Surface Controllers

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Chub and Rudd will oblige but Carp will take a bait off the surface more readily than any other species. This applies to virtually all sizes of fish from seriously big specimens right down to their smaller relatives who inhabit the popular commercial Carp puddles. Floats for surface fishing are a breed apart and because you can actually see what's going on right on top of the water, they are first and foremost aids to casting and line controllers rather than bite indicators.

They are of course equipped with a fluorescent top to help you keep track of them but nine times out of ten, you are watching the bait to see when you get a take and not relying on the float to tell you when you've got a bite.

Tempting fish on a surface-fished bait is heart-stopping stuff. Presentation is key if you are to put together a sizeable weight.

Of course Carp taking floaters can be pretty much relied upon to produce lots of highly visible swirls and surface disturbance, so whenever you are not quite sure whether it's a free offering or your hookbait that's been taken, you need to quickly look back to the float top for any telltale movement.

Fishing a bait right on the surface obviously means you don't need any lead on the line, so conveniently you can build all the weight into the base of the controller. This will provide all the casting weight you need and produce a float which automatically rights itself and immediately sits up nicely to the fluorescent top on landing.

As with all loaded floats, they fly much further and more accurately if the loading weight is concentrated right at the very base rather than distributed over a greater length. So if you want to improve your casting, avoid floats and surface controllers with long, brass stems for weight and instead, use those with an aerodynamic load right at the base. It really does make a radical difference !

The modern plastic controllers are some of the best for two basic reasons: Firstly they are tougher and more durable than balsa wood models. Secondly, being transparent or translucent, they are less obtrusive than solid coloured floats. Thanks to a neatly mounted swivel in the fluorescent tip, they are also virtually tangle free.

There are several simple methods of attachment through this swivel and where stronger lines and bigger Carp are involved, it's important not to have the controller fixed in position. If a big fish should charge off through weed, a fixed controller could lead to breakages, so to avoid this and act as a safety rig, it must be free to slide back up the line under pressure. The answer is to use a semi-fixed attachment as shown in diagram 1. Here, the main reel line is tied off to a swivel or uni-link swivel, using it as a stop for the controller. A short 20mm section of 1.5mm silicone tube is pushed down part way over this swivel and then the swivel on the controller is in turn pushed over the soft, flexible portion of the tubing to form the all important semi-fixed attachment. This set-up also prevents the stop swivel on the main line from sinking down away from the controller and slowly but inexorably pulling the hooklength under the surface.

This system also provides the opportunity to step down from a stronger reel line to a lower diameter hook length but as always, the step down must not be too great; one breaking strain or diameter is enough like 10lb reel line to 8lb hooklength. If the differential between reel line and hooklength is too great, for example 12lb on the reel and 6lb to the hook, there will be little or no stretch at all in the thicker reel line when it's under pressure from a big fish and all the stretch will be concentrated in the much thinner hook length. That's asking for trouble and you are bound to get breakages. So the diameter and therefore the elasticity and shock absorbing effect of reel line and hook length must always be close to each other and nicely balanced.

When fishing floating baits, the hooklength can be anything from 4ft to 6ft (120cm to 180cm). If you are being brave and fishing amongst lilies or if the controller is masked by surface weed and debris in the margins, you can reduce this right down to a couple of feet (60cm). Alternatively if the Carp are out in open water but are really shy and spooky, you can lengthen it right up to 8 or 9 feet (240cm to 270cm), just

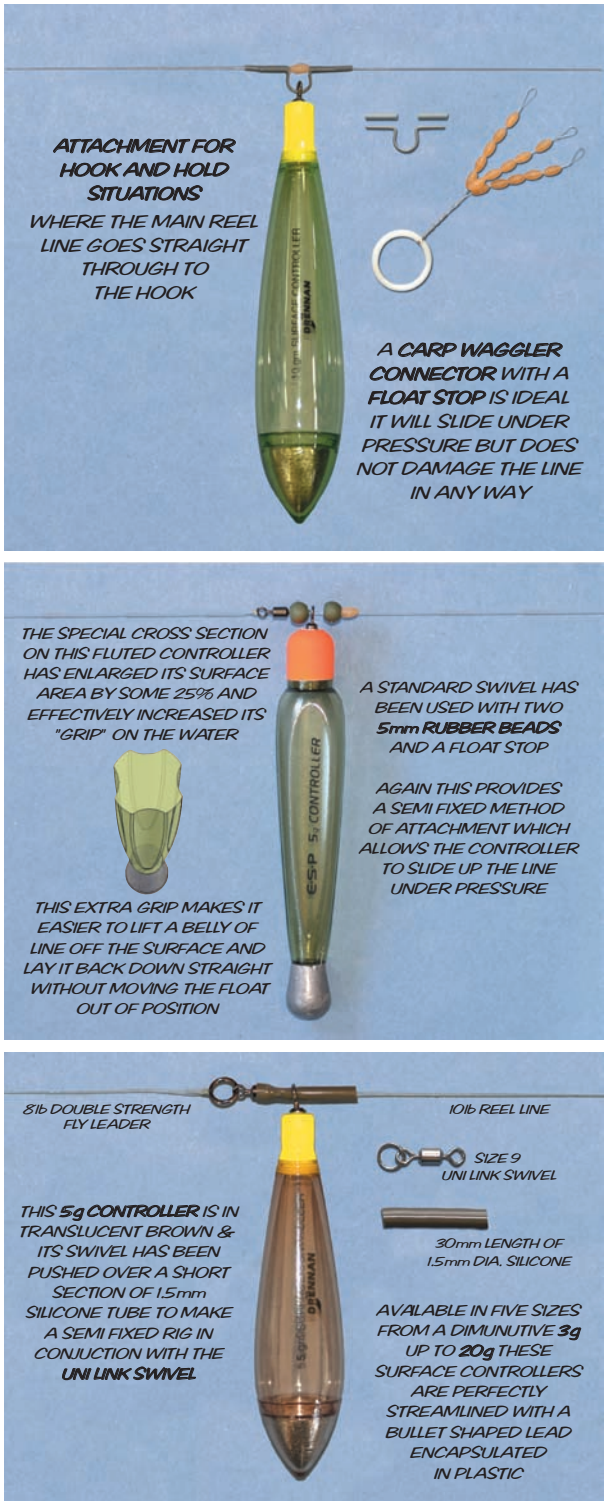
Peter Drennan with a fine estate-lake carp take from the surface using a controller-float set-up.

as a precaution to distance bait from controller. With an exceptionally long hooklength of 8ft or 9ft, you can get away with a slightly bigger differential in diameter to the reel line, simply because there is more of it to stretch. If, on the other hand, you're on a really short hooklength, fishing right amongst lilies or snags and it's a hook-and-hold job, it's best to run the mainline straight through to the hook. My preferred method of semi-fixing the controller in position when fishing a direct mainline is shown in diagram No.3.

All nylon monofilaments are hydroscopic, which means they tend to absorb water. Once they have done so, they are more inclined to sink so you need to grease both reel line and hooklength to get them to stay afloat for a reasonable length of time (that is, long enough for the carp to come along and take the bait !) The problem with line floating right on the surface is that it picks up absolutely all the surface drift and in a cross wind, can quickly form a big belly between rod top and controller. The bigger the belly, the more drift it catches, a bit like the sail on a yacht; the more you let the sail belly out and fill with wind, the faster you go. So the speed at which a line belly drags your controller along increases exponentially. A small belly quickly turns into a big one and controller and bait are being dragged across the surface in a totally unnatural manner. For this reason, good line management is as important with surface controllers as it is with Wagglers, Avons or any other type of float.

The truly streamlined controller with a tapered bomb shape casts marginally better than the fluted ESP model. However, flutes increase the surface area dramatically, so there are two subtle advantages with the ESP shape. If the floating line between rod top and controller has developed a big curved belly due to surface drift, you can lift it up and reposition it nice and straight without moving this fluted body very much at all. Conversely, you can employ this extra surface area or grip on the water to drift the ESP controller into position. They can be moved perceptively faster than round bodied models, so you could, for example, cast well away from fish feeding just on the edge of lilies and efficiently work tackle and bait into place without disturbance. With wind drift taking your free offerings into the lily pads and lining up them up along the edge, Carp will be working this safe zone. The controller and your bait will also come to a halt right up against the pads and the Carp will come straight up and take the bait.. Easy!

Whether you are stalking an individual big specimen or fun fishing for smaller carp, surface fishing is a deadly method throughout warmer months.



Peter's Surface Controller set-ups