

IS LIGHT RIGHT?

We join Bag 'em and Frenzee-backed aces **Lee Blagden** and **Jon Clegg** at Garbolino Lindholme Lakes, as they attempt to answer one of modern-day match angling's most pertinent questions...



Is it better to get a bite and stand a high probability of losing what you hook than never to get that bite in the first place? This is the quandary that modern commercial pole anglers face almost daily. They are in a real catch-22 situation. Commercial carp in many of our more established waters are now bigger than ever – fish to double figures, and even over 20lb at some places, come out on a daily basis. These fish fight hard too, and when bites are at a premium anglers really can't afford to be losing fish of this size.

On the flip side, the fact that many of these fish are older and wiser than ever means that they are also more difficult to catch. If your feeding, presentation and tackle setup isn't absolutely perfect, then you will not get a bite in the first place.

For this reason, more and more of the country's top anglers are resorting to fishing lighter and lighter when it comes to their commercial fishing. The pages of this very magazine are adorned with anglers fishing hooklengths as light as 0.09mm when targeting even big carp and F1s.

However, some top anglers still swear by using heavier-gauge line and elastic, in the firm belief that they want to land everything that they hook, and that doing so will give them an edge over those who choose to 'pussyfoot around' with light lines.

We wanted to put these two theories against each other and drafted in the help of newly sponsored Frenzee and Bag 'em Matchbaits rods, Lee Blagden and Jon Clegg.

Our venue for the test was to be Bonsai Lake at the prolific Garbolino Lindholme Lakes complex near Doncaster. Like many of our commercial fisheries, Bonsai started life as a small-fish water some 10 years ago, stocked with small F1s and carp. Now, though, there are massive fish in the lake, monster



The end of the first session proved very productive for Lee's light-line approach.

carp that have grown on the protein-rich feed of legions of anglers. With an average of four matches per week taking place on the venue, these fish have seen more than their fair share of anglers' rigs too, and are the perfect candidates to test out our theories to the limit!

Also perfectly suited to this test are the two anglers with whom we are shooting the feature. Lee and Jon both have an esteemed reputation built on a solid base of good results on the ultra-competitive northern commercial circuit.

That said, both are the first to admit that they are no 'superstars', and being proud family men with young children, they are only able to get on the bank once a week. Like most of us, they don't therefore have

the fish-playing prowess of someone like Des Shipp or Alan Scotthorne. Will the light line wreak havoc and cost our two anglers big, valuable fish, or will it equate to more fish in the net?

THE TEST

In keeping with the format of this feature, rather than being a head-to-head between the anglers it is to be a head-to-head between a 0.10mm hooklength and a 0.16mm hooklength. Both anglers are fishing up towards the cover of an island in around three feet of water. They have identical rigs, 0.25g Drennan Tipos tied to 0.18mm line, complete with a 12in hooklength, with a bulk of shot just above it.

Each will fish with one hooklength for 90 minutes, putting all the fish caught in one of their keepnets. Then they will swap, putting the fish caught on the other hooklength in the other net. This should give us a clear indication as to which diameter is best on the day.

To keep the test fair, each angler is only allowed to feed a small Frenzee Soft Pot full of bait each put-in and fish a 4mm Bag 'em expander pellet on the hook.

For the first part of the session it's Lee on a 0.10mm hooklength and Jon on a 0.16mm. Both anglers seem convinced that the lighter hooklength will prove best but will The Big Test bear out their theories?

After five minutes fishing it is first blood to Jon and a tiny F1 comes to the net. Lee is struggling, with no indications at all, and soon Jon is into another fish. >>>



Jon only managed stamp fish, like this, when he used the thinner 0.10mm hooklength.



Bonsai is an established venue, with a big head of old, wise fish; the perfect arena for our test!

It takes around 15 minutes for Lee to get off the mark but, surprisingly, when he does start catching, the fish seem to come a lot quicker. After the first hour, Lee has 10 to Jon's seven.

"Now that I have got the fish feeding, I certainly seem to be getting bites quicker than Jon. The bites are dead confident and, as I expected, it feels like I am fishing the right setup," says Lee.

For Jon, things are altogether more frustrating.

"Although I had a reasonable start and clearly have fish feeding confidently in my swim, hooking them is proving altogether more challenging. I am missing a large percentage of the bites and losing some of those that I do hit on the way back!"

As I am talking to Jon, he hooks into something far more substantial that nods off around the island. It is clearly a big fish, far bigger than anything that either angler has hooked up to now. As he brings it back to the net, it wallows on the top – a big mirror

carp of around 6lb. Something is clearly not right with how it is fighting, though; it looks to be foul hooked. Just as Jon is about to net it, the hook pulls out.

Conversely, Lee has enjoyed a great late few minutes to the first session, adding several chunky F1s to his tally.

THE ACID TEST

There has been little doubt that the lighter line has been better on the first session but will the same be borne out when the anglers change hooklengths?

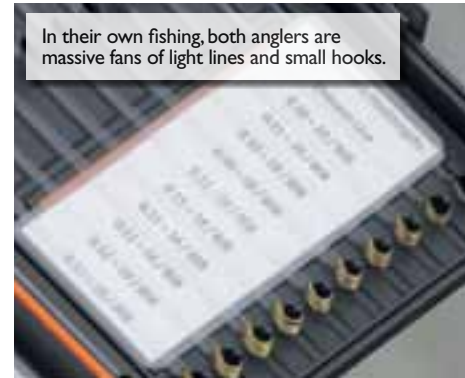
Interestingly, it seems like we might have jumped to false conclusions because when the anglers swap lines, Lee carries on catching very well, just as he had when using a thin main line.

Jon also sees an improvement in his catch rate, though, with fewer missed bites and more fish ending up in the net.

"This seems loads better than the thicker main line that I was using. I can't describe the improvement any better than to say that the fish just seem to be taking my hook bait loads more confidently."



Allowing each angler to only feed this amount of bait after every fish kept the test fair.



In their own fishing, both anglers are massive fans of light lines and small hooks.

Interestingly, after catching quite well for around 10 minutes on the thick main line, Lee's catch rate starts to slow.

"Although initially the change in main line didn't seem to make any difference, I now definitely feel like it is costing me fish. I am getting loads more line bites, less positive indications, and I'm even starting to foul hook and lose the odd fish – including a big mirror, exactly as Jon did."

As the session draws to a close the pattern continues and both men end firmly believing that the thicker main line was not as good as the thinner one on the day.

The scales confirm their beliefs as well. The 0.16mm net (held by Jon) contains 21lb, while the 0.10mm net (held by Lee) holds 29lb. This is quite a convincing win for the lighter line, considering the small stamp of fish.

Lee concludes: "It has been a really interesting test because although the thin hooklength has yielded more fish in the net for both of us, it hasn't yielded fewer indications. Indeed, there have been plenty of dinks, lifts and pulls on both setups, but the more positive bites developed more regularly when using 0.10mm.

"An angler who is confident with 0.16mm line in this sort of situation might well have sat down and believed that because he was getting indications it was the way he was feeding, his choice of hook bait or the depth of water in which he was fishing that was responsible for his lack of positive bites.

"It is because we have only tested the variable of the hooklength line that we have been able to draw what I think is a clear conclusion. I have always felt that fishing light hooklengths gave me an edge anyway – and this test has certainly fortified my opinions."



VENUE FILE

GARBOLINO LINDHOLME LAKES
 Location: Don Farm, West Carr, Doncaster DN9 1LF
 Contact: 01427 875555
 Day tickets: £6.50; concessions £5.50
 Website: www.lindholmelakes.co.uk

Lee with the '0.10mm hooklength' net. Note the big average stamp of the fish.



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