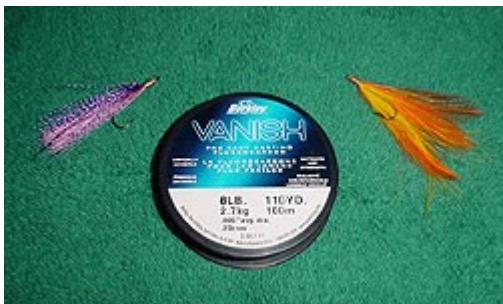


Learning To Fly

By Rich Stadler



Here we are at the beginning of a new year. We reflect on the past year and look forward to the year to come. This is a perfect time to think of new ways to put the elusive walleye in the boat!

There are few techniques that a person can use all year to catch walleyes. Temperatures change constantly along with water levels and vegetation. Forage is on the move and changing in size and location. Finding a technique that works day in and day out is quite a task. There is no sure thing in

fishing but I have found that pulling flies on rivers can be just as reliable as a jig and live bait presentation.

Most people have not heard of this and I am sure some are scratching their heads. Simply put, a fly is a single hook with some type of animal hair attached to it. It has been around for a long time in trout fishing and more and more it is being used for other species. The flies used for walleyes are a little different than the flies used in trout fishing. I make my own but you can buy them. This has become very popular on the Winnebago system in Wisconsin so a lot of the bait shops here are carrying them. It actually is not that new, just was a well kept secret for many years. I learned this from an old river rat over ten years ago. I believe it started out as a white bass technique and people started to catch on that it also worked extremely well on walleyes.

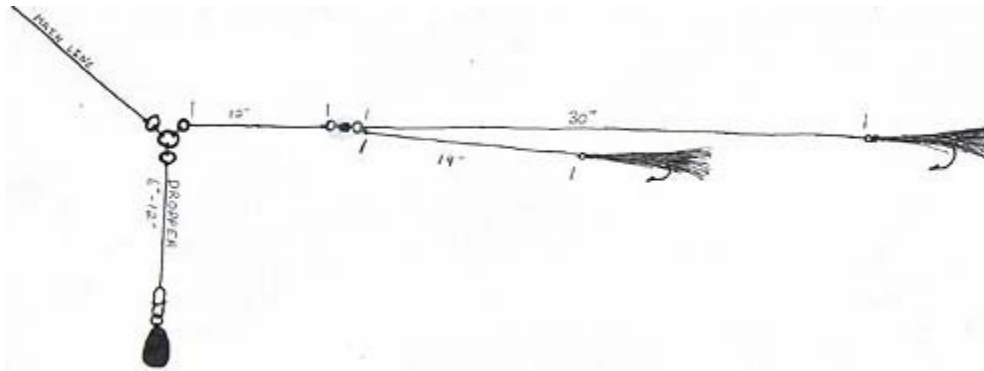
You can easily make your own flies. All you need is a small vise, super glue, metallic thread, Mustad size 4 long-shank hooks and animal hair. I like to use Spey Hackle but bucktail works fine also. Cut off a piece of metallic thread about 12" long and tie one end to the eye of the hook. Place the hook in the corner of the vise horizontally with the point underneath the shank. Cut a small clump of hair about 2-1/2" long and place the cut end of the hair up to the eye of the hook without blocking the eye. Now wrap the metallic thread tightly around the hair and hook shank about twenty times. (This will leave you with about 6" to hang on to.) When wrapping the thread, keep it within 1/4" to the eye of the hook.

If it is not tight enough, the hair will be able to slide down the shank of the hook. Keep the thread tight and put a dab of super glue on the thread. It only takes a couple seconds for the glue to dry. Clip the tag of the thread off and put more glue on. Once the glue is dry, cut the remaining thread off that was tied to the eye of the hook and you are ready to go. If you want to make a dual-colored fly, just put the first color on and wrap it about 5 times then put on the second color.

My favorite color fly is green and yellow, probably because I am a Packer fan. Flies are like any other bait: you have to experiment with size and color to find what the fish want. If you want to make a longer fly, be sure to use a larger hook as well as longer hair. These were just some basics to get you started.

Now for the rig. Depending on your state's regulations you can make the rig with one, two or three flies. A baitcasting set-up works the best. I use a 7' medium action rod. It is helpful to have a baitcasting reel that has the flipping switch because you will constantly be changing the amount of line out. Use either 10/4 Fire Line or 15lb mono for your main line. I know those two lines are drastically different in diameter and later I will explain how to use both.

First, tie a three-way swivel onto your main line. Cut a piece of 6lb mono 6" to 12" long to use as the dropper. Don't be afraid to vary the dropper length; sometimes a few inches can make a huge difference.



Put a duo-loc snap on the other end so you can change weights when needed. Be sure to use 6lb test for your dropper in case of a snag you don't take the chance of losing the entire rig. A bell sinker works best on the dropper (they have the biggest surface area at the bottom creating more noise when they hit). Cut a 12" piece of 8lb mono and tie one end to a barrel swivel and the other to the three way swivel. On the other end of the barrel swivel, tie two pieces of 8lb mono or fluorocarbon, one around 14" and the other around 30". Tie one fly to each of these lines and you are ready to fly! If you want to use three flies, just tie another length onto the barrel swivel.

There are many ways to fish with this rig. You can troll it upstream keeping the rod in a rod holder similar to a three way rig or just hover over a pod of fish. The most common way to fish it is to start upstream from where you believe the fish are. Pump your rod and make sure the sinker pounds bottom at the same place in the stroke every time. The key is to have the right amount of weight so the rig is about two boat lengths behind the back of the boat. It is very important to not give any slack line to the sinker after it hits bottom. It is tricky at first but practice makes perfect.

Pumping the rod gives the flies that start-stop action that triggers fish. Work cross-current up and down the break or in shallower rivers work from shore to shore. As you work back and forth, you are slowly slipping down-current covering a very large area quite quickly. Once you find the fish, work over them side to side rather than straight forward. One drawback to this presentation is that because you constantly have to change the amount of line out, it is nearly impossible to fish with two rods. Keep in mind that the sinker hitting bottom is the attractant and the erratic action of the flies is the trigger.

The fish will hit at any time. Sometimes they hit when you are dropping back and sometimes they hit when you are pulling forward. As soon as you feel anything that could be a fish, set the hook immediately using a sweeping motion. Almost every fish you catch will have the fly totally inhaled. Set the drag light and hold onto your rod tight. Do not tip the fly with anything as it only seems to make it less productive.

The reason for the two different lines is for shallow and deep water. I like to use a heavy weight because it makes more noise. In shallow water I use the 15lb mono to get the rig back farther using the line diameter to my advantage. In deep water I use the Fire Line; otherwise I have to let out too much line to make bottom contact. I define shallow water as 3' to 10' and deep water as 10' to 30'.

This technique is one of the most fun and most consistent I use on rivers. It does work on lakes also, but not nearly as well. It accounts for several tournament wins on the Winnebago system. I have used it on the Illinois River and even the Mississippi River. Skeptical? So were lots of my friends—but they aren't anymore. Give flying a chance. You won't regret it!