

Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

April, 2001- The Rubber Legs/Girdle Bug



Rubber Legs: Flies with a natural, but man-made wiggle

By Jim Abbs

How can a wary fish distinguish a live underwater fly from a dead (or fake) fly that is being carried along with the current or stripped in by an expectant fly fisher?. One answer would be legs, or more specifically legs that are moving in a life-like fashion. Hackle, particularly soft hackle used on underwater flies is intended to create that illusion of life. The soft hackle from a partridge or quail, tied long and flowing does this job pretty well. Moreover, these are natural materials and acceptable to more traditional fly tiers. Tying flies with materials from the hair and feathers of nature's wild critters is a noble undertaking and it fits with the ecosystem world view of many fly anglers. Silk and wool are acceptable because of their natural origins.

However, we live in a world made better by chemical manipulations, so we are told. Indeed, there is a man-made leg material thought by many to be better for fly legs, especially on imitations of big insects like giant stoneflies and dragonflies. It is more available, generally cheaper, easier to tie with, can be changed to almost any color pattern and is almost indestructible. This miracle material is rubber, or more accurately, the thin strands of rubber like those in a rubber band. These rubber strands are available in most fly tying supply stores and you can get thousands of flies out of the bundle of rubber found in a common bungee cord, costing less than two bucks. Rubber legs are common in the most popular big flies for trout, like Girdle Bugs, Bitch Creek Nymphs, Yuk Bug, Madam X, Ugly Rudamus, most spun deer hair bass bugs and a host of panfish flies, including the favorite cork body poppers.

Why are rubber legs so popular or effective? Unlike barbules of a feather, the rubber strands used in fly legs do not taper and hence a long rubber leg has a lot of weight or mass far out from the point of attachment. That mass tends to be very unstable and it moves almost on its own. While this mini-physics lecture is unnecessary, it adds to the view we fly anglers have of ourselves as scientific.

Finally, for those traditionalists who find rubber legs unacceptable, rubber is a material

perhaps almost as old as silk, with archeological data to suggest that the native people of central America were using it for over 3,500 years.

While there are literally hundreds of flies with rubber legs, the following instructions are for the Girdle Bug. The name of this fly is based on the source of the rubber for the legs.

MATERIALS:

Hook: 2X long hook, sizes 2-12

Thread: Black

Tail: Two strands of "rubber hackle" white or any color desired. Some tiers segment the rubber strands with a marker creating a grizzly pattern and Orvis actually sells some barred rubber strands.

Body: Black, green, brown or even yellow chenille, or two of these colors.

Ribbing: A fine silver or gold tinsel (optional)

Legs: Three sets of rubber strands tied to stick out sideways from the body and spaced evenly so as to divide the body into 4 segments.

Antennae: Same as tail.

TYING STEPS

1. Select two segments of rubber strand material about $1 \frac{3}{4}$ the length of the hook shank. Tie them directly on top of the hook so that they form a "V" tail extending beyond the end of the hook shank about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the hook shank length.
2. Wrap the thread over the rubber leg material up to about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the hook eye.
3. Select three segments of rubber strand material about $1 \frac{1}{4}$ times the length of the hook shank. Lay these at right angles to the hook shank and tie in with a criss-crossing thread. Position the three sets of legs at equal intervals along the length of the body (a common pattern for a Girdle Bug), or alternatively concentrate them near the front, as in a "Rubber Legs" pattern.
4. If you wish to weight the fly, tie in a segment of thin or heavy lead wire just behind the eye (depending upon weight desired) and wrap it from the front to the back. Leave room to finish the head.
5. Wrap the thread back to the bend of the hook and tie in the ribbing and the chenille. If a two-tone fly (as in the Girdle bug) is desired tie in both colors of chenille.
6. With a single color fly wrap the chenille forward and tie it off behind the eye (leaving room for the head). The chenille should not interfere with For a dark upper body and a yellow underbody, wrap the thread back to the bend and lay the yellow (second color) chenille under the body. Wrap the thread forward followed by the ribbing.
7. Tie off chenille, ribbing, whip finish the head and apply cement.
8. Go and catch some fish.

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