

GET TO THE POINT WITH HOOKS

Which types work best with certain baits and hooklinks? Gardner's LEWIS READ explains all...

THE manner in which we carp anglers scrutinise and ultimately choose the hooks that we use is a far more complex process than in other branches of angling.

This added level of scrutiny is necessary due to certain key factors that are pertinent to the 'bare hook' style of fishing that dominates our branch of the sport, as well as the physiology of the carp's fleshy mouth.

Critical aspects to consider are the sharpness and shape of the hook's point, the hook's inherent strength, the size and shape of the pattern (including the angle of the eye) and even the hook's colour!

Size matters

With so many choices at your disposal, how do you decide which is best suited to the angling scenario you're facing? Where on Earth do you start?

Well, to my mind, the first step is to relate the basic shape and size of the hook to the size and type of hookbait you're going to be using, taking into account both the hookbait's inherent buoyancy and the style of rig you are constructing.

Too big a hook could easily restrict the movement of the hookbait, while too small a hook could potentially limit the hooking potential of the rig.

Of course, we can easily adapt the rig to work with a bigger hook by adding a bit of buoyancy into the equation, in which case you're balancing the impact a big hook has on the bait by countering the weight of the hook. There are many benefits to using balanced (slightly buoyant) hookbaits, but that is probably for a different article. Suffice to say at this point, bigger hooks tend to offer greater hooking potential and secure hookholds:

Patterns and angles

When it comes to deciding which specific pattern of hook to use, you need to get your head around a few factors which, together, affect a hook's suitability for a certain rig.

The fundamental physical

specifications of a hook are its shape, the length and quality of its hookpoint, the gauge of wire, the shape of the bend and the length of the shank. After all that, there is also the size and angle of the eye to consider. It's these specifics that make a hook capable of being adapted for a variety of rigs.

The most basic and fundamental mechanism in terms of hooking is defined by the 'angle of draw' – that is to say, the direction that the force of pull is coming from in relation to the angle of the hookpoint.

Ideally, this needs to work in concert with the shape of the hook to keep the offset of this angle (in relation to the eye) as narrow as possible. This ensures the best possible penetration by getting the point to go in easily as



possible. As soon as you stick a straight point on a wide-gape, general purpose hook, you're asking for trouble because the angle is increased and the hook's basic function is undermined because the hook has a propensity to open out, unless it's constructed using an overly heavy-gauge wire or the rig design compensates for this (horrific) angle.

The way a beaked-point hook works is similar in concept, but you need to consider the angle that the hookpoint faces as well as the direction of draw. This is why beaked points are better suited to wide gape patterns, such as the Covert Dark Wide Gape Talon Tip, as the point can still be facing towards the eye, despite having a relatively

short shank. It virtually rotates the hook into position as it penetrates, and this is what makes beaked points excellent in barbless hook scenarios, as they create a 'pincer' type grip as they go in.

We're largely relying on a super sharp hook to prick the fish as soon as it inhales the hookbait, and a really sharp point ensures the hook can embed itself down fully with minimal resistance.

"As soon as you stick a straight point on a wide-gape, general purpose hook, you're asking for trouble"

ABOVE: Straight-pointed hooks are great all-rounders, and work with just about any type of hookbait.

Sharpness is key

You'll often read all about top anglers being fastidious with hookpoints – and this is for very good reason. All the fine-tuning mentioned so far to get the best penetration and mechanical efficiency goes straight out of the window if your hookpoint is impaired.

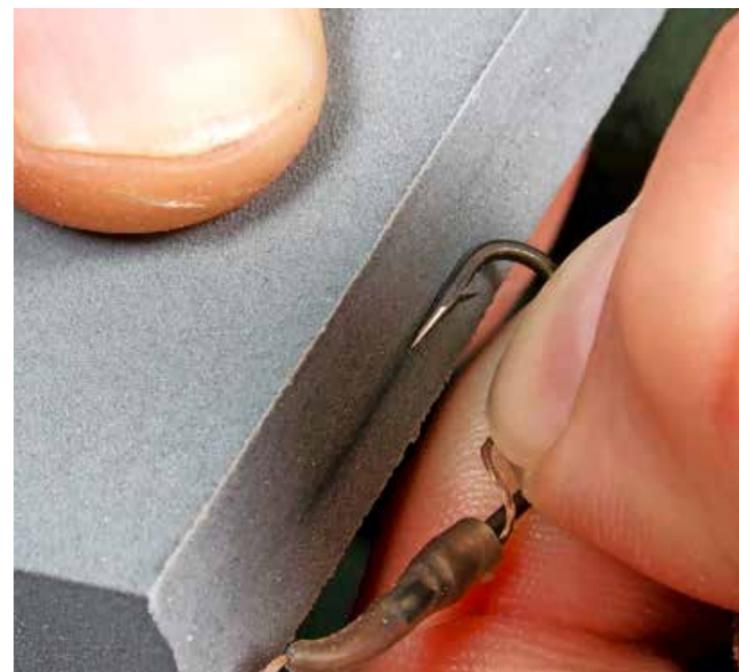
The capacity for a fish to sample and get away with ejecting a hookbait that's attached to a barely-sharp hook, compared to a razor-sharp hook, cannot be overstated. It's common sense, but an area still often overlooked by some anglers, despite the current trend for sharpening hooks.

It was for this reason alone that we initiated the Covert Dark upgrade to our hooks, as the new points offer a longer, more gradual taper and an exquisitely sharp point that offers the best possible performance.

If you find yourself on a tight timeline, perhaps because you're on a short session or a quick overnighter, you can always touch your hooks up. There are loads of tools available and practice certainly makes perfect, but a 'nearly' sharp hook can be brought back up to scratch using one of the hook-sharpening tools available on the market. One such product, the Point Doctor, is essentially a rubberised abrasive block that polishes off a fine layer of hook plating or metal, making touching up hooks a simple and easy process. They are not designed to take

FAR LEFT: Beaked points work well on wide-gape hooks because the point faces towards the eye, despite the short shank.

LEFT: Polishing off a fine layer of hook plating or metal makes touching up hooks simple.





'meat' off the hook, and if you need something like that then a pillar file like the ones sold by JAG are about the best you can get from a tackle shop. These two types of sharpening product both have a place in any carper's tackle box.

The eyes have it

How we anglers utilise the potential of any hook is where the whole topic explodes into the world of rig design, encompassing things like hooklink material, length, bait attachment, bait type and lead arrangements. We could write tens of thousands of words on these subjects, but with space limited, for now let's look at the other principal concern when choosing a hook, and that's the shape of the eye.

Some hooks can be made to work with almost any rig material and hookbait attachment method. For instance, the Incizor is a great all-round pattern that will work with anything from a super-stiff material, right the way through to a supple braid thanks to its straight eye.

All you need to do if you want the hook to react more aggressively with a braid or stripped 'skin' hooklink is add a hook aligner or shrink tube kicker that elongates the shank and creates an in-turned angle that mechanically forces the hook to turn so the point drops to take hold low in the scissors or the bottom lip. This gives you lovely, firm hookholds and ultimately means that you land more fish.

Other hooks, like the Mugga pattern, feature inturned eyes and therefore turn aggressively

"Some hooks can be made to work with any rig material"



LEFT: Adding a 'kicker' to a hook with an inturned eye puts the pivot point further back in the fish's mouth...

RIGHT: ...adding one to a straight-eyed pattern, such as an Incizor, will make it turn more aggressively.

BELOW: A 43lb mirror that fell to a Ronnie Rig featuring a Mugga hook and a balanced bait.

without the addition of a 'kicker', though by adding one of these you can put the pivot point of the hook further into the fish's mouth, and gain distinct advantages in terms of hookholds, particularly with balanced bottom baits.

Hooks with out-turned eyes are quite specialist compared to other patterns, and these are normally used with monofilament hooklink materials. The knotless or whipping-style knots used with these materials means the angle that the line comes out the inside of the eye is controlled in such a manner that it promotes positive hooking. The hook gape isn't closed down by the hooklink, and the point is kept in a very 'effective' position.

If you combine this style of hook with a 'D' hookbait mounting arrangement you end up with a fast-reacting hooking mechanism, as the components work in concert with one another – and this is the fundamental point.

So, when deciding what hook to use the key is to try to understand the way that the key components – your hook and hooklink – can be made to work together to create the presentation that you need to fish effectively in any angling scenario. Get this bit right and your catch rate will soar... I promise!

