

Larford Silver Fish Festival

Lee Kerry looks back at the recent Larford Silver Fish Festival, where the fishing didn't quite go to plan!

By now I should be talking about how I have been bagging up with big catches

and starting the suntan on my lily-white arms! Instead, I still have my thermals on and in one of my most recent matches the lake was partly frozen!

Throughout all the cold weeks, though, the one event that I have been really looking forward to is the Larford Silver Fish Festival. Last year catches of 30lb were commonplace, with match-winning weights of 50lb of skimmers making a mouthwatering prospect for this year.

In the run-up to the event, Alan Scotthorne and I decided to go down for a practice. We made the three-hour journey and even though it was cold we caught plenty of fish. Alan absolutely bagged up, catching over 50lb. I had caught well early on but the fish totally deserted me in the last two hours and I felt that I had got a bit carried away with the feed.

The next few days saw a dramatic drop in temperature and when we arrived for Day One I was sure it was going to be hard.

I had drawn B section; this was the higher pegs on the Burr Bank and is traditionally the hardest section in the match. The feeder had been a banker for skimmers but if you can catch on the pole then you stand a chance of a match-winning weight. I felt that with my section being potentially a low-weight affair, I would feed for everything that swims on the pole and target purely skimmers on the tip. The question was, what could I do differently on the pole to target all species and

not just skimmers?

It seemed to me that the lake's skimmers were not keen on large amounts of bait. The water temperature had dropped significantly and any large amount of bait was likely to see fish back off. With this in mind, I mixed up a bag of Sonubaits 50:50 Method Paste, but not until I had put it through a fine sieve to remove all the larger particles. I do this a lot for cold-water skimmers because it seems to attract them into your peg but doesn't leave too much food for them to become preoccupied.

On the pole I fed five small balls with a few pinkies and casters in. Then, while I started on the feeder I loose fed casters onto a pole line to try and draw in all species. The first few chucks on the feeder gave instant bites; the peg was solid but only with little roach. I knew it could be a hard day, so for the next hour I persevered on the feeder and kept putting small roach in the net.

Bankside rumours were that the venue was fishing really hard, so it was time to see if there was anything on the pole.

To go with the cold weather it was also very windy and I became instantly involved in a wrestling match with 13 metres of carbon. It hardly seemed worth it because I could only catch a few small roach. However, I reminded myself that the festival was decided on points and with nothing but a few roach coming out on the feeder I was prepared to keep putting something in the net.

The fish were keen to come up in the water but it was too windy to fish there comfortably, so I started feeding bigger pouchfuls of casters, but with less frequency. This worked a treat and in the last half of the match I started to catch a few better fish.

Rigs for the pole were

PB Silver 4 floats in 0.75g and 1.25g. The heavy rig seemed to give the better presentation in the strong wind but the lighter version seemed to be putting more fish in the net; a good example of why it is important to have a variety of rigs to vary presentation. It is also worth noting the hook size and type. I have spent the entire winter using PR 412s in size 20 or 18 for maggots and casters on the pole on commercial waters.

festival. However, I felt there was potential for more had I sorted it earlier.

Elsewhere it had fished rock hard. The cold water had totally knocked the stuffing out of the fish and Alan had only had five bites, including two carp, which only counted 1lb each.

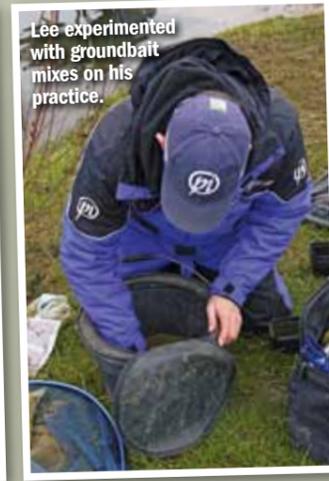
There was not a single fish caught on the pole in his section, which goes to show how much it could change from one area of the lake to another.

and cast a little further out. This brought a short run of skimmers but they seemed to be on the small side.

The match passed by all too quickly and I had only managed 10 fish for 8lb. Amazingly, this was enough for fourth in the section, with Mick Vials winning with 17lb. I didn't feel my peg had that amount of fish to compete with that sort of weight but I also don't mind admitting that I didn't really



Lee opted for simple baits!



Lee experimented with groundbait mixes on his practice.



The skimmers were hard to come by!

These are light enough to catch all sizes of roach but unlike many barbless hooks they have a long shank. This seems invaluable when you hook a bigger fish because the hook-hold stays true and the point doesn't straighten out, which is a common issue with light hooks. I have a real thing for using the right hook and encourage anyone to spend time choosing the right one every time.

In the final stages of the match I had a run of quality roach and when the whistle went I was actually really frustrated because I felt I hadn't really got on top of the feeding until too late.

At the weigh-in it seemed that everyone else had suffered a similar fate. When the scales got to me 8lb was winning the section. My fish went 10-15-0, enough for maximum points, so a good start to the

My destination for Day Two was Peg 76, in the middle of the section. Mick Vials was on boss Peg 67, and his skills on the feeder meant he was going to be hard to beat.

After an hour I had not had a bite, so a quick phone call across the lake was in order. To my amazement, the roach that had been in my section on Day One had completely gone. No-one could get a bite from them and only the top pegs were catching skimmers. It was turning into a real cold-water match!

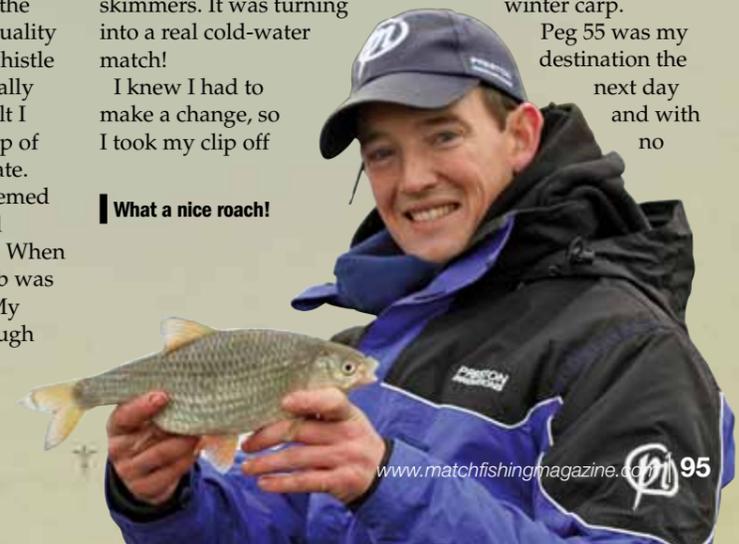
I knew I had to make a change, so I took my clip off

What a nice roach!

feel in tune with the feeder fishing after my day on the pole previously.

That night I started to feel that I knew what was required. Basically, the ice-cold temperatures were making the fishing extremely difficult. Everyone was struggling for bites, so instead of fishing a feeder in the traditional manner of building a swim, I felt it needed a more patient approach; one that you might take when fishing for winter carp.

Peg 55 was my destination the next day and with no



Lee Kerry
Age: 29
Lives: Leeds
Sponsors: Preston Innovations, Sonubaits
MF says: We told you so!

Quality skimmers were the target.



Arctic conditions greeted the anglers on the festival.

form I knew that I had to do something different. Everyone had been fishing around 30 to 40 turns. I wanted my own area of the lake to fish in so decided to clip my rods up at 60 turns of my Inception 3000 reel. The big feeders were removed and a small three-square cage feeder with extra lead to take it to 30g for casting was prepared. To cast that extra distance I set up an 11ft 8in Dutch Master rod. I had been using the 10ft 8in model previously and, although it had been working well, the extra length is necessary for casting extra distance. I have undertaken a lot of distance-casting practice and it is essential to have the right rods for the job. Basically, the extra length in the rod makes distance casting that much easier.

Once I had decided where to fish, it was time to look at my setup. Fixed rigs

were allowed and, having suffered the odd tangle the day before, I had set up two rods to try and establish the best setup. Firstly, I had a traditional paternoster rig, with the feeder hanging around 50 centimetres below the feeder. The other was something that top feeder angler Will Freeman put me on to. Basically, it involves the feeder running up the line and sitting above a 10cm twizzled loop, to which you attach your hooklength. The twizzle creates a stiff-boom effect and keeps your hooklength clear while casting. It sounds simple enough but with the wind still blowing it was a good chance to see what would bring the best results.

I was very conscious that you don't want to be chucking out too often, so every cast would require maximum concentration. My feeder had been in the water

for 20 minutes when my first skimmer found the net. I was fishing a single red maggot on a size 18 PR 434, so extra care was taken with every fish. Over the next few hours I managed to keep putting the odd skimmer in the net.

With 45 minutes to go bites had dried up completely, so I put another six turns on the reel to see if the fish had backed off. The move worked and two more fish took me to 12 for the day and 15-6-0. Alan was at the top end of my section and had also had 12 fish but his went 17-8-0, which won the match, leaving me second in the section and third on the day.

I felt that I had made the most of my peg because the fish had not really shown there all week. It also meant that I had a chance of winning going into the final day. Tommy Pickering was leading the way with five points, my seven was in the top four and, although the fishing was hard, I fancied a few fish from A section on the final day; especially as I felt I was starting to understand the feeder fishing required to make the most of your peg.

On the final day I was on Peg 14. This had been a steady area but Pegs 8 to 11 had thrown up fish every day. With more top anglers in the section it was going to

be tough.

It had gone so cold overnight that half the lake was frozen. Venue owner Phil Briscoe had gone out in a boat to break it up, so the match was delayed. This was probably a good thing because it took me 30 minutes to stop laughing after Phil decided to drop his pants once in the middle of the lake. It didn't seem to melt the ice, although it was suggested that the weight of his wallet is what had

There was a distinct lack of fish on the pole line!



actually caused his trousers to come down. It summed up the relaxed mood of the festival and certainly kept me chuckling while sitting in the cold easterly wind.

The day before had seen the twizzled-loop rig work a treat, so both the 11ft and 10ft Dutch Masters carried the same rig for the final day. Again I wanted to start further out but in this section I didn't feel that the distance would be a massive advantage, so I set both reels at 45 turns and waited for the all-in.

No-one had set a pole up; there was simply nothing to be caught on this line. The freakishly cold weather had turned it into a really difficult match but I felt confident of finding the fish once again.

As on the day before, I started with a small feeder and patiently waited for bites. Further down the section they were straight into fish but after 40 minutes

I had a couple of my own. As the match went on they were still finding fish in the middle of the section and, although I was hanging on at the back of the pack, I needed something going into the last 90 minutes. It was time to take the clip off and go that little bit further. The plan worked again for one fish but nothing more and with 45 minutes to go I was drastically running out of time.

Waiting for bites gave me time to think and it occurred to me that, generally speaking, feeding fish start to come closer to the bank to feed on all commercial venues. With other anglers chasing the fish out, it was time for a gamble.

I came back in to 30 metres, giving me my own line, but would the fish have thought like me and settled in a so-called safe zone? They had! In the last 45 minutes I had six skimmers, including one around 3lb. The move had paid off and I was delighted, but had I done enough?

Andy Moors had fished very well all week and had done the business again from Peg 8 with 18lb. We had the same number of fish but once again the scales did me no favours with 16-15-0. This was enough for second, though, and after a hard-fought week of classic skimmer fishing I had finished fourth in the festival with nine points, behind well deserved winner Tommy Pickering, Andy Moors and new England feeder team member Grant Albutt.

There was a good turnout of 40 anglers and I really felt that the weather had drastically affected the fishing. Hopefully next year there will be some milder weather because silver-fish events like this definitely mean more bites and not just one or two pegs catching while everyone else struggles to compete. I will certainly be booking on next year to try and add this trophy to my CV. ■



It soon became apparent that the feeder was the only consistent approach.

Kerry's Final Word

To finish this month's piece I have to mention the unbelievable support that I have received following the news that I have been included in the six-man squad to go with Drennan

Team England to the European Championship in Serbia. The other anglers in the team are simply incredible and to be a part of that setup is very humbling.

Although I know how much hard work has been put in to get to this point it is now where the real graft begins.

The other team members have been there for a while because they continue to

work at an unbelievable level. I know from speaking to Callum Dicks, who has also been selected, that we both want to help Drennan Team England continue to achieve the success that makes them the most respected and decorated team on the world circuit.

So this is my chance to say thanks for all the support and let's hope that the hard work is hopefully only just beginning.



Lee was well pleased with his fourth place and will be back for more next year!