

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

April, 2000- The Stimulator



This photograph of the Stimulator was provided courtesy of its originator, Randall Kaufmann.

Kaufmann's Stimulator: A great all-around attractor fly

By Jim Abbs

While the April Fly of the month is nationally heralded, it is almost worshiped in the American West. That is not to say that it is not used elsewhere for it has an international following and is reported to be very effective from New Zealand to the mountains of Sweden. However, aside from these reasons for describing Randall Kaufmann's Stimulator and how to tie it, I have personal endearing memories toward this fly. From the time I started fishing western waters in the early 1980's this fly has been a great producer, first on rolling, roaring Rock Creek in Western Montana, and following that on a couple dozen medium sized and large western rivers, including the Wenatchee, Yakima, and Methow in Washington State, the Clark Fork, Yellowstone, Gallatin, Bitterroot, and Blackfoot in Montana and even the Tongue in Wyoming. This fly is truly an attractor for all occasions and can be fished in sizes from 4 to 16, with features of both stoneflies and caddis, but also working as a hopper.

What makes the Stimulator so effective? Many fly originators have elaborate theories. Randall Kaufmann is perhaps more honest than most in stating outright that he doesn't know why the Stimulator is so effective. He even raises a possibility that is not mentioned by most fly designers who want to mimic nature with new looking patterns: "The Stimulator may be just different enough that fish do not remember having an earlier encounter with it and mistake it for real food."

Randall Kaufmann is unusually honest in another way as well. He readily admits that the Stimulator is not unique, but is kind of a composite of "parts" from other effective flies. In the 21st century, there are very few things that are truly brand new. In fact, genius is often in the ability to synthesize, rather than create.

So why does the stimulator work? Well, I think one particular insight deserves a direct quote: "By tying the fly wide (spreading out its tail and wing) and tall with the wing spread upward, the fly "creates the illusion of bulk and the blurred or fluttering image of wing movement. Palmered hackle adds to this illusion, and it should be stiff and tapered, smaller

at the tail area These features, along with fishing them when they are in good condition ensures "they react to tiny individual currents, portraying a bouyant, animated natural insect." (Randall Kaufmann, Tying Dry Flies, 1992).

If you are going somewhere out west (or to New Zealand or Sweden) and are not familiar with the Stimulator, try it this year. It is very easy to tie and by varying color combinations and sizes, it offers almost a full fly box of variety.

MATERIALS

- **Hook:** 2X OR 3X Long Dry Fly, TMC 200R, Mustad 79580, Size 6-16
- **Thread:** Orange, 3/0 or 6/0
- **Tail:** Elk (Deer Body Hair is called for by some tyers)
- **Abdomen:** Yellow/orange dubbing
- **Rib:** Brown or grizzly hackle, palmer style, smaller than hook size
- **Thorax:** Orange Dubbing
- **Hackle:** Grizzly over thorax, dry fly style
- **Wing:** Elk

TYING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Tie in clump of elk hair for the tail, with a length extending beyond the bend of the hook about 1 ½ times the hook gape. Some tiers tie the butt ends of the elk hair on the hook shank as an underbody.
2. Tie in brown or grizzly hackle for palmer rib and dub a tapered yellow-orange body forward to about 2/3rds the length of the shank.
3. Wrap the hackle forward, palmer style over the abdomen. Tie off and tie in the wing of elk hair such that the end of the wing is even with the bend of the hook.
4. Tie in second hackle and dub the thorax forward to a few mm behind the hook eye.
5. Wrap the hackle forward, dry fly style and tie off.
6. Whip finish and go fishing.

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