

Rob Denson's trout fly of the month

Alexandra

(variant)



Hook Size 8-14

Fulling Mill 31531 or Kamasan B175

Tail Originally red ibis, but use dyed-red goose, swan etc

Rib Silver oval for standard dressing, or black wire for variant

Body Flat silver **Body hackle** (Optional) Black hen

Wing Peacock sword

Wing slips As tail

Cheeks Jungle-cock splits

Thread Black



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: www.robdenison.co.uk

IF ANYONE knows of a more strikingly resplendent trout fly than the Alexandra would they please let me know?

Better still, write next month's column about it!

The capture of a trout on a traditional pattern is a delight, and one of our sport's great thrills. Even as a young coarse-angler, many, many years before I was to cast a fly, I somehow had an innate appreciation of that fact, and would borrow game-fishing books from the local library to sit and marvel at the beautiful creations contained within: Alexandra, Silver Invicta, and Golden-olive Bumble. Mystical, magical names for equally mystical, magical concoctions of fur and feather.

Matching the hatch is all very cunning and clever, but for me, the more inexplicable the design and appeal of a traditional, the more satisfying the deception. It's a bit like telling your boss or your child a pack of out-and-out wild and filthy lies for being late, or failing to secure seats at the

cinema for the latest blockbuster – more interesting, more fun, and much, much more rewarding than proffering the truth! Of course, there's a time and a place for all flies, and many of the most seemingly random fly designs do contain hidden truths and reasons for their success that may not always be glaringly obvious to us, but thankfully are to the trout.

I have about as much idea now as I did as a child why many traditionals are capable of fooling a fish; knowing when and where they work, though, is always a heck of a lot more useful than knowing why. Ignorance truly can be bliss, but it can sometimes help to have a theory or at least a sneaking suspicion as to why a fly works, if only to add the weight of confidence to your side of the scales. I have a feeling that the Alexandra works best when minnow, fry and/or stickleback are on the menu, and that's largely when I'll use it, but I'm happy not to worry too much about logic as this would detract somewhat from the pleasure, and

to a certain extent the point, of using such patterns – to keep tradition alive and bring a little magic and mystery to one's cast.

The Alexandra has been around since the mid 19th century, changing little but catching lots of trout, and indeed, salmon and sea-trout around the world for the past 150 years. Exact provenance is uncertain and disputed, but what is widely accepted is that it's an English fly, originating in either the Test valley or the Norfolk Broads. With such rich coarse heritage in both areas, either option gives a little weight to my small-fish theory. This doesn't explain why, though, back in the day, it was banned on many waters the length and breadth of the nation. Much as I love the Alexandra, I very much doubt that it was any more efficacious than any other fly pattern of the day. Probably the fly simply "caught fire", and people, as they tend to, caught fish with it, because, well, they were fishing it.

Like most flies I've fished, the Alexandra has drawn blanks. It's no superfly, and not what you'd call an all-rounder or banker, but it does seem to have a knack of producing a big performance now and again if brought into play at the right time. It has filled the boat for me on several occasions, from Stocks reservoir in the late '80s to June of 2012 on Loch Eye. Two very different waters, same result. I'd like to think the latter performance was due to my little tweak of palmering the usually bare silver body with black hen, but I seriously doubt it. Bare tinsel bodies put my teeth on edge, and adding a little extra movement and contrast in the form of a hen hackle improves fishability at slower retrieve rates. The Alexandra has been duping trout, and lots of them, for an awful long time without a black body hackle and I'm sure will continue to do so. To hackle or not to hackle; take your pick; just keep these wonderful old patterns alive.

TYING TIPS

■ Tie your slip of tail material the full length of the body and cover with touching turns to provide a smooth, flat bed for your tinsel.

■ Specify "peacock sword" if ordering materials for this fly. Standard peacock herl is not the same as sword, which is brighter and more mobile.



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