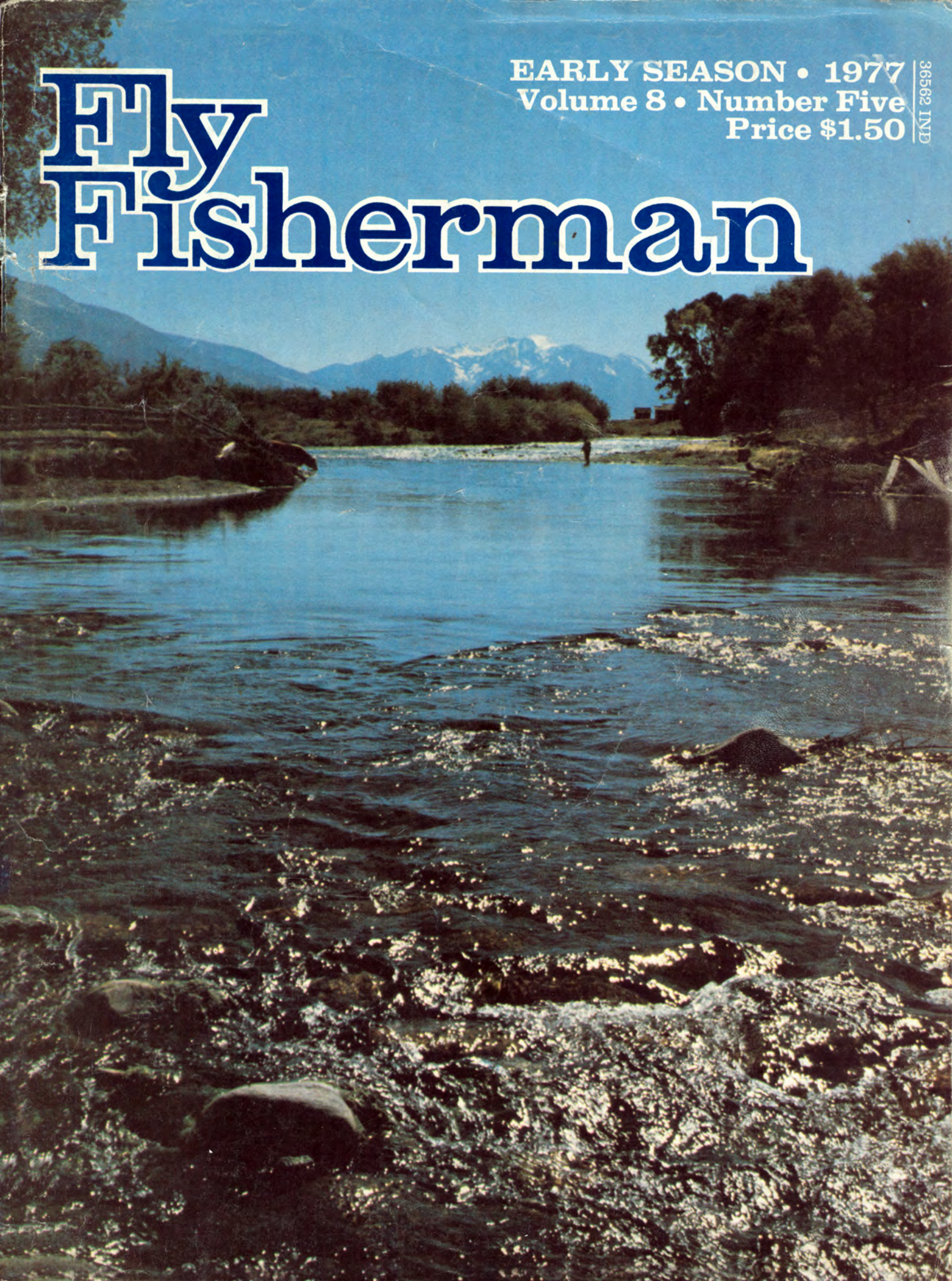


Fly Fisherman

EARLY SEASON • 1977
Volume 8 • Number Five
Price \$1.50

36562 IND



There's productive fly-rodding to be had in the surf on both coasts that requires neither boat nor expensive gear. Photos by the author.

In this second of two articles, Contributing Editor Mark Sosin continues his explanation of the basics of saltwater fly-rodding

Saltwater for Starters — II

MARK SOSIN

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

[The following is the second in a series of two articles in which Mark Sosin explains the fundamentals of fly-fishing in salt water. In his previous article (1977 Season Opener issue), the author described some of the basic differences between fresh- and saltwater fly-fishing. He also discussed rods and reels for the salt, pointing out that expensive and elaborate gear is not necessarily a prerequisite for success in the brine. In this second installment, he covers fly lines, leaders, flies and techniques for the saltwater fly rodder. THE EDITORS.]

THE WEIGHT-FORWARD FLY LINE has become the standard in salt water and is rapidly becoming the universal line in fresh water as well (even down to a WF4F). Level lines and double tapers can be a handicap. Some fly lines are labeled "saltwater taper," and this usually indicates that the weight of the line is concentrated in

the first 25 feet instead of the first 30 feet, which is the standard for other weight-forward fly lines. This line was developed for fishermen who spotted their quarry before they cast and had to get off a fast but accurate presentation. Actually, for long casts a standard weight-forward is superior. Shooting heads are also used, especially on the West Coast where many fly rodders are skilled in their use.

A floating line is still the standard for most saltwater work, but specialists are taking a long and hard look at fast-sinking lines. Hand-tailored lead-core fly lines are showing up more and more in the salt, because

MARK SOSIN lectures frequently on saltwater fly-fishing, and was one of the founders of the Salt Water Fly Rodders of America.



A representative collection of simple saltwater streamers and bucktails, and two reels commonly used by saltwater fly-rodgers that represent extremes of cost, the relatively inexpensive Scientific Angler's System reel (at left) and the relatively costly Seamaster.

fishermen recognize that fly-rodging has been needlessly limited to the upper layers of the water. With some of the lead-core modifications, it's possible for a caster to let his line sink as deep as 100-feet. Line manufacturers are aware of this trend and, in the very near future, you'll see several extra-high-density and/or lead-core innovations introduced in the marketplace.

Fly lines are available in a variety of colors, ranging from subtle grays to white and even a blaze orange. In the majority of saltwater situations, fly-line color doesn't really make a difference. There are times, however, when it does. Well-versed shallow-water anglers prefer a matte gray, medium-green, or basic brown line in preference to white or other light shades. You have to see those moments when a fish is spooked by an airborne fly line to appreciate the difference. Change to a subtly colored fly line and the fish will be much less apt to panic. No one really knows whether this applies to deep water, but it is a matter of fact in the shallows.

Leaders

WHILE THE FRESHWATER FLY FISHERMAN usually takes a somewhat complex approach to the construction and taper of leaders, the marine angler moves toward total simplicity. The butt section is usually 60 percent of the leader length, and is often either 30- or 40-pound-test, depending on line size. Consider a 9-weight line as the pivotal size, using the heavier butt with larger lines.

For big fish, a double surgeon's loop is tied in the end of the butt section, making it possible to change leaders quickly. The remainder of the leader is the class (middle) section, usually 12- or 15-pound-test, followed by a shock tippet. [Class section refers to line-test record categories established by the Salt Water Fly Rodders of America. THE EDITORS.] The shock tippet is generally less than 12 inches long; the class section is usually around 18 inches. Length of the class section should, however, vary with its breaking strength. Twelve-pound-test sections should be 18-24 inches, while 6-pound-test sections should be almost 36 inches.

It may be hard for the 6x-tippet user to fathom, but a saltwater leader can taper from 40-pound down to 12-pound, then up to 60- or even 100-pound-test. When a more delicate presentation is required, or when using a 6-pound-test tippet, a couple of intermediate steps are

[Readers seeking additional information on saltwater fly-fishing should read *Fly Fishing in Salt Water* by Lefty Kreh (Crown), a good general introduction to the topic. Readers may also wish to contact the Salt Water Fly Rodders of America, an organization established to serve the needs of saltwater fly fishermen and their sport. The group publishes a newsletter and provides other services to members. Inquiries are encouraged and should be directed to the Salt Water Fly Rodders of America, Business Office, Box 304, Cape May Court House, Cape May, N.J. 08210. THE EDITORS.]

often used in leader construction. As an example, the taper may go from a 40-pound butt to 20-pound, then 12-pound, and finally, 6-pound-test. It varies, but few saltwater fishermen pay much attention to the often complex formulae that are expostulated by freshwater leader experts. Amazingly, even basic leaders can be made to turn over without much of a problem. A very simple leader formula to remember, and one that works as well as any other, is to simply make each section shorter than the one before it.

Fly Patterns

FLY PATTERNS FOR SALT WATER are generally simple. There have been repeated attempts to duplicate common baitfish, but the typical streamer fly still does the job. Hook sizes start at about #6 for bonefish flies, and move sequentially up to a 5/0 or possibly a 6/0. It's difficult to set a hook larger than 4/0, and 5/0 is considered marginal by many in the know. Bigger sizes can be an exercise in frustration. In fact, many of the top anglers use smaller hooks on even the big flies because it facilitates penetration in the fish's mouth. It goes without saying that every hook should be sharpened. Saltwater critters often have hard and bony mouths and, unless a hook point has cutting edges, you are going to miss a lot of fish.

Equipping a fly box can be as simple or complicated as you want to make it. All of us enjoy looking at and fishing with a wide selection. For openers, however, buy or tie an assortment of several different sizes in a couple of primary colors. You should have white and yellow flies on the light side, and black, green, blue, and/or brown on the dark side. If you tie your own, add mylar to the wings. You can always remove it when fishing, but it usually produces fish. Approximate the size of the prevalent baitfish with the size of the fly. Try a light pattern first and then dark, or vice versa. It is no different than trout fishing; size and silhouette are the keys.

Techniques

SALTWATER TECHNIQUES are not difficult to learn. The key to casting is to reduce the number of false casts to a minimum. You should learn to double-haul if you haven't already mastered the method. This will give you both added distance and the ability to buck a headwind. Unless you are fishing the tropical flats where you see your quarry first (spot-casting), most of your efforts will be blind-casting. It can be done effortlessly with a weight-forward line if you pick up 30-feet and then shoot another 30-feet without repeated false-casting. This can be done if you are willing to practice. Eventually, you'll also learn to cast farther and to cover a greater area.

Even tournament casters have problems when they first attempt to spot-cast to a cruising bonefish, tarpon or permit. One reason is that they have very little time to make the presentation, but even more important, they must start with the fly in their hand. For a 60-foot cast, you'll have about 15-feet of fly line extending past the tip-top and dragging in the water behind the boat. The fly is in your fingers. When you see a fish,

you should be able to make a high forward-roll cast in the air (releasing the fly from your fingers), shoot line on the backcast, and go to the target on the first forward cast. With a little practice, the technique can be mastered, but the time to practice is before you ever step aboard the boat.

When cast to a specific fish, the fly must land beyond the quarry and be moved across its line of vision. If you cast too close, even the gentle splat of a fly landing on the water may spook the fish and, if you cast too far, the fish will never see the fly.

The strip method of retrieve is the most popular in salt water. Put the butt of the rod at your belt buckle and point the tip directly at the fly. The rod is not used to impart action to the fly, because then the angler would not be in position to strike the fish when the fly was taken, and because one cannot pick up and make another cast unless the rod is in front of him.

The fly line is held under the first or second finger of the casting hand and allowed to slip between the foregrip of the rod and the fingers. The other hand strips in the fly line from behind the rod hand. It is a simple method and can be used to create erratic motions or short jerks and darts, depending on the timing and length of the pulls. Since the line is always in your left hand and the rod is pointing directly at the fly, you are constantly in a position to pick up for another cast and ready to double-haul.

Your hook-setting method depends on the species. Soft-mouthed fish, such as sea trout or weakfish, require only a gentle lifting of the rod. Remember also that it takes a bit more power to drive in a 1/0 hook than it does to hook a freshwater trout on a #16. With fish that have a hard mouth, and when you are using leader tippets of 12- or 15-pound-test, the strike can be extremely forceful. Veterans actually strike several times, pulling on the line with the left hand and yanking back on the rod with the right. [For a detailed discussion of this topic, see "It's Time to Strike!" by Lefty Kreh in our 1977 Season Opener issue. THE EDITORS.]

Saltwater fly-fishing is really an "opportunity" sport. For some species, it can be the best technique, but for others, it only works when conditions are right. You cannot catch fish on a fly rod, however, if you leave it home; it pays to take the light wand with you if and when you go saltwater fishing. More important, it makes sense to plan specific trips to catch marine gamefish on fly. Start with smaller fish and those that are easiest to catch. As you try to gain experience in fighting larger fish on a fly, don't overlook the shark. Nature's greatest predator is found wherever there is salt water and, if you can't chase sharks on the flats, you can often attract them with chum. A well-placed fly should do the rest.

Finally, a word of caution is in order. Saltwater fly-fishing has been known to have addictive qualities, even for those anglers who once considered themselves trout and salmon purists and who viewed the marine bunch as second-class citizens. It is fun to hear them now as they extol the virtues of fly-rodging in the briny and, if you have never tried it, you can certainly join their ranks.