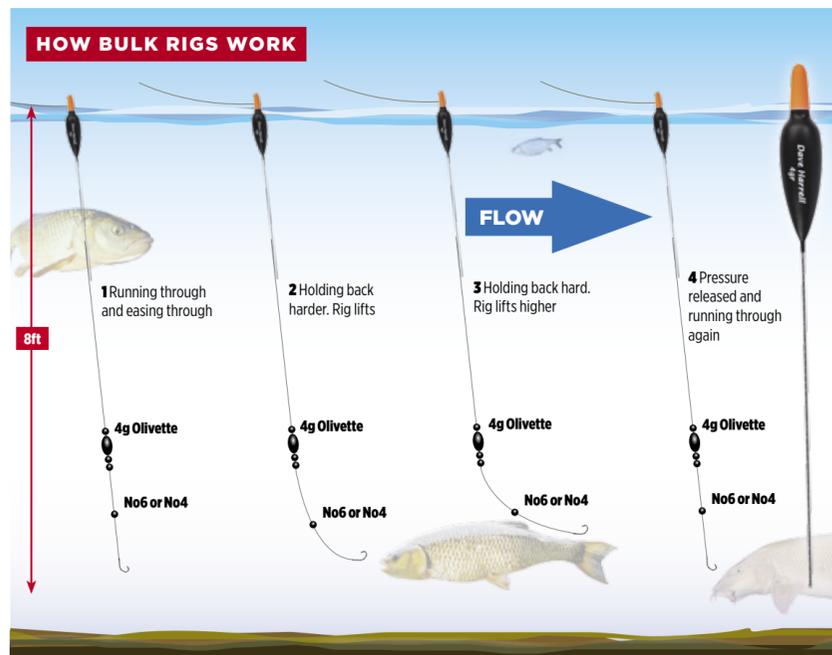


**TACTICS | MASTER OF THE STICK, DAVE EXPLAINS HOW TO SHOT AND**

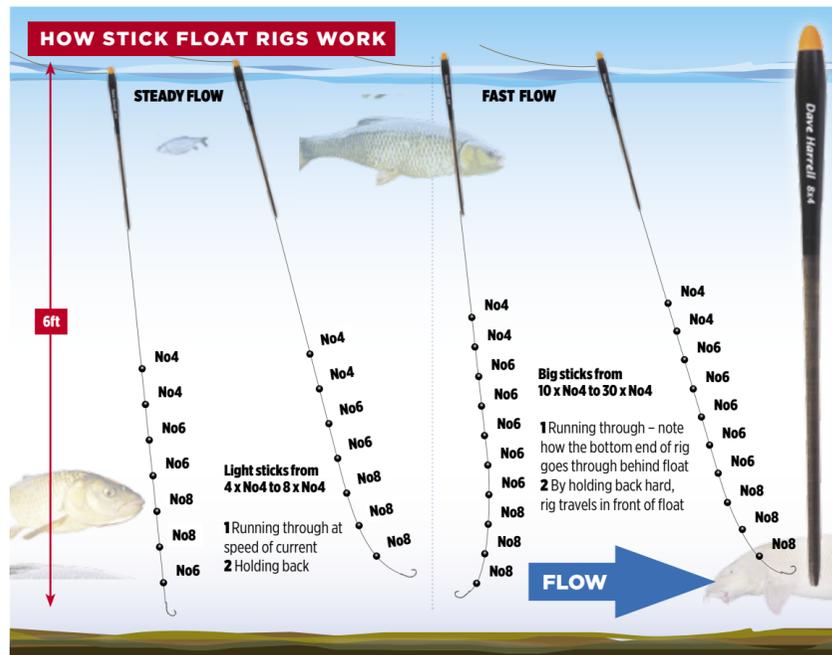
**WORK IT TO BEST EFFECT**

# CONTROL YOUR FLOATS

## How to bring your baits to life and catch more on rivers



**Buoyancy, visibility, sensitivity, distance and control will all determine what float I use**



**DAVE HARRELL**  
**UK'S NO1 RIVER ANGLER**

**Good float presentation is vital if you are going to catch the maximum number of fish from your swim. It's not always easy, but there are a lot of things you can do to make it happen.**

Over the course of a season I coach a lot of anglers on different rivers and often they ask me what is meant by 'holding back'. You might think it's just about slowing down the float, or even keeping it in check to try and get a bite, but there's much more to it than that.

**DIFFERENT FLOW SPEEDS**

Before we look at floats and rigs it's worth pointing out that flow rate on rivers isn't as fast at the bottom of the water column as it is on top. Whichever float you use it will travel through faster than the speed of the current if left to do its own thing. That, in turn, will lead to poor presentation and not many bites. Thankfully, there are many things we can do to improve this situation and sometimes present the bait even better than our loose offerings.

This week I'm going to take you through how top and bottom-attached floats work and what you can do to catch more fish with them.

**FLOAT SIZE CHOICES**

I'll look first at stick floats. These come in all shapes and sizes, but you have to choose the right size float both for the depth of water and the flow speed.

It's difficult to describe flow speed but I tend to place it in three categories - slow, medium and fast. My general guide for selecting stick float size is to plumb up with just a buoyant float and a heavy plummet or bomb. Then, for slow flows, I use one No4 shot per foot of depth. Let's say we've got 10ft of water on a slow river like the Warwickshire Avon. Here I would elect to use a 10 x No4 float with the loading split between No6 and No8 shots.

On a faster river like the Severn at winter level, that same depth might require a stick float twice as big. Here I would up the capacity to 20 x No4 and use strung-out No4 shot with a No6 on the hooklength.

A very fast river like the Wye or Severn with extra water on needs even bigger floats but that doesn't mean we always have to go for bulk-shotted rigs. There are days when big strung-out shot rigs work better than bulks. In the same depth, especially where roach and dace are the

quarry, I would often set up a strung-out stick float rig taking three times as much shot as the slow flow set-up. This is where my seriously big sticks taking 30 x No4 really come into play.

**BULK RIG**

For my bulk rig fishing I always use an olivette and a single dropper shot. My own design Alloy Stem Avon is the best shape I have ever used for this type of fishing and took a lot of development to get right, as the shoulder and the thickness of the tip are vital features.

The shoulder allows me to hold against the flow, and the tip needs to be big enough to see at distance. It's no use whatsoever having a thin tip that you can't see 30 yards downriver if that's the distance you need to fish to. That's why my floats have progressively thicker tips as you go through the sizes.

You'll also notice from the picture that the tips are tapered. This means you can make the float more sensitive if conditions allow you to dot it down. If, however, you are struggling to see it, you simply leave a bit of shot off and so leave more tip showing above the surface.

In medium-paced water I use a gram of weight for every 2ft to 3ft of water, but in a fast pace I sometimes increase that to as much as a gram for every foot, so for swims that are 9ft-10ft deep you might be using as little as 4g-5g or as much as 10g.

**TIP THICKNESS**

Whatever top and bottom float you choose to use, you must be able to see it. That might sound obvious but a float that may look nice in a tackle shop won't be much use when it's a long way downstream and you can't see it! Give some thought to the tops of the floats and what you need or want them to do. At times you'll need a thin, shouldered top, on other days a big buoyant domed top will work better.

To make the right choice, I balance the qualities of buoyancy, visibility, sensitivity, distance and control, and those five things will determine what float I use. Do I need it to be buoyant enough to suspend a big bait or drag line along the bottom without it being pulled under? Can I see it as far down the swim as I want to fish? Is it sensitive enough for the fish I'm targeting or what I hope to end up catching?

Can I cast far enough out with it without being on my limit? Can I control it against the flow? If the answer to all five of these questions is yes, you're on the right track. If one of them is a no, then you need a different float!



**WORK HARD, CATCH MORE**

Anglers on my coaching days will tell you that I work them quite hard when it comes to controlling a float. The reason is that it's the key to catching a lot of fish if you put in the effort to do it right.

It goes without saying that whatever reel you use, it needs to be filled to the lip of the spool with the correct thickness of line. For most top-and-bottom floats, that means somewhere from 2lb to 6lb.

It's important to always plumb up carefully, select the correct size float and then start at dead depth. Make a note of this on your rod rings so you can always return to it if you get a tangle and need to make a rig up again. You can even mark the depth with Tipp-Ex if it's easier for you to remember.

Obviously, you need to get your feeding right, and this is a big subject I'll be covering at a later date, but assuming you are doing it properly, the next thing you need to do is control the rig correctly.

**EASE IT!**

I have had a lot of success by easing the float through the swim. This is done by holding the rod in my right hand and feeding line off the spool of the reel with my left. This way I can slow it down or run it at the speed of the current and you often find that bites will come after you've held the float back a little, then let it go.

There are days when holding a float back harder will work better than the 'easing it through' routine and on these days I'd be using a bulk rig, in my case an olivette as the bulk and one shot, usually a No4 or No6, between that and the hook. Again, I'd control the line with my left hand.

**RUN IT!**

In an ideal world we'd always have an upstream wind to help us, but in this country that's not always the case. If it's the other way and blowing downstream, you're limited to how far out you can fish with a top and bottom float as your control will

be affected. The easiest way to catch a good bag of fish is on days when you just run a float through at the speed of the current and it keeps going under. Sadly, these days are few and far between, but there are ways we can induce bites.

**HOLD IT!**

On very difficult days it can pay to almost stop the float in its tracks, but to do this you need plenty of weight down below. This sort of control can be achieved with a centrepin reel, but the way I usually do it is by back-winding the float down the swim off the reel handle. It's a brilliant way to catch all fish in the colder months, but also a great way to catch barbel in the summer, so give it a try!

**MORE INFO**

Dave Harrell is recognised as one of the county'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. For details of the product range go to: [www.daveharrellangling.com](http://www.daveharrellangling.com)