

# Spoons

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*The famous Pako spoons in two sizes (11.5cm at 15g and 9.1cm at 10g) and different colours.*



The Jim Vincent Broads Spoon, 5¼ inch at 1½ oz, made by Hardy's during the 1950s.

I must confess that I find most spoons intriguing and almost magical things, even without fishing them. They are simple and solid objects and yet they possess a hidden power for catching fish. In this article I will focus on spoons in relation to pike fishing, although I have used them with just as much pleasure and success for perch and zander, trout and garfish.

### HISTORY

Spoons belong to the oldest forms of artificial baits. They have been around for centuries, so they may be considered well proven lures. Yet their popularity differs widely, both from country to country and over time. In the Scandinavian countries spoons belong to the most popular baits and have done so since the mid 1800s. But in the UK, as well as over here in Holland, natural baits have long prevailed over artificials. The latter were used only when natural baits were hard to get hold of or cumbersome to carry along. Francis Francis, writing in 1867, held that principle as well, but he also stated that 'if an artificial bait be used, a good large spoon bait is perhaps as attractive as any' and he valued them as 'excellent lures'.<sup>1</sup> But only three years later Henry Cholmondeley-Pennell wasn't quite so enthusiastic about them. Although he had expressed several years earlier that he 'took strongly to the Spoon-bait when it first became generally known in this country'<sup>2</sup>, he now stated:

*So far as my experience goes, artificial baits - and I have tried not a few - are entirely inferior to natural baits for Pike fishing: they should only be used when the latter cannot be obtained. The 'spoon-bait' was tolerably killing when it first came out, but it seems to have gradually lost its attractiveness, at any rate on waters where it has been much used, and is now generally inferior even to the ordinary run of artificial baits.*<sup>3</sup>

As far as I know, the first person to promote spoon fishing for pike as a fully-fledged method instead of a second rate alternative to using natural baits must have been that great angler John William Martin, aka 'The Trent Otter'. In his book *Days Among the Pike and Perch* (1907) he writes:

*I am very partial to a spoon bait; I have one in my possession that has been in at the death of numbers of fine jack. This is one of the oldest forms of artificials, and in my opinion still equal to any new-fangled invention. Pike have been taken on spoons in every water where these fish are found; I have a record in my notebook of forty pike being killed with spoon baits in a single season.*<sup>4</sup>

And he goes on to give records of great catches of pike on spoons and to describe how a friend of his caught big pike in Irish loughs by trailing 'huge spoons' Martin had made for him - 'these Irish lake spoons being about six inches long and three wide, with hooks on the end more like grappling-irons'.

Still, amongst most pike anglers the idea that pike, and big pike in particular, should have a definite preference for natural baits would remain happily alive for many decades to come, despite famous pike anglers catching plenty of big pike on artificials. A well-known example is Jim Vincent, who fished the Norfolk Broads between the early 1920s and 1944, and who was quite successful with a large spoon of his own design that was later marketed by Hardy's as the famous Jim Vincent Broads Spoon.

1. Francis Francis, *A Book on Angling*, 2nd edition, London 1867, p123.
2. H. Cholmondeley-Pennell, *The Book of the Pike*, London 1865, p227.
3. H. Cholmondeley-Pennell, *The Modern Practical Angler*, London 1870, p194.
4. J.W. Martin, *Days Among the Pike and Perch*, Plymouth 1907, p70 (the 'grappling-irons' quote, p74).

From the 1970s onwards it would take people like Barrie Rickards a lot of time, effort and ink to get artificial baits well established. And although Barrie also used spoons with great success - catching eighty pike weighing a total of 800lb in a day-and-a-half on a Lucky Strike Lizard - plugs probably gained more popularity among lure anglers. They certainly did in Holland. This may partly have been because plugs looked more like natural fish than spoons or spinners and therefore gave the anglers more confidence, but a more practical reason was that most spoons available were made for deep or fast-flowing waters. They were simply too thick-bladed and therefore too heavy for their size to be used in the rather shallow still-waters of the low-lands. To keep them from scraping the bottom or hauling in masses of weed they had to be retrieved far too rapidly to be successful.

Today, in the UK as well as in Holland, artificials are widely accepted as excellent pike catchers, but among them spoons still remain modestly in the background compared to e.g. plugs and jerkbaits. This is great for people who prefer spoons of course, because the less pike are confronted with spoons, the less they become conditioned to them.

#### WHY SPOONS?

Spoons are particularly appealing to me. That's not because I believe they will catch more pike than other types of artificials - unless I'm lucky enough to fish in a water where almost nobody else uses them - but because I enjoy fishing them so much. The attraction lies in the fact that they are such versatile lures and that I can put all my creativity and imagination into working them. It is the angler that can really bring a spoon to life and manipulate it - also in a vertical plane - into likely places.

Spoons, thin-bladed, slow sinking spoons in particular, can be fished in many ways. They may be retrieved at a constant speed, deadly slow if you like, or with a few short jerks on the way in. A spoon can be used in many layers of the water: either in subsequent casts (each time working at another given depth) or covering a wider depth range during one retrieve (sink and draw style). Also, spoons are good hookers.

Unlike 'thick' lures, like plugs, jerkbaits and large soft baits, spoons are both thin and hard: a flat metal blade that pike cannot clamp well between their jaws. Therefore, when a pike seizes a spoon and/or when the angler strikes, the spoon will usually slide forward with ease, enabling the treble(s) to quickly grab a good hold and penetrate well. Another advantage is that a spoon is almost indestructible. If you don't lose it because somewhere deep down it refuses to let go of Mother Earth, or because a fish has decided to keep it, a spoon will last a lifetime. Over the years a spoon may lose its paint or shine (easily fixed, if you so wish) but it will never lose its action and its fish catching potential. And finally spoons are relatively cheap lures, at least when compared to plugs and jerkbaits.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES

I usually go spoon fishing for pike in the type of water that abounds in Holland as well as in many parts of the UK: still-waters up to about eight feet deep. In fact, over here these waters - especially the polders - are often even shallower; about two to four feet. But they still hold plenty of pike, even big pike. And make no mistake about the size of pike that may dwell in just one foot of water. The pike in these waters may be caught with a great variety of lures. Spinners, spoons and plugs are the trusted traditionals of course, while since the 1970s many other artificials, like spinnerbaits, surface baits and soft baits, have come over from the USA - some of them in the ten-tray tackle box of the late Fred Taylor, who did a lot to promote them in the UK. Jerkbaits followed in the 1990s and the list of lures I haven't mentioned, including all sorts of feather and fur fantasies, will no doubt be even longer. I use many of these lures myself, depending on circumstances like depth of water; required casting distance, season, time of day and the amount of wind. And sometimes I will pick out a certain type of lure for no other reason than that I fancy it myself at that moment, or because I like to use a particular outfit on a certain day. There are no great theories here, but of course I do select those types and sizes of lures that I consider suitable for the circumstances I will be fishing in. In very windy

Three Professor Onega spoons (9cm at 17g) and two Räsänen Veto spoons (6.8cm at 9g), made by Kuusamo.  
Some of the greatest flappers around!



weather I would certainly prefer jerkbaits; I have seen some large but light spoons, used with braid, being blown right out of the water.

### ACTION

As to the action of a spoon, I like that nice regular flapping from side to side. But the only reason for that is, that such an action gives me more confidence: if I were a pike, I would grab that spoon without a second thought! This popular fallacy is known as an anthropomorphism and it works well for breeding misconceptions. So don't let me fool you. What really counts of course, is not what I prefer or what appeals to me, but what triggers the pike. I am reminded of this almost every time I go fishing with my friend, the Dutch pike specialist Jan Eggers, which often means jerkbait fishing. Here I prefer a Salmo Slider, with its pronounced action, darting from left to right and back again like an irresistible bait fish, while Jan prefers a Fatso, a bait that in my opinion wobbles with a clear lack of enthusiasm. A bit like a wet cigar. To me such a weak and clumsy action is neither convincing nor appealing. But the results show that the pike do not agree with me at all. Still, the value of having confidence in a lure should not be underestimated. Fishing with confidence means fishing with greater concentration and precision and for that reason it often leads to better results.

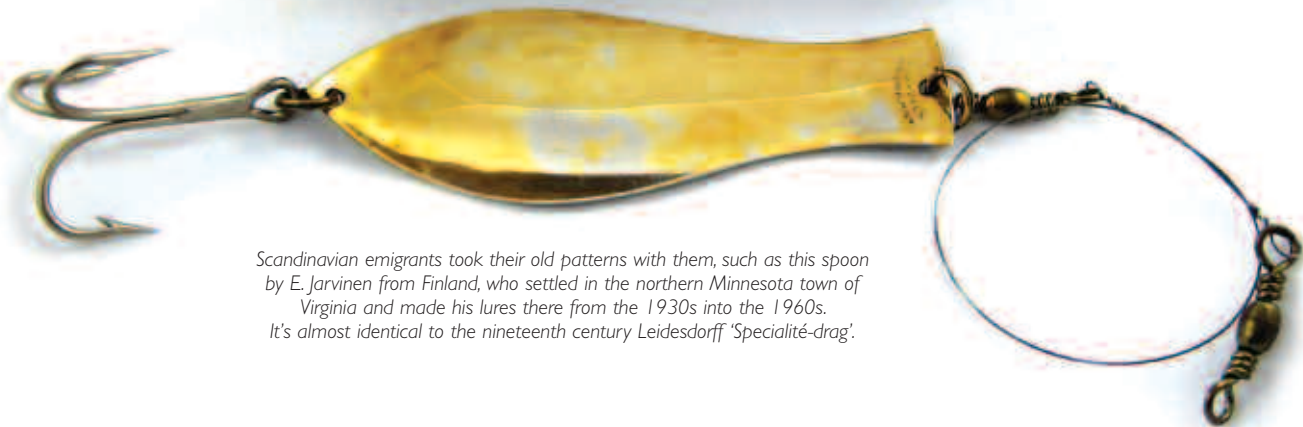
Yet sometimes a spoon may show very little action indeed. I had a few of these reluctant spoons, thin-bladed 7cm ones. In an attempt to 'knock them out of balance' and thus get them to act more lively, I drilled a small hole at the broad tail-end of one such spoon, near the rim and about half an inch from where the hole for hanging the treble was. Here I attached a split ring with the purpose of hanging the treble off-centre. That worked quite well. But further experimenting revealed that the treble might just as well stay in its original place, because the weight of the extra split ring to one side of the spoon alone was already enough to disturb its balance and improve its action. And maybe the additional noise of the extra, loose split ring adds some attraction as well, even though real fish don't rattle. We humans will never know.

### SOME MODELS

Chris McCully, who until recently lived for many years in the Netherlands, has written a book called *Fishing and Pike Lures* (2009). Although it's a small country over here, I don't know Chris personally. But I know his book very well. The best books on angling cause a dilemma: they make you want to read on and at the same time go out and fish. And this book is one of them. It also contains a very informative chapter on spoons and spoon fishing. I won't go into rods and reels and fishing techniques here, but I will say something about one brand of spoons Chris speaks highly of: the so-called Pako spoons.

These Pako's are - or rather were - mostly thin-bladed stainless-steel spoons, designed and made in Holland by Paul Korver (hence the name Pako). They were excellent and very popular spoons, made especially for the circumstances found over here in the low countries: light for their size. But as their popularity increased year on year, making Pako's took up more and more of Paul's spare time until it got in the way of his family life. So a few years ago he decided to stop producing them, leaving many Dutch lure anglers sobbing and sighing and causing the prices of the few remaining and second-hand Pako's to soar. Those Pako's were very good spoons indeed, but the main reason for this was that they - or at least the most popular types - were made of such thin and light metal sheeting. Therefore they could be fished very slowly and were deadly in even the shallowest waters. The Dutch polders notably. But after 'counting down' they worked equally well in deeper water.

Instead of lamenting the non-availability of these Pako's, anglers would have done better to look for alternatives. Abroad if necessary. One of the best alternatives I know of are the thinnest gauge trolling spoons made by the Finnish company Kuusamo. Two types in particular proved very good for shallower waters: the well-known Professor and - flapping even better - the Räsänen. The thin-bladed 9cm sizes of these spoons weigh only 13 and 14 grammes respectively, to give you an idea. The shortened models of these spoons, the large Professor Onega and the smaller Räsänen Veto, must be my



*Scandinavian emigrants took their old patterns with them, such as this spoon by E. Jarvinen from Finland, who settled in the northern Minnesota town of Virginia and made his lures there from the 1930s into the 1960s. It's almost identical to the nineteenth century Leidesdorff 'Specialité-drag'.*

all-time favourites, but the regular types are splendid as well. These trolling spoons are quite suitable for casting as well. And that is what I use them for: They may not cast like a bullet, but they cast well enough, that is as long as you're not using a multiplier - the bird's nests then will remind you of spring even in the heart of winter.

#### DR HEINTZ

Now that I've mentioned the famous Kuusamo Professor; I should also tell you something about its even more famous predecessor, the classic 'Heintzblinker' (Heintz spoon). This spoon was named after Dr Karl Heintz (1849-1925), a medical doctor cum salmon angler from Munich, Germany. It has nearly the same fish-shape and curve as the Kuusamo Professor and the American version, the Doctor Spoon. Dr

Heintz is usually credited with being the inventor of this spoon. He is said to have developed it after a salmon fishing holiday in Norway, in 1906. But it's more likely that he adopted an already existing Scandinavian pattern that had proven very successful to him over there. Fish-shape spoons very similar to the Heintzblinker were made in Scandinavia well before the 1900s. For example, the famous old Swedish company Leidesdorff, from Stockholm, had been marketing such a spoon since way back in the nineteenth century. This type was called 'Specialité-drag' (*drag* meaning 'lure') and dated from 1882, but similar, even older models existed already. These spoons had a somewhat broader fish-shape than the Heintzblinker, but the most notable difference was that, seen as a fish, they had the swivel at the tail-end and thus were retrieved 'backwards', tail first, just like the Doctor Spoons and the larger size Professors are mounted today

(these spoons can all be fished either way in all sizes anyhow).

Back from his fishing holiday, Dr Heintz had the Hildebrand company in Munich make a batch of spoons for him of a design similar to the one he had used in Norway, but modified to his own preferences. The first time he tested one such spoon, on 1st October, 1906, he caught a brace of Danubian salmon of 27 and 33lb with it and the next year this prototype went into production as the 'Silberbinker' (silver spoon). Within a few years this spoon had become a great commercial success. It was widely copied, so the Hildebrand company decided to stamp a 'K-Heintz' signature on the spoon and advertise it as the 'Original Dr Heintz Silberbinker'. Only later was its name changed to 'Heintzbinker'. The Heintz type of spoons were, and still are, sold by numerous companies under different names. And, as mentioned before, the oldest examples far pre-date the 'original' developed by Dr Heintz.

*Two sizes of the original Silberbinker, made by Hildebrand.*



So there you have it - some of my humble observations and thoughts about spoons. If they should have sparked your interest in using them, just remember how well you've always caught with your trusted plugs and jerkbaits and the like. Not to mention deadbaits. So why try something different and uncertain? Perhaps it's better to leave those simple spoons to the old-school bunglers. They will be grateful to you and go on catching plenty of fish. ■



*Two 9cm Kuusamo Professor spoons, with hooks and swivels mounted either way.*