

How to FISH A MUDDLER

Ron Denson describes a multitude of uses for a buggy-marvellous fly



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SO WHAT'S ALL the fuss about Muddlers? With their bulk, appendages and water-shifting properties, Muddlers demand attention. A well-tied and well-presented Muddler screams "eat me"! But don't be fooled into thinking that they're only of use on big, wild waters in a big blow. Muddlers have many more tricks up their sleeves, and can be put to good use on virtually any day of the season. Read on to find out how to get the most from this beautiful but deadly style of fly...

EVERY DAY IS A MUDDLER DAY

With a plethora of Muddler styles, shapes and sizes available to us these days, it's not a case of whether to fish a Muddler or not, but more a case of which one. Big, flashy patterns can arrest the trout's attention in the most foul, adverse conditions, but they can also seduce in more subtle ways. I use Muddlers from size 8 down to size 14. Sometimes the Muddler is effectively used as a lure, sometimes it's genuinely imitating food, and on other days something inbetween. Unless the situation in hand demands a specific tactic, such as Buzzers, dry-flies or nymphs, then almost every day can be a Muddler day.

MAKE A WAKE

Muddlers are known primarily for their ability to kick up a fuss. The bulky head shifts water, creating not only visual disturbances but audible disturbances and vibrations, too. They also provide presence and a target when fished in a big wave.

The most obvious use for Muddlers then is on the top dropper ahead of a team of traditional wet-flies, typically on a floating or intermediate line. A fairly short line is cast, then the rod is raised during the latter stages of the retrieve to bring the team back into the surface layers and further work the Muddler.

Takes to the Muddler can be vicious, but as many fish will come to the flies further down the cast thanks to the pulling power of the Muddler.

HOW FAST SHOULD YOU RETRIEVE?

Fishing Muddlers isn't all about retrieving at the speed of sound and whipping the surface to a frothy mess. Work your Muddler as you would a "normal" fly, and trust it to do its thing. A slow figure-of-eight can be just as productive as fast roly-poly. As a loose rule of thumb, and as with wet-fly fishing in general, as the speed of the wind, your drift, and the size of the wave increases, then so should the speed of your retrieve. That is only a guide though - the opposite can sometimes be true.

DEADLY WITH SALMON AND SEA-TROUT

Muddlers are a great choice for migratory species, too, especially on stillwaters, accounting for a significant number of sea-trout and salmon taken each season, not only in the UK, but around the globe. Simple, classic loch-style tactics are perfect, but don't forget to try any of the other tactics mentioned here, too.

KEEPING FLIES ABOVE WEED

Yet again we eschew the use of foam - deploy a Muddler on the tail to keep the cast high when fishing close to weed, or even try New Zealand-style, and suspend a nymph, Buzzer or Corixa pattern below a well-ginked Muddler.

HOLD, HOLD, HOLD!

When loch-styling (floating or slow intermediate line; team of three or four; short cast; lift and hang) it pays to hold the Muddler top dropper in the surface film at the end of the retrieve until you "run out of arm" having lifted the rod as high and as far back as you can go. A Muddler held in the film does a fine turn as a meaty mouthful, such as a mayfly, daddy, sedge or heather fly. You won't get a fish every cast with the hang, or even every tenth cast, but on the right day, it can account for a large proportion of your bag. When a fish does come to the hang, it's right under the rod tip, and is one of the most exciting, exhilarating things our sport has to offer.

SWEEPING THE DEEPS

Muddlers can be devastatingly effective when fished on sinking lines. Try them on the top dropper or the tail, on anything from a slow intermediate to a Di8. Use one to replace Boobies and FABs on the tail and it will stay much higher in the water for longer and therefore exaggerate the arc described by the whole team when the line is counted down and then retrieved. Again, as with the washing line, the relative bulk and buoyancy of Muddlers makes them a very viable alternative to flies based on foam. This is a great method for searching the depths, and when there are layers of fish holding at various levels. Team up the Muddler with combinations of wet-flies, mini-lures, smaller Muddlers or nymphs.

DEPTH, COLOUR AND LIGHT

Bold fluorescent colours and a touch of flash can work wonders on Muddlers fished at depth. Try white, fluorescent orange and chartreuse deer hair, if you can get it. If not, then incorporate these colours into the hackles, bodies, and/or marabou wings. Drab, more traditional tyings will work well on days with nice, overcast light.

TRY TOPPING AND TAILING

Don't be afraid to fish two Muddlers on the same cast. It's not a tactic I use often, but one that works well in a big blow when fish are looking for trouble in the waves. Top and tail is the best option - I seldom, if ever, use a Muddler on the middle dropper. If I do, it's a small one.

HANGING OUT THE WASHING

The washing-line technique usually employs a buoyant fly, such as a Booby or a Foam-Arsed Blob, to suspend a team of nymphs, Buzzers or even skinny wet-flies between the end of a floating line and the chosen buoyant fly - "hanging" the nymphs out as if on a washing line. A Muddler makes a great alternative to foam-based flies if you have an aversion to such things and prefer to keep things a little more traditional. Control the sink rate of the Muddler and the rest of the team by paying attention to the style, size and hook size/weight of all the flies on the team. Dress the Muddler with floatant for extra buoyancy. Just taking up the slack in the fly-line will keep the Muddler on the surface, and the nymphs very high. Retrieving the flies slowly will result in the Muddler and the team "digging in" and sinking slowly.

OVERLEAF: SIX MUDDLERS FOR YOU TO TRY.

SIX FOR YOU TO TRY

Rob ties a handful of proven Muddlers to match different seasons and conditions on stillwaters. Don't cast off without them



Buggered Kate

Hook Size 8, 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175
Butt Flat silver
Rib Oval silver
Body Black seal fur
Body hackle Furnace hen
Shoulder hackle Yellow golden pheasant body feather
Head Roe deer hair
Thread Black

Simple, classic colours. Works well in most conditions and right through the season. One of my best performers for wild fish.



Cheeky Bugger

Hook Size 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175
Rib Oval gold **Body** Seal fur mix - fiery brown/ant brown/claret **Body hackle** Red game or ginger cock or hen **Shoulder hackle** Orange golden-pheasant body feather **Cheeks** Jungle cock **Head** Natural roe

The buggy look makes this one another summer/back-end favourite.



Soldier-palmer-dabbler-muddler

Hook Size 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Tail** Bronze mallard and/or Glo-Brite No 4 **Rib** Oval gold **Body** Red seal fur
Body hackle Red game or ginger cock or hen **Wing** Bronze mallard
Head Natural roe **Thread** Red

A favourite pattern for the second half of the season. Keep it high in the water where the fish expect terrestrials to be.

Ess Cat variant

Hook Size 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Body** Black-and-gold Straggle
Wing Marabou - layers of chartreuse, olive
Wing slips Opal Mirage
Head Chartreuse deer hair
Thread Olive

A great early-season and summer pattern, specifically for sunk-line work.



Gold Digger

Hook Size 8 or 10 Kamasan B170 or 175
Body Black-and-gold Straggle
Head Natural roe
Thread Black

A real attention-seeker. The one I reach for in extremes of sun and/or wind.



Pearly Invicta Muddler

Hook Size 10 or 12 Kamasan B170 or 175 **Butt** Opal Mirage
Rib Silver wire or fine oval silver **Body** Pearl Ice Dub
Body hackle Grizzle hen or cock, dyed ginger **Wing** Hen pheasant secondary **Head** Natural roe **Thread** Black

A must for high-summer sedge time, sunk or on the surface, top or tail.