

**HOT  
AIRE**

Trouting on a  
shrunk Dales  
stream

# TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

## Bewitching hour

Thrilling dusk sport  
with blue-winged olives

### DRY-FLY DECISIONS

When to use one,  
two or three flies  
on stillwaters

### Loaded Gunn

Canny ways to  
improve a classic  
salmon fly

## Mawddach returns

A sea-trout recovery in West Wales

SEPTEMBER 2021 £4.75 ON SALE JULY 22-AUG 18





# PRICE HIKE

Simon Cooper asks if we're paying too much for modern tackle



**I AM NOT PRONE TO BLASPHEMING, BUT** the other day I yelped Holy \*\*\*\*\*! — fill in with whatever word takes your fancy. The cause of my distress? The website of a prominent fly-fishing brand.

I was surfing around in search of a new eight-weight saltwater outfit, not something I have bought for many years. Now I love saltwater fishing. It is, in many respects, my perfect fishing holiday as it is both similar and different to my day job. But I am by no means an expert. What's the best-balanced outfit to buy? I don't really know. I know the brands I like. I know the length and weight I prefer. But as to the whole package of rod, reel, line and backing, I'm happy to go with the expert choice. Until I saw the price. £1,693. Holy \*\*\*\*\*! When did fly-fishing gear get so expensive?

The more I googled, the more astonished I became. Nearly a grand for a pair of waders. Over a ton for a fly-line. I used to encourage newbies to fly-fishing by explaining how, relative to, say, golf or shooting, ours is a relatively cheap entry-level sport. But now, I'm not so sure. Or am I simply being an old git, recalling some non-existent halcyon era when the beer was always cheaper and the girls prettier? I decided to investigate.

My reference point was 1971, which is conveniently 50 years ago, but more pertinently I have a *A Choice of Tackle* catalogue from that year produced by Dermot Wilson when he ran his mail-order business from Nether Wallop Mill. From this I picked out an outfit for chalkstreams and small stillwaters of an 8ft 6in rod, reel and five-weight floating fly-line.

Surprisingly, at least to me, there are still many familiar names in the Wilson catalogue still operating today. To pick a random few: Hardy, Abu Garcia, Air Cel, Farlow's, Orvis, Sharpe's, Wheatley, Barbour — in fact, hardly any have disappeared. And also, usefully for the purposes of this article, plenty of the same exact named

products remain in production today, such as the Hardy Marquis reel, though the inherent technology has moved on. Nowhere is this truer than in rods.

The startling thing about the 1971 catalogue is that split-cane rods still reigned supreme; carbon-fibre was yet to enter the market and the other option, glass-fibre, was definitely marketed as a cheaper and inferior product. There was certainly a clue in the price. The most expensive 8ft 6in, five-weight cane rod was £74 (£1,069 in real terms) while a similar entry-level glass-fibre rod was £9 (£130). It is probably not a fair comparison as bamboo is now such a niche market, but that exact same cane rod will set you back £3,395 today.

But back to my 1971 outfit of a Hardy Marquis reel, Hardy Palakona rod and Air Cel line, fairly equivalent to my modern day £1,693 outfit. Fifty years ago, you'd have paid £45 for the trio — £650 in 2021 hard cash.

So, it seems we are paying, at least at the top end, a great deal more for our pleasure; that Hardy Marquis was £7 in *A Choice of Tackle*, so £166 in real terms, but it retails today at £259. However, some items, such as flies and lines, have kept pace with inflation, but I struggled to find anything that was cheaper. That said, it is my firm opinion that our gear today is better made, better engineered and does the job far better than anything we were using 50 years ago.

One final thought and missing from my calculations but included in all the prices — tax. In 1971, VAT (or Purchase Tax as it was back then) was 8%. Today it is 20%. Ouch! ■

*Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks (fishingbreaks.co.uk) the leading chalkstream fishing specialists. He is author of Life of a Chalkstream and The Otters' Tale.*