

Fingers at 46 1/4lb



Since his childhood, Chewy had always had a burning ambition to one day fish the historic Horton Church Lake. His opportunity finally arose when new owners, RK Leisure, took over...

AMBITION ACHIEVED

Understandably, I was full of excitement and anticipation as I arrived for my first session on Horton Church Lake. With the carp barrow loaded, I headed off on to the banks. I'd never even seen the Lake before and came to an abrupt stop when I first gazed across the water, almost pulling a muscle in my cheeks with the big smile on my face.

The gear was parked near a swim and I went for a walk, searching out my quarry and checking all the likely areas, only to find nothing! Just as I completed a lap, though, a couple of fish rolled in open water in front of a vacant swim. With some activity to go at, I set about getting two rods out. The depth was around 17 feet, so both rods were rigged with chods, simply because I didn't know the contours of the lake bed and at least the

presentation would be fine. Besides, I definitely didn't want to push 'em away by casting too much!

As the day wore on the bobbins remained motionless and the fish stopped showing. By evening I was on the move again trying to find them. That first fish from a new venue is the trickiest one to get at times and unfortunately, as the session wore on, I wasn't rewarded. I headed off home feeling like I'd failed, kicking myself, like you do.

Still, I'd learnt a lot about the place, which all helped to build up a bigger picture.

I was back the following week, searching for them once again. After leading around in a swim I found a couple of hard spots amongst the black, smelly silt. Accurate angling was necessary here as I doubted anything would feed in the black stuff. I decided to knock up a couple of hinged stiff links using Gardner Trip Wire, size 5 Covert Chod hooks



Chewy used a new bait currently on test from Carp Company called Purple Haze



Chewy's first Horton carp was an old character known as Lucy



A CamFlex leader helped to pin down the end of the main line



Chewy allows the Mirage fluorocarbon to settle for a few minutes before setting the bobbins

and Tricklink boom sections, and baited them with a new one currently on test from Carp Company called Purple Haze.

Just as I was going to position the rods on the spots, a big mirror turned over the area. Er... what to do? Well, I waited five minutes then set the traps and put out a few offerings as tight as I could around the hookbaits.

At dusk I saw the fish showing down the other end, so without hesitation I upped sticks and was on the move again. One thing I'd learnt on my first trip was how quickly the fish moved about. Before you're on them, they're gone! Well, I'm a mobile angler. I've been known to move any time of the day or night, whatever the weather, and I feel I owe a lot of my success over the years to this mobility.

As I arrived in the zone I was greeted by the spectacular sight of loads of big fish rolling – three at once at one stage! I quickly set up in a vacant swim near the fish. Having got a nice drop on the first rod, I was in the process of tying up a fresh bait on the second when the first was away! I couldn't believe it. After giving a good battle it finally came over the net. "YESSSS!" My first Horton carp was a stunning old character known as Lucy, tipping the Reubens at 28lb. After a few snaps I let her on her way. Luckily, recasting at dusk didn't bother the fish, as they were still rolling and crashing. I had a sleepless night, as every time I nodded off another big girl leapt out.

Morning arrived and I couldn't believe I'd not had another pick-up – but the Church Lake is renowned for that apparently. I packed my gear away and headed off home. Work had built up, but eight days later I was back down there for a three-nighter.

As I arrived there was a southerly blowing into one of the bays. Despite the fact that I wanted to get in there, it was already occupied by three other anglers and I felt the pressure would push them out.

After seeing four fish roll, I found a little gravel hump at 50 yards and decided to fish at the back of it. I felt a bottom bait was more suitable here and knocked up a simple but effective blow-back rig with 15lb Sly Skin and a sticky-sharp size 8 Covert Continental Mugga hook, coupled with a CamFlex leader to pin down the end of the main line. After knocking up a tiny stick of Purple Haze boilie crumb and pulling the hooklink through it, I was good to go and the cast hit the spot with a crack. I did the same with the other rod, using the same approach, but this one was cast to a hard spot at 40 yards, just behind a bed of fresh weed that was full of invertebrates. I carefully allowed the Mirage fluorocarbon to settle for a few minutes before setting the bobbins and putting the kettle on, back in the game.

At 11pm the right-hand rod gave out a burst of beeps followed by a one-toner. I knew it was a good fish by the slow lunges as it came in and after a bit of a battle she slipped into the net. Putting on the head torch I could see it was a mirror and my initial thought was she was 40lb-plus. I checked the hook hold... it's fair to say she wasn't coming off! It was a fish known as Spotty and the Reubens settled on 38½lb. I had a few pictures before letting her on her way to make someone else happy one day.

I repositioned the rod on the spot and climbed back into bed. I couldn't believe my luck when the other rod sprang to life with a scaly stocky of 17lb, which was very welcome.

Nothing else showed, apart from the occasional tench slapping the surface. As morning arrived I thought I was in for a chance, but they'd moved yet again. I decided to call it a day, but before I left I crushed up half of the bait I had left to prebait a margin spot I wanted to get going.

During the week I managed to get back down and noticed that the bay I'd prebaited was devoid of anglers and there were fish in the area again. After sorting out the rods I checked out the margin spot, but due to a big southerly the previous day the pussy willow (i.e. white fluff) had gathered like a thick blanket covering the spot. I got out some oily glugged pop-ups and threw five on the fluff to make it part slightly. It worked a treat, but all I saw was tench so I decided to concentrate on open water spots, knowing we were due for a bit of rain.

The first night was quiet, but thanks to the rain the fluff over my spot was gone in the morning. I carefully inched through the dense undergrowth and spotted four tench and an upper thirty sitting over the spot. It was clear that the tench were spawning as one came flying over the spot upside-down, discharging eggs and spooking the chunky mirror, which must have been waiting to feed on the eggs.

With this in mind I put in 5kg of boilies and bits over the spot, then left the tench to do their thing



and headed off up the other end of the Lake in search of the elusive carp. All was quiet...

The forecast during the following week was for prime conditions that looked good for the bay so I raced to get there, hoping to get in it. On arrival the wind wasn't doing much, but knowing it was coming I trickled more bait over the spot and did a night up the other end after seeing a few grass carp on the surface – usually they're not alone!

That night was very still and as morning arrived I upped sticks and headed down to the bay to find that the prevailing wind had blown a band of weed across the area. After a couple of drags with a small spod I managed to make a break in it, and then as the wind moved it further along, I was finally able to set my traps.

Having to fire the lead right under a bush without tangling the rig, I decided to use a 30lb Mirage hooklink as its stiffness would help push the bait away from the lead. The Purple Haze pop-up was mounted on a D formed on a size 6 Gardner Covert Incizor hook, with a piece of Critical Mass putty pushed inside the hookbait so it just sat over the hook. The final touch was to use a piece of fake corn as a visual, as I wanted to see if it was presented correctly over the spot.

After two sneaky casts it was in there. Laying the rod on the deck with a loose clutch, I grabbed a handful of freebies and shot around to check how and where the hookbait had settled. It was bang

on! I placed the free bait at the back of the hookbait, hoping it would be one of the first to get picked up – what a mission!

As they say one rod in the right spot is better than 10 in the wrong. After shooting back around, I decided to have a brew before sticking the second rod out. I'd noticed my hook point was dulled on the retrieve in the last swim so I sat there giving it a touch up, and the rod was away! It felt a reasonable fish, but due to the weed that had drifted in to my right, I was convinced it may be dragging some with it. After a couple of powerful lunges, it charged up and down the margin, peeling line off the tight clutch. Eventually, under steady pressure it slid in the net.

I took a look, smiling like a kid as I realised it was a forty. The hard work had paid off. After a few minutes sorting the scales, etc., a couple of anglers arrived to witness the weighing. The Reubens stopped at 46¼lb. A call to the bailiff confirmed the big fish's identity as Fingers. After thanking her and letting her on her way, I slowly got both the rods out again, hoping for another one.

However, the weather deteriorated as the session went on and the chance of another was looking slim. At 10 o'clock the following morning I set off for home earlier than expected, yet all the while looking forward to venturing back for another go. Fingers crossed, the carp gods will keep looking after me for the rest of the season.

