

'It's the year of the young ones'

'Awesome' stuff in cool Canada

AT the moment, England most definitely rule the world at fly-fishing, as three recent events have proved beyond any doubt.

First, England won the Home Countries International then, two weeks ago

SO far it's been a successful year for the England fly-fishing team, culminating in a world title win in Canada. Bob Church gives an in-depth look at the success of our home-grown stars, and describes the fishing conditions on the dramatic Canadian lakes where they flew the Union Jack so well...

in Canada, won the World Fly Fishing Championships. They followed this by winning again in the Commonwealth event.

So, at stillwater fly-fishing, England are the best. Isn't it nice to say we are the best at a sport after the cricket and football nightmares?

I enjoyed my three weeks in Canada, flying into Vancouver before driving through magnificent scenery to Kamloops. This is the home of the famous strain of rainbow trout which has now found its way all over the world. They have a saying in Canada - if something is different in any way, it's 'awesome'. Actually, that's how I would describe British Columbia. Its sheer size is awesome.

Our party - the England Commonwealth team of Dennis Buck, Chris Howitt, Dave Grove, Brian Thomas, Charles Jardine, Tony Pawsen and myself, fished several lakes around the Kamloops area and enjoyed some magnificent sport.

In all, we caught 530 trout topped by a 9 lb 8 oz rainbow and Eastern brook trout to 4 lb. Ninety nine per cent of fish caught were returned, and we used only one fly at the time: this is a local rule. Having said that, stillwaters seem to behave the same the world over where trout are concerned.

Standard British tactics worked really well on all the Canadian lakes, and it was these that gave us the edge.

I am very pleased to say that Wales also got in on the act by providing the individual World Champion in 23-year-old Russell Owen. In fly-fishing, what with Jeremy Herrmann and now Russell, it's the year of the young ones.

BOB CHURCH

Tops for trout every week

At every lake we visited, the bird life interested me almost as much as the fishing. Each day we had ospreys fishing with us, and bald eagles and red-tailed hawks were everywhere.

That incredible water bird the Loon (or, as we know it, the Great Northern Diver) was represented by at least one pair on every lake. They have the most dramatic, eerie, howling call.

The Canadian rainbows and brookies have a main diet of shrimp or, as they call them, 'scuds' - plus chironomids very similar to ours.

They also dine on Damselfly and Dragonflies in plenty, a type of Mayfly, and leeches and large sedges.

The fly patterns which worked best for us were chironomid pupae (Buzzer), Damsel Nymph variants, Black Leech and a Welsh Nymph called Dai Bach.

These were all that were needed to get seriously good catches. The only other important thing was to work out at what depths the fish were at. This varied considerably from lake to lake, and we used either Hi-D lines, Wet-Cel intermediates or my Claret Fast Glass.

Often you would have to double anchor up on the edge of a drop-off, then fish the deep water, bringing your fly 'up the hill'.

There was one special water we all loved called White Lake - it had the most crystal-clear water, making it ideal for fish spotting and stalking tactics.

We would anchor in about 15 feet of water and sit quietly in the

boat. After a while, you could see fish swimming by deep down over the white-coloured marl bottom.

The tactic was to use a weighted size 10 Buzzer Nymph in black or olive, then cast a short line.

You needed to concentrate on where your nymph had reached bottom and, when a trout came into the area, give the rod-top a slight lift.

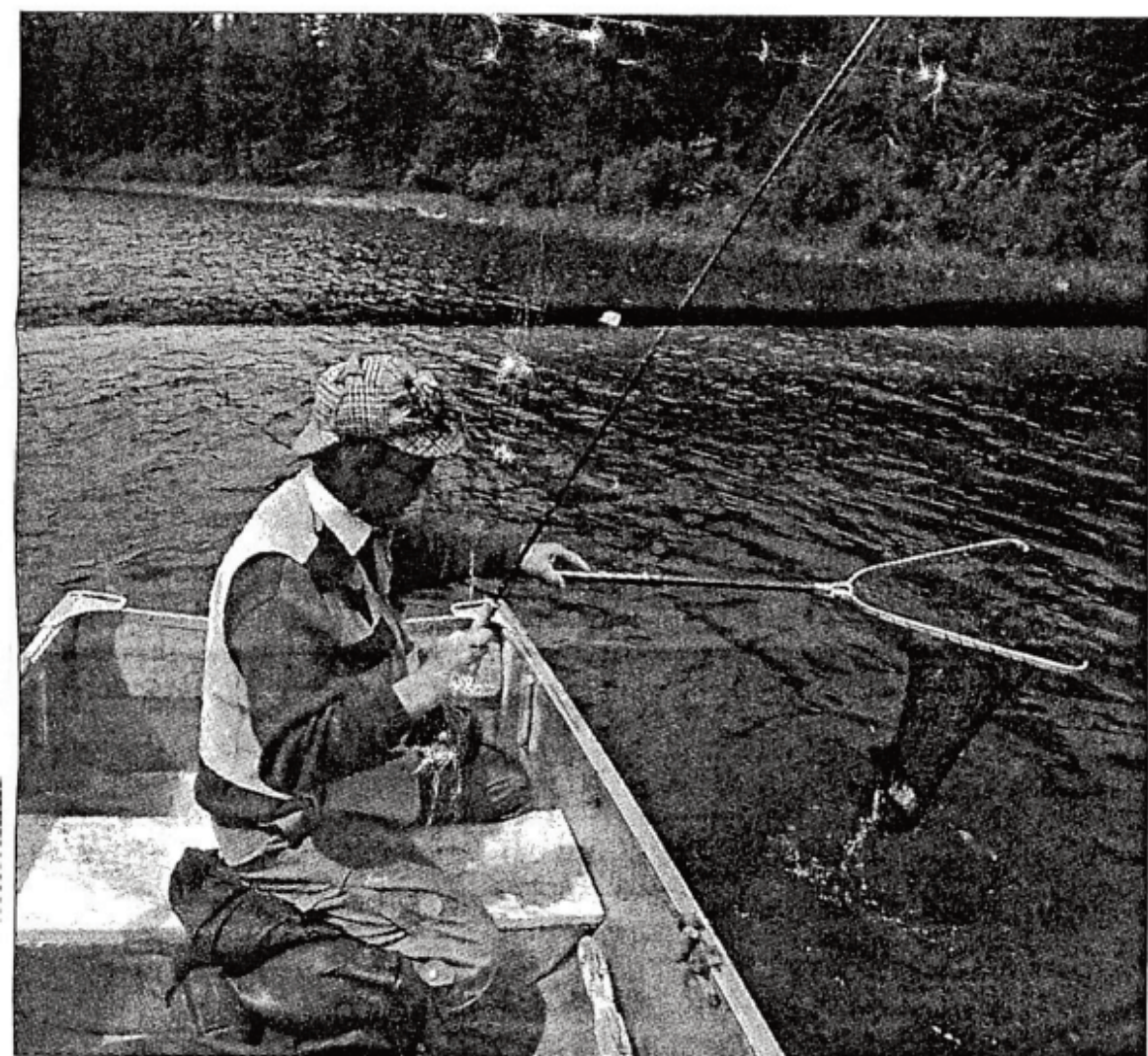
You could see the fish change direction to take the nymph, and have the opportunity to time your strike perfectly. I had several between 3 lb and 4 lb on this method - magic sport indeed. Finally, after the celebrations of the England World win, the England Commonwealth team travelled another 400 miles North to Nimpo Lake.

Here, there were no towns for 200 miles, and the fishing was for completely wild rainbows. With Canada, New Zealand and Australia putting their best professionals in their teams, we knew we were in for a battle.

There was no practice on the lake but, by the second of the four three-hour sessions, we had found fish on the six-mile lake. Instead of the anchoring tactics for so long favoured, the English team opted to drift-fish in the traditional manner.

This was a very brave move, giving us the winning bag of 54 trout. Team positions were: Dennis Buck (third); Charles Jardine (fifth); Bob Church (seventh); Chris Howitt (ninth) and Dave Grove (fourteenth) - a very consistent performance.

New Zealand came second with (keeping it in the family) Wales third, Scotland fourth.



PARADISE...Bob gets to grips with a Horseshoe Lake rainbow with all the grandeur of British Columbia spread out around him. Beats Pitsford!

FISHERIES

A CANADIAN ADVENTURE

Angling artist CHARLES JARDINE brings back from Canada his impressions of the 13th World Fly Fishing Championships where England scored such an impressive victory.

NEVER in all my days have I seen lakes so rich in aquatic life, or so clear, as those chosen for this year's World Championship at Kamloops in British Columbia. This was an appropriate venue for the match, as it's the place where most of our UK rainbows originated. And this year it hosted teams from 19 countries, including newcomers Andorra and Japan. I had hardly arrived before, in some degree of sleeplessness and confusion, I was whisked away for a practice session. Not for the World Championships (at which I was a mere spectator), but for the Commonwealth Championships to be fished a week later 300 miles away.

THE VENUE

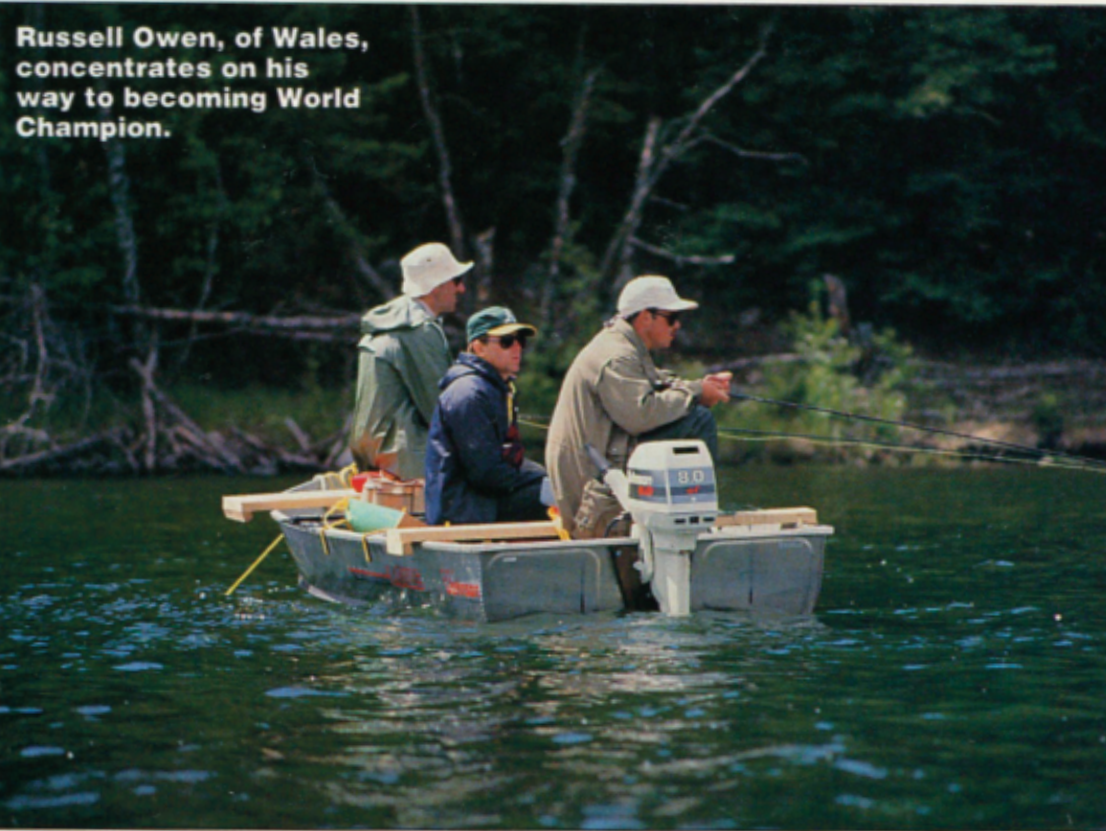
IN these clear lakes the normal Canadian style revolves around floating line and long leaders, with the artificial chironomid (their correct term for our buzzer or midge) left to fish for itself or retrieved ultra-slowly. Often a cast takes 15 minutes or more to fish out.

We found this method rather slow and gradually we developed a pattern of fishing involving artificials such as the midge or Distressed Damsel on high-density sinking lines. The buzzer patterns were uncomplicated and leaded, ranging from seal s fur variants to straight leaded bugs like those popularised by Bill Sibbons.

Another variation was to cast to a rising fish and to immediately retrieve, making the imitation appear like a fleeing natural. The takes were confident, bordering on the savage.

Anything gaudy or fluorescent tended to be cold-shouldered disdainfully.

Russell Owen, of Wales, concentrates on his way to becoming World Champion.



THE WORLD MATCH

THREE lakes were used for the World event - Lake Roche, where we were staying; Tunkwa, which proved a nightmare for most competitors; and Lake Paul. There were two sessions each day, split into five groups of ten boats, and points were given for each fish caught and for length. No fish were weighed, and all were returned alive.

Only one fly was allowed, and boats could travel where they wished (the two anglers agreeing on where to go) but fishing was allowed only at anchor.

Top points scorer in each group of ten boats (19 anglers the odd man had another angler in the boat with him) got 1 place point; second man 2 and so on. All blanks recorded 19 place points.

In the event there were lots of blanks and only two competitors avoided recording at least one during the three days.

FIRST DAY

FIRST day, fished in bright sunshine, saw Chris Ogborne of Drennan England record a first and a second in his group, with John Dallas of Scotland also getting a first place. Incredibly Albert Adel Rincon of Andorra also recorded a first and a second spot, giving his country, in their first World Championship, a real boost as he shared top individual spot with Chris Ogborne.

Meanwhile England led the team event ahead of Scotland. Things were looking good. The fly which appeared to do most damage was the Diawl Flash Back - more of that later.

SECOND DAY

SECOND day saw conditions change, the heat and arid weather of June being replaced by a wall of driving which cloaked the Aberdeen mountain range in a mantle of grey.

The curious thing was, though, that conditions which would prove useless in Britain - hot, bright and windless - are ideal over there, especially for sedge fishing. So the cold of the second day saw many anglers struggling to catch fish.

Nevertheless amid the downpours John Lindsay overhauled Chris Ogborne in the individual list, giving a further boost to the English Flyfishing Machine.

THIRD DAY

THE third day saw high cumulus clouds being driven across the blue sky by a gusty wind and I watched competitors in Roche struggle in the afternoon. One unfortunate Italian did extraordinarily well to land four fish...only to find that all four failed to make the size limit! Chris Ogborne was suffering similar problems in the second session after having come second in the morning.

This was the worst moment for Torill Kolbh, from Norway, and the only woman in the competition. She had caught in all of the previous five sessions, but fell at the last hurdle. Yet she managed 14th place.

INDIVIDUAL PLACINGS

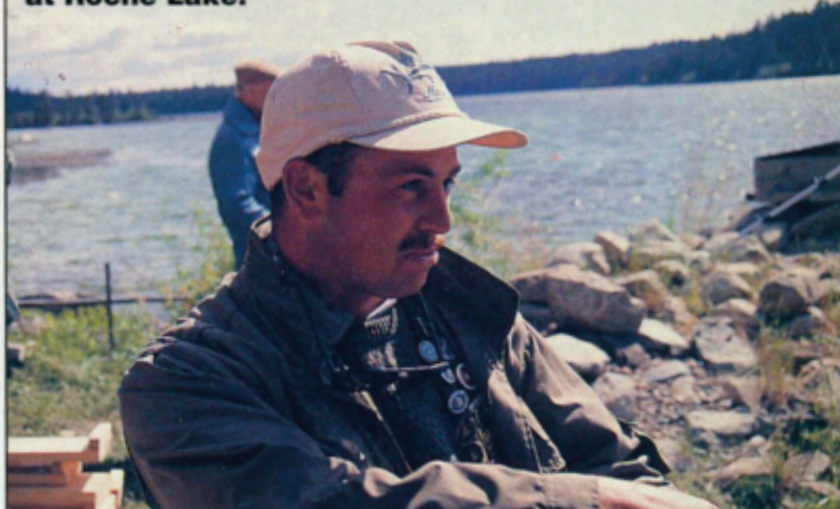
HARD against the western shoreline of Roche on that final day was Russell Owen from Wales, already in contention for the individual crown. His commitment and power of concentration were spellbinding. One felt that here was a champion in the making...and so it proved to be. Russell slowly inched a black nymph, on a high-density sinking line, back towards the boat for an amazing tally of six fish in that final session, bringing his total to 19. This gave him the world crown.

Runner-up was Franciszek of the extraordinarily-gifted Polish side, who caught just eight fish in the six sessions, yet caught in every one! A wonderful display of consistency.

Third was England's Jeremy Lucas, with a wonderful set of placings three seconds, a third and a fifth, but one blank.



New World Champion Russell Owen at Roche Lake.



INDIVIDUAL PLACINGS

AS the exhausted anglers came ashore after the final session England were almost certain they had won. For their overall superiority was such that they could have had five blanks in the final session and still won. Yet National pride and the outside chance that someone might have miscalculated kept them giving 100 per cent up to the final second. Their winning score of 260 place points was 60 ahead of Poland. And they caught nearly twice as many trout as any other team.

The Killing Tactics

Fast glass lines with damsel-type nymphs retrieved with a fast figure-of-eight; or high-density sinkers with Diawl Bachs sporting a thoracic collar, which allowed the fly to be worked through bottom weed, were the killing tactics. In the case of the Diawl, the fly was taken as it left the bottom.



Heading off across Nimpo Lake on the first day of the Commonwealth Championships.

THE COMMONWEALTH CHAMPIONSHIPS

THE day after the World Match we boarded the coach for the two-day Commonwealth Championships organised by Arthur and Annie Humbert. Teams from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Scotland, and Wales boarded the coach for the 300-mile trek north into the British Columbian wilderness around Lake Nimpo.

We had sneaked away to Horseshoe Lake to practise during the third day of the World match, catching rainbows and a stream of brookies to 3lb. With this good session under our belts we were able to enjoy the journey as we wound our way through mile after mile of untamed landscape, across massive rivers, and past towering pine-clad peaks.

We broke our journey at Williams Lake and shared a barbeque, attended by guest of honour John Denver, who joined us for the whole of the next week - one of the reasons why this event is known universally as the "Friendly Competition."

LAKE NIMPO

OUR first inspection suggested that Nimpo was less rich than the Kamloops lakes. It revealed a few cadis, a good head of chironomid, and the lovely western upwing fly *Calibaetis*.

The whole team of Bob Church, Dennis Buck, David Grove, Chris Howitt and myself, and super-sub Brian Thomas, plus our manager Tony Pawson, decided on a strategy of high-density lines and a damsel nymph or midge the flies which had proved so effective during our practise at Kamloops.

FIRST DAY

AMID gathering cloud and obscured horizons we boarded the boats for the first session. We looked for the areas that had held fish at Kamloops - shallows between eight and 20 feet with sudden drop-offs to the real deeps.

My three fish, taken from an area where birds were taking midges near the surface, turned out to be a good catch for the morning session. But my afternoon outing, fished in horizontal rain, a hint of snow, and only sporadic-rising fish, was a disaster. Dejectedly I reported my blank to captain Bob Church.

However, Bob and Brian Thomas, had gone to the very top of the lake - a 25-minute drive where they had dropped on some furiously-feeding fish. And again the Diawl and Damsel did the damage.

SECOND DAY

I WAS anything but relaxed after such a bad first day. But things looked up when I drew as my partner Scotsman Gordon Michie; and we agreed to drift at the top end of the lake.

We were not alone - a real armada crested through the early morning calm. Then the weather lifted to reveal a breathtaking panorama of mountains, conifers, sky and water. The distant clouds still threatened snow, and a chill wind made us shiver - yet the loons called their haunting melody of the wild, and it was all quite eerie.

We settled into an oily calm and out came the fast glass line, 15ft of 5lb Superstrong leader, and a size 12 long-shank Diawl. The odd fish was cruising and sipping the midge-dappled surface. Third cast and my 9ft Sage thumped round. Before the morning was done I had taken another three.

For the final session, we set up the drogue over the shallows and two casts later I was into a strong rainbow. I don't think I've ever been more petrified of losing a fish. The sheer joy when it was in the net, and I knew I had not let the team down, was indescribable. Then I started to enjoy it all, and spent the rest of the session catching eight more fish.

FISHERIES



DIAWL FLASHBACK
HOOK: 10 to 14 longshank.
TAIL: Approx ten natural or dyed red/brown cock hackle fibres
RIB: Fine copper wire
BODY: 2 strands peacock herl.
HACKLE: Dyed red-brown or natural cock hackle fibres
THORAX: Peacock herl with two strips of Flashabou either side.



DISTRESSED DAMSEL
HOOK: Standard 10-12 TMC 3769 or 3781, weighted in thorax
SILK: To match body colour
TAIL: Long plumes of marabou
THORAX: Peacock herl
THORAX COVER: Raffine varnished and cut to shape.
EYES: Craft glass beads available in pearlescent finishes.



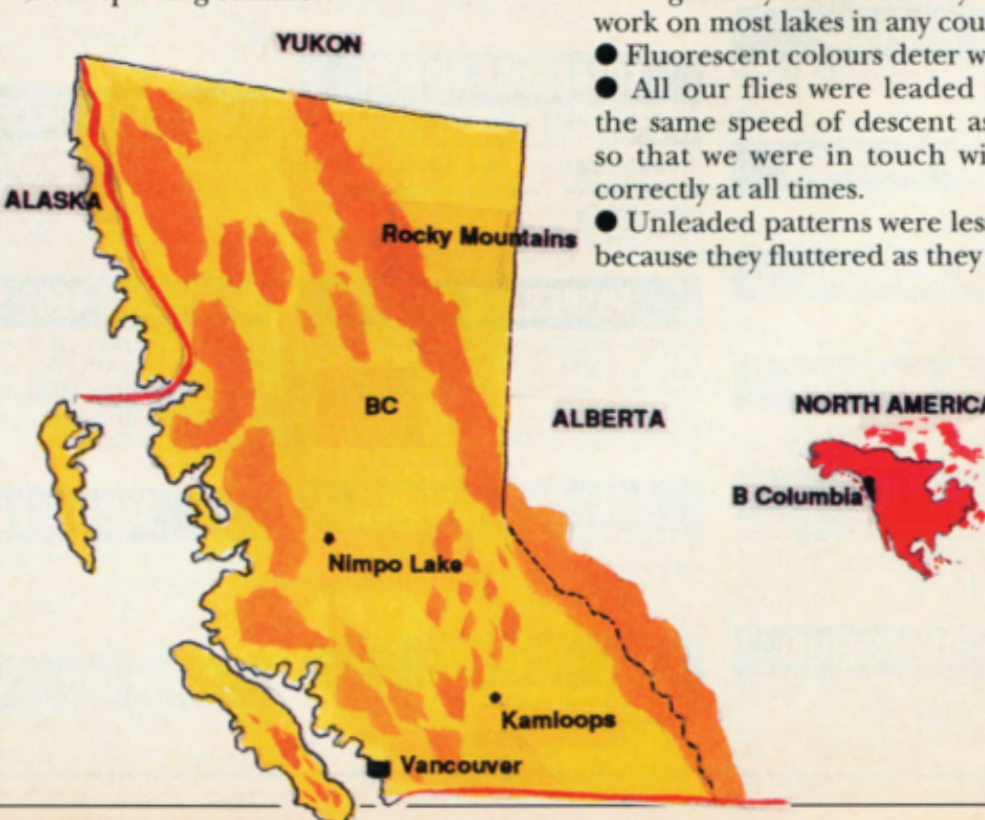
LEADED CHIRONOMID
HOOK: TMC 2487 12-16 weighted at the thorax
SILK: Light olive
BODY: Light yellow-olive seal's fur (or substitute)
RIB: Emerald green flat Mylar.
THORAX: Orange-brown seal's fur white wool filaments.

RESULTS

IT turned out that Dave Grove had caught eight fish on a high-density sinker and Olive damsel, in stark contrast to my near-surface ultra-slow style. Still, they all count! And this, together with steady performances from Chris Howitt, Bob Church and Dennis Buck, made up the overnight deficit, and we won, ahead of New Zealand.

FAREWELL

TWO English victories in two weeks was some compensation, we thought, for some abysmal performances by our football, rugby and cricket teams which had threatened to make this a disastrous sporting summer.



CONCLUSIONS

Yet my abiding memory is of the teams sitting round the camp fire after the presentations, with the sun slipping behind the distant snow-clad peaks with the pine trees turning bright mauve and the sky bathed in peach and pearl. I can still hear the crickets chirruping and John Denver singing softly in the still evening air.

Somehow it summed up the true spirit of Izaak Walton, with no trout sacrificed in the name of our sport - and fly fishing the real champion.

- Using low-stretch lines, plus narrow-gape barbless hooks, led to far fewer fish being lost than with other gear
- English style stillwater flyfishing will work on most lakes in any country.
- Fluorescent colours deter wild fish.
- All our flies were leaded to ensure the same speed of descent as the line, so that we were in touch with the fly correctly at all times.
- Unleaded patterns were less effective, because they fluttered as they fell.

FISHERIES

RUSSELL'S FLIES



CAREY SPECIAL

Hook: 1/8 4 - 12.
Silk: White
Body: Peacock herl
Hackle and tail: Cock Pheasant Tail
Rib: Fine flat silver tinsel (optional)

BIG MOTH

Hook: 14
Silk: Black
Hackle: Black cock
Wing: Starling cut to shape
Body: Rear half fluoro yellow floss; front half black floss

COCH-Y-BONDHU

Hook: 12 - 14
Silk: Black
Body: Bronze peacock herl
Back: Pheasant Tail
Hackle: Natural red game
Tag: Gold lurex

HAWTHORN FLY

Hook: 10-12
Silk: Black
Abdomen: Black silk
Thorax: Black ostrich herl
Legs: Goose herl dyed black
Hackle: Black hen

CLYWEDOG HOTSPOTS



FAVOURITE METHODS

- Use the fast sinker (Hi-D or Di line) in the shallows at the start of the season. Small flies are usually just as effective as lures.
- The fish start to come to the surface by mid April when all you'll need is a floater. There were clouds of buzzers

about in deep water as early as February.
● By summer, dry Sedge and Hopper patterns are working in the shallow arms at the top of the reservoir
● Autumn sees the dry Daddy working well on the main body of the reservoir.

PROFILE OF A WORLD CHAMPION

RUSSELL OWEN has stormed through the calm world of competitive flyfishing like Nigel Mansell lapping the back of the field in a Grand Prix.

He's simply taken it apart by the age of 24 to become the youngest ever World Fly Fishing Champion.

Yet how many anglers know his name? That's something that Russell is out to change. He's already had business cards printed, bearing the legend, "World Champion Fly Fisherman", and is hoping for a deal with Welsh television and a tackle company.

Certainly as far as the national media's coverage England and Russell's victories in Canada went barely noticed. "Apart from a small story in the Daily Telegraph, you wouldn't know I won," lamented Russell. "Yet over in Canada I was front-page news."

Like many top competition anglers, who are often reluctant to express their real views on the subject, Russell believes that competition fly fishing will always be the poor relation to coarse match fishing and other sporting events until real money comes into the picture.

"Most of the current competition prizes are pathetic," said Russell. "We could do with more like the £500 prize for winning the European Bank Open at Clywedog, which is sponsored by the Mid Wales Development Board and always attracts a full entry. If sponsorship isn't always available, then at least let's have a sweep or a pool. When I fished the Benson and Hedges Welsh finals at Rutland recently, I didn't even receive a badge."

"It cost me two grand of my own money to take part in Canada. More could be done to help raise funds for the selected team."

Russell fished for Wales in Italy last year, finishing 16th overall. But he made sure he was number one team choice for Canada with a first at Clywedog and fourth at Llys-fran in the selection trials. Russell's father, who started him fly fishing when he was just seven, was also selected for the World squad.

Russell's match record was already impressive having fished for Wales in the internationals no fewer than five times, winning the Brown Bowl at Grafham in 1990 when just 21 to be the youngest-ever winner.

Another recent success was the Ruddles Compleat Angler competition at Rutland, his favourite water despite the



Russell Owen selects a pattern from his wide selection of flies.

CHAMPION'S FACTFILE

Name: Russell Owen (24)
Home: Caersws, Powys
Club: Llanidloes AA
Car: Astra GTE
Occupation: Builder
Other interests: Soccer - he's a Manchester United supporter
Favourite waters: Rutland, Clywedog
Favourite rods: Bob Church 10.5 ft Alaskan IM8 for sinking lines; Sage 10ft 6 weight for floaters.

distance to drive. "Five of us go there once a month to fish," said Russell. "I simply love the place."

His memory of the Canadian World Championships is their good organisation, although he's the first to admit that the fishing was hard. Yet of the 19 fish he boated, 16 all came to the same fly - a Carey Special (see picture)

"It's an American pattern that imitates everything and nothing," laughed Russell. "The secret seems to lie in the way it's retrieved. I fished it on a Di-2 line with slow two-inch tweaks to make the hackles pulse with life."

"The fish were there to be caught. But you had to simulate the underwater life they were feeding on."