



# HANG TIME

## BY BRAD BOKEN

“She moves, she shimmies, she shakes!!! That gal has more moves than an India Rubber Man.”

That’s what my eccentric fishing buddy Charlie said the first time he saw Hang Time in action. Though I had to laugh, Charlie was right; this pattern does wonderful things in the water. It’s a special fly, for a special fish.

I live to chase after muskies with a fly rod. The muskellunge is possibly the ultimate freshwater fish for the fly. They are wary, they are often maddeningly picky, but when a muskie is ready to eat, they make no bones about it. A muskie attack is a knee-shaking experience – leaving even hardened fly fishing veterans visibly altered. I have had numerous accomplished fly anglers come unglued at the sight of their first muskie strike. “Holy Shit! I just never imagined fishing could ever be like this...” is a common reaction. It is an addicting thing, this muskie hunting, however, to earn this ultimate take, it often requires hours, at times days, of concentrated cast/retrieve/cast effort. One super-important key to success is to ALWAYS be 100% focused and engaged in the presentation.

I feel that a big part of catching a muskie on a fly lies in the ability of a pattern to help keep the angler actively engaged in the presentation through the “long silences” as

Thomas McGuaine so eloquently put it. Nothing is more heartbreaking than putting in eight hours of tough fishing with due diligence only to have a lapse in attention at the end of a retrieve, as a muskie shoots out of nowhere to take a swipe at the fly you just lifted clear of the water. That totally sucks!

I developed Hang Time to keep the angler engaged by making it super-fun to fish. Time and again, I have anglers say, “Man I just love the way that fly looks in the water.” Bottom-line, a fly that is fun to watch as an angler is a fly that is bound to get killed by a muskie. Hang Time can be fished top to bottom – and performs well whether dead-drifted or retrieved at Mach One. The pattern got its name from its ability to take sulky fish by just “asking” to get nailed while hanging on the pause. Sometimes it takes nerves of steel to get a tough fish to commit. The flowing materials in Hang Time offer great “motion without movement” as steelhead wizard Matt Supinski coined it. This inherent pulse allows an angler to ice down a fish by allowing the pattern to sit for upwards of a minute in the danger zone.

As good as Hang Time is on the low end of the speed spectrum, it does equally well burning across the upper

water column enticing super-hot fish to strike. An angler cannot work this pattern too fast. The faster you strip, the wilder it looks. Those familiar with muskie know that the key to converting the dreaded “followers” into biters is often to “heat ‘em up.”

The pièce de résistance in Hang Time’s arsenal is the deadly side to side “stunned mullet” action it exhibits when retrieved with a steady strip, strip, pause. Similar to the motion of the one in a million jerkbaits all casting gear muskie junkies long for. That subtle “slide to the side” action when paused between strips just drives muskies wild and Hang Time has this in spades.

Hang Time can also be swung on a tight or slack line in the steelhead and Atlantic salmon tradition. In fact big trout and salmon respond well to a smaller version of this pattern – just scale it back and watch out around big coldwater predators. This swinging technique transfers well to the tube fly platform. Actually, that is the realm where Hang Time, its smaller variants, and future progeny will progress to.

Hang Time is the culmination of five years of working to develop a muskellunge fly pattern which has all of the characteristics I require when targeting the most demanding fish in freshwater. Hang Time is durable, easy to tie with readily available materials, casts like a dream, and above all else gets consistently KILLED by muskies.

As legendary Chippewa River guide Joe Flater says when asked about his key to success, “Shut the heck up and keep casting.” Hang time will hang in there and will get the job done as well as anything out there.

I call this pattern a “solid state” tie. Every step in the construction is geared to make a pattern that is truly muskie proof. I used to think of a muskie fly as a one fish only deal. That was part of the problem with all of the commercially available big game flies – they just did not cut the mustard when tested against repeat muskie attacks and battles. When the muskies are hot and you have

a dialed in pattern, nothing is worse than having that hot fly fall apart in the middle of it all. I want a fly that can take a beating and keep going back for another helping. I have had several Hang Times withstand double digit days. You know if a fly can put 10, 12 or even 14 muskies in the boat, and still be able to fish well it is really “solid state.” That is what I demand in my boat, and that is why I worked hard in developing this pattern. Full flies enjoy a better life expectancy. They can get groomed down from fish attacks – losing materials in battle so to speak. I tie Hang Time very full but not bulky. The key is to apply balance to the hair-flash-feather, hair-flash-feather mantra used when constructing these flies. Aim for consistency in how you select each bunch of material – bucktail, flash and feather and maintain it as you work your way up the shank building the fly. No matter the battle-scars, they will still fish as well, at times better, than a fresh fly. My fishing buddies and I may often “field dress” a fly to fit the situation of the day. A good haircut can often improve the effectiveness of Hang Time. The angler can also trim the material down in order to maintain balance, remove flash, or to change the action or inherent buoyancy.

Credit where credit is due - I give props to: Larry Dahlberg for his groundbreaking Mega-Diver, Dan Blanton with his Flashtail Whistler and Lefty Kreh for his timeless Deceiver. I also see a lot of similarities in my tying style and that of the grand steelheader Kevin Feenstra. I have admired Kevin’s mastery of tying for years; he really knows the value of movement, profile, and flash. I come from a background of big trout and steelhead hunting, and you will notice the flowing qualities of Hang Time echo the beauty and aesthetics of traditional trout and steelhead streamers. These tiers gave me plenty of inspiration while exploring this emerging facet of our sport. These classic patterns produced plenty of fish but I am never one to be satisfied with good enough. I continually push every part of my tackle system

to new levels. When chasing muskie every piece of gear must be totally dialed in to consistently connect with this challenging species. That is what I find so exciting in the muskie arena – every time on the water is an opportunity to try something new, to find a better way. Hang Time is the result of this approach.

Hang Time can be tied in a near-limitless number of colors and variations. Colors, textures and flash can be mixed up in any combination. You can build in bold contrasts or remain monochromatic. All black, all white or any other solid color and flash scheme. The illustrated fly, a fire-tiger variation, shows bold color and contrast for use in stained waters. A more natural “match the hatch” color scheme is easily achieved with neutral colors and subdued flash. Forage such as smelt, dace and sucker can be easily imitated.

Every body of water will have color and flash triggers that work best. The entire spectrum can be achieved through creative material selection. The Hang time is a solid fly that gets it done on a variety of waters throughout the season. From late spring through the fall freeze-up Hang Time can be adapted to match the forage base, worked with a variety of retrieves, and modified for the peculiar day-to-day change in preferences that muskie exhibit. Hang Time is a muskie fly, and as Muskie addict and fly rod man Derek Kuehl of Hayward, WI describes muskie flies.

“If, when you pull a fly out you don’t hear drums and can’t smell chicken blood in the air, put it back in the box, for if it is evil you seek, then it can only be conjured with the same.”

## Tying Hang Time

Glue: Fishin' Glue or perfered head cement

Hook: Mustad 34011 size 3/0 or equivalent

Thread: Danville 210 Denier Waxed Flymaster Plus

Tail: Bucktail, topped with Flashabou, barred saddle hackle

Body: Hair, Flash, Feather applications – bucktail, Flashabou or Krystal Flash, barred saddle hackle, and blood marabou

Collar: Blood marabou

Head: Lacquered thread

Optional

Eyes: Mirage Eyes

**1** Prepare a level, solid base of thread from  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch behind the eye to even with hook point. Coat the entire thread base with Fishin' Glue. After each material is tied in I coat the thread wraps with glue to increase durability.

**2** Select a bunch of long, thin bucktail from the underside of a tail. The best tailing fibers are generally found at the base of the tail or at the tip. Tie in the bunch securely above hook point with the tips facing rearward and cover the butt ends with thread. Begin to build the forward taper now. Each material tie down should be utilized to build the base of a future tie down. This will help with the flow and balance of the pattern.

**3** Select 20-30 strands of Flashabou and tie in. Do not trim the Flashabou, and each strand should have at least 2 inches of "overhang."

**4** Fold back the Flashabou in a half-hackle fashion, and tie it down.

**5** Select two very long and flowing barred saddle hackles. Prime feathers will be 7 to 8 inches long with strong shafts and even butt ends. Strip duff off butt ends and tie in one feather on each side of hook shank. Wrap butt ends all the way up to behind the eye of the hook. This will keep balance in the construction. It is important to keep the feathers from twisting and great care should be taken in selection and application of the saddles. The tips of the initial pair of saddles should extend back to the end of the Flashabou.

**6** Select a prime blood marabou quill. Look for long flowing fibers and a thin yet strong shaft. Strip duff off butt end, tie in and wind spey-style to cover tie down area of the tail. Wind feather forward one wrap spiraling in front of the other while stroking back the flowing fibers. Secure tip section, stroke fibers rearward and wrap back over the spiraled shafts a bit.

**7** Now we begin to build the body with 'bulk' around the hook shank. We will do this by reverse-tying bucktail. Select a bunch of bucktail similar to the amount used for the tail. Instead of tying in the fibers with the tips facing rearward "reverse" the butt ends and the tips. Do not crowd the tail materials with the rearward facing butt ends. Notice the gap. Secure the bucktail on top of the hook shank with five or six wraps and while holding firm tension with bobbin use your free hand to distribute the material around the hook shank...

**8** ...so it will look like this. Add a couple more secure wraps of thread and fold the tips of the bucktail rearward...

**9** ...this "reverse" is where this reverse tying method gets its name and is one of the keys to the strength and durability of Hang Time. The angle of the tips of the bucktail is controlled by how far back you choose to warp the thread. This reverse tied bucktail profile has both inner and outer elements. The short butt ends form a halo around the shank and give an inner dimension, while the tips form a halo around the entire body giving an outer dimension.

**10** Select a similar amount of Flashabou as for the tail (20-30 strands) but this time tie in at the midpoint of the strand with four or five secure wraps then pull the ends rearward and spread around the top  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the hook shank to create a half hackle of flash.

**11** Select another prime pair of barred saddle hackles like the ones used for the tail. Tie these in one on either side of the hook shank, allowing no twist and wrapping the butt end shafts up to just behind the hook eye.

**12** Hair again!

**13** Flash! This time select another texture of flash like Krystal Flash

**14** Feather! At this point it works well to select shorter and webbier saddles.

**15** Last Hair! Finally it's time to apply the last reverse tied hair bunch. I like to continually trim each batch shorter than the previous. This way you develop a continuously shorter taper into the outer profile. Trimming the butt ends progressively shorter also reduces tie down bulk as we approach the head of the pattern.

**16** Remember to coat all tie downs with Fishin' Glue or head cement. Hang Time is looking fine but not yet complete.

**17** The final blood marabou is selected and wound on as we did in the tail section. Remember to stroke everything back as you wind forward.

**18** Secure everything with a nicely tapered thread head. If you care to add eyes a black head sets off the effect best. Otherwise, double whip finish and coat the thread liberally with hard enamel.

Enjoy!



