



Channelled aggression

Forget the sound of leather on willow. Summer means one thing to the English Channel boat angler; the sight of silver on blue as bass show up in numbers. We joined Poole skipper Andy Adams to find out what all the fuss is about. He didn't let us down...

Story by Jeff Ford. Photographs by David Ingram

IT IS ONE of sea angling's most definitive images. The height of summer; a boat bobbing on turquoise water, bare male torsos in varying states of maintenance and the sun glinting on mantelpiece-sized bass, fins up like the sails on a junk in protest at the unexpected change of schedule.

No wonder Andy Adams' dentist doesn't see much of him. Skipper of Poole boat Random Harvest, Adams recently worked 38 straight days with a tooth holed down to the nerve before he could manage an afternoon off, such is the demand among his customers wanting to live the bass dream off the Dorset coast.

Blessed with a harbour big enough to host half-a-dozen rock concerts simultaneously, an upmarket look to its waterfront and beautiful coastal scenery to be enjoyed by those who venture out into the open sea, Poole can throw a host of fishing opportunities into its tourism mix, but bass fishing remains the summer's hardy annual, in a season that runs

from late-April to August/September.

The sea bed furrows its brow in many places, producing the reefs and sandbanks where those bass loiter, either to capitalise on what are natural food-holding areas or to conceal themselves from their prey.

"You can fish the Swash Channel close to the harbour entrance but you get mainly school bass there," says Andy. "Further afield, the popular areas are Old Harry and Peveril Races on the way to St Alban's Head to the west of Poole, while to the east we fish Southbourne Rough, Christchurch Ledge and the area around The Needles. These are all banks swept big strong currents."

It is this latter quality that creates the funnel effect as the sea bed ridges force the tide into a smaller area, causing an upsurge that drags food particles into concentrated areas.

"Plenty of tidal movement is the key," Adams confirms. "You can catch on the ebb or flow, but you need the water to be active. The fishing in general here is always best on a spring tide."

When conditions suit, double-figure bass come as standard, with a 16-pounder the best to have crossed the Random Harvest gunnels to date.

"Ideally, you want a warm, sunny day with plenty of bird action on the surface," says Andy. "That's the sign that the fry are being forced up and there are bass in the area."

A sandeel is the classic bait, of course, but if you're seriously committed to catching one of the larger bass, Adams recommends joey mackerel. That's small fish to the layman. Shads and other artificials he finds are an increasingly effective alternative.

"I'd say shads and livebait catch equally well now," he confirms. "Artificials are fantastic and I fish them on a 4ft snood."



When food meets predator there's only one winner

I use Storm but all makes tend to work well and of course they have the added advantage over livebait of not making such a mess on the boat!"

Whatever bait you opt for, the approach is to fish it on the bottom, in a bid to lure the fish out from the sea bed's humps and hollows. Adams advises his crew to go for 30lb mainline and a 20lb snood of 6ft for sandeel, although you should halve that length if using mackerel livebait, in order to minimise tangles with other anglers on a busy boat.

"If we're in about 30 metres of water, use a 4oz lead," he suggests, "but in anything shallower, 2oz should be enough."

The Poole Bay Small Boat Angling Club website (www.pbsbac.co.uk) recommends a sliding boom, stopped by a buffer bead and a swivel to keep the trace clear of the mainline and it also points its readers in the direction of fluorocarbon line, the extremely low refractory value renders it almost invisible in water.

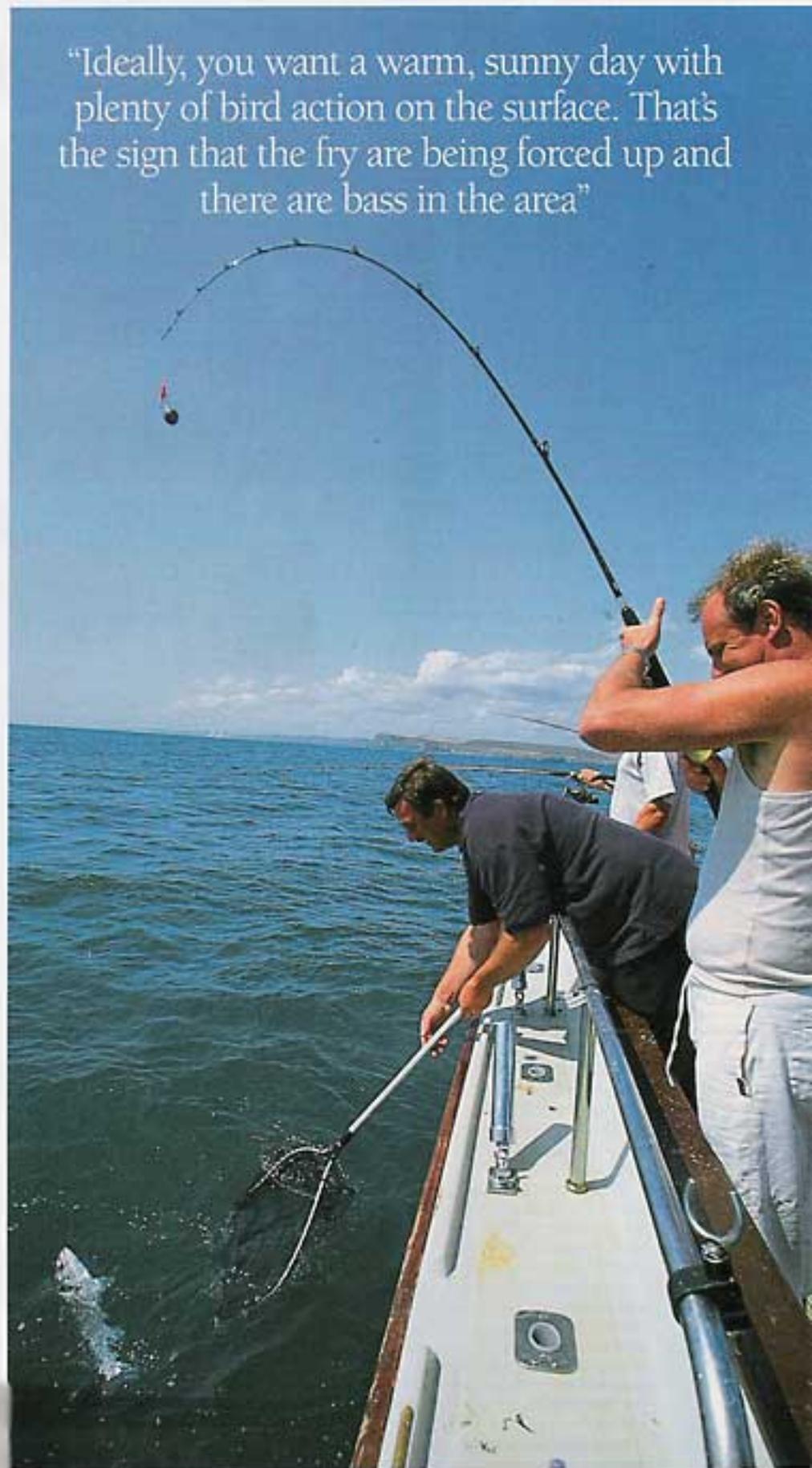
Adams is not a fan of braid. "I have seen a lot of good fish lost by anglers fishing with braid, usually because the leader has not been secured well enough to the mainline."

Given the species you are after, do not forget to use hooks that are strong enough to absorb a fish's most vigorous attentions but light enough not to restrict your bait's natural action if you are live-baiting. →

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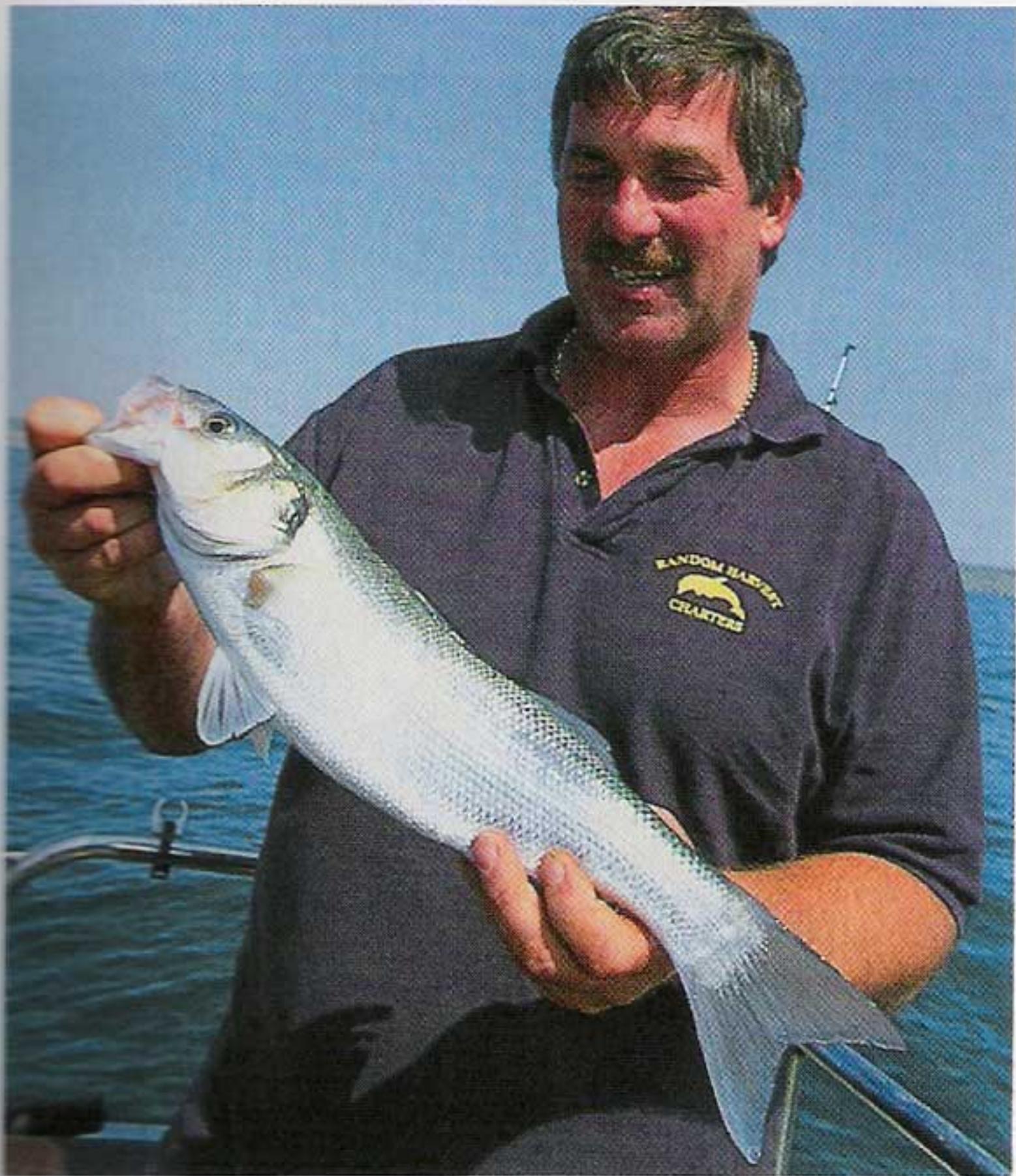


Gotcha! Fraser Stainbridge-Smith with a bass



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Skipper Andy Adams prepares to net a bass caught on a joey mackerel livebait



Skipper Andy Adams displays another pristine bass