

Viva variants

Rob Denson in praise of a magical family of flies with which to open your stillwater season

MARCH IS a dreadful month weatherwise; I don't like it much. Fickle in the extreme, instability and unpredictability are March's mantras. Like the ladies and, ahem, gentlemen, who will canvass and court tirelessly over the coming months as we run up to the General Election, March will promise much, but inevitably deliver little. A pledge to remove March from the calendar would secure my vote. Now there's a policy!

Still, unlike our political masters, March can at least be trusted to follow through with the odd policy or two in its manifesto. Hedgerows and highways, byways and banksides will rejuvenate once again as birdsong and colour slowly but surely return to release us from the grip of the long, icy, grey monotony of winter. Day will conquer night, the clocks will go forward, and temperatures will occasionally think about heading into double figures. As and when they do, I'll occasionally think about heading out, clad top-to-toe in more skins than an onion, into the great wide open.

Despite the vagaries of the British spring, the new season is always welcomed with open arms. Plans are made, fishing friends reacquainted, and freshly stocked fighting-fit fish are looking for trouble in the cold, oxygen-rich water. And so are the overwintered residents - if you know where they live and take the time and effort to tempt them.

It's a time to reacquaint yourself with old friends in your fly-box, too. We all have our favourites: tried-and-trusted servants that seem to smile and whisper in quiet persuasion, making our choice an easy one as we peer into our boxes for the first time in months.

One such old friend is the Viva and its variants. Simplicity itself, and sporting perhaps the ultimate early-season colour scheme, the Viva is probably responsible for as many springtime kills as any other fly. From Lechlade to Ladybower to Leven, the Viva will take rainbows and browns, brookies and blues wherever and whenever it is cast. It is a "no brainer".

Two more Viva variants: one with a simple black thread body and silver rib (left) and another with a straggle fritz body palmered with a black hen hackle.



Hook Kamasan B170 and B175 or Fulling Mill Black Competition Heavyweight **Thread** Black **Tail** Fluoro green, lime-green and chartreuse marabou or glo-brite No. 12 **Body** Black seal's fur, straggle fritz (black-and-silver straggle makes a perfect modern replacement for the silver rib/black chenille of the original) or black silk **Rib** Silver tinsel **Wing** Black marabou (garnish to taste with pearl wing-slips, jungle cock cheeks and/or hen body/head hackles)



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The original chenille-bodied fly, however, has long since disappeared from my armoury. I'm not a fan of the stuff; far too chunky for my liking, it offers none of the translucency and life afforded by seal's fur or straggle - which is important, I think, in the larger style of dressing, less so perhaps in smaller mini-lure and wet-style variants where a simple black thread body wound with an appropriately sized and spaced flat silver rib is hard to beat.

The three variants pictured have served me well over recent years, generally fished on the lower half of the leader - middle or tail - with a slow retrieve, picking up the pace slightly as the weather warms. Like most truly great flies, the Viva has inspired 1001 variants, from wee doubles to wet-flies, mini-lures, straggle- and marabou-clad nasties, Snatchers, and even the dreaded Blob. To be fair, the Viva connection is sometimes a little tenuous, often the only link being the black, silver and green colour scheme. However, it stands testament to the pulling power of the pattern and the efficacy of its colour scheme that 40 or so years later the association is still made. It's as if the mere mention of the name will bestow magical powers upon one's variant. How silly. But you know what? I think it does! **T&S**