

## Valley Angler

### What Not To Buy Your Fishing Friend for Xmas

by Bill Thompson

As a follow up to last weeks column, “New Fishing Books for Christmas”, I am writing this weeks column as a public service for all those long suffering anglers who may have received a singing bass for Christmas. Many fishermen are still in therapy after having the unpleasant experiencing of opening up one of those things on Christmas morning. There is nothing like seeing a mounted rubber bass suddenly come to life and sing, “Take Me to the Water”.

These things were so bad that for years Saco Valley Anglers would auction one off at their annual banquet as a joke. The object was that someone would buy the thing and then present it to another member of the club. This would always bring a big laugh from all except the poor fellow who ended up with it. The receiver was allowed to keep it for a year and then forced to return it to be auctioned off at the next auction; much to the relief of his significant other.

I remember the first year Bubba or Billy Bass showed up at Ames. Some of you may remember that I worked for Ames Department Stores in North Conway and Ossipee for many years before starting my second life in the fly shop business. In any event, the first shipment sold out in a matter of hours and the second shipment in only a couple of days. There was no question about it the singing bass was a hot item. Next Christmas the buyer went after it again. This time he added singing trout, pickerel and all other species of fish that the manufacturer could think of. By now the market was saturated and I think we sold the last of them at a quarter. Thank goodness the “Singing Bass” is a thing of the past.

There are, however worst things out there that you could give a fisherman. This is the time of year when your mail box is stuffed with catalogs filled with gift ideas for outdoors men. I got one the other day that kept me amused for the better part of an hour.

I was immediately drawn to the luggage made from, “Safari-Grade camel leather and tweed”. What sportsman would not be delighted to be spotted carrying a matching set of camel luggage? Personally I was unaware that camels wore tweed and what the heck is “Safari-Grade”?

The device that promised to chill my wine in less than five minutes seemed like good thing. I drink a lot of wine while fishing and I am sure I am not alone in this. This may explain why a lot of people think fly fishermen are snobs. I am kidding of course, as everyone knows that real fly fishermen only drink single malt scotch.

I also liked the hat that was an exact replica of the one worn by Harrison Ford in Raiders of the Lost Ark. It was made from 100% wool felt with a genuine Grosgrain trim band in “Temple of Doom” brown.

Of course the grand-daddy of all “Life Style” catalogs has got to be Orvis. The Perkins family

has made a fortune selling plaid pants and tweed jackets to “wanna-be’s”. Orvis gets a lot of heat for this from the fly-fishing community. If Orvis is offended by this I guess they are able to shake it off when they go to the bank. Of course Orvis still manages to make some of the worlds best fly rods and if it takes selling doggy beds to keep this alive then I personally am all for it.

Orvis is not alone in their marketing strategy; L.L. Bean has done pretty well doing the same thing. A lot of other companies would like to be better at it, but lack the credentials to carry it off. Just about every rod company in America has a selection of peripheral merchandise. If nothing else they will try to sell you a hat or a t-shirt.

With this in mind it is still hard not to get a laugh out of the leather fly swatter that made it into last summer’s Orvis catalog. Something that every sportsman secretly lusts for.

In closing my final advice for those seeking to find the perfect gift for their favorite sportsman, keep it simple and when in doubt pass up the hand painted trout tie and get the gift certificate.

See you on the river.