

# Looking Back

*Lee Kerry enjoyed another vintage year in 2013, although it wasn't without its mistakes. We discover what lessons were learnt...*



Small fish will keep you busy even on the coldest of days.



On shallow venues, Lee will happily feed the joker straight out of the newspaper.

One of the topics I get quizzed on more than most is bloodworm fishing. I have spoken before about the Stainforth & Keadby Canal and how its twists and turns throughout the winter season keep all the competitors on their toes. This winter I wanted to go back to basics and look at some of the key things that so many people disregard when bloodworm fishing and how I try to keep them at the forefront of my mind when using the red stuff on a match.

The first things to clear up with bloodworm and

joker are the myths that surround the baits. I think one of the biggest problems, or not as the case may be, is the availability and cost of the bait. All the matches I fish with B&J in the UK are supplied by Sam Wildsmith, and I usually take 0.75kg of joker to each. The only joker I use these days is the Russian/Ukrainian stuff, which is practically bulletproof – I simply keep it in its paper in the fridge, or more commonly through winter it just lives on the garage floor.

Bloodworm is equally straightforward and I just get a hooker pack delivered

with my joker. You can of course keep it week on week, by keeping it in water and changing it daily, but to be honest I usually just get a fresh pack every week and at £2.50 it saves a lot of hassle. Total cost for this amount of bait is around £15. I don't take casters, maggots or worms, so in my eyes this is certainly a reasonable bait bill.

I order bait on a Monday for the following week's match, so with the bait all sorted the most important thing is thinking about how to feed it. This is probably the area that causes the most confusion when people come

to bloodworm fishing. Soil or leam, groundbait or not – even straight from the paper is an option; no matter which I choose, though, I like to keep things very simple.

The depth of your swim and the make-up of the bottom play a key part in feeding joker. Effectively what you are trying to achieve is the bait concentrated on the bottom where the fish can compete over it. With joker you are not trying to draw fish up in the water, so with this in mind it is important to know exactly where your bait is on the bottom. I can guarantee that any feeding fish will be

right on top of it!

Again this is much simpler than with baits such as maggots or hemp, when loose feed can draw fish at all different depths, and trying to regulate your feed to keep bites coming has to be constantly at the forefront of your thoughts.

With joker, however, I have a couple of simple rules and depth plays the first part. Generally speaking I will only consider feeding raw joker straight from the pack in less than one metre of water. Anything over this depth and I need something to accurately carry my bait down to the bottom. In less than one metre feeding the bait straight from the paper can be very effective, but be aware that any tow or boat traffic could wash your bait away easily.

With this in mind I generally feed my joker in a combination of leam, soils and groundbait. Which combination can often take a little fine-tuning but as a basic rule I use 50/50 groundbait and soil throughout summer and into autumn, then when the cooler months come I use one-quarter groundbait and three-quarters soil. I have mentioned soil as an example, but you can substitute this for leam. Using soil or leam could take up an extensive article all on its own, but once again in the interest of keeping it simple I generally use leam for bream, with soil for roach.



Short, 4in hooklengths are a must to show the bites.

This is not a strict rule, but it is a good starting point.

The combination of groundbait and soil forms a carrier for the joker, so the next decision is how much joker to use. Plenty of articles have been written about measuring the amount of joker you feed at the start of a session. I am a big fan of this as it gives you a chance to keep a mental record of what you have fed in your

This is what it's all about!



peg. The key thing is that you monitor what is introduced into your peg, so you can start to understand how and when to top up.

Recently on my bloodworm and joker matches I have been taking this one step further, by creating a mix at the start of the session then using that same mix throughout. The measuring is done at the start so I can be sure I am happy with the ratio of joker in the mix.

The mix I have been using this winter is two pints of groundbait to six pints of soil. After this has been blended together well I add one pint of joker. This gives a mix that is rich in joker, but holds together nicely to get fish competing in your swim.

Once I have my mix I feed three balls on each line and start fishing. As bites start to dry up I look to introduce

another ball of the same mix. So, for example, if I have fed three balls at the start of the session and they have lasted 90 minutes, I know that one top-up ball should last approximately 30 minutes before I need to feed again. This can of course change throughout the match, but this is a basic guide that makes feeding joker easy to follow.

Of course, you have the option of feeding more or less at the start depending on how you feel the fishing will be, but as a general rule three balls is a good starter on a new venue.

The best thing about this feeding strategy is that once the fish arrive it is easy to understand when and with what to top up the swim. This is an area that causes much confusion, even at the highest level, so by keeping my feeding options simple it helps me read the swim and adjust how much I feed each time to make the most of my peg.

With the feeding options simplified the next consideration is rigs. Again I have spent a long time reviewing different floats and shotted patterns, but have settled on some basic rules that help me address any new swim. The first float I always look at for this

type of fishing is a PT Series 6. I cut the tips down to 30 millimetres, which helps the float settle quickly to show only five millimetres above the surface.

I always set up three different sizes. First I choose a float size I feel is appropriate for the venue – tow and depth play a key part in this choice – but it is no different choosing a float size for bloodworm fishing as it is any other bait. Once I have what I think is the correct size, I will prepare one size above and one below, to cover my options. For example, on a deep canal such as the Stainy, I base my match around 0.6g, with a 1g bagging option and a 0.4g in case bites are harder to come by.

The choice of float follows the same rules for every venue, so it is worth finding out what sort of depths and flow you will be faced with before taking on a new venue. Incidentally, shotted patterns are always a simple bulk and two droppers. This is kept tight, around 50 centimetres from the hook. Again, there is little point having rigs with a slow drop when all the fish and bait are on the bottom.

Fine-wire hooks are usually a must for bloodworm fishing too, although don't be fooled into thinking that this means they need to be small. I use a size 18 PR 311 for a lot of my bloodworm fishing, dropping to a 20 or 22 when bites on clearer venues are hard to come by.

I also prefer 0.08mm hooklengths, because when bloodworm is on the hook I think the fish become so focused on the bait that a slightly thicker line makes little, if any, difference. This allows me to be aggressive when swinging fish, helping to put together match-winning weights.

Where to fish is another common query, and I usually look to feed two lines, but sometimes three or even

On a deeper venue, this is all you need!



It's absolutely vital to pick a far-bank marker and then accurately cup your bait in.

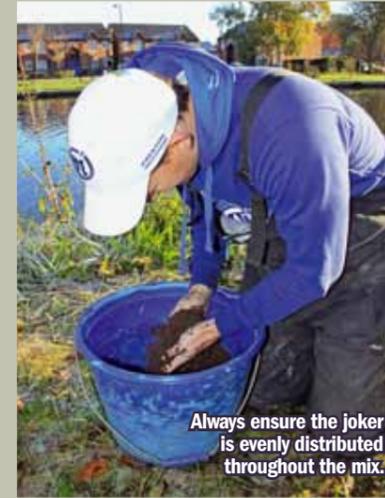


four are needed to keep fish coming. That doesn't mean I feed neat on one line, lean on another and then groundbait elsewhere. I know my chosen mix will attract fish, so I feed the same in each location. Then, once the match is under way, I try to identify the best areas and concentrate on keeping them topped up rather than trying to work across many different swims.

This is a key part to success on bloodworm and joker venues. Most of the time I only end up working two swims, but even then one of them is often better than the other. By feeding multiple spots you run the risk of splitting fish up in your peg, so they don't settle properly, and you buzz around trying to keep bites coming and losing track of what's actually happening. This is the voice of experience on that front – many of my matches have been spent not knowing where to turn next!

So with the basics of bloodworm fishing firmly established it gives me a chance to reflect on a recent match on the Stainforth & Keadby Canal at Thorne. They say this canal was built for shipping but I just can't believe the designer wasn't a bloodworm angler, such is its suitability for the method.

I started my winter campaign on the Stainy a bit



Always ensure the joker is evenly distributed throughout the mix.

Lee will use this groundbait, soil and joker mix everywhere!



late this year, so when the first match of the new teams-of-three series got under way I could hardly wait to get back on the bank. I wasn't too sure how the canal was fishing, so my basic feeding pattern would be a great start to try and gauge how the fish were feeding.

Home for the day was Peg 262. This is on a section of the canal known as The Flats, and in the early matches it tends to hold plenty of fish, so I certainly wasn't disappointed to be there.

Plumbing up revealed I had roughly seven feet of water at 10 and 13 metres; fortunately the two swims were exactly the same depth. This made life very simple so I prepared 0.4g, 0.6g and 1g PT Series 6 floats to cover both, all with a soft No 4 Original Slip elastic through the top three of my pole.

I decided to start with a little breadpunch, which gave me a 30-minute window to allow my bloodworm lines to settle. This is something I often do when bloodworm fishing; not necessarily starting on bread, but on a method that allows the fish on my bloodworm lines to start feeding confidently.

This time it worked and when I switched over I was soon into my stride with single bloodworm on the 0.6g rig. The wind had dropped completely and I was starting to miss the odd bite; a change to the 0.4g rig reignited the



Bloodworm fishing needn't be out of your reach!

peg, before the swim began to fade on the two-hour mark. This is a classic sign that the bait in your peg is starting to run out, so with three balls lasting almost two hours I decided another two should keep the peg going. I had a quick look on the longer line, but bait there had obviously also been thinned out by the large amount of roach in the venue. The fish were feeding confidently at 10 metres, so not wanting to split the shoal I decided to leave the 13m line, and sure enough the fish were back at 10 metres.

I have spoken many times before about the various methods of presenting your hook bait on the Stainy. There are plenty of times when lowering the rig slowly into place brings a near-instant bite, but with so many small fish feeding I could be a little more aggressive and simply place the float over the top of the bait and allow it to settle quickly.

I fed once more with two balls towards the latter half of the match, but with many small fish feeding it was a case of finding a smooth rhythm and keep coming back with a fish. On the whistle I had around 250 fish, certainly a busy day's fishing, but more importantly I had kept everything very straightforward in getting there.

There were two 17lb roach weights on hemp and casters, which took the top spots, but my 15lb 7oz was enough for third place on this well-attended league and helped my questionably named 'Match Fishing Team' of Tom Scholey, Matt Godfrey and myself to over 33lb on the day and a good start to the series.

I hope this piece has demonstrated that bloodworm fishing doesn't have to be such a big mystery, or a method only suitable for big team matches. If it is allowed, get some bait for your next match and try my simple approach. ■



Lee loves catching roach.