

Valley Angler The Fly Show By Bill Thompson

The first fishing show of the season has come and gone. This past Saturday I drove down to Marlboro, Massachusetts to attend the annual Eastern Fly Fishing Exhibition. I don't think I have missed this show since it began. Because it occurs on or pretty near to my birthday I have always considered that it was held in my honor. Apparently the show owners are unaware of this as they continue to charge me admission. Putting aside any delusions of grandeur that I may have the show has always provided me and many others a break from the mid-winter blues and a chance to dream of the coming spring.

There have been a lot of changes in the show over the years. The show has changed venue several times before it settled in Marlboro. For a couple of years it was held in Boston and in one year they tried Providence, Rhode Island. Various vendors have come and gone and of course the equipment has changed greatly over time.

The most notable change has been the decline in attendance of both customers and exhibitors over the last few years. I had great hoped that this year, do to the demise of the Wilmington show, that there would be a surge in attendance. There was to some degree, but it was still no where near what it has been in the past. A few of the large national companies that were noticeably absent last year were back this year. However, it was very evident that they had scaled down their effort. The number of fly shops in attendance was about the same. Some of the old names had disappeared, but there were a few new ones to take their place.

At time the show seemed busy but, it was pretty evident that the numbers were no more than they had been last year. There was a time, not more than just a few years ago, that it was almost impossible to get down the isles. At one point I went to try out a new rod and the waiting line was only two deep. Years ago this would not have been the case.

The other disturbing trend is the average age of those in attendance. Short of going to a Shriner's parade I have never seen so many gray bearded, pot bellied, balding men. Of course I must admit that I am a charter member of this group. There is no question that the fly fishing community is not getting any younger.

None the less I had a great time and enjoyed meeting old friends and checking out all the new gear. One thing about the fly fishing industry is that there is no end to new gadgets. You would think by now that every conceivable thing had already been invented to make fly fishing easier. Truth is most new things are just old ideas recycled and made to look new.

There were a couple of things that caught my eye that will probably find their way into my gear bag. Temple Fork has a new "Switch" rod that looks pretty cool. The idea is that you can purchase a tip section that converts a standard fly rod into a spey rod. With the

growing popularity of spey casting it looks like a great way to get into the sport without having to break the bank.

There were a lot of new names in the tiers area. I must be getting old as I was only able to recognize three of them. Contrary to my previous statement about the fly fishing crowd getting older I did meet a young tyer by the name of Garret Booth from Bennington, New Hampshire that tied some very nice streamer flies in the old Yankee style. Not to many people tying tandem streamers these days.

Most vendors that I talked to said that had been pretty busy and on the whole were pleased with the show. Needless to say I had to contribute to the overall well being of the industry by making a few small purchases. Stopped by one booth to talk to a friend and I ended up with several packages of feathers that I just had to have. There was a guy from France with some very nice cul-de-canard and another fellow was selling some neat nymph forms and naturally I reached for my wallet.

With these shows in decline there are a few things that the promoters could do to make them better. First and foremost is find a way to reduce the admission price. I am sure that the costs of putting on one of these shows is high, but if by lowering the price a bit they just might find that the attendance would go up. Second would be to invent more things for kids to do. We need new blood and we need families to attend these events. Last of all improve the food and lower the price. I know that they are probably locked in to the food vendor that is hired by the arena, but the promoters must have some control over what goes on. I had a couple of hot dogs that cost an arm and a leg and stayed with me all the way home and most of the night.

See you on the river.