

GIVE 'EM A GOOD KICKING!

Line-aligners, kickers, hook extensions... those little bits of tubing have many monikers, but do they all do the same job and when's the best time to use each type?

LEWIS READ provides the answers



“The bonus benefit of kickers is that they effectively enlarge the hook, and this is particularly useful if you’re targeting really big carp”



CONSTANTLY changing fashions surround our terminal tackle set-ups.

That, allied with the huge variety of components and materials available, can sometimes muddy our understanding of how rigs work and undermine our perception of some amazingly affective ‘tried and tested’ hooking arrangements.

Too much choice can be a bad thing in this respect, yet I suppose it’s only natural for us ‘super-keen carpers’ to assume that any new rigs somehow supersede the old.

The problem with this, however, is that anglers sometimes end up using certain arrangements without really understanding why they are doing so, and without really understanding the true mechanical benefits, and perhaps shortfalls, of the set-up they are creating.

A typical example of this is the use of ‘kickers’, ‘hook extensions’ and ‘line aligners’ to create a more aggressive,

faster-reacting hook set-up. The mechanical benefits of these simple, bulletproof rig tweaks is beyond doubt, yet many anglers use them without knowing which one is best for which type of hook, bait or fishing scenario.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

Let’s try to throw some light on the matter. In the simplest terms, adding

ABOVE: A 43lb 12oz mirror, taken on a rig sporting an angled shrink tube hook extension.

BELOW: Match the shape and length of the ‘kicker’ to the pattern of hook being used.

a length of shrink tubing to extend the shank of a hook moves the fulcrum (axis of turning) further away from the hookpoint. You can think of this in terms of pushing the weight of the hook further forward, but the actual mechanics are a little more complex than that and, more importantly, can be tweaked and adjusted to offer an incredible improvement in terms of

hookholds over the standard (yet effective) knotless knot arrangement.

If you add in either a small ‘kick’ (by forming an angle in the shrink tube as it cools) or, better still, use a baiting needle to thread the hooklink through the tubing (an old-school ‘line aligner’), then you create a more precise fixed exit point that can be perfectly aligned to the hookpoint, thereby ensuring that the final rig works far better.

Even though this is a tiny detail, the alignment of the hookpoint with the exit point of the hooklink makes a tremendous difference.

Another key benefit of these various ways of elongating the hookshank is that they reduce the critical ‘angle of attack’, in the process improving the initial phase of pricking and penetration by improving the alignment point to the direction the hookpoint wants to penetrate. In other words, the point can go into the carp’s mouth ‘straighter’, which means it requires less force to take a good hold and bed down to the bend.



Then there’s the bonus benefit of kickers effectively enlarging the hook. This is particularly useful if you’re targeting really big carp here in the UK or in mainland Europe. There’s no doubt that increasing the scale of the hook helps create a more effective hooking mechanism when targeting monster carp, and by using a kicker you can create the same effect without adding the weight of all that extra high carbon steel of a much bigger hook.

CHOICES, CHOICES...

So, that’s the ‘physics’ out of the way, now let’s get down to the real nitty-gritty! The question is, how do you decide on the length and style of kicker to use with certain set-ups? And what factors dictate how you incorporate one into your tried-and-tested rigs?

Well, the main factors to consider are the hooklink material being used, and the hook shape/pattern.

I’ve seen kickers work amazingly well with high breaking strain monofilaments, but the greatest benefit has always been when they are used with braided hooklinks. This is because the pivot point is allowed greater freedom and the hook is free to twist and turn. I’d recommend starting with braids and then experimenting

“The main factors to consider are the hooklink material and the hook pattern being used...”

ABOVE: Kickers are normally best suited to braided hooklink end-sections, but can be used with mono hooklinks as well.

BELOW: It’s very important not to go too severe with the angle of the tubing, for fear of ‘closing off’ the gape of the hook.

with monos once you have a feel for what’s ‘right’.

But what precisely is ‘right’? Well, essentially you want to create a hooking mechanism that reacts quickly and consistently takes hold whether you’re using the good old finger ‘flip test’ or the ‘drag across the palm’ method. It’s this consistency that is radically improved by adjusting and tuning the rig.

SHORT-KICKER WINNERS

Carp fishing hooks vary in so many ways, but the key features that you need to consider when deciding what type and length of hook shank extension to use are the angle of the eye and the general shape of the pattern.

First of all, it’s safe to say that most hooks can be used in conjunction with extensions and kickers, except maybe those with out-turned eyes.



Hooks with inturned eyes, like the Mugga and Wide Gape Talon Tip, are better combined with shorter extensions of up to 2cm in length.

Go any more 'radical' than that, and you run the risk of 'closing off' the gape of the hook.

That said, there's always room to experiment: tie some up and test them to see what you think works best.

There will always be a variation in how rigs work with different combinations of hooklink materials and even hook sizes, so sometimes you need to invest a bit of time into playing with your favourites to arrive at an end result that you're entirely happy with.

The popular 'mag aligner' rig is another example of a short hook shank extension, with the fake maggots or caster being used to create an old-school line aligner, and the hooklink exiting the underside of the rubber maggot.

Hooks with inturned eyes can be used with such set-ups, although be careful not to use a pattern with too marked an inturn at the eye, or you run the risk of closing off the gape, as mentioned above.

GOING LONGER...

Straight-eyed hook patterns, like the Covert Dark Incizor pattern – a fantastic all-rounder – can naturally accommodate a much longer kicker or hookshank extension without running the risk of closing off the gape.

These are ideal for getting a bit more



ABOVE: Kickers improve hookholds, so the carp don't fall off!

BELOW: When fishing with pop-ups, you can create the same 'flip' affect by using stiff hooklink materials, but in a far less conspicuous manner.

creative – perhaps adding an angle into the shrink tube extender to help create a positive directional flip that puts the hookpoint precisely and consistently down on to the bottom lip, thus creating stronger hookholds.

There's yet another option of 'kicker', and that's the ready-made versions you can buy, such as the Covert Hook Aligners. These can be a fantastic option in many ways, as they tend to be designed to work with most hooks, as the angle of the kicker has been specified at a versatile angle that works with most hooks.

Of course, they don't need steaming either, making them perfect for anglers

that are either terribly disorganised (like me, as I rarely seem to have spare rigs tied!) or for those carpers that want the improved rig performance to hand in a convenient form. Lovely!

BAIT SELECTION

I've seen hook shank extensions and kickers of various guises used successfully with pop-up hookbaits, but I only apply them to bottom bait rigs and balanced rigs myself.

My rationale is that I can easily create the same 'flip' affect with a pop-up by using different hooklink materials, such as the super stiff Trip Wire, but in a far less conspicuous manner.

Having a long hook shank extension suspended a few inches off bottom under the pop-up makes it highly visible, whereas with bottom baits the tubing is less obvious because it sits flush to the lakebed.

Once set, it is less likely to be affected by a feeding fish rolling or sucking and blowing as it feeds on our carefully-placed free offerings.

So, to summarise, kickers should essentially be viewed as a super-effective 'tweak' that is well worth having in your armoury. T

They're nothing new, for sure, but their mechanics have stood the test of time. Inevitably, one day you'll find a situation when rolling out this small rig adjustment will make a huge difference to your catches, and turn more pick-ups into carp on the bank. Just the ticket!

