

Those Crazy Rubber Legs

*Use these wiggling legs to
add strike-inducing action
to almost any fly pattern.*

JACK DENNIS

IFIRST LAID EYES on a Girdle Bug in the late 1950s as a teenage fly tier in central Wyoming. A man asked me to copy a funny-looking rubbery-legged, black-bodied fly tied by a respected local lake expert. At first I thought it was a joke—perhaps some kind of a bass pattern. The man explained, however, that he used the fly pattern on Boysen Reservoir in Wyoming and caught bigger rainbows than anyone around. Fishermen called it a “Girdle Bug.” That was all he knew about it except that it caught fish and he needed more.

It was a simple-looking pattern, but with a name like *Girdle Bug* it seemed that finding the materials might be difficult and/or interesting. Anyway, after searching several sewing shops, I found an elastic suitable for leg material.

That was my experience with rubber-legged flies until several years later when I fished the Beaverhead River with fly innovator Al Troth of Dillon, Montana. The Beaverhead is a fast-moving, winding river just large enough to float in a small drift boat. I began tying on my favorite white Marabou Muddler when my guide for the day, Monte Hankinsen, cautioned, “If you want to do well in this river, you have to rubber-leg it.” He reached in a clear plastic box filled with dozens of rubber-legged flies of every conceivable color and combination. Then as I began tying on the black, orange-bellied Girdle Bug that Monte had given me, he said: “Don’t use that limp leader, we only use Maxima knotted leaders—as heavy as possible. You’ll find out.”

On the fourth cast I caught a bush, and as the boat floated swiftly downriver, I hauled on the fly until the leader snapped and the fly hung like a Christmas ornament on the willow. As we floated, I noticed other rubber-legged jewels festooning the branches. “There were a few other clients who wouldn’t believe me,” Monte said.

Casting the Girdle Bugs in tight to the banks caused large, shadowy browns to rocket out to strike the pattern, and during the evening we netted many 14- to 22-inch browns and rainbows. I was fast becoming a convert to rubber legs.

The next morning I fished with Al. In the gray dawn we drifted down the Beaverhead toward one of his favorite spots, searching the inside curves and the shallow tail-outs of the pools for big fish as they cruised for meals. “Drifting a Girdle Bug or Bitch Creek near these large trout should bring action,” Al said. “The boys back in Pennsylvania would die if they saw these rubber-legged monsters we’re fishing. I don’t know what the rubber leg represents. Some anglers believe it looks like a large stonefly. I agree for some rivers, but on the Beaverhead we have no *Pteronarcys* (large stoneflies), only the smaller golden stones. Perhaps it represents the early-morning cranefly, which hatches in the numerous slow-water sloughs that feed the Beaverhead.”

During the following years, fishing pressure increased on the Beaverhead, and fly tiers modified the rubber-leg patterns to meet the needs of the river.

Monte introduced me to a cross between a Woolly Worm and the Girdle Bug, called the Yuk Bug.

New Fork and Green Rivers

THE NEW FORK AND GREEN RIVERS flow out of the Wind River Mountain Range in northwest Wyoming. Lifelong friend and guide Robbie Garrett and I were drifting the Green one evening when the fish started working. I cast a black Girdle Bug against the brush and slowly stripped it out. A large dorsal fin appeared behind the fly, followed it for ten feet and then pounced. It was my first six-pound brown on the Green River. The Girdle Bug proved itself on Wyoming rivers, and I converted Robbie into a rubber-legged-fly addict.

Since then Robbie has become an expert in fishing rubber legs and has created new patterns (the Senior’s Bitch and the Pepperoni Yuk Bug) that drive the trout wild. He has also discovered that, as in dry-fly fishing, trout can become selective on rubber-legged patterns. Sometimes they prefer small black flies; at other times they prefer large brown Yuk Bugs. In the fall they seem to prefer black Girdle Bugs. You just never know.

Do rubber legs represent movement or an image of movement. And does it matter? Their lifelike movement appears to imitate a living creature, but rubber legs are both an attraction and an image. Like Al Troth, Robbie agrees that the action of the legs in the water creates the impression of a live insect. While rubber legs may imitate types of stoneflies, they can also represent terrestrials and other insects nature deposits in the water. Robbie believes that the rubber-leg is to nymph fishing what the Royal Wulff is to dry-fly fishing—an attractor, an image. Rubber legs are attractor nymphs.

Fishing Rubber Legs

ROBBIE PREFERS DEAD-DRIFTING rubber legs on a taut line with an upstream cast. He holds the rod high in the air so just the leader touches the water. He lets the fly drift with

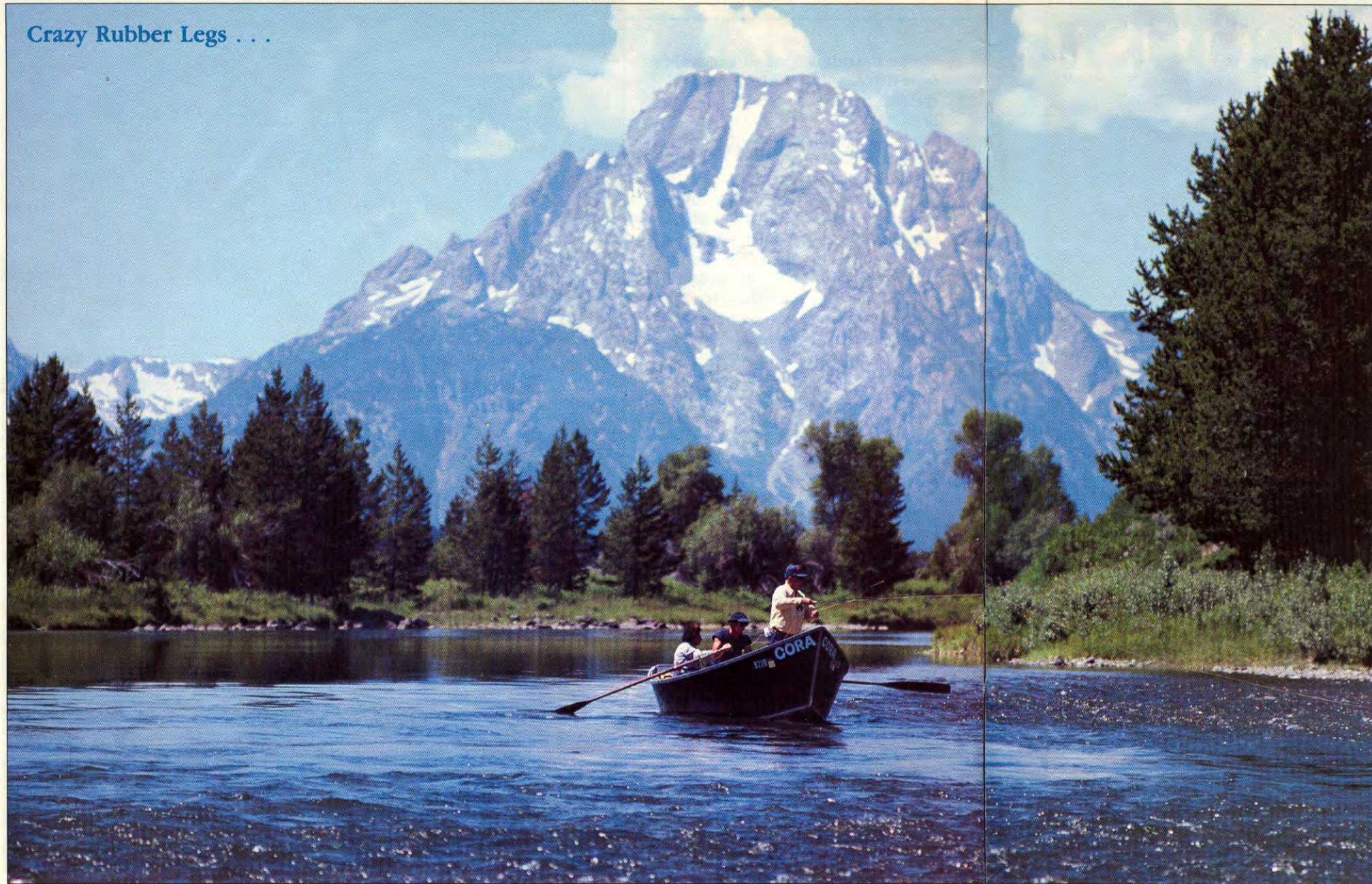


A brown trout (above) taken on a rubber-leg pattern. Rubber-leg patterns: (left, from left to bottom right) brown Yuk Bug, Pepperoni Yuk Bug, black Girdle Bug, black-legged Girdle Bug, black Yuk Bug, Garrett’s Bitch Creek, Senior’s Bitch, Anderson’s rubber-leg Brown Stone, Girdle Bugger.

DAN ABRAMS PHOTO

TOM MONTGOMERY PHOTO

Crazy Rubber Legs . . .



Rubber-leg flies take large trout on such drift-fishing rivers as the Snake River in Wyoming.

several slight rod-tip twitches to make the legs "breathe" in and out. Throughout the drift he intersperses twitches with dead drifts to create an impression of a live, drifting insect. Robbie contends that if you strip the fly through the water like a streamer, the legs fold tight against the body, destroying the movement. Lifelike action is the key to successful rubber-legged fly fishing.

Striking the fish can be difficult. Keeping a keen eye on the white legs, Robbie watches for a flash, a swirl or any indication that the trout has hit the fly. He strikes at

the first sign of a fish. When a trout strikes a rubber-leg pattern, it rockets up from bottom and swipes at the fly the way a trout sometimes does at a dry fly. You must be quick.

I caught my largest trout on a dry fly during a stonefly hatch, but it was with the *assistance* of a rubber-legged fly. I had a #4 orange-thorax, rubber-legged Bitch Creek on as my lead fly and a Troth's Bullet Head Stonefly dropper. It was an interesting combination: The heavy nymph would drift underneath the brush piles and I would give it a twitch or two and

the big dry stonefly pattern would pop on the water like a bass bug.

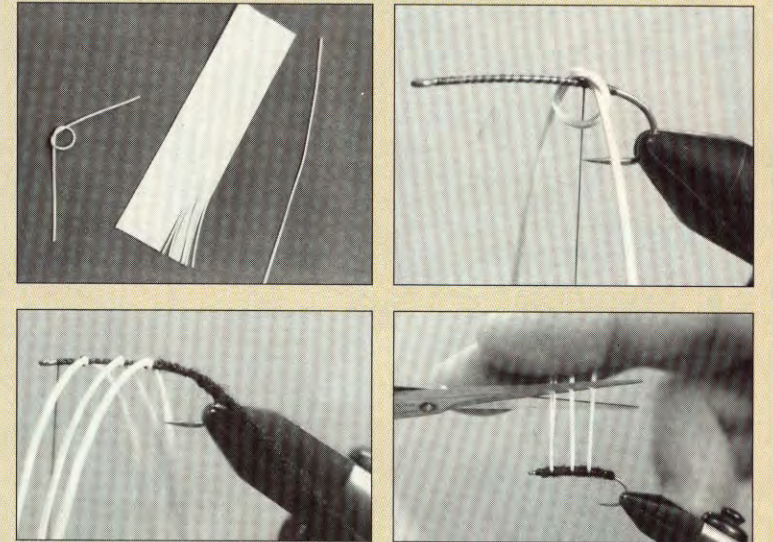
I was fishing a sharp corner in the river where a big log protruded, and when I flipped the fly toward the head of the log, the Bitch Creek pulsated as the current pulled it into the depths. A huge dark shape appeared behind the Bitch, and as the boat floated away from the log, the shadow drifted slowly away from the Bitch Creek. Suddenly the trout turned and shot up and engulfed the dry Troth Stone. The rainbow vaulted into the air and almost landed in a wooden drift boat anchored

nearby. A surprised angler yelled, "Hey, I just fished that place and didn't even get a rise." The fish made several spectacular jumps as we drifted downstream. We finally beached the boat in a little backwater then landed, measured, and released a 28-inch rainbow.

Montana guides stop at nothing when it comes to rubber legs. From them came the multiple-fly method: You attach three different rubber-leg patterns to the leader, approximately two feet apart. With this method a fisherman can cover a greater range of feeding areas by

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Tips on Legs



RUBBER LEG material can simply be bound to the hook shank with tying thread, but tying the rubber to the shank with a simple overhand knot is better in a couple of ways: 1.) you can tie all the legs onto the shank and then adjust their position before binding them down with tying thread; 2.) the overhand knot provides some bulk for the tying thread to grab onto without cutting the rubber; 3.) there's less chance of a leg pulling out if the rubber is knotted to the hook.

Tying rubber legs to the hook is easy. With the fly completed to the stage where the legs should be attached, tie individual rubber strands to the hook shank with a simple overhand knot (the shank should go through the loop of the knot). Pull the knot snug and attach the additional legs. When all the legs are knotted to the hook shank, adjust their positions so they are where you want them.

After final positioning of the legs, make firm thread wraps over the individual knots to secure the legs in place. Figure-eight wraps work well.

When the legs are tied in position, pull all the legs above the hook shank and hold them between the index and second fingers of your left hand (leftys should hold the strands with their right hand). With the rubber strands extended above the hook shank, determine the correct leg length and cut all the strands at once. *Voila*, you now have a set of legs that are all the same length. Finish tying the fly.

The size of the rubber material used for the legs and the length of the legs themselves determines the action the legs will exhibit. Heavy material and/or stubby legs exhibits less action than thinner or longer legs. I make the legs on my flies slightly long and then fine tune them for the best action when I get on the water. When tied from bright-colored rubber, the action of the legs can be seen when the fly is in the water.

Don't forget, rubber legs work on trout, bass and even salt-water flies. So experiment with your favorite patterns, because rubber legs can make a good fly even better.

JACK RUSSELL



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Crazy Rubber Legs . . .

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dead-drifting the nymphs among the tumbling natural stoneflies. A little wider loop and a much slower cast helps cast the smorgasbord of crazy legs.

I have found that fishing a heavily weighted Girdle Bug on a dry line with approximately six to eight feet of leader is the most effective way to fish pockets. Whether fishing from the bank or out of a boat, I can pop the fly underneath the brush and sink into the dark haunts of the browns. If I need more depth, I place a split-shot on the leader at the fly.

I've always enjoyed streamer fishing. Now I like to attach a large Bitch Creek

things, right here and he murdered them on it! Hey, try it Mate."

One cast into the inlet resulted in a leaping New Zealand rainbow for the video. A bit of good luck? Another excuse to search out a new place where the rubber legs may not work. How about China? I hear there are trout high in the mountains of Tibet. I'll bet they haven't seen a girdle bug!

Tying Tips

AS WITH ANY FLY, many modifications and changes occur. Everybody has an idea how to improve the fly. Montana fly tier and fly shop proprietor, George Anderson, has added white rubber legs to his stonefly to create the Rubber



DALE SPARTAS PHOTO

about three feet up the leader just above the streamer. While this adds a little extra weight to make the streamer run deeper, it also jigs the Bitch Creek, giving it lifelike movement while the streamer pumps through the water. But while I concentrate on the streamer, a rocketing trout often takes a swipe at the dropper Bitch Creek.

Rubber-legged flies work well for bass, crappie, and saltwater fish. Black Girdle Bugs and brown Yuk Bugs are effective for large Alaskan rainbows, steelhead in British Columbia and browns on the Bow River in Alberta. From Alaska to Australia rubber-legged patterns can catch a wide variety of fish.

I doubt if there is a place in the world where the rubber legs *won't* work. I've fished the clear mountain streams of New Zealand, where simply revealing a Girdle Bug to a local guide would send him into near cardiac arrest.

Last February, while finishing my fly-tying video in New Zealand, my guide spotted one lone black and grizzly Yuk Bug hanging on my vest patch. We parked the boat in an inlet where a fast-flowing stream entered Lake Rotoroa and he said: "You know, I had a bloke last year fishing those bloody looking

Legs Brown Stone. The Girdle Bugger is the combination of the very effective Woolly Bugger and the Girdle Bug. I have seen Bitch Creeks tied 15 different ways, including with a woven chenille body. Lately, the popular material called Flashabou has been used for excellent patterns. This flashy material adds color and sparkle to the fly, giving it improved visibility in murky water. Since Flashabou comes in a variety of colors, the combinations are practically endless.

Create your own rubber-legs pattern. Experiment with different colors of legs by using magic markers if necessary. Try different lengths of legs and also different hook lengths. My friend Robbie contends that longer-legged flies are infinitely better than the shorter ones because they have more fluid action.

Make sure that you tie your legs evenly spaced along the body and that they are all the same length. When tying with lead, secure it tightly and don't hesitate to use some cement or Dave's Flexament when wrapping on the chenille body (this cements the chenille to the hook). A little gold wire wrapped through the Yuk Bug hackle also increases the fly's durability by

preventing the hackle from unwinding.

Dressings

IF YOU DESIRE a belly on any of the rubber-leg patterns, tie some gold wire and a section of contrasting-color chenille in at the bend of the hook. Complete the fly down to the last step before finishing off the head, then pull the chenille underneath the body to the eye of the hook. Pull it tightly, tie it down then wrap through the body with gold wire to secure it. This works with the Yuk Bugs, Girdle Bugs, and on the thorax of the Bitch Creek.

Bitch Creek

HOOK: Mustad 9672, Tiemco 5263, size #2-#10.
THREAD: Black 3/0 monocord.
TAIL: White rubber-leg material.
ABDOMEN: Black chenille.
THORAX: Yellow chenille palmered with brown saddle hackle.
ANTENNAE: White rubber-leg material.

Girdle Bug

HOOK: Mustad 9672, Tiemco 5263, size #2-#10.
THREAD: Black 3/0 monocord.
BODY: Black chenille.
LEGS: White or black rubber-leg material.
TAIL: White or black rubber-leg material.

Pepperoni Yuk Bug

HOOK: Mustad 9672, Tiemco 5263, size #2-#10.
THREAD: Black 3/0 monocord.
TAIL: Red squirrel tail.
ABDOMEN: Black chenille.
LEGS: White rubber-leg material.
THORAX: Orange chenille palmered with brown saddle hackle.

Brown Yuk Bug

HOOK: Mustad 9672, Tiemco 5263, size #2-#10.
THREAD: Black 3/0 monocord.
TAIL: Squirrel tail.
BODY: Brown chenille palmered with grizzly saddle hackle.
LEGS: White rubber-leg material.

Senior's Bitch

HOOK: Mustad 9672, Tiemco 5263, size #2-#10.
THREAD: Black 3/0 monocord.
TAIL: White rubber-leg material.
BODY: Black chenille, abdomen palmered with brown saddle hackle.
ANTENNAE: White rubber-leg material.

JACK DENNIS, a freelance author and fishing guide, lives in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.



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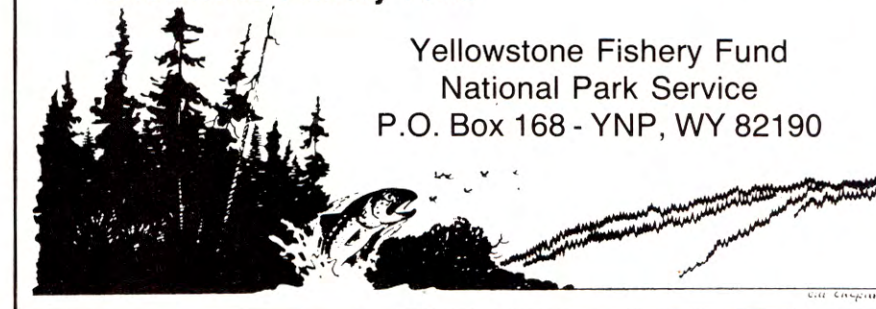
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