

# THE CARE & FEEDING OF GAME GUNS



*Photo by Thomas G. Oro*

BY DATUS C. PROPER

**O**ld British game guns suit me not because they are old, but because they are good. They combine form and function as well as any objects ever made by man. I choose to believe that they were built as a tribute to hunting—a sort of offering to Diana—and besides, they have helped me to shoot better. I wince to think of collectors buying up such guns while there is still life in them. They deserve a better fate than porcelain figurines, early editions of Batman Comics, and dumb blond bird dogs.

My two game guns are, in order of purchase, a Woodward and a Westley Richards. Both are 12-gauge, side-by-side doubles, and each is almost a century old. I bought the Woodward in London back when prices were reasonable. More recently, I had to send it off for work that is going to take time. This brings up the leading problem with hand-made guns: They demand specialized gunsmiths, all of whom are overworked. A back-up gun therefore comes in very

handy. And that's how I persuaded myself that I needed the Westley Richards.

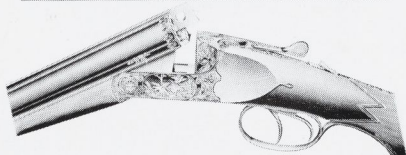
The Woodward sidelock is perfection, as far as I can see, and I have stripped it down often enough to know it intimately. The Westley Richards comes close in quality, and its design fits my purposes. The outside of the action is solid steel, without pins. The locks on the inside stay dry, at least by comparison to those on the Woodward. The Westley Richards's action is known as a droplock—meaning an Anson & Deeley action with most of its mechanism mounted on two separate plates. When they do need to be checked after a Montana blizzard, they can be removed by hand within seconds. The rounded bottom of the action makes it pleasant to carry, too.

There is another thing. The Westley Richards' lines are simple and smooth, the finish resolutely austere. It tickles me to think of those polished locks hiding like jewels in a modest vault. I could wish, however, that

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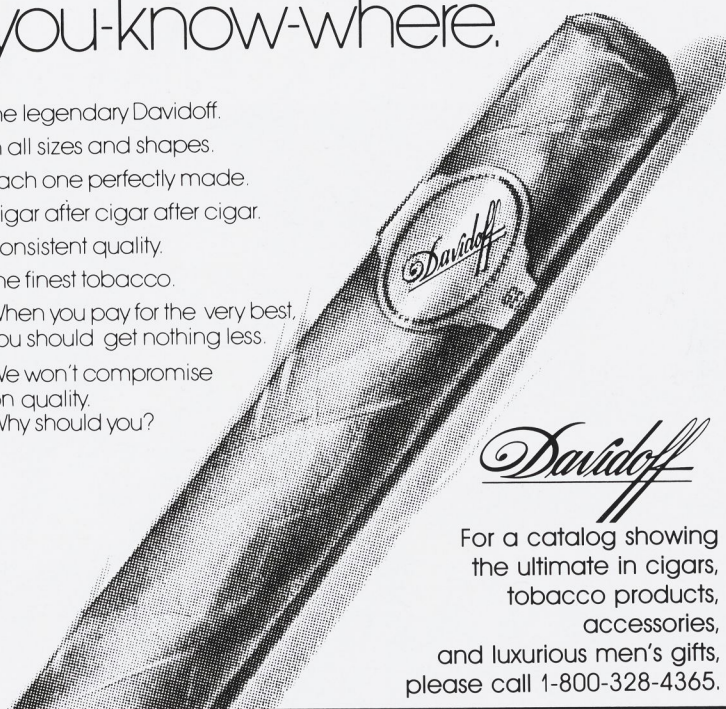
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the locks had intercepting sears like those on sidelocks.

Both of the old guns have double triggers, thank goodness. Both also have low, unobtrusive ribs, plain forends, and simple stocks. I do not know of any cars or houses as well designed as these game guns. Their lines make my eyes happy.

The weight and balance keep my body content, too. I happen to need both light weight and length in a gun: light weight because there are miles between shots; length because I am long myself, and precipitate. Twenty-nine-inch barrels slow me down and remind me to aim. Aim? But somebody has written that a shotgun must not be aimed. My dictionary, on the other hand, says that to aim is "To direct (a weapon) at someone or something." I am here to testify that my guns do not hit unless I direct them at the target.

It is not easy to find long, light guns. My Remington 1100 autoloader is long, but it weighs 8 pounds, 7 ounces. I use it for ducks with 12-gauge, 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" steel-shot loads, and it makes their recoil tolerable—barely. But only an artilleryman would describe this weapon as a field piece. At the other extreme, light modern doubles run to short barrels. They are pleasant to carry, and they fit some hunters. Once upon a

time, all of us assumed that short barrels were ideal for upland shooting. The game of sporting clays has raised questions about that.

Old guns—and certainly old British guns—do require special care and feeding. My remedies may be of help to a few other eccentrics with similar enthusiasms. I shall provide specifics, because generalities are risky in dealing with guns filed out by hand a long time ago.

Both of my guns had problems with Winchester and Remington primers. The Woodward's firing pins (strikers) stuck in the primers, making the gun difficult to open. The Westley Richards had misfires. I tried various complicated cures before finding the easy one: Federal 209 primers. With them, the firing pins no longer hang up, perhaps because the rear face of the primers is slightly convex. At the same time, Federal primers are much less prone to misfire.

If you handload, please note that Federal primers may require less powder than others. For that matter, it is dangerous to substitute any component of a load—including the wad—without knowing the effects on pressure. My source on this subject is the *Handloader's Guide*, published by the IMR Powder Company, Plattsburgh, NY 12901. This guide, for-

merly published by Du Pont, has been updated frequently in the years I have used it. It gives precise pressures and velocities for hundreds of loads. There is not much chance of misinterpretation, because every component is listed.

Most British game guns have  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " chambers. This is  $\frac{1}{4}$ " shorter than the American standard. Over the years, therefore, some Americans have had British chambers lengthened to  $2\frac{3}{4}$ ". It is a simple, common-sense change, and it works as well as most of the simple, common-sense changes proposed by politicians before elections. Don't bite. If you do, you will invalidate the gun's British proof, lower its value, and do nothing to make it suitable for American factory ammunition.

The problem, as it turns out, lies not in the shell's length but its pressure. British game guns are generally designed and proofed for a pressure of three long tons per square inch. The equivalent in American terms is not obvious, because British methods for reading pressure differ from those in America. British writer Gough Thomas, in a book titled *Shotgun Shooting Facts*, provides an interpretation. The British "3 tons," he says, is equivalent to about 8,500 pounds per square inch for pressures taken by American methods.

There is still a little translating to be done—because chamber pressures can be taken by more than one method, even in America. Thomas's reference is clearly to the old standard: lead unit pressure (LUP), as used in my *IMR Handloader's Guide*. American loads often produce pressures above 10,000 LUP, which greatly exceeds the British 3-ton level. I roamed London and asked gunmakers whether American ammunition would really be a problem for my Woodward. The helpful gentleman at Purdey's, to take one example, warned me to avoid pressures above those for which my gun was designed. The action would be stressed, he said. The gun might shoot loose. He had seen instances.

On the other hand, British authorities were not concerned about an extra  $\frac{1}{4}$ " in the length of a shell, so long as (a) pressures were mild and (b) the shell was pie-crimped, with no overshot wad. Please excuse me for getting technical here. This is an issue that has been causing confusion for a couple of generations, and its resolution is not obvious.

If you want a simple way out, order shells designed for  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " chambers and low pressure. Several firms stock them. But don't be astonished if you get British shells that are  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " long after you fire them. I lived in Ireland from 1971 to 1975 and shot Eley shells. They were all  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " in length after firing, though their box

was marked " $2\frac{1}{2}$ " chambers." In America, I try to duplicate these loads with our components, which are even better. This country is a good place to live for people who like to fiddle with guns.

Another book by Gough Thomas, *Shotguns & Cartridges*, carries a handloading guide by Eley. It recommends a case length of  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " for star-crimped ammunition intended for  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " chambers. Eley is the British equivalent of Winchester or Remington, so the recommendation carries weight. It is supported by a series of tests in yet another reference, Gough Thomas's gun book. Identical  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " loads were fired in both  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " and  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " chambers and found to give virtually identical pressures.

I handload to pressure levels that I know to be mild. My normal combination is 12-gauge,  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " Winchester AA shells, Federal 209 primers, wads specified in the IMR guide, and SR 7625 powder. (This slow-burning powder makes it easy to produce good velocities with low pressures.) Early in the season, for most birds, I use one ounce or  $1\frac{1}{16}$  ounces of shot at muzzle velocities between 1150 and 1200 feet per second. Late in the season, when pheasants flush wild in cold temperatures, I load  $1\frac{1}{8}$  ounces of nickel-plated shot for a nominal velocity of about 1,250 feet per second. In all cases, I keep pressures below 8,000 LUP by the IMR guide. The old Woodward has been using such ammunition for fifteen years with no problems.

It is only human to believe that hard-kicking shells labeled "maximum" or "magnum" are appropriate for tough old pheasants. If that has been your assumption, try these low-pressure handloads. You may be in for a nice surprise.

**I** do not want to leave the impression that I am an antiquarian. I bought turn-of-the-century guns because they were cheaper than those made between World Wars, let alone new best-grade guns. I am a hunter, first. I would welcome a modern, light side-by-side with the qualities of the old game guns. I could learn to live with low prices, interchangeable parts, and wide-slotted screws. The threat of liability suits will probably keep American firms from designing light, modern successors to the game gun, unfortunately. Perhaps someone in Britain will give it a try. Or maybe the Italians will take on the job. They could build a gun the way they build Campagnolo bicycle components, but they would have to get the lines right first, and the balance. They should not start by designing a gun that is easy to manufacture. They should insist on perfect line, balance, and function, then find a way to make it happen. They might begin with an old game gun and try to make something as good a hundred years later.





# THE EVOLUTION OF SPORTING CLAYS

By John Brindle

If you will allow that clay targets thrown from a hand trap by someone with a strong arm, and a determination that the shooter will miss as many as possible, are a form of sporting clays, then I have been shooting sporting clays for just 50 years.

Fifty years ago I was a teenager on the family farm in wartime England. Things were a bit fraught at times. I had spent some time staring into the muzzle ends of the machine guns of a Heinkel bomber as its crew searched for something that wasn't there at rooftop height around the hedgerows. Night bombing was frequent in the towns just to the south, and mowing hay took a lot longer than usual because of the frequent stops to replace teeth on the blade broken by shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells lying in the grass.

Nevertheless we had a lot of fun. One prescription for fun consisted of two strong teenagers, a hand trap (we called it a "flinger"), a box of clays, a shotgun, and some shells. We hadn't run out of good pre-war shells, but Pa saved these for serious business, and we were forced to use the "Agricultural Issue" shells for this "fun" shooting. These shells were for farmers only (other shells were indeed in short sup-

ply in the stores), intended for shooting pests, and were stamped as such. Quality was not their chief attribute, and I opened some to find shot of mixed sizes: everything from 2's to 8's. However, nobody minded; it seemed

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WAS AVAILABLE  
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CLIENTS.**

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to add to the fun.

At times I even flung targets for myself, first laying the loaded gun on something in front of me, and picking it up to break the target. Nothing

stopped us. At times we ran out of the shells we were allowed to use. When that happened, we would shoot at the clays with a .22 rifle (also with "wartime issue" ammunition) and not without some success, especially at quartering outgoers at no great distance. Years later I read of the great Percy Stanbury shooting at incoming overhead clays from the 80-foot tower at Barnstaple in Devon with a .22 rifle, hitting enough of them to have the onlookers open-mouthed and speechless. I would have loved to see that.

It was a few years after that when I first shot clays from a regular trap on a regular sporting clays ground, and a few more years again when I was present at my first sporting clay competition, also in England. The thing that struck me about it was that this, also, was fun. Some other things about it have struck me since, and I think the easiest way to show what I mean is to look at a little history.

As I am sure all readers know, the clay target is an American invention. What its inventor, Ligowsky, and its subsequent developers had in mind was a target for trapshooting competition. They thought it would give trapshooting a much wider appeal by making it cheaper and removing from it the objections that were already being voiced concerning live-pigeon trapshooting. And they were right. The numbers of people taking part in

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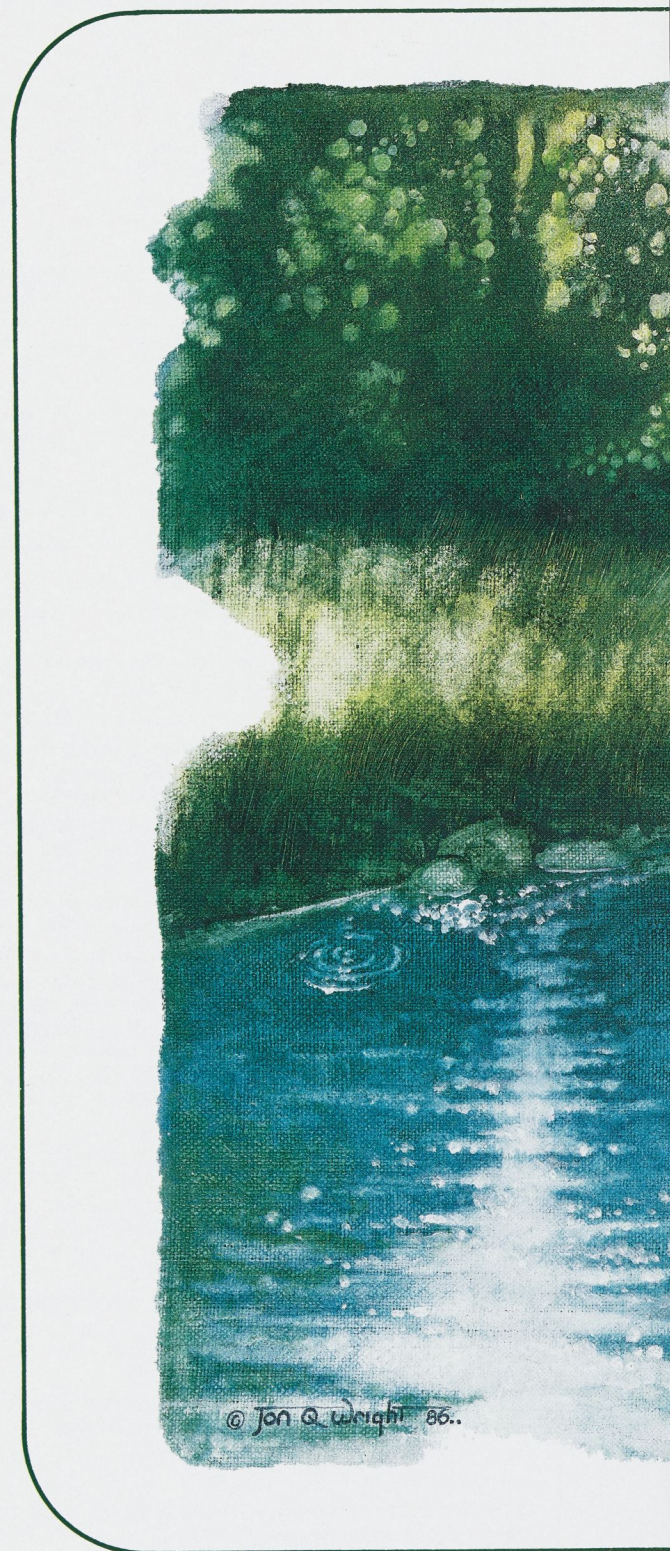
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**V**INCENT C. MARINARO'S HOUSE was at 600 East Marble Street in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, but he lived on the banks of the Letort Spring Run. At least, he seemed to live there during the summers I knew him, starting in 1971. If we spent an hour or so in the house before fishing, it was because the tackle was stored there. A big Winesap tree shaded the back porch, and Vince's rods had been planed from bamboo strips in that small, screened room. Usually we'd take one of the finished rods, or two or three, out of a battered leather case which, he said, "had been over a lot of iron bridges." I'd hold the screen door open carefully so the tips wouldn't snag. Then we'd cast on the lawn as the sun dropped. Vince would compliment the old tree for setting a crop of apples that would do him and his wife all winter. I'd compliment him on his rods, which was easy. He wouldn't compliment mine, but he would allow that one French rod might get the job done. And then we'd go and do the job.

On the banks of the Letort, Vince Marinaro took root like a gray-barked hickory stump. He fit there as woodcock fit in alder bottoms and brown trout fit under clots of elodea. Part of it was that Vince moved slowly in his later years, because of a bad hip. I'd thrash my way through a mile of ragweed without seeing a rise—nothing rises in the Letort while the June sun is still hot—and then I'd thrash back, sneezing, and see Vince planted in the riverbank reeds, rod sticking up like a flowering stem and eyes sharp on the wrinkle of current where a fish would show

# Casts No



# Under the Apple Tree



when its time came. A cigar would be branching out from the corner of Vince's mouth. Probably he did not actually smell like tobacco and bulrushes and limestone mud and the pollen of every tree in the mid-Atlantic states, but that's the way my memory of him smells.

The sun, after a 32-hour day, would drop behind the trees and give us a few minutes of evening. The sulphur mayflies would float down the stream and Vince would get two or three trout, including the best of the evening, which was likely to be about 16 inches long, a little thin, with a pink sheen along the sides and big black spots: the old Letort strain, which always made Vince happy. In the near-dark, his long, pale rod would flicker a few more times, throwing line back high over the greenery, dropping "puddle casts," and perhaps bowing to another fish as a pair of late mallards whistled up the river.

Vince won't be on the Letort's bank again but I haven't a proper obituary in me. He was a private and compartmented person. He liked to talk about what was under a few of the lids and I made no attempt to open the others, which may be one reason we got along. Some scholar will do a lot of research on Vincent Marinaro. He is as important a figure as American angling has had. What I have is a few years of memories that are sharp but disconnected, like film sequences without a script.

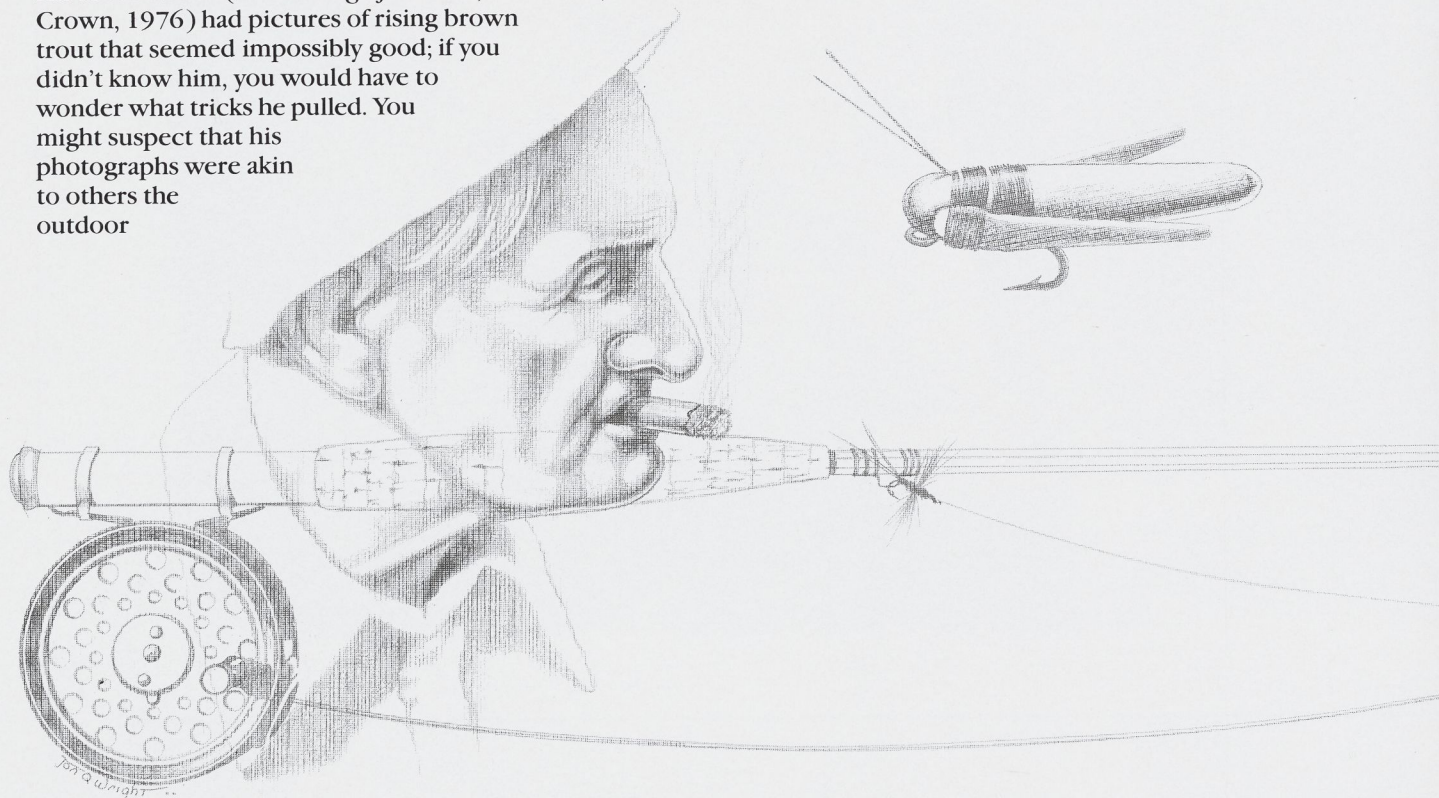
**V**INCE DID NOT WRITE two important books just because he happened to be in the right place at the right time, though of course that helped. He did everything well, if he was interested in it, and worked at it until it was perfect.

His second book (*In the Ring of the Rise*, New York, Crown, 1976) had pictures of rising brown trout that seemed impossibly good; if you didn't know him, you would have to wonder what tricks he pulled. You might suspect that his photographs were akin to others the outdoor

magazines used to run, with fish performing faked leaps. But Marinaro's pictures were as uncompromising as the man behind the camera. He set up blinds along the banks of the upper Letort and ran countless rolls of film through his old Leica with the reflex housing. The trout were all stream-bred, unconfined, rising to natural insects. The river was open to fishing, so anglers could and did try to catch those fish. If you have tried to see Letort trout, let alone photograph them, you will understand the dimensions of the problem.

Vince's reputation, however, had been made by *A Modern Dry Fly Code*, first published in 1950. The worth of a book must be a matter of opinion, but I will not be isolated in suggesting that it was the first great innovative American work in its field. That field is fishing with flies that imitate natural insects. There were, of course, other good fishing books in American by 1950; there were even two excellent ones on imitative flies (by Jennings and Flick). This, however, was a subject on which Vince and I did not agree, as I discovered when he went through a manuscript of mine in the mid-1970s. Jennings and Flick were honest and sound; they knew their trout and their natural insects and, in my view, both men tied splendid floating flies in the traditional design. Vince, however, had a low opinion of the Halfordian (and Catskill) dry fly. For him there were no good traditional dry flies.

In *A Modern Dry Fly Code* he reproached Skues for not having "emancipated" the dry fly as he did the wet. The Halfordian dry fly was, he thought, no more than a maladapted wet fly—so you can imagine his opinion of Americans who were using it in the mid-20th century.



The *Code* provided abundant and clear alternatives. Marinaro had rethought the design of the dry fly from head to tail. It is important, however, to be precise on what he did and did not do. In my view, he proposed more successful new dry-fly designs than any writer in history, by a wide margin. It is fair to say that he did for the dry fly what Skues had done for the wet. At the same time, the *Code* was squarely within the great English-language tradition of fly fishing. It is impossible to think of the book being written in any other language. (This is my opinion—not one that I recall discussing with the author.) As between the English and American schools, he clearly found more guidance in the former. He collected English books, flies, and tying materials. But within the great tradition he was an entrepreneur, not an adapter.

Originality has its costs. Americans were still waiting for the great American novel long after it had been published; the *Code* was similarly ahead of its time. A mutual friend told me the first edition was remaindered in Philadelphia for a dollar a copy. A few years later, before the new edition of 1970, the 1950 edition was sold for a hundred times the remaindered price—which, of course, did nothing for the author's bank account but must have made him feel better.

In the time I knew him, Vince was wary of the angling public, and of other authors too. Perhaps the *Code's* slow reception left a mark on him, but someone who knew him in the '50s will have to address that.

For me, at least, 1950 was the watershed year in American fly fishing. In the years since, other good books have appeared, and vast (though still very incomplete) work has been done on American trout-stream insects. There could have been no better model than Marinaro. He was a lawyer, and the *Code* made good case law: a book that could be argued before the court of anglers for decades without proving flawed. Vince claimed nothing that he had not done, repeatedly. There were no evasive generalities to fail scrutiny. Sources got credit. If you open the book today for the first time, you will have no feeling that you are reading something dated. Everything in it works, and always will.



*Code:*

PERHAPS VINCE (like Skues) left a list somewhere of the contributions that he considered important. If so, I haven't seen it and will not attempt a comprehensive list here. But consider some of the innovations in the

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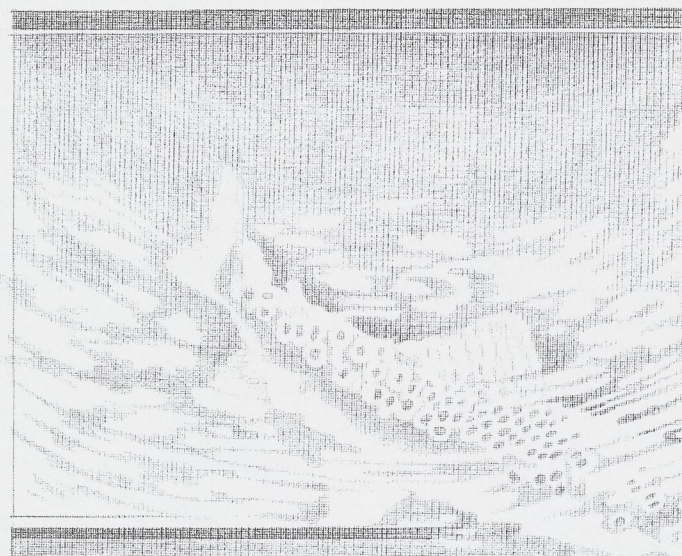
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The list of things he did not like was longer but expressed with equal frankness if anyone asked. He held conventional wisdom in such disregard that some interlocutors found him unsettling. In addition to Halfordian flies, he disliked:

- ☐ Many prestigious bamboo rods, especially if they had stiff butts or soft middles.
- ☐ All graphite rods. (He found them lacking in soul, repulsive, "almost slimy" to the touch, and got so that he would not willingly walk into a shop where he had to look at them. But, at an earlier stage, he once admitted that an Orvis 9-foot, 3-inch graphite rod for a 6-weight line cast well. As the years went on, Vince increasingly objected to overwhelming trout with modern technology.)
- ☐ Rivers (or grouse covers) with lots of people on them.
- ☐ Writers who attract crowds by publicizing individual streams. (But for friends who could keep their mouths shut, he was generous in sharing knowledge of the best streams in Pennsylvania.)
- ☐ Most fishing books.

VINCENT C. MARINARO

# IN THE RING OF THE RISE



A STARTLING AND PENETRATING LOOK AT TROUT BEHAVIOR  
AND RISEFORMS—WITH BRILLIANT  
PRACTICAL INSIGHTS INTO APPROACH AND PRESENTATION

Jon Q. Wright

In connection with the latter dislike, Vince once objected when I expressed a high opinion of a well known author and fly tier. Vince had visited the Au Sable River in Michigan with this man and found him “fishing the water” (casting at random rather than to rising fish) at a time when there were visible rises to cover. I didn’t know enough to press the point, but I wondered whether the other angler could see rising trout as well as Marinaro, whose eyesight was keen until the end.

The *Code* made clear what kind of fishing Vince liked best. He was not, however, a dry fly purist. On one of our last trips to the Letort, he experimented with old-fashioned wet flies on little double hooks. I don’t recall seeing him nymph-fishing. One day, though, I was fishing a little beetle upstream and wet, just like a Skues-style nymph, and Vince invited me to try two small Letort fish that had refused his dry fly. He seemed delighted when they took the beetle. I think he enjoyed filing that away as another angling problem solved.

It was easy to know when Vince was *not* pleased. You can be sure that I did not “pollute the water” (his term) with plastic rods when we went fishing together.

**A**MONG THE OTHER mysteries of life on which I sought his advice was the relationship between women and field sports. He told me that his wife—he called her “Mom”—had gone fishing with him exactly once, early in their marriage. But she never objected when, several evenings a week, he rushed home from the office and out to the Letort. When he returned late at night, she always had a good meal ready for him and any friend he brought along (and to this I can testify). She was “a real fisherman’s wife,” he said; when she died in 1978, he floated lower in the water.

About then I started driving up to Mechanicsburg on Friday evenings, occasionally, and sleeping over so that we could make a start before dawn for the *Tricorythodes* fishing. It’s hard to believe that Vince actually discovered this hatch. Taking the country as a whole, the Tricos must now be the most important mayflies that American anglers have—and we didn’t even know they existed before Marinaro’s article of July 1969 in *Outdoor Life*! It was the angling equivalent of Columbus’s discovery of 1492. If anglers instead of entomologists decided these things, we would change the name of the genus to *Marinarus*.

Vince took pleasure in the Tricos right through his last summer in 1985. In July he showed me an original Trico spinner design that he considered the best ever. He also explained exactly how to fish for trout "gulping" the tiny flies—and why a bamboo rod worked better than anything else for the purpose.

After the hatch we'd go back to 600 East Marble Street for lunch. He would never let me stop at a restaurant. His food was still good, but the Winesap tree hadn't been pruned and windfalls covered the yard. There was still a swath of mowed grass for casting. Inside the house there were paths between piles of waders, long-handled wading nets, fishing bags, rod cases, guns, and fly-tying gear. On the wall was a sconce with three unburned candles drooping in the heat: one bending like a rod on the backcast, one near surrender, and one limp. Near this were a Trout Unlimited Limestone award and a plaque from the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, for Vince's contribution to the literature. He must have felt good about these, but he'd have been embarrassed if I had mentioned them. It was, however, open season on his fly boxes, and I could prow through them as much as I liked.


Then we'd go scout some streams, desultorily, and some doves, seriously. Vince would shake his head when he saw the traffic jam on the Yellow Breeches. For the last couple of years, he wasn't willing to face that horde of anglers even to fish the white fly, which he considered a better spectacle than the Tricos. He had worked hard to get catch-and-release regulations on some of the limestone spring creeks, but now he preferred to fish elsewhere—without so many trout, perhaps, but also without so many anglers. Besides, he said, he liked to eat a trout now and then.

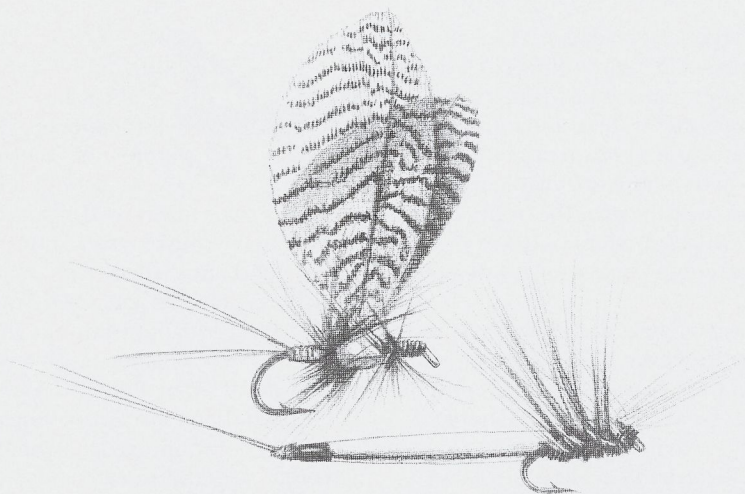
He got more pleasure from the doves. After opening day in September, the hunting would get as crowded as the fishing, but in July the birds still whistled around, a reminder of the times when you could get two cock pheasants in any cornfield and Cedar Run still had trout in it.

To my knowledge, Vince did not write about hunting, but he liked it as much as fishing; indeed, he seemed to draw no line between the two. By the time I knew him, however, he walked so slowly that my dog found our hunting trips puzzling. I remember creeping through one woodcock covert, full of good smells, while Trooper ran back and forth in front of us, and back and forth, and back and forth. No covert has ever been covered like that one.

On a dove stand, however, legs did not matter much, and Vince was a good shot. The first time we tried it, he uncased a vintage Remington Model 32. It was the first single-triggered double gun I had seen with instant, effective barrel selection—by means of a custom Miller trigger—and it seemed typical of him to have worked out that problem too.

**A** S WE DROVE DOWN a July road very slowly, Vince shot every dove that crossed—with his forefinger. Any shotgunner would have enjoyed calculating the leads. An incomer would slip by at that peculiar angle which makes doves tricky and Vince would go "bang!" cackling like a nine-year-old slaying dragons. Vince spotted more doves than I did. "Bang!" he'd exult. "You sure missed that one!"

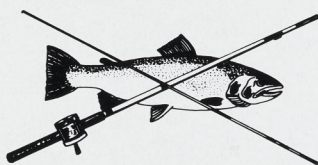
It's my other favorite memory. Vince crossed the last iron bridge on March 2, 1986. The limestone country will remember him for a long time. 



*With Illustrations by Jon Q. Wright*

On the banks of the Letort, Vince Marinaro took root like a gray-barked hickory stump. He fit there as woodcock fit in alder bottoms and brown trout fit under clots of elodea. Part of it was that Vince moved slowly in his later

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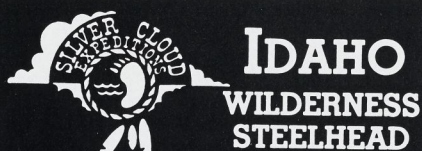
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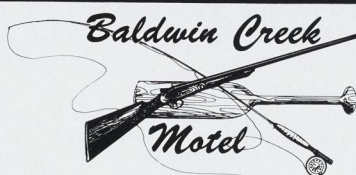
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years, because of a bad hip. I'd thrash my way through a mile of ragweed without seeing a rise – nothing rises in the Letort while the June sun is still hot – and then I'd thrash back, sneezing, and see Vince planted in the riverbank reeds, rod sticking up like a flowering stem and eyes sharp on the wrinkle of the current where a fish would show when its time came. A cigar would be branching out from the corner of Vince's mouth. Probably he did not actually smell like tobacco and bulrushes and limestone mud and the pollen of every tree in the mid-Atlantic states, but that's the way my memory of him smells.

The sun, after a 32-hour day, would drop behind the trees and give us a few minutes of evening. The sulphur mayflies would float down the stream and Vince would get two or three trout, including the best of the evening, which was likely to be about 16 inches long, a little thin, with a pink sheen along the sides and big black spots: the old Letort strain, which always made Vince happy. In the near-dark, his long, pale rod would flicker a few more times, throwing line back high over the greenery, dropping "puddle casts," and perhaps bowing to another fish as a pair of late mallards whistled up the river.



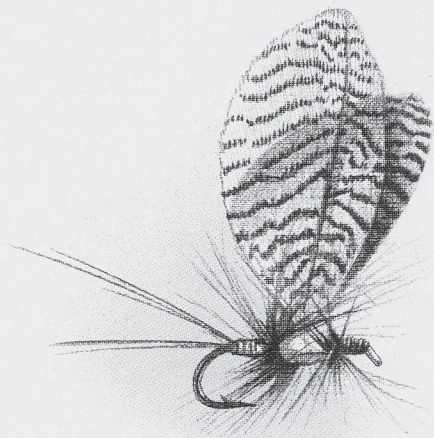
Bernard "Lefty" Kreh

Vince won't be on the Letort's bank again but I haven't a proper obituary in me. He was a private and compartmented person. He liked to talk about what was under a few of the lids and I made no attempt to open the others, which may be one reason we got along. Some scholar will do a lot of research on Vincent Marinaro. He is as important a figure as American angling has had. What I have is a few years of memories that are sharp but disconnected, like film sequences without a script.

Vince did not write two important books just because he happened to be in the right place at the right time, though of course that helped. He did everything well, if he was interested in it, and worked at it until it was perfect. His second book (*In the Ring of the Rise*, New York, Crown, 1976) had pictures of rising brown trout that seemed impossibly good; if you didn't know him, you would have to wonder what tricks he pulled. You might suspect that his photographs were akin to others the outdoor magazines used to run, with

fish performing faked leaps. But Marinaro's pictures were as uncompromising as the man behind the camera. He set up blinds along the banks of the upper Letort and ran countless rolls of film through his old Leica with the reflex housing. The trout were all stream-bred, unconfined, rising to natural insects. The river was open to fishing, so anglers could and did try to catch those fish. If you have tried to see Letort trout, let alone photograph them, you will understand the dimensions of the problem.

Vince's reputation, however, had been made by *A Modern Dry Fly Code*, first published in 1950. The worth of a book must be a matter of opinion, but I will not be isolated in suggesting that it was the first great innovative American work in its field. That field is fishing with flies that imitate natural insects. There were, of course, other good fishing books in America by 1950; there were even two excellent ones on imitative flies (by Jennings and Flick). This, however, was a subject on which Vince and I did not agree, as I discovered when he went



through a manuscript of mine in the mid-1970s. Jennings and Flick were honest and sound; they knew their trout and their natural insects and, in my view, both men tied splendid floating flies in the traditional design. Vince, however, had a low opinion of the Halfordian (and Catskill) dry fly. For him there were no good traditional dry flies.

In *A Modern Dry Fly Code* he reproached Skues for not having “emanipated” the dry fly as he did the wet. The Halfordian dry fly was, he thought, no more than a maladapted wet fly – so you can imagine his opinion of Americans who were using it in the mid-20th century. The *Code* provided abundant and clear alternatives. Marinaro had rethought the design of the dry fly from head to tail. It is important, however, to be precise on what he did and did not do. In my view, he proposed more successful new dry-fly designs than any writer in history, by a wide margin. It is fair to say that he did for the dry fly what Skues had done for the wet. At the same time, the *Code* was squarely within the great English-language tradition of fly fishing. It is impossible to think of the book being written in any other language. (This is my opinion – not one that I recall discussing with the author.) As between the English and American schools, he clearly found more guidance in the former. He collected English books, flies, and tying materials. But within the great tradition he was an entrepreneur, not an adapter.

Originality has its costs. Americans were still waiting for the great American novel long after it had been published; the *Code* was similarly ahead of its time. A mutual friend told me the first edition was remaindered in Philadelphia for a dollar a copy. A few years later, before the new edition of 1970,

the 1950 edition was sold for a hundred times the remaindered price – which, of course, did nothing for the author’s bank account but must have made him feel better.

In the time I knew him, Vince was wary of the angling public, and of other authors too. Perhaps the *Code*’s slow reception left a mark on him, but someone who knew him in the ’50s will have to address that.

For me, at least, 1950 was the watershed year in American fly fishing. In the years since, other good books have appeared, and vast (though still very incomplete) work has been done on American trout stream insects. There could have been no better model than Marinaro. He was a lawyer, and the *Code* made good case law: a book that could be argued before the court of anglers for decades without proving flawed. Vince claimed nothing that he had not done, repeatedly. There were no evasive generalities to fail scrutiny. Sources got credit. If you open the book today for the first time, you will have no feeling that you are reading something dated. Everything in it works, and always will.

Perhaps Vince (like Skues) left a list somewhere of the contributions that he considered important. If so, I haven’t seen it and will not attempt a comprehensive list here. But consider some of the innovations in the *Code*.

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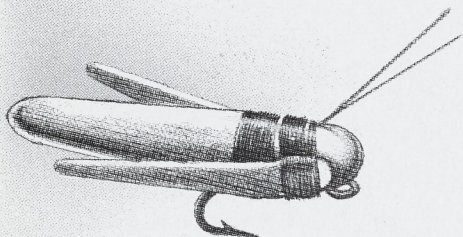
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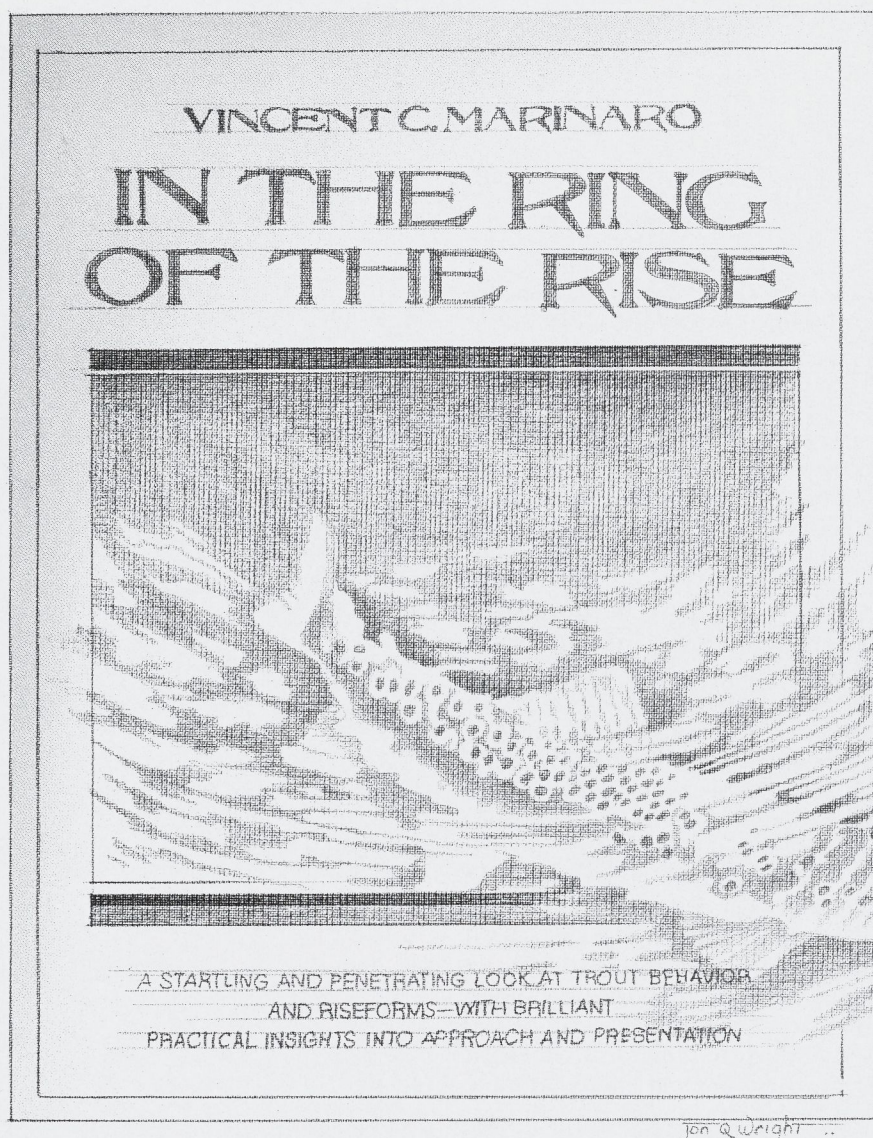
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good double-barreled shotguns, a rod by Tom Maxwell, a pair of hackle pliers. "That's the only good pair of hackle pliers I ever saw," he said.

The list of things he did not like was longer but expressed with equal frankness if anyone asked. He held conventional wisdom in such disregard that some interlocutors found him unsettling. In addition to Halfordian flies, he disliked:

- Many prestigious bamboo rods, especially if they had stiff butts or soft middles.
- All graphite rods. (He found them lacking in soul, repulsive, "almost slimy" to touch, and got so that he would not willingly walk into a shop where he had to look at them. But, at an earlier stage, he once admitted that an Orvis 9-foot, 3-inch graphite rod for a 6-weight line cast well. As the years went on, Vince increasingly objected to overwhelming trout with modern technology.)
- Rivers (or grouse coverts) with lots of people on them.
- Writers who attract crowds by publicizing individual streams. (But for friends who could keep their mouths shut, he was generous in sharing knowledge of the best streams in Pennsylvania.)
- Most fishing books.

In connection with the latter dislike, Vince once objected when I expressed a high opinion of a well known author and fly tier. Vince had visited the Au Sable River in Michigan with this man and found him "fishing the water" (casting at random rather than to rising fish) at a time when there were visible rises to cover. I didn't know enough to press the point, but I wondered whether the other angler could see rising trout as well as Marinaro,



whose eyesight was keen until the end.

The *Code* made clear what kind of fishing Vince liked best. He was not, however, a dry fly purist. On one of our last trips to the Letort, he experimented with old-fashioned wet flies on little double hooks. I don't recall seeing him nymph-fishing. One day, though, I was fishing a little beetle upstream and wet, just like a Skues-style nymph, and Vince invited me to try two small Letort fish that had refused his dry fly. He seemed delighted when they took the beetle. I think he enjoyed filing that away as another angling problem solved.

It was easy to know when Vince was not pleased. You can be sure that I did

not "pollute the water" (his term) with plastic rods when we went fishing together.

Among the other mysteries of life on which I sought his advice was the relationship between women and the field sports. He told me that his wife — he called her "Mom" — had gone fishing with him exactly once, early in their marriage. But she never objected when, several evenings a week, he rushed home from the office and out to the Letort. When he returned late at night, she always had a good meal ready for him and any friend he brought along (and to this I can testify). She was "a real fisherman's wife," he said; when she

died in 1978, he floated lower in the water.

About then I started driving up to Mechanicsburg on Friday evenings, occasionally, and sleeping over so that we could make a start before dawn for the *Tricorythodes* fishing. It's hard to believe that Vince virtually discovered this hatch. Taking the country as a whole, the Tricos must now be the most important mayflies that American anglers have — and we didn't even know they existed before Marinaro's article of July 1969 in *Outdoor Life*! It was the angling equivalent of Columbus's discovery of 1492. If anglers instead of entomologists decided these things, we

would change the name of the genus to *Marinarus*.

Vince took pleasure in the Tricos right through his last summer in 1985. In July he showed me an original Trico spinner design that he considered the best ever. He also explained exactly how to fish for trout "gulping" the tiny flies – and why a bamboo rod worked better than anything else for the purpose.

After the hatch we'd go back to 600 East Marble Street for lunch. He would never let me stop at a restaurant. His food was still good, but the winesap tree hadn't been pruned and windfalls covered the yard. There was still a swath of mowed grass for casting. Inside the house there were paths between piles of waders, long-handled wading nets, fishing bags, rod cases, guns, and fly-tying gear. On the wall was a scone with three unburned candles drooping in the heat; one bending like a rod on the backcast, one near surrender, and one limp. Near this were a Trout Unlimited Limestone award and a plaque from the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, for Vince's contribution to the literature. He must have felt good about these, but he'd have been embarrassed if I had mentioned them. It was, however, open season on his fly boxes, and I could prowl through them as much as I liked.

Then we'd go scout some streams, desultorily, and some doves, seriously. Vince would shake his head when he saw the traffic jam on the Yellow Breeches. For the last couple of years, he wasn't willing to face that horde of anglers even to fish the white fly, which he considered a better spectacle than the Tricos. He had worked hard to get catch-and-release regulations on some of the limestone spring creeks, but now he preferred to fish elsewhere – without so many trout, perhaps, but also

without so many anglers. Besides, he said, he liked to eat a trout now and then.

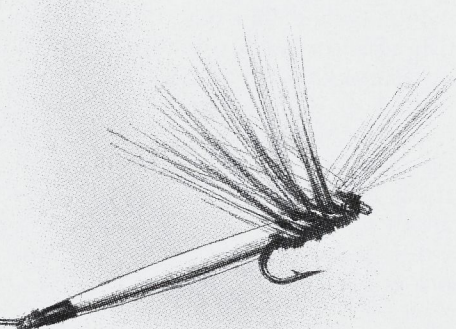
He got more pleasure from the doves. After opening day in September, the hunting would get as crowded as the fishing, but in July the birds still whistled around, a reminder of the times when you could get two cock pheasants in any cornfield and Cedar Run still had trout in it.

To my knowledge, Vince did not write about hunting, but he liked it as much as fishing; indeed, he seemed to draw no line between the two. By the time I knew him, however, he walked so slowly that my dog found our hunting trips puzzling. I remember creeping through one woodcock covert, full of good smells, while Trooper ran back and forth in front of us, and back and forth, and back and forth. No covert has ever been covered like that one.

On a dove stand, however, legs did not matter much, and Vince was a good shot. The first time we tried it, he uncased a vintage Remington Model 32. It was the first single-triggered double gun I had seen with instant, effective barrel selection – by means of a custom Miller trigger – and it seemed typical of him to have worked out that problem too.

As we drove down a July road very slowly, Vince shot every dove that crossed – with his forefinger. Any shot-gunner would have enjoyed calculating the leads. An incomer would slip by at that peculiar angle which makes doves tricky and Vince would go "bang!" crackling like a nine-year-old slaying dragons. Vince spotted more doves than I did. "Bang!" he'd exult. "You sure missed that one!"

It's my other favorite memory. Vince crossed the last iron bridge on March 2, 1986. The limestone country will remember him for a long time.



BY DATUS C. PROPER

# THE CHASE AT PHEASANTS

used much  
This is  
Pheasant Suck

**T**he drive to Mr. Colchis' farm takes half an hour longer than usual because the forecast was accurate. But pheasants don't worry about the weather. People do. One friend said he'd come along except that he had family driving in from Keokuk for the holidays, and another reported what some lady on television had said about a cold front. Hunters are human and pheasants are heroes.

This drab decade is no place for a bird of bronze, orange, green, white, red, and olive—a bird, moreover, that hides its 3-foot length in 3 inches of bleached grass. Jason and his Argonauts discovered the *phasianos* while seeking the Golden Fleece and brought both back. If pheasants and fleeces now seem about equally scarce, it may be that you are rational. You will learn. Ours is the oldest and least rational of pursuits, dating from a layer below logic. The events that try us in the field are beyond fiction because fiction makes sense.

I shall now give counsel on dealing with the unexpected. The first point is that you must make sacrifices to Artemis, maiden goddess of the chase, in order to gain her favor. Artemis can be beastly. Once she turned a hunter into a buck deer and sicked his own dogs on him, just because he watched her skinny-dipping in a sylvan pool.

I spend a lot of time near sylvan pools, so today I thank Artemis for the invigorating trickle of elements down my collar and, as a sacrifice, offer her my fleece, which if not golden is at least a nice pink and covered with goose pimples.

In the station wagon are two German shorthaired pointers, one has-been and one might-be. Huckleberry is just 6 months old and has not yet grasped the meaning of life. That's the trouble with buying a pup; you have to feed him for a year before you find out if he's useless,

and by then your wife won't hear of sacrificing him to some woods hussy. Huck just came along for the ride; Trooper is the one who knows what to do. He can no longer hear my whistle, but he was never a great listener anyhow, except once a day at chow time.

Today Trooper spends too much time sniffing at bushes and piles of brush, none of which harbor a pheasant. I have to wonder if his nose is getting as feeble as the rest of him. He doesn't catch on even

to the left, landing in a bramble patch. Fourth, I pick up another quail, dead, which must have been sitting where the rabbit was supposed to be. Fifth, we jog to the brambles where the surviving quail lit. Sixth, another rabbit flushes from the brambles but Trooper is chasing this one, so it's safe. Seventh, the quail flushes and I let it go without a shot—as an apology to the goddess for ground-sluicing the first one.

It is really Artemis who should apologize. Instead of helping out, she has bought an Olympus camcorder and is video-taping a script of the Keystone Kops variety, with me in the lead. Capriciousness is to be expected of goddesses, but enough is enough. Perhaps she agrees, because where second-growth trees have covered an old homestead, Trooper and I find a 6-pound 6-ounce puffball mushroom, our biggest ever, and a good omen. Puffballs are delicious with pheasant—if you have a pheasant. We won't get the main course with Trooper wet and tired, and I could use dry boots myself.

Artemis distributes pheasants to deserving mortals in accordance with a mileage chart. In heroic times we would see one rooster every half mile. The current rating

is 10 miles per bird, but that's an average. You can flush two in the first field and then you can walk from here to Washington without seeing another. The ancients refer to this sport as "the chase at pheasants," which is the proper attitude. We efficient Yanks like to think we're hunting—a methodical search terminating in game for dinner. Trooper and I, we've been chasing. That means I'll have to wake up the pup and give him a try after all.

Huckleberry does not need waking. I left him with a 19-by-41-inch welcome mat

*Datus C. Proper is an avid chaser of pheasants in his home state of Montana.*



when a rabbit sneaks out from one of those brush piles, hops across the field, and hides behind a tuft of grass. This reminds me that rabbit marinated in white wine used to taste good.

My shot pattern hits the rabbit's clump of grass—right in the middle, if I do say so—and things begin to happen. The script gets confusing now so follow this carefully: First, there is a feeble thrashing around in the grass, as is to be expected of a rabbit that's on its way to the marinade, and I run to pick up dinner before Trooper arrives and eats it. Second, the rabbit streaks off to the right, highly motivated rather than marinated. Third, a quail gets up from behind the tuft of grass and flies

PHOTO BY ROBERT PEARCY

sightings of other fish down to 30 feet.

While using three to four colors of metered, lead-core line, we caught nothing but northerns—the belt at the upside of the graph. When we went to six or seven colors, we caught only lake trout—the scattered fish below the thermocline. Depending upon the depth, what turned up on the end of our lines was as predictable as sunrise.

I have also found that temperature fluctuations and trends influence the times that fish bite, and the patterns apply to both streams and lakes. The following are general observations to which I have found occasional exceptions, but have proven to be good rules to follow:

- When temperatures are stable, fishing falls into predictable patterns. For example, I know of one high-country lake where regular surface temperatures in the 45-degree range will find the cutthroat trout biting best near the shoreline between 8 and 11 A.M. This happens every spring for a period of about a month. When days get hotter and the water warms, the trout disappear. Realize too that "stability" can also refer to normal daytime fluctuations. When a shallow bass pond warms to 80 degrees every day and cools to 65 degrees every night, you will usually find that there are specific and predictable times when the fishing is best.

## A SIMPLE FATHOMETER-THERMOMETER

■ First, buy a short ice-fishing rod and reel. These rigs are about 2 feet long and include a closed-faced spinning reel. They usually cost under \$25.

Using a yardstick, mark the line with red nail polish in 3 foot increments, one dab for 3 feet, two dabs for 6, and so on.

Tie a large snap-swivel to the end of the line and clip it to a home thermometer. Leave the thermometer at whatever depth you are reading for 30 seconds, then reel it in quickly so the instrument doesn't register the surface temperature. With this arrangement, you'll have a compact, neat, and fast way to read water depths and temperatures.

- Uncommon changes in water temperature will result in a corresponding change in the fishing. For example, a cold front passes at 6 A.M., and the water cools rather than warms throughout the day, or an unusually hot night discourages radiant cooling. The vexing thing about this situation is that you can't predict whether the change will improve the fishing or give everything that swims a case of lockjaw. I've seen it go both ways.

- Rapid changes in water temperature, up or down, mean bad fishing. The classic case is the dramatic cold front that drops

air temperature by 30 degrees, but it can also happen with unusually warm fronts, as well as from warm-water discharges from generators and cold-water discharges from dams.

- Slow-moving temperature trends, those that move up or down throughout a fish's preferred comfort zone, signal good fishing. For example, let's say a trout stream warms from 50 to 60 degrees over a two-week period or cools in a like manner. Fishing should be exceptional throughout that time. It might be worth noting that this situation occurs at least twice a year, in the spring and fall. A classic case here is the showery cooling trend that breaks the back of summer's dog days. At this time, I have seen Western rivers that seemed barren one day explode with surface activity the next.

- Fishing with a thermometer has surely improved my luck, but trying to predict fish behavior by water temperature alone doesn't always work. Where fish will be found and when they will bite are often influenced by other factors: dissolved oxygen levels, available food, turbidity, cover, light intensity, and angler disturbance, to name a few.

All are important pieces of the angling puzzle. Assembled correctly, they will always lead you in the direction of better fishing.



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## The events that try us in the field are beyond fiction . . . because fiction makes sense.

(heretofore dog-proof) as a cushion for his little snooze. At present, Arachne, the weaver, working full time till next season, could not reassemble the mat. It used to have 25 tufts of sisal per square inch. That amounts to 19,475 tufts, each with 100 separate fibers. Huckleberry has separated and distributed 1,947,500 sisal fibers, neglecting no cranny of the wagon. If, while gutting a deer, your knife has ever slipped and cut open the paunch, you know what the inside of my vehicle looks like. My wife's puppy has to be located by sound. He is asking where I have been and why I didn't take him along. I am saying that he is going to Artemis' altar without consulting Mom.

It is all my wife's fault, anyhow, that this pheasant season is a bust. She wouldn't let me get an older pup—not cute enough. Finally Jim McCue found Huckleberry for us, and he's a cute lady's dog, all right. Cutest little shredder-mulcher you ever saw.

I expect Huck to stay close to me, for protection against Harpies. (A Harpy, in case your mythology is rusty, is a kind of half-bird, half-woman with terrible talons, capable of flying off with pointer puppies. Cock pheasants fantasize about Harpies.) Young Huckleberry, however, shows heroic tendencies. He busts a meadowlark, nearly catches it for the first 30 yards, then chases it out of sight. He flash-points a hen mallard on the creek and flushes her, then splashes down in the middle of the stream, lunges to the other side, and chases the duck out of sight. This is how both the pup and I discover that he can swim. His next conquest is a muskrat, which doesn't take as long to get out of sight, thank goodness. Life according to Huck is the chase at everything.

A half-acre triangle of abandoned land surrounds a boggy spring. The patch is tall with grass, thick with weeds, clogged with honeysuckle, and home to one cock pheasant, who makes a noise that sounds like *Keo-kuk*. Perhaps this is how a pheasant expresses happiness when rain turns into a mere mist. I reach into my shooting vest for a leash, with which I plan to lead Huck close to the bird and encourage sniffing around. "Here, pup," I will whisper, leading him back when he tries to dither off after muskrats. But first I have to catch him, and he's another bad listener. He's running through those weeds too fast but on scent, sure to bust the only pheasant of the day before I can get within shooting range. When he is 30 feet from the far edge, Huck points: head high, tail up, puppy foreleg cocked, baby-fat body tense. He vibrates but shows no sign of moving. The real thing. Neither of us

knew he was going to do that.

In his book *A Rage for Falcons*, Stephen Bodio explains why men fly them: "You are the bird." You are the pointer, too, following his nose to something beyond the grasp of mortals. The falcon's stoop takes first place, but the point of an intense dog comes next, and there's no third place. I have wanted to shoot lots of pheasants but never as much as I want this one, the first for a pup who is hunting a season too soon. There's going to be a flush, because the cock is pinned between us and a clear field.

But you can never count on a pheasant. This one may be so wet that he doesn't want to fly, or he may have been sent to try us. Anyhow, he runs out into the open. He's 11 feet long and iridescent against drab grass. Huck is too low in the weeds to see what's happening, and I hesitate. Better to wait for the bird to get in cover again or it will flush wild. My pup loses the body scent but holds the point and turns his head toward me, brow wrinkled quizzically. *Did I do something wrong, boss?*

You did it just right, buddy. (Tell me now, do I know how to pick bird dogs or what?)

I see where the rooster enters a woodlot, but Huck is not waiting for advice. He zips into the trees at the right place and I'm running as fast as I can, which is about 40 miles an hour slower than my pup. It's important to stay close. This place is all trees and no ground cover, so the bird won't hold long.

Huck, thank goodness, is pointing again when I find him. We have fetched up against a sylvan pool, or perhaps it's the rain-swollen creek, but either way we have the rooster pinned. The pup breaks and the pheasant, which has grown to a length of 16 feet, flushes across the water. The bird is too far away and half-hidden by limbs, but I have to try. The rooster falls on the far side of the pool. Huck crosses the stream a second later, running on water. I hike up my shell vest and follow, keeping my powder dry but not the wallet in my hip pocket. Huck points to where the bird landed, but it's no longer there. Then, instead of getting his nose down and trailing, my wife's idiotic pup gallops away with his head held high. I reckon he's after meadowlarks again but try to keep up. (Next year I will make my first million by selling a slimming pill, illustrating the ads with pictures of a hunter before and after the chasing season.)

After covering about 300 yards, Huck is pointing at a national monument—our nation's largest contiguous mass of thorns. His forehead is wrinkled again and it occurs to me that he doesn't know about retrieving anything except canvas training


dummies.

Once during another epic, such a thick-et saved the life but not the skin of John Waddingham, who had annoyed a buffalo. The bull tossed John in the thorns and spent half an hour trying to get at him. After the buffalo gave up, my friend spent the rest of the day extracting himself from the thorns and concluded that, on balance, he preferred buffaloes. You need this information in order to grasp the importance of getting a pup's first bird. I peel off the vest, leave the gun, flop belly-down in a puddle, and start crawling under the bushes.

One cannot, I suppose, blame a goddess on Mount Olympus for turning on the camcorder again, given an opportunity like this, but she might have left out the part with the woodchuck sunning itself on a tree limb. This vicious animal scrambles down the trunk and charges me. (I trust you have grasped the point about fiction making more sense than the things that happen to hunters.) Mangling by marmot must not appear on my tombstone, but I cannot retreat; the thorns have detained a portion of my anatomy that no one could expect me to sacrifice, except Artemis. Finally, the woodchuck disappears down a hole at arm's length. You may have thought that was funny, Mizz Goddess Ma'am, but yellow incisors at 20 inches didn't look very comical to me. Furthermore, my ego is wounded; I have borne all this in a posture of minimum dignity, and my wife's pup has been pointing a woodchuck hole.

As I crawl out of the thorns, Huckleberry crawls in, and if he disappears down that hole, the woodchucks can have him. Instead, Huck wriggles further into the thorns and emerges with two deep, red scratches down his back. There is also a dead cock pheasant in his mouth. It isn't as long as it looked flying—maybe just 7 feet—but that's enough to hide much of a six-month-old pointer pup. Huck prances around on tiptoes with his head in the air, just as he does when running off to bury my wife's best shoes. He doesn't exactly retrieve, but he runs around me in diminishing spirals until there's nothing left to do but give me the bird.

I forgive Artemis even for the woodchuck. To Huck, I promise a new pair of red Italian high-heeled shoes that he can bury and dig up as often as he wants. But he has found something he likes better. His tail is saying that he wants to go chase another of these birds that smell so good.

And so we do. When Artemis is cranky you persist until she changes her mind, and when she's in a good mood, you keep on chasing. 

# HUNTING & FISHING ON SKIS

Don't let snow keep you from your favorite sport.  
Here two FIELD & STREAM editors tell you how it's done.

## SKI HUNTING

**T**he foothills of the mountains around my Montana home are laced with old logging trails, and before my wife and I began to spend the colder months in Mexico, I would often pass a winter's day by strapping on a pair of skis to see where those trails led.

Cross-country skiing had not yet developed into the sport it is today, so my equipment consisted of an old pair of wooden slats, crudely adapted to travel where there were no packed trails. Aside from discovering a marvelous way to see the winter world, I was amazed at how agile those skis proved to be, and how closely I could approach game on them. I walked up to grouse and snowshoe rabbits, and surprised bedded moose and mule deer, often passing close enough to wipe their quivering, inquisitive noses.

The realization that, given the right conditions, skiing might be a workable way to hunt big game soon followed, and since then, a half-dozen deer and an elk have fallen before me and a pair of swift, silent skis, which have proven to be the perfect remedy for most of the ills associated with hunting in deep snow.

There are two important reasons why. First, skis are a fast and efficient way to travel. Because of the "glide factor" a person on skis can go twice as fast as one afoot on bare ground, and with less exertion.

Because skis distribute a person's weight over the surface of snow, a skier can go three or four times as fast as someone plodding through a foot of snow.

When heavy snow forces elk to the lowlands, I often hunt behind a neighbor's ranch that borders National Forest. To get to the stands of spruce, fir, and popple where the bulls bed, you have to cross more than a mile of pasture and tilled

cropland. It takes hunters afoot half an hour to reach the edge of the woods, and when they get there, they are already sweaty and tired from pushing snow. On skis, it takes me 15 minutes if I have to break a fresh trail. If there is already a trail, it takes me 10, and in either case, I arrive at the forest edge with plenty of wind and the wherewithall to hunt the hills ahead long and hard.

Second, skis are also silent. In wet snow they don't crunch like footfalls, and their weight-distributing property keeps the snap of twigs to a minimum. Perhaps most important, a hunter gliding silently along on skis is utterly perplexing to game.

It's my habit to ski-hunt by climbing high, then hunting down, in an effort to surprise game from above. Coasting downhill, I traverse hillsides at a gentle angle that has me poking along at speeds of 3 to 5 miles an hour, hands and poles tucked tightly to my sides to eliminate all but forward motion. Game commonly freezes in its tracks at my approach, probably because the animals can't figure out what I am.

So long as snow conditions are right, the advantages afforded by skis are enormous, but it would be misleading to suggest that they are the preferred alternative to foot travel whenever snow lies on the ground. In general, you'll find them more of a hindrance than a help in thick brush where you have to thread your way along twisting trails. They are also unsuitable in terrain where the snow isn't deep enough to cover most rocks, and especially downfall. When ski tips jam under downfall that is hidden by an inch or two of snow, you have to back up to get free, at

which point the tails of skis often dig into the snow or beneath another downfall, and you become trapped.

But when the snow is deep enough, skis work better in just about any place you could or would need to use snowshoes. Too, if the snow is deep on open flats, but only is scant inches under tall timber, you can always cover the open ground fast, then take off your skis and switch to foot travel upon entering the timber.

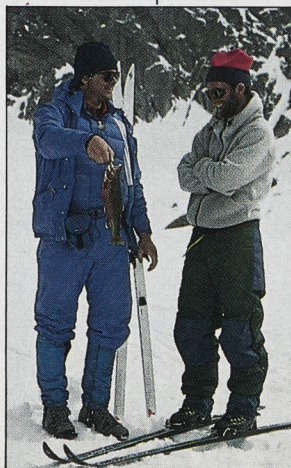
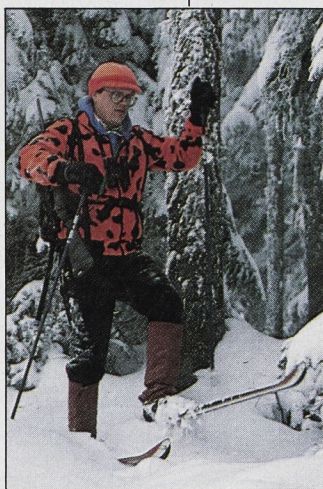
You will also find hunting on skis to be easier and more effective if you modify conventional cross-country equipment, or buy skis specifically designed for back-country travel. Standard cross-country skis are designed to be used on packed and groomed trails, so they are narrow and long. Hunting skis must be capable of getting off trails, getting over loose, unpacked snow, and literally weaving their way across country, so they need to be short and wide.

You can make off-trail skis and save a few bucks by doing what I did at first—buying an old pair of downhill skis at a garage sale. Assuming your height and weight are in a healthy balance, buy skis 6 inches to a foot longer than you are tall, and they will support your weight on loose snow and still be relatively agile in tight timber.

You will have to equip the skis with cross-country bindings, and the best kind for hunting have a heel-lock option. When you are covering ground or going uphill, these bindings anchor only your toe, so your ankle is free to flex as you walk.

When you want to glide downhill, heel-lock bindings let you lock your heel in place, too, affording more directional control. Any heel-lock binding should have a quick-release feature, however. Should you fall, your foot will then pop out of the binding before stresses mount to the point of possible leg or ankle injuries.

You'll also need cross-country ski boots, which have a lot of give and flex to make walking easier and more natural. Their soles and heels also have pins



HUNTER PHOTO BY TIM CHRISTIE; FISHERMEN PHOTO BY STEVE NETHERBY

The season starts with ice-out in June, when streamers and darkish wet flies are effective. Before the month ends, mayfly hatches begin, and dry-fly fishing reigns roughly into the beginning of August—an ideal time for the angler who savors heart-stopping rises from hefty trout that take with calm, sure determination.

Lee Wulff discovered this area in 1957. He landed his little float plane and guess what—his first trout weighed 6 pounds!—PETER BARRETT

## STRIPED BASS

Of all the lakes that produce true trophy-sized striped bass, few are as reliable and predictable as Virginia's Smith Mountain Lake, a 20,000-acre impoundment between Lynchburg and Roanoke. If you're looking for a fish in the 15- to 20-pound class, this is the lake to visit.

Spring probably produces the most consistent action, although summer and fall fishing can also be good, especially if the fish can be taken on surface plugs.

The spring fishing here is exciting and uncomplicated. Anglers cast large minnow-imitation floating/diving crankbaits, white bucktail jigs, or swimming plastic grubs along the main points of the larger tributary creeks. Places like Indian, Beaverdam, Hales, and Stony Creek are locally famous as striper hotspots in the spring.

Because Smith Mountain Lake is one of the most popular fishing areas in the state, marinas, launching facilities, and guides are not hard to find. More than thirty marinas are located around the lake. —STEVE PRICE

## CUTTHROAT TROUT

I had barely waded into the Yellowstone River and started casting last August, when a fellow in full, fly-fishing regalia came running by, if you can call that running. Two more men in waders and vests followed (*thump-thump-puff-puff*). Behind them trotted a buffalo bull, carrying his weight more gracefully. He just wanted to cross the river. The fishermen happened to be in the way.

There are more fishermen and more buffaloes in Yellowstone Park than there used to be, but there are more big cutthroat trout, too. Some of them are easy to catch. The dark, skinny trout that have recently spawned will take anything, including spinning lures or streamers fished downstream at random.

The best and brightest fish are in the stream for its abundant insects. These tend to hatch when fishermen are not around: during a storm, or on a cool day, or in the evening. Be there. Tie on a dry fly that looks like the mayflies or caddisflies the fish are taking. Then cast to the best rise you see. The cutthroat taking it may turn out to be 19 or 20 inches long, bright and heavy. That's your trophy.

Go to the 6-mile stretch of river that is open to fishing below Yellowstone Lake. Access is almost too easy, but you will have good water to yourself, and deserve it, if you put on chest waders and cross the far bank at the spot marked Buffalo Ford. Don't risk it if the water is high.

The season does not open until July 15, and the fishing slows by late August. For those few weeks, however, it is extraordinary. Yellowstone Park is busy then, so make lodging reservations well in advance. The nearest cabins are at Lake and Canyon Villages. —DATUS C. PROPER

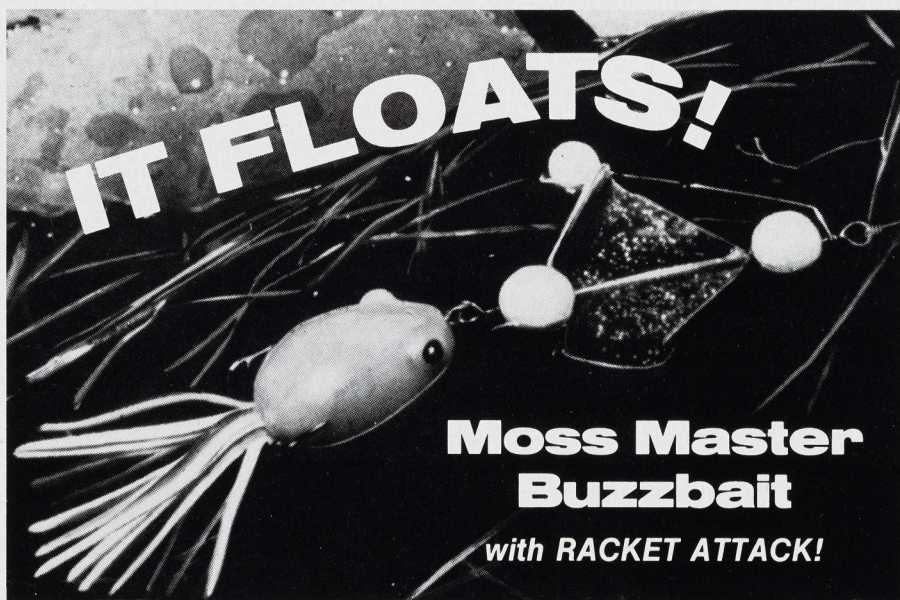
## STEELHEAD

Steelhead are abundant throughout the Pacific Northwest, but trophy fish of 25 pounds and larger are rare enough that even most serious steelhead anglers live and die without hooking one. An angler whose sole goal is to catch a steelhead over 25 pounds should spend as much time as possible on the west side of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, where a half-dozen trophy steelhead streams flow into the Pacific Ocean within an hour's drive of each other.

The Quinault, Queets, Hoh, Calawah, Bogachiel, and Soleduck Rivers all have produced 30-pounders, and among them they give up several fish in the high 20-pound range every year.

The best time for trophies on any of these streams is during March and early April, when wild-stock steelhead return from the Pacific. The upper Quinault (above Lake Quinault) closes March 31, but all the others are open at least through April 15.

Two fishing methods account for most Olympic Peninsula trophy steel-



The Moss Master Buzzbait is naturally bouyant. And it's weedless. A hollow floating body protects the treble hook. Floatation beads hold the tri-blade prop on the surface. This combination ensures fishing success. It floats even when it stops, providing an excellent target for hungry bass and pike.

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However, as always happens in a paradise, there is a problem. Its name is salmon. Even a modest run usually drives the largest rainbows (7 to 15 pounds) from usual river haunts to deeper water.

Thus, the best rainbow fishing occurs early before salmon runs—June and perhaps into July, then resumes from September onward. As Bristol Bay salmon runs fade in August, rainbows become more numerous up and down rivers, feeding on salmon eggs drifting from the redds. During this period, small lures with a flash of red or pink are effective, also “egg” flies (chenille balls on short hooks), single eggs or double like the Babine Special.

Still, first-time visiting fly fishermen should take a wide selection of patterns from leeches and sculpins to big dark nymphs to dry flies large and small, even to some deerhair mice. Many Alaskan guides use as a fish-finder the Pixee spoon with an orange or red fluorescent see-through strip. —PETER BARRETT

### CHANNEL CATFISH

These streamlined cats are almost everywhere: much of the United States, southern Canada, and well into Mexico. There are channel-cat rivers as well as lakes, and the fish do well in farm ponds.

Every sort of bait or lure has been used successfully, even dry flies. Though old standbys are live and very dead baits, artificials such as spinners, crankbaits, plastic worms, and jigs have gained ground.

Below a dam is a particularly good locale for channel cats—they can't travel further, and downstream of a dam is a forage haven for live and stunned or mangled baitfish that have passed through turbines.

Thus, a dam or system of locks has to attract channel cats, with fast fishing as a result. Nowhere is this more evident than in the upper reaches of the north-flowing Red River just above the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This province tracks channel cats that have been weighed to keep or release. In 1988 (latest figures) 134 were taken from just over 24 pounds to 36, with hundreds more listings down to 19.84 pounds; most were turned loose. About 98 percent of these monsters came from the Red River. —PETER BARRETT

### BROWN TROUT

When you talk about brown trout—



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a reclusive fish; the biggest commonly feed at night—“big” doesn't always mean “best.” You can have terrific days with browns of 12 to 18 inches, and, in this case, the *quality* of the fishing is what counts.

But suppose you want a brown of 5 pounds or larger. Are you willing to spend at least a week fishing for it, maybe into the nights?

If so, the upper White River and its North Fork in Arkansas merits your attention. In the IGFA's 1989 World Record Game Fishes, the “line-class” records show winners for 2-, 4-, and 8-pound lines were 20 pounds 12 ounces, 27 pounds 9 ounces, and 33 pounds 8 ounces—all from the White. The fifth listing, for 16-pound line, was 34 pounds from the North Fork.

Though there are rivers in many areas that occasionally yield an excellent day's sport to flies or spinning lures, the most consistent producers are the Bow River in Alberta and the Bighorn in Montana.

These unusually fertile rivers abound in insect life, sculpins, and the like. Dry flies, nymphs, plus what-is-its like Woolly Buggers and Zonkers take a huge toll on good days

all summer on float trips.

Excellent as the Bow can be, I think the hard-fished Bighorn probably has the edge because of its incredible population of browns—almost 5 tons per mile, according to a recent survey. —PETER BARRETT

### BROOK TROUT

Considering that 4 pounds should be the minimum weight for a trophy brook trout by today's standards, only Henrys Lake in Idaho gives up fish of this size *consistently* in the lower 48.

The best place for predictable success is the Minipi watershed in Labrador, for three reasons. First, this remote area is fly-in only. Second, like other trout strains in northern Canada, these fish can live eight to ten years (old for the species). And, third, the fishing is almost all catch-and-release. As a result, fish averaging 5-plus pounds are the norm, and brookies of 8 to 9 pounds are good possibilities.

The Minipi watershed is a series of glittering lakes interconnected with small rivers bordered by dark spruces. The water is tea-colored, with many lakes rather shallow and rich in insect life. Fly fishing only.