

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

December, 2000- Mickey Finn



Mickey Finn: A streamer with an amazing story

By Jim Abbs

A particularly intriguing aspect of fly fishing is the history behind each of the 10,000 fly patterns and the people who used and popularized them. Even more captivating is why a fly has a particular name. On the American side of the Atlantic, perhaps no fly has a more interesting history than the Mickey Finn.

Classically, a "Mickey Finn" was a knock-out or doped drink given to an unknowing person. For trout, bass and panfish, the Mickey Finn fly was considered as deadly as that super-strong drink. But the story of this fly name is even more interesting.

Originally the Mickey Finn was a streamer fly called the "Red and Yellow Bucktail". It apparently was sold by a company called William Mills and Son in the early part of the last (20th) century.

Mr. John Alden Knight, an author and famous angler in the 1920s and 1930s (developer of sun and moon tables predicting fishing success) was its early promoter. On one fishing trip he introduced the fly to war correspondent and columnist for the Toronto Star, Mr. Gregory Clark. Mr. Clark found the fly to be particularly deadly and first named it the Assassin. But several days later, he heard a claim that famous singer and movie star Rudolph Valentino was killed (in 1926) by New York waiters who gave him a Mickey Finn. Clark renamed the fly and subsequently wrote a story about it in the Hunting and Fishing Magazine.

According to Clark, when that magazine hit the newsstands in fall of 1937, it was during the New York Sportsman's Show and as a result over 300,000 Mickey Finns were tied and sold during the show alone. In the first 2-3 months of 1938m so great was the demand that the Weber Fly Company of Steven's Point Wisconsin claimed to have sold over 1 million Mickey Finns.

What made this fly so popular? One suggestion is that it is simply a very pretty fly, with its bright red, yellow and silver colors. But apparently for trout, especially brook trout, largemouth bass and bluegill, it is still very effective. Certainly, given its wonderful history

and everyday familiarity, it belongs among the classic flies of America.

The technique for fishing this fly is fairly simple, according to its originator, John Knight. In moving water, cast the streamer quartering upstream, let it sink 2-3 feet and then retrieve it with short, well-spaced jerks. Apparently, according to my experience, a similar technique works in Stillwater, at least for bass and bluegill.

MATERIALS

Hook: Sizes 2-10, 4X long (Mustad 9575, TMC 300)

THREAD: Black

RIB: Oval silver tinsel

Body: Flat silver tinsel

Wing: Yellow over red over yellow bucktail (or calf tail)

TYING STEPS

1. Start the thread at the bend of the hook and tie in a length of oval silver tinsel.
2. Wrap the thread forward to a point about 1/8 inch behind the hook eye and tie in a length of flat silver tinsel. Wrap the silver tinsel down the hook shank to the bend of the hook and back to the tie in point.
3. Wind the silver oval rib tinsel forward to just behind the eye of the hook and tie off and trim excess.
4. Select a bunch of yellow bucktail and tie in over the body.
5. Select a bunch of red bucktail of the same size and tie in over the yellow bucktail.
6. Select a second bunch of yellow bucktail (about equal in size to the combined red and yellow bucktail already tied in) and tie it on top of the second red bunch.
7. Trim butt ends of the bucktail so as to create a taper toward the head. Whip finish the head, apply head cement and go fishing!

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You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org