

HOW TO GET AFLOAT

For the novice reservoir-fisher, taking to a boat is a daunting prospect. Andrew Flitcroft explains how to get started

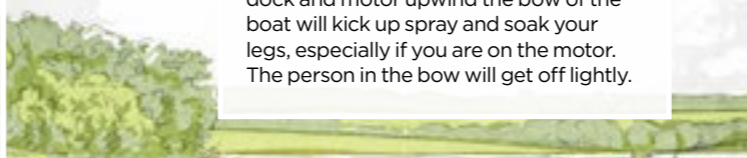
First, wear a life jacket

Before you walk on a jetty or get in a boat, you must put on a life jacket. All big reservoirs supply them and it is compulsory that you wear one (they will have passed regular safety checks). If you struggle to put one on, ask a fellow angler or fishery staff to help and if you take it off for any reason (ie removing clothes or going to the toilet), always do it up again – it's easy to forget! These life jackets inflate automatically on contact with water, but can inflate unexpectedly. Don't wear one under a waistcoat or jacket – if it inflated it could break your ribs.



Protect your rods

Rods can be crushed between boats and flies can get snagged on other rods and neighbouring boat-users in a crowded mooring. Keep your rod tip in the air, resting against the gunwale (side of boat) or in the stern or bow, depending on your position. Rod-holders that attach to a seat are a good idea and help to eliminate breakages.



Know the rules

Fishery rules vary so make sure you read the rules displayed at the lodge or on the approach to the jetty. Some state that you should keep 50m from bank-anglers and nature reserves. There will also be areas with underwater cables and pipes where anchoring is forbidden and there are restrictions on trolling.

Take plenty of clothing

It is much colder on a boat than it is on the shore, so take extra layers of clothing. Waterproofs are a must, not only to protect from rain, but wind, too. A day in a boat can be spoilt if you are wet and cold. Even on a bright, dry, but windy day you will need to wear waterproof trousers – as soon as you leave the boat dock and motor upwind the bow of the boat will kick up spray and soak your legs, especially if you are on the motor. The person in the bow will get off lightly.

How to start the engine

Step 1: Prime the engine. Pump the bulb in the fuel pipe between the engine and fuel tank with your hand until it goes firm.

Step 2: Check the engine is in neutral (the engine will not start unless it is in neutral). These engines are simple – there will be a shift lever on the side or front of the engine, which can be put in one of three positions: towards you to go Forward; upright for Neutral; and away for Reverse. Put the lever in the upright (neutral) position.

Step 3: Use a little choke to get the engine started. Pull the choke button out about halfway.

Step 4: Adjust the throttle (the hand grip on the end of the tiller). Turn the handgrip until the arrow aligns with the start position (if shown). If not shown, about half-throttle should do. Some motors will have a hare/tortoise symbol on the

throttle that indicates maximum/minimum throttle.

Step 5: You are ready to start the engine. Check again that the engine is in neutral, then pull the starter rope slowly until you get resistance from the starter gear, then more forcefully in one movement (as you would with a petrol lawnmower). Do not stand in the boat to pull the starter rope. If the motor is in gear or the starter just spins, you could lose balance and fall overboard.

Step 6: If the engine starts, push the choke button in slowly until the engine runs smoothly. If it doesn't start, repeat the process. If the engine doesn't start after five or six attempts, leave it for a while – you don't want to flood the engine. Then, prime again, give it a little more choke and try again. Fishery staff will be on hand to help.



The shift lever (far left), choke and stop button (under thumb) are easily located. Sit down when starting the engine and be patient if it doesn't start first time.

Getting in the boat

Don't carry all your tackle into the boat in one go. Place your kit on the pontoon, within reach of the boat, and then climb aboard. Keep your weight in the centre of the boat to stop it lurching to one side. You can then place yourself in the bow and load each item of tackle – one at a time. If you're fishing with someone, your partner can pass tackle to you. Once everything is aboard you can organise it. Fix your seating first and then place everything around you so that it's within easy reach.

Tackle up in the boat

If you've not fished from a boat before, it's best to tackle up in it, rather than on the bank. This will not only avoid breakages in transit, but will give you time to familiarise yourself with the available space, the movement of the boat and your balance, before you leave the jetty. Prepare your outfit ready for your first cast – rather than tie on a dropper fly or degrease your leader when under power.

Choose your seat

Boats have inbuilt seats (thwarts). Some anglers prefer them because they are secure and their low height means you are less likely to be seen by fish. However, their fixed position – you can't easily turn your body to the left or right, or move them nearer the stern or bow – and height can be uncomfortable over long periods, especially if you have long legs. Many fisheries supply thwart boards, which can be hired for a small fee (eg £1). These basic planks sit across the thwart and are higher, moveable and allow you to stretch your legs more. Incidentally, the stern has more space than the bow. If you become a keen boat-fisher, you may wish to buy a more comfortable seat, which revolves and has a back rest.



Basic boat-fishers' checklist

Before you leave the jetty...

- Make sure your mobile phone is charged and that you have exchanged phone numbers with fishery staff for emergency purposes (good fisheries have emergency numbers displayed in the boat).
- Ensure there's enough fuel in the tank before you set off. The boat should have oars, rowlocks and an anchor.
- Make sure there is a bailer to ship any excess water and to pee in.
- Before you go afloat, find out when the boats have to be back at the end of the day. Once on the water you will need to know how long it will take to return to the jetty (make a note of this on the outbound journey).
- On a boat you will burn easily in sunshine – light reflects off the water. Always wear a hat and glasses, take plenty to drink and apply sunscreen.



Attach the kill cord

If you look at the engine, you'll see a coiled red cable with a U-shaped clip slotted behind the stop button. This is the kill cord. Pull the clip from behind the stop button and the engine will cut out. If you are fishing alone, you should attach the other end of the cable to your clothing (waistcoat or jacket). Then, if you fall overboard, the engine will cut out rather than disappear into the distance or, worse, run you down with its propeller. If there are two of you in the boat, attach the loose end of the kill cord to the engine. If the man overboard takes it with him, his partner won't be able to restart the engine to rescue him.

Leaving the pontoon

Now that the engine is ticking over (still in neutral) and you are prepared and organised, you are ready to go. You will need to put the engine in reverse, but before you do, you or the fishery staff will need to untie the boat from the mooring and you must check that rod tips, nets, boat seats and anything else that protrudes from the boat won't get damaged as you leave. Once done, give a little throttle and back away from the jetty.

Steering the boat

Like parking a trailer with a vehicle, your first attempts at steering will take a bit of getting used to – especially in reverse. The boat turns in the opposite direction to the tiller. If you move the tiller to the left, the boat turns right; move the tiller right, and the boat goes left.

NEXT MONTH
Part 2: What to do in open water