

Looking Back

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



Lee's England debut taught him some valuable lessons!

The one task I like to perform at the end of the outgoing year is to sit down and, by being as critical as possible, look at my angling performances throughout the year and pick out every single mistake I can think of to try and improve myself as an angler. It's not the easiest thing to write about in a magazine but let me tell you, EVERYBODY makes mistakes, and realising and learning from them is what enables you to improve as an angler.

The first thing to realise is that there are lessons to be learnt every time you

go fishing. Whether you win or lose, being a match angler means that you must carefully review your performances to try and improve for the following year.

It is also useful to realise that improvements can come in many ways, be it feeding, casting, pole handling, tackle, timings, bait choices or playing fish. If every error you identify results in one more fish, then the end results will see dramatic improvements to your overall results.

I'm going to look back throughout the year and identify a match from each

period where lessons learnt will make me a better angler this year.

January/February: The match that made me think hardest at this time of year was a visit to Hayfield Lakes for a pairs' series. This series was to allow carp as well as silver fish, something I don't mind admitting I don't do very often in the depths of winter. For this match I had prepared the normal carp fishing equipment, such as bomb rods and a waggler. I had also prepared one or two bloodworm rigs.

I thought I was ready for the start but I wasn't actually

ready for either tactic. There were a few carp to be caught early and late. However, on the bomb, popped-up baits seemed the best option... and I didn't even have any with me!

I managed to hold my own with normal pellets on the hook and then I went on to my bloodworm line. This is a method that I really enjoy but, as with any technique, it takes a certain amount of concentration. I took it for granted; my two rigs were not right and although I caught a few fish I never really got on top of it. I managed two more late carp on the bomb and my



Fishing abroad has certainly given Lee an insight into some new techniques.

20lb scraped into a section second.

I hadn't done anything properly; I had chopped and changed without properly focusing on either technique, or really being prepared for either. This was a great example of taking things for granted in terms of preparation and being prepared to chop and change techniques. I know that I need to be thinking clearly when I change tactics but I thought both were straightforward methods. I know I could have made a lot more of them with a little more thought and preparation.

March: Team fishing started to kick in again and a winter-league semi-final at Makins was where my attentions were drawn. I wasn't sure what to expect; it looked like a couple of the lakes could be good but no-one really seemed to know. When I drew my peg it actually looked quite tempting; a small bay with around four feet of water made me think there would be a few bites. I started off looking around various areas of the far bank for carp.

Sometimes Lee feels that targeting smaller fish, like these F1s, is far better than sitting it out for big fish on mixed venues.



After an hour I had three stockies for about 11lb. I had been feeding a caster line at around six metres into the bay and when I went on it I enjoyed a fantastic

day's sport catching roach, perch and skimmers for 40lb and fourth in the match. I was feeling quite pleased with myself and had really enjoyed the day.

Then, while starting to pack up I noticed that at around 11 metres away to my left the water looked as though someone had turned on a washing machine. On the next peg, Wayne Mellings told me that he had noticed it at the start but it was out of the reaches of his peg. I shipped my plummet out and this part of my peg was 40 centimetres deeper than everywhere else. I couldn't believe it; I shipped out my dobbling rig with a piece of corn and caught three carp in a row.

What an idiot! They may not have fed all day but I could have used this area to snatch an odd bonus fish and take my catch to a possible winning one. On any venue you should plumb your peg carefully. I had plumbed nearly everywhere but not at 11 metres away to my left! A good performance but a wasted peg maybe?

April: White Acres in spring always teaches me a few lessons and this year was no different. I get the chance to fish two festivals a year; not as many as others but still very enjoyable.

I was having a good week

and with 34 points going into the final day I was sure of a top-10 finish, but I was hoping for more.

I was at Trewaters, a lake that was very kind to me in the early years, but in the last couple of visits I hadn't had things my own way. My Peg 49 draw looked okay and talk was that the fish were all on the short pole and down the edges. I geared my rigs around these lines and a Method feeder just in case.

I fished the first hour on two short-pole lines for very little reward. Other anglers were catching but the pegs immediately around me also couldn't catch on the short pole. I took a few fish on the Method feeder and things were going okay but I was still convinced that I needed to catch on the short pole. A few perch in the last 45 minutes finished a miserable match.

At the weigh-in my 70lb was enough for third, 80lb was second and cost me a couple of places in the festival. Had I fished the short pole all day I would have finished nowhere and blamed the peg. Actually, I had a peg capable of second had I targeted the right areas. Elsewhere on the lake the short pole was king but in my corner it certainly wasn't, but there were fish for the right approach. A lesson in being open-minded.

May: With the weather getting warmer I always think the key to success on commercials is carp. I make this mistake every year. The problem is that the carp are often still tightly shoaled, so when you are not on them you end up very disappointed. I fished a couple of Match This qualifiers where I went for the win, only to be left very fed up. I know I could have had a better day's fishing, possibly winning a section with a mixed-fish approach. Single-minded approaches often leave anglers feeling empty. Win your section

first and then look towards winning the match. This is an approach that I prefer when results aren't going my way and often helps to get performances back on track.

June/July: Nothing really special at this time but an England debut in Serbia deserves a mention I guess! I was highly motivated and grateful for this opportunity and after a great week with such a strong team we suffered an indifferent result with some terrible



pegs. I was lucky to have a good first day, which just intensified my focus to getting a good result on Day Two. I drew the next peg to my first-day experience, where the catfish and carassio had been in my peg in numbers, which, combined with skimmers, gave me over 5kg and second in the section. Same again then for Day Two?

I was sure the fishing

would be similar, so after feeding the same at the start I had my 30 minutes bleating and was on to the long pole. Bites weren't quite as regular as the day before but there were still plenty of skimmers feeding. I was aware that the day before I had to be positive with the feed; greedy catfish and carassio meant heavy feeding was the key, so I started with a similar approach on Day Two.

After two hours I was arguably winning the section

because, with all the catfish and carassio down the other end of the section, the skimmers in our area were overfed and had simply gone. Grams are crucial at this level and although my 3.1kg was eighth in my 25 pegs, 4kg was second. I know that with a slightly more conservative approach in the middle period of the match I could have had that. However, after the day before I think that most anglers would have done the same. But, like I said at the start of this piece, the point is to be overly critical in a bid to improve.

August: The Evesham Festival is always the highlight of this month for me. The fishing is rarely easy and for most it can be a gruelling few days. I was lucky to draw two reasonable pegs in the first two days. On both of these I caught over 5lb of roach on bloodworm. However, on both days I was left a little disappointed because towards the end of the match I could only muster a few small roach. Would a late hemp surge have added an extra dimension to my match, or even a maggot feeder?

Most matches are five hours long in the UK, not three, so I need to be prepared to make more of the closing stages during this festival. I will take this into next year.

September: This month has so much going on, so no doubt lessons are learnt all over. I was on the bank to watch/help England win the World Championship without making any mistakes. I was also lucky to be part of Barnsley Blacks' winning effort on the World Club Classic on the River Ouse. Nevertheless, among this, I also made time for the Match This Team final at Larford Lakes.

I have a good team fishing record, but not here. I was on

The waggler played an important role in the Sensas Challenge.



Peg 3 on Specimen Lake. The year before I made the most of silver fish, but then carp fed and I was left around halfway in the section. This year I decided to go all out for carp.

Five fish in five hours left me well down in the section with 14kg. I focused on Method, short pole and margins, where neighbour Cathal Hughes fished waggler for five much bigger carp than mine. At least Cathal was a good laugh.

I was overaggressive with the feed throughout, never set up a waggler and didn't consider a mixed bag. Only 20kg was needed to make the top three. I also lost a couple of bigger fish by scaling down when bites were hard. Big carp need big hooks and line!

October: Something a little different this month and a trip to the South of France for the Sensas Challenge final. Catfish were the main species, something we don't even consider in the UK but a very interesting fish. They are the most aggressive feeders I have ever come across. Waggler fishing played

a major part; our tactics revolved around catching catfish and skimmers using the faithful English mix of Lake and leam.

The first day was good and I managed 20 skimmers in with 100 catfish for 10kg and second in my section.

The next day I caught five skimmers early, then the swim was full of catfish. This was the complete opposite to my European Champs experience, so I upped the feed big time and catfish came thick and fast. I needed some skimmers, though, and although I came third with 7kg, it was the skimmers that made the difference. Alan Scotthorne got it spot-on with two wins and the team did well, coming sixth out of 64 teams.

At the end of the match I was a little confused because I had come back with a fish nearly every cast all day. Skimmers had been absent in my section, so how had two others managed more than me? I had a look at some of their tackle. Size 8 hooks with five maggots were a long way away from my 16 and three bloodworms, so when the catfish arrived

in such numbers a much more positive approach was required.

November: A trip to Italy taught me that all is not what it seems with match fishing. The River Tevere at Umbertide was full of chub. The pegs were 10 metres apart and I feared the worst. I was wrong, the fishing was brilliant and everybody managed at least five chub in my section. I had seven for 4kg and was a little disappointed because in the first hour, when the fishing was at its best, I was slow to pick up on how best to fish it.

It was my first-ever sight of the river and obviously all the locals had more experience, but it was an education in light hooks and line because one chub I landed had a rig in its mouth and the hook was a 24 and the rig only 0.2g. I think my 2g and a 16 PR 333 may have been a touch heavy! We don't have much chub fishing on poles in the UK, so certainly a lesson in balanced tackle for the future.

December: Roach dominate the colder months of my

fishing and my final lesson of the year came courtesy of the current World Champion, Didier Delannoy.

Fishing a match at Hayfield Lakes, I had to wait a little longer than most for the roach to arrive. I felt all match that I was playing catch-up to a flying world champion a few pegs away. So, in the last 45 minutes I went in search of a few bonus skimmers – it never happened.

My 15-4-0 was enough for third in the match; Didier won with 18-6-0. Had I fished for roach for the last 45 minutes it may have been a different tale. Final lesson of the year: think very carefully before you come away from feeding fish.

Looking back, the thing that stands out more than anything is the danger of assumptions when sitting down to fish a match. Many times these will pay off but, equally, there are many occasions when you can fall foul of them. If you want to improve your fishing this season, think carefully about the areas that could be improved and make sure you put them into practice. ■