

PF CHALLENGE

Bag Up On A Pint

We gave **Andy May** the mission of catching as much as possible on one pint of casters. Could he deliver? You'd better believe it!

Those who know me and my feeding habits will be aware that I tend to get a bit giddy with bait, especially if the fish are having it. So I wasn't worried about not catching on casters as such, more the fact of how long I could make them last to put a decent net of fish together!

I decided to fish Suez Canal at Cudmore Fisheries. This is my favourite lake on the complex and has been very kind to me over the years in the way of match wins and placings. However, this was going to be completely different and I truthfully didn't know what to expect. Casters, along with maggots and worms, are my all-time favourite baits, but with the trend in pellet fishing having gone through the roof over the last few years, and the price of casters increasing, more and more anglers are not using them. That means the fish don't see them as regularly, so I could be in for a hard time.

Going back just seven or eight years it was a different story. Suez was full of chub and barbel and I always had a minimum of four pints of casters with me and used to catch from any peg! This lake has gone through many changes. It has been drained, blocked off then reopened and had a completely new stock of fish and I don't think there is another

BACK SHOT

I really can't stress enough the importance of back shot at this time of year. They really do make a massive difference. For example, if I were to fish my far bank rig today without it, because it is so light the wind would be blowing it around everywhere. With the addition of a couple of No8 back shot supported a few inches from the float, I can get away with fishing an ultra-light rig so the fish cannot feel any resistance at all.

fishery in the country that is as well stocked as this lake is at the moment – but will they have casters?

I thought about how I would set about catching with a limited amount of bait and I've decided on two rigs and exactly how I used to target the chub and barbel – but would the carp and F1s respond the same? Of course they would... wouldn't they?

TWO RIGS

My first rig is to fish over against some reeds in around three feet of water. I'm using a very light Sconezone Bitz float of just 0.07g that takes five No12 shot. I spread these evenly down the line, which is 0.12mm Power Match to a 5in 0.10mm Power Silk hooklength. My hook choice is a Drennan Silverfish Pellet pattern in a size 18. Importantly, the rig also has two No8s as back shot around five inches above my float to help with stability in the wind and, more importantly, keeping that tight line required to hit those fast-biting F1s.

My elastic is MAP's new yellow 5-8 hollow, which is very forgiving and smooth and will eliminate fish being bumped. It also allows the fish to swim straight out of my peg to avoid disturbing other fish present. This is how I used to target the fish on here. I also opt to loose feed rather than cup in

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the casters on this far line because I want to draw fish in quickly with a minimum amount of bait. Simply Kinder-potting casters will not achieve the same results.

For my other rig I've decided on concentrating down the middle of the canal to target them in the deepest bit of water. This time of year, when the water is very cold, you can really bag up in no time, once the fish become confident. Many times this middle line has caught me so many fish in the last hour of a match and I have complete confidence in it. Having said that, we have experienced very mild weather this season and it needs to be much colder for this swim to be at its best. However, I have made up my mind and I'm sticking to it!

My float is a 4x12 MAP C8 and has three No11 droppers and a bulk of five No10 shot around two feet from the hook in about six and a half feet of water. My hook is a Kamasan B610 size 16 and I use a 7in hooklength of 0.09mm Power Silk. Elastic is the same as the other rig. I always look to fish just as the shelf starts to come up for the far bank on commercial canals because any bait falling down the shelf will settle here first and it is a natural patrol route for fish.

I can see a few fish topping quite frequently so I am gaining more confidence, but I still make one last plea with Tom Scholey, who is shooting the feature,

"Are you sure I can't use pellets?" I ask him.

"No!" is the reply!

THE CHALLENGE BEGINS

To start things off I catapult around 30 casters in groups of five towards the reeds. These make a lovely noise and that is the reason I choose to loose feed rather than Kinder pot. Down the middle I start with 50 to 60 casters spread over a 1ft area. I will continue to cup casters here every 20 minutes and wait at least two hours before trying it. I always

cup bait in on this deeper swim at this time of year because I need to make sure of the accuracy. If you start loose feeding, especially if it's fairly windy, like today, your bait will be covering too much of an area and you are not concentrating your fish tightly enough. Of course, with the mild weather the fish could still be up in the water, so I will start loose feeding and try to catch them shallow. I will just have to keep an eye on this and look for signs. I will obviously know more once I actually have a go on this line.

To begin with, I am fishing across and working my bait a lot so that my hook bait falls through with the loose feed: similar to how I target silver fish up in the water. After 10 minutes I have my first indication, which comes as I lift the float out 12 inches and lower it.

A minute later and I am into my first fish, a carp of around 2lb, which waddles out of my peg perfectly once hooked. You really don't want the fish to spook the others in your peg at this time of year. This is mainly caused by having your elastic set too tight, although striking like a maniac can sometimes be to blame!

I am beginning to get regular bites and they are all coming from the bait being moved. I'm fishing just slightly overdepth but if the bait has been settled for 10 seconds it is a case of either lift the float up 12 inches, or lay the rig in again holding a tight line to the back shot.

Bites are coming fairly quick now and I am shocked at the positive response. Okay, I am on here on my own pleasure fishing, but every time I have tried casters on here since the restocking I have never caught that well. I always assumed that it was because the fish didn't know what they were.

Hmm, time for a rethink on that theory!

I am catching mirrors, angry commons and F1s regularly and have also started to foul hook the odd fish, with them coming off the bottom to intercept my loose-fed casters.

Down the middle I've seen a few bubbles coming up and I'm still routinely feeding this line every 20 minutes. I reckon that after two hours I already have a good 40lb in my net. By far the best way to catch has been to feed first and then ship out, flick the rig side on and hold back tight. Fish are just tearing the elastic out most of the time: that's when you know they're having it proper! I could have carried on with this line all session (and obviously in match conditions you never come off feeding fish) but if it was this good over, what will it be like down the middle? Er, rubbish: at least to start with.

I am getting dinks on my float and it is almost certainly caused by fish up in the water. They simply aren't on the bottom. By this time I have around half a pint of casters left so I've decided to abandon my far line and start loose feeding casters down the middle. I've gone in with the same rig that I was using across set at three feet and missed two bites straightaway before foul hooking an F1, which falls off. Hmm, they are even shallower! I decide

IF YOU LOOSE FEED WHEN IT'S FAIRLY WINDY YOUR BAIT WILL BE COVERING TOO MUCH OF AN AREA.

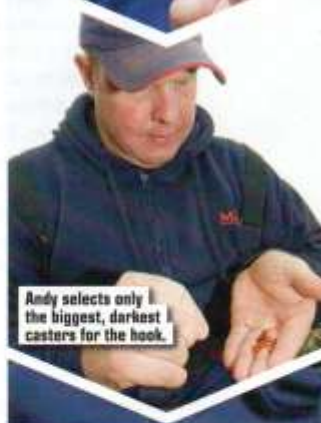
Drennan Silverfish pellets are a fine but deceptively strong pattern!



Andy paints his back shot white for ease of visibility.



Andy selects only the biggest, darkest casters for the hook.



MAP 5-8 Hollow elastic is perfect for cold-water carping.



BITES ARE COMING FAIRLY QUICKLY NOW AND I AM SHOCKED AT THE POSITIVE RESPONSE.

to come down to 18 inches deep and never look back!

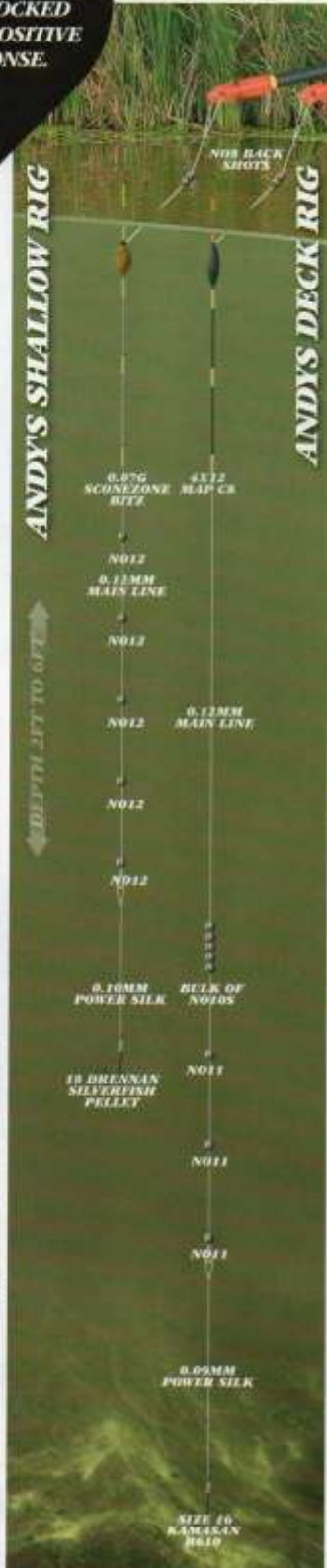
Suez's great big F1s are ravenous today and for the time of year I cannot believe that I am catching this many and this quickly in shallow water. It is so hard to restrain myself on the feed, though. If I have this many fish in front of me the half pint I have left would usually last two minutes!

I somehow make them last another two hours and I'm still coming to terms with it. One pint of casters has lasted me four hours – that's just unheard of for me!

The session has gone brilliantly. I had a plan and stuck to it. Okay, the fish weren't on the bottom down the middle but they were up in the water instead. With bright sunshine, the top few feet of water was obviously much warmer and that's where the fish preferred to be. I've ended up with a good 90lb of carp and F1s and it has made me think again about taking casters for my next match. It just goes to show that something different can sometimes be the difference between catching loads and not so many. Casters are the future!



The Cudmore F1s are often as big as the carp but don't fight nearly as hard!



Regular loose feeding soon had the fish competing shallow!



Cudmore's 'stockies' have wasted no time in piling on the pounds!



By keeping to a strict feeding regime, Andy met our challenge in grand style!

PF Challenge

ANGLER FILE ANDY MAY

Age: 35
Lives: Winsford
Sponsors: MAP, Day 'em
Matchxons
Pole: MAP
TKS 825

VENUE FILE

CUDMORE FISHERY

Location: Pleck Lane,
Whitnore, Staffordshire,
ST15 3JW

Day tickets: 38;
Concessions 16

Contact: 01782 689919

Website: www.cudmorefishery.com

Could our star catch a netful on just a pint of shells?