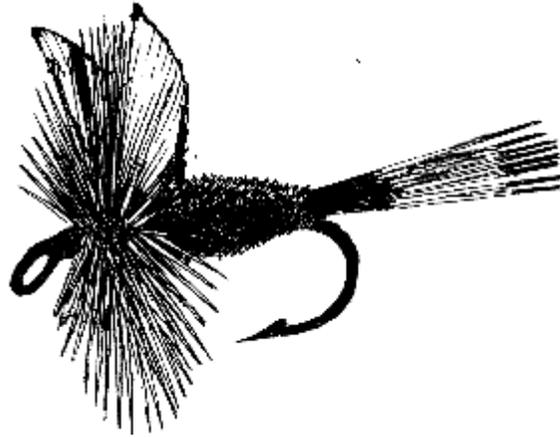


Federation of Fly Fishers Fly of the Month

September, 2000 -- Coachman



SEPTEMBER FLY OF THE MONTH

The Coachman: 200 years of success

By Jim Abbs

Perhaps one of the oldest fly patterns still in use is the lowly Coachman, claimed by some to be an offering from a real-life coachman (caretaker and driver of horses on a coach in the 1800's) for his fly fishing English lord. While it was originally a wet fly (a class of flies not currently in favor), the original coachman appears to be the ancestor of many modern patterns.

If we adopt the perspective of Gary LaFontaine, a successful fly must meet elicit certain reactions from the fish. For a fly to work, it must first get the fish's attention. Secondly, it obviously is important that there be an illusion of a multi-faceted insect's body and living undulations of functioning segments to seal the deal and elicit a strike. These illusions are achieved in various ways in successful fly patterns. In the last ten years a number of materials have emerged via the modern miracle of chemistry to assist fly tiers in making their flies attention-getters and life-like. These include Krystal Flash, Flashabou, Sparkle yarn(s), Flash Chenille, Mylar Flash, Holographic Flashabou, Light Bright, etc. However, certain natural materials have been used for almost two centuries to do the same thing.

The original Coachman is a rather unspectacular pattern (to human eyes), but it has an essential feature, a body of wrapped peacock herl. Peacock herl seems to possess its own wizardry, seemingly because it has an iridescent quality that reflects light like many of the modern attention-getting synthetics... only better. Many fly fishing experts consider peacock to be a magic material, with a spectacular display of color and especially effective on bright days and bright water. From the coachman came the Royal Coachman, perhaps the most famous of all flies-at least to the lay public. And of course there are other coachman variations, like the Leadwing Coachman, the California Coachman, Hairwing Coachman

The effectiveness of peacock herl as a body material for flies is seen in the number of

famous and still very popular patterns that use this material: These include the Royal Wulff, Renegade, Tellico nymph, Prince Nymph, Carey Special, Half Back, Coch-Y-Bondhu, Griffith's Gnat, Sureshot, Cluster Midge, Royal Trude, Lime Trude, and more.

While it is outside the scope of this short article to describe how to tie all of these patterns, we will focus on the coachman in its dry fly form (apparently adopted from the wet pattern by Theodore Gordon - before 1875). The dry coachman provides the basic idea for the many other related patterns.

MATERIALS

Hook: Mustad 94840, Partridge L3A, or Tiemco 100 (sizes 8-20)

Thread: Black

Wing: White duck quill sections (a more durable wing is white calf tail)

Tail: Golden pheasant tippet feathers (original wet coachman was without a tail)

Body: Peacock herl (Royal Coachman has a center band of red floss - see Royal Trude)

Hackle: Brown or dark brown

TYING STEPS

1. Choose two white wing quill segments from the right and left wings of a mallard duck (generally from the middle section of the feather).
2. Align the wing segments with the tips pointing away from one another. Lay the two segments toward the eye of the hook horizontally over the hook shank. The length of the wing from the tie-in point (2/3s the distance from the bend to the eye) to the tip should be equivalent to the length of the hook shank.
3. Tie the wings in place with no more than two turns of thread. Pull wings upward and wrap thread in front of them so they are vertical.
4. Wrap thread to the rear of the hook and tie in pheasant feathers for tail so they extend one hook shank length beyond the bend.
5. Tie in 1-3 strands of peacock herl with the ridge facing forward. Some suggest tying in a thin strand of wire to strengthen the body. Wrap peacock (and wire) forward to just in behind the wings. If you want to create a Royal Coachman, take a look at the body instructions for the Royal Trude, which include a red floss waist.
6. Tie in 1-2 brown hackles (with barbules of proper dry fly length) behind the wing and wrap both behind and in front of the wing. Tie off and trim excess.
7. Half-hitch or whip finish to complete the fly. Cement head and go fishing.

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