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ON THE BENCH



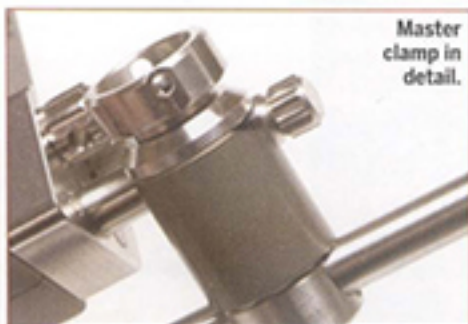
MAGNUS ANGUS reviews the latest fly tying items

PROFILE

Magnus Angus was one of the first SGAIC-qualified instructors and subsequently a SGAIC assessor. He also set the SGAIC fly-tying examinations. His first fishing forays were on the Don and Feugh in the 1960's with his grandad, where he fished with a cane rod.



Key clamp.

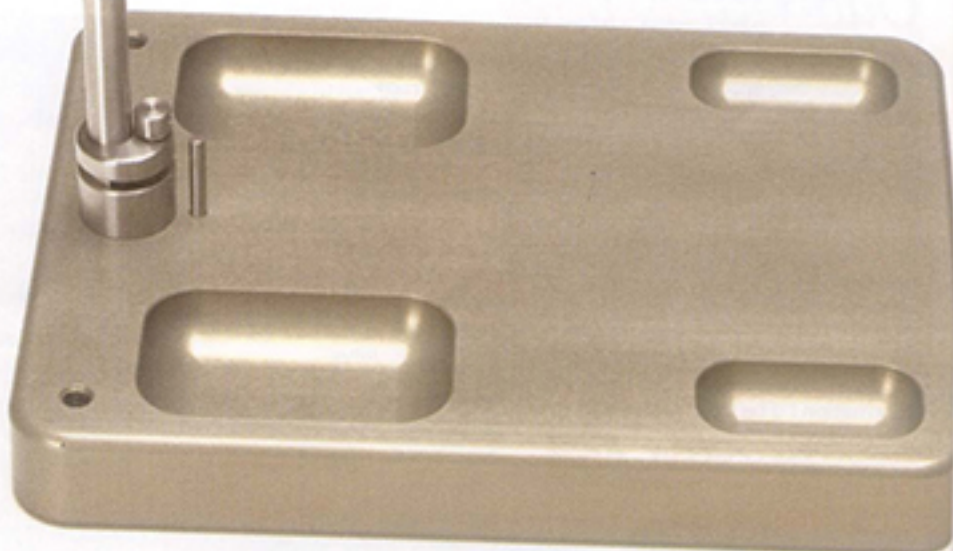


Master clamp in detail.



REVIEWS

Swiss army vice



Swiss Vice by Marc Petitjean

Just describing the Swiss Vice in detail could take more than the space I have in these pages. This thing fairly bristles with features, original design thinking and applications, but it is an elegant functional tool, and as with most good tools, it's easy to use.

Slip a hook into the jaws, lift the lever until it clicks and locks the hook in place ... then tie a fly. If that really is all you want, stop reading now.

Obviously, this is an in-line rotary vice. That's the main component, the vice bit. Exactly the same jaws, arm and stem fit to the Master, Base and C-Clamp versions. This is a Master version so it comes with a rather clever clamp. In addition, I was supplied with a pedestal base so I can cover another permutation. The C-Clamp version comes with a smaller lighter slightly more conventional clamp.

Head and jaws

A familiar jaw type, essentially a parallel or engineer's clamp, on the end of a bent arm. The simplest form of this clamp is two plates side by side, one screw, nearest the holding end, pulls the plates together while another at the rear, farthest from the gripping end, pushes the plates apart.

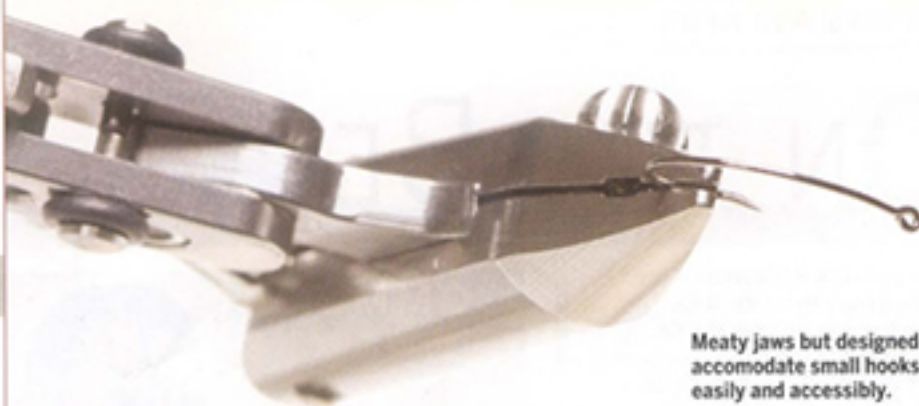
The Swiss Vice jaws have a small sculpted screw near the jaw-tips to adjust for the hook size, try to get the jaws parallel, then lift the lever at the rear of the head. Cam surfaces push the rear apart and the jaws tighten. Hook sizes are highly adjustable and exact. Grip is excellent and very dependable.

Small hooks are the bane of this jaw type, particularly vices with simpler double screw mechanisms; hooks either fall out before the tightening screw is adjusted or they fix securely but at the wrong angle. The Swiss Vice has spring loaded jaws, so I squeeze the rear of the jaws to position my hook which is held in position before the lever applies grip. The same feature means I can release the jaws and the hook stays put!

So, I can confidently place the hook in the jaws with the hook-shank horizontal. How about adjusting the height so the hook is on the axis of rotation? Vice makers have devised a wealth of ways to deal with that problem, this uses a clever arm which is actually two arms. Slacken the star nut and the head can move up and down while the hook remains level – in fact there's slight play in that movement so I can adjust and fine tune the hook angle as it reaches the positioning tool. Then tighten the nut and the angle of the arm and hook height and angle is fixed: a complicated mechanism, but a very complete design solution and simple to use, which is what really counts.

Large hooks, up to 9/0 (ie, very large hooks) can slip into a notch or 'pocket' several millimetres back from the jaw points so the Swiss Vice can handle big hooks. View the jaw tips from the side and they are pointed, view from above and they have meat and strength. The tips of vice jaws inevitably wear but these are strong, should outlive most users. Jaw tips are crucial if one ties small flies, these jaws are very well designed and made; a couple of quite complicated shapes and some clever mechanics mean with a hook in place the tips align almost perfectly and I have excellent finger access. In the past I have criticised this jaw type for the screw near the jaw tips, they tend to project and interfere with tying – thoughtful shaping and recessing all but eliminates that issue.

Three-tapered tube fly mandrels are available.



Meaty jaws but designed to accommodate small hooks easily and accessibly.

Rotation

I won't delve into the inner workings of the head block and bearings. (The designer started drooling, just a little, when he first described them to me.) The point is the rotary function is smooth and adjustable. A nut immediately at the rear of the body adjusts pressure on the bearing so the rotation is loose enough to turn the wee handle and use this as winch. Even at the lowest pressure setting if I turn the vice head and let go, the head and arm and fly stay put – which is ideal.

Pedestal

Pedestal bases are essentially slabs which are heavy enough to secure the vice stem. This does that job well. It also has a few convenient sculpted pockets for beads and hooks. But wait, design innovation has reached the simple pedestal base. To attach the stem to the base, place the stem in the hole in the slotted block on the base and use the wee lever to tighten a screw and bend the block, trapping the stem. To be honest, that seems like a designer showing off. A more conventional block and screw would work just fine. The very flexible joint used on the Master clamp would be even better.

Master clamp and base

At first glance this is a nicely made if slightly eccentric clamp. The range of adjustment is awesome few tables can resist, just select the most appropriate hole, fix the arm and adjust.

Then place the stem in the pivot on top of the vice, the most obvious position is straight up and down; sits fine, looks familiar. Now slacken the pivot and angle the stem forwards, lock in position, and you have an astonishingly simple means of bringing the vice head away from the edge of the table. As someone who likes clearance around a vice that works beautifully and if you suffer by hunching forwards at the vice it does rather a lot to relieve possible back and neck tensions – excellent feature.

Now, as you may have noticed this C-clamp is really a pair. Undo the screws, the block comes off and the legs come apart, to be reassembled as a skeletal pedestal; very functional if a little lighter than the full-on pedestal base. Top marks for design.

Key or tommy bar

Assembly and adjusting the head height requires that I tighten one or two things, the star nut in the arm between the head and body of the vice, the mechanism attaching the stem to the pedestal, the flexible joint between the clamp and the stem. Hand tightening can't get things tight enough so I am provided with a key, a short lever, which fits into strategically drilled holes and lets me turn what I need to tighten.

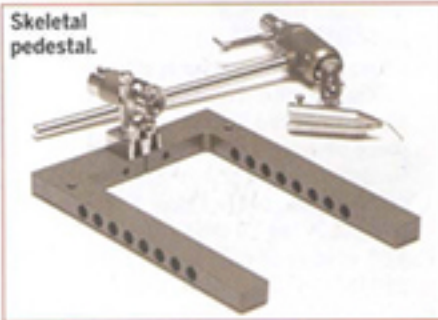
On the Master the key screws into the top of a short shaft, on the pedestal it simply slips into a hole in the base. While I appreciate that the key is just a metal rod and I have a rod the same size on the tube fly adaptors, it seems to be that a threaded home on the pedestal would prevent me losing that key – as I inevitably will.

Tube fly vice

In best Swiss Army knife tradition, Marc Petitjean never misses the opportunity to add function. Undo the nut attaching the handle to the rear of the vice arm. Remove the handle. Choose the appropriate tube fly mandrel (three sizes are supplied), thread it through the nut and screw back in place. Hey presto! A rotary tube-fly vice. Quite a superb function. I don't know if this is unique but I've certainly not seen it before.

The tapered mandrels allow me to fit tubes firmly, certainly firm enough to tie on. I'm >

The mandrel screws onto the vice head.



Skeletal pedestal.

ON THE BENCH

sure someone will wonder if the whole thing can rotate. It can, using the jaws as a handle. Oh, and, since the rotation is not loose I can't make the whole thing spin by pulling on thread wrapped around the tube.

Conclusion

Inevitably, I can only scratch the surface in this account. Along the way I've pointed to design features which strike me as open to debate, but hopefully I've also pointed to the originality and quality of the design.

Hook-hold is first-class. Hook placement for the in-line rotary function is exceptional. I tend to tie with my hand resting on the vice, the heel of my hand on the body and my finger and thumb at the jaw tips – that's what feels natural to me. I believe this is only the second in-line rotary which is the right size and shape for tying that way and the contoured shapes and surfaces make it comfortable, indeed a delight to use, and very easy on the eye.

As you might expect the Swiss Vice is not a cheap, but it's easily one of the best vices I've used and stiff competition for similarly priced vices. Prices run from £300 to £390, depending on version. All versions come in a padded nylon case, with a handbook and brief DVD explanation of all most functions, a hook-centring tool and three tube-fly mandrels. (Accessories: sight board, bobbin cradle and waste basket are available.)

● **Lakeland Flytying stock all three versions of the Swiss Vice. Veniard distribute the Master version which is available through Veniard stockists.**

■ Swiss Vices are fabricated from stainless steel and alloy. All the components are made and finished very well indeed. That combination of materials means the heaviest version, with pedestal base, weighs in at 1395g (3.05lb). The Master clamp base is a knockout piece of design, turning the Swiss into a travel vice with no compromises, weighs 623g (1.37 lbs.) If that's not light enough the C-Clamp version is 475g (1.05lb) total.

COMMENT



By simply watching a skilled fly tyer at work we can learn how to properly handle materials. This is Peter Kealey who acts as an advisor for the Fly Tying League on FF&FT's website Forum. Go to: www.flyfishing-and-flytying.co.uk/

Patterns, skills, flies and fishing

Devising patterns and tying to a high standard are not the same. Watch a skilled tyer work and we are seeing a performance. If we know a little about tying, we value how they handle their tools and materials, how they get that taper or attach that wing or coax that strand to stay put. Their techniques may be completely conventional or have a creative twist; the way they bend this or hold that may be something we've not seen before or done the way we do, but better. When I've watched a tyer work it's their tying ability I envy and admire and which inspires me. The pattern is, more often than not, well known.

With basic tying skills and a healthy assortment of tying materials it's relatively easy to adapt patterns or even 'invent' flies. Take an established pattern add a few knotted legs, or change a colour or change a material and you have a 'new fly' based on an existing pattern. The intellectual effort involved in simply adding or subtracting to devise a variant is not exactly huge. For example, in my humble opinion, switching material, eg substituting a polypropylene wing for a deer hair wing, or changing a colour, or changing a proportion, or adding a tail or butt does not create a new pattern. Dignifying minor changes to a pattern by calling flies 'variants' is fine, if tedious. Claiming intellectual property by renaming a fly for that type of change is frankly sad and can, understandably, insult the tyer who devised the parent pattern.

In fly-tying driven by fishing, things get interesting and can become genuinely creative. Combine a realisation that trout and grayling feed more sub-surface than at the surface and

you have an opportunity to identify a problem. That could lead to a simple suggestive Sawyer pattern or a more complex, more detailed and suggestive Oliver Edwards Nymph. Realise that trout and grayling also eat fish and we might understand why streamers are effective river flies. Realise that caddis larvae are available all year round and form a significant part of trout or grayling diets and you have Bugging, Czech Nympling, Polish Nymphs and the rest.

Realise that salmon are alerted to their prey both by sight and by vibration and you have an opportunity. Creative tyers have addressed that in a couple of ways, by attaching diving veins, or placing discs at the head of flies so their flies wiggle and dance.

Watch saltwater fish slashing into bait balls, cutting and chopping their prey. Then see them come back after the carnage and take half fish as they flutter downwards and you need a fly – heavily weighted flies sink too quickly, slim sleek flies don't flutter through the water – again fishing guides' tying.

When we think of fish as predators and know a little about how they hunt, where and how their prey lives and we strive to work out flies and fishing techniques – we identify problems and try to work out solutions. When that leads to a new fly, or even more, when that leads to a new type of fly and opens up fresh fishing possibilities that commands my respect. Changing the colour scheme of a trout fly, whether it be a dry or nymph or lure, whether it is used for wild fish or stocked fish, is the tying equivalent of re-decorating the kitchen – nice, fresh, but not exactly mind boggling.