

Although originally designed for match fishing, the Method feeder is now the most popular tactic for many anglers. Here, top specialist Paul Garner looks at everything you need to know about it.

Mastering The METHOD

There was a time when the Method was frowned upon in some circles as being too crude, too easy, and more akin to trawling than fishing! Well, how times have changed. As with all methods, the devil is in the detail. Whilst to the casual observer it might appear that it is a simple case of chucking out a loaded feeder and waiting for the tip to sail around, it is not surprising that some thinking anglers have adapted the Method to up their catch rate substantially.

Today, the Method is, without doubt, the most popular fishing style on commercial fisheries throughout the summer months, and can also be devastating for specimen fish of several species into the bargain. Most of the detractors have either joined the legions of feeder anglers, or gone elsewhere, because the truth is that on the right day the Method really does take some beating. It is not a panacea for bad angling, but when used effectively, just another useful tactic.

Tight Baiting

It is no coincidence that the other development of the last decade that has been hailed as having the biggest impact on fishing – PVA bags – gives the angler pretty much the same advantage as the Method feeder. Namely, a small quantity of bait right next to the hook-bait. This is nothing particularly new, but being able to achieve this consistently is where these techniques score.

Whilst originally developed by match anglers in the early '90s, it didn't take long for the specimen carp lads to catch on to how effective the Method can be. But whereas its popularity still seems to be increasing for pleasure and match fishing, it is still very much underrated as a big carp technique, and should be used more. I guess that one reason why carp anglers do not use it as much as they perhaps should is that a Method feeder will attract not just carp, but big bream and tench as well. A fact not lost on anglers targeting these species in recent years!

ANATOMY OF THE METHOD FEEDER

Whilst there is a huge selection of Method feeders available, they fall into one of two basic designs. The choice of which to use really comes down to how far you need to cast and how much bait you want in the swim.

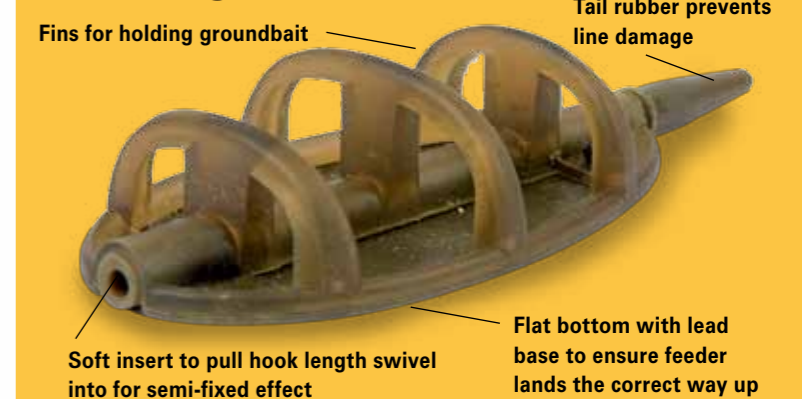
The flat bed match style feeders are obviously less aerodynamic, so are better for short to medium range work, whilst the tri-finned carp feeders can be chucked to the horizon on the right gear. For regular recasting, to create competitive feeding, the flat bed feeders are the way to go because they are faster to load, whilst I prefer to use the finned feeders when I want a ball of feed out there for longer.

The other advantage of the flat feeder is that it is easier to use with pellets as well as groundbait. When combined with a mould that compresses the bait evenly you can produce a perfect payload for the feeder every time. The hook-bait can even be positioned perfectly on top of the feed, putting it in the right position for fast bites.

Although I have used them quite a lot, I rarely feel the need to use elasticated Method feeders and prefer to simply semi-fix the feeder. The shock-absorbance provided by elastic is great if you need to fish fine, as it does give an extra margin for error on frail gear. The elastic might also lead to a few less lost fish when using barbless hooks and really short hook-lengths, as the feeder can bounce the hook out when a fish is on the surface. By using a relatively soft rod though and playing fish correctly losses are minimised.

Feeders come in a whole range of sizes and weights. I tend to use the lightest that I can get away with, and rarely more than an ounce of lead. With a sharp hook this is plenty enough to nick the hook point home and give a bolt effect. When loaded with bait this becomes a total weight of close to three ounces, which is as much as most normal feeder and specialist rods are capable of handling.

FLAT BASE FEEDER



FINNED FEEDER



End Tackle

End tackle is pretty much identical whatever style of feeder I use, being balanced to the time of year and the size and species of fish I am targeting. Although cruder than what the match anglers will use, I like to have a little margin for error as there is a good chance of the hook-length becoming damaged over time and with the short hook-lengths normally used, there is little in the way of shock-absorbance between feeder and hook.

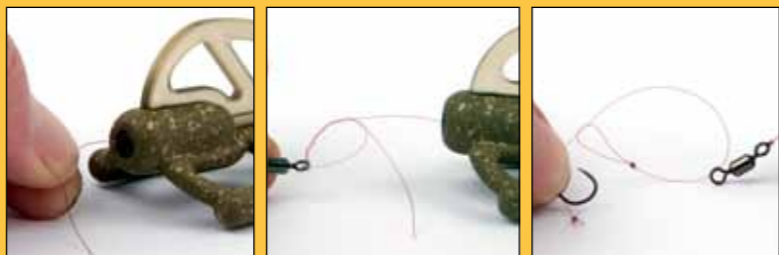
I am a big fan of fluorocarbon hook-lengths, but fishing the Method is one of the few times when I won't use this material, as I find it too prone to damage. Terminal tackle is likely to get damaged in any number of ways when fishing the Method so you need to use robust rig components. For commercial style fishing where carp up to double figures are expected, then I use 6lb (0.26mm) mono, something like Fox Steel being ideal. I have gone through a number of different hook patterns and for all my short legering rigs I use a short shank, wide gape pattern with a very small micro-barb. When big carp are on the cards the Nash Gaper hook in a size 8 or 10 is spot-on, for smaller carp and other species a finer wire hook, something like a Korum S4 is preferable. Hook sharpness is paramount, particularly when fishing for bream as they do not give such violent bites that hook themselves as you can expect with carp. With bream the hook really must be as sharp as possible to nick the point home against the weight of the feeder.

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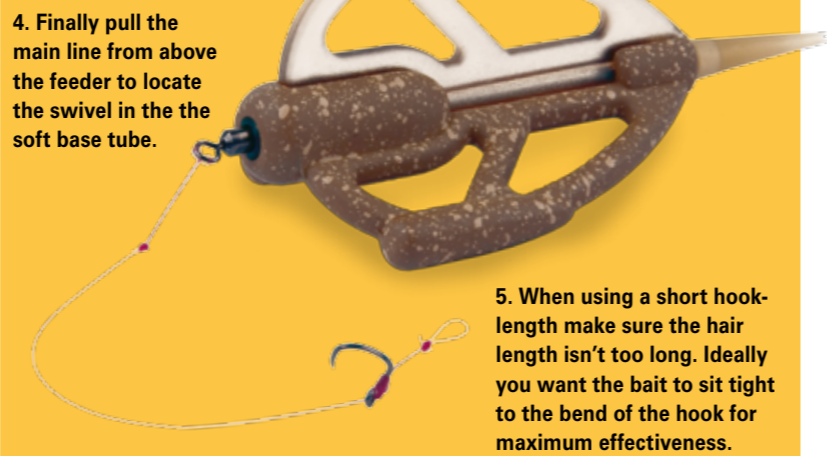


SETTING UP A SEMI-FIXED METHOD

Setting up a semi-fixed Method feeder is quite straightforward. You can use this process for both finned and flat feeders. The important thing is that the swivel that pulls into the base of the feeder can be released easily which prevents tethering in the event of a break-off.



- 1. Thread your main line through the feeder from the tail rubber end.
- 2. Tie on a correctly sized swivel using a grinner knot.
- 3. Add your hook-length to the swivel using the loop to loop method.



- 4. Finally pull the main line from above the feeder to locate the swivel in the the soft base tube.
- 5. When using a short hook-length make sure the hair length isn't too long. Ideally you want the bait to sit tight to the bend of the hook for maximum effectiveness.

Bait & Presentation

Almost without exception, I will hair-rig the bait, be it pellet, corn, boily or meat. The reason for this is simple, and is, once again, purely down to ensuring that the hook is unobstructed and so there is the best chance of the point nicking home against the weight of the feeder. Normally the hair is very short, with the bait just touching the bottom of the bend of the hook. With the fish finding a concentration of food in a small area they will be constantly sucking and blowing at morsels of food. Fish a longer hair and there is a very good chance of the bait being sucked in and not the hook.

Another critical factor is the length of the hook-length.

When the fish are feeding confidently, particularly carp, then the

shorter the hook-length the better. Many fisheries impose a minimum 4" rule, hence why several companies now sell ready-tied hair rigs of this length. When the fish are really going for it then they will attack the loaded feeder as soon as it is cast, so it makes sense to have the bait as close to the feeder as possible.

When conditions are not so perfect, and when fishing for bream on the Method feeder, a longer hook-length can often pay dividends. For a long time I reconciled the effectiveness of the longer hook-length with the fish backing off from the feeder, but now I am not so sure. Perhaps, instead, it is simply that if you are waiting longer for a bite that the groundbait or pellets will have dispersed over a wider area and so when a fish does come in to feed it is browsing and so the longer link gives them a little more time to get the hook properly into the mouth?

Whatever the reason, increasing the hook-length to around twelve inches, or even eighteen, can bring more bites when the going is tough.

MATCH OR SPECIMEN STYLE

MATCH STYLE

There are dozens of feeder rods on the market that are badged up for Method feeder fishing and most do a pretty good job. I like a rod with a fairly through action that will give a slow build up of power and not snatch the feeder on the cast. Quiver tips are normally in the 2-4 ounce range, as they need to balance with the action of the rod, but as they are designed for stillwater use do not need to be overly stiff. Normally I prefer a carbon tip, because it will blend in with the carrier section better than a softer glass tip. Currently I am using a 11 foot Drennan Series-7 Method Feeder rod, which is about right for anything up to forty yards when coupled with a 40 size reel and 6lb Maxima main line.

SPECIMEN STYLE

Most of my Method feeder fishing is spent targeting big bream in a more relaxed specimen style with a couple of rods fished with buzzers. Most of us will already own kit that it is perfectly adequate for this style of fishing. A heavy feeder rod, or better still a barbel rod of 12 feet in length and around 1 3/4 lb test curve, and a 4000 to 6000 size reel loaded with 8lb Maxima is about right.



The Drennan 11' Method Feeder is a good choice for up to 40 metres.



Reels in 4000 to 6000 size are most suitable for the Method.



For specimen style Method fishing you want a rod of at least 1.75lb test curve.



BITE INDICATION

Whether I am expecting plenty of bites on a commercial, or sitting it out for a specimen, bite indication needs to take into account that you are likely to get plenty of linebites and knocks as the fish roll the feeder around. Obviously, you do not want to be striking at the slightest tremble on the tip, so it really pays to sit on your hands and wait for a positive indication. I like the tip or bobbin to be able to move at least a foot before I strike, so they need to be set up accordingly. Remember, the feeder is semi-fixed, so with that sharp hook you are expecting the fish to give very positive bites as they hook themselves.

It's Your Choice

Method Feeders

Method feeders come in two basic styles - finned and flat. The ones listed below are all recommended and can be found in most tackle shops throughout the UK.

FINNED FEEDERS



>>> Drennan Finned Feeder
Sizes: 15g · 25g · 35g · 50g



>>> Fox Finned Feeder
Sizes: Compact - 14g · 25g
Standard - 35g · 60g



>>> Korda Finned Feeder
Sizes: Mini - 14g · 28g
Standard - 14g · 28g · 43g · 56g · 84g

FLAT FEEDERS



>>> Fox Flat Feeder
Sizes: Small - 20g · 28g
Large - 20g · 28g



>>> Guru Flat Feeder
Sizes: Small - 24g Large - 28g



>>> Preston Flat Feeder
Sizes: Small - 15g · 30g
Large - 15g · 30g · 45g
X Large - 30g · 45g

METHOD MIXES THROUGH THE YEAR

Whilst most people still seem to think of the Method feeder as a summer technique that can only be used when the fish are active and feeding well, I believe that it can be used all year round with great results.



WINTER Highly flavoured groundbait only.

I am looking to give the odd carp or bream that might be interested in feeding something to home-in on, so I use Dynamite Baits Source Groundbait with 25% of the liquid coming from the matching liquid attractant. This is much stronger smelling than would normally be used, but can bring bites when all else fails.

Hook-bait is either a piece of worm or a grain of sweetcorn.



SUMMER Pellets rule the roost

The fish are now in full feeding mode and will need something substantial to hold them in the swim. By now I will have switched to just using softened expander pellets on the feeder and will be casting regularly to get plenty of bait in the swim. To get bites faster try using a hookable pellet that is slightly larger than the feed pellets or use two pellets.



SPRING Groundbait with soft pellet feed

Water temperature will now be rising and big weights can be had as the fish are not going to be backing off the feeder. It is important to give them something more substantial to feed on. I now switch to Marine Halibut Groundbait and add softened pellets to the mix as feed. The more confident I feel the fish are feeding, the more pellets I will add.

Hook-bait is normally a hookable pellet or if the fish are feeding well, a 10mm boilie.



AUTUMN Mix and match

By now the fish are going to have become jaded after a summer of being caught, so it can pay to try slightly different approaches. The pellet still makes up the bulk of my feed, but I will use the Green Swim Stim Expander, or sprinkle some Swim Stim groundbait over standard pellets to make them a little different from the norm.

Rigs and hook-baits also need to be more subtle, try using a punched barrel of Polony meat, or matching pellet on the hook.



HOW TO . . .

The easiest way of loading a flat Method feeder is to use a mould like the Preston one. This makes a uniform shape and works for both soft pellets and groundbait. Not only does it produce the correct shape it also places the hook-bait in the perfect position.

USE A METHOD MOULD



1. If you want your hook-bait to be on the surface of the pellets you need to place it in the mould first. This is best when the fish are straight on the feeder.



2. The next stage is to fill the mould to the top with pellets. Smooth off the pellets so they are level. If you are using groundbait do exactly the same.



3. Now place the feeder face down on the pellets and push it into the mould. You need to be firm, but don't overcompress the pellets too much.



4. Finally pop it out of the mould. The finished loaded feeder has the hook-bait in the surface skin of the pellets making it easily accessible to the fish.

Pack It On

Whether you are loading your feeder by hand, or using a mould it pays to think about how hard you compress the bait on to the feeder. As one of the main advantages of the Method is that it should leave a pile of bait next to the hook, giving the fish something to home in on, the last thing you really want is for all the bait to come off the feeder on the drop. So a simple rule of thumb is that the deeper the water the harder you need to compress the feeder or the sticker you need to make the mix. This particularly applies to pellets, which fall off the feeder pretty easily anyway, so it pays to really compress them down hard.

If you are going to be leaving the feeder out for any length of time then it also pays to take into account the action of fish moving through the swim and displacing the bait away from the feeder. Even small fish, like roach and F1s can soon wipe out a feeder load of bait, so I really want some bait to be stuck very firmly to the feeder to give the fish that all-important target.

The Cherry On The Cake

One tactic that has developed out of me wanting to introducing a lot of feed, particularly for bream, but also on my local Earlswood Reservoir for big weights of carp, is to begin the session by spodding out a big bed of 4mm pellets over a large (15 feet square) area and then fishing the feeder over the top of this. This gives the fish a big area to graze over and, hopefully, will keep the big shoals of fish looking for food for a reasonable length of time.

A Method feeder fished over the top of this bed of pellets is really then just the cherry on the cake, giving the fish a focal point in the swim. When fishing like this I make the ball of groundbait around the feeder really sticky so that it will stay on the feeder for an hour or more only very slowly breaking down. The thinking behind this is that the pellets create a bed of feed in the swim, whilst the feeder is really only there to attract fish to the hook-bait.

With spring now, hopefully, well underway the Method feeder will start to come into its own. In fact, for my bream fishing, I don't think I will use anything other than the Method, my confidence in it is that high. With a bit of tweaking to match the conditions there can be fewer more efficient ways of catching big weights of carp and bream, but like any method it is the angler who puts in the effort to learn the nuances who will reap the greatest rewards. **CF**



The 'Doc' with a Method caught carp. Now spring is on the way it's time to reap the rewards that wait.

HOW TO . . .

PREPARE SOFTENED FEED PELLETS

There are several ways of preparing softened pellets to go on the feeder. The quickest method is to use a pellet pump and force the water into the pellets. Using a pump you can prepare a couple of pints of pellets in just a few minutes.

If you don't own a pellet pump then there is an easy, if longer-winded alternatively.



1. You can use any size pellet. The smaller the pellet the tighter it can be packed onto the feeder. I normally use Dynamite Baits Swim Stim Original pellets.



2. Add about 50ml of the liquid attractant to a 3-pint bait tub and fill with water. Mix thoroughly to ensure that the attractant has dissolved into the water evenly.



3. Tip the water into a large groundbait bowl and then add a kilo bag of Swim Stim pellets. Mix thoroughly to that the pellets are covered with water.



4. The pellets need to be soaked for different lengths of time depending upon their diameter. For each 1mm of pellet size soak them for 1 minute.



5. Once the correct time is up drain off the pellets. I like to tip them on to a riddle and press them down slightly to remove as much water as possible.



6. Now put the pellets in a large sealable container or plastic bag and seal them up. After ten minutes give them a good shake to separate them.



7. Leave the pellets overnight to soak in the moisture and you'll have perfect soft pellets that retain their shape, but are sticky enough to use on the feeder.