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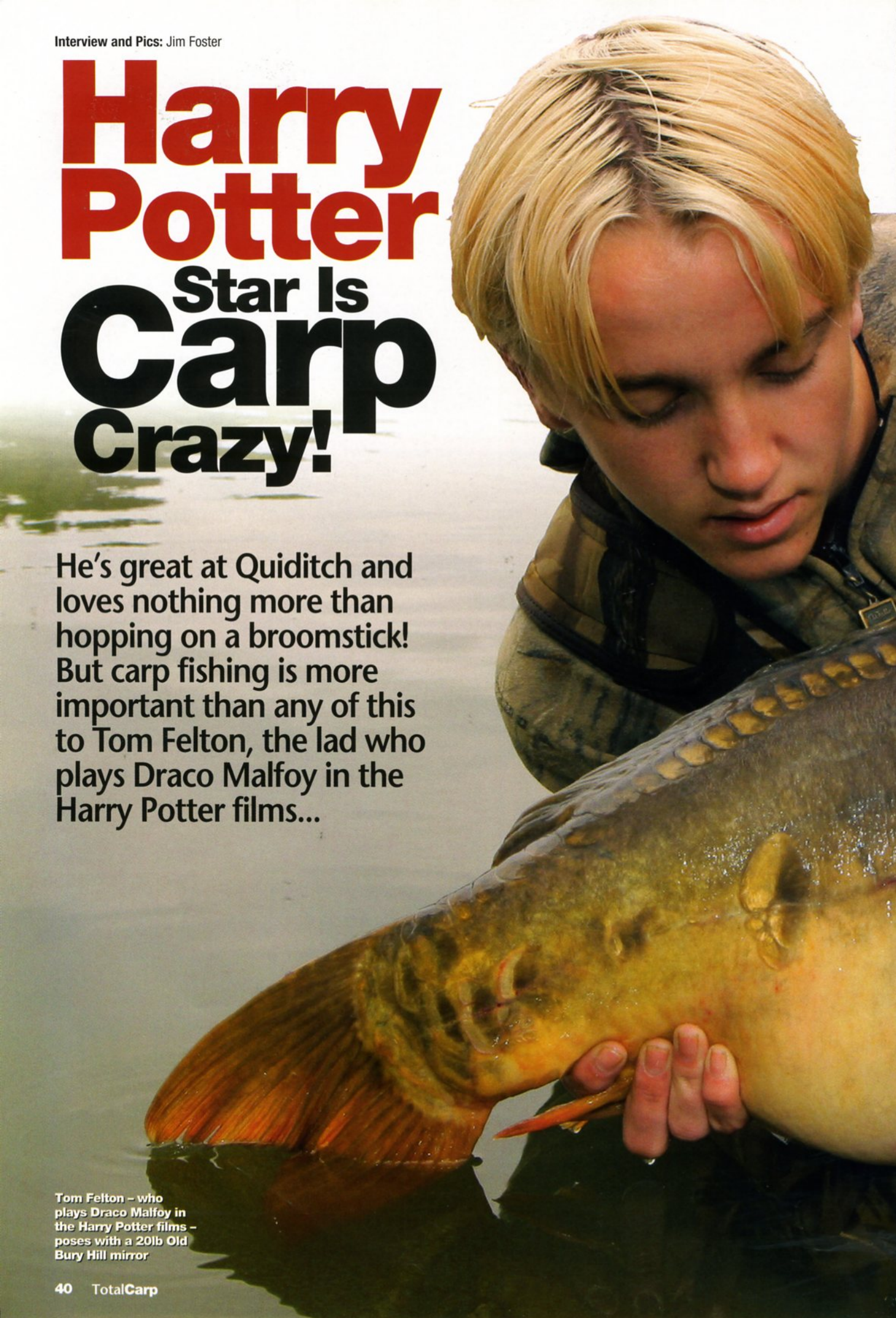
Interview and Pics: Jim Foster

Harry Potter Star Is Carp Crazy!

He's great at Quiditch and loves nothing more than hopping on a broomstick! But carp fishing is more important than any of this to Tom Felton, the lad who plays Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter films...



Tom Felton – who plays Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter films – poses with a 20lb Old Bury Hill mirror

JF: Well Tom, here we are sitting by Old Bury Hill Lake in Surrey. You're in one of your favourite island swims on the front bank. I guess most journalists interviewing you would start by asking you about the Harry Potter films, but I'll resist that temptation for the moment and instead start by asking you how you got into carp fishing in the first place?

TF: I started fishing in the summer holidays when I was about 11. I went with a couple of mates to a local lake, not a very clean lake but one that was free to fish, and float fished in the edge, catching the usual stuff. You know, roach and perch. Then my brother Chris, who's also a mad-keen carp angler, took me carp fishing for my 12th birthday. We fished for a night at Old Bury Hill and I managed to catch two fish, a common of 17lb and a mirror of 18lb.

Admittedly Chris did everything for me, like bait up and cast out and stuff, but I reeled the carp in and was amazed by their power. When they were on the mat I was almost in awe of their size!

One of them flapped when I was holding it for the photos, which was quite scary, but it was good, too, because I learned quickly about respecting the fish and looking after them while they are on the bank.

From that night on I have been hooked on carp fishing and can't get enough of it.

JF: So how long did it take you to get a full carp outfit? What gear did you buy? Being a film star must surely mean you got the best kit!

TF: I started out like anyone else. I went to the Thorpe Park Show, which is great for picking up bargains, and started out by buying a couple of basic, mass-produced factory rods.

I can't remember which company made them, or exactly what they were called, but it was something like 'Dragon Carp'.

Anyway, Chris haggled the price down for me and I got three for about £100. I also bought three Shimano Baitrunner 8000s to go with them.

Angler Fact File

Name: Tom Felton
Age: 15
Occupation: Actor. Plays Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter films. Has also had parts in 'Anna and the King' and 'The Borrowers'
Ambition: To be a pro carp angler
Favourite Water: Fox Pool
PB: 27lb

I'd recommend the Thorpe Park Show to any beginner or junior, as you can go there and get some real bargains. There's a lot of cheap stuff for sale there, but if you do some research and know what you want to buy before you go, you can usually get a really good price on it.

JF: I take it your fishing went from strength to strength from there, as I know your personal best is quite a bit bigger than 17lb these days. Can you tell us how you managed to up your personal best?

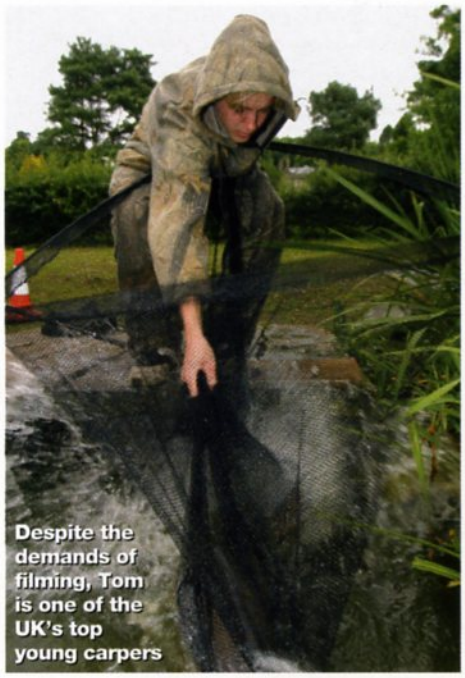
TF: It all started when I got a Sunday job as a bailiff and gave a helping hand at Old Bury Hill. This was good as it allowed me to get to know the lake well.

I was there a lot through the summer holidays, when we weren't filming The Philosopher's Stone and The Chamber Of Secrets, and on most Sundays.

My personal best now is a 27lb mirror from the big lake at Bury Hill. This was a real result and I was thrilled with it, as getting big fish from there isn't easy as you have to wade through loads of doubles. There are probably only about 15 fish of that size or bigger in the whole lake.

There's a bit of a story behind the 27-pounder! At Old Bury Hill there's the fishery lodge, which is built on stilts over one corner of the lake.

You can't fish right by the lodge, so a lot of carp go there in the day and are fed by the anglers on bread from the cafe.



Despite the demands of filming, Tom is one of the UK's top young carpers

Tom prepares to cast a PVA bag to the island

Because I was a bailiff I got permission to fish a night and set up in front of the island, casting a PVA bag three-quarters of the way to the island margin.

I reckoned that the fish would come out from the boathouse at night to feed, when there was less angling pressure.

I ended up catching it that very night on a Nash Scopex Squid Liver ready-made boilie. I recognised the carp instantly from its scale patterns – it was The Boathouse Mirror.

"When asked what I did, I didn't want to say 'I'm Draco Malfoy'. So I became a bailiff..."

We used to look at and feed these fish all the time, and there was one that was really distinctive – it was really wide across the shoulders and had rows of scales going down the top of its back on either side. We called it Puddles or The Boathouse Mirror, because it always hung around the boathouse during the day.

Lots of people estimated its weight at around 30lb, with some guesses putting it as high as 32lb.

JF: Good angling! Most anglers would have fallen into the trap of casting tight to the island margins. Why didn't you do this?

TF: In the big lake at Bury Hill, there's a trough that runs parallel with the front bank from an area called The Jungle, right to the point of the island.

It runs through open water and is about a foot deeper than the water around it. I think it's an old stream bed or something.

That trough is consistently baited by a lot of anglers, so carp are used to finding food there. Also, like any feature, they follow its contours.

Plus, if I'm honest, my casting at the time wasn't all that great and I couldn't cast a PVA bag far enough to reach the island margin!

JF: Are you still a bailiff on there? And what did your job involve? I'm quite surprised you wanted to be a bailiff on a Sunday! After all, it must be hard work being at school full-time and also filming for the Harry Potter series.

TF: I'm not a bailiff there now. It's only because my fishing has progressed and I want to spend my time fishing other lakes, though I do still fish on Bury Hill from time to time.

To be honest, I wanted to be a bailiff at Old Bury Hill because I wanted a normal job. When people asked me what I did, I didn't want to say I was in the Harry Potter films, so I said I was a bailiff!

Plus I loved being down there. My duties included selling day tickets to customers

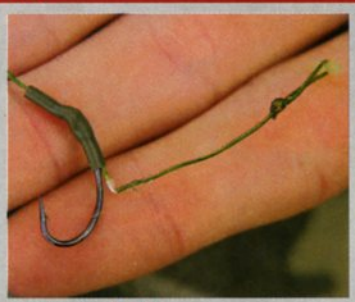
The 'Draco Malfoy' Old Bury Hill Rig!

STEP One

Tom is a fan of a safe helicopter rig he ties up using Anchor BDS leads. First, tie a lead to the end of the line.

STEP Two

A helicopter bead is sandwiched between two ordinary running beads, placed over 0.75mm tubing.



STEP Three

Tom ties his hook onto Snake-Skin with a knotless knot. He ties a stiff hair with a hinge by the shank.

STEP Three

To avoid the small fish (particularly bream) at Bury Hill, Tom likes to put two big 18mm boilies on the hair.

and going around picking up litter. I loved all of it. I enjoyed just being there, it was great to be close to a beautiful estate lake that held so many carp.

The perks of being a bailiff were hard to ignore, too! I got free fishing, which for a 14-year-old wasn't bad, and got paid £20 a day...

JF: I'm glad to hear you've moved on from Bury Hill. It's not that Bury Hill is a bad fishery, far from it – it's actually an excellent water – but sometimes if you're to progress as an angler you need to keep setting yourself new challenges.

TF: Yep. My brother Chris and I have moved onto RMC's Fox Pool. That's a totally different place to Old Bury Hill and I love it there even more. I've only walked around Fox Pool a couple of times and haven't actually fished it yet, but from what I've seen it's just the ideal carp water.

"I can't film without going fishing. I love doing overnighters between shoots..."

It's got so much more character than Bury Hill. The main lake at Bury Hill is a beautiful water, but it's busy with anglers and has loads of pegs on it. Fox Pool is smaller, more intimate and more of your classic carp water. It's overgrown, the water's crystal clear and you can see the fish moving almost everywhere, especially in the margins.

This means you can stalk them, setting traps for them. I'm looking forward to fishing there this summer and am hoping I'll actually be able to see a carp or two take my hook bait.

I'd like to thank Chris Maltby for helping me get a ticket for Fox Pool. He also does night fishing schools at Old Bury Hill and is a top angler who has helped me no end – thanks Chris!

JF: I'm looking forward to seeing how you get on at Fox Pool. Changing subjects, though, one question I've got to ask is this: Does being in the Harry Potter films have any disadvantages when it comes to carp fishing?

TF: Funny you should say that. Anyone who has seen the films will know that I have to have my hair dyed bright blond to play the part of Draco Malfoy.

One day when I was walking around Fox Pool, Chris found some fish feeding in the edge, right under a bush. He told me to have a look – and it was one of the greatest things I've ever seen.

There, underneath the bush, was a shoal of big mirror carp, some of which must have been more than 30lb. You could see

Whack it... The effort Tom put into this cast lifted him off the ground!

This summer Tom wants to try and catch a few fish from RMC Angling's Fox Pool

every detail of each fish in the clear water.

Then I stretched my head too far over the edge of the bush. I looked straight down, the carp saw my blond hair and bolted! They'd been spooked by the colour of my hair!

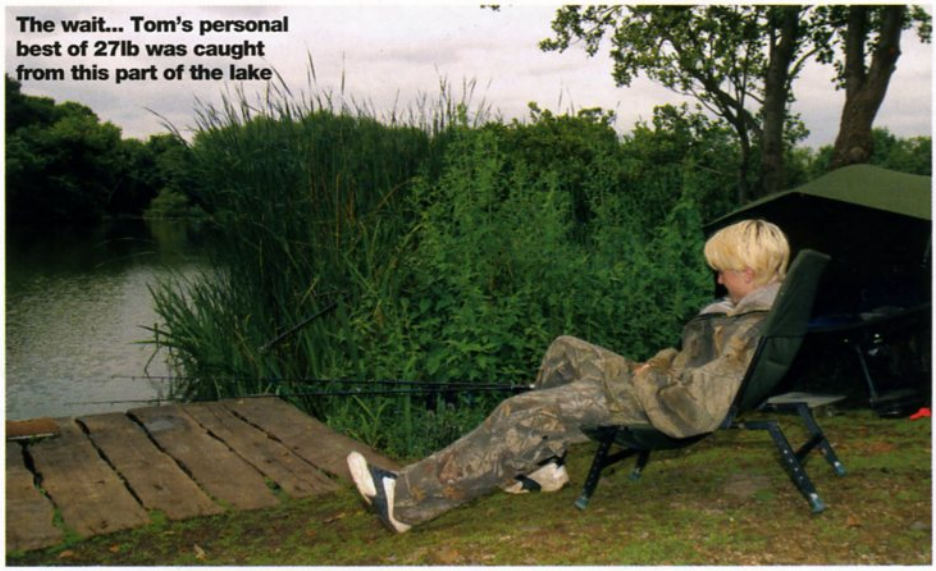
I always wear caps now to hide the hair, whenever I'm carp fishing during spells of filming.

JF: Sounds to me like you need a Realtree camou cap or something. Maybe someone in the trade reading this can sort you out with one! Filming must severely affect the amount of time you get to spend on the bank?

TF: I can always squeeze in time to go fishing. Filming can be hard work – a lot of the time you're hanging around for ages just waiting to film one scene, a scene that might not even get used in the final cut.

I can't do a week's filming without going fishing. This was especially the case when I had to do a Sunday's bailiffing down at Old Bury Hill. I love to do overnight sessions between takes in the studios!

I remember one day we were filming in January and some of the crew said they had never seen a carp before. They told me to go out and get a photo of a carp to show them.



The wait... Tom's personal best of 27lb was caught from this part of the lake

The weather was freezing and it was pouring with rain and dark when we arrived at Old Bury Hill. Chris and I set up in the dark, and it seemed that everything was going wrong until midnight when I got a screaming run. The fish fought well and I landed a 24lb mirror. The film crew were well impressed.

JF: So it would be fair to say that, when people are watching you in the films riding that crazy broomstick thing, you might have caught a 20lb carp only hours before? Mad!

After an overnighter when you've bagged a few fish and not got any sleep, do you find that you have to have extra make-up to hide the bags under your eyes?! And do you have any problems remembering your lines?

TF: No! I'm pretty lucky and can survive and work on just four hours sleep a night if I need to. Remembering the lines isn't a problem.

JF: Going back to your fishing this year. You say you'll be doing a couple of sessions at syndicate venue Fox Pool. It isn't the easiest of waters, you need to think about every aspect of your fishing on there. So what rigs would you use, and what are your favourite tactics?

TF: I love the Terry Hearn hinged stiff rig. That would be my first choice on most venues. I tie it up using sliding ring 'D' rigs, with the hook tied to a two-inch stiff boom, which in turn is tied to a small swivel that connects the rest of the hook link to the main line.

My favourite hook for this rig is a size 6 Short Shank Nailer from Carp 'R' Us, with my pop-up hook bait being weighed down by putty I mould around the swivel.

I also like to use a hinge rig made from Kryston's Snake-Skin, an excellent hook link that I've caught a lot of fish on.

I tie the hook onto the Snake-Skin using a knotless knot, without stripping back any of the outer coating. This means that the hair is stiff.

I then place some shrink tubing over the hook to extend the shank, increasing the rig's effectiveness, and create two hinges by stripping back a small amount of the Snake-Skin's outer coating – one hinge on

Tying Tom Felton's Helicopter Bag Rig

STEP One

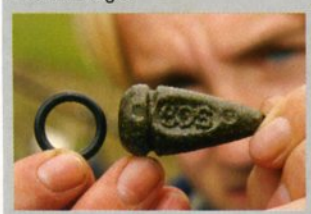
You can use the Bait Delivery System with any solid-type PVA bag. Tom prefers Gardner and Anchor bags.

STEP Two

Tom puts boilie crumb into the bottom of the bag. This means less air is trapped in the bag and the corners are easier to fold in.

STEP Three

Tom then adds a selection of trout pellets. The bag at this stage is just under half-full – don't overfill it!



STEP Four

Here's the BDS lead. Note the elastic loop. The lead should be tied to the end of your main line as part of your helicopter rig.

STEP Five

Don't overfill the bag. You want it to be slightly more than half-full when you add the lead – no more than that.

STEP Six

Feed the entrance of the PVA bag through the elasticated loop. Then place the loop around the grooves on the lead.

STEP Seven

Pierce the bag and stick the corners in, using saliva. Make the bag as tight as you can get it around the bait.

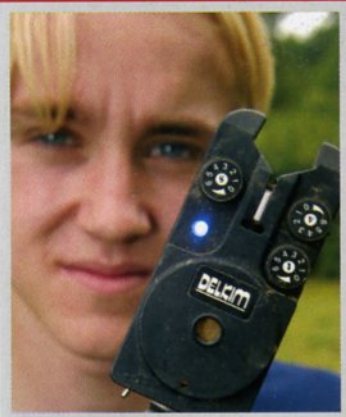
STEP Eight

The bag is now almost ready to cast. Tom trims the top of the bag, just above the loop, to make it neater.

STEP Nine

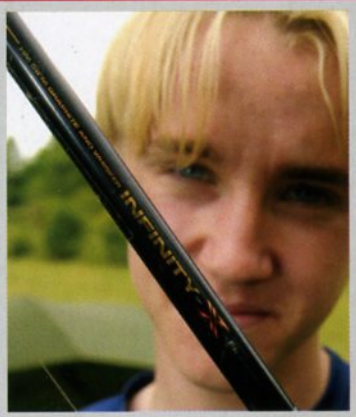
The helicopter bag rig, ready to cast. Note how the hook link hangs free, with the rig hooked in the side of the bag.

Tom's Four Favourite Tackle Items, Which He Paid For...



ITEM One – Delkims

"The Delkim TXi is my favourite alarm," says Tom. "I've had a set for ages now and have never had a problem with them."



ITEM Two – Daiwa Infinitys

"When I started to get serious about carp fishing, I bought a set of Daiwa Infinity rods," says Tom. "They are brilliant!"

ITEM Three – JRC Bedchair

"My Terry Hearn bedchair is essential," says Tom. "When I do overnighters between filming, I need a bed that's comfortable."

ITEM Four – Nash Brolly

"I use the Nash Oval Profile brolly," says Tom. "It's quick to put up and perfect for overnighters. It's never let me down."

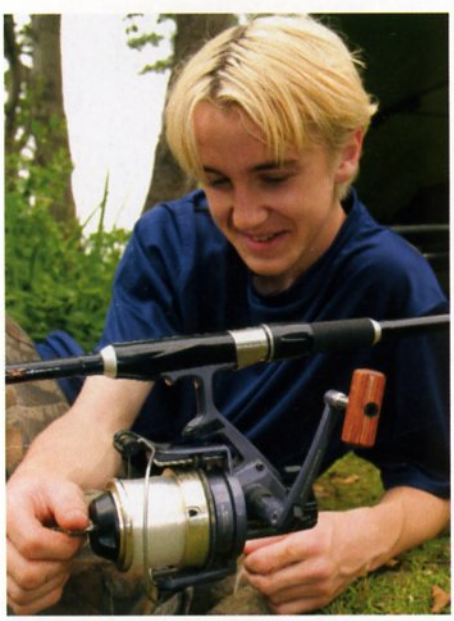
the hair, to give the hook bait added flexibility, and another on the hook link itself a couple of inches from the hook. Again, this is to give the hook bait more flexibility.

With the Snake-Skin rig, I like to use a snowman presentation, with a bottom bait and a pop-up on the hair at once. That's the rig you've photographed.

JF: You use both safe helicopter rigs and lead clips with PVA bags. What system of attaching your PVA bags do you use, and why?

TF: I use Anchor's Bait Delivery System (BDS), which incorporates solid PVA bags and also leads with a rubber ring on them.

What you do is fill the bag up with the bait you want to use, then place the lead in the top of the bag. You thread the top of the PVA through the rubber loop, then place the loop in the groove on the lead.



Tom sets the clutch on his Daiwa Tournament reels, ready for action

This holds the PVA bag in place tightly.

The hook link stays outside of the bag. Before casting, I hook the rig into the side of the bag.

The whole thing was thought up by my brother Chris. He went to David Devere with the idea, and then Anchor manufactured it. As far as I can see the BDS way is the easiest way of attaching a PVA bag. It's tangle-free and has caught me a lot of fish.

You can use the bags with in-line leads, helicopter rigs or lead clips. I use a helicopter rig on tubing with it. Every aspect of my helicopter rig can come apart, so it's safe for carp if I was unlucky and lost one.

JF: Well Tom, thanks for your time in putting this interview together. It's clear that you love your carp fishing. I don't want to sound like I'm sucking up to you, but I'd like to get it across to the readers that you're a talented angler in your own right, regardless of the fact you're in some of the most popular movies of all time. I'm sure a few TC readers will learn from the way you put your PVA bags together.

One last thing before we finish. What's your aim in life from now on – I take it you want to be a movie star?

TF: No! I want to be a pro carp angler. Carp fishing means that much to me. I also want to follow in my brother Chris' footsteps and go to Sparsholt College...

Bury Hill is the water where Tom really learnt how to carp fish