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&

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5 Winter Match Fishing Mistakes Most Anglers Still Make

By Clive Branson



Introduction

Winter match fishing separates anglers into two groups:

Those who understand cold water —
and those who fish as if it's still October.

In winter, fish metabolism slows, feeding patterns change, and bites become cautious. Margins for error shrink dramatically. The anglers who consistently frame in winter matches are rarely the ones with the most feed — they are the ones with the most control.

Over the years, I've seen the same mistakes repeated on canals, rivers and commercials when temperatures drop.

Here are five of the most common.

Mistake 1 – Overfeeding Early

Cold water fish do not need heavy feeding to settle.

Yet many anglers begin a winter match by cupping in groundbait or loose feed as if it's summer. In low temperatures, this often kills the swim before it has even started.

A careful start is usually stronger:

- A few pinkies
- A small nugget of bread
- Minimal disturbance

You can always feed more later. You can't remove what's already on the bottom.

In winter, restraint is often your biggest advantage.

Mistake 2 – Ignoring Depth Accuracy

In summer, you can be slightly off depth and still catch.

In winter, half an inch matters.

Roach and skimmers often sit tight to the bottom in cold water. If your bait is hovering just above them, bites will be hesitant or non-existent.

Take the extra time to plumb carefully.

Check depth again after 20 minutes.



Precision wins winter matches.

Mistake 3 – Choosing the Wrong Float

Winter demands sensitivity.

Using a heavy bristle float or too much visible tip can cost you delicate indications. Cold water bites are often slow lifts or slight dips — not aggressive sail-aways.

Consider:

- Slim pencil floats
- Fine bristle tips
- Lighter rigs where conditions allow

You're not just fishing — you're interpreting subtle signals.

The right float choice can easily add several pounds to your net in winter conditions.

Mistake 4 – Feeding Too Much on Rivers

Flowing water tempts anglers to keep feeding.

But in winter, river fish are less mobile and less willing to chase feed downstream.

Instead of constant feeding, try:

- Smaller, more measured introductions
- Letting the swim settle
- Building rhythm slowly

Often, winter river matches are won by the angler who disturbs the peg the least.



Mistake 5 – Changing Approach Too Quickly

Winter fishing rewards patience.

Many anglers switch lines, change baits, alter depths and adjust rigs within the first 30 minutes when bites don't come instantly.

But cold water fish move slowly.

Give each line time to develop.

Establish a pattern before abandoning it.

More winter matches are lost through impatience than poor tackle choice.



Final Thought

Winter match fishing isn't about feeding hard or fishing aggressively.

It's about control. Precision. Patience.

When temperatures drop, simplify your approach and focus on doing the basics perfectly.

Small adjustments make a big difference in cold water.

For more match fishing insights, tactics and classic angling reflections, visit:

Angling-News.com

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— Clive Branson