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WHAT'S NEW IN SALTWATER TACKLE FOR 2007?

STORY BY

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FISH & FLY SALTWATER EDITOR

ALTITUDE SICKNESS & MY FIRST DAY as a Member of the Working Media . . . Sweet View of Invesco Field from the 12th Floor . . . Sneaking into the Convention Center a Day Early . . . Near Disaster at the Casting Pond: Hitting Some Guy From Sage with my Sidearm Back Cast . . . Dancing to the Bee Gees at Johnny Rockets . . . Renè Harrop with a Gallic Flair & a Cool New Vise . . . The Most Intriguing Product of the Show . . .

Friday, August 24, 2006

9:15 a.m.

Fly-Fishing Retailer and World Trade Expo

Denver, Colorado

Overcast and a bit cold for my thin Floridian blood

I'm always early for a morning of fishing, but for some reason I managed to be late for my first morning as a journalist. When I walked into the Denver Convention Center, I was only 15 minutes late, but it felt like I showed up after lunch. The place was already hopping, rods were flexing, vendors were selling and my editor was nowhere to be found.

Relieved that my tardiness would go unnoticed, I took stock of the situation: My throat was dry, my pulse racing, my head pounding—altitude sickness, not a hangover—and worst of all, I was dressed from head to toe in khaki.

Yes, khaki.

Decked out in my FISH & FLY logo shirt and casual dress pants, I looked like one of those trying-too-hard middle-aged guys that my buddies and I make fun of at the dock. So I retreated quickly to my hotel room across the street, changed into some jeans and slid on my trusty flip-flops.

Looking to calm myself down, I stared out the window of my hotel room. From the 12th floor, I had a view of both the Front Range and Invesco Field.

I pounded a handful of Advil, took a deep breath and returned to the show. Now a good 40 minutes late, and finally ready to start, I began my first day a member of the working media—which sounds only slightly less ridiculous than calling myself a journalist.

WHO IS THIS GUY, ANYWAY?

Before we go any further, some sort of clarification is in order. Unlike all the other technical editors, I am not a writer. At least I wasn't until this moment.

My life revolves around tides, weather, fish and flies, because I'm a full-time fly-fishing guide in the lower Florida Keys. Basically, I can't think of a better way to spend a day than pursuing large, wild fish (read: tarpon) in clear, shallow water.

Given my literary shortcomings, you're probably asking yourself why I'm writing for this highly-literate fly-fishing publication. Frankly, I'm not sure why Tom Pero asked me to join the staff in the first place, but I'm guessing it has to do with some residual good feelings from the adrenaline rush he got after hooking into a laid-up tarpon from the bow of my skiff last April.

Tarpon will do that to you.

Regardless of the reason, I will tell you that I live and breathe fly fishing. I have the good fortune to be on the water more than 200 days a year—success in my profession demands that my clients catch fish. From knots to rods to reels, I know what works and what doesn't. I don't have any vested interests in particular products, since I'm not on any "pro staffs," and more importantly, having never been to the Fly-Fishing Retailer World Trade Expo, I hope to offer a fresh take on this annual industry event.

You decide how I do.

At the "strategy session" the night before the show, I was given rather broad editorial guidelines for this article: Create

A Florida Keys fishing guide without a good pair of sunglasses is like a piano player without any fingers. Just ask the author, a true aficionado.

and the market is flooded with options at every price point and for every species. We have fly lines for muskies, tarpon, redfish, long casts, short casts, bass bugs, even Clouser Minnows.

Personally, I'm still waiting for the carp line. Maybe in 2008.



We have rods and reels designed to handle a 200-pound blue marlin as well as a six-inch native brookie. We can find something for almost any need we have, no matter the size of our pocketbook.

In many cases, the tackle is so refined, so technologically advanced, that none but the most skilled angler will ever push it to the limit. Simply put, the tackle is better than the angler; the tools are better than the craftsman.

But it sometimes seems that "new" products are simply a reworking of older models. Sure, there will be some

technological advances that will enable a rod to feel lighter in the hand or cast to the end of the pond, but is it significantly that different from the model it replaced?

Before I start sounding cynical, I'm just trying to make the point that there have been no giant technological leaps made in this industry in some time. The last time I felt like I was fishing with something really cutting-edge was the first time I cast a G.Loomis GLX. Yet the reworking of tapers and materials, along with a better understanding of specific angling needs, has created a bounty for the modern angler. Almost



Swiss vise-master Marc Petitjean's latest offering is not only stunning to behold, it also has more features than any other vise on the market.

every casting style, every species and every need has been, or will soon be, addressed.

With that in mind, I searched the aisles for those products best suited to my style of fishing: Sight-casting on the flats.

EYES ON THE FLIES

Before I ever made it onto the bow of a flats boat, I was a fly tier. While I could never get his Magic Heads to work just right, I absolutely had to meet Marc Petitjean (www.petitjean.com), whose fetching CDC patterns changed the way I tied.

If you've never seen them, think René Harrop with a Gallic flair.

Along with some fantastic photos of huge marble trout and a fly-caught silure (a monstrous catfish-like creature), I learned of his new vise.

This Swiss-made vise is a remarkable piece of engineering. Not only is it stunning to behold, it offers more features than any other vise on the market. It is available with a C-clamp, pedestal base or in the Master Version with both. It can easily hold hooks from a size 32 all the way to a 9/0; I tried them all. The head can be positioned at an infinite number of positions through a 360-degree swivel arm.

It also features an adjustable full rotary head, which can be converted to a tube-fly vise in seconds. Best of all, minimal adjustment is required to secure the hook, and the Dyna-King-esque lever is easily engaged.

This vise garnered none of the press that was received by the lower-priced Renzetti Presentation Cam series of vises, yet is far more versatile and—I don't know how else to put it—is much cooler.

I have never been a big fan of commercially tied saltwater flies. Most of the patterns available suffer from many of the same faults: Poor hook choice, incorrect proportions, no weed guards, weed guards made of limp (useless) mono and insufficient weight. Even more heinous are the flies that simply won't work, whether due to one of the previously mentioned faults, or poor pattern design.

Too many flies look like they were designed by a one-week-in-the-salt trout bum from Montana who had a few glasses of Early Times before sitting down at the vise. When I see one of



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