

A SIMPLE PALMER

Most Palmers and Bumbles are dressed to the point of suffocation, claims Rob Denson, who urges a more restrained approach

ALMOST AS old as fly-fishing itself, Palmers are among the most ancient and ubiquitous - not to mention effective - weapons in the stillwater trout angler's fly-box. Palmers and their counterparts, Bumbles, almost certainly evolved on river and stream, where they held sway for centuries, fished wet, dry, and in between. Subsequent developments in river flies and techniques gradually focused on those specific zones - wet, dry and in between (emergers) - and introduced "deep" (nymphs) into the equation, too. This revolution in river flies and techniques all but sounded the death-knell for Palmers and Bumbles on river and stream. Take a look into any river man's fly-box today - but be prepared for a long haul and blank looks aplenty in your quest for a humble Bumble - it's all tungsten beads on jig hooks, space-age synthetics and genetic hackles. Not so, the modern stillwater man's box.

Sure, stillwater flies and techniques underwent a similar revolution, yet Palmers and Bumbles not only survived but flourished. Boobies, Crunchers and foam-arsed wot-nots have their place, but for a significant proportion of today's stillwater fly-fishers Palmers and Bumbles are as relevant and killing today as they've always been. Why? By and large, stillwater men, when possible, like to take their fish top-of-the-water - the realm of the Palmer. On most waters, given the right conditions - anything from a corduroy ripple to a force 6 - nothing can quite match them for their trout-pulling powers and sheer fishing pleasure.

However, somewhere along the revolutionary road something was lost: the essence of the Palmer in its simplest form. Pretty though they may be, many of today's incarnations suffocate, festooned with swathes of garnish and superfluous embellishment. That's not to say that all are overdressed - a few simple, well-thought-out twists can and often do transform a pattern's fortunes.

What it does say, in my opinion, is that the modern



Hook Size 10-14 Kamasan B170 or B175
Rib Oval gold or silver
Body Seal's fur mix: red/ginger/fiery brown
Hackle Red game cock
Thread Red UTC 70



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Palmer/Bumble can be stripped back to its bare bones to reveal a hitherto overlooked and very much underexploited simplicity.

This season, as high summer sets in, I would urge you to "undress" your Palmers. Discard those tags and tails, arms, legs, cloaks and cheeks until all that's left are the rudimentaries that make fish take our flies: a haze of colour, a little movement and a suggestion of life. It's something I've been doing with my Palmers for several years now, and they have met with a great deal of success. Simple flies fished in a simple fashion: floating line, short casts, an unhurried retrieve, then hold. **T&S**

TYING TIPS

- As ever, vary the hook type/weight to suit the conditions and control the sink rate.
- Experiment. The dressing above is just one of several I use regularly - black, claret and ginger being among my favourites. Try your favourite seal's fur colours, or other dubbing materials. A pinch of Ice Dub or similar can add an enticing hint of flash. Vary the hackle colour, too, for interesting combinations.