

# Advanced leader systems

by MC Coetzer

As one of the members selected for the Protea team to represent South Africa at the 2006 World Fly Fishing Championships in Portugal, I did a lot of research and it became apparent that the accurate and delicate presentation of small flies would be of paramount importance.

Apart from spending as much time as possible actually fishing, I decided that a change from our old leader systems would benefit the team greatly. The undisputed experts at dry fly fishing are the French and many hours were spent reading up on their approach to brown trout in European rivers. With the facilities now available on the internet you can now actually surf French websites by translating them to English and, in this way, much new information became available.

It soon became apparent that the top French fly fishers do not utilise shop-bought, tapered leaders but construct their own, utilising a variety of intriguing designs and tapers.

A lot of emphasis is also placed on fishing really fine tippets, with 7X and even 8X being the norm. These fine tippets, according to the French, significantly improve their catch rates and I believe that this would also be the case here .

There was, however, more than met the eye in fishing these fine tippets. All the reference sources continually referred to the "boiling of leaders". No information on the reasoning behind this boiling process was given however and originally I assumed that it could only affect the suppleness of the nylon. I then stumbled across an article that gave away the secret.

Boiling monofilament has two consequences. The first and very obvious effect is that the line does, in fact, become very soft and supple. The advantage of this during fishing is that the leader conforms more readily to the movements of micro-currents on the water surface, substantially reducing drag .

The second and most amazing result of this process is that the monofilament becomes very elastic. It actually stretches like a continuous-taper piece of Shock Gum. It is this elasticity that allows French fly fishers to utilise such fine tippets as a norm.

I am not overly concerned about the chemical reaction that takes place when the monofilament is boiled. To me the end result is all that matters and you have to try this to really appreciate the effectiveness of the system.

There are two important things to remember when attempting to boil your own leaders.

You can only do this with pure monofilament. Maxima Ultra Green or Vision tippet material is ideal. If you boil a co-polymer or fluorocarbon it does not work and the line retains a lot of bad memory. Only boil the portion of your leader that is constructed with Maxima or



*MC Coetzer proves that the French leader formulas and boiling methods work in the Western Cape.*



*7 and 8 x tippetts are protected by the shock-absorbing qualities of boiled leaders.*

Vision mono and, thereafter, add your favourite tippet material.

Place the pre-tied leader into the boiling water for one to two minutes only and do not bunch the line together in tight coils.

The most usable knots are a double barrel knot for the thicker sections and then a double surgeons knot for the thinner tippet sections.

I include herewith three basic leader formulae by French fly fishing legend, Pascal Cognard, one of only three people in the 28 year history of the World Fly Fishing Championships to win three individual gold medals. The first three are progressive taper leaders and these are meant for fishing fairly open water with no or very light wind. These formulae give you the best imaginable presentation and the one that I now use most often is the "Medium River" leader. This length and taper is perfect for fishing on the Cape Streams.

When the wind starts picking up later in the day or when you need to cast into tighter cover, then it is time to change to the degressive leader design. Again the shorter length is ideal for Cape Streams and the accuracy that this design delivers is truly impressive.

LARGE RIVER & NYMPH		MEDIUM RIVER		SMALL RIVER	
0.5	100 cm	0.42	90 cm	0.42	60 cm
0.42	70 cm	0.32	60 cm	0.32	40 cm
0.32	40 cm	0.3	30 cm	0.3	25 cm
0.25	15 cm	0.25	10 cm	0.25	10 cm
0.22	40 cm	0.22	30 cm	0.22	20 cm
4X	50 cm	4X	40 cm	4X	30 cm
5X	60 cm	5X	50 cm	5X	40 cm
7X	135 cm	6X	120 cm	6X	100 cm

  

DEGRESSIVE LONG		DEGRESSIVE SHORT	
0.42	75 cm	0.42	60 cm
0.37	65 cm	0.37	50 cm
0.32	55 cm	0.32	40 cm
0.3	45 cm	0.3	30 cm
0.25	35 cm	0.25	25 cm
3X	50 cm	3X	20 cm
5X	50 cm	5X	15 cm
6X	200 cm TIP	6X	150 cm TIP

*"I learned long ago that if I used knotless tapered leaders I was using another person's idea of how I should cast and under what conditions every day."* A.K. Best, *Fly Fishing With A. K.*, 2005.