

TACTICS | DAVE TAKES A PRESTIGE WARWICKSHIRE AVON MATCH WITH

THE £6,000 BARBEL (THAT'S OVER £461 A POUND)

DAVE HARRELL

UK'S NO1 RIVER ANGLER

In the late 1980s and early 1990s I enjoyed some major successes at the Evesham Angling Festival with a win in the John Smith's Champs, two Wychavon Championship wins and an individual win in the team competition.

Since that time I've managed several main list places, but the top spot has proved to be elusive.

In my defence though, I have to say that over the last few years my drawing hand has let me down every time and I don't mind admitting that I was beginning to think I might never win one of the days again. All those thoughts vanished last weekend when I became the 2012 Shakespeare Championship winner, courtesy of a 13lb 2oz barbel.

A lot of people have asked me since the win just what goes into the preparation for a big event like this one, so this week I'll give you an insight into how I got ready for the most prestigious river event in the calendar and how I won the £6,000 top prize.

The Evesham Festival is like no other weekend, and for me it's always been a special one.

I qualified for the Saturday final three years on the trot in the 1980s when it was known as the Courage Championship, and I remember standing in the draw queue with Ivan Marks, Kevin Ashurst, Ken Giles and a host of other top anglers and feeling totally in awe of the situation I was in.

The first final I fished was a nerve-racking affair and I remember playing a big chub for ages before netting it to a huge round of applause from the crowd that had gathered behind me. The adrenaline was running so high that my hands were shaking as tried to put the next maggot on! I'm pleased to report the same feeling was with me last weekend, despite all the years of experience I have gained since.

The Warwickshire Avon at Evesham has changed a lot over the years. It's much cleaner now and it runs very clear at times, which results in difficult fishing for most. As a result, you need to cater for every situation and I have never known a venue that needs so much varied kit.



Dave's winning
13lb 2oz barbel,
taken second cast.

For starters, there's a big variation on depth, which runs from as little as 4ft to as much as 14ft. That in itself requires pole rigs from around 0.4g up to 4g for running-through rigs.

Then there are the big-fish pole rigs and flat float rigs which are needed in much bigger sizes if the river is running fast after extra rain. These are set up on top-4 and top-5 sections so you need a fair amount of pole spares.

In addition to pole gear, you need a lot of different running-line rigs in the form of stick floats, bolos and waggler.

The only consolation for those who had decided not to use the controversial bait was that a qualifying weekend a couple of weeks before the final, with bloodworm allowed, had seen very few big weights of roach and a main list dominated by big fish.

Add to this the possibility of whip rigs for bleak plus pole feeder gear for if the river is up and you get some sort of

idea of what is required to fish at Evesham nowadays. A far cry from that first final I fished where everyone just put up a couple of float rods and maybe a feeder.

This year's Shakespeare final saw 70 anglers line up at the draw, and with all the England team present it was like a 'who's who' of modern-day match fishing. Bloodworm and joker was allowed, so these boys would surely take some beating if any of them got on a low-weight affair.

I went into the bag and pulled out peg 27, five swims below the town bridge, and instantly I fancied that I might do some damage off it. This area had produced a few barbel the previous month, and if the final turned out to be a low-weight affair, as I expected it to given the low and clear conditions, then one big fish might be enough.

I had all bases covered, but after surveying the swim for several minutes I decided on an out-an-out feeder and float attack. I had an empty swim below me that would allow me to run a waggler a fair way down, but my main attack would be for barbel.

In a big-money final like this one, I

always think the first requirement is a peg where you think, 'I have a chance', rather than the pegs I've been drawing far too regularly in recent years where you think, 'it's a no-hoper'!

I set up two 12ft Daiwa 12/13Q feeder rods, both at 12ft and both with 10lb (0.28mm) mainline and 6lb (0.22mm) hooklengths. On one rod I set up a medium open-end Nisa feeder with a hair rig hooklength tied to a size 14 Drennan Super Specialist Barbel hook for pellets. On the other I had a medium Kamasan Black Cap feeder with a size 16 Mustad Power Specialist hook for maggot fishing.

I also set up two 13ft Tournament Pro float rods, both with 4lb (0.18mm) mainlines. These both carried straight peacock waggler of 5BB and 3AAA, the latter set at full depth (5ft) and the former about a foot off bottom. Shotted was simple with just two No6 and a No8 down the line.

Hooks were Drennan Wide Gape patterns in sizes 20 up to 16 and

hooklengths from 0.12mm to 0.14mm. Bait for the day was four pints of bronze maggots, two of casters, half a kilo of worms, a bag of my favourite 4mm Bait-Tech Super Halibut pellets and a selection of the same in pre-drilled hook pellets from 8mm to 12mm. Groundbait was Bait-Tech Halibut Marine Method Mix.

I'd also mixed up about 10 litres of groundbait and soil for bloodworm and joker fishing and this comprised two bags of a new Bait-Tech roach mix I've been having a lot of success with recently, plus some fine heavy soil. One pint of joker plus a hook pack of bloodworm from Sam Wildsmith completed the bait list.

I suspected that most of the anglers

around me would be in with 10 or 12 big balls of groundbait and joker at the start. I just didn't fancy doing that, though, as I felt there was a very real possibility of scaring off any barbel that might be present. There were only a few pegs where I would have adopted this approach and this was certainly one of them.

The all-in sounded and the

bombardment began upstream and downstream of me. I just went in with the open-end feeder, packed with 4mm pellets and plugged with the halibut groundbait. Hookbait on the hair was two 8mm pellets.

It's easy to say this now, but most

match anglers will know what I mean when I say that sometimes you just get a feeling that what you are doing is right. That's exactly how I felt at that point in the match, but I wasn't quite expecting what came next to happen so quickly. I cast in again and the line tightened up against the flow. I remember thinking that it could be a long and patient wait when suddenly the tip pulled forward then bounced back as a fish hooked itself. I picked up the rod and found myself attached to something very large.

I played it as carefully as I could and gave it line whenever it wanted, as this was no race against the clock. I'd got at least four hours 50 minutes left, after all.

Eventually the fish tired and I managed to bring it to the net. It was then that I realised just how big it was! My biggest barbel to date had been 12lb 14oz, also from the Avon, and this one looked to be a similar size. What a start! Everyone cheered and clapped as the fish went into the net, accompanied by a big 'Wahoo' from me!

Word soon got around what had happened and I was obviously well in front with just a few minutes gone. The big dilemma for me now was what to do. I stayed on the feeder for a while but no more bites followed so

A massive crowd had built up to watch me weigh in and I was very relieved when the scalesman read out 13-2-0. The tiny fish I'd caught went 0-14-0, taking my total to 14lb.

So, 24 years after winning my first Evesham title, I've managed it again and I am absolutely delighted. I would have loved to do it with a bag of roach, but instead I had a personal best barbel to thank.

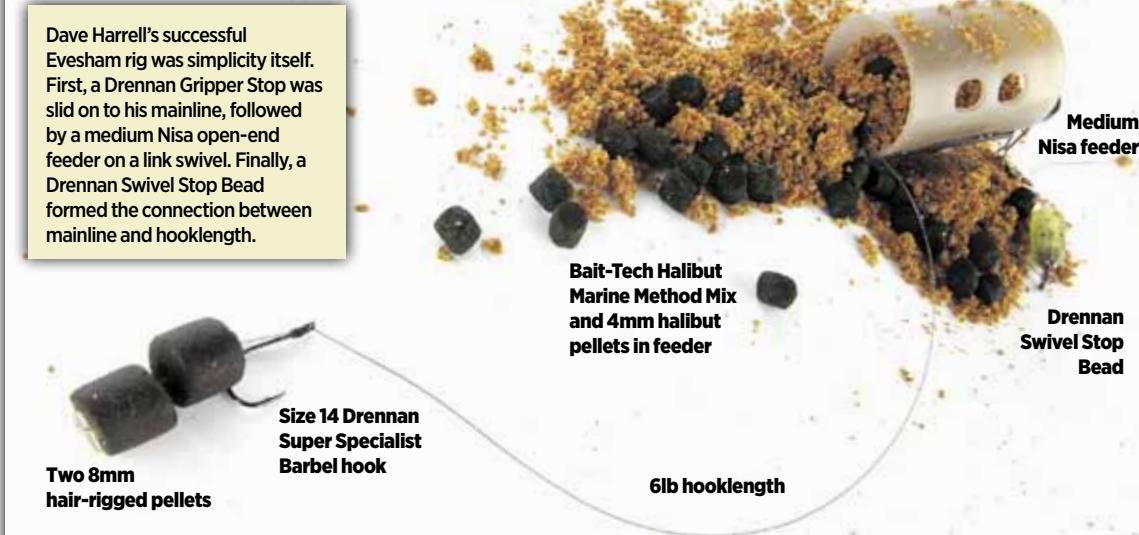
That fish was worth over £461 a pound, which definitely makes it the most valuable fish I have ever landed.

COACHING DAYS

Dave Harrell is recognised as one of the country's best-ever river anglers and has devoted his life to learning different skills on running water. He has fished for England at World and European level and now owns his own tackle company, Dave Harrell Angling. One-to-one or small group coaching days are available between June and March. For more details about these you can email Dave at: info@daveharrellangling.com and for details of the DH Angling product range go to: www.daveharrellangling.com

A HUGE FISH ON HIS SECOND CAST

DAVE'S WINNING RIG



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Dave flanked by runner-up Will Raison (right) and third-placed Gary Smith.