

I think I should have enough time”, I said to myself.

It was a Sunday morning, and like the vast majority of others, at around half past ten I had decided to get the weekly shopping, to brave the traffic that so clogs this area every Sunday morning. The mass exodus to the shopping centres and retail parks, together with those venturing out to see what lies on the other side of the M25 makes Sunday mornings a bit of a nightmare where I live.

Before I left, I had to have one last look I thought to myself, this Sunday morning was slightly special. It was the one on which the Barbel Society auction was finishing, and for me the excitement of waiting to see whether I had won or not, was quite a lot to bear.

Scrolling, once again, down the list of items on offer, there it was – ‘A years Ringwood & DAA membership’.

I still had it!

I had kept a constant check on it over the past few days, and I had to do it again just to make sure, scrolling down the page further to look at what was on offer.

It was unbelievable how many people and companies had offered things in order to raise money for the Research & Conservation side of the Society.

Strange I thought, I’d never noticed ‘The Barbel Catchers Centrepin’ before now, though there it was. A couple of links were followed to have a look at the reel being offered, and that was it.

Pictures of an aerial style centrepin of reel (sic) beauty within those links suggested I bid on it. So I did!

Despite my near computer-side vigil that week, I didn’t really expect to get anything from the auction. I had decided that it was all in aid of a good cause so anything I had bid, won or



A Reel Good



DAMIAN KIMMINS

DAMIAN KIMMINS WAS BORN IN LONDON IN 1974. HE'S BEEN AN ANGLER SINCE HIS MATE STEVE CHANDLER TOOK HIM FISHING WITH A SPOOL OF DRENNAN MONOFILAMENT ON THE THAMES WHEN HE WAS AROUND NINE YEARS OF AGE. HE WONDERS HOW MANY OF US HAVE BEEN HOOKED ON FISHING ON THE BACK OF CATCHING A PERCH!

DAMIAN LIVES IN LONDON, BUT HAVING BEEN A MEMBER OF CHRISTCHURCH ANGLING CLUB FOR TWELVE YEARS, REGULARLY MAKES THE JOURNEY DOWN M3 TO THE HAMPSHIRE AVON.

CONTRACTED TO VARIOUS COMPANIES, DAMIAN TRAVELS AROUND THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND WORKING ON CIVIL ENGINEERING PROJECTS OF ALL TYPES.

n Auction

lost, had done its bit for the cause. The bid on the reel at that moment stood at £200, so not expecting to possibly win, though admittedly hoping, I decided to go to £205, and then brave the roads of South West London.

Hoping to be back before the midday finish of the auction in order to secure the reel, a year's membership to the R&DAA, not to mention the Christchurch Angling Club membership which I had been trusted to secure for a friend of mine, I rather rapidly made my way round the supermarket. I didn't even have time for some Sunday supermarket trolley rage, thankfully however they parted down the aisle like Moses parted the Red Sea.

I'd flown round the supermarket in record time that Sunday and I was half expecting Norris McWhirter of Guinness fame to greet me on my way out. He wasn't there, but what greeted me instead was the traffic, and today it was bad! It seemed that there had been a local accident as it had built up very quickly.

Steve, the friend who had trusted me to secure the 'Christchurch Angling Club membership' for him, phoned. Unfortunately for Steve, he has no internet access away from work. Unfortunate for him also, as he knows my clock is always 15 minutes out. "Where are you"? The time was 11:45. "Steve, I'm sat in traffic"! I replied. I knew when the phone rang he'd start getting nervous with my present location. "I knew I should have gone to work this morning"! He said. I tried as best I could to calm him, though of course not knowing what the outcome would be, I assured him that the year's membership being offered in the auction would be his.

What a stroke of luck then at 11:59 when I hurriedly logged back onto the site that I saw the membership was his. Had that not been the case, I dread to think...

Luckily, I had managed to secure both the items which I had bid on also. The years R&DAA membership and the Barbel Catchers

Centrepin were mine! I couldn't believe it!

Not only had the auction over only a period of two weeks, raised over £4000 for the Research & Conservation side of the Barbel Society, I'd landed the items I had bid on. RESULT!

Of course it wouldn't be quite right to go any further without mentioning the people that really made it happen. Companies up and down the country offered goods. I know we live in a commercial society, it's not something I enjoy that much, however, it's heart warming when some companies are so forth coming in being able to offer items in the name of a good cause. Clubs offered memberships, one of which I secured, individuals offered their own possessions. Fred Crouch donated one of his very own reels! Others (and the list was long) offered their own time in guiding and other days out. Last but not least, Barry Norris. Barry did an absolutely fantastic job of keeping the auction above water the whole time it was running. Constantly

updating bids and such like, it must have taken a tremendous effort to have it all looking so smooth.

Since the inaugural Research & Conservation auction run by Barry, there have been two more, each more successful than its predecessor. Now organized by a small group of volunteers from within the Society's Committee and general membership, the auctions have raised in total more than £16,000 and in spite of some economical hardships at the present time, the commitment and support of the donors involved does not seem to be waning at all. Indeed, the auction from last year raised a whopping £7,800 towards enabling the Barbel Society to put something back into fishing.

An e-mail received from Barry detailing how much damage I had done to my bank account was in the inbox in a day or two, and a cheque was sent to Barry post-haste. Barry informed me that there may be a delay with those bidders securing hand built items, as the items they'd secured were not off the shelf and allowances might have to be made. Having secured such a beautiful looking reel, I was obviously keen to get my paws on it. However, realising that these items were similar as the proverbial Rome, and particularly with the pin was not built in a day, I was prepared to wait a bit longer.

Getting my hands on the years membership of R&DAA was a much more hurried affair. I received a phone call from Darren Smith, the Press and Publicity Officer for the club, informing me that all I had to do to get my hands on the book was to visit Ringwood Tackle and see Richard. Richard as agent of the R&DAA would be able to furnish me with the membership that runs for a



full twelve months. It was no later than a fortnight afterwards I was in Ringwood Tackle speaking with Richard, hoping that not too long after I'd be taking advantage of some of the fishing that the club has to offer.

I visited their much famed Severals stretch after some advice from Richard, and spotted several fish, but as typical Avon fish, they didn't want to play ball that day!

Garry Mills, the manufacturer of the Barbel Catchers Centrepin got in touch via e-mail soon after the auction had finished and much to my amazement asked me what options I'd like to consider having on the reel. The colour of the anodizing, the positioning, shape and materials of the spool handles, as well as the number of the model (within reason of course) were all offered. It was then I told Garry of the joy I have from owning one of the J.W.Youngs models, the Bob James version of their Purist in fact. Coincidentally, he told me that it was him that designed the spool on the Bob James model. The Barbel Catchers Centrepin is built by Garry at The Mill Tackle Company based in Redditch, Worcestershire. Garry having worked most of his life for Redditch's centrepin makers J.W. Young, decided to start his own repair service for those Young's customers after learning of the companies fate. J.W. Young, having been bought by the much larger Masterline Company were obviously considered a worthwhile acquisition, but it would mean that those employed by Young's would have to find employment elsewhere. Masterline had decided that with the purchase they'd take the manufacture of the reels in-house. Garry, a former Young's Assembly Manager had the intention of serving

a hole in the market left by the move, decided to buy up a lot of redundant stock and machining tools from the Young's workshop. He'd planned to cater for ex-Young's customers who wanted a reel repairs service using top quality components he'd manufacture himself. Garry confirmed that he could have my new reel looking very similar to my J.W.Youngs model, and I was all for that! The dark graphite/grey looking anodized pin always looked good attached to my barbel rod, motionless or not, and the handles I had felt comfortable with were the concave type in a black ebonite. It would take eight weeks for the reel to be with me, and though I knew they were going to be a long eight weeks, I couldn't wait!

It was mid-December before the long awaited ring at the door came from the courier, and Garry's estimation was proved spot on!

As mentioned, the only pin I had owned previous was Young's' Bob James model. There is quite something however about a handmade object, along with a design of such history that heightens the feeling of joy you get from owning it. Coming with a certificate of authenticity, opening the reel's box was something that I won't forget... BCC no. 35. As being an object of desire though, it's sometimes thought acceptable to leave them to just gather some dust along with some interest also. I had no intention of doing such and I'm glad that that was the case, for it's in its use where the Barbel Catchers Centrepin sticks out.

Having owned the BJ no. 0622 for some time, it was for the same time evident that the weakness of the reel's ratchet spring was a bit of a problem, however considering the reel was designed as a trotting model,

this was no slight on it. In the summer, particularly on the Avon, with its weed at maximum height, maintaining station on the river bed was occasionally proved difficult by the softness of the ratchet. Any weed floating downstream or otherwise coming into contact with the line would have the pin paying out line unwontedly, and making the job of the lead more difficult by way of increasing the resistance against the line. Moving swims was a tad sticky occasionally as not normally one to remove the end tackle, once on the go, the reel's ratchet would be letting the line out, ending with the lead dragging on the floor. This was later resolved by getting some leads that allow them to be taken off without the need to break the line. These issues were solved with the cleverly designed ratchet system on the Barbel Catchers model. Incorporating the surprising element of adjustability, at its weakest setting the ratchet offers similar in resistance to my BJ 0622. Adjusting it through the multi-position knob on the backplate increases the resistance markedly, and such is the strength of the ratchet at its strongest setting I am able to leave 50zs of lead on the line whilst moving swims without inadvertently paying out line, and also fish Summer, Autumn and Winter with almost no regard for the river conditions. For fishing a fairly low flow area of the river, for instance the margins in summer, set the ratchet to its minimum setting, and again during summer, it's possible to fish just over the top of a weed bed with some waving fronds on the surface, select a setting offering a greater resistance and care less. Autumn conditions similarly with leaf litter and the like, select the appropriate setting. Winter conditions

also offer nothing to worry about – simply select the greatest resistance setting and it would take almost a tree catching the line to shift the spool! There's no need to use the drag system at all, perhaps only to set up whilst not announcing to all and sundry that you're there, the whole element of adjustability is contained within the design of the ratchet.

Elsewhere too the reel didn't disappoint. The beautifully machined backplate inscribed with the words 'Endorsed by The Barbel Catchers Club, THE BARBEL CATCHER, The Mill Tackle Company' and has attached a brass foot to keep things nice and steady when situated on the rod. The spool being a 16 pin design, helps in not kinking the line too much, a potential problem on reels with less pins if for you, like me, presentation is a consideration. It measures four and a half inches in diameter and one inch deep and has a very handy six millimetres on the outside edge allowing the thumb a greater contact area to stop even the most powerful surges of the barbel's. The handles being positioned centrewards on the spool are some distance away from the edge, and have never painfully contacted with my thumb when trying to tighten down on the spool whilst a fish is in full flow.

The Barbel Catcher Centrepin has now become my most treasured angling possession. It has been in use many times catching me numerous barbel on the R&DAA and Christchurch Angling Club waters on the Avon, and also those run by Newbury Angling Association on the river Kennet. In short it's a well built, wonderfully designed pin based on the old aerial model with the addition of a very clever modern touch.