

## Al Owen November 2022

The Covid shut down delayed a proposed visit from Al Owen some 12 months ago. He was brought up on a hill farm close to Aberystwyth and honed his skills seeking salmon and sea trout on the Dovey. His attention turned to Clywedog, a serpentine shaped reservoir set between some steep mountains. It is a non-profit organisation run by the local angling club. I noted that it was recently voted best reservoir of the year on a still water forum on Facebook. It is a 200+ mile journey from Cambridge but readers can get a practical idea of the fishery from an article in [invictaffc.org.uk/about-us/members-contributions](http://invictaffc.org.uk/about-us/members-contributions) by Rob Edmunds which reflected on a 3 -day visit with family and Neil

and Sue Potts.

He is now near the banks of Rutland where he has fished for 40 years. He admitted it was a hard start but progressed to regular limit bags. He reckoned that the most important development over the years was not in secret flies but the vast range of lines now available.

Al started with a basic FAB using 8/0 Uni Thread to build a thin base layer. A few strands of mirror flash were added followed by the foam. I recall that some tyers like to split the foam but the image suggests that this was not the case in this demo. The fly was built up from the rear with a few turns of yellow fritz and a front end of



Figure 2

orange fritz with the fibres

constantly stroked backwards as the construction progressed. The head was finished off with turns of red thread. I noted that he was a fan of a whip finishing tool and Sally Hanson's "Hard as Nails" varnish rather than UV resin. The fly is shown in Figure 1.

The flamboyant nature of this pattern initially caused a lot of hostility when it was introduced. However, as Al pointed out, it was a vital tool in the armoury to keep buzzers in the field of view

of the trout and facilitate a retrieve which caused the fly to move in a deadly vertical plane. They are usually employed on the point and occasionally one at each end of the leader. If you do not like the colour then there are plenty of other options including black!

Mr Owen is famous for developing a chironomid pattern known as Al's Buzzer, reputed to be highly effective at Rutland. A description of the tying technique is best followed on [www.troutandsalmon.com/tips-venues-gear/fly-library/how-to-tie-als-buzzer/](http://www.troutandsalmon.com/tips-venues-gear/fly-library/how-to-tie-als-buzzer/) His basic philosophy was to use natural materials including the quill body and goose biots (Veniards) for the wing cases. He liked to keep the body as thin as possible. The fly was finished with many coats of varnish: did I hear 3 or 4 coats? This fly is shown in Figure 3.

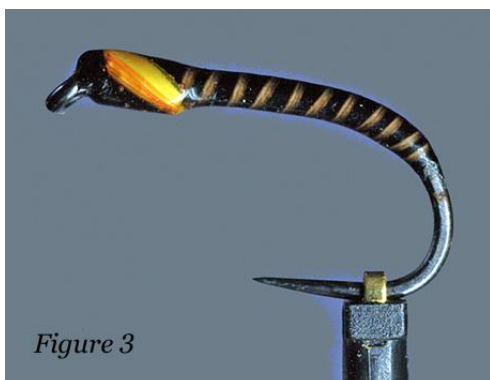


Figure 3

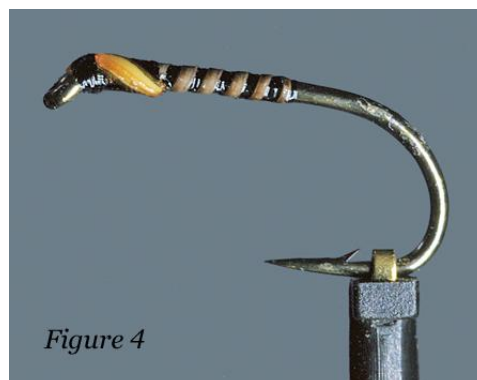


Figure 4

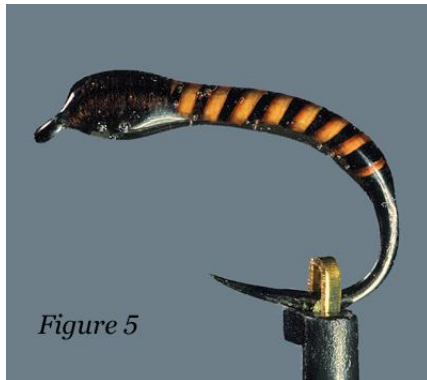


Figure 1

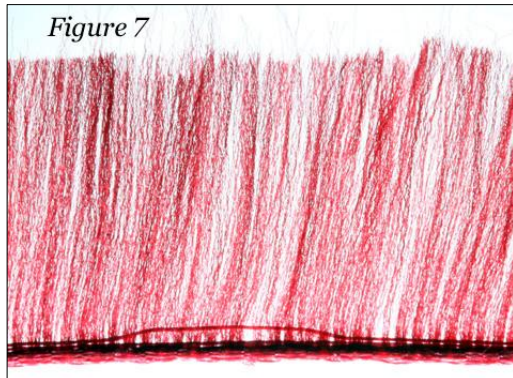
In case the colour of the body is not obvious in the picture, it is a chocolate brown.

Should the fish be on a smaller pattern, then his approach is to use the same hook but tie the body short. This pattern is shown in Figure 4.

The fish are invariably deep early in the season and a heavier nymph is required. Al was talking about achieving a depth of 30 feet with a combination of 4 nymphs on the cast. The point fly was essentially the Al's pattern without the biots but extra varnish as shown in Figure 5. He also stressed the need to use the hang method in the later stages of the retrieve. He did not mess around with flimsy leader material and regularly used 13lb fluorocarbon.



Al demonstrated his version of the Cruncher. He was a great advocate of using Metz capes: in this case it was a Greenwell hen pattern. The tail was made from crimson pheasant feathers. The body was constructed from 4-5 fibres from a pheasant tail either natural or sometimes black. The body was secured with turns of silver wire. 3 turns of micro fritz was used for the thorax with a secondary turn of UV material to act as an attractor. 3 turns of a Greenwell's feather was employed to finish the fly on a size 10 hook – see Figure 6.



Finally, he introduced (to me at least) a new material "Organza" which is a decorative ribbon used to bundle up parcels and bunches of flowers. A perusal of Amazon shows that it is available in many colours and 20 metre rolls are quite cheap. The ribbon must be sectioned down the middle and the longitudinal fibres teased away. The result is not unlike a feather but without the tapered fibres, Figure 7. The example he tied utilised Organza as a hackle wound along the length of the body suitably spaced to allow a red holographic body to shine through – Figure 8 – the fly with no name?

*I thought that his talk was an informative combination of fly tying and fishing techniques. The FAB reminded me of the Muddler Minnow except nobody at the time (AFAIK) realised its potential for inducing the vertical rise of the secondary fly. A precursor of the skinny chironomids was the Footballer, devised by Geoff Bucknall, who employed a single layer of horse hair for the body. I dismissed it at the time, thinking that a trout could not possibly see it!*

Al left the flies he tied with the club which I expect to be used as a prize in a future raffle may be?

**Dave Jones December 2022**