

FFF Fly of the Month

July, 1999 - Trico Spinners: A hatch for the leisurely angler



Comments by Jim Abbs

Being at the right place at the right time for an anticipated hatch is often a hassle. The famed hexagenia hatch of the upper Midwest requires that you be in place in the dead of night (usually after 10 PM), on fairly slow water which also happens to be the place and time of dense mosquito activity-the areas around such slow water usually support large populations of these pests. In my part of the world, brown drake and many major caddis hatches are often also are pretty late, when an after supper nap would be a pleasant alternative. Despite these hardships, the excitement of anticipated success usually offsets the discomfort and inconvenience.

It is now July and there is however one concentration of mayflies that seems to be well fitted to the gentleperson angler, the trico spinner fall, which really is not a hatch as such. In late July and in August, the tiny tricorythode mayfly actually hatches very early in the morning-right around daybreak, but most importantly returns as a spinner between 8:30-10:30 am-----just in time for serious trout feeding. These trico spinners fall spread-winged to the water, to deposit their eggs and complete their mission in life. So the best fishing of the day is in the sunny but still cool part of the morning, letting you sleep relatively late, enjoy a relaxed breakfast and still be right on time.

However, all is not effortless with the tricorythodes. First, this tiny mayfly is only 3-5 mm in length (some are a huge 6 mm in the west) and this means sizes 24-26 hooks. With this small hook size you need to use very fine tippets, usually 6X, and maybe 7X in slick water. With hooks this small and tippets that only test at 2-3 pounds, a fair amount of finesse is required, clearly offering a challenge to even the most experienced fly angler. Furthermore, trico spinners tend to lay their eggs in smoother water, giving the trout a better look and more time to make their choices. The related challenge is thus identifying a fly pattern that successfully imitates this tiny mayfly spinner.

Vince Marino, of the legendary author of *A Dry Fly Code* and In *The Ring of the Rise*, made a major contribution in imitating spinners. From observations in his so-called water-filled slant tank (which allowed him to observe flies like trout see them---up through a window in the side), Vince was the first to note that folds in the horizontal wings of mayfly spinners trap water and act to condense light, yielding bright clear streaks that are not seen in an out-of-water view of the fly. On that basis he suggested constructing spent wings of sparse hackle fibers that also trap water between them, to yield a similar effect. Marino argued that wings of hackle points, cellophane, or body feathers do not work, but must be of hackle fibers, "the stiffer the better".

Nowadays, few use hackle fibers, at least for the trico spinners, but rather polypropylene yarn, an innovation of Barry Beck, who like Marino is also from Pennsylvania. Several more evolved synthetic wing materials with other names also have become popular, including sparkle yarn, Z-lon and so-called High Vis. These synthetics are lighter than water and permit control over wings not possible with natural materials. Dennis Potter, a Michigan tier uses Krystallflash, another synthetic fiber with lots of sparkle. Interestingly, the wings on tricos are not always horizontal or flat; sometimes these flies have a wing that is tilted up slightly somewhere between a dun and a spinner. Tie some both ways; apparently the trout

are sometime sensitive to the difference.

Materials

Hook: Mustad 94859 (straight eye with extra fine wire), or Partridge K1A (also called the Marino Midge Hook), or a Mustad 94840 (standard dry fly hook) in sizes 20 to 28 (larger sizes for some western tricos)

Thread: Black 6/0

Tail: Dark dun hackle fibers, tied forked

Wing: White poly yarn, Z-Ion, sparkle yarn, Krystalflash, always sparse!

Abdomen: White poly for female, black poly for male

Thorax: Black poly behind, across and in front of wings

Tying Steps (you may want to use midge jaws in your vise, if you have them)

1. Insert hook in the vise and attach tying thread above the barb of the hook. Create a little thread bump at the bend of the hook.
2. Select 5-8 hackle fibers (tail should be a little longer than the length of the hook shank) and tie them in at the bend of the hook. Force the fibers against the bump to spread them, if desired.
3. Tie in poly yarn for abdomen and wind it forward to 60% of the hook shank length. Tie it off and tie in a short piece of black poly yarn for the abdomen. If it is an all black body (a male), the abdomen and thorax yarn can be one piece.
4. Select a sparse piece of white poly yarn for the wings (about twice the length of the hook shank) and tie it in with a figure 8 or X across and under the wing, adjusting it so it is horizontal and perpendicular to the hook shank. For the version of the fly with wings slightly raised, adjust wings with wraps and attach a drop of superglue.
5. Trim the wings to about the length of the hook shank; to get a uniform length, hold them up and trim them together. Comb the wing poly yarn to spread and separate the poly wing fibers.
6. Wind black thorax poly (very thin) in a figure 8 fashion around wings to form thorax.
7. Taper head with thread, whip finish and apply cement.

Please Credit FFF Website or FFF Clubwire with any use of the pattern.

You can direct any questions or comments to FOM at flyofthemonth@fedflyfishers.org