ft of tackle out in a straight line.

On becoming proficient at casting, you will require a line tray for stripping the line into, prior to shooting the head (the line does not come straight from the reel). All I can say about casting is that its pure timing, but well worth the effort. A first class book is "Advanced fly casting" by Lefty Kreh and can be bought most game shops.

On hairbugs, they can be from 3" to 8" long, maybe of bucktail, feathers or synthetics mounted on size 1 to 2/0 hooks. As they are designed just for pike they can be any colour and with or without eyes. I will tell you now that this is not the most efficient way of taking pike but in my book it is pure. One fine day your rod top will be dragged under by a would be record that turns out to weigh just 7lbs. But by then, as the Americans say "Holy shit, its diaper changing time"

PS There is a lot more to it than this short scrawl.

Cec White

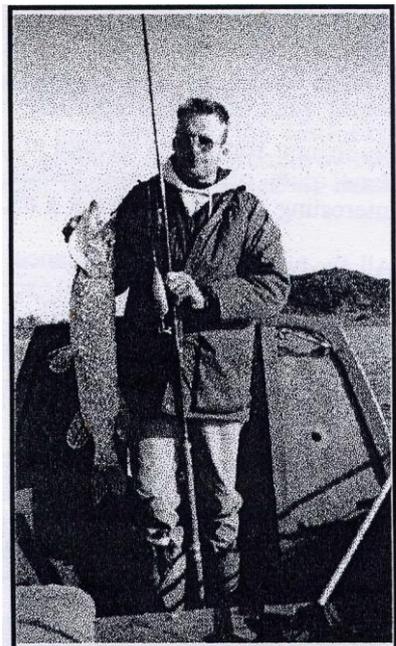
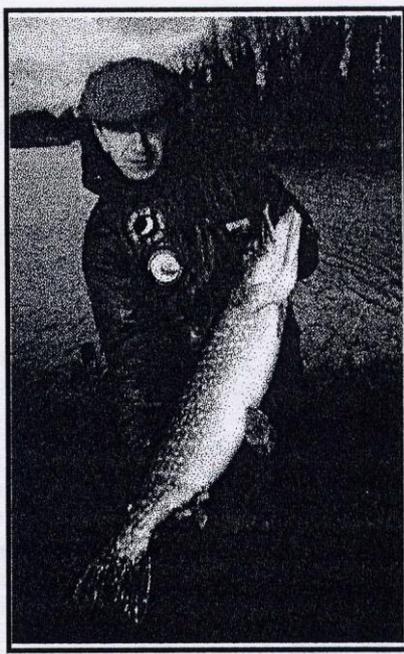
Just in case

With the local lakes being frozen over for so long, you may have forgotten what we usually fish for.

Working from left to right, Andy Longfellow with his first '20' caught at Papercourt. Andy was almost on his way home then decided to have an extra 30 minutes in a swim that had just been vacated by an angler who had sat there fishless all day.

In the middle is Dave Fish with the 14lb'er that he caught twice in 10 minutes on last years trip to the Lincolnshire drains.

And finally, Ian Goodchild with a healthy Loch Ken double caught on a spoon during last years trip up t'north.



Spinnerbaits

For a number of seasons now I have been attempting to catch a Pike on a spinnerbait. Jeff and Steve keep telling me that they swear by them so I thought that I would give them a serious try. I tried and tried but without success, at first I thought that perhaps I was not using the correct type I only had half a dozen and these were Barries Buzzers or some cheap ones from America. I felt that I had given them more than a fair try as I would often go out with just Spinnerbaits, but still nothing.

At about this time I borrowed a Cabellas catalogue from Jeff (this is an American mail order fishing catalogue), as I was looking for some rod rests for my boat In this catalogue were hundreds of different types of lures and in particular lots of different types of Spinnerbaits, in an amazing array of colours. I studied the catalogue at length and then spoke to Jeff about types and colours. After this I again sat down with the catalogue and made a list of the ones I was going to order. I then telephoned my order to America, paying by credit card and my order arrived a couple of weeks later. I have since found that another company, BassPro, will get your order to you in 7 days and often less.

I was now ready for my next spinnerbait campaign and I was determined to catch on a spinnerbait. The first real opportunity came on our trip to Lock Ken in May, but it was not to be. I did have a follow but no takes, well not on a spinnerbait.

In June I went to California on holiday and although it's not a Pike or Musky state the K Mart and Wall Mart supermarkets sell fishing tackle and lots of lures. My flexible friend went to work and I bought spinnerbaits in every size, colour and blade combination I could find. These were not all for me as I had been asked by several people to bring various lures back. On my return these were distributed and I set out once again to catch a pike on a spinnerbait.

My new campaign was to centre on the weir pools in the River Thames and this would be achieved by the use of a small dinghy that Paul Smith and I had bought. Success was achieved on our first outing; my first fish came to a Tandem Willow Firetiger spinnerbait and weighed about 6lbs. During the fight the top blade (large one) came off, disaster, my only catching spinnerbait was now useless. I tried a different one, again a Tandem Willow and again success. This is how it went on; each time we went out I caught several fish on the spinnerbaits.

I soon learnt that the Single and Tandem willow bladed spinnerbaits had to be worked quiet fast to get the blades to rotate. If you used a tandem blade combination of a large willow blade and a small Colorado blade it could be worked a little slower. If either a Single Colorado or tandem Colorado was used this combination could be worked very slowly and gave off a very strong vibration.

The beauty of the spinnerbait is that they are almost impossible to snag, a very important factor in the weir pools of the River Thames as they are riddled with snags. If they did become snagged a pull from a different direction would free them, this did not work every time but we lost very few lures.

All the spinnerbaits I was using were 3/4 ounce; this weight was more than adequate for the distance to be cast and also would sink down in the little current that there was in the weir pool. These baits can be worked at any depth from surface to bottom. We found in the weir pool that most of the fish came right from the edge of the weir sill where the water dropped off the sill into the pool itself, The fish were also on the bottom as opposed to higher in the water. I am certain that the fish were in this position due to the high air and water temperatures, as the water here was well oxygenated. We caught very few fish from other areas of the weir pool. As the season wore on and

the flow in the weir increased due rain, we found it more difficult to get the spinnerbaits down to where the fish were at the edge of the sill. This problem was overcome by ordering heavier baits, once armed with these 1 ounce baits we were back amongst the fish.

We now began to experiment in other areas of the river, away from the weir pool. This would often be just a matter of drifting with the flow and casting to likely looking areas. On almost every occasion we were successful, so far we have not contacted any large fish, the heaviest going just over 10lbs, but we have caught lots of fish.

A word now about the other items of tackle we use. We both use single handed, one piece casting rods, fitted with small baitcasting multipliers that are loaded with 30lb breaking strain "Gorilla braid. The use of braid was a new thing for me. The fact that it has no stretch means that you feel every pull, tap and vibration, and I am certain we have caught more fish as a result of using the braid. The only other modification that we have done is to crush down the barbs on the large single hooks that the spinnerbaits are fitted with. This has made the unhooking much easier. We have now progressed to other methods and are trying ultralight lures and tackle and also the use of soft plastic worms but that is another story that is just beginning, perhaps I will tell you about it another time.

Dave Fish

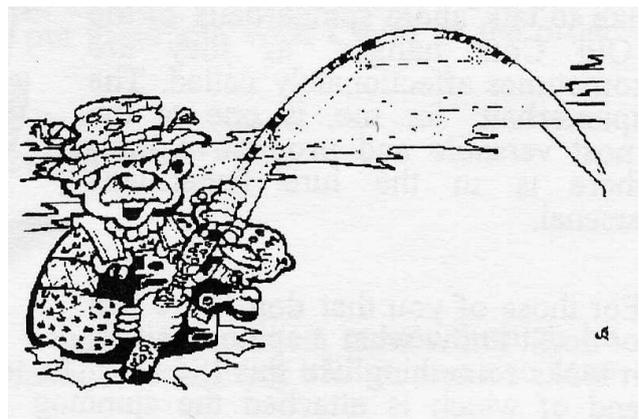
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BRASS MONKEYS

Having never been the greatest believer in the term the early bird catches the worm, I arrived at New Road gravel pit just before mid day on Wednesday 8th January. A visit to the pit earlier in the week had shown that the majority of the water was frozen although a few areas remained fishable. Having put on enough warm clothes to ensure that I looked like a green Michelin man I made my way to the gate.

The first noticeable effect of the recent freezing weather was the ground. Instead of the usual muddy quagmire, I was greeted by solid ground with enough ridges and troughs to ensure a twisted ankle and blue language before I even reached a swim. There were two fishable areas of the gravel pit. The first was the swim near the pipe that allows water to flow in from the river. The second was the far corner of the pit, near to the current gravel workings. I chose to fish the first area, mainly because it was less of a walk (lazy bastard) and also because the cold wind would be blowing into my back. The chosen swim had an ice free area approx. 30m across and stretching 60m into the gravel pit. I cast a legered mackerel tail 25m out, tight against the edge of the ice (after 4 or 5 attempts). The right hand rod had a float legered sardine cast roughly 10m out to the bottom of a slight drop off. It was now time to sit back and await results.

Due to the freezing conditions I was not highly expectant of a run and planned to stay for 2 or 3 hours. Roughly an hour had passed and I was contemplating a recast when the float on the right hand rod disappeared. I stared at the spot where the float had been in disbelief; surely I hadn't got a run? The float re-emerged and I blamed its disappearance on wind dragging it under. However when the float started to poodle off towards the far bank my initial suspicions were confirmed. A run!! I then realised that I



had forgotten to put the net up but after quickly putting it together I wound down to the fish. The pike did not fight spectacularly well but the fight was made more interesting when the stop knot jammed against solid ice in the top two rings. I landed and unhooked the pike that weighed approx. 7 pounds, not a huge fish but a satisfying capture considering the cold conditions.

I fished on for another couple of hours but was unable to tempt any more fish into dining on my sardines. I decided to call it a day and walked back to the car with Jeff who had been for a chat and walk around.

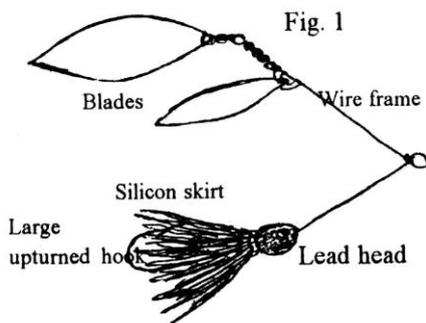
Paul Smith

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The Lure Box (Part 2)

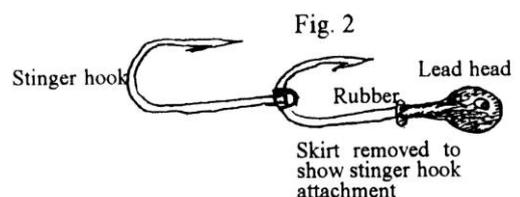
In this issue of DropBack I would like to talk about spinnerbaits or the 'Old Coat hanger' as they are most versatile and productive lures there is in the lure fisherman's arsenal,

For those of you that don't lure fish or don't know what a spinnerbait is, it looks something like this (See Fig. 1). It consists of a wire frame on one end of which is attached the spinning blade or blades. These can be willow or Colorado or a combination.



Down from the blades comes the attachment point and then below this we come to the lead head. This provides the casting weight, but importantly it keeps the lure on an even keel. The head can be of any combination of colours to match the rubber skirt that is attached to it. It is this skirt plus the lead head that gives the pulsating movement to the bottom end of the lure. Beyond the skirt we finally reach the business end, the hook.

The hook on a spinnerbait consists of a large upturned single. This might look inefficient but I have not had many problems with them. On the occasions that the fish might be coming short on the lure I fix on a stinger hook. This is just another large single hook that fixes over the bend of the lure hook and is fixed in place by a small piece of silicon over the eye (See Fig. 2).



Originally designed for bass fishing in the States, it did not take long for the Muskie and northern pike anglers to discover that the spinnerbait was a deadly lure for their prey.

So what makes the spinnerbait so deadly? Well, I think you can put it down to three main factors. I've put these into what I think is the order of importance.

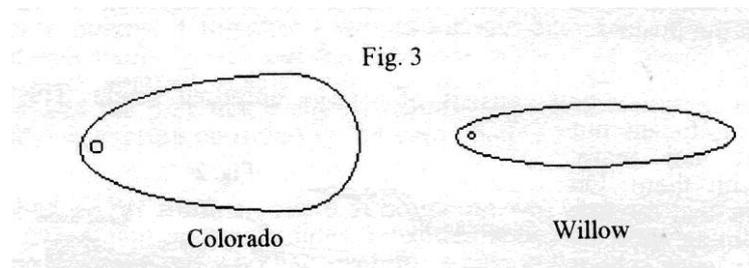
Like Miss World these are in reverse order.

Multi movement

This is just simply the way in which a spinnerbait moves through the water. Not only have you got rotating and flashing blades, you also have this brightly coloured head and skirt combination undulating below the blades.

Vibration

Interlinked with the multi movement is vibration. No other lure creates or makes more noise and disturbance under water than the spinnerbait. Different frequencies of sound and disturbance can be governed by the size and shape of the blades. For example Willow blades rotate at a faster speed than the Colorado blades and large blades produce a lower frequency than small ones (See Fig. 3)



By Design

The main factor I think is quite simply that by its very design a spinnerbait can be fished in places where other lures would be snagged and lost. Due to its weighted keel and upturned single hook it can be fished and bullied through quite dense cover, although it is not totally un-snagable. Ask any of us who fish the weir pools of me Thames.

Well, that's a description of how a spinnerbait looks and works. But, I hear you say, "How do you fish it?" The answer to that one is not quite so easy, as the lure will cover several different situations. Here is a rundown of some of the techniques that have worked for me at some time or other.

The steady retrieve

As the name suggests you simply retrieve at a steady rate using the countdown methods to cover different depths.

Sink and draw

This is the same technique that you might use with a deadbait. Just let the lure sink to the required depth, lift the rod up, retrieve the slack line and then lower the rod allowing the lure to sink back, down again. Repeat this procedure until the retrieve is complete. 90% of the takes I've had using this method happen as the lure drops back towards the bottom.

Bulging

Cast the lure out but don't let it sink too far down in the water. Start to retrieve very fast, this will bring the lure up in the water. The blades should be just disturbing the surface. Reduce the speed of retrieve to maintain this bulging without breaking the surface. On its day this can be a devastating technique.

Just one other tip, Jeff and I have found that it is best to use the heavier spinnerbaits, say 3/8 oz upwards. I personally like yellow or chartreuse skirts but have had success with other colours as well, just experiment. I also personally like tandem or twin bladed spinnerbaits and have a preference for willow or willow/Colorado combinations. You can also fit all sorts of rubber worms and tails to your lure; often in our experience it can give you the edge.

So there you are, I hope I have been able to help you get more out of fishing this type of lure. If you don't normally fish with lures or are only able to afford a few lures, I strongly recommend that you have a few spinnerbaits in your box. It is the lure that normally manages to winkle out a fish when nothing else seems to work.

Tight lines

Steve Aldridge

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Dates for your diary

Monthly meetings 1997

March 10th
April 14th
May - no meeting
June 16th
July 14th
August - no meeting
September 8th
October 13th
November 10th
December 8th

Fish-Ins 1996/97 season

Feb 16th Papercourt Lake - Charity match
Feb 23rd Ardingly Reservoir, E Sussex

Fish-Ins 1997/98 season

During the 'close season' the committee will be meeting to arrange, amongst other things, next seasons 'Fish-Ins'. If you have any suggestions for venues or for the frequency of our trips please pass on your suggestions as soon as possible. This year we originally arranged one trip a month. Do you think this was right or should we have more or less dates?

Region 15 cloth badges

These are available from Neil Depledge for just £2.50. They are the same design as the logo on the front page of DropBack. The pike's head is black and the text and border are red.