

FEATURED TYER FOR JANUARY

By Todd A.Schotts

Who better to start off our 2015 Featured Tyer program at the January activity meeting by exhibiting his master fly tying skills, than our outing chairperson supreme; the great host of the Trout Opener; and bamboo enthusiast himself? That would be none other than Al "Hackleman" Haxton!

If you are not familiar with Al, he has been a member in the Michigan Fly Fishing Club for more than 26 years. Out of those years, aside from being on the board, he has also served as club President, and is an invaluable component of various club functions. He chairs the famed and popular "Yellowstone Outing." Besides tying, and all he does in our club, he enjoys fishing the AuSable and Manistee Rivers near Grayling (I wasn't able to get the level of authorization for clearance to divulge his exact fishing locations).

One thing about Al that I will never forget....at my first meeting, an activity meeting, he was the featured tyer. I was camping out in the back of the room at one of the tables, not knowing anyone, and was contemplating possibly sneaking out the back unnoticed. That is when Al came over, introduced himself, and invited me to come up and sit next to him for the tying. We tied, what else, but a soft hackle that night, and from then on I was hooked on the club. Thank you Al for that warm welcome back in the day!

Al will be bringing to us the famed "Zonker Streamer." This fly was designed by the late Dan Byford out in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, back in 1975. It is known as one of the "big fish catching flies." His unique design using Rabbit Zonker's and Mylar Tubing was a far departure from the typical hair wing streamers used up to that point. The original Zonker consisted of a lead tape underbody folded over the hook shank and trimmed into a triangular shape. Mylar tubing was slid over the trimmed lead underbody, tied in at the head, pulled tight, secured at the bend of the hook and featured rabbit strip that was trimmed along the grain of the skin roughly 1/8" wide.

Patterns for this fly range in style, material, eyes and gills, yet still basically have the same original format. You can now buy the pre-cut rabbit strips, known as Zonker strips, in different sizes (1/4", 1/16" and Magnum strips which come in a wide range of colors) or you can still trim the rabbit strips yourself from rabbit hides, as Dan did back in 1975. In addition to using Rabbit Zonker's, you can also use Fox, Mink, and Squirrel Zonker's, but as Dan noticed when designing this fly, rabbit hair pulsates and adds a lot more movement to the pattern than other furs.

For fishing this fly you don't want to have your streamer chasing towards your target. This usually spooks the fish because they are used to seeing the baitfish fleeing from them. When you have your fly in the area of the fish you are targeting, strip the fly away from the area fast. This will make your streamer appear more natural in the water. Remember, dead drifting a Zonker doesn't have the fly moving like a minnow, leech, or muddler, so don't forget to strip, twitch the rod, and give your fly some Zonker-like movement.

With the Zonker turning 40 years old in 2015, it is a time proven design that elicits vicious strikes from a variety of fish in lakes, rivers, streams, and saltwater alike. So bring your tying tools, vise, and note taking material to tie a Zonker or two with the Hackleman. Until next month, tight lines & snazzy flies.

Hook: 3XL to 4XL sizes 2 to 10

Thread: Black 6/0 and Red 6/0

Weight (optional): Non-lead wire wrapped around hook or DS style

Body: Silver Mylar tubing along hook shank. Gold or other colors may to used also.

Wing and tail: Natural grey rabbit strip. (Other colors may also be used.)

Collar: Webby grizzly hackle wrapped at front. (Other colors may also be used.)

