

Perching Afloat

by Kevin Woodthorpe

Ever thought of owning your very own fishing boat? Yes perhaps. OK, ever wondered how to go about it? Well this is a brilliant and easy to follow article from Kevin Woodthorpe. My thanks for another wonderful contribution from one of our pioneering members.

A few years back I bought a small fibreglass boat off a friend for a foreign carp trip. It was about 7ft long and at a guess weighed about 5 tonnes! It done the job and on returning home I stuck it behind the shed and forgot about it until one of my angling buddies popped in for a coffee and a natter. On seeing the boat one of us (I can't remember who) came up with the idea of fishing the Thames for pike and perch from the boat.



I have been around boats since I was 10 or 11 years old. My dad owned boats ranging from RIBS (Rigid Inflatable Boats) up to cabin cruisers. Uncles of mine also had them and most of my summers as a child were spent on them in and around Poole Harbour swimming at Sandbanks and stalking the Mullet at Cobbs Quay Mariner. All this meant that I had a better understanding of the logistics required to get us afloat than my buddy Steve who just presumed we would turn up at the river, lob the boat in and sail off into the blue yonder!

For a start we would need some sort of propulsion. Petrol or electric? How would we transport the boat to and from the river? What about slipways and car parking? Do we need a license for a small boat? Who do we get one from if we do?

As you can see actually getting afloat starts to get a bit involved and when we set about it we didn't have anyone to turn to for advice. It would be trial and error all the way!

As I sit here now I am on my forth boat and my third engine and more importantly have acquired a bit of knowledge along the way. I am surprised there aren't more Perchfishers afloat because once you are up and running it isn't hard work and not that expensive, (I can fish the Thames from Letchlade to London for £50 a year!) and by going halves with a mate you can reduce the cost still further. I won't talk about tackle and rigs as really its no different than that used from the bank.

Obviously the most important piece of kit (though not necessarily the most expensive) is the boat. These can range from small fibreglass craft up to the latest aluminium type from America. The up side of fibreglass boats is that there are plenty of them about. The downside is the cheap ones you see advertised in the Free Ads etc at bargain prices tend to range from piles of junk to death traps. That said fibreglass is easy to repair using repair kits from *Halfords* and other motor accessory shops.

Back in the summer I repaired a small boat for a carp angling friend for next to no money including a smart new paint job. One other problem with fibreglass boats is that they are heavy compared to aluminium, especially the twin skin type. The first boat I had was twin skinned and used to weigh I guess 100kg. We used to lift this on and off the roof rack of my friends four-wheel drive every time we went out! The other problem with a heavy boat is increased fuel consumption if using a petrol outboard or battery drain if using an electric trolling motor. These problems aside these boats are a good way into angling afloat for a small amount of money.

The boat I have been using for the last three years is a 12ft aluminium boat made by *Quicksilver* and on the whole it's been brilliant. It is prone to denting on the sides if you aren't careful and you do have to cover the floor with something to keep the noise down. I put a couple of shelves in to keep things off the floor and fixed a couple of cleats at either end for tying up on, but apart from that its pretty much how it came.



I bought the boat from *Nauticalia Boats* at Shepperton who specialise in aluminium craft after seeing their advert in the *Angling Times*. It was priced up at about £1,000 but as it had a small dent in the side I managed to haggle £100 off. *Quicksilver* aren't the only manufacturer of aluminium craft *Sea Nymph* boats are similar and *Crestliner* boats look superb but I don't know if they have any agents in the UK.

Whatever type of boat you purchase it should be big enough to accommodate two people and your kit. There is nothing more dangerous than an overloaded boat. The reason I bought the 12ft version of my boat was that it fits in my garage easily on its trailer. At under 50kg it is easily launched and retrieved by one person as well.



The big expense with boating of any powered sort is obviously the engine. I don't have much experience of electric trolling motors but would say I wouldn't use one as my main source of propulsion on rivers such as the Thames as currents can be quite strong particularly in weir pools. Electric motors are superb for manoeuvring in and out of nooks and crannies without disturbing fish and also trolling which is what they're designed for, although I have to confess I don't know if trolling is allowed or not on the Thames.

With a small boat I would say the ideal engine size is 4-horse power. Most manufacturers make 2.5, 3.3 and 4hp outboard engines and obviously bigger. While the smallest two engines will power a small boat along no problem, (speed limits are about walking pace - no water skiing!) they don't have reverse gears. Reversing is done by turning the outboard 180 degrees and you don't get the twist throttle on the tiller (the bit you hold and steer with) instead the throttle is a lever on the front of the motor. Outboard motors today are very reliable compared to those made a few years ago.

Yamaha are probably the best but are about the most expensive, *Tobatsu* the cheapest but the manufacturers I would recommend are *Mariner* and *Mercury* (they are the same outboards, just different paint and stickers).

The next thing to decide is two stroke or four stroke. Two strokes are cheaper but adding oil to the fuel can be a pain and fuel economy is not as good by some margin. (The equivalent Four Stroke can be as much as 40% more economical). Four Stroke engines although dearer are much more user friendly but must be properly serviced at least once a year. One word of caution should you decide to buy a new outboard- SHOP AROUND! Prices vary dramatically between dealers and also through out the year. Dealers drop prices at the end of the year when the Boat Shows are on and also sell previous year models at discounted rates. The cheapest dealer I have found is *Ron Hale Marine* at Portsmouth (023 9273 2985). The Four Stroke 4hp *Mercury* I bought from them cost me £565. I later saw the same engine in another dealer for £695 so we're not talking small differences.



There is also the second hand market to consider but good outboards are very difficult to find cheap. What you will find is loads of corroded junk that will almost certainly let you down when you are out afloat!

When you have your boat you will need to decide how you are going to transport it to the river. If you have a big car or four wheel drive and always fish with a friend you can lift a small boat on and off a roof rack as me and a friend did when we started out but by far the best way is to get hold of a trailer. I swapped a couple of rods with a friend for mine but have spent about £100 on new wheels and suspension for it - not through choice, one of the old wheels fell off whilst going along! Again you can buy new but at a price, a new galvanised trailer for my boat is £500! A lot of money considering it will be left for long periods unattended in car parks even if it is locked up.

The best place I have found for trailer parts is *Tomsure* (023 80 33 99 80) in Southampton. If you know a welder you could build a trailer for not much more than £100 using parts supplied by *Tomsure*.

The next items to consider are ropes, oars, bailer, light board for trailer, ratchet straps to hold boat to trailer and a padlock and chain to lock up the trailer.

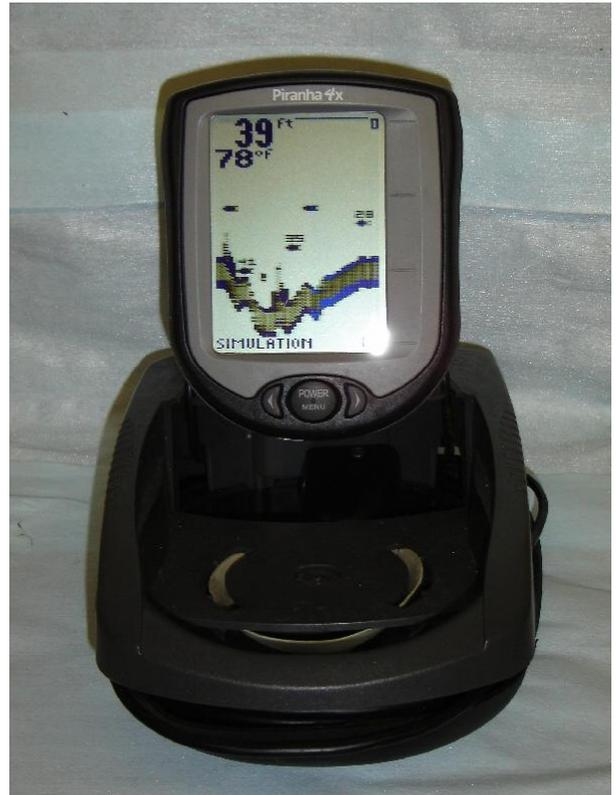
A vital piece of equipment is a life jacket. The automatic inflate types are the ones to have and if you know where to look they aren't expensive. I have one made by *Fox International* that cost about £90 and two made by a mail order company called *Compass* that cost £36 each. Both will fire automatically should the worst happen as well as having manual firing mechanisms.

At this moment in time I can't find a contact number for *Compass* but they are based in Devizes, Wilts. I do not recommend buoyancy jackets (the ones that look like body warmers), as these will not keep your head up should you knock yourself out as you fall in. It goes without saying - always wear a lifejacket. Rivers can be dangerous, as we all know, especially in winter. Only yesterday (3rd January 2005) a young rower drowned at Caversham near Reading on the Thames (one of the places I go to in my boat).



Another important piece of equipment is a fish finder, although I tend to think of them as feature finders. For a small craft a portable type is the one to have, the one I use is a *Piranha 4X* made by *Humminbird* and it hasn't let me down. I paid about £160 for it at *Poingdestres* in Southampton (023 8077 2958). Should you want a more basic version I think there is a 2X version for less money.

I tend to only look for depth and feature readings when I'm using it as they can be tricked by weed and other submerged objects that you may pass over. Try to remember to remove the transducer before you drag a boat up a slipway as they can get damaged, although spares can be purchased - I only mention this as it's something I forget all the time!



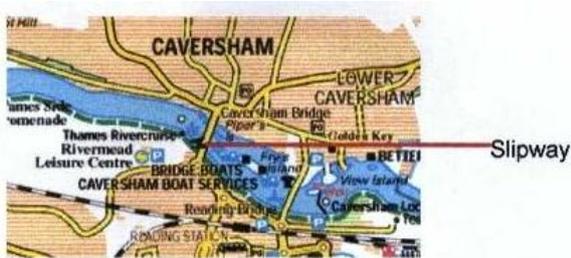
Once you have located a fishy looking spot you may wish to stay put, for this you will need two mud weights - one of the front and one of the back. When I first started on rivers I only had one and the boat used to constantly keep turning causing all sorts of problems with crossed lines etc. To make mud weights is very straightforward.

Fill a couple of buckets with ready mixed cement after first placing a wire loop made out of a piece of coat hanger in each one. The weights I have are about 14 inches across and 6 inches deep and seem to do the job OK. The only other thing I've done was to give each one a lick of paint although I'm not sure why! I have strong cord tied to the weights instead of rope as it's easier to store onboard.



Once you have assembled all of the kit your ready to launch - once you've registered with the Environment Agency. Your boat will need a name in which to be registered. If the name you choose is already in use you will need to follow it with a number so it pays to be imaginative, my boat is registered under the name *Reed Runner*.

You have to fill out the application showing what size the boat is, whether it has an engine, cabin etc. Small boats like the one I have cost about £50 a year to use on the Thames, which isn't bad value at all when you think how much water this gives you. As long as you don't moor on private land you can fish anywhere, don't let anyone tell you different! I expect you can get a license on the internet but I got my first one at the E.A. office at Caversham, since then I get a form sent in the post. Licenses run from January to December and are half price from September I think.



Believe it or not getting the boat ready to go is the easy bit! The real fun starts when you try to find places to launch your new toy. Thankfully with the internet you can find slipways on the E.A. website though be warned not all slipways are marked and worse some are marked that don't exist! There is a booklet called *The Good Launch Guide* which although mainly shows coastal slipways does show a few on the Thames. The best bit of advice I can give with regards to slipways is always do a reccy first as its not just the slipway your looking for but somewhere to park the car and trailer. Don't give up there are some real jewels out there on fabulous stretches of river if you know where to look.

Well I think I've covered everything to get you afloat, as you can see there's quite a bit to it if you want to do it properly and a fair amount of expense incurred but a small comfort is a good boat package will give loads of enjoyment and wont depreciate in value too much if you buy wisely and look after it. I realise not everyone lives as close to the Thames as I do, (I live about an hours tow away) but the same kit can obviously be used on other navigatable rivers such as the Severn and Norfolk Broads.

KEU W.