

Drogue review by Michal Rybka

I was recently asked to conduct a comprehensive review of a drogue based on a design by Peter Hayes, but with further development and changes.

A drogue is simply a device that enables you to slow down the drift speed of your boat.

Why use a drogue?

Drogues are used to slow a drifting boat and, to a lesser extent, control the boat's direction. If you are fishing the lakes, the speed at which a boat drifts is dependent on the wind. If you are fishing in a river, both the current and the wind will influence the movement of your boat.

When there is a significant wind blowing, it will push your boat along so fast that tends to overrun your fly or lure, and you will end up retrieving faster to catch up with the boat. This means that the lure or fly won't have had the time to sink to the depth that you are trying to target. The speed of the drift may also mean that you may not even get a chance to properly work the lure through the water, and you also don't have much time to fish a particular area. It can be a big pain in the butt!

It is in such conditions when the drogue becomes very valuable piece of equipment. In windy conditions, you will be able to drift more slowly and this means that you will have more time to cover the area that you want to fish. The more time you have, the more effectively you can work that lure or fly and the more chances are that you will catch fish.

How it works?

This drogue is rectangular in shape and made of a durable shade cloth type material creating resistance, which slows the boat. The original was solide weave fabric and it required a hole in it to stop it yawing. The shade cloth type material eradicates the need for a hole in the middle. There is a light chain at the bottom to add weight to the drogue, and a float at the top. This ensures that the drogue hangs vertically in the water and doesn't spin or flip over as you drift.

The drogue is secured at the bow and stern so that it holds the boat side-on to the prevailing wind and, as a result, the boat drifts sideways and downwind. As a general rule, the closer the drogue is to the boat, and the closer it is to the surface, the less it will slow the boat. Therefore, in stronger winds you will need to let out more rope, which will produce more drag and slow the boat drift to a greater extent.

If your ideal drift is not directly downwind, the drift direction can be controlled to some extent by lengthening either the bow or stern line, which will alter the position of the drogue so that it is no longer parallel to the length of the boat. Obviously, you will need to adjust the rope lengths until you achieve the desired result. Joining the bow and stern lines to make a continuous line will make this adjustment process easier, essentially enabling the angler to use the drogue to steer the boat.

What you get

The 'Stevens' Drogue comes rolled and will fit in a 3kg Australia Post bag. It is quite compact. Included are simple A4 printed instructions that will give you all of the information required on how to properly set up and use the device from new.

Unfolded, the drogue measures 1800mm long x 900mm deep. There is a larger version 1800mm x 1200mm for boats with a lot of windage.

Short, top quality braided lines extend off each tow point; however, you will need to attach your own ropes to these so that the drogue can be connected to your boat. I have used a couple of pieces of plain nylon rope, which is both pliable and very cheap.



A thoughtfully used drogue, in windy conditions, allows you to fish the water more comprehensively and more effectively.



This drogue is compact when folded, but opens to 1800 x 900.

Results

I managed to test the drogue at Four Springs one afternoon in a stiff breeze. I wasn't able to measure the wind speed, but I was able to measure my drift speed using the Lowrance HDS5 sounder using GPS (Global Positioning System). GPS is a pretty accurate way of measuring speed, distance or position on the earth's surface.

Drifting south along the western shore with my boat in the traditional 'broadside' drift position (side on at 90° to the bank), I recorded my speed at 1.8 km/h without the drogue. You may not think that this is a fast drift, but it's enough to be too quick for any type of slow retrieve work.

Anyway, back to testing. The next step was to repeat the same drift with the drogue in place. I looked at the GPS and I was now drifting at 0.5 km/h. The large reduction in drift speed made it possible to retrieve the wet fly I was using in a slower and more controlled manner. It also allowed me to fish the fly deeper over the weed beds without having the boat running over it.

The time difference

Here is a simple calculation to give you an idea of the time difference between drift speeds with and without the drogue.

The distance of the drift on that western shore was approximately 400 metres.

The time required to cover this distance, drifting at a constant speed can easily be calculated:

Without the drogue:

Drifting speed was 1.8 km/h (0.5 metres per second)

Time = distance (metres) ÷ velocity (metres per second)

= 400 ÷ 0.5

= 800 seconds

= 13 minutes to complete the drift without the drogue

With the drogue

Drifting speed reduced to 0.5 km/h (0.13 metres per second)

Time = distance (metres) ÷ velocity (metres per second)

= 400 ÷ 0.13

= 3076 seconds

= 51 minutes to complete the drift with the drogue

From these results, it is clearly evident that by using the drogue I had significantly more time to fish that 400-metre stretch of shoreline!

Pros and Cons

Pros

- Dramatically reduces boat drift speed in windy conditions.
- Increases the time you have to fish over distance.
- Allows you to control your boat's drift direction.
- Improves boat stability in heavy wind.
- Compact size and lightweight material allows for easy stowage.
- Made of a durable shade cloth type material that won't rot.
- Brings in minimal water on retrieval into your boat.
- Easy set up with full instructions included.



Drift speed can be reduced by 75% or more, and set properly the boat can also be sailed across wind.

Cons

I can't say that I found any faults with the 'Stevens' Drogue.

However, this safety precaution applies to all drogues - when motoring at speed ensure that the drogue is well stowed. If it is just resting on a gunwale or sitting on a casting deck, it can blow overboard. There is a danger of it then setting in the water. This can cause an accident or it can even flip your boat. So don't be lazy. Stick it somewhere where it won't be blown out of your boat!

Finally, when using your outboard or electric bow mount motor, ensure that the drogue or the lines of the drogue cannot be caught in the propeller.

Summary

While the 'Stevens' Drogue is a rectangular 'sail-like' device, there are other drogues available called sea anchors. Some people also call them 'drift chutes' or 'drift socks'. To get things straight, a sea anchor is little more than a bucket with a hole in the bottom (in fact, a bucket can be used as a crude drogue). Different sizes are available, but the larger the drogue the more resistance it provides. While working on the same principle (water resistance), they tend to slow the boat less effectively than the rectangular 'Stevens' model. A sea anchor will also provide less control over the drift direction. They are also more difficult to retrieve.

The 'Stevens' Drogue is an essential piece of gear for those of you who are serious about your trout fishing. I know that I absolutely love mine and won't ever go fishing without it! It is easy to handle and will enable you to maximise the time spent fishing each section of water. It works very well with my boat, which is around 4.5 metres in length.

As a final note, I will leave you with a quote from Jim Allen:

"A properly set drogue is as fundamental to an enjoyable days fishing as is confidence in my fly, rod, reel and boat. Don't go fishing without one, but think about how and when, or even 'if' you deploy it."

The 'Stevens' Drogue sells for RRP \$120 or \$135 Express posted. Email mike@tasfish.com or phone 0418 129949 for retailers near you.

Michal Ryba



“A drogue is fundamental to lake fishing success in Tasmania!”

- Jim Allen

A drogue is a device that enables you to moderate the drift speed of the boat. This drifting technique originated on the reservoirs in UK and Ireland. The lakes of these countries are very much like ours in Tasmania and if the fish are hard to locate there is no better fishing technique than this as it enables you to cover large areas of water in a controlled manner.

Jim Allen, has fished Tasmania’s highlands for 40 years and shares his thought on drogues.

‘I was first introduced to the drogue when Peter Hayes donated one of his original designs. For the first time I had some resemblance of control over the drift. It was made from a very tough material and the rectangular shape proved a significant advance over the many home made jobs that were around. A combination of floats and weights keep it at the right attitude in the water, and by adjusting the length of the bow and stern rope you could sail across the wind rather than just drift directly down wind.

‘In heavy wind it improves stability of the boat, but in light conditions it is often preferable to NOT use a drogue and cover more territory. It can be advantageous to cover water reasonably quickly looking for fish, so don’t always put it out. If you do come onto some fish have it ready to drop over the side.

‘I often observe what I consider an overuse or misuse of the drogue. I see it deployed as a matter of routine even in the lightest winds. In conditions such as this the drift slows to an almost stalling speed and some drogues sink.

‘However I will set a drogue to slow the drift, particularly over a weed bed where past experience tells me fish are holding. It is wise to spend the most time in an area where the fish are.

‘The drogue should allow some water to pass through as this stabilises it. Importantly it should be set to achieve a drift following a shore or foam line by adjusting the bow or stern line with minor adjustments on your motor.

‘Over the years the Peter Hayes’ drogue became ‘the standard’. It is made of a tough material and its rectangular in shape proved effective and durable. The combination of floats and weights kept it at the correct attitude in the water.

‘However they are no longer available, and it was difficult to store in our mostly smallish boats. So I had to find a new one.

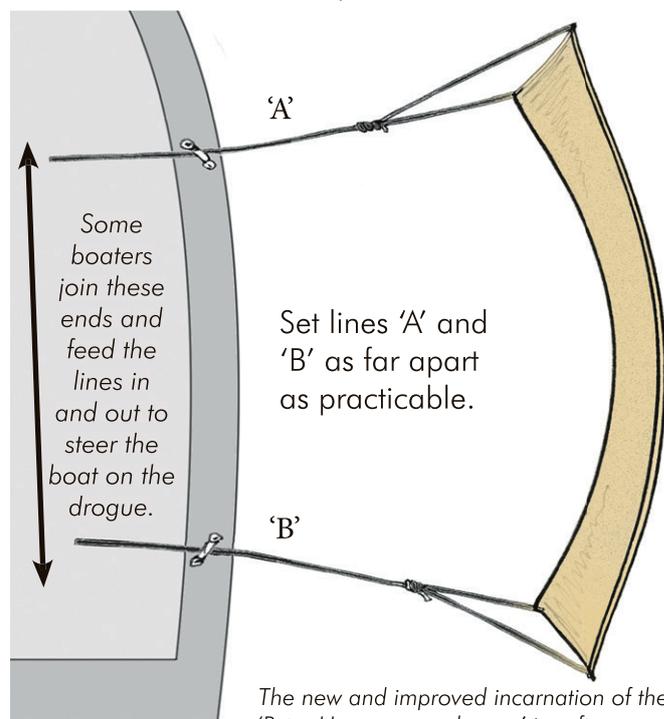
‘I recently upgraded to a 4.5 metre Polycraft and installed the Mike Stevens’ upgraded drogue based on the “Hayes” principal. In my opinion the upgrade is “sensational”. This new drogue balances the boat and achieves perfect drifts. The mesh design allows for easier storage and ready deployment. They are made locally in Tasmania, so contact Mike if you want one. When deployed this drogue has the perfect balance between flotation and stability in even the most severe conditions that one can experience in the “highlands!”

‘A properly set drogue is as fundamental to an enjoyable days fishing as is confidence in my fly, rod, reel and boat. Don’t go fishing without one, but think about how and when, or even ‘if’ you deploy it.’

Jim Allen

Using your drogue

Please note: Your new drogue takes some ‘running in’. It will be a little stiff at the start, but will soon become soft and flexible as you use it more and will ‘set’ faster.



The new and improved incarnation of the ‘Peter Hayes super drogue’ is softer, more easily set and stores in a smaller space.

Your boat can be ‘sailed’ across the wind on the drogue but letting line ‘A’ and/or ‘B’ in or out. Experiment to find the best drift as it varies between boats.

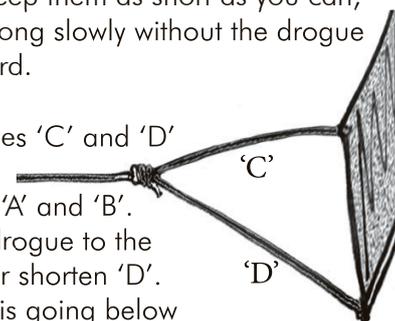
If your boat has high sides you may need to extend the lines ‘A’ and ‘B’. Keep them as short as you can, then you can motor along slowly without the drogue tangling in the outboard.

Drogue comes with lines ‘C’ and ‘D’ attached.

You need to add lines ‘A’ and ‘B’.

If your boat pulls the drogue to the surface lengthen ‘C’ or shorten ‘D’.

Likewise if the drogue is going below the surface lengthen ‘C’ or shorten ‘D’.



RRP \$120 + post; email mike@tasfish.com or phone 0418 129949 for other retailers near you.

Extra large version (1800mm x 1200mm also available on special order from Mike. Std version \$135 posted; Extra large \$150 posted. Pay by Paypal to mike@tasfish.com