

A Day with a World Champion

David Moore recalls a memorable day on Rutland Water last season and some lessons learnt.



I took up loch-style fly fishing through the encouragement of Invicta club members in 2008. Since then I have been gradually fishing more competitions and finding it great fun as well as improving my catches. In May last year I fished in the Bob Church Classic on Rutland Water, exactly 40 years after the fishery which I used to manage first opened and had a day to remember.

Regarding myself as a club angler who enjoys the competitive element of fly-fishing I was looking forward to fishing the 30th Bob Church Classic at Rutland Water with mixed feelings. On the one hand it's always a special event with a great atmosphere and a privilege to be invited to fish with more than 100 of the best loch-style anglers in Europe but I had to be realistic and brace myself for being in the 'also rans' at the weigh-in. This was my 4th year of entering this prestigious competition and last year I came 49th which was by far my best result but when I arrived at the lodge to see I was sharing a boat with ex-world champion Iain Barr I was bit stunned to say the least. 'Don't worry about it David'. I've won this the past three years on the trot so we are just out for a fun day' said Iain trying to re-assure me as we set up in the boat.

Looking around the pontoon there was the legendary Dave Shipman teamed up with Rutland expert Robbie Winram in the boat to my right and another local international star Leon Smith and Steve Cullen with Iain's brother Craig Barr among many famous faces to my left. I had fished Rutland Water a couple of times in the previous week including a 2nd place with 16 fish in our Invicta club match and I intended to start with a 5ft slow midge tip and two green diawl bachs and a coral & yellow FAB on the point. This had worked well for me here and in a hectic spell of five days on Bewl, Chew and Draycote over the past two weeks. Iain had a similar set up but more ambitious than I could handle, a much longer leader on a 10ft slow tip and a pink blob above his nymphs, all well-spaced apart. The match was being fished to a 4 kill plus 12 released.

The inevitable banter filled the air as the 60 boat fleet worked its way around the harbour wall and we were off with Iain on the engine. I thought we were going to

fish to the left of the harbour towards the sailing club but Iain knew he would be followed and moved us out to the right and then cut back to the left behind the fleet but we still had a couple of boats who followed us. We started in East Creek where I quickly got my first lesson. I had just set the drogue and untangled my leader from my rod tip when Iain was into his first fish. It came straight across the water into the net and Iain was out again before I got my flies wet. A couple of casts later and he was two up and I made my mistake of abandoning my plan and trying to copy Iain. I lengthened my leader and added a fourth fly with the inevitable result of tangles in trying to handle a set up beyond my capabilities in a swirling wind.

A bit over one hour gone and Iain had four fish while I struggled to get a pull. 'It's too slow' Iain announced, 'We need to finish with 16 by 1pm to stand a chance! Let's try Spud Bay and then Old Hall there were lots of fish there yesterday'. I pulled in the drogue and we were off while I was left thinking 'four in an hour seems pretty good to me'. This was Iain's only mistake of the day, two hours later we had worked our way down the north bank of the south arm with just two more to Iain's catch, which were now being released. It was obvious most rods were struggling as they hadn't reached their 4 fish before releasing. I tried a fast glass and a few tweaks but with only the odd follow and short pulls and nothing to the net before a quick drift off New Zealand point. Iain took a fish just past the Point before we finally opted for a return to East Creek where now we were now the only boat.

It was bright sunshine and clear water but Iain was adamant we needed to keep in very close to the bank and he was right. Although there was a stiff breeze we didn't use the drogue for fear of spooking the fish as we drifted quickly through 3-4 feet of water. Iain quickly reached his 8th fish before I changed back to my original set-up and eventually took my first fish although not without incident. We had compared our FABs which I thought were identical but Iain proclaimed, 'Yours is arse about face with the coral in front'. With my very next cast I finally netted a brownie, foul-hooked in the vent and the fly pattern was duly christened an AAF-FAB !

I was feeling much more confident now twiddling my nymphs very slowly in four feet of water close to the bank and starting to get pulls and fish regularly but losing a frustrating number. Iain was also hooking fish steadily now but also losing a few. Interestingly, every fish he took was on the FAB but all of my action was to green nymphs or buzzers and nothing to my FAB. It might have been my proximity to the bank and shallower water but I think it was Iain's faster retrieve.

With time ticking away Iain was first stuck on 12 and then 14 trout and we were both losing a lot as the fish got wary to the numerous boats that were joining us and annoyingly persisting in using drogues in the very shallow water. Then with 30 minutes to go and a change to crunchers, Iain caught two quick fish to reach 16 and I caught my 4th before we headed home to beat the rush. The match dinner was well-attended and it was good to sit next to Bob Church MBE who was on good form and we reminisced about our early days on Rutland Water. I had fully expected to be bottom rod but I wasn't the only one struggling and even a few had blanked so

when the results were announced there were two surprises. Iain had been beaten into 2nd place by Allan McLachlan, the only other rod to finish and I was a respectable 75th, rather better than expected! It was good to see Invicta's Joan Russell was top lady (again!) and in 35th place.

So what did I learn from the day? Firstly, I could see why Iain is so successful, he starts with a clear plan based on careful practice and sharing information with his team. He can handle any set-up and shoots a long, smooth line with a single false cast. Iain keeps a string of entertaining banter going which might annoy some boat-partners but it's all completely focussed on the day and what is happening around him. He varies the retrieve continually but always remembers what he was doing when he gets a take. When Iain hooks a fish he immediately keeps its head up and skids it across the water and into the net at a speed which belies his combination of an #8wt rod and 8lb leader. He only really played one out of his 16 fish all day and I don't think he had a serious tangle all day just changing a leader once when it was looking a bit damaged.

For myself I learnt not to fish beyond my capabilities, to fish with methods with which I feel confident and to make gradual changes to my method rather than chop and change. I was definitely over-excited and over-awed by the frantic pace at the beginning and foolishly trying to match Iain's pace. Had I kept calmer then I wouldn't have had so many tangles, wouldn't have got my line in the prop, wouldn't have lost my cap in the wind or snapped my drogue clamp by pulling too hard. That golden rule: 'Keep calm and keep your flies in the water!'

David Moore