

Rob Denson's trout fly of the month

Farmer Palmer



Hook Kasmasan B170

Rib Oval gold

Body Red seal's fur – tied slightly round the bend

Body hackle Grizzle cock dyed golden brown, or red game

Cloak Bronze mallard

Thread Red



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.

IF YOU'VE followed this series, you might have noticed by now that I have a wee penchant for the traditional style of fly. And why not? Even today, after the plethora of fly-tying materials that the past 50 years has thrown at us - the weird, the wonderful, the space-age and the downright cunning - many of our favourite patterns, and some of our best, still fall into the "traditional" category. The Soldier Palmer proudly parades alongside the best of them, in the upper echelons of fly-fishing's most revered, and, it must be said, most successful. I've knocked up a good few Soldier variants over the years, many of them containing flashy, modern materials, and some of them have even worked, a bit, sometimes. I always then return to the original, or very close, but it's never long before I start tinkering again.

One such experiment that's kept its place in the box for a few seasons is the Farmer Palmer.

It's August, 2011, Malham Tarn. A slow morning is brought to life as a local farmer begins grass cutting, upwind of the tarn, his debris and disturbed terrestrials carrying nicely across the water. A dozen trout (a true red-letter day by Malham standards) came to the net that day, every one to the Soldier variant on the top dropper. The Farmer Palmer was born.

Usually, as we head into July, our summer has warmed up (at least, it's as warm as it's going to get), and terrestrials are playing an increasingly important role. On many upland waters, if the trout don't look up then they don't eat; the buzzer hatches have all

but gone, and peaty, acidic waters often hold precious little in the way of sub-surface trout fodder. So, in short, I was looking for a specifically "buggier" feel to the Soldier. Removing the tail helped; "firming up" the proportions and giving a clean, buggy outline to the slightly round-the-bend body. The next twist, a Dabbler "cloak", serves a few purposes, not least to try to imbue the fly with the same fish-catching powers as the Dabbler. The cloak, when tied correctly, covers the top half of the fly with a roof, or dome structure, giving some shadow, density and presence to the pattern. The jaunty angle and spiky nature of the cloak also imparts that lively, "darty" dynamic so important and effective in the Dabbler. The next change to the Soldier swapped the standard red game body hackle for a grizzle, dyed "golden brown", chosen to give natural variation to the hackle colour, in keeping with the buggy brief. The rest of the fly remained faithful to the Soldier - red seal's fur, oval gold rib.

I can't tell you that the Farmer Palmer has transformed or replaced the Soldier, or is any better. The standard Soldier was never a particularly versatile or workhorse pattern anyway, being more akin to a luxury player on a football team: often useless, but occasionally an inspired choice that produces magical results. If I'm honest, I've never got to the bottom of when to make that choice. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't, sometimes it works, sometimes it won't. I never really understand why. What I do understand is that although the Farmer is no wonder fly, it has, perhaps by virtue of its enhanced buggy qualities, proved more versatile than the standard. Through high summer, when terrestrials abound, I'm a little more confident that I'm fielding a grafter, rather than a super-sub.



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