



PIKE SCENE

Seasonal advice from predator experts

WEEKLY PREDATOR SERIES

THIS WEEK: Big water expert Andy Black talks trace materials.

CHOOSING the right trace

THERE are lots of different materials available for making pike traces – some are good, some aren't – and it can be a minefield for the newcomer to know what trace material is best to use. Some are better suited for lure traces, some are good for livebaits, and some are nice and flexible for deadbait traces. Here I look at the different types and what they are most suitable for.

FLUOROCARBON:

THERE'S been a lot of hype over using fluorocarbon in high breaking strains for a leader. Fluorocarbon in heavy breaking strains (100 lb or 0.91 mm) has been highly recommended in some lure fishing circles as the next miracle product for catching pike. The idea being that it is next to invisible in water so the pike won't shy off the lure – which may lead to more wary pike being caught. Another factor is that it's neutrally buoyant – so won't pull the lure down like a heavy metal trace would.

Both are exciting statements in theory but, in practice, from a human perspective heavy fluorocarbon stands out like a sore thumb in the water because of the thickness required to make it pike-safe! The weight of the trace is an issue too, as sometimes you want a heavy trace to help the lure work at the right level.

Fluorocarbon isn't pike-proof

FLUOROCARBON, despite what some anglers might tell you, isn't 100 per cent pike-proof at all.

Now it's highly unlikely that a single fish will ever bite through a fresh fluorocarbon trace when you are talking about a 0.91 mm thickness or above. This is the gear they use to land marlin, tuna, wahoo and other big water game fish with sharp teeth.

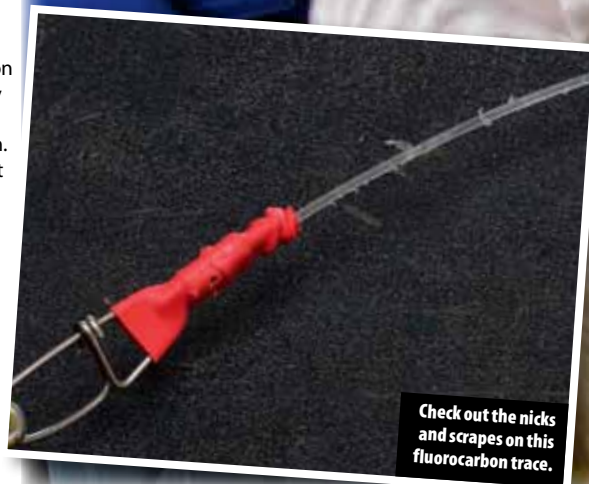
What does happen, however, is that the fluorocarbon deteriorates after every fish. It's not like wire that can stand up to multiple fish, fluorocarbon gets slashed and cut by the pike's teeth, reducing its breaking strain, and its ability to stand up to further abuse.

So, to be sure that the trace is okay after each fish, you have to check it, and if it's been scraped or nicked by the pike's teeth, it needs to be changed.

This is where the problems occur, as most anglers just assume the trace is okay and cast out again when it could be irrevocably damaged, which could result in leaving the lure in the next fish hooked!

I've also witnessed anglers mistake fluorocarbon for monofilament. Mono is a 'no no' as it's not pike-proof at all, and even in a 100 lb breaking strain it's soft and can get bitten through in seconds.

Overall the disadvantages outweigh the advantages and you're far better sticking to wire.



Check out the nicks and scrapes on this fluorocarbon trace.

WITH teeth like this, you need to always check your pike trace for damage.

WIRE: Wire comes in all manner of types and breaking strains, but the three I use the most are 7-strand, 49-strand and single strand titanium.

Single strand titanium

SINGLE strand titanium is the most expensive wire by far, with ready-made traces costing upwards of £5 each, which seems extortionate, but each trace will last for years!

The single strand titanium doesn't kink or twist like other traces, and even if it is bent around at funny angles by the fish, it springs back to its original shape. It really is brilliant stuff.

I use this in a range of sizes from 50 lb for small to medium lures, to 150 lb for larger jerkbaits. It's only really used for lure fishing and it has the great advantage that it is stiff, so it will reduce tangling on the cast and on the retrieve when using jerkbaits.

The downside with it is that it is hard to use. You need to crimp it and, because of its slickness, you need to double crimp, and make sure that the wire is passed through the crimp and double tucked to ensure it doesn't slip. It is quite a difficult material to work with, which is why most anglers will buy ready-made titanium traces.



A titanium trace will last for years.

7-strand

7-STRAND 30 lb wire is probably my go-to wire for nearly everything bait related – it's a good straightforward wire that can be crimped or twisted. It's nice and stiff which is an often-overlooked bonus, especially for livebait fishing where you don't want a supple wire that can tangle. The only downside with 7-strand is that it can kink easily and often 'pig tails' up after a fish. This doesn't reduce the breaking strain per se, but does impede presentation, so most of the time for me a 7-strand trace is a single fish trace. The good thing is 7-strand wire is about the cheapest wire you can get, so it's not a problem to replace the trace with a new one after every fish.

It's ok for lure fishing, being a stiff trace, but because it's prone to kinking it's not the best wire to use if you expect a good few fish in a day.



7-strand is my 'go to' wire for most of my bait fishing.

49-strand

UNSURPRISINGLY, as the name implies, 49-strand is made of 49 small strands of wire that are braided together, because of the number of individual strands woven like this, it makes it a very flexible wire, almost braid-like in its suppleness, which can be a good thing in some situations where you want something a bit more subtle.

I use this wire for zander fishing and pike fishing in 30 lb breaking strain on pressured waters.

It needs to be crimped as it is too supple for twisting, and it's prone to curling up after a fish.

It is one of the more expensive wires and it's not overly user-friendly, as the ends can fray easily when trying to crimp them, so you need to be careful with it. It's more than useless for lure fishing traces, and will see your lures in all kind of tangles.



49-Strand wire offers a more subtle presentation.

CONCLUSION: THE only 99 per cent safe material for a pike trace is wire of the correct breaking strain. I have put 99 per cent safe for a reason, as it's important to always check your traces – as even almost indestructible material such as single strand titanium can show signs of wear after a few fish.

It's often the attachments that will wear first, so always check your clips, crimps and swivels before you cast out.

Remember that your trace is the direct point of contact with the pike, and your next fish could be the fish of a lifetime, so if in any doubt change your trace.