

At 60lb 8oz, this catfish was Bob's second sixty of the season.

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BELIEVE ME IT'S ONLY LUCK

BOB BANTICK



Come the spring and it's that time of year again when I'm rushing around like a blue arse fly trying to get me gear ready for my first trip of the year to France. I wrote a list of what I needed to take, it was that long I wrote it on a bog roll - I'm not joking there's every-thing on it including the kitchen sink. Where do you start? A trip to France is not cheap, first there's the cost of the ferry then petrol, fishing permit and food etc. the cost soon mounts up and before you know it the ten day trip has cost you more than £500 and that doesn't include the bits and pieces i.e. new line, hooks etc. that you just had to have, just in case - in case of what? Over the years I bought loads of odds and ends which I thought I needed, what a waste of money.

Back to catting, the French trip went well, the river Saone was at its summer level and the weather was great, I say great it was for 7 days but, like most good things it came to an end and in a most spectacular way in the shape of the worst electrical storm that I've ever seen, to put it mildly the wind got up and it pissed down. Poor old Shags got the shock of his life when a tree some fifty feet from him got struck by lightening, besides that we all ended up with a nice tan. Everybody except me caught their personal best, Simo took three cats, the biggest going over the magical ton mark at 119lb he also lost a bloody good fish when his 6/0 Eagle Wave snapped at the eye; it's not the first time this has happened. Shags also got in the act by

taking I think four to 77lb, even a couple of pie eating northern mates caught, both Rostie and Chris had cats to over 59lb while I on the other hand caught sweet f**k all. I suppose the reason I didn't catch was because I'm so bloody stubborn, I let my heart rule my head, being a part-time carper i.e. during the winter months, I draw the line when it comes to using carp as live bait. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against live baiting; I do it myself but I'm not a fish at any cost angler. When it comes to fishing some people say I'm so laid back I fall over. In the end I paid the price and blanked, do I care, do I hell, all I can say is roll on the next trip! And watch this space.

The Pits – 3rd May 2009

This year I decided to put all my effort into catching one of the biggies from my own water. My cat campaign got off to a slow start, the first three day session was a complete wash out, the only fish I managed to catch were 7 small pike, a bleeding pain in the butt especially when your fishing for cats, still I can't complain at least I was out in the fresh air taking in some early spring sunshine. Two weeks later I was back on the bank ready to have my rod bent. Again it was slow for the first couple of days with only small jacks coming to the net, but on the third day of the session things changed. The day started off very windy with showers, so most of the time was spent in me bivvy reading and listening to the radio. My good friend and bruv Graham the bailiff

popped over during the day to see how I was getting on and to see if I needed anything, I think really he just needed to get away for a while from doing the decorating; the poor old sods been working his nuts off just lately doing his daughters new house up. By the evening the weather changed and my confidence started to rise. Isn't it strange how the weather can affect the mood your in, it's a shame it doesn't have the same effect on the complete idiots that run our country, well that's another story I won't even go there co's it p****s me off. An hour before dark Quen and Jane came over with yet another meal for me and the dog and what a meal it was, they brought me enough food to feed an army I was like a pig in s**t putting it down me throat faster than you could say snap – bloody hell Jane, I'm on a diet. After about an hour we said our goodbyes and off they went. By then it was nearly dark so I quickly re-baited me rods, then got settled in for the night, after listening to the football on the radio I called it a day and climbed in me bag and it wasn't long before I was in the land of dreams. At around three in the morning I awoke to the sound of me alarm; a couple of bleeps then silence. Bloody hell I thought, not another bleeding pike, having taken many a pike during the hours of darkness. With that I rolled over and went back to sleep. Around forty minutes later, I had what can only be

described as a finicky take, at this I jumped out of me bag and was on the rod faster than a rat up a drain pipe, just as I reached the rod my bobbin shot up and slammed into the butt ring. On tightening the clutch, the cat took off like the 7.10 from Liverpool Street Station! Off it went down the pit taking yard after yard of line, in one weed bed then out of another, I just had to let her go and by this time I was in no doubt who was in charge of the situation; it wasn't me! Without warning, the fish changed directions and came charging back up the pit, I quickly regained line and I applied as much pressure as I dare. I must say at this point it never actually worries me if I lose a cat, don't get me wrong I don't like it but if it happens I put it down to experience and learn from it. Gently I eased the cat out of another weed bed and into open water, Steve me brother who was fishing the next swim came to my rescue and wound the rest of me rods in. Ten yards, then five, slowly she came towards the waiting net. Bloody hell it was cold, all I had on was a pair of boxers, not a pretty sight I must say, Steve reckons Chippendale could have knocked me up a better pair of legs, as for me belly he said it would look better on a butchers slab, he even had the cheek to call me a fat b*****d – he can talk! After a few heart stopping moments the cat was finally beaten, thank God for that, I was bloody cream crackered.

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Bob Bantick admires a beauty of 60lb 10oz.

Steve netted it at the first time of asking. I was quite surprised to see how lightly hooked she was, the 2/0 Eagle Wave was in the soft tissue of the top lip, I think a couple of minutes longer and the hook would have pulled. Steve reckoned she would go around 55lb but to our surprise and after taking the weight sling off we settled on 60lbs 2oz. What a corker, a light chestnut brown in colour and six feet long with the added bonus of being a P.B. As it was dark we decided to tunnel her until the morning. Do you think I could get back to sleep? The hell I could, I was up and down like a yo-yo drinking coffee after coffee and making sure the cat was ok. Two hours later and still buzzing I was ready for the photo shoot. To say tunnelling a cat is a bad move would be an understatement when it came to taking the photos it was like wrestling a giant eel and to make things worst my back gave way but thanks to Steve me brother and me old mucker Shags (Kevin Blears) we managed to get a couple of reasonable shots. After giving her a big sloppy kiss goodbye I took her to the edge of the swim held her in the water for a couple of minutes so she could recover then without warning she gave a almighty flick of her tail as to say "Up you," soaking me from head to foot – that's fishing for yer!

When I got home I checked the entire cat photos from the pit to see if I could recognise her. Well you could have knocked me down with a feather; it was the spawned out sixty that Kevin had last year at 65lb. I said to Kev and Steve I still reckon the pit could have three different sixties and perhaps one or two around 70 to 75lb. As a partner in the fishery I must admit I was a little bit disappointed with the weight of the cat, I expected her to be at least 66lb, otherwise I was over the moon with catching a sixty. Before I carry on, I would like to point out for all my good catches that I write about there's been many a blank, hours upon hours, month after month in the pursuit of my prey. You don't just buy a rod, reel and bait, cast out and catch a monster it's not that easy you have to work at it, first find a water that holds big cats, ask a few questions i.e. about where the cats have been coming out, what baits are being used then the most important thing is use the right tackle for the job, put in as many hours as possible, by putting in the time your catch rate will increase – believe me it works. It's like the old saying "The more you put in, the more you get out" If the gods are with you and luck is on your side you will catch, if not, don't give up, keep on

trying. Cat fishing is not rocket science, if you're still not clear about some things don't be afraid ask another angler for some advice, not all us anglers are tossers as some people would make us out to be. I can promise you now, in the end you will catch. Personally I think catching big fish is 85% luck, and the other 15% is being there at the right time in the right place, and having the right gear for the job there's not such thing as a wonder rig or bait, if there was I would be first in the queue to get them. It's just down to pure common sense.

The Pits – 12th July 2009

I had three pick-ups during this trip, the first fish I lost when the hook pulled! Then in the early hours of the following morning at around 1.45pm, I had a screamer of a take on my middle rod, on picking it up the line went slack, as I tightened up the cat then pulled the rod side ways nearly snatching it out of me hands, knocking my right hand rod off the alarm, the violence didn't stop there, time and time again the rod was slammed over. The cat stayed deep hugging and following every contour of the pit, then without warning she gave up the fight and came to the surface. A couple of minutes later she was in the net. In the meantime, two of the permit holders and good friends of mine Steve Southgate and John Judge arrived in my swim just in time for the weighing. The cat went on to bang the scales around to 65lb 8oz after taking off the sling we all settled on the weight of 60lb 8oz. I was going to take some pics but with only a couple of hours before daybreak I decided to tunnel her. Two hours later I phoned Quen and ask him if he wouldn't mind coming over to take some photos for me. When we got her out for the photo shoot she went mad, knocking me all over the place and covering me in so much slime and s**t I had to phone me brother Steve and ask him to bring me over a change of clothes.

Twenty four hours later it all kicked off again, this time the take came at around 11pm, just as I reached the rod, the alarm fell silent so I tightened up the line, put the rod back on the rest, turned around and headed towards the bivvy. I hadn't taken two steps when the alarm let out a high pitched sound, I grabbed the rod and I bent into the fish, off it went like a madman, every time I gained a few yards of line, the cat took more. This must have gone on for about five minutes. At this point I was feeling quite pleased with myself having kept the cat away from me other lines, well as you



Jo's first catfish –
a cracker of 18lb 8oz.

can guess, I spoke to bloody soon, over one rod then under the other what a bloody state but luckily for me I managed to untangle the lines. After a bullish fight that lasted around eight minutes I finally netted her. You should have seen my swim; it was like a war zone with rods all over the place. By the light of me head lamp I recognised the cat as being Kevin Blears' first fish from the pit back in 2007; a fish I always wanted to catch. After taking the sling off she went 61lb 10oz another p.b. I couldn't believe it TWO 60's in a session and 3 different 60lb cats so far this season! I couldn't sleep for the rest of the night, I just laid there in me bag scratching me nuts, drinking coffee and re-living every moment of the fight, I just can't get over the power of these great beasts, it's the best adrenaline rush I've had for a long time. I had to pinch me self to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Both fish fell to popped up 6 inch rudd live baits fished on a size 1 Eagle Wave hook, three foot off the bottom.

The Pits – 3rd August 2009

I was back on me own water with Jo the son of a good friend of mine, because of his dad's commitments I said I would

take him fishing for a few days. Jo at the age of 14 is a keen angler willing to learn and try anything; a well mannered lad by today's standards. We both decided to fish the same swim. Jo fished the right hand side while I took the left. On the first night I somehow managed to pull out of a good cat when it came charging towards me, I was bloody gutted, Jo on the other hand caught his first catfish, a cracking little kitten of 18lb 8oz. He said he was over the moon and loved the fight, after taking a few photos he was straight on the phone to his dad, he was like the cat that got the cream. On our last night of the session I was beginning to think that I might blank when at 11.30pm I had what can only be described as a 'one toner' when my middle rod tore off. On picking up the rod all hell broke loose, first the cat took one rod out then another and another by this time all me Neville's were singing in tune, it was a right bloody mess, at one point during the fight I was playing the cat on all three rods (because of the blanket weed it's impossible to back lead) – what a balls up! In the end, I cut the line on two rods, by this time the cat had gone round the side of the swim and was now

heading down the pit. I was praying the hook would hold, nine or ten minutes later I had gained a few more yards of line when suddenly to my horror some blanket weed got caught in the top eye of the rod, somehow I managed to clear it, although a couple of minutes later, just as I thought the battle was won, the line jammed again around the tip ring. At this point, the cat was rolling some 10 feet away and I thought I was goner lose her. What the hell I said it's s**t or bust, I placed the rod between me knees wrapped the bottom of me t-shirt and line around me hand and pulled. Three times I had the fish over the net and three times it got out, in the end I dropped the rod after failing miserably to unclog the eye and hand lined the cat over the net for the fourth time, lucky for me she had given up the fight and sunk to the bottom of the waiting mesh. On the mat the cat looked huge; to be truthful I struggled to get her over to the mat in the first place. Both Jo and I also had trouble trying to weigh her so we put her back in the net and pegged it to the side of the swim. I then phoned two of my friends, Jane and Quen and asked them if they wouldn't mind coming over and giving me a hand. Bless them; they were in bed when I phoned. Five minutes

later they were both in my swim. After zeroing, Quen slid the cat into the sling and on to the scales, where she banged them around to 72lb – what a fish! I still can't believe it, a new pit record and P.B. As far as I'm concerned this fishing game is better than sex (only because I'm not getting any at the moment) Quen took some photos for me, all came out blurred; I've kept one of the better ones. Poor old Quen was full of remorse I told him not to worry it was only a fish after all. He had only used my camera once before and that was in the day light, "I don't care" I said. It's all about the battle between man and beast and what a battle it was and I get a kick out of having me line pulled. In any case I'm sure I will catch it again. My brother Steve said when it comes to fishing I'm a lucky b*****d and you know what, I hope you don't think I'm being big headed but I'm beginning to think he's right!

I did manage another cat session before the cold weather set in and I ended up blanking, so now its time to get the paint brushes out and get on with the decorating. Looking back, I think I did bloody well this season, taking five cats, 48lb 12oz, being the smallest 3 different 60s and the pit record at 72lb. All I can say is roll on next spring.

At 72lb this cat was a new P.B. and lake record.

