

Part 3: Customizing a Rhys Davis Teaser Head

I've found that the Rhys Davis Super Herring Special teaser head can be improved with three simple modifications: cutting out the bottom to accommodate larger herring, using a single 5/0 hook instead of the treble for big salmon, and adding a piece of stainless steel wire to control the bend of the herring.

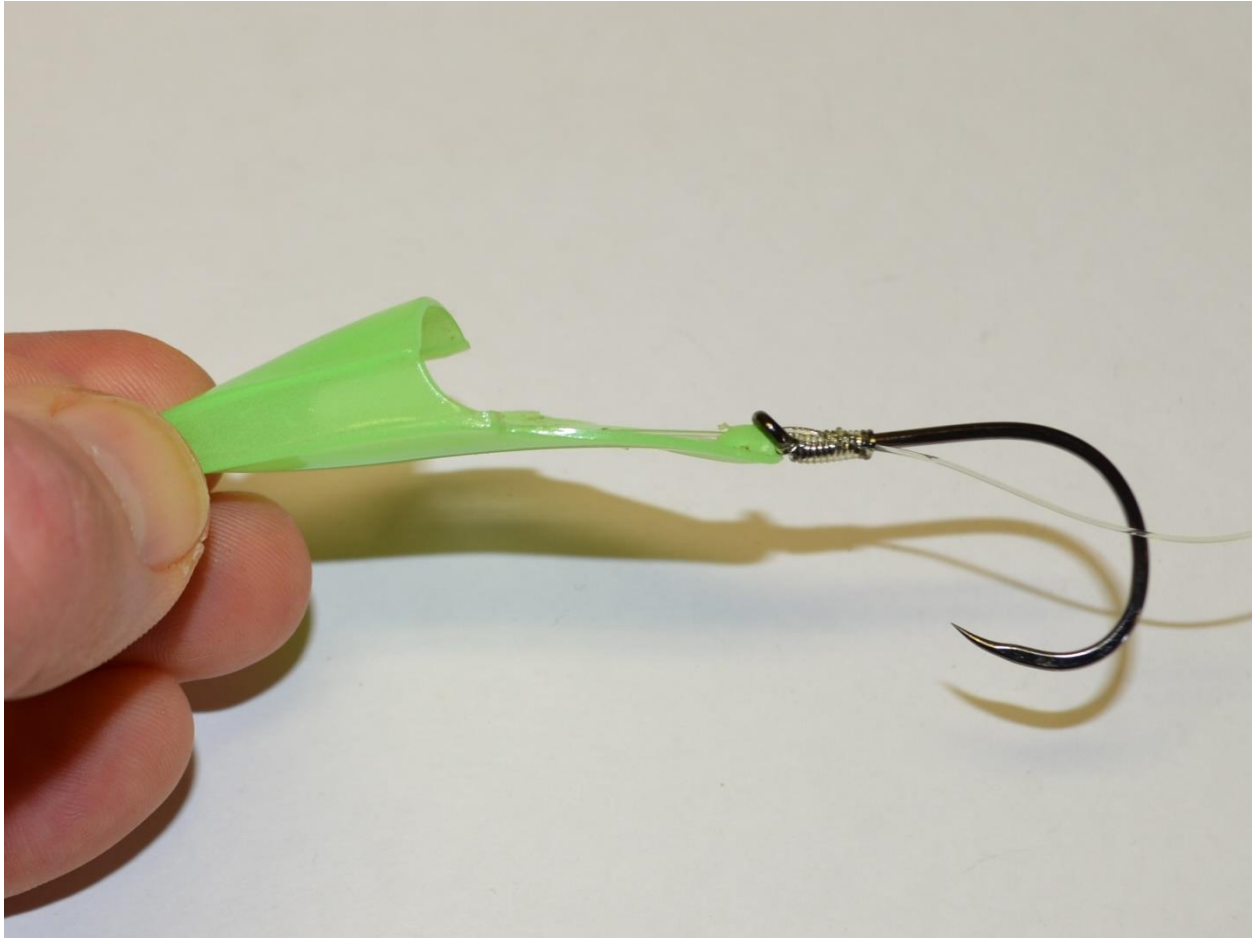
There is no question that big salmon like big bait. The Rhys Davis Super Herring Special teaser head is designed for blue (7 to 8 inch) herring, but I often fish at lodges which supply herring in the purple and black sizes (8 to 10 inch). To accommodate the larger herring I cut open the bottom (short side) of the teaser head.



Bottom of Teaser Head Cut Open

Although I've caught many tyee with the VMC #1 treble, I also lost one or two each year due to the trebles pulling out during a long fight -- unfortunately these were usually the biggest salmon. Now I use a 5/0 single in place of the lead treble.

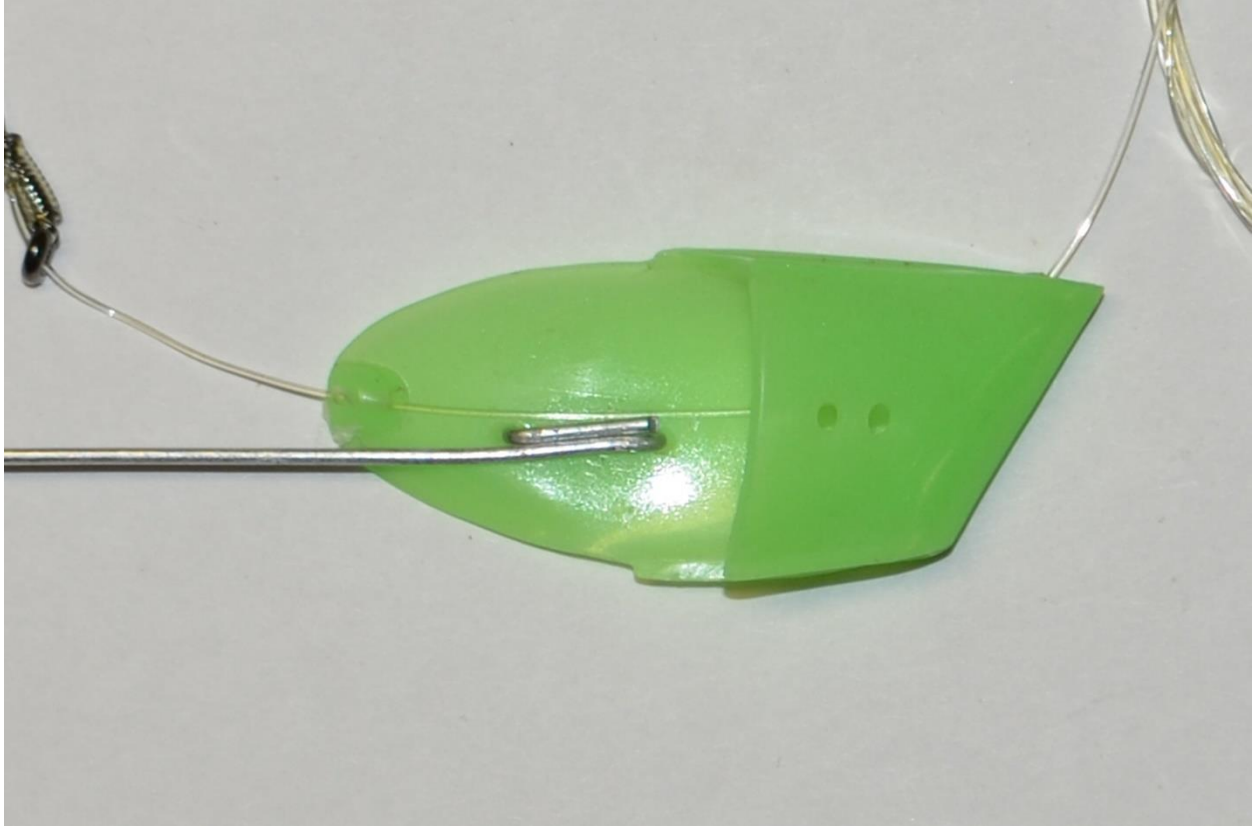
To position the lead single so it points outward, away from the herring, I file the teaser head plastic at the spot where it meets the lead hook to a 45 degree angle, as shown in the photo on the next page. I also omit the tensioning toothpick. Line tension holds the 5/0 single pointing out away from the herring in perfect position to hook the salmon.



Teaser Head Filed With a Bevel

I wire rig the teaser head to hold the herring in the desired curve. This is done by drilling two 3/64 inch holes in the teaser head to attach a 6 inch piece of soft 16 gauge stainless steel wire as shown in the photo below (adapted from a method shown to me by Deryk Krefting). The 16 gauge (0.051 inch diameter) stainless steel lockwire is manufactured by Malin Company and in the United States is available from Grainger Industrial Supply. Alternatively galvanized steel wire is available at Home Depot.

The holes should be about half an inch apart. The exact placement is not critical, but I like to keep the wire away from the monofilament leader. Thread the wire through the holes and use a pair of pliers to crimp it tight. The wire should be long enough to thread inside the herring past the dorsal fin, and soft enough to bend easily and hold the bend.

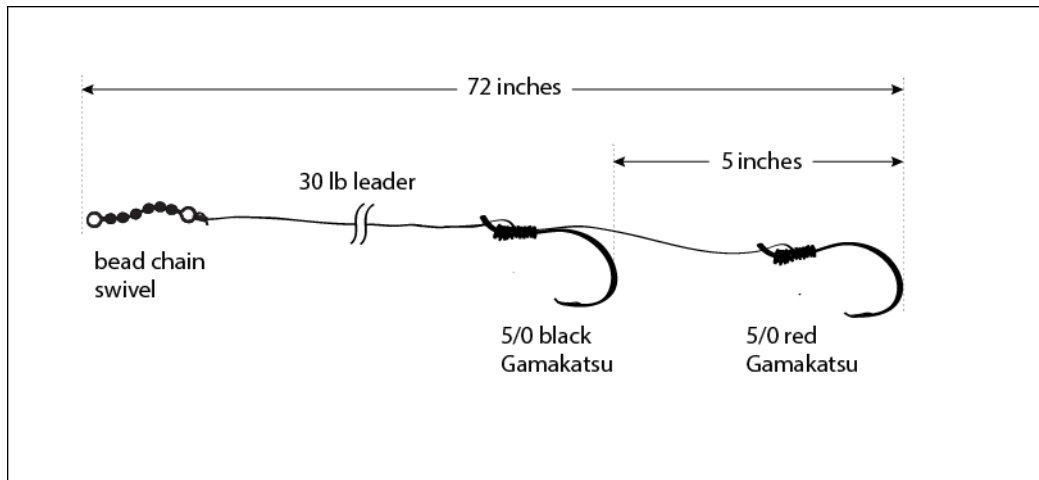


Wire Rigged Teaser Head

I usually rig the teaser head with a long piece of wire and for storage fold it back to fit in a plastic snack bag. In the boat I straighten the wire and cut it to length, to fit the herring supplied by the lodge.

The advantage of this approach is that the tensioning toothpick is no longer required, the treble hook can be replaced with a 5/0 leading single, and the roll will not deteriorate over time. This roll is both beautiful and bombproof, and the bait can be run at any speed.

The leader is similar to a cut plug leader with five inches between the back end of the lead hook and the back end of the trailer. Begin with a seven foot piece of 30 lb Maxima Ultragreen (or 40 lb for guiding) and tie in the red 5/0 Gamakatsu trailing hook with a salmon egg loop knot. The lead hook is a black 5/0 Gamakatsu and is also tied with a salmon egg loop knot. Thread the leader through the teaser head and attach to a bead chain swivel, then store the completed assembly in a snack bag.



Tandem Single Hook Teaser Head Leader

In the boat place the teaser head beside the herring to estimate the entry point for the wire (usually in the gap between the gills and the body), then thread the wire into the herring along the backbone. Use the normal round toothpick to secure the herring to the teaser head.

I've found it best to embed the trailing hook in the same manner as a cut plug.

Bend the herring into a very gentle curve (the secret to a sweet roll) and try it in the water. It should roll smoothly with the tail directly in line with the head. I love this roll and have found that it is perfect for running with a flasher.

When run "naked" (without a flasher), the roll can be improved by bending the tail up 90 degrees and fixing it in position by inserting a toothpick from the rear of the herring. The result is a lovely undulating roll which moves more water and provides a stronger acoustic signature, and attracts salmon from a distance in much the same manner as a flasher.

A common argument against using wire rigged bait is that it is fiddly and takes time to get the action right. I've found that the reverse is actually true, with this approach I usually get a perfect roll on my first try and rigging the bait doesn't take much longer than the traditional method. And for me a huge advantage is that I have confidence that my bait is fishing properly even at higher trolling speeds (this is a great method to use if the motor has a fast idle and can't be slowed down).

An injured herring will become separated from his buddies and loses his ability to swim upright, and often spirals in the water. It is this spiralling action that the teaser head herring and cut plug herring mimic. The injured herring also often loses its depth control and spirals upwards towards the surface.

It happens that pulling a teaser head herring or cut plug herring off the downrigger release clip does a beautiful job of simulating a wounded herring spiralling towards the surface. Many times I've pulled the line from the release clip to check the bait and hooked a nice spring (occasionally a tyee) as the bait spiralled upwards. I can only assume that the salmon was in the area and not interested in biting until he

saw the wounded herring action. On one trip my friend Tom Berger accidentally hooked a 42 lb chinook using this method.

Another good strategy is to occasionally put the motor in neutral for a few seconds to let the bait sink in the water, then start forward again. The strike often occurs at the point where the downrigger ball is hanging vertical in the water.

One consideration is that teaser head herring lacks the rich scent trail which is so effective with cut plug. I often make a small cut in the belly near the vent to release a trail of blood and herring juices.

Teaser head herring is a good option when many lodge boats are hitting an area hard with cut plug herring. Since the head of the herring has not been cut off, the bait is larger than cut plug and is of interest to the bigger chinook. I think that the action is a better imitation of a wounded herring than cut plug, and a salmon that is resting in a popular spot and is jaded from seeing many cut plugs spin past might find the change of pace interesting. Charlie White, the late fishing guru who made underwater videos of salmon taking different baits, believed that salmon preferred teaser head herring to cut plug herring by a wide margin. And I've observed that some of the best guides quietly fish teaser head when everyone else is using cut plug.

Bill Haymond is author of "The Science of Salmon Fishing", which is available at www.thescienceofsalmonfishing.com .