

FFF Fly of the Month

H & L VARIANT (a.k.a. House and Lot)



By Bob Bates

In 1991 my son Hilary and I were fishing Millionaire's pool on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, near Last Chance, Idaho with his friend, Lorie Ann Murphy. He knew her in Seattle before she became a well-known guide. She told us that President Eisenhower used the H & L Variant when he fished Millionaire's Pool as a guest of the Harriman family. Many people and several books also tell us that the H & L Variant was President Eisenhower's favorite fly. It is so easy to see that it should be everybody's favorite.

My references back to 1960 talk about the H & L Variant or House and Lot, but the tying instructions were a little confusing. One book had a picture of it, and the hackles were extremely long - three to four times the gap width - which does fit one definition of variant. Most tiers and other references said that it should have normal size hackle. Certainly Ed Thomas from Montana who tied it at the 1993 FFF Show and Lory Watkins from Washington who tied the pictured fly at the 2002 FFF Show use a normal hackle length.

Fish it in a stream is like any dry fly using a floating line and drag free float. At one time I thought that "drag free float" was just something magazine writers made up to fill space. However in the 50's, Yellowstone

National Park browns and rainbows convinced me that it is important.

For a real thrill on stillwater, cast it in the path of a big chain feeding fish and watch the fly disappear. The trick is to judge where that fish will come up next.

Materials:

Hook: Mustad 94840 or Tiemco TMC 100, 100BL or 900BL, 10-18

Thread: White 3/0 and Black 6/0

Tail: White calf body or calf tail hair

Body: Rear half stripped peacock quill, front half peacock herl

Wing: White calf body or calf tail hair, upright and divided

Hackle: Furnace

Tying Steps:

1. I always smash the barb first. Start the thread at mid-shank and make a thread base rearward. Lory starts with white thread, and Ed uses black from start to finish.
2. Cut a bundle of calf body hair or straight calf tail a little bigger in diameter than the hook's eye. Clean out the fuzz and short hair and stack it. Tie on a shank length tail, trim butts and wind a thread base forward to near the eye before bringing it back to the 1/3rd point.
3. Cut another bundle of calf hair about twice the size of the first. Clean out fuzz and short hair and stack it. Tie in bundle with tips forward one shank length. Hold the hair toward you (assuming that you wind away from you over top of hook) to it on top of the shank. Trim butts to match butts from tail, taper the body a little and make a smooth thread base for the body.
4. In tying flies to catch fish there is usually more than one way to accomplish the task. Ed and Lory tie the wings differently. Try both ways and see which you like.
5. A. Ed's method: Divide hair and use a figure eight to put wings into almost a spinner position. Post each wing by winding up the wing bundle and then down again. If the thread slips off the wing, then use a little less thread tension, more calf hair or both. Do a figure eight on top of wings and drop the bobbin. Now just pull up wings to position them instead of pulling the thread. Put one or two thread wraps behind the wings.
B. Lory's method: Pull up tips and wind thread in front of wings to stand them up. Divide hair and wind thread in a figure eight to keep hair divided. Post each wing. Put a drop of cement on the base of

each wing and body. At this point Lory ties off the white thread and attaches the 6/0 black thread.

6. Strip about 2 inches of the fuzz off the butt part of a peacock herl using your thumb and first finger. If you have never used this method of stripping herls, you will probably break a few before you get the pressure right. (I find that a newly trimmed thumb nail helps.) Attach the quill under the shank and pull down on quill as you wind thread rearward to the bend. Return thread to mid-shank. Wrap the stripped quill forward. If the quill splits or breaks as it is wrapped, soak it in water first.
7. With a little practice the quill will run out and the herl start at the point 3/4ths back along the shank from the eye. If there is a little too much stripped quill, wrap a little forward of the 3/4th point and then back to the 3/4th point so the herl starts there. Then wrap the peacock herl forward to the mid-point, secure and trim. (If all else fails, wrap on the quill and tie it off. Then tie on herl and wrap it forward to the mid-point.) Some recipes call for counter wrapping the quill and herl with fine gold wire.
8. Tie on a hackle and secure shaft under hook to in front of wing or put shaft between the wings and tie down. Pull hackle forward before starting to wrap. Put three wraps behind wings and three in front. Stop wrapping on top of hook and secure. If you clip off a few fibers on top when trimming it is OK.
9. Finish the head and put on a little cement.

I cannot guarantee that this tie is identical to the pattern that President Eisenhower used, but even without that information there are many expert fly casters who use the H & L Variant. It is a great dry fly.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.
You can direct any questions or comments to flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org