

The S.S. (surface subsurface) Leech Rig

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Over the years I have found myself using leeches more and more, in an attempt to catch what must be one of the hardest fighting fish in European, and UK waters, the wels catfish (*Silurus glanis*). The problem hasn't been obtaining leeches for bait, but how to present them, via methods and rigs. Over the years most cat anglers have relied on the ever popular polyball and cocktail stick mini dumbbell, but to be honest I have never had any confidence in the rig or its application. I have used regular polyball dumbbell rigs, but that has restricted me to fishing leeches just on the surface, and I feel I have suffered with my catch rate as a result. What I needed was a rig that was versatile, in that it could be fished at any given depth, from off the lake bed to right on the surface. Three years ago, after searching around, for quite sometime I might add, I came across a company called Decathlon Sports, in Merry Hill West Midlands. They had a department that dealt with fishing tackle, not brilliant, but they had what I was looking for, a component called, clear rigid crystal rig tube, in both 2mm, and 4mm diameter, and each slotted together perfectly. The 2mm was flexible enough to bend under tension yet didn't fold or kink, and would also spring back when released. After buying several packs of each sized tubing, I set to work in my shed with my new found components, and after a bit of chopping and changing, I had devised a rig I thought just might work.

The next step was to try it out. A phone call was made to Shatterford Lakes, a local venue for me, and I booked myself on for 48 hour session on Eric's Pool, armed with my usual mountain of gear, food, bait and a new rig, I set off, full of anticipation. I arrived at my chosen peg and basically just got myself bivvied up, and settled, first job was to put three leeches on the new rig and test it in the margins. I dropped the rig complete with attached leeches in around 4ft of water and wound it down tight to the lead, and just watched how the rig performed, it worked a treat. The 2mm tubing bent over just enough to create an arced boom type effect, and pushed the leeches far enough away from the main line and rig, more than enough to stop the leeches latching onto anything. On closer observation I noticed the rig bounced slightly when the leeches started to swim in their eel-like manner, and the 2mm tubing would pull slightly over, and then spring back to its natural bent position, this made the rig react a bit like a yo-yo,

and helped impart even more movement to the bait. After seeing how it worked below water I gave out line and the rig rose to the surface, and once the polyball reached the surface layer, the rig still kept its shape and still reacted the same. I was over the moon, how could any sensible catfish refuse that I thought to myself.

So out went the rig, in around 15ft of water. Firstly I had to make sure the rig hadn't tangled, so I paid off line, and up popped the rig, perfect I thought, so I wound it down again until I felt everything go solid against the lead, then let out about two feet of line and clipped up and put the Delkim alarm on, the other two rods were put out, fished on big lumps of meat, just down the shelf in around 10 feet of water over big beds of 8mm pellets, and chopped up meat. The traps were set, at about 1pm on the first night, one of the alarms was sounding, and to my delight it was the leeches that produced the first run, I wound down, let everything go tight and struck. The rod took on a nice bend and I was into my first "new rig" caught cat of the session, bingo! A result, and at just over 32lb, I was a more than happy man. I went on to take another cat of around 38lb on the right hand rod to meat, during my 48hr stint. But that first fish found my favour, as it showed me the rig worked a treat. Since then, I have caught countless cats on it from a variety of waters north and south of the country on both leeches and worms. I would now like other anglers to try it out and hope they too get some great results.

The details of the rig including construction are as follows.

Components used

38 inch - 40lb fluoro carbon shock leader (I use Grease Weasel), 1 x 100lb swivel, 1 x 15 - 18 inch 2mm crystal clear rigid rig tube, 1 x 10 inch 4mm crystal clear rigid rig tube, 2 x large rubber shock beads, 1 x 1 ¼ inch polyball, 1 x 2 inch silicon tubing, 1 x medium oval ring, 1 x hook 2 – 2/0 and 1 x 1 inch medium shrink tube.

Construction of rig

First tie on the oval ring, use a 4 - 5 turn blood knot, next attach the hook (I prefer barbless circles, Owner SSW, and a bait shield when using leeches), I use a regular knotless knot and allow a ½ hair for the oval ring, then slide on the shrink tube over the knot and carefully steam to secure. Take care not to damage the hook link material. Next, thread the hook link through

the 2mm tubing, followed by the 4mm tubing. Slot the 2mm tube into the 4mm tube around about 1 inch until secure, a dab of super glue can be used if needed. Next, slide on a shock bead, followed by the polyball, and another shock bead, and position just at the junction where the two pieces of tube are connected. Next slide on around two inches of silicon tube big enough to grip the base of the 4mm tube, then tie on the swivel, use a grinner knot of around seven turns, then secure the swivel into the other end of the silicon tube to secure the rig and holds together. You should end up with around about 12 - 14 inches of hook length material exposed outside the rig depending on knots and wastage, the overall length of the rig is around 36 inches long or there about and should be okay. The reason for the oval ring is when using worms as bait, I attach a length of braid as a loop to the ring, then thread on around 15-20 dendrobaenas to form a medusa type worm ball, then simply add a couple to the hook, just to tie it in with the rest of the bait, at the same time it doesn't mask the hook and impair hook-ups.

The only other thing I should mention is when casting out the rig, try to feather the line off the spool, or stop the rig in flight, just as the lead is about to hit the water. This catapults the whole rig forward and helps prevent any chance of tangles. The rig can also be boated out or winched out if required.

