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There can be only one ...

The big decision

DARREN LEWIS reviews the flies used and the logic behind their selection in this year's 'River Test One Fly' competition

When it comes to fly fishing, Britain and America have always had a symbiotic relationship; sharing ideas, equipment, flies and techniques. Now we also have America's most famous fly fishing competition, 'The One Fly'.

The inaugural event took place on the Snake River in Jackson Hole in 1986, and has been growing in status ever since spawning successful versions in South America and New Zealand, with another successful version making it's natural migration to our shores.

The concept has been imported and translated to the UK by Simon Cooper, himself a former competitor of the Jackson Hole event. He has organised the competition around several beats of the River Test, and has used The Peat Spade Inn at Longstock as the base of operations to create the British version of the competition – now in its second year – 'The River Test One Fly'.

Like all competitions, preparation of equipment is paramount. Reels are cleaned, lines dressed, fresh leaders are fitted and a new bottles of floatant purchased, but unlike all other competitions, you can't repeatedly resort to a huge arsenal of flies ... you can only use one.

Tie your own

The reality isn't quite as brutish as this, as the rules do allow for a replacement fly, but the bonus for not changing your fly is so substantial, that to be in with a chance of winning, you really do need to stick to one fly. Think of all the possible scenarios and permutations involved, and their resultant ramifications ... it's not an easy decision!

The first decision for me is an easy one: tie your own. Fly manufacturers churn out thousands of excellent flies every day, but how do you know that the exact fly that you've chosen to use



Left: the Test fish like Charles Rangeley-Wilson's choice of fly.

PROFILE

Darren Lewis is an AAPGAI instructor and guide and was the lead instructor for Sportfish at its Reading casting school. Coming from Pembrokeshire he is a keen bass fisherman, but can mainly be found chasing trout, sea trout and salmon all over the country. He is also an experienced fly tyer.

is well tied? It looks good, but does that mean that the construction is secure? I've bought some mass-market flies in the past that have been terrible. Some salmon tubes have quite simply exploded on the first cast in a mass of floating multi-coloured hair, and I've had Snake flies which have pulled apart under moderate pressure because they were tied incorrectly.

Wet or dry?

This single fly has to be special. It needs to be able to be fished all day, to be recovered from trees, slashed at by tiny teeth, dragged through weed, and caught in nets, so it has to be especially robust, particularly well tied, and very durable. So, the first decision for me is easy: trust no one. Tie your own.

The second decision is: dry or wet?



Everyone would love to fish the dry all day, to have rise after rise of big, buttery-brown trout to a big Mayfly pattern, but the reality is the nymph is the more successful tactic on the Test in mid-April when this year's 'One Fly' took place.

The other main advantage of the nymph is that you can fish a heavier leader, but not only is it harder to spot the takes, but it's much more likely to get weeded up, so you run a bigger risk of losing the fly, so this isn't as simple a question as it appears. Also, there is a separate prize if you do persevere with a dry, so ultimately you may not win the event, but you do have more chance of winning something!

Next, you're presented with a whole raft of choices dependent on what fly you're going to fish. The size and gauge of hook, for example. A heavy gauge

hook is great for deep fishing nymph, but will it sink too quickly, will it get hooked into the weed too much? A fine wire dry fly hook will aid presentation, but will the wire be too fine and pull straight playing a large fish? Minor details are all of a sudden vitally important. The competition is catch-and-release, so do you opt for barbless hooks and risk the fish slipping off, or do you squeeze down the barb of a normal hook and risk damaging it, maybe even leaving a micro-barb that's too large and leads you to being disqualified?

And, finally, pattern

Now we're onto which pattern. Do you tie a realistic fly in sombre colours, or risk a gaudier pattern that may attract more attention but no firm takes? How much notice do you take of

'Minor details are all of a sudden vitally important'

the local fly life, do you go for an exact match or a general impressionistic pattern? Do you put your faith in a traditional pattern that's served you well over time, or risk everything on a modern pattern that gut instinct tells you should work on the day?

Even leader choice is vital, do you go for fluorocarbon for its refractive index in the water but have its reputation for being brittle nagging at you all day, or do you go for an old faithful nylon and hope the fish can't see it? What strength leader should you use in the first place?

The knot is obviously vital, do you glue it for extra security and lose that slight amount of shock-absorbing stretch? Do you Aquasure the knot to make it streamlined to avoid snagging weed, but then risk the fish seeing it? Do you leave the tag a bit longer than normal to allow for slippage?

Charles Rangeley Wilson

An experienced global fly fisherman with his passion firmly grounded in wild trout. When asked why he had chosen his fly, Charles stated that he chose his fly based on the nature of the beat he was allocated. Faultless logic really, he turned up on the day, saw the section of water he was to fish, and chose accordingly.



His fly

A straight forward hair-construction streamer pattern
Hook: Size 10 Kamasan B175 wet fly hook.
Thread: Brown thread.
Body: Flat tinsel.
Wing and tail: A fine but 'scratchy' natural hair such as Icelandic sheep in olive.

Howard Taylor

An ecologist, last year's individual top rod, and this year's individual runner up, so a serious contender for fly choice. When asked why he had chosen his fly, he replied that "Small is beautiful". Again, great thinking. Most commercial nymphs are heavily overdressed and are way too big, and by using the tungsten bead he didn't waste any competition time waiting for it to sink. He also hedged his bets by combining the two great nymphing materials, a pheasant tail thorax and a hare's ear body. One look at the fly also suggests why durability is important!



His fly

Very small weighted nymph on a medium wire curved shrimp hook
Hook: Size 16 Tiemco 206BL.
Thread: Tan thread.
Head: Small gold tungsten bead.
Body: Fine dubbed hare's ear
Rib: Fine gold wire.
Tail: Pheasant tail.
Wing case cover: Pheasant tail.

Neil Patterson

An accomplished fishing writer and fly tying innovator, Neil is an experienced angler with an analytical approach whose opinion is worth respecting. When asked about his choice of fly his logic was beautifully simple: "It's a good fish catcher". After all, isn't confidence key when in a competition?



His fly

A long-shank straight-eyed hook to accommodate the 4 beads, with a curve to the tail to give it shape, so a Klinkhåmer hook:
Hook: Size 12 Partridge Klinkhåmer.
Thread: Black thread.
Thorax/head: A small tungsten bead fitted in reverse followed by 3 small red plastic beads.
Abdomen: Rough black seal's fur body with a small amount of fine Flashabou.
Rib: Fine gold wire.

Nick Zoll

Another experienced global fly fisherman, and as the individual top points scorer and member of the winning team, the most salient opinion to seek out on the day. Not only was his lightweight, two-dimensional winning fly a beautiful individual creation that made my eyes flash in wonder when I saw it, but his answer summed up the decision process eloquently, but with all the prerequisite mystery that should surround any winning fly.

"The fly comes from Macedonia, and is tied up by a secret tyer who's sworn to reveal his patterns only to me, and has been very successful for me on the Norfolk rivers. Today it just seemed like a sensible choice, I don't know why, probably because it'll hold together really well, it's got an epoxy back, and I just thought it would be the fly to use."

His fly

A light slim epoxy shrimp but with a wide flat profile making it extremely mobile by easily catching the current when side on. Tied by an unidentified tyer from Macedonia, arguably the home of fly tying!
 A medium gauge shrimp hook such as a size 12 Kamasan B100
Thread: Is there any? The fly's head is finished off with the ribbing material.
Legs: French partridge 'grey neck feather' cut to length for shape



Body: Epoxy coated.
Rib: Fine red vinyl rib under the epoxy.
Body construction: Very light, so not solid epoxy, and a secret! Something appears to be forming the shape, and it appears to be lashed down with white floss. It didn't appear to have any thread, and the epoxy was perfect, the feathers emerged absolutely without blemish or hindrance. Whoever tied it is an excellent craftsman!

Sorry Nick, but I'd recognise that jewel of a fly a mile away – it's one of Igor and Nadica Stancev's Shrimp patterns. It's the dressing that's a mystery – they keep that close to their chests, but I hope one day they'll reveal it in *FF&FT*. Until that point you can purchase them at: www.fishingflies.com.mk/order.htm
 – Editor.



Up a gum tree. Fly retrieval takes a new, all-important meaning in this competition.

On the bank

I spoke to a selection of the competitors on the day to see how they came to their fly of choice (see left). Every competitor I spoke to was a successful and experienced angler, more often than not was professionally involved in angling, and all were experienced chalkstream fisherman. What was interesting – and what I wasn't expecting – was that all the competitors I spoke to had a different thought process for choosing their fly. When I asked them all to explain their reasoning for their choice of fly some gave considered technical responses, some gave automated quick-fire responses, some seemed amazed I had even asked at all as to them it was an obvious selection.



Charles Rangeley Wilson being presented with a £1,500 cheque for the Wild Trout Trust by Simon Cooper, organiser of the 'River Test One Fly'.

There were other winners at this event, guide Marcus McCorkell picked up the prize for top guide after being strongly tipped to win all day. Charles Rangeley Wilson who had been sponsored to compete in the competition also collected a cheque for £1500 towards the Wild Trout Trust, with a further £500 being added later in the day.

The day summed up why I see fly fishing as an art form: 24 competitors, each with a different approach, each with a different fly, and each approach as valid as the next. There is no 'right' answer to anything in fly fishing! But remember to tie your own fly ...