



One fly leads to failure at the Test match

IT'S always a pleasure to mosey down to Hampshire in 'the sweet of the year'—the countryside is greening, and full of promise, and, in its fabled chalk streams, the trout are nicely overwintered. This time, however, I was a tad nervous. I had to fish in the River Test One Fly competition, beside COUNTRY LIFE Editor Mark Hedges, and I reckoned my piscatorial reputation might be on the line.

Modelled on an annual event that takes place at Jackson Hole, Wyoming—the rules limit contestants to a single fly per day—One Fly is the brainchild of flamboyant Simon Cooper, entrepreneur of the 'Fishing Breaks' sporting agency. It began last year, and our Editor reported it was well run and full of camaraderie. He wanted the magazine to take the 2009 trophy. I duly signed up, as did our team mate fellow author Neil Patterson, who lives on the Kennet and likes to set his alarm for 3am, to catch the Caënis hatch. I know of few finer fly-fishers.

Besides, I thought, what's the worst thing that could happen? Lose my hook first cast, shatter my new Loomis rod, hook noth-

'What's the worst that could happen? Lose my hook first cast, shatter my new Loomis rod, let the side down?'

ing, let the side down? I tried to relax as I swung into the car park of the Peat Spade Inn, where we were treated to breakfast butties and a full briefing. Eight teams of three were assembled, including a rod squad from deadly rivals (and sister publication) *The Field*. 'It's just a bit of fun,' Neil reminded me. But, of course,

Each individual is allocated



When you're only allowed to use one fly for the whole day, making your choice takes some time

a beat for the day and a guide, who also acts as adjudicator. I was in the capable hands of formersniper Clayton Moorhouse, and we were assigned a stretch of the lovely little Dever, at Bullington. At the hut, we rapidly decided on our set-up: there were few insects coming off, and a pesky breeze, so we plumped for a smallish Hare's Ear Nymph, attached to 7lb tippet (to minimise break-offs in foliage or fish). We got off to a flying start with a nice brownie, first cast—and, at 10.03am, the first fish of the entire competition. I shot Clayton a lopsided grin of triumph. If we carried on at this rate, I thought... anyway, it was only a bit of fun.

Being restricted to one fly per session adds piquancy to the day. Gone are those cavalier casts below the far willows—every move must be calculated, and that's all good practice. Clayton was soon busy with his pruning hook, and more than once had to shimmy up trunks on my behalf. Assisted by his sharpshooter's vision, we were able to pick off two more trout before

luncheon, but they were thin on the ground.

At half time, a phone call to HQ ascertained that I was in sixth place—but way out ahead was Nick Zoll, of *The Field*. Curses! Neil was having a lean time over at Mottisfont (F. M. Halford's old haunt): he'd managed a brace of tiddlers, dredging a nymph, but the only fish he'd seen actually rise had cheekily grabbed his strike indicator. If Halford hadn't been such a dry-fly purist, he'd have been spinning in his grave. The only consolation was that my old sparring partner—*The Field* führer Jonathan Young—was faring even worse. I couldn't raise Hedges on the mobile, so presumed he was continuously busy on his other line.

Clayton and I struggled through the afternoon, and made it back to the Inn with a total of 365 points (a combination of fish length and numbers). But when I saw our Editor at the tea table, I knew something was amiss. He smiled as if passing a kidney stone. Michael, his guide, weeping openly into his

bandana, explained they had spent most of the day in the tree-tops, lost both flies, and had finished (bottom rod) with an incredible 15 points. I bit down hard on my HobNob.

Well, we collected our trophy. Amid catcalls and general calumny, we took the Duffers' Delight award, for lowest-ranking team. *Victor Ludorum* was the preternatural Zoll who had finished with 1,075 points, thus almost single-handedly securing the overall winners' prize for... *The Field*. Now, indeed, I knew The Worst Thing That Could Happen. I shook Jonathan warmly by the throat, and headed straight for home.

There's been a whip-round in the COUNTRY LIFE office, however: to improve our chances, next year, we're packing the Editor off to Ulan Bator. 🐾

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