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ISSUE 208

BIG FLOATS

» WHO IS RUSS EVANS?
He's an experienced angler and tackle dealer, Russ meets hundreds of anglers and IYCF readers every week so he understands your angling problems and can provide invaluable advice to help you catch more fish

CATCH BIG BREAM

Russ Evans uses huge floats and long-distance casting to keep specimen slabs coming during the heat of summer. Let him show you how to do it, too

WORDS & PHOTOS **KEVIN GREEN**

HALFWAY through a sweeping strike Russ Evans' 12ft waggler rod locked into a hefty thumping curve.

"Ahhhhh, that's what I'm after..." smiled the Surrey angler. "That's definitely a bream."

There was no need to rush, no panic or great fuss. By adopting the same deliberate movements as the fish he'd just hooked, Russ patiently pumped the slab-sided specimen towards him.

Alternatively lowering his rod, and winding in line as he did so, then easing the carbon curve back to guide the fish away from its shoalmates, he teased the heavyweight grazer towards the landing net he was dipping into the margins in preparation.

Then, appearing out of the depths of the glorious Old Bury Hill Lake, came the unmistakeable shape of a hefty bream.

Struck by the warm summer sun filtering through the rich waters, the bronze-scaled flanks of the fish illuminated as if charged with electricity.

"Got to say, I love catching bream," mused Russ, a big smile breaking across his face as the fish slid into the mesh of his net.

The 4lb bream was no monster. The fishing grapevine didn't spark into life and the adjacent anglers enjoying the day barely lifted their gaze from their own rods.

But to Russ it was a fish that vindicated his decision to spend his day off work tracking down a herd of bream with a long-range float tactic.

As the day progressed, it was a style of fishing that increasingly impressed due to its simplicity and its ability to transfer to hundreds of other waters across the country.

Presuming we get some sun this summer, the 46-year-old tackle shop manager has devised a method that will keep bites coming when other techniques have failed. »

Why big floats and long casts rule in summer...

Since man first picked up a stick, tied some string to the end of it and attached a bent pin, summer has been synonymous with fishing in the margins.

As warm conditions spawn an explosion of plant life down the edges of lakes, anglers drop floats next to lily pads or beds of rushes to tempt the fish lurking among the stems to come and grab their hookbait.

So when IYCF turned up at scenic Old Bury Hill, a 200-year-old estate lake complete with a cordon of reeds, rushes and lily pads near Dorking in Surrey, it was a tad surprising to see Russ Evans launching a huge float as far as his powerful Shimano Beastmaster Commercial Floatcast rod could manage.

Blasting the foot long float some 40 yards, he pulled his line tight to the float as soon as it splashed down, dipped 10 inches of his rod tip under the water and then ripped it back to the surface.

This instantly sunk his mainline and he focused his attention on the distant float, several inches of which was standing proud of the surface. Frankly, it looked daft.

"Don't worry, the float's just settling..." assured Russ, and with a few turns of his reel handle the tip dipped lower in the water until an inch of the tip poked above the surface.

>> Big float, big distance
To cast a long way, use a large-bodied float that needs a lot of shot or has a big in-built loading

"That'll do nicely. When a fish picks up the bait and lifts the anchor shot off the bottom the float will shoot out of the water and you'll see the most unmissable bite."

Sure enough, a few minutes later, after a burst of pin-prick feeding bubbles had erupted near the float, the bulbous tip rose out of the water like King Arthur's sword Excalibur!

In a carbon copy of the previous capture, a full-sweep strike saw the rod loop into a thumping curve as another slab was hooked.

A little bigger than the first fish and weighing close to 5lb, over the next few hours it was joined by a dozen 2lb-5lb bream and a brace of carp totalling 20lb.

All told, over 50lb of fish was caught on a warm, calm day when you might have thought that the fish would be more inclined to sunbathe than feed.

"Warm, still days like this are perfect for using big wagglers at long range," explained Russ.

"On waters all over the country that have fairly shallow margins like this lake, the bigger fish back away from the bank to seek deeper water further out.

"Sure, it's still possible to catch plenty of fish on the pole and the float at close range, but when there's plenty of people fishing and the sun is beating down on a flat calm lake, the bigger bream, tench and carp get away from the disturbance by moving further out into deeper water."

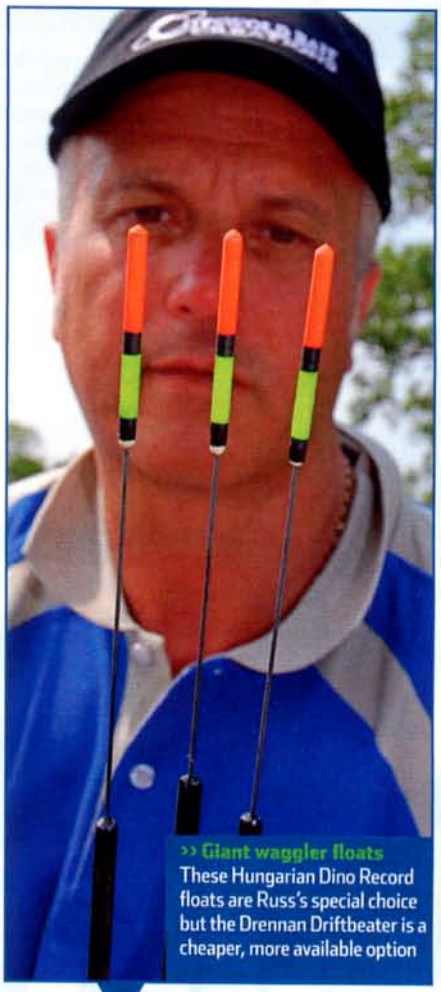
If you're wondering why Russ can make such a bold claim, consider the fact that he's perfectly positioned to notice such trends.

As the manager of Bury Hill Tackle and Bait, the on-site fishing shop overlooking the lake, he witnesses fish behaviour every day of his working life.

He is also able to record the catches made by the hordes of day-ticket anglers that flock to this southern paradise, noting the dominant methods that consistently produce the goods.

"A big float launched 30 to 40 yards into six or seven feet of water, definitely produces better quality fish than the pole.

"While the lads fishing at close range catch lots of roach, rudd and smaller skimmer bream, it's the big waggler fished further out that does the business for the slabs," he revealed. >>



>> Giant waggler floats
These Hungarian Dino Record floats are Russ's special choice but the Drennan Driftbeater is a cheaper, more available option

›› Action man
Russ's Shimano Beastmaster Floatcast rod is powerful enough to cast a long way, but soft enough to play bream at close range. In the background is the tackle shop he manages

Why not reach for a feeder?

While it makes sense that older, wiser and bigger fish should seek the security of deeper water further from bankside noise so common in summer, a question occurred.

Surely, the swimfeeder would be easier to use at long-range? Surely, we reasoned, this could be loaded with bait and repeatedly cast to a tight area of the lake to draw fish in?

"You can use a feeder and it will catch bream and tench," Russ countered. "But in the middle of a warm summer day, when the water is calm and the fish are a bit lethargic, I've often seen them back off an area where a swimfeeder is landing.

"I can't tell you how many times I've seen anglers tearing their hair out with frustration because they are getting loads of line bites but they just can't catch many fish. The bream just won't settle on a big bed of feed when there's lots of disturbance in the area.

"With the big waggler I can overcast the area I've been loosefeeding, then silently draw my hookbait back to the area where the fish are feeding.

"It is a much more subtle way of fishing for bream and tench. In fact, it's a great way to ambush feeding fish. I often get bites within seconds of the float settling.

"While the feeder might be best on a wet, windy day when the water is choppy and there's plenty cloud cover, on a still day like this the float has the edge."

Beating the wind

Chucking a float at the horizon is a style of fishing that is not without its problems.

On lakes as big as the 12-acre Old Bury Hill, any wind action whatsoever will set up surface water movement that can drag a float and bait very unnaturally through the water below.

Furthermore, the sophisticated aeration system built at the lake, to keep it well oxygenated during the summer, also sets up a tow on the water.

This is not a phenomenon unique to Old Bury Hill, because at hundreds of lakes around the country aeration pumps and paddles blast health-giving oxygen into the water making them run like rivers!

"Any normal sized waggler float will get dragged along by tow on the water," explained Russ. "And fish like tench and bream just won't hack that.

"They rarely chase a hookbait driven along by the wind. Think about it – why would they take a single bait that is bouncing through the swim when all the loosefeed is stationary on the bottom?"

To combat surface tow, Russ makes sure his mainline is sunk below the waterline (see panel far right).

To combat any undertow below the surface he also ensures his hookbait stays nailed to the bottom.

He does this by laying up to a foot of line on the deck, along with a couple of No4 or a BB 'anchor' shot that will resist being dragged along. >>

>> Summer breaming
When the weather is warm and still bream often feed further from the bank. Russ casts his float 30-40 yards to bag the big fish

Lift bites for big bream

>> STEP ONE
When you cast out a big waggler with lots of shot down the line (see diagram on page 32), you can wind line on to your reel until the extra long float tip is pulled lower in the water. Russ has around an inch above the water so he can still see it at long range

>> STEP TWO
When bream, tench or carp pick up the hookbait, lifting the anchor shot off the bottom, the bouyancy of the large body causes the tip to rise out of the water – a classic lift bite. You also get sail-away bites when fish feel the weight of the shot and instantly bolt

Beating the wind

>> STEP ONE
Russ launches his float into Old Bury Hill where the tow created by the wind can pull it out of position

>> STEP TWO
With a smooth overhead thump he fires the float in a wide arc, so it sails nearly 40 yards into the distance

>> STEP THREE
Closing the bail arm on the reel and winding the line tight he holds the rod tip a few inches above the water

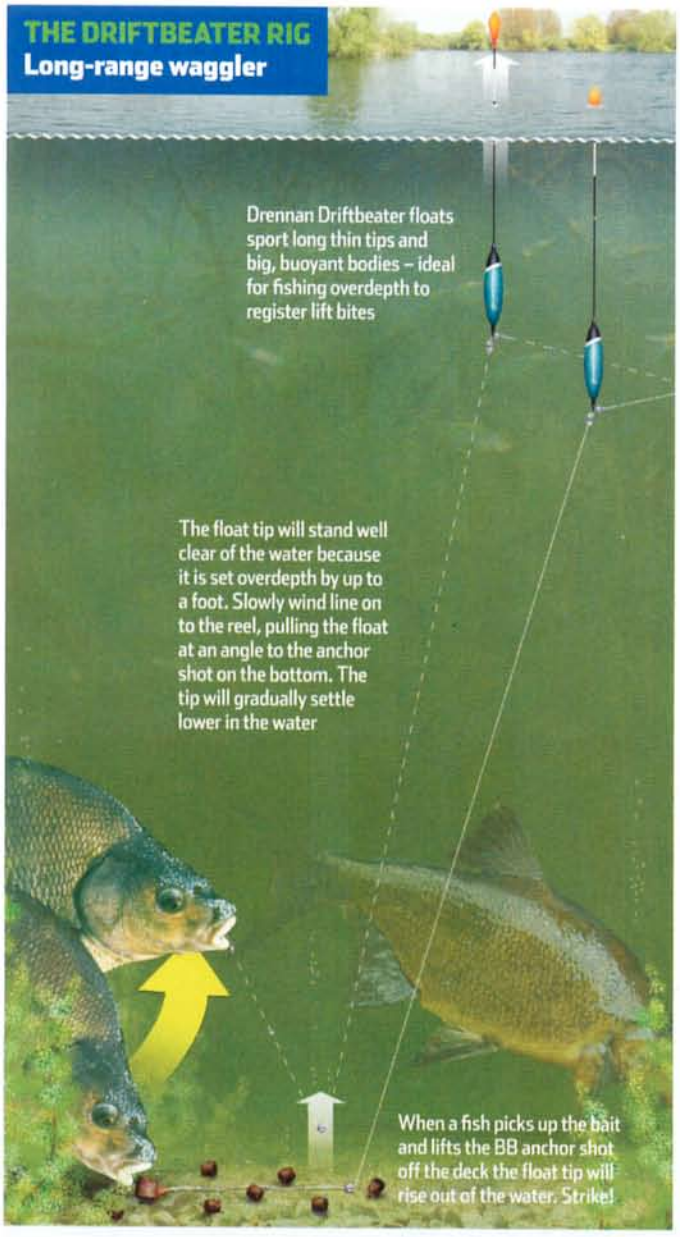
>> STEP FOUR
Next he dips the top foot or so under the surface which drags the line at the rod tip below the waterline

>> STEP FIVE
Then he quickly yanks the rod upwards, ripping the rod and line through the water

>> STEP SIX
As the rod tip springs clear of the water the line between the rod and float is tugged below the surface

>> For more info on Old Bury Hill check 'Get Britain Fishing' on page 98 >>

THE DRIFTBEATER RIG
Long-range waggler



Strangely sensitive

Small, lightweight floats are generally preferable to large, heavy floats because they are more sensitive.

Yet Russ's float is more sensitive than you might imagine considering it's a foot long, carries lots of weight and there's plenty line laid on the deck along with 'anchor' shot!

"The float is heavy but it has a thin tip and a buoyant body," explained Russ. "When the shot are lifted by a fish picking up the bait, the body lifts the tip out of the water."

Russ uses a Dino Record float which isn't widely sold in the UK. He got his on the internet and they were very expensive.

But, if you want to try this tactic buy the cheaper Drennan Driftbeater (diagram left) which does the same job.

Sporting a long, needle tip and a huge buoyant body, these floats are also fished overdepth with anchor shot on the deck.

Bulk shot is placed around the float to lock it and provide casting weight.

Long-range feeding

The final hurdle to overcome when floatfishing at long range is accurate loosefeeding.

Maggots, hemp or casters can't be catapulted the distance required, so Russ loosefeeds heavier Cotswold Baits 8mm halibut pellets and 10mm pineapple boilies.

Half a dozen baits every few minutes gets bream and tench grubbing around.

For presenting his hookbait Russ uses one of the best new gadgets of 2008 – the Middy Las-Soo ready-tied hooklink.

Costing £2.45 for six links, these pre-tied hair-rigs carry a sliding rubber float stop.

The sequence (below) shows how it becomes easy to hair-rig a hard 8mm pellet without drilling or glueing it.

Baiting up takes seconds and you can even catch more than one fish on the same hookbait!

Going the distance

Casting big waggler floats huge distances is not every angler's cup of tea.

But watching Russ catching fish on a bright, calm day, it was impossible not to be struck by the effectiveness of the tactic.

It also became clear that the method is much simpler than it looked at first appearance.

Don't dismiss the big waggler because you think it'll be too complicated – all the information you need is on these pages.

Once you're geared up it really is a case of putting the float and the loosefeed in the same place and waiting for it to periscope out of the water or get dragged under by a specimen bream, tench or carp.

When it's warm and calm a big float can mean big fish. **IYCF**

Middy's Las-Soo

>> STEP ONE
Here's Middy's brilliant new Las-Soo ready-tied hai-rig. The looped hair-rig hanging below the hook has a rubber float stop sliding on it

>> STEP TWO
The hard pellet is simply inserted into the open loop with the rubber stop pushed up to the bend of the hook

>> STEP THREE
Holding the pellet in the base of the loop, slide the stop down until it comes to rest against the pellet, locking it tightly enough to withstand casting

>> Bream time
This 4lb-plus bream was typical of over a dozen slabs that Russ bagged, along with two bonus carp. The big waggler was very impressive