

# XVY

## Hard Pellets Versus Soft Pellets

new series

Take two anglers – one with hard pellets and one with soft pellets – and put them side by side on a commercial fishery. Which one do YOU think will catch the most fish, and why?

**M**anor Farm Leisure, in Worcestershire, is absolutely stuffed with fish, which means that 100lb-plus bags are commonplace throughout the year – summer or winter. The rules at this place are refreshingly simple and relaxed, so everyone catches fish and no one angler dominates for long.

This means that practically anything can and will catch fish but, like most venues, pellets are by far the dominant bait.

Some time ago Andy Neal did a feature in sister title Match Fishing extolling the virtues of hard pellets throughout the year, both on the hook and as feed. In fact, he perfectly demonstrated their effectiveness on a half-frozen Ash Lake on this

**With weapons chosen it was time for battle to commence. May the best pellet win!**

same complex. Fast forward to the present day and we thought we'd bring him back to the same venue and offer him our first-ever 'X versus Y' challenge! Would Andy's hard-pellet attack outscore a more conventional soft-pellet approach?

Of course, we needed another angler to take him on and Andy's long-time travelling partner, Lee Werrett, was just the man. The rules were simple. Andy could

only feed and fish with hard pellets, while Lee could only feed and fish with soft pellets. With the weapons chosen and two even swims on Middle Lake set aside it was time for battle to commence. May the best pellet win! »»



Which is better – hair-rigged hard pellets or soft expander pellets?

### ANGLER FILE

#### ANDY NEAL

**Age:** 30

**Occupation:** Angling consultant

**Lives:** Abergavenny, South Wales

**Sponsors:** Frenzee, Bait-Tech

**Pole used:** Frenzee Precision 666 P1

### ANGLER FILE

#### LEE WERRETT

**Age:** 38

**Occupation:** Postman

**Lives:** Abergavenny, South Wales

**Sponsor:** Fox Match

**Pole used:** Maver Competition 301

### ANDY'S HARD-PELLET ATTACK

Fishing hard pellets today was certainly my favoured option. Having fished here before it is something I have done a lot of with great success. I definitely felt that, in the mild weather and with the amount of fish in this venue, hard pellets would be the winning method on the day.

Most anglers seem to feed hard 4mm or 6mm pellets yet fish a soft expander pellet over the top. My theory is that if the fish are used to crunching on hard feed pellets without

getting caught, why not give them something hard on the hook too? I personally think the bigger carp have wised up to

soft hooker pellets on some venues and that's why you seem to pick up bigger-than-average fish with a hair-rigged hard pellet. This definitely isn't unique to Manor Farm and I've used hard pellets with success on almost every venue I've been to, from deepest Cornwall right up to the north of England.

Just as in paste fishing, where I only ever make my hook bait out of the feed pellets I'm using, the same is true for feed and hook baits with my hard-pellet approach.

Today I have put 6mm and 4mm pellets in to begin with in two swims,

roughly six and 13 metres out. It didn't take long before I cut out the 4mms completely, though, as they didn't seem to make any difference plus I was happier trying to just feed and fish hard 6mms. The bigger-sized pellets seemed to keep the fish on the bottom better too. I have varied the feeding today from dump potting to catapulting to Kinder potting and throwing by hand.

In the end I found the best way to catch was to cup in just six to eight pellets each cast via a Frenzee Precision Particle pot

**"It's been a very interesting session comparing the two approaches."**

and then follow that with the rig by lowering it slowly down directly over the top. This way I foul hooked less fish and bites came almost immediately.

If I didn't get a bite I would simply lift the float out the water by a few inches and lower it down again.

Although the plan was to compare two bottom-feeding approaches there definitely seemed to be a few fish much higher off the bottom today. For a fair challenge we've both fished on the deck, but several times you could sense the fish drifting up in the water column, which resulted in a few foul-hooked fish at times. If this had been a match I would have definitely considered trying to catch them shallow at some point.

My main rig has been a 0.5g Frenzee FP100 on 0.16mm main line with a strong 0.16mm hooklength, as I never expected the fish to be too line shy. I fished a bulk of No8s and No10s around 12 inches from the hook with one No10 dropper just above the 6in hooklength. As the day has worn on I've fine-tuned this presentation by sliding down two more No10s from my main bulk to create a positive 'double-bulk' set-up. My hook has been an eyed size 16 Drennan Carp Match tied with a knotless knot and finished with a lasso. I prefer a sliding lasso to a latex band as it looks far neater, in my opinion.

I also set up a lighter rig just in case the fishing was more difficult but never needed to pick it up. This was a 0.3g slim, wire-stemmed FP500 on 0.14mm line. On both rigs I used doubled-up black No8 Preston Slip elastic and a pull bung.

As an experiment, in the last hour or so I tried upping the pellet size to

hard 8mms, both on the hook and as feed. For this I stepped up to a size 14 hook and was surprised how well the fish took it. In fact, the fish were a bigger overall stamp, too, averaging 3lb to 4lb apiece. Not only was I catching bigger fish with 8mm pellets but it also seemed to 'clean' the swim up. By that I mean the liners virtually stopped and the amount of bubbles and fizzing reduced too. It was like flicking a switch, and a lot of this must be down to the bigger pellets sinking faster.

I've ended up catching a few fish short at six metres but it seems the bulk of the fish were happier feeding further out at 13 metres. The water is definitely getting a bit clearer now the days are drawing in, and this must be why the fish preferred to be further out.

It's been a very interesting session comparing the two approaches and I'm pleased to have ended up with an estimated 120lb to 130lb final bag. Although we've both caught well throughout the day I've had noticeably bigger fish and more proper carp instead of F1s. That has definitely been the difference today and the hard pellets must have been the main reason for this.

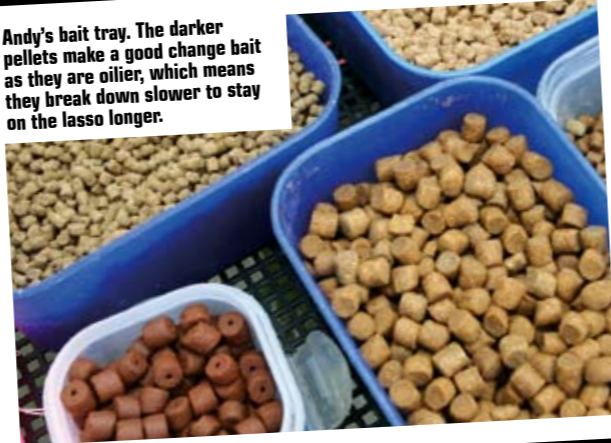
#### HARD PELLET PROS:

- Ready to use straight from the bag
- Makes a fish-attracting noise
- Can catch more than one fish on same hook bait
- Good for shallow fishing
- Leaves entire hook exposed
- Resilient bait
- Less attractive to nuisance fish
- Often catches bigger fish

#### HARD PELLET CONS:

- Increased chance of foul hooking
- Must be hair-rigged
- Hooklengths are fiddly to prepare
- Takes slightly longer to bait up

Andy's bait tray. The darker pellets make a good change bait as they are oilier, which means they break down slower to stay on the lasso longer.



### LEE'S SOFT-PELLET ATTACK

I've definitely drawn the short straw today, by the looks of it! My soft-pellet approach hasn't been as successful as Andy's hard pellets and I am sure a lot of this has got to do with the noise factor. By that I mean softened pellets don't make the fish-attracting rattle on the surface that you can achieve with dry pellets. I reckon this has been one big

**"I've had less bites, but my bite-to-hooked-fish ratio has been better."**

reason why I haven't been so successful in drawing and holding the bigger fish into the swim.

To overcome this I tried squeezing my softened 4mm pellets into small balls later in the session. These made an attractive plop on the surface when cupped in and definitely helped to some extent. This also helped to keep the fish on the bottom as the pellets could get a

lot nearer the deck before breaking up. Like Andy, though, I have still suffered from liners at times and, if anything, I've probably had even more fizzing.

I suppose the main difference between our catches is that I've had a much larger percentage of smaller F1s than Andy, whereas he's had better carp right up to 7lb, especially after increasing the size of his pellets. I was surprised not to get any nuisance skimmers today, but I've had a couple of tench take a liking to my soft 6mm hook bait.

I actually started really well on a hook-in-the-loop rig with a size 16 Fox Series 2 hook running inside a 3in loop. Above this loop I had two No8 shot with the main bulk at 12 inches. This was fished dead depth but only seemed to last about an hour before I had to switch to a more conventional set-up. I used a 0.5g Fox pattern for both rigs on 0.16mm Micro Plus+ line with 0.16mm hooklengths and doubled No8 elastic.

As the day has progressed I worked out the best way to feed was to cup in a squeezed ball of pellets half a metre short of the float and then lower the rig in beyond it. This definitely reduced the amount of liners and missed bites. »

A squeezed ball of soft pellets makes a nice plop and ensures the bait gets through the upper layers of water intact.



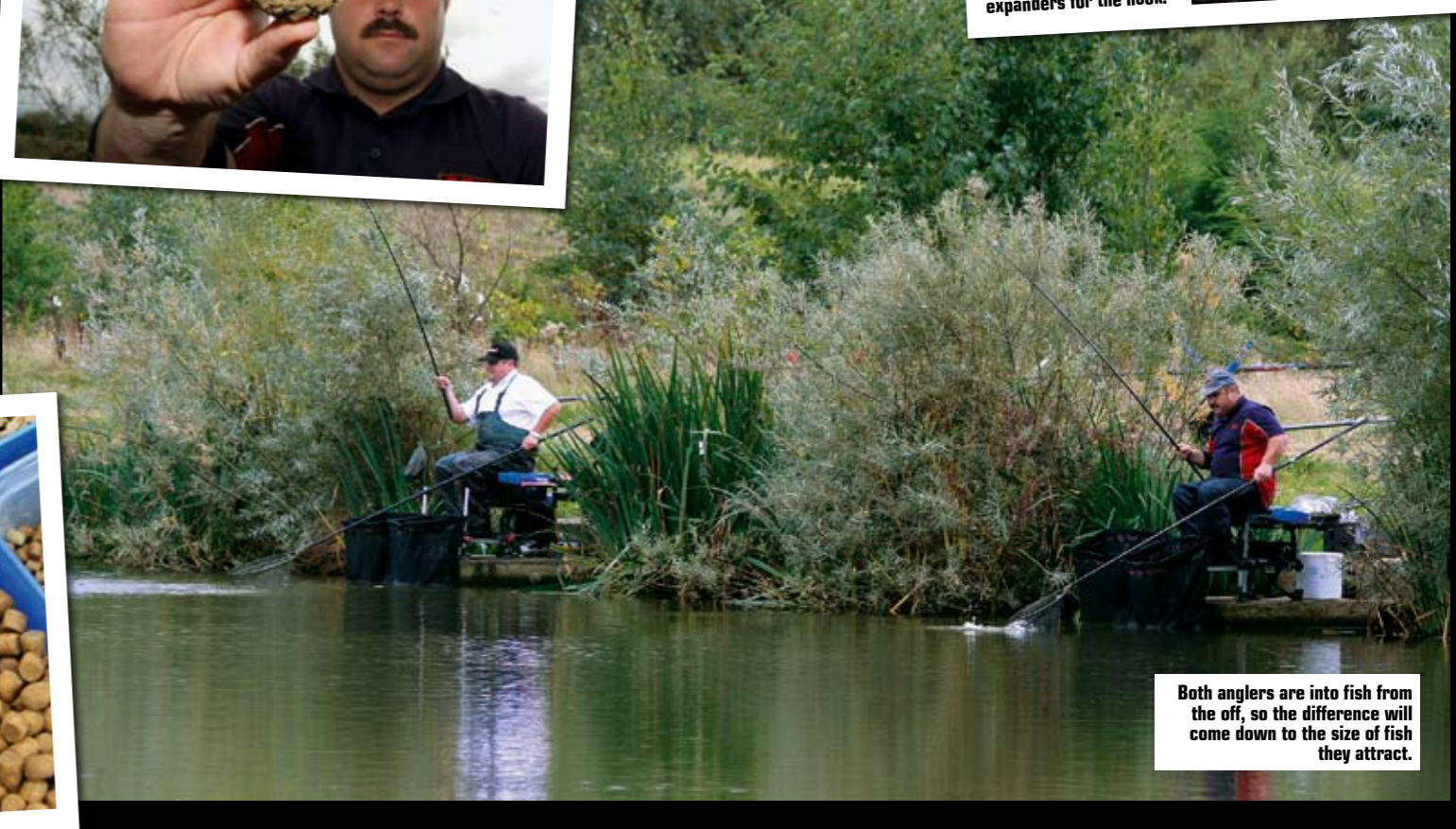
Lee has more F1s but struggles to attract as many proper carp like this.



Lee's bait tray – softened 4mm feed pellets and a choice of 4mm or 6mm expanders for the hook.




Doubled No8 Slip elastic copes with everything Andy hooks.



Both anglers are into fish from the off, so the difference will come down to the size of fish they attract.

Although my shotted pattern was similar to Andy's to begin with I ended up moving the bulk up to about 18 inches from the hook and laid on three to four inches. Fished this way I hardly missed a bite with a 6mm expander on the hook. Incidentally, I always give my soft hook baits a bit of a boost with CSL liquid to increase their attraction. I've probably had less bites overall but my bite-to-hooked-fish ratio has been much better. It was noticeable that when Andy pricked a fish he normally still had the hook bait on to lay back in, whereas I've had to rebait each time. On the other hand, though, I haven't foul-hooked anywhere near as many fish!

We have fished fairly similar lines and rigs most of the day, so it has certainly been interesting to see the difference the type of feed has made. My estimated 80lb catch of smaller fish has been a bit disappointing really, but I'd like to think that if the temperature had been even lower the difference between our weights would have been much closer.

The way Andy has fished today is something we have both had a lot of success with over the past couple of years. It definitely goes against the grain when everyone else recommends using soft expanders. It takes a bit more preparation in tying hooklengths with hair rigs but it's definitely worth the extra time. Fishing this way is largely a confidence thing, but once you try it I'm sure it will open your eyes. Quite often Andy and I will have both types of rigs set up for a session – a standard rig and a lasso rig – as it always pays to experiment. Today the lassoed pellet has been king! 

### SOFT PELLETS PROS:

- Less selective so catches everything
- Can be squeezed into a ball
- Easy to hook
- Faster to bait up
- Possible to conceal larger hook inside
- Easier for fish to eat
- Miss less bites
- Easy to add flavourings

### SOFT PELLETS CONS:

- Attracts nuisance fish
- Takes 10 to 30 minutes to prepare
- Need to rebait more often
- Not as effective for shallow fishing

### VENUE FILE

#### MANOR FARM LEISURE

**Location:** Anchor Lane, Harvington, Worcs, WR11 8PA

**Contact:** 01386 870039



Just part of our anglers' catches. Andy's 120lb-plus total to Lee's 80lb bag highlights why hard pellets should never be ignored!