



While static baits presented with either a swimfeeder or a straight lead can account for many fish, I think a lot of people miss out on enjoyable river sport – and sometimes even better catches – by not learning how to floatfish properly.

I've had a love affair with floatfishing since I was a kid and I can honestly say that over the ensuing years I have never stopped learning.

Every time I fish on a river, whether it's in a competition or just for pleasure, I'm potentially faced with a different situation, and that for me is the big challenge.

Float and rig choice is determined by the conditions of the river itself, the species you are targeting, depth, how far out you need to fish, and the baits you plan to use.

Constantly changing levels and current speeds mean that the correct choice of floats and how you feed the swim is critical.

I often go for walks along my favourite rivers and see too many anglers using either the wrong pattern of float or the wrong size.

As a result they end up catching very little. By choosing the right rig before they started fishing they would have had a much better chance of catching.

Selecting the right float and rig can take practice, but with my help you can narrow it down quickly.

Standard wagglers
Super-sensitive with insert tips, these floats are best fished off bottom for smaller species like roach, dace and chublets. Straight wagglers, with their thicker tips, allow you to trip your hookbait along the bottom on medium depth, slower paced rivers.

Bolo floats
These are created in Italy for fishing Bolognese style with rods as long as 6m on huge, deep rivers, and I use them when there's a bit of extra water on venues like the Severn and Wye. These are perfect when I want to hold my rig and bait back in the flow to keep it in the swim longer. The shaped shoulder on the float helps to stop them riding up when you put the brakes on the rig.

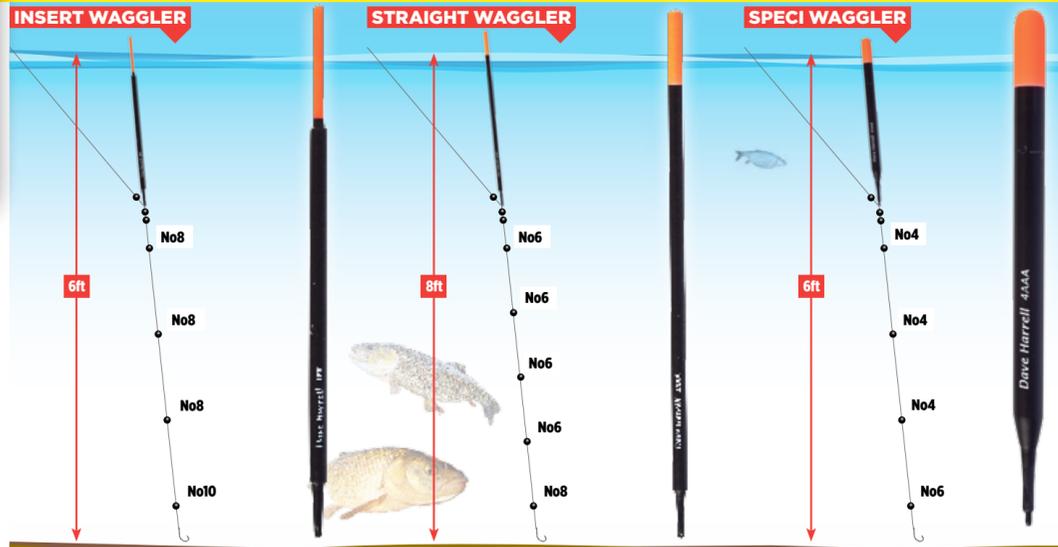
Stick floats
There are many types of stick float and they differ not only in size and shape, but what they're made from too. And it's this construction which determines how they can work for you and the type of conditions they can conquer. Floats with rounder 'dome' tops tend to be best in faster, shallow water where the extra-thick tops stop them being dragged under when fishing overdepth. They're also highly visible when you need to fish at range. Slimmer tipped floats obviously offer much more sensitivity.

Speci wagglers
Shallow, fast flowing waters normally require short, stumpy, fat-topped floats similar to the pellet waggler floats you use on stillwaters for carp. These are super-buoyant and won't be dragged under by the flow. I actually use two types – a standard speci waggler for all-round use on shallow fast stretches and a thicker one for even faster water, bigger fish, and heavier lines.

With a variety of float types and sizes you can conquer all rivers.

The body and stem material can be used to your advantage, and float stems made from a heavy wood known as lignum vitae are ideal for fishing further out, where the float helps with casting and control.

RIVER SPECIAL | HOW TO TIE THE BEST FLOAT

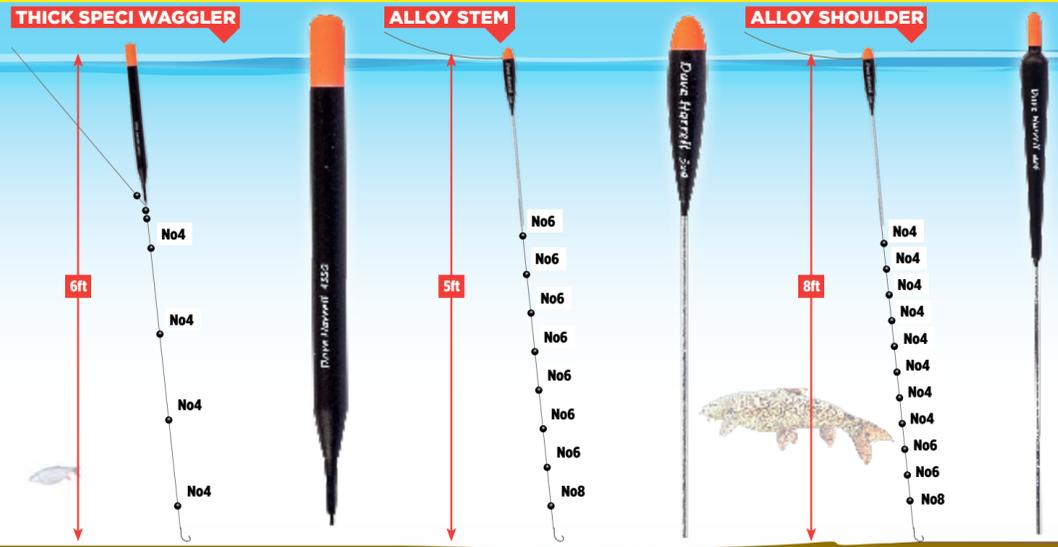


INSERT PEACOCK WAGGLER
Sizes: 3BB, 2AAA, 5BB, 3AAA, 4AAA, 5AAA
The ultra-light hollow insert lets light shine through and can be seen easily. Best used with very little shot down the line and fished just off bottom. Most of the shot cocks the float to the insert, with a few No8 or No10 shot spaced down. Always have the bottom shot 8ins-10ins from the hook.

STRAIGHT PEACOCK WAGGLER
Sizes: 3BB, 2AAA, 5BB, 3AAA, 4AAA, 5AAA
A float with more buoyancy in the tip, for rivers or stillwaters. Use enough locking shot to cast the chosen distance. Down the line use a No8 or No6 shot for every 2ft of water, plus a No8 on the hooklength. For an 8ft swim use four No8 or four No6 shot plus a vital hooklength shot 10ins from the hook.

STANDARD SPECI WAGGLER
Sizes: 2AAA, 3AAA, 4AAA, 5AAA, 6AAA, 4SSG
All-balsa float for fast shallow rivers, or use as a pellet waggler on stillwaters. The small sizes are perfect for shallow, swift rivers while the longer floats can be used at distance in 10ft-12ft. I lock these on to the line with the bulk of the shot, then use a No4 shot for every 2ft of depth plus a No6 on the hooklength.

RIGS...WHICH FLOAT TO USE...THE RIGHT GEAR



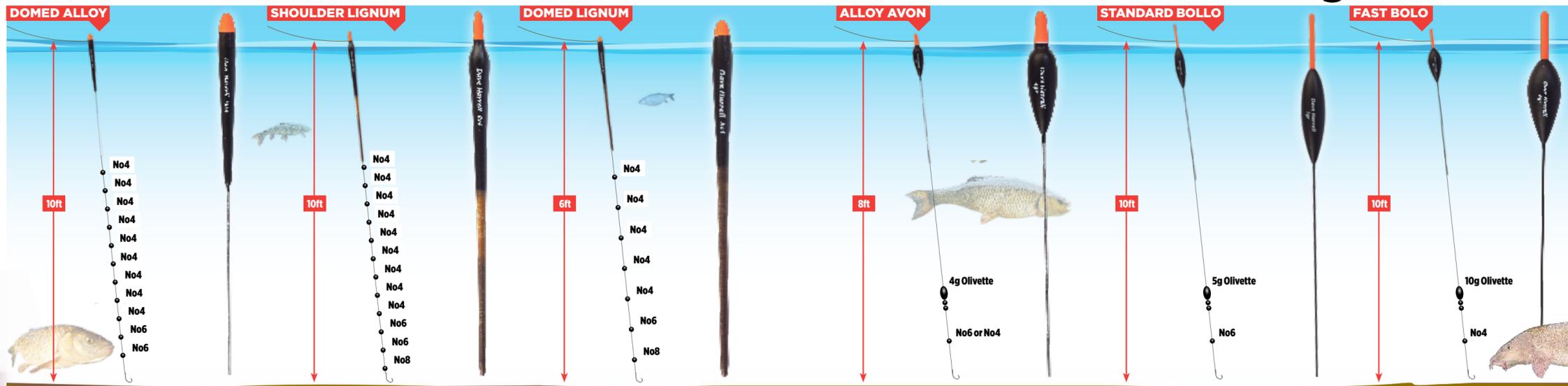
THICK SPECI WAGGLER
Sizes: 2SSG, 3SSG, 4SSG, 5SSG, 6SSG
I developed this 'beast' from sessions on shallow stretches of the Severn where I needed to use 6lb lines to tame barbel. I shot this waggler with a No4 down for every 2ft of water plus a No6 or a No4 on the hooklength. Interestingly, this design has also found favour with anglers fishing shallow for carp with pellets.

ALLOY STEM SHALLOW WATER STICK
Sizes: 4No4, 5No4, 6No4, 7No4, 8No4
This range of short top and bottom floats is perfect for fast, shallow water where buoyancy and visibility are important. Use with a bulk shot or strung-out shooting. The tip is visible a long way away and the buoyancy means you can fish with the bait tripping the riverbed without the float constantly dragging under.

ALLOY STEM SHOULDERED STICK
Sizes: 4No4, 6No4, 8No4, 10No4, 12No4, 14No4
This range will cover many situations and depths. As a general rule use a No4 shot per foot of water, so in a swim 8ft deep go for an 8No4 float. You don't need to use No4 shot, though, as these can be broken down into much smaller No8 and No6 shot to give you more flexibility with your shooting arrangement.

GET ON THE FLOAT!

Dave Harrell reveals his top rigs and tackle



ALLOY STEM DOME TOP STICK
Sizes: 4No4, 6No4, 8No4, 10No4, 12No4, 14No4, 16No4, 20No4, 25No4, 30No4
Some days a big stick float with strung-out shot works much better than a bulk-shotted float. In fast water I discovered that the rule of thumb of one No4 per foot of water changes to 2No4 or even 3No4, so for a 10ft-15ft deep swim I'd often opt for 25No4 or 30No4 floats.

LIGNUM STEM SHOULDERED TOP STICK
Sizes: 4No4, 6No4, 8No4, 10No4, 12No4, 14No4
If you need a fairly sensitive float tip but also need to fish a fair way out, these lignum vitae-based floats are all you need. They're for medium flowing water at depths of up to 16ft. I use them with a strung-out shooting pattern of equally spread No4s with a No6 just above the hooklength and a No8 on it.

LIGNUM STEM DOME TOP STICK
Sizes: 4No4, 6No4, 8No4, 10No4, 12No4, 14No4
These floats take over where the shouldered patterns leave off and work well in fast water where you need to fish a long way out. The bulbous tips are easy to see at distance, 30m or more downstream of your position. I recommend a strung-out arrangement of No4s with a No6 on the hooklength.

ALLOY STEM AVON
Sizes: 2g, 3g, 4g, 5g, 6g
These are for fishing with a bulk rig 2ft-3ft from the hook and one or two droppers, either No4 or No6 shot, below. The tip diameter of this float is critical and you will notice that the diameters get thicker as the floats get bigger. As a general guide, use 1g for every 2ft of water. A fast flowing 8ft deep swim would therefore need a 4g float.

CARBON STEM STANDARD BOLO
Sizes: 3g, 4g, 5g, 6g
These floats are designed for use in deep water, usually with a long rod. My general rule of thumb for this sort of fishing is to use 1g for every two or three feet of water. A swim that is around 12ft deep should therefore be tackled with a 4g to 6g float. The hollow tips of these floats allow for easy visibility at distance.

CARBON STEM FAST WATER BOLO
Sizes: 4g, 6g, 8g, 10g
This takes over where the standard Bolo leaves off. The thicker hollow bristle and its teardrop body shape allow it to be held back and controlled in strong currents. It works well at depths from 6ft-15ft and should be fished with a bulk rig of either shot or an olivette. I normally use a No4 or No1 dropper shot.

RIVER FLOAT TACKLE

How to pick the perfect river rod
As with any sort of fishing you need the right rods to get the best results. You don't need to spend a fortune to get kitted out, as there are some excellent value-for-money float rods now available. When it comes to rod selection, unlike carp and fly fishing, there is no industry standard for floatfishing rods. This can often lead to a lot of confusion, as one company's 'power' rod is nothing like the next company's offering in terms of strength. I tend to work in three categories, which basically cover every situation I am ever likely to encounter on flowing water.

Light action
My light float rods are all Daiwa Tournament Pro models – a 13ft, a 14ft and a 13ft/15ft combination rod. I use these with 0.14mm to 0.16mm reel lines and hooklengths from 0.08mm to 0.14mm – ideal for roach, dace and chub.

Medium power
For chub and medium-sized barbel I step up to Daiwa Connoisseur 13P rods which are perfectly balanced to 0.18mm to 0.20mm reel lines and hooklengths from 0.16mm to 0.18mm.

Heavy action
If big barbel are the target I use 0.22mm to 0.25mm reel lines and hooklengths from 0.20mm to 0.22mm, matched with my 'extra power' rods – Daiwa's Connoisseur 13XP and 14XP.

Load your reels
As with rods, you are spoilt for choice these days when it comes to reels and there are plenty of good ones to choose from. I tend to keep things simple with just two Daiwa models. I use TDR2508 reels with lines from 0.14mm to 0.20mm and the bigger TDR3012 reels with lines from 0.22mm up to 0.25mm. For mainlines I use Ultima Power Plus for all my running line float work and have found it to be very reliable. For hooklengths I use Ultima Power Match.

Hook patterns depend on mainlines
Walk into any tackle shop and you'll be confronted by a huge array of hooks. Choosing the right ones for a given job isn't easy but I've narrowed my favourite patterns down to just a few. Drennan Carbon Match – Fine line floatfishing with lines from 0.08mm to 0.10mm. Drennan Red Maggot – Running line hooks with hooklengths from 0.10mm to 0.12mm. Drennan Wide Gape – Running line hooks with hooklengths from 0.12mm to 0.16mm. Kamasan Animal Spades – Running line hooks with hooklengths from 0.14mm to 0.20mm. Mustad Power Specialist – Running line spade end hooks with hooklengths from 0.22mm to 0.25mm.



Balance your tackle to get the best out of your river.