

IMPROVED KATE McLAREN

Rob Denson dares to tinker with a much-loved classic

I THINK I can safely assume that I have your attention. I can hear the cries of outrage from here... Improve the Kate McLaren? Why, in the name of all that's sacred, would one even countenance such an undertaking? Surely, these are the ramblings of a deluded fool?

To respond to those questions respectively: Perhaps. Why not? Pass.

To be fair to the Kate McLaren and other flies of that ilk, classics are classics for a reason - they've stood the test of time, the scrutiny of generations of discerning anglers, and above all else, they catch fish. The Kate has been mesmerising brown trout, rainbow trout, sea-trout and salmon, give or take a season, for 80 years. Suffice to say, the old girl has been doing something right. Far be it for me to offer a so-called improvement, therefore implying that the original, or "standard" dressing leaves a little to be desired. Evidently, this is not the case.

The thing with flies is that they're as much about what we want them to be as they are about what we think the fish want them to be. To study and ponder what fish "want" and then deliver the goods is a laudable, fascinating and ultimately rewarding endeavour. Then again, it can be futile and infuriating, and the most cunningly conceived concoctions can, and often do, go down like a knackered lift. To get inside the mind of a trout and invent a fly that shakes the foundations of our sport is probably beyond my scope as a thinker, fly-tyer and angler, which is why I like to tinker. Tinkering is the art of fine-tuning a fly so that it becomes exactly the way YOU want it. A fly, first and foremost, must fill you with confidence. If it does, then fish will follow. If it doesn't, then tinker!

The Kate, in her standard guise, was an early favourite of mine. For many years she was seldom off the cast and, from Siblyback to Stocks and beyond, caught me hundreds of fish. So why the tinker? As so often happens to many of us with our favourite flies, she fell out of favour. Soon after the initial lay-off, I began to see the Kate as an awkward collection of parts - yellow, black, silver, brown - that no longer made any sense to me. I knew it worked, but could no longer see why. For a good ten years or more she lay redundant and rusting in the corner of my fly-box. Guilt and sentiment, as much as anything else, eventually prompted the tinker!

The solution to my problem was simply to remove the separate black body hackle and red/brown head hackle and replace them with a hackle that contained both colours - good old furnace - for both the body and head. The resulting fly, if I may be so bold, felt



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Hook Size 10-14 Kamasan B170 or B175
Butt Flat silver **Tail** Golden-pheasant topping
Rib Oval silver **Body** Black seal's fur
Body hackle Furnace cock
Head hackle Furnace hen
Thread Black

more Kate-like than the standard, with its centre of black and halo of red/brown, to my mind at least, bestowing a little more harmony and a little more life. I strive in my tying to achieve a harmonious interconnection of the parts, and ultimately something that becomes more than the sum of its parts. It may sound like a whole lot of fuss about nothing. Maybe it is. I'll let you be the judge. Either way, I like Kate again, very much indeed. And that, above all else, is why, once again, she catches me plenty of fish. **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- For top-dropper work, tie as per dressing with cock hackle, but also try furnace hen hackle straight through for use on the tail/point position. The softer hen will get deeper a little quicker than cock.
- Whichever hackle you use, as always, consider how your choice of hook (weight) will govern the sink-rate of your fly.
- Rake out the seal's fur with velcro for a little extra buzz. You should do so prior to trimming the stem off the excess body hackle. If you rake after trimming, you risk dragging the final turn of hackle from under the rib.