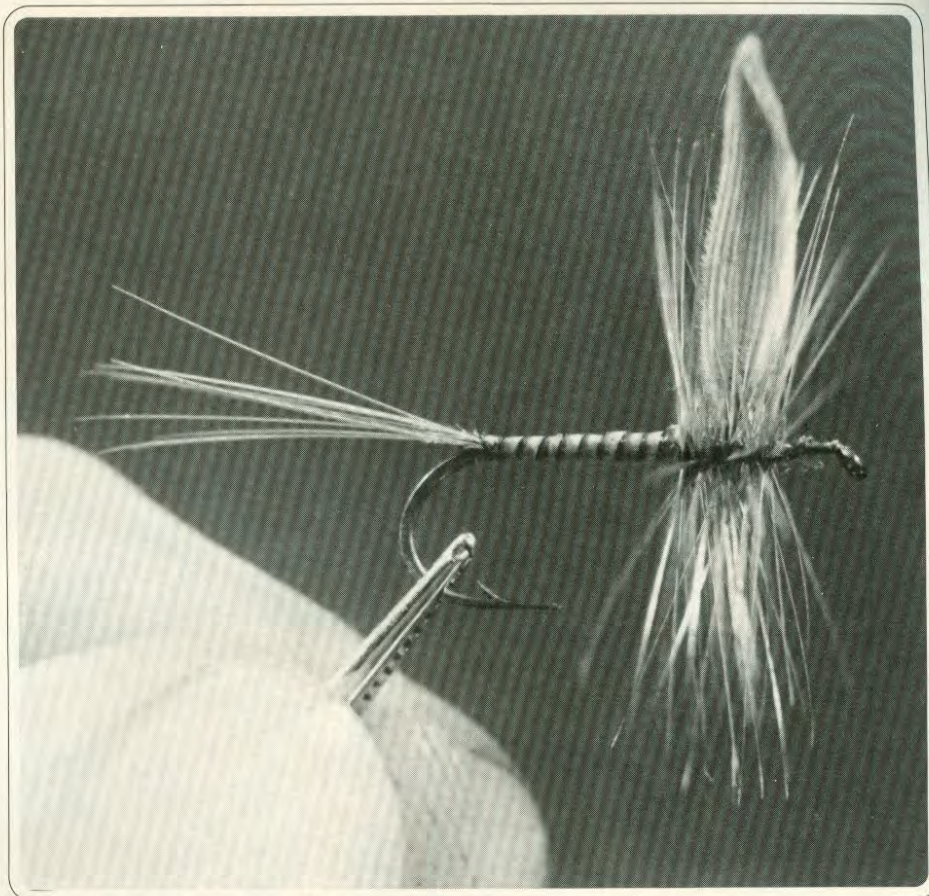


There's a disease that afflicts the work of many tiers, but don't worry; it's curable. Our Fly-Tying Editor has some hints for getting rid of those . . .

Lumps and Bumps

TED NIEMEYER



A Ginger Quill tied by Walt Dette of Roscoe, N.Y. Note the smoothness with which each material blends into another, and also the neatness of the fly's head. Photo by Will Gantley.

JUST A BRIEF LOOK at the precisely tied patterns of a Theodore Gordon, Reuben Cross or Walt Dette should be sufficient cause for an attempt by most tiers to match the perfection achieved by those artists. Fly-tying has grown tremendously since the times of Gordon, Edward R. Hewitt, Carrie Stevens or Cross, and one might thus expect that the present tying fraternity would be producing a vastly superior product. That's a logical assumption, but it's not the case. Contemporary tiers are faced with the challenge that flies by the aforementioned North American tiers *still* represent some of the finest work ever produced.

The individual tying styles of those classic tiers contribute to their flies, of course, as do the color and quality of the materials they used. These factors don't really fall into the realm of technique. There is another important factor, however, and it's one that's worth study by contemporary tiers. The work of those classic tiers is *free* of awkward lumps and bumps. Whether the fly in question was a dry, wet, streamer or salmon fly, the materials were placed about the hook in a manner that produces a smooth transition from tail to eye, and through the materials placed in between.

It's difficult to observe your own flies with a critical eye. Doggedly searching for small construction flaws in a freshly tied fly is not a normal procedure when

eagerness to pass on to the next pattern is the general rule. I'm confident that most tiers don't want telltale lumps to appear in their tying, but carelessness, accompanied by a lack of desire to stop, go back and do it right, normally prevails. I've seen it so many times that I'm becoming almost embarrassed to continue my harping about "go back—do it over."

The books I've consulted in an effort to improve my own tying seldom mention this matter of going back and correcting a mistake. Some don't even show poor tying techniques and suggest solutions. More often they show poor tying techniques unintentionally—in some cases projecting them as proper techniques.

I've been studying classic flies, observing untold numbers of tiers, and developing my own techniques for more than thirty years. In the course of that pursuit, I've been maintaining a log book in which I note those things that I feel constitute the real principles of good tying technique. Much of my study has been centered around the fine work of those classic tiers mentioned earlier. The following directions, extracted from the numerous entries in my log, are aimed at helping you to eliminate the lumps and bumps from your own work.

Of course the following suggestions are only a few of the many possible that may help you more closely

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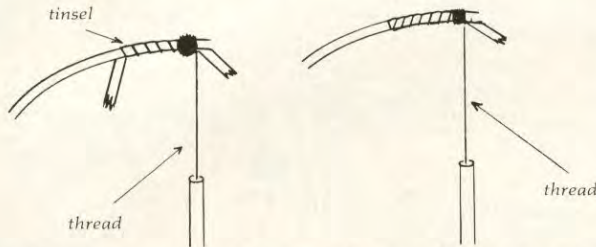
Lumps and Bumps . . .

emulate the work of a Gordon or Dette. Trying these suggestions, however, should get you out of the phase of just knocking a few flies together, and into a phase of attention to detail—of really refining your own techniques and getting the immense satisfaction to be derived from tying a better fly.

Tip and Tag Lumps

PATTERNS CALLING for a tinsel tip or tag frequently wind up with a sloppy lump at the point at which the tinsel was tied in. Numerous turns of tying thread are commonly used to bind down the tinsel. When the tinsel is then wound down the hook shank toward the bend, returned to where it was tied in, and then again secured with thread, a lump develops.

To avoid producing this lump, place five turns of tying silk over the tinsel at the tie-in position, then wind the tinsel down the hook shank toward the bend, and back to a position *one turn short* of where it is to be finally secured. Unwind the five turns of tying silk



A lump is commonly formed (left) when tinsel is tied down twice in the same spot. The author's method as outlined in the text will produce the smoother configuration shown at right. Sketches by the author.

holding the tinsel in place. Cut the end of the tinsel (that had been held in place with thread) very close to the hook shank, and then continue forward with one full turn of tinsel over its own base. Now secure it with two turns of tying silk. The tinsel thus holds itself to the hook shank, and only one end is bound with thread. This procedure applies to most tinsels, cords, wires and so forth that are applied directly to the hook shank.

Oval or Bulky Tinsel

OVAL OR BULKY TINSEL is an abomination to tie with if not properly prepared for application to the hook. Most tiers simply bind down the loose end at a point near the hook bend, wind the tinsel forward three or four turns, then secure it and cut off the excess. The result is invariably lumpy and awkward in appearance.

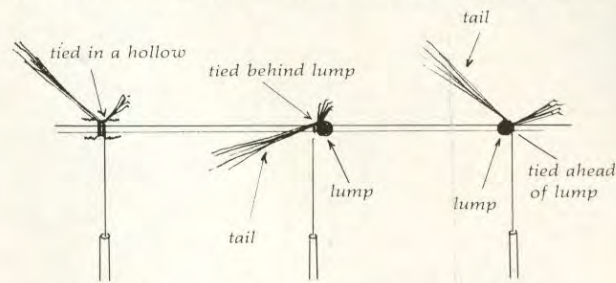
To eliminate this problem, strip off a short section of the metallic surface of the tinsel to expose the soft inner core. Tie in only the core, forming a smooth, small base. This will result in a smooth tinsel body.

Tailing

SOME VERY STRANGE and exotic patterns are developed as a result of poorly applied tailing material. These exotic profiles generally result from lumps of material or thread near the butt or tail of the fly.

The items previously bound to the hook shank will often determine the attitude (degree of vertical eleva-

tion) at which the tailing material will rest. Reuben Cross tied tails that elevated slightly on his dry flies. This caused poor floatation, and on flies tied in his latter years, the tails are tied straight (horizontal). Reub apparently learned a lesson somewhere along the line.



A variety of lump-and-bump situations that can cause tailing problems.

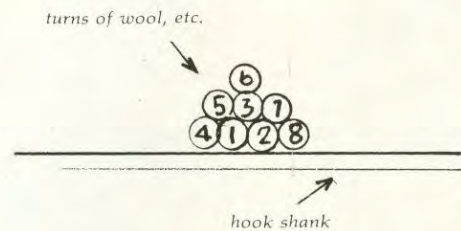
Arguments still persist on the merits of elevated or horizontal tails. You can elevate the tails in your tying if the base over which you secure them contains lumps from causes similar to those previously mentioned. If you want them horizontal, make sure the base is even and smooth.

Do what you will with tailing, but don't allow poor application of materials to dictate their profile. Another common problem is the careless application of thread or material, causing it to slide back over the tails, forcing them out of position.

Butts and Egg Sacks

USUALLY THE FIRST part of a fly to come apart is the butt or egg sack that adorns many fine trout patterns and most salmon flies. Ostrich, peacock, pheasant, goose and other large wing-fibers are especially difficult to handle, often slipping and sliding as if they were greased, if not wound over a smooth, flat base.

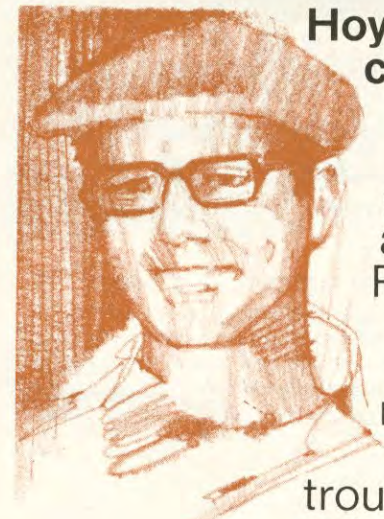
If your base is uneven and cannot be altered, try twisting four or five fibers of any of the above materials



Make your turns of butt material in this sequence for a neater job.

counter-clockwise around the tying thread itself, and then winding that assembly on the fly. The bulk produced may help; it has worked for me.

A strand of wool, thread, fur or similar material may be simply wound around the hook to form a rounded butt. Random turns may not look smooth to the eye, however, so I suggest a build-up with eight turns of material as shown in the accompanying sketch. Notice that turn #3 to #4 is a cross-over turn. Also, apply pressure to the left when applying turns #7 and #8.



Hoy's Boys. After 25 years the only things that have changed are hair lines, waist lines and fly lines. ■

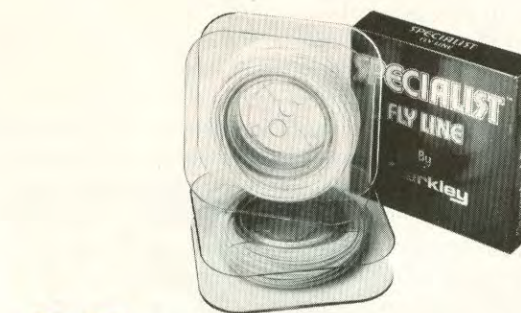
They're a little thinner on top and a little thicker in the middle, but they're still the same crazy guys who got together for Opening Day 25 years ago. Hoy himself, Power, Bud and R.T.; Shoey and Claude; Joe, Mitch, Freeman, Spike and Clyde. Some of them great fly fishermen; some not so great (and then there's Joe.

He's still waiting to catch his first trout . . . but he waits in the cabin a lot.)

■ As a bunch, Hoy's Boys have three things in common: a kind of off-the-wall friendship; fly fishing; and an inability to agree on anything. ■ Or just about anything. Because a couple years back, one of 'em brought a Berkley Specialist into camp and that brought about the first unanimous decision ever. "Man, does this thing shoot!

Doesn't even crack when I step on it!" They all agreed: Berkley Specialist is the best line they've ever used! ■ And why shouldn't they? The Specialist does have a lot of features to like: the "bearing finish®" for greater shootability and longer casts

(darned important when your casting arm loses a little of its spring); the tough, durable coating, the variety of tapers, weights, shapes and colors. ■ Go to your Pro Shop or tackle dealer. See Berkley Specialist for yourself. If Hoy's Boys like it, so will you.



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Bodies

ALL TOO FREQUENTLY the body itself (which should be the easiest to apply of all the fly's parts) will have an unsightly, lumpy appearance that betrays poor construction practices.

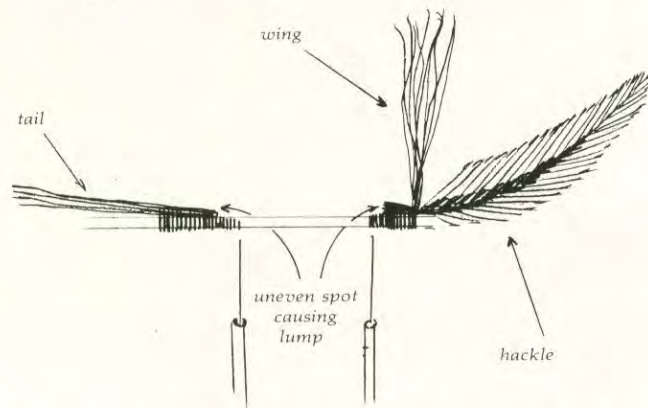
The most common cause of lumps in bodies of dry flies is the uneven distribution of materials comprising the tail, wing, and hackle butts. A simple solution is to allow the tailing material to continue along the full length of the hook shank to meet with the wing butts and hackle stem. Fur, quill, tinsel, or other body material will then go on very smoothly. I usually cut the wing butts very short after tying in the wing material. The hackle stem is next, and is secured between the wings and clipped so it's a fraction longer than the wing butts. Now place the tail material on the hook shank so that it extends over the wing butts. Cut the tail material precisely where the materials meet (line CC in accompanying sketch). When the tying thread secures the entire mass of wing butt, hackle stem and tail, a smooth base for the body will result.

The secret of a smooth tinsel body is simply a matter of preparing a smooth base. Application of the tinsel is similar to that which I described in the previous section on tip and tag lumps. For a tinsel body, however, begin the tinsel at the shoulder position of the fly, and work the tinsel down the hook shank in even, tight turns so that each turn of tinsel butts the previous. Return the tinsel up the body in the same manner. Unwind the tying thread that held the tinsel in place and clip the excess tinsel close. Now wrap the free end of the tinsel forward one full turn and secure with tying thread. The excess tinsel now may be bent back and forth a few times so that it will break off—this method of breaking tinsel produces a more secure fly. But Mylar tinsel, if used, must be cut.

Wings

ALTHOUGH LUMPS FORMED BY WING BASES may not stand out like the ones found on tags, butts or bodies, they nevertheless affect both the circular plane of the hackle and the smallness and neatness of the head.

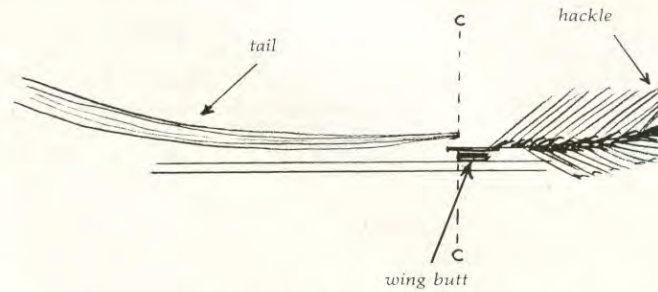
Dry-fly hackle that flares out in many directions, looking like a truck ran over it, is normally caused by a



It's difficult to avoid a lumpy dry-fly body when the underlying materials are tied in as illustrated.

lumpy base over which the hackle stem has been wound. Taking care to produce a smooth wing base will help to overcome this problem.

Streamer, salmon and all wet flies must also have a smooth base for the winging material to be applied



Careful trimming (at line CC) of the wing butts, tails, and hackle stem will give you a neater job.

properly. If you were sloppy, and the wing base is uneven, don't fill it in with thread. Remove all the thread and material and start over.


Heads

I SELDOM FIND IT NECESSARY to use many turns of thread to finish off a dry fly. When the last turn of hackle is made, I take two tight turns of the tying silk over the stem, press hard with my thumbnail against the thread and hackle to compress them toward the rear of the hook, and then clip the excess hackle tip. Three turns of whip-finish are sufficient as a "lock" on the fly.

Streamer- and salmon-fly heads should be small and conical. If the finished head appears lumpy, simply squeeze the head between thumb and forefinger (before whip-finishing), and twist in a clockwise motion. The motion is similar to screwing a cap on a bottle. Each turn of thread in the head tends to bind and fit more smoothly as they are forced into place. Keep the loose end of the tying thread taut, and take up the slack as you twist. Also be careful not to damage other materials on the fly when you twist the head.

Two persons excel when it comes to finishing the heads on flies; they live at opposite sides of the country, and have probably never met. Walt Dette of Roscoe, N.Y., has put more small, tight, beautiful heads on standard dry flies than any man I know. Reub Cross was good, but Walt's work is superb.

Steelhead flies don't excite many Easterners, but they would if you saw one tied by Syd Glasso. Small, precise heads with perfect tapers mark the excellence of Syd's work. Flies tied by these two artists indicate the practice and patience they've devoted to building smooth, lumpless flies to perfection. Not so much, perhaps, because their flies will catch more fish, but because an artist takes pride in superior workmanship.

THE QUALITY OF THE FLIES that you produce in any given tying session will be the result of the attention and patience that you give to each fly. If you can concentrate on reducing or eliminating lumps and bumps during your next few tying periods, your patterns should look more like a Flick or a Dette classic. 

FLY FISHERMAN

