

The Burgundy, Super Stretch Blood Worm

Peter Smith

When I first met Ken d' Hotman de Villiers I took an instant liking to him. Who wouldn't? Ken - a regal looking fellow - was, at that time, the Chairman of Durban Fly Tyers and I was attending my first meeting. It was in the late 1990's and I had just purchased a beginner's fly-tying kit, and an eastern imitation of a Regal Vice. Now the vice did look the part, but had definitely not been engineered in America. The jaws had been put through many difficult training sessions by the resident shop assistant where I bought it and, its failure to hold a hook of any size was legendary.

Not that any of this worried me, I was there to bury my pride, meet other members of the club and learn everything I could. To this end, I had drawn up a list of trivial questions to ask men of high standing, in addition to hopefully learning how to whip finish - without a tool! Surprisingly, and almost a decade later, I still learn something by attending meetings, this ranging from good to bad tying threads, which merchant has a new consignment of good quality dry fly hooks and, which high-profile expensive rods don't live up to their expectations and should be avoided.

That being said, Ken approached me during a social session and thrust at me a small plastic packet with three different coloured worm-like patterns tied on size 12 wet fly hooks. He gave me a wink, and asked me not to mention this to anybody but suggested that I try them on the lower stretches of the Umzimkulu River in Underberg.

Now, I knew that in addition to myself, not only did he have a passion for the place, but he was also an accomplished skin diver and conventional fisherman so who was I to argue. To be honest, I didn't argue, but I did forget, and placed the packet in a very secret place that was only to be remembered many years later.

It was those irritating mullet that started the issue. It was early May, hadn't rained for a few weeks and, with all summer game fish having headed north, the only remaining species of note were mullet. I'd watched them on many mornings gliding through the midbreak and some were really majestic. This left me really determined to catch a big one on the fly. Against this background, there's not much else that I can say to the credit of this species. They have soft mouths, smell awful and don't make a good meal. However, they do fight clean, and continually take off for the horizon every time they sense the sand.

With a strong resolve, I spent a great deal of time at the vice inventing new patterns, yet it was the cleanliness of the water, the thickness of my tippet or any other excuses that I could conjure up which stood in my way!

Fortunately, it was at this time that Ken's flies miraculously reappeared. Into my saltwater pocket they went and I remember that I waited for the sun to rise to just over the horizon

– to be partially obscured by a layer of clouds drifting over the Agulhas Current. I tied the first one on, hoping like hell that no one from up country would approach me to ask the same old questions about which flies I'd been using and comment that the fishing must be bad because there were no fish in my stripping basket.

What happened? Well the session was great, with many mullet being caught - and even a small kingfish who must have missed his departure to Moçambique! All takes stopped when the fly eventually fell apart. Not that I was concerned - there were three in the pack and I had only used one. However, the rub of salt was still to come. The remaining two were olive green, one of which had its one side bound to the hook instead of the middle body which had just fallen apart.

Unconcerned, I went power shopping. I bought freshwater blood worms tied with chenille, invested in burgundy elastic bands, and bought packets of size 12 hooks or anything else which would broadly simulate that fly that had just been destroyed. The result, nil!

So it was back to Ken I sheepishly crept and asked him to please reveal just how he tied the fly and exactly what material had he used. Despite the fact that he was horrendously busy having been 'yanked' out of retirement to run two separate offices, his instructions were clear:

Size 12 hook – use fresh water if salt water is unavailable.

Burgundy coloured thread – micro if possible.

Five strands of 'burgundy super stretch floss'.

Sounds like a breeze! Not really, because super stretch floss has a mind of its own! The idea is to select four strands and to tie them together at either end. The bundle then needs to be secured between two independent points and stretched to 50% of capacity. Using the fifth strand, tie it in at one end and begin tying it down the length of the four strands using unobstructed loops. Once the length of stretch floss has been covered – and believe me it seems to take forever – tie in the fifth strand at the far end and release the tension. Tie the bound bundle on the shank at the halfway point of both. The front and back ends of the worm should extend far beyond both the gape and eye and, when flicked with the finger, it should have plenty of movement.

Now I was on a roll, or was I? I was unable to find the materials locally, so I sourced them from Sportfish in London, turning a blind eye to the cost. I delivered two packets to Ken to say thank you and perused my saltwater reference books to see what Ken was imitating. Darn, out of all the things, it best represented was a bloodworm, *Arenicola loveni*. Prevalent from Kosi Bay to Alexander Bay, I also noted that this chap can grow as broad as a thumb and reach a length of 80cm!

To be honest, I began to hate tying this pattern. It certainly doesn't have the beauty of a 'Partial Emerger with Reverse Hackle Wings', but it really does catch fish. The trouble is that mine seem to untangle themselves just before I tie them off and I would have to go right back to where I'd started. This almost immediately results in a loss of humour - following the realisation of lost time. You can't just unravel one stage and keep on going, the whole fly unravels itself and just like the worst reptile in the Snakes and Ladders game,

it's back to the starting point you go!

Is it the 'be all and end all' of fly fishing patterns? No, and the only reason why I say that is that who can say for any form of fly fishing that there is a 'be all and end all' pattern. We all carry more that one fly and situations are hardly ever the same. Fly fishermen will always get flies stuck in rocks, cast them into shrubs on the opposite side of the river and, high-cast them into trees that just weren't behind them a few moments earlier.

This fly is great, but if I was about to leave on a local saltwater fly fishing trip or, a magical trip to the rivers, I wouldn't like to leave home without a Blue Deceiver, Chartreuse Clouser or Orange Crazy Charlie nor – if headed for a river - a Rab, Zak's nymph and GRHE. That said, it would still be a good idea to add the Burgundy Super Stretch Blood Worm to your fly box. When all else fails or, with game fish being absent, you will still have a lot of fun catching mullet and other salt and fresh water species on the worm - and please, always give a silent blessing to Ken d' Hotman de Villers, for he is, and will always be, its humble creator!

Marine Bloodworm

Materials

Flexi Floss Red, Burgundy or Olive, Hook Short Shank #12 or smaller

Tying Steps

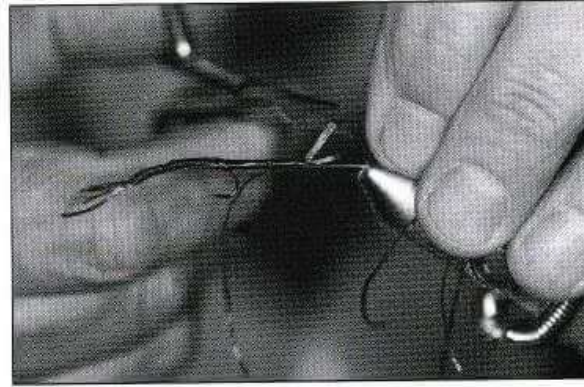
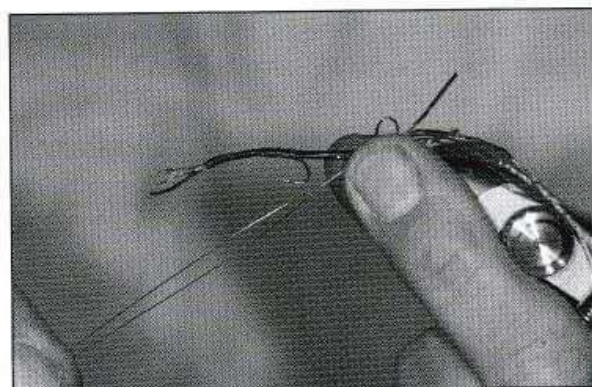
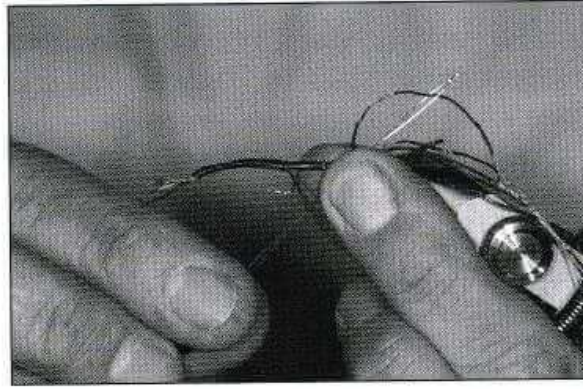
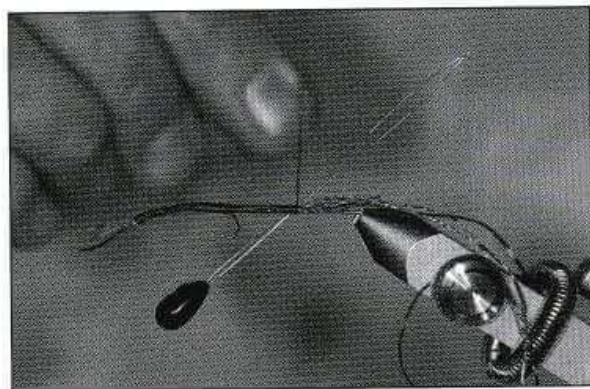
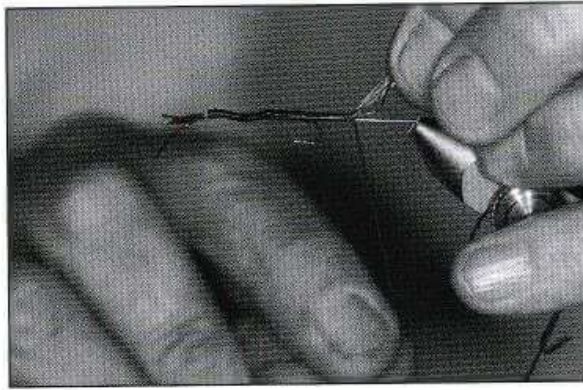
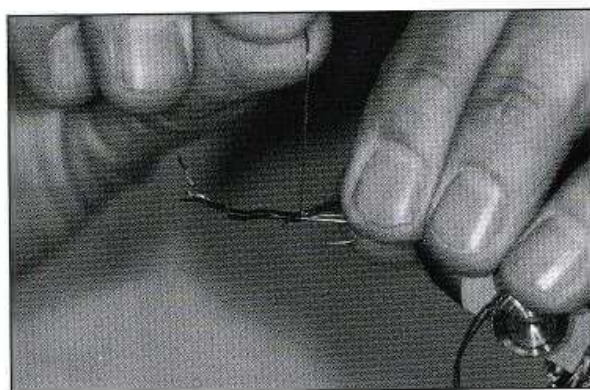
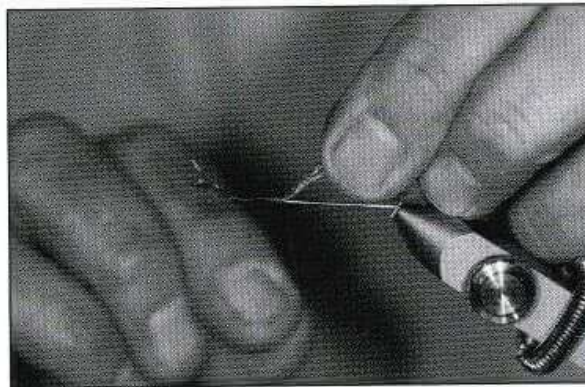
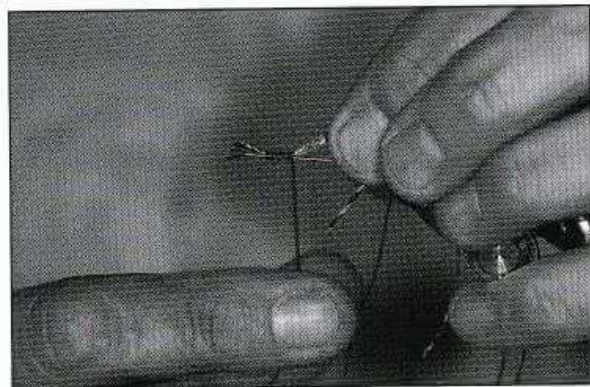
1. Clamp a sewing needle horizontally in the vice jaws.
2. Lubricate the needle with a small amount of Vaseline or saliva.
3. Place the hook, your hackle pliers and a bobbin threader on the tying surface so that they are at hand when required.
4. Place 3 to 5 strands of the floss lying together on the tying surface.
5. Take another piece of floss and tie a loose half hitch at one end.
6. Feed the ends of the 3 to 5 prepared strands through the half hitch with the short side to the left and the ends protruding by about 5mm.
7. Gather the bunch behind the half hitch between left hand thumb and forefinger.
8. Being careful not to inject yourself, bring the end of the needle through the half hitch.
9. The long ends of the 3 to 5 strands should be parallel with the needle, short ends protruding past the needle with the long end of the floss with the half hitch hanging free.
10. Pinching the bunch to the needle take the long end and tighten the half hitch.
11. Begin winding the long end back along the shank of the needle in close wraps.
12. As soon as you have 3 or 3 tight wraps stretch the 3 to 5 strands to the left as you continue wrapping the long end back.
13. Once you have about 5 to 10 mm of tight wraps clamp your hackle pliers onto the piece of floss being used for wrapping. Let this hang - the weight of the hackle pliers should prevent unraveling.
14. Place the hook with the eye toward the point of the needle. Hold it in place with the left hand.
15. Continue winding the floss back over the hook and then behind the hook until there is about 5 to 10 mm of wrap behind the hook bend.
16. Note, if at any stage the wrapping piece becomes too short, take up one of the tail pieces, wind it over the winding floss and then continue the process now with a new long wrapping piece.
17. Place the bobbin threader at a 45 degree angle to the left across the pin and at a point where the winding is. Wrap about 3 wraps over the pin the body and the bobbin threader.

Push the end of the wrapping floss through the bobbin threader and pull the end back through the winding forming a neat finish.

18. Clip of the end and now gently slide the completed worm off the pin.

19. Trim the ends to any length from about 3 to 10 mm

20. QED Keep practising - it's worth it.



Tying sequence.