

IS THERE A BETTER WAY OF RIGGING HOOKS ON LURES TO ENSURE MORE EFFICIENT AND FISH-FRIENDLY HOOKING? JENS BURSELL CERTAINLY THINKS SO, AND HERE HE EXPLAINS HIS DEVELOPMENT OF A RELEASE RIG FOR HIS LURES.

CATCH WITH R

We have all experienced those frustrating days whilst lure fishing when you have quite a lot of contacts, but few result in a flexed rod for more than a few seconds.

When you do finally get a decent bite and a good, long

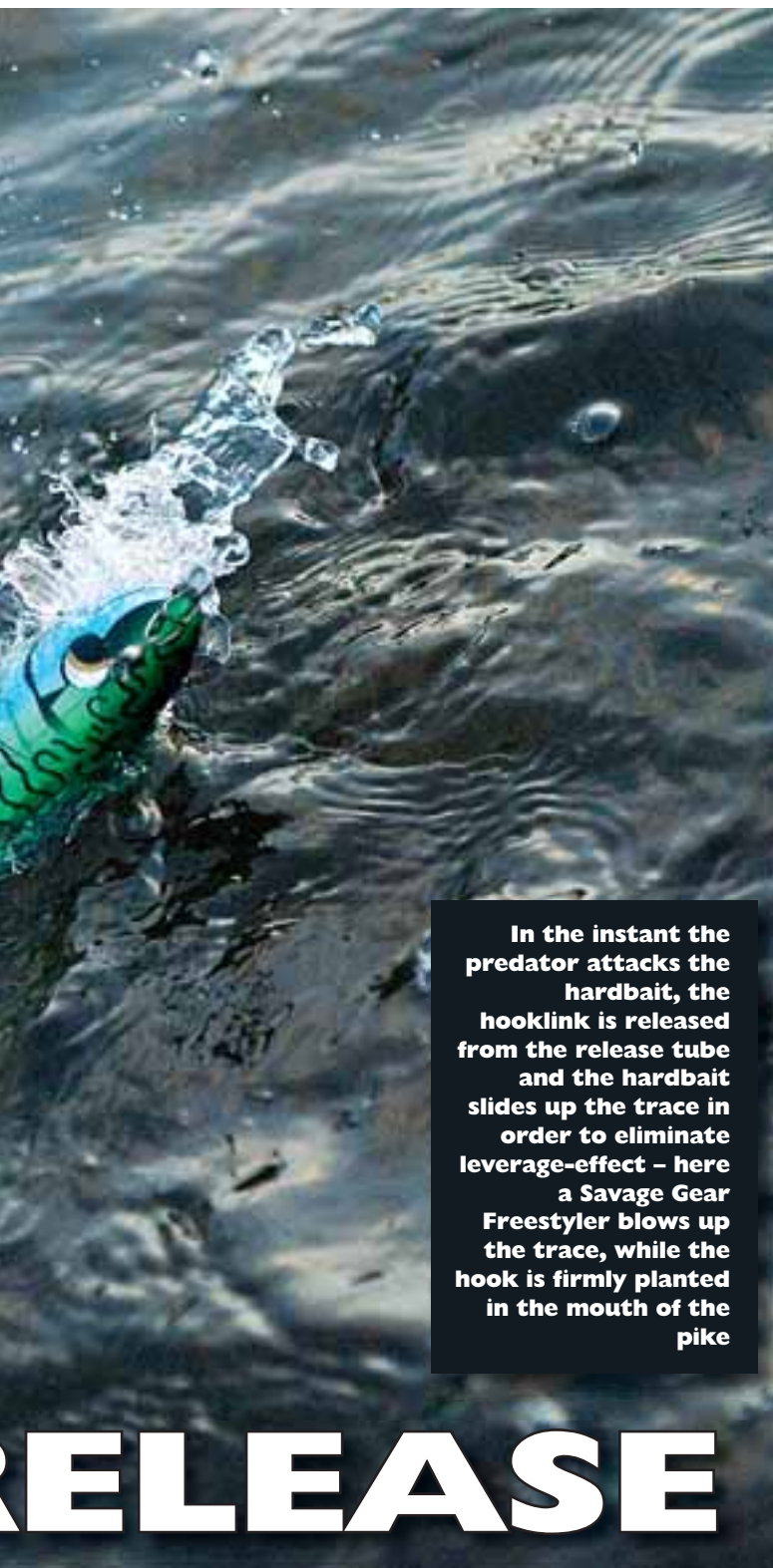
fight from a big predator starts, you risk that it all will end with a lost fish, especially when the fish starts to shake its head violently and takes advantage of the leverage effect to force the hooks out. Far too often, it is the bigger fish that are lost because of this. Sometimes it's perhaps just 5-10 % of your contacts you miss, but in other cases when you fish big baits

and the fish are very shy, but still fight hard, it can easily be up to half of the contacts you lose on a bad day.

Most people accept lost fish as bad luck, but in my opinion, it is more often a question of using sub-optimal techniques. Imagine then if you were able to solve the technical problems and improved the hooking efficiency and hook holds so

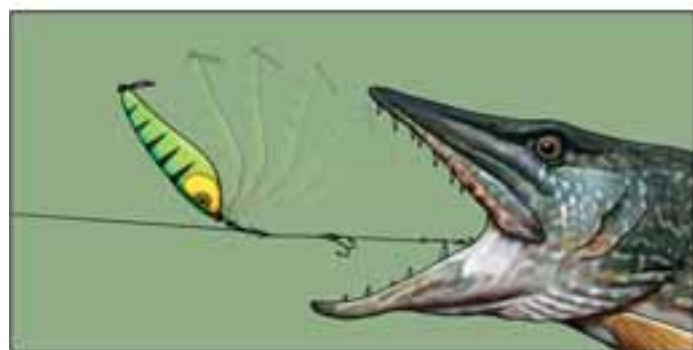
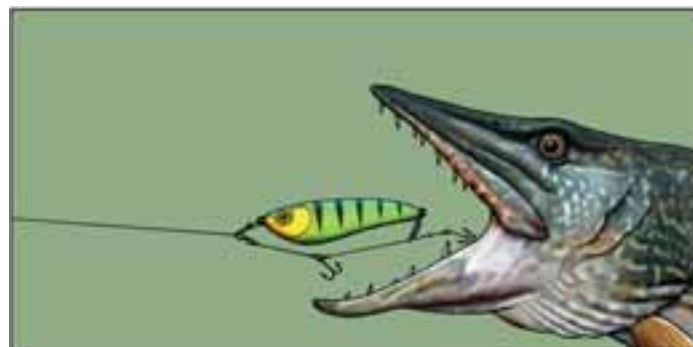
much that instead of losing half of the fish, you caught nearly all of them. In that case, you would catch twice as many fish. Even if you only lose 5-10% of your fish on a good day, the fish of your lifetime could very easily be one of the lost fish.

The leverage effect is a well-known phenomenon among predator anglers using long and hard baits. It is in many



In the instant the predator attacks the hardbait, the hooklink is released from the release tube and the hardbait slides up the trace in order to eliminate leverage-effect – here a Savage Gear Freestyler blows up the trace, while the hook is firmly planted in the mouth of the pike

RELEASE



Top: At the moment of attack, the hooklink is released from the release tube, and shoots up the trace

Above: In the very few cases where the fish is not hooked immediately by the loosely dangling hooks and the fish tries to spit the bait out, the fact that the bait is mounted on a swivel around which the bait will swing gives a very effective anti-eject effect, unparalleled by any other sliding systems

These eliminate leverage when the fish is hooked on the hook at the end of the bait, but does not prevent leverage effectively when the fish is hooked on the front hook or both hooks at the same time. Read more about this principle at <http://orionlure.free.fr>. As with other inline constructions this method also has the aforementioned problem that you cannot change quickly and freely between different baits.

Poor hooking and lost hookholds caused by the leverage effect is especially pronounced when using big hardbaits. This problem is not improved by the fact that big hardbaits are normally mounted with big hooks in order to maximize the exposure of the hook-point. Sometimes these big hooks are good, but often they are only mediocre. However, as long as the hook gape is wide enough to get a good grip, smaller, sharper and thinner wired hooks are usually be easier to set than big, heavy

hooks. This is the reason why I originally started to experiment with modified hardbaits, and mounting smaller hooks on wire



With big crankbaits such as this super effective Westins Jätte, the leverage effect is the main reason for a significant number of lost fish – this problem does not exist when fishing the same lure on a release rig

cases one of the most frequent reasons for losing the hookhold during the fight. One of the classic ways to avoid leverage effect when lure fishing with one hook at the end of the lure is using inline lures, that slide up the line when playing a fish. The only problem here is that you cannot switch to another lure of the same type without having to re-thread the lure and tie the

knot to the hook once more. Additionally, you cannot shift freely between different types of lures.

When fishing hardbaits mounted with two or more hooks, it becomes more difficult to eliminate the leverage effect. An example of inline construction for stickbait and popper fishing are the hardbaits from Guston and Orion Lures.

The release rig works on all types of baits – a Zam Z Tail from Zalt



by a combination of bad hooking and leverage effect. Since then, I have used countless hours in order to develop a method that maximizes hooking abilities and minimizes the risk of lost hookholds on large hardbaits. My aim has been to develop a sliding rig with the following properties:

- 1) The rig must hook up better than the original hook set-up.
- 2) The hooks must be mounted semi-fixed, so they are fixed during cast and retrieve, but released in the moment a fish strikes.
- 3) The hardbait must be able to slide freely up the trace/main line in order to avoid leverage effect.
- 4) The construction of the rig must make it harder for an unhooked fish to spit out the bait without being hooked.
- 5) It must be possible to switch quickly and freely between all types of artificial baits without having to retie knots.
- 6) The rig must not affect casting performance or the original attractive movements of the bait.
- 7) The construction must be flexible and strong, and not give more tangles than the original set-up.

THE RELEASE RIG

The result is the release-rig shown here. This rig-concept, and other variations on the same theme, fulfils all the criteria above, and is in my opinion the ultimate way of solving many of the traditional problems addressed to fishing with artificial baits – and especially big hardbaits.

My conclusion is clear: in order to obtain perfect hooking and hookholds on most big artificial baits, you must break completely with the dogma that hooks are mounted directly on the bait. No, the solution in most cases is to fish your bait sliding on the trace/main line with the hooks mounted separately. I'm convinced that, no matter who you are or how you fish, you will catch more by demounting the original hooks and fishing your bait on one of the rigs in the release rig concept.

The idea with the release-

extensions in order to achieve better hooking. This technique, explained in the article 'Jerkbaits see the Light' (see P&P 129), also lessens the leverage effect, but does not eliminate it.

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

This is what I thought two years ago after I had lost a big pike on jerkbait. I had no doubts that the loss of that fish was caused



When using the release rig concept, there are no hooks on the baits – note the small box where the different release rigs are stored





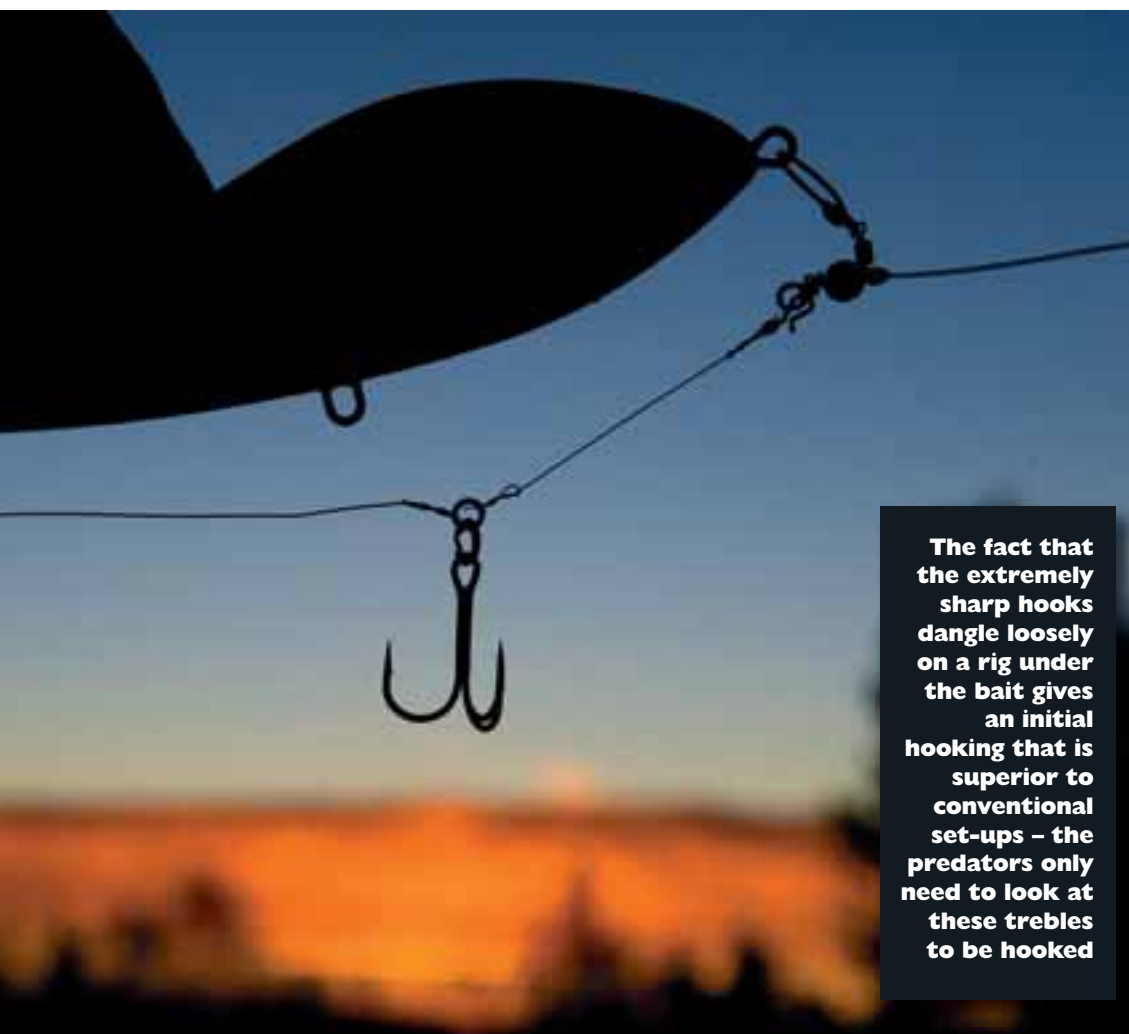
Release rigs also have a great potential for river fishing for trout, sea trout and salmon – for brown trout like this one, the hooklink is made from 0.15mm Fireline Crystal combined with a single size 8-10 Owner ST-21 treble

rig is to mount the bait sliding on the trace in a snap lock with swivel. The hooks, which I prefer to be a bit smaller, thinner and sharper than the originals, are mounted on a hooklink that hangs 2-5cm under the bait. In this way, they are perfectly exposed when the fish attack. Even when shy and vary fish puff or bite hesitantly at the bait, they are hooked immediately. In a way, the effectiveness of this dangling and hinged rig parallels the some of the principles behind the many types of hair rig used for carp fishing.

Because the hooks are not fixed on the bait and the leverage effect is eliminated, the hooks and split rings are not subjected to the same pressure as hooks and split rings mounted the normal way. For this reason it's not a problem to drop down in hook size and wire thickness in order to obtain better initial hooking – it doesn't compromise the strength of the rig at all. Most big wobblers and jerkbaits are mounted with 1/0- 2/0 trebles, so perhaps it's hard to believe that you can fish efficiently with big baits and land the fish on, say, size 2-6 trebles. However, if you doubt this, think of all the big pike and carp that are caught on natural bait using hook sizes of 6-8. This is not a problem, so why should it be a problem with big hardbaits? The only good reason for using 2/0 hooks for pike is to get a good exposure of the hookpoint and avoid the hook getting in 'physical shadow' of the bait. Nevertheless, this problem does not exist in the same way with release rigs. Of course, it's possible to fish release rigs mounted with the original hooks – but in most cases, you would hook and land more fish if you scale down to thinner and sharper hooks.

RELEASING THE HOOKLINK

The hooklink is semi-fixed in the back eye of the bait using a release-tube. The release tube secures the position of the



The fact that the extremely sharp hooks dangle loosely on a rig under the bait gives an initial hooking that is superior to conventional set-ups – the predators only need to look at these trebles to be hooked



Here are some of the rig bits you need to create a release rig: silicone rig sleeves, extra sharp hooks like Owner ST 36 BC or Gamakatsu T13, titanium mono wire, split rings, ringed swivels, big, soft and relatively loose rubber float stops, and size 6-8 swivels

hooks in the perfect distance from the bait. The hooklink is semi-fixed to the release tube by pushing the swivel into the tube. On most baits the eye at the end of the bait is the best place to fix the release tube. However, especially on jointed hardbaits, it is in many cases best to semi-fix the rig in the middle eye on the front part of the bait. A good example of these variations are that the jointed wobblers from Savage Gear; Butch works best when fixed in the middle/front eye, while 4-Play, which is multi-jointed, actually works perfectly when fixed in the back eye.

Silicone rig-sleeves used for carp fishing are often made for semi-fixed rigs and fit the purpose perfectly. Size 6-8 swivels fit most rig sleeves, but if they fall out of the release tube during cast or retrieve, you must find a bigger swivel or a tighter rig sleeve. The swivel that pushes into the tube is fixed between the rubber float stops. This gives the possibility of adjusting the position of the hooks a bit – and to adjust to different baits.

When the fish attacks the bait, the rig is released from the

bait and slides up the trace, giving a very direct and steady pressure on the hooks. In the few cases where fish is not hooked immediately and the

fish tries to spit the bait out, the whole sliding construction of the rig gives an anti-eject effect, very much like a boilie mounted on a sliding hair rig. As you can

see in the drawing, the bait will slide up the trace when spat out, while the hooks will stay in the mouth. Alternatively, the hooks will be dragged out perfectly exposed with the hook points pointing forward – perhaps with a delay caused by the bait sliding on the line. When big fish inhale a bait in suck-and-blow style, the construction of the release rig will make it harder to spit out than a conventional set-up.

MATERIALS

The upper part of the release rig, the trace on which the artificial bait slides via a snap swivel, can be made of whatever material suits the fishing situation: fluorocarbon, hard mono or wire. The trace is mounted to the main line via a swivel. Between this and the sliding swivel is mounted a big, soft float stop. The purpose of this is to prevent the hooks from sliding backwards or too far down under the bait during a retrieve pause. This will only happen if the weight of the hooklink is greater than the



A nice pike caught on a Westins Jätte crankbait fished on a release rig



Jens with a nice pike caught on a Buster Jerk fished on release rig – note that the bait slides on the trace

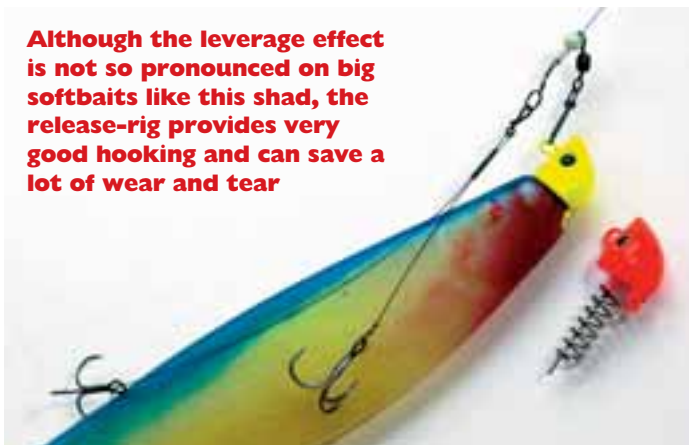
weight of the front trace. The exact nature of this relationship is determined by the choice of hooks, rig bits and trace materials. The float stop must be loose, so that the bait will have no problem sliding up the trace when you hook into a fish.

On the other side of the sliding swivel, you mount a rubber bead and a big rig ring that acts as stop for the sliding bait. The rig ring is the anchor point for the hooklink, which can be adapted to the size of the bait. For most types of pike fishing, you cover the main size

spectrum of hardbaits with three to five different hooklinks. In order to change hooklinks fast, it's most easy and elegant to mount the hooklink on a small but strong snaplock like the Fas-Snap. Alternatively, but a bit more clumsy is larger cross-lock. The strongest but least flexible is to fix the hooklink to the trace permanently with either a knot or wire-crimp.

It is an advantage to fix the hooks in split rings mounted in rig rings in order to give maximum flexibility and

Although the leverage effect is not so pronounced on big softbaits like this shad, the release-rig provides very good hooking and can save a lot of wear and tear



HOW TO MAKE A RELEASE TUBE



- 1 Take a rig-sleeve and cut it to the right length (from the end where the diameter of the hole is smallest). Make sure the hole is small enough that the swivel won't pass all the way through.
- 2 Push a piece of steel thread through the rig sleeve in the smallest hole.



- 3 Thread the wire through the swivel eye...
- 4 ...and push the steel thread back through the big hole in the sleeve.



- 5 Push and drag the swivel into the tubes big hole.
- 6 Drag the swivel all through the sleeve, so the eye of the swivel sticks out through the small hole (which is so small that the middle part of the swivel won't slide out) and secure position with a drop of glue. Fix the release tube to the eye of the hardbait with a split ring.



- 7 Semi-fix the hooklink to the release tube simply by pushing the two parts together.

minimize the consumption of expensive rig materials. This also makes it easier to shift a hook or a piece of wire, without the need of remaking the whole hooklink. For pike fishing, I prefer to build the hooklink of 40-50lb titanium mono wire such as Boa or BFT No Kink Wire. Another advantage of mono titanium is the fact, that the blood knot does not slide when tightened. This means that it is very easy to interpret the precise length of the individual pieces of wire in the hooklink. The hooklink can also be made out of fluorocarbon, hard mono or multi-strand wire where the hooks are fixed with knotless knots. This is the quickest way to make a hooklink for the release-rig, but the titanium hooklink will last much, much longer.

If you want to use the release rigs for improving the

efficiency of your crankbait fishing, you need to modify the lip. Fix the bait upside down in a vice and cut a thin slot down the central axis of the lip with a hacksaw. Glue a 4-5cm piece of 50-60lb titanium mono wire with a drop of Araldite in the topside of the lip and mount it diagonally across the lip. When you mount the hooklink, you slip it behind the wire and into the slot, which secures the position of the hooklink during cast and retrieve. However, when a fish bites, the hooklink pulls out of the slot and past the titanium wire, so the lure freely slides up the trace.

FREE THE HOOKLINK

The purpose of the release tube is to prevent the hooklink sinking down during retrieve pauses, but if you fish the bait with a constant and relatively



Crankbait lip modified for fishing with the release rig

fast movement, the hooklink will automatically hang at the perfect distance under the bait. In this case, you don't need the release-tube at all; in fact it gives an even better hooking and anti-eject effect if the hooklink hangs loose under the bait. Moreover, despite what you might think, this does not cause more tangles during casting than the original set-up. Good examples where the loose hanging release-rig could be an advantage are speed

spinning, trolling, and cross-stream and downstream fishing in rivers. If situations where you don't really need the release tube arise spontaneously, you just don't semi-fix the hooklink. If you your entire fishing style is focused on the above-mentioned techniques, it is clear that you get a more elegant presentation by eliminating the release-tube, swivel and float stops completely.



One very big advantage with the release-rig concept is that you can use the same rig and easily switch lures



Standard release rig made in modules connected by rig-rings – the back hook can also be mounted on a rig-ring/split-ring as the front hook, but in order to make the presentation more elegant, I often tie it on

OTHER ADVANTAGES

Using the release rigs also gives other advantages. Big and heavy baits have a tendency of causing more damage and bigger wounds in the mouth of the fish. However, as the bait slides on the trace, it acts as a buffer for the tearing force applied to the flesh. This prevents the hole made by the hook getting so big that the hook falls out, again reducing the risk of lost fish. The fact that the bait hangs outside the mouth during unhooking also makes it quite a lot easier to release the hooks



Mono titanium wire is perfect for the hooklink

without damaging yourself or the fish.

When using the release rig concept, there are no hooks on the baits, which means that you can store many more baits in the same volume of space in your box – because there are no hooks to tangle up. This also means that you can bring a broader variety of colours without have to bring extra tackle boxes, and you can even store them in your pocket – a great advantage when wading far from the shore.

Fishing traditional inline baits in order to prevent leverage effect has one problem: when the heavy bait suddenly slides back on the line and bounces against the hook. This actually gives the hook a push in the wrong direction, and if it hits back on the hook with sufficient power, it can push the hook back out. This problem does not arise with a release-rig, because there is no power transmission from the point where the sliding bait stops to the hooks further



In order to push a rubber float stop on to a 50lb hard mono trace like this, you must pre-bend the end of the trace with pliers to make it is easier to push on without damaging the float-stop – the same trick is good for wire

down the hooklink.

The advantages of release rigs is evident in connection with big hardbaits, but in my opinion, it also has a big

potential for other types of artificial lures such as big softbaits. Large shads and Bulldawgs are often mounted with huge hooks including a big



The right size of release tube will not release during the impact of a cast, landing and retrieve, but only when a predator attacks the bait

fixed single-hook in their back. Baits like this will, in my opinion, also benefit from the advantages of release rigs. If you mount the softbaits on a release rig, you also get the advantage that the softbait will hang outside the mouth of the fish in most fight situations – in safe distance from the sharp teeth that drastically shorten the lifespan of softbaits. The release rig concept does not end there. It can also be used with metal spoons and other lures, as long as the weight of the lure and hooklink is well matched to the retrieve speed. .

DENSITY ADJUSTMENT

When taking off the original hooks and mounting a lighter hooklink, the bait will be slightly lighter than normal. On most baits this doesn't matter much, as the original movement pattern of the bait is unchanged. Nevertheless, having the original density of the bait can have great importance, especially when fishing

suspended baits. Here you need to compensate for the weight difference, either with lead tape or lead wire. The lead tape can be glued to the back or belly of the lure. Placed high, it will give a higher degree of bellyflash during pauses, and placed on the belly the movement pattern will be more like the original. If you want to have the centre of gravity placed exactly as in the original, the easiest means is to wind equal lengths of lead wire on to all eyes that previously held hooks. Once the sinking rate is comparable with the original bait, you can secure the lead wire with a good two-part glue such as Araldite. Just to give you a rough guide to the lengths of lead wire you need when fishing a size 2 Owner ST 36 BC hook under the belly and a size 4 hook on the tail end you must compensate with two 15cm lengths of 0.5mm lead wire on a Buster Jerk or Deviator, and around 20cm of 0.7mm wire on bigger jerkbaits such as Big Bandit or the big



This Deviator has been density adjusted by wiggling a piece of lead wire on to the eye – secure with super epoxy glue

Freestyler

In the next issues of *Pike & Predators*, you can read more about variations of the release rig concept that will improve the efficiency even more in specific fishing situations. Only your own imagination sets the limits. Simply by varying materials you can downscale and upscale this technique to

cover different fishing styles for most predators. If you make the right rig, you can make a delicate five-centimetre Rapala work like a dream. Likewise, if you scale up with heavier hooks, rig bits and materials, you have a set-up with big potential for muskies, catfish or stand-up fishing with big poppers for GT and tuna.



Release rigs can be fished with all traditional equipment, but if you feel like it, the superior hooking abilities enable you to go down to lighter gear, because the hooks are so easy to set