

Words: Simon Scott. Photography: Simon Scott.

THE TANK TEST **PART 1**

Ever wondered which baits drive carp insane? Us too, so we called up Scotty and asked him to run some tests. This is part one of the results...



▲ The tank. From this...

▼ ...to this!





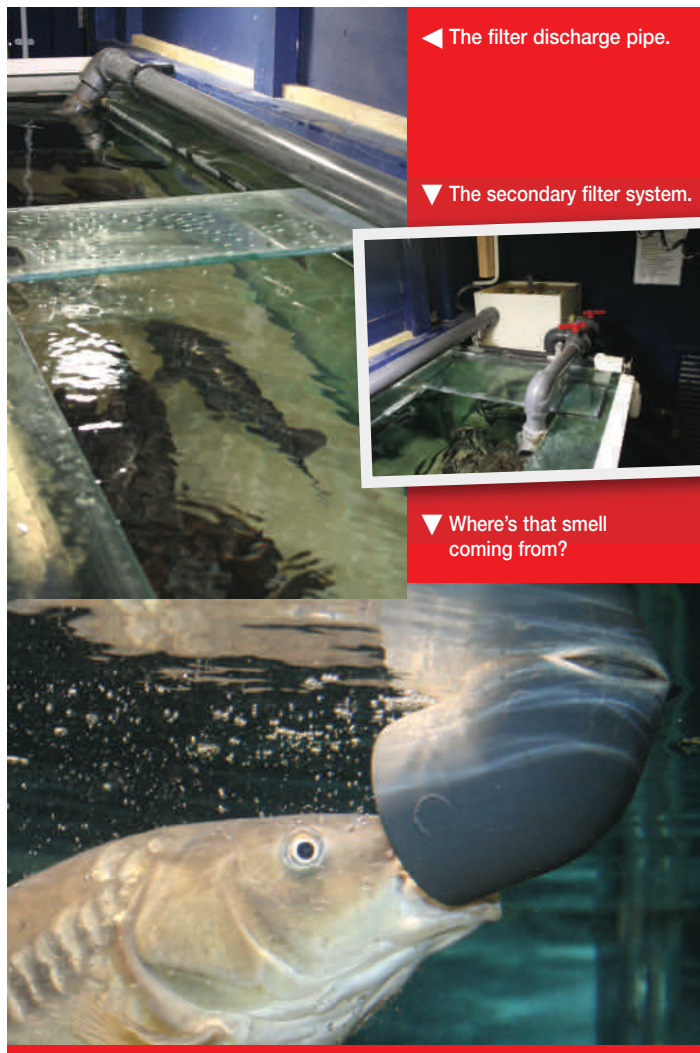
When Joe Wright originally contacted me and asked if I'd do a series on testing baits I must be honest, I was less than enthusiastic about the idea. Joe clearly thought he had come up with the best idea for an article ever. I, on the other hand, felt he had come up with a truly dodgy plan!

Although I have over the last twenty years done a huge number of tank and pond tests on a vast array of baits from numerous companies, these have always been for my own benefit. I have put loads of baits, flavours and oils into holding units and then sat back quietly to gauge the results. Such tests never fail to be fascinating and the results can sometimes be surprising, but they must always be taken with a pinch of salt.

They give a useful guideline about the attractiveness and palatability of a bait or ingredient, but they certainly don't guarantee results at the lake! The reverse is also true; some baits that have hardly evoked any response in tank or pond tests have scored really well at the lake! For me, a strongly positive tank or pond test is fantastic for the confidence. If I have watched carp in three or four tanks and a couple of ponds go completely potty after the introduction of a bait then I will use that bait with huge confidence. If I am confident in my bait then I can worry about the far more important part of my fishing – putting that bait in the right spot – LOCATION!

The problem with Joe Wright is that he's not very good at accepting the word "NO"! I think in Joe's world "NO" means have another go in a week or two. So about three months after the original phone call and several "NO's" down the line, my resolve slowly started to crumble and I eventually agreed that we could make an interesting series... anything to stop him calling me! Joe, you win again!

Over the next few months Joe has got plans to send me a wide range of boilies, flavours and dips to run through "The Tank Test" trials and I am really looking forward to seeing how the carp in the tank respond to some of the ingredients. There



are loads of excellent baits about now and I am sure that in the majority of cases the trials that I undertake will be really positive.

THE TRIAL FACILITIES

One of the biggest problems with trialling a bait on tame fish is that they eat anything and everything that is dropped into their tank! They assume that if a human is standing by their home they are about to be fed and anything that is dropped into the water is taken instantly... even stones!

To avoid making things over complicated I decided that I would only use one tank of fish for this series. The tank I felt best suited this experiment is a ten-foot glass aquarium, housed within the National Aquatics Training Centre at Sparsholt College.

The tank contains about 1,080 litres of water and has a normal temperature of approximately 22 degrees centigrade. The water within the tank is circulated with

a swimming pool pump, which also supplies the water flow to the filters. Filtration is split into two stages. Primary filtration and solids removal is undertaken using a sand pressure filter. Secondary and biological filtration is carried out using a fluidised bed of plastic media.

Water leaving the secondary filter passes out of the filtration chamber through a fine screen before running ten feet down a large pipe to the far end of the tank, where it discharges back into the aquarium. The water quality within the tank is routinely monitored each week and regular water changes prevent the build up of nitrate. The pH of the water within the aquarium commonly sits at slightly over 7.

The tank is stocked with eight carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), one common, one leather and five mirrors. The fish, which are of mixed origin, are all less than six years of age. Their weight ranges from approximately 2lbs (0.9kgs up to 7lbs (3.18kgs).

THE DISCLAIMER

The diet reaction trials that are carried out in this series are conducted in one of the large aquariums at Sparsholt College. However, the observations and recordings in the articles are the thoughts and views of myself and NOT of Sparsholt College. Sparsholt College in no way endorses or condones any of the baits that are trialled in this series.

The results that are gained are NOT scientifically sound and the experimental techniques are certainly open to criticism! The idea of this series is to have a bit of fun and hopefully along the way see which baits are really worth a try as the water warms up over the next few months. Remember that the fish in the trials have NEVER seen a hook and do not associate boilies and flavours with danger.



▲ A single crumbled 14mm boilie.

▼ Introducing a single crumbled 14mm bait.





▲ The Baitworks boilies tested in the article.

EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUE

For this series of articles I wanted to undertake two basic trials on each bait.

TRIAL ONE: How do fish react to the smell of the bait?

In this trial I want to observe how fish react to the smell of the bait when it is introduced to the system but not into their holding tank. To achieve this, a single 14mm boilie will be crumbled to dust and then introduced to the secondary filtration system. This will result in the smell of the boilie rapidly entering the water in the aquarium but will prevent any particles of food entering the tank. This is important because any response from the fish will be a scent stimulated feeding reaction and not the result of visual stimulation.

Although I have to introduce the crumbled boilie to the filter system by hand I will be watching for a response at the filter discharge point over ten feet away and therefore feel that any stimulation observed in the tank around the filter discharge pipe will be as a result of the scent of the bait rather than my presence behind the tank.



▲ Frantic response following the introduction of a single crumbled bait to the filter chamber.

For this experiment and in the past I have scored the reaction of the fish by the degree of stimulation or enthusiasm to feed observed following the introduction of a single crumbled 14mm bait.

The reaction of fish, after the introduction of a single crumbled boilie into the secondary filtration system, usually falls into one of the following categories:

- 1:** No reaction at all! The fish exhibit no signs of stimulation. No feeding response. No increase in respiratory rate... Errr back to the drawing board!
- 2:** Slight reaction. Fish observed mouthing (tasting) within the water column. The carp start mouthing sand around the bottom of the tank and exhibit slightly increased activity. Slight increase in respiratory rate.

3: Good reaction. Fish observed rapidly mouthing (tasting) within the water column. Some interest in the filter discharge point. The carp are clearly turned on by the scent. Fish actively searching for food around the tank bottom. Increased activity and respiratory rate.

4: Bingo! Frantic mouthing (tasting) of water column, particularly around filter discharge point, often followed by fish actually mouthing at the filter discharge point. The carp are highly stimulated by the scent in the water. Strong increase in activity and respiratory rate. Frantic feeding activity around bottom of the aquarium. Sand being dug up all over the place! Fish generally going BONKERS!

▼ BINGO! Sand going in all directions!



TRIAL TWO: Do fish actually eat the bait?

Over the last twenty years on several occasions I have trialled baits as outlined above and witnessed strongly positive reactions only to then observe carp actually rejecting the baits when they are given the opportunity to eat them. Clearly the smell of the bait is more attractive than the taste.

There are a number of reasons why carp may react in such a way but obviously as anglers, in the majority of cases, we want both a strong reaction to the smell and then an equally positive reaction while the bait is being chewed up by the fish.

So for Trial Two four 14mm baits will be broken up into quarters and then introduced into the tank. The baits will be broken in this way to enable the carp to eat the baits easily, 14mm baits being too large for fish of this size. The feeding response of the fish will then be gauged. Once again I will score the reaction of the carp by the degree of stimulation or enthusiasm to feed observed following the introduction of the bait.

The reaction of the fish usually falls into one of the following categories:

A: The carp are stimulated by the sight of the bait entering the water and pick up pieces upon introduction. The fish then

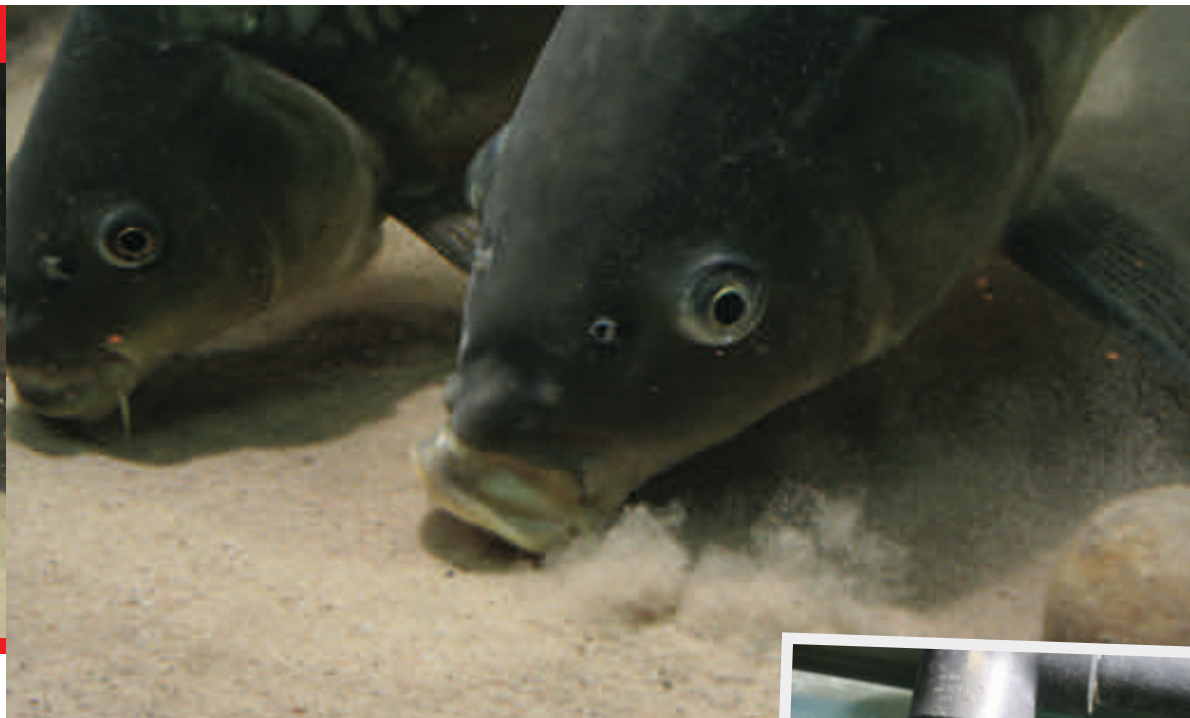


reject the bait and show little or no further interest! No increase in feeding activity after the initial visual stimulation.

B: The carp are stimulated by the sight of the bait entering the water and pick up pieces upon introduction. The fish are observed chewing the bait slowly and seem keen to eat the food items. There is some feeding activity around the tank. The carp seem to enjoy eating the bait.

C: Monster reaction! The carp go bonkers the moment the bait hits the water and appear frantic to eat the bait before one of their tank mates snaffles it! The carp are clearly turned on by the taste. Fish frantically searching for food around tank bottom. As soon as the carp have consumed one piece of bait they are straight on to the next piece. Sand going in all directions!

In order to make the results a little more valid I will carry out no more than two trials per day to allow the fish to settle between each. In the past I have found that trialling a single bait per day works well. In the morning I will carry out Trial One and then in the evening I will undertake Trial Two with the



▲ Hoovering!

same bait. In the interim the carp in the tank will receive their normal daily ration of pellets.

I know that from a scientific point of view the above trials are fundamentally flawed BUT please remember that I am trying to keep things simple! (I don't want to confuse the editor!)

THIS MONTH'S BAITS

To kick off this series, a very brave (or stupid!) man, called Mark Bryant from Bristol, who runs a company called Baitworks has volunteered to be the first to put his baits through the "The Tank Test". Good for you, Mark, someone had to go first and thanks for sending me the bait at such short notice!

Baitworks is a relatively new bait company that has been causing a bit of a stir in and around the southwest of England. I first heard about Mark Bryant and his Baitworks company in the early Autumn and since that time I have had several of my angling mates telling me that I had to try some of the bait Mark has been rolling. In particular, two good friends have caught on their respective waters right through the winter on Mark's gear.

"So what?" I hear you say and fair enough, there are loads of baits that have caught carp this

winter BUT one of the waters in question is Wraysbury 1 and having done a fair bit of time on that lake over the years I am well aware that any bait that scores on Wraysbury right through the winter is well worth further attention!

Baitworks claims to provide a range of boilies for the more discerning angler. Mark blends his own mixes and then hand rolls them to order. Mark told me that this ensures freshness and also quality.

I have had a couple of long conversations with Mark on the phone in the last couple of weeks and the thing that struck me most about Mark is that he is hugely enthusiastic and totally committed to producing baits that are spot on. Mark has explained that he undertakes a great deal of tank and pond tests before he eventually settles on a final mix and that he is confident that the boilies he produces are as he puts it "bang on"!

I have been carp fishing for a fair few years and to be honest I have heard so many claims like this that I tend to take them with a huge pinch of salt... lets see what the carp in the tank make of them...

Baitworks have submitted three boilies for trialling. In brief they are as follows:



▲ First class reaction!

MONSTER RED

An all season bait, based upon milk proteins, spices and feeding triggers from the koi industry.

ATLANTIC HEAT

Fish and marine extracts, fishmeals and an array of spices.

SHRIMP LIVER

Liver, shrimp and fishmeal, plus a hatful of other carpy attractors.

For a full break down on each of these baits look at the Baitworks website (address at end).

RESULTS...

The results below look a bit like a fix BUT that is exactly as it was. If all the baits I test in this series come up with results like these this series is going to be short lived and a bit repetitive!

MONSTER RED

ATLANTIC HEAT

SHRIMP LIVER

TRIAL ONE: How do fish react to the smell of the bait?

4: The carp reacted amazingly to this bait! One minute the carp were quietly going about their business, the next all hell is let loose! Fish trying to eat the filter discharge pipe. Sand everywhere – spot on – certainly a winner!

4: Another really strong reaction to this bait! Again the fish were highly stimulated. Carp pushing each other about, frantically tasting the water column. Fish desperately trying to find the source of the smell. The fish started digging in the sand within a minute of the bait being introduced to the system. Another winner!

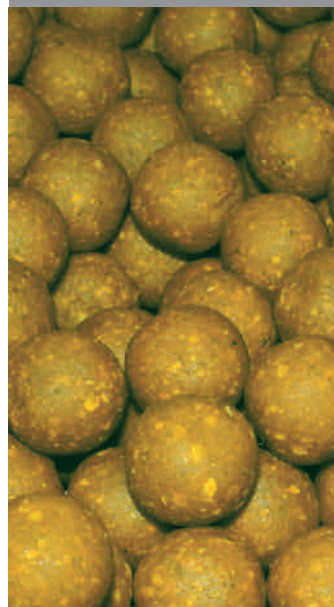
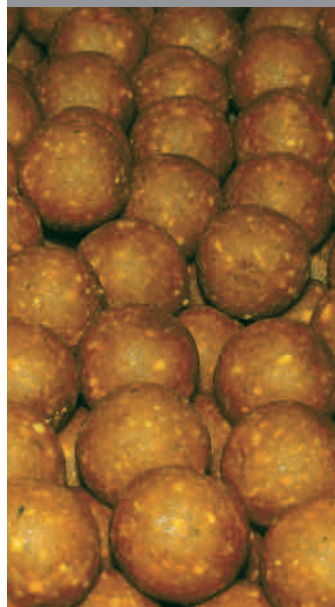
4: Another hit! Frantic mouthing (tasting) of the water around filter discharge point. Carp actually sticking their heads inside the discharge pipe! The carp were clearly highly stimulated by the scent in the water. Within a minute, frantic feeding activity around bottom of the aquarium. Sand being dug up all over the place!

TRIAL TWO: Do fish actually eat the bait?

C: Hugely positive result – the carp ate the bait with gusto! Having finished all the free offerings, the fish then continued to hunt for food items for over twenty minutes.

C: Hugely positive result – again the carp ate the bait like their lives depended upon it! Having finished all the free offerings the fish then continued to hunt for food items for more than twenty minutes.

C: Major snacks! – The carp wolfed the bait down and then continued to search for morsels on the floor of the tank for an extended period!



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although Mark told me over the phone that he undertakes a great deal of tank and pond tests to enable him to fine tune his products, I was hugely impressed with just how attractive his baits have proved to be. It would have been great to report in the result sections that one of the three baits was not as good as the others but it just wasn't that way – I would be hard pushed to pick a winner from the three Baitworks products.

Mark Bryant has clearly come up with three boilies that are as he describes them "BANG ON"! A brave man to go first in this series, BUT as they say "fortune favours the brave"! The boilies are obviously highly attractive to the fish trialed and then this initial attraction is further enhanced by the palatability of the bait. The carp in that tank have over the last couple of years seen a fair few boilies and their reaction to each of the Baitworks products was first class.

Since completing the trials on Mark's bait and having been greatly impressed with what I observed, I have had a chance to feed it to several other carp in tanks and ponds. The reaction that I witnessed in the tank at Sparsholt was certainly not a one off. Every carp that I have offered one of these boilies to has behaved in a similar way. They clearly love the bait!

I like to use a wide range of baits throughout the year but if I'm looking for a boilie with a difference I will certainly be giving Mark a ring. If you are thinking of trying something a bit different this summer I suggest you give Mark a ring (07723 060849) or check out his excellent website at: www.baitworks.co.uk

Simon Scott 

NEXT MONTH!

Scotty takes a look at Bait-Tech's range of products and compares their new Hot Hemp to their standard and Aniseed Hemp. He'll also tell you which of their liquid additives is best! Out 24th May!