

# HOW TO GO AFLOAT

Last month we explained the basics of getting into a boat, starting the engine and preparing yourself for a day's reservoir fishing. This month *Andrew Flitcroft* explains what to do in open water

## Give way to other traffic

Now you've organised your boat and have left the harbour, the world is your oyster. You have the space of open water in which to get to know how the boat will travel, including its speed (which is restricted), basic steering and handling. The first thing you'll think about is "Am I going to crash into anything?" Visible hazards, apart from static buoys, include other fishing boats, yachts, windsurfers and powered launches (rescue boats). On reservoirs, power should give way to sail, therefore it is your responsibility to avoid other craft.



## Be courteous

- Lower your revs when you pass another fishing boat and try to give it a berth of around 100m if possible.
- Do not drop your anchor in, motor up or cross another boat's drift.

## Watch out for the propeller

Make sure your fly-line, leader and flies are safely in the boat while the engine is running. Leave them in the water and the propeller will suck them in, chopping your fly-line into pieces and possibly your rod tip, too.

## Read the map

Reservoirs are vast pieces of water and can appear daunting. Most fishing lodges display a map and highlight the areas that are fishing well and the flies that are working. Don't ignore this advice. The wind will dictate where and in which direction you fish. The top of the wind (where it blows off the shore) will be more enjoyable, manageable and safer for the novice boat-angler.

## Find the right depth

Finding the depth at which the fish are feeding is more important than having the right fly, which is why experienced boat-fishers have lots of fly-lines. However, even if you only have a floating line you can use a long leader (sometimes 20 ft or longer) with a team of flies or patterns with plenty of weight (bead heads) to search the depths.

## To drift or anchor?

There are two key ways to fish from a boat. Drifting will allow you to cover more water and so find fish easier. The boat should drift broadside down the wind (with the wind on your back while sitting on the thwart or seat). This can take some getting used to as you will have to constantly retrieve your fly-line at the same speed or faster than the boat is drifting to keep in touch with your flies. This is easily done in a light to moderate breeze - in anything stronger you will need to employ a drogue (underwater

parachute) to slow the boat. A drogue will also stop the boat swinging from side to side and should keep your drift straight downwind. Some reservoirs supply drogues, but it is best to have your own.

Anchoring is easier - you will have no drift to contend with and you will have total control of the retrieve. However, you must wait for the fish to come to you. Because you have more time for the retrieve it will be easier to get your flies down to deep-lying fish. Avoid making noise - any clattering of the anchor, chain or rope will scare fish away.



## Sitting and casting

- Always remain seated when fishing. Standing is dangerous and fish are more likely to see you. They'll also be spooked if the boat rocks.
- Avoid sudden acceleration or turning. Much like driving a car, if you are in control of the engine you can anticipate boat movement, but your passenger (boat partner) will not and may lose balance.
- Do not sit too far back on your seat. The boat will become unbalanced - you could fall backwards. If your boat partner does the same this imbalance is even more

dangerous. If you're fighting to maintain balance, it will also make you (and your boat partner) tense, tired and uncomfortable.

- If you have a boat partner and you are both right-handed, the angler on the engine will be casting over his right shoulder through the middle of the boat. This means his flies will travel at speed past his partner's head. Both anglers should be acutely aware of this danger and wear a hat and protective glasses at all times. If one angler is left-handed, he should fish on the engine to eliminate the danger.

## Do it up!

Keep your life-jacket on at all times. If you take it off or undo it to have a pee or change clothing, remember to fasten it again. It is easy to forget!



## Don't get stumped

Look out for submerged obstructions. Fences may extend far out beneath the surface to help contain livestock when water levels drop. Be wary of submerged

tree-stumps, too. Grounding in shallow water is common, especially around points. The lie of the land will give clues to depth. Water will be shallow next to a low-lying, gently shelving bank.



## How to motor in a big wind

Most reservoirs will not let boats out in a dangerous wind. However, weather can change. If you end up in a big wave you will have to navigate the boat differently. Instead of motoring across big waves (side on), you must head upwind to such a position that you can then motor carefully back downwind with the wave. It may take longer to get to your desired position but it will be far safer.



## Approach the pontoon slowly

When returning to the harbour, slow down well before you reach the boat pontoon. As you approach it, cut the revs to a snail's pace. When the bow is within a few yards of the pontoon put the engine in reverse to slow the boat almost to a standstill. Ensure all rods, seats and anything else is out of harm's way and look out for other fishers and tackle in the moored boats.

## Take shelter from the storm

If you hear or see thunder and lightning, stop fishing immediately, stow rods flat across the seats and go ashore. Floating in the middle of a huge expanse of water in a storm is not a pleasant experience, especially given that carbon rods are superb conductors of electricity. I've seen a rod damaged in a fatal lightning strike - no matter how tempted you are to fish on, don't.

## Be ready for the end of a drift

If you are drifting towards a bank, leave time to get your flies and line (and drogue) into the boat and start the engine before you run aground.