

# Slip-Wing Mallard & Claret

**Rob Denson** modifies a classic for the top-dropper position



**ROB  
DENSON**

has fly-fished for trout for 25 years, visiting all four corners of Britain and Ireland, combining his love of fly-tying, photography and a rolling wave. Website: [robdenson.co.uk](http://robdenson.co.uk)

**M**ANY OF THE traditional wet-flies that we use remain, by and large, unaltered and unadulterated. Time, modern materials and the fly-dresser's uncontrollable urge to tinker have had little impact on sound, simple and very successful thinking. They have – for those that remember the ad – the Hovis factor: “As good today as it’s always been”. It’s still tempting, however, to view the old classics as a framework for bright ideas and even brighter, flashy materials; surely, there’s room for improvement? In the case of the Mallard & Claret, 160 years, and more kills to its name than virtually any other fly, suggests not. Improvement is a big word; twist is a little shorter. So here’s a Mallard & Claret with a twist.

From an aesthetic and a fish-catching point of view, the original Mallard & Claret has always appealed to me more when dressed on the lean side. Most shop-bought and some home-tied specimens contain enough material for three flies – a tail and wing like a witch’s broom and a body like a grape does nothing for me, and I suspect the fish feel the same. Many theories have been mooted as to what the original represents: buzzers, shrimp, sedges, ephemeropterid nymphs or duns. The fact that the Mallard & Claret

kills consistently from March to September tells me that it’s taken for none in particular but suggests all rather well.

Despite its versatility, my use of the Mallard & Claret is limited to when olive, sepia and, of course, claret duns abound. All three species are fairly common, and can hatch as early as March. The Mallard & Claret’s efficacy as a claret or sepia dun suggestion is logical; it’s harder to make the case for pond or lake olives. But trust me, claret works mighty fine for olive-feeders.

So why the need for slip-wings? Having no body hackle, my personal preference for fishing the standard tying is always on the lower positions – middle dropper or tail. The fly gets down and gets to work instantly. Fine when the fish are taking claret and sepia nymphs, and agile darters (olive nymphs), but what about emergers and duns? Rightly or wrongly, it goes against the grain for me to fish such a slim fly, loch style on the top dropper. A little more bulk and movement suits the top-dropper position nicely, so two elements were added: a hen body hackle, and a drab slip-wing. The mallard switched from the wing position to cloak the shoulder and throat, almost Dabbler-style.

The resulting fly has served me well over the last seven seasons when any small or medium-sized duns litter the surface and skitter around. The inaugural outing, in particular, will live long in my memory. It was 2010 on a misty, mid-May morning when I headed for Tal-y-Llyn to meet Alex Ferguson, his father, Jim, and George Barron. Hopes were high for big numbers of olives. For once, everything came together: conditions for the olives were perfect – dull and damp. Pairings were made, and I drew George. My backside on a silver salver was surely only a matter of hours away for George has form, tying and fishing olives in Welsh Wales. The Slip-Wing Mallard & Claret was my only hope. We lost count, but I think George stopped counting before I did, if you get my drift.

It’s a little bit “niche”, but well worth having in your box. **T&S**



**Hook** Size 12 or 14 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Tail** Golden pheasant tippets, dyed olive, chartreuse or yellow **Rib** Fine gold wire or oval tinsel  
**Body** Claret seal fur **Body hackle** Claret hen **Wing** Grey or brown duck, jay or starling **Cloak** Bronze mallard **Thread** Red, claret or black

## TYING TIPS

- Use thin feather for the wing-slips. Starling or jay is ideal, and some species of duck.
- Don’t get obsessed with perfect wing-slips. This is a fishing fly, not a show fly. Proportion and the right type of feather are much more important.
- Think of the mallard cloak and throat as an upside-down Dabbler cloak.