

A truly stunning scenic shot that captures the ambience of the canal perfectly.

Carping On The Cut

A southwesterly gale on a 300-acre pit isn't needed to be in with a chance of an unknown monster. **GEORGE NORRIS** advises that you visit your local canal.

ANGLER FILE **George Norris**

AGE: 34
OCCUPATION: Fabricator
UK PB: 42lb 10oz
SPONSOR: Blakes Baits

Local to me is the Grand Union Canal, which now widely holds carp along its entire length. I'm lucky, in that "my" stretch has so many carpy areas that it would put Mark Pitchers to shame – sunken barges, collapsed walls, staging, undercut banks, to name but a few. There is a rule that I've stuck to over the years and that is – it might look carpy but if there not there you aren't going to catch 'em!

With numerous marinas within 20 minutes of my house I am spoilt for choice. One thing they all have in common is that they are magnets to carp. On hot sunny days you can find large numbers of them holding up in little suntraps in some random places. I have spent

The canal houses a variety of carp, including pristine commons.



Nice and tight, keeping concealed.

many an afternoon laying on the walkways face to face with scaly old carp, taking photos of them and videoing them for reference. One thing to bear in mind is that most, if not all, marinas are privately owned and public access is forbidden. Nevertheless, a quick chat in the marina office often gains enough permission to have a wander about.

I was stood looking at several good commons and a lovely linear when an old chap was rolling an empty water bowser along, making a terrible noise right over the top of these fish, and they never even flinched. They literally see this on a daily basis, so finding and observing them was often a doddle.

One particular marina had two specific areas where the carp used to live and you could often have 3lb mirrors sat next to mint 25lb commons and proper battle-scarred old gnarly fish just feet away from you in broad daylight.

When it comes to fishing them, the only option will be to fish the entrances or towpath side of some of the basin-type marinas. My local marina, which I have fished for many years, has an area where the main bulk of the carp reside, a good 400 to 500 yards from the nearest area you could squeeze a broly on. This meant that my only approach was to wait for the fish to be travelling around the marina. For this reason, I usually target them in

July/August, which is when the canal carp are not necessarily at their most active due to the raised temperatures. However, it's when I find I have the best chance of intercepting them on their travels. I take blank sessions as the carp simply not being there.

Fishing any marina entrance comes with its hazards and increased boat traffic and I can never fully relax until late into the night. I've had several occasions where I've been sat under my brolly when I've heard the unmistakable 'putt, putt' of a narrow boat. By the time I've got to my rods it's too late, it's ploughing through my

lines. Like I say, you can't simply relax and switch off.

Back leading is essential and sometimes I will use two, one in the centre channel and one directly under my rod tip. That said, if you have time to reel in your rods I would still do it. Casting them back out is much better than re-doing all your rods with a new end-tackle arrangement.

Choice of back lead is very important and I've used many designs over the years. I have one major gripe with back leads and that is that they often come off while playing fish. I once paid nearly a tenner for some safety back leads, because that's all they had, but after three snotty bream on the first three casts and being left with just three little green clips attached, I was not amused! The best that I have used by far are little 1oz discs with a plastic S clip attached – they simply don't come off.

There's no mistaking a carp run because they single tone from the word go on a tight clutch.

Tacklewise, it's pretty much the standard leadcore lead-clip arrangement but I tend to use a 12in to 14in hook link with a snowman setup. I only use leads of up to 1½oz because the bream average 1lb to 3lb and, believe it or not, they can take the bait and not give any indication at all, so any help in indicating that you have a snotty on before you get into bed is a massive help.

Carpwise, I've found 1½oz is more than enough to set a sharp hook at short range. The use of a longer than average hook link is to allow the hook bait to settle among the bottom debris. Being a canal, it is full of anything from plastic bags to bits of cloth and general rubbish.

So why not just use a chod rig, I hear you say. I have caught fish over 40lb on the naked chod and used it on many occasions. However, when used on a canal I find that by the



Helping to keep the lines out the way.

time I register a bite the fish often seem to have travelled a fair distance left or right before I can take control. In a lake this is not a problem, but when fishing close to staging, boats and the like, the lead clip often results in the carp hitting the surface sooner.

Another issue on the Grand Union is the crayfish and all baits need to be super-wrapped for peace of mind. When I have not bothered or forgotten, I have reeled in the following morning to have all baits stripped, thus wasting a night on the bank.

Talking of bait, I have been associated with Blakes Baits for nearly a decade and have 100 per cent faith in Pete Cox supplying the best baits with the best ingredients. I have been predominately a bottom-bait angler for most of my carp fishing life and in recent years I have been using Malarkey and Belachan\Sea Snail to great success. However, around 18 months ago a bait called Krinella was brought out and from the first time I broke one open and smelt the almost "fresh baked cake aroma" I knew it was going to be a good instant bait. Utilising the distinctive pulling power of both krill and a soft sweet vanilla, this was a bait that stood out from the crowd.

With the bait side sorted, my main approach would be to apply bait in a way that any passing carp would result in a pick-up. On most occasions I would use three rods so that I could cover the near margin, centre gully and against the boats on the far margin. These would have 15 to 20 baits tight on the spot and I spread a good half kilo in a line from one side of the canal to the other to create a tripwire effect that would mean any travelling carp would come across some bait and hopefully result in getting them feeding. More often than not this tactic has caught me some lovely fish.

Prebaiting would be the obvious way to boost your catch rates and make the carp come to you. Any baiting up that I have done has resulted in shoals of bream and an army of crayfish taking up residence on my spot, so after several attempts I knocked that approach on the head.

Daylight hours can be almost impossible in the summer months, with endless boats going past and the

towpath having constant human traffic, so I only do over-nighters and have found that 99 per cent of my bites come between 2am and 4am.

There's no mistaking a carp run because they single tone from the word go on a tight clutch and fight like animals right to the net. To this day I have had 16 carp from around the marina entrance and I have only recognised one common and a small fully scaled from all the carp I have seen over the years deep in the marina. I'm almost certain that many simply don't move out of their little safe zones among the boats.

One commonly used location tactic often mentioned is that, especially in the cooler months, residential narrow boats create a 'hotspot' underneath them and attract the carp due to the ever so slightly warmer water around the boat. I have always been dubious about this, so I asked a marine boat surveyor about this topic. His answer confirms my thoughts. Nearly all residential boats will be insulated from top to bottom to retain maximum heat inside the boat. His tests have shown zero heat loss through the hull. It's only one man's opinion but it's good enough for me.

Location on any canal, not just marinas, is the key to catching. I always make time in the height of



Nice bright baits, strong tackle and long hooklengths.



summer to walk every inch of the local canal. You will nearly always find carp on the surface. Many a time I have found a group of them around a far-margin feature but come back the next day to find no trace of them. It's not like lakes where they can't actually go anywhere; these carp can travel for miles in a single night. Canal carp fishing is definitely a case of effort equals reward. On stretches with not many boats, any resident boat that doesn't move will be a good bet and will often be visited by carp.

One last tip is that the towpath and canal surroundings are often not carp friendly, so large unhooking mats are a

must and I use one on top of another due to the stony nature of the towpath. Most carp from the canal have never been caught before so are often very lively on the bank.

Uncaught carp are out there and with a bit of effort and actually finding somewhere to squeeze a bedchair on, you could be staring at an unknown fish on the mat. **TC**



With instant pulling power, Krinella is my first choice of bait.

