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Annual Subscription Rates (12 issues):
UK £39; Europe £51;
Rest of the World £58.

Subscription Hotline and Enquiries
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email: subs.ffft@btinternet.com

ISSN: 0959-8383

Distribution
Seymour Distribution Ltd.

Printing
Warners (Midlands) plc

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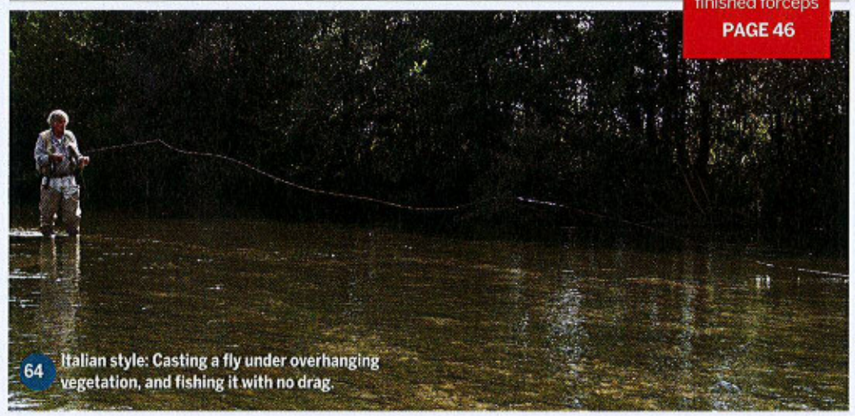
Welcome



64 Italian style: Casting a fly under overhanging vegetation, and fishing it with no drag.

The Italian job

The style of precision presentation casting from Italy arrives – at last!

Ten years ago, on the steps of Arezzo cathedral in Tuscany, Italy, I watched a snowy-haired, moustachioed man demonstrate a high-speed, wide-arc, side-cast with a short cane rod. I could see that he was creating ultra-tight casting loops, with complete control over his leader and fly, and the Italians informed me that this was a new casting style, which could place a fly under a bush on the far bank along with coils of leader to prevent the fly dragging.

The man I was watching was Roberto Pragliola, who had created the style. Keen to get Roberto's take on the cast, and how it was made, I then encountered a major problem – translating fly fishing terminology and technicalities from Italian is incredibly difficult – and often hilarious – and, despite my girlfriend Bonnie being fluent in Italian (and a regular translator of fly-tying articles), I could never quite crack what was happening with Roberto's casting action (or capture the action photographically), so had neither the words nor the pictures that would do justice to how Roberto made the casts in order to produce an article about it.

Two years later, I was reminded of the cast again, when I fished with guide and classical guitarist, Luca Castellani on the Nera, in southern Italy, and I noticed he used the same style to flick a foam-bodied Chernobyl Ant under the bushes of the far bank. The cast was very effective, but it still seemed to be an exclusively Italian 'thing'. Today, the style has spread – obviously due to its effectiveness – and demonstrations of the "Italian style" of casting often feature at British Fly Fair International. However, it wasn't until I received Vincenzo Penteriani's superbly written article, which not only describes the technicalities of the cast, but also features shots of Roberto demonstrating the technique (see p64), that I had enough information to feature it.

The next time you are faced with a fish rising right under a bush on the far side of the stream, you'll undoubtably think about Roberto and his casting style, as I often do.

Enjoy! Ciao! **Mark Bowler, Editor**

More from Italy next month as Neil Patterson hunts giant catfish in Florence! – Editor.

Three things to do this month

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A fly and tactic help get your season underway on stillwater.

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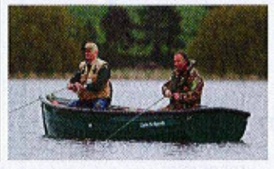
STEAL YOURSELF A TROUT
5 factors to help put an extra fish or two in the bag.



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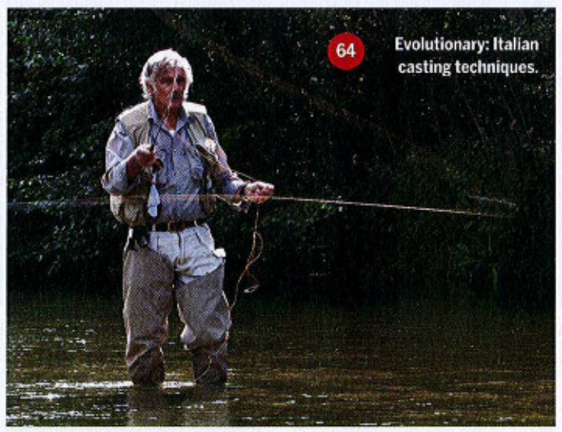

64 Evolutionary: Italian casting techniques.

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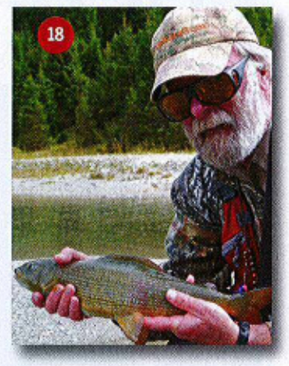

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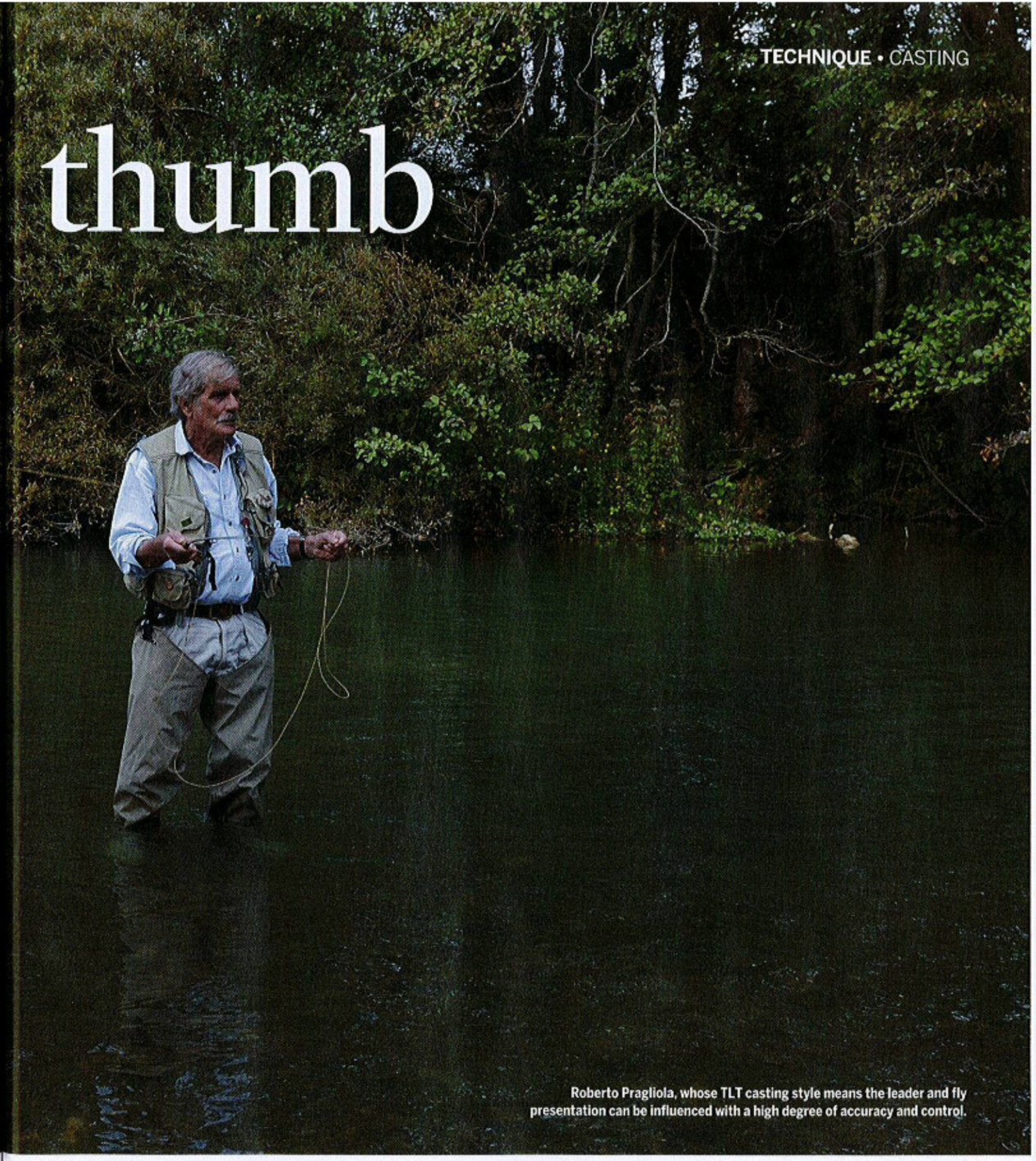
COMPETITIONS & OFFERS

Under the thumb

When it comes to presentation, **VINCENZO PENTERIANI** describes why Italy's TLT fly casting technique is a major step in the evolution of casting

Photos: Mauro Barbacci, Andrea Limberti and Simone Ripetti



Roberto Pragliola, whose TLT casting style means the leader and fly presentation can be influenced with a high degree of accuracy and control.

An evolutionary process is characterised by two main aspects: a change in one or more specific traits or features over time (due to a number of mechanisms and processes) and the gradual occurrence of these changes. When evolution occurs, the possibility exists for a given element to positively progress over time as a result of the combination of several different factors. If we attempt to translate this example to the field of fly casting, the Italian TLT (Tecnica di Lancio Totale, which can be translated as total fly-casting technique) undoubtedly represents one of the most interesting phenomena of the last decades, allowing casting to move a step forward.

Roberto Pragliola and his TLT

TLT emerged at the beginning of the 1970s from the creative and technical skills of an Italian flyfisherman, Roberto Pragliola. As is frequently the case when an abrupt change appears in a field with well-established rules and skills, this fly-casting technique was criticised and experienced a difficult beginning. Many people misunderstood (or deliberately rejected) this novelty, believing that everything in the 'flycasting world' had already been discovered and that classical casting did not leave room for further discussion and improvement. However, as in any evolutionary processes, time determined the viability of change. After more than 40 years, TLT persists. Today, TLT is one of the most inspiring fly-casting techniques for flyfishermen throughout Europe, and TLT fly-casting schools have developed casting courses in many countries since 1980. TLT has been the topic of hundreds of articles and several books. Even the United States has been influenced. Over the years, Roberto Pragliola has acted on the Casting Board of Governors of the Federation of Fly Fishers, has visited several North American fishing trade fairs and shows to illustrate his casting technique, has been a guest of Mel Krieger at the prestigious San Francisco Club Pacific 2000, and has received recognition from well-known professionals, such as Bruce Richards, formerly of Scientific Anglers, and Steve Rajeff, when Roberto projected a Loomis rod specifically conceived for his technique.

With the help of technical images, I will introduce the stimulating and novel perspective of fly casting promoted by the TLT, which has been defined as 'the technique that starts where the other ones end'.

Line speed and angular trajectories

The essence of the TLT is based on a relatively simple concept. The energy that can be transmitted to the line during the cast is limited; this limit has been reached by other fly casting techniques. Consequently, real progress in fly-casting technique does not entail, for example, the search for a different or heavier rod/line, which may produce longer casts and/or better presentation. Rather, progress involves more efficient use of the energy that can be produced during a cast and a better way of preserving it, with the aim of achieving (when necessary) extreme line-speed.

Why is it so important to retain most of ➳

Silent landing

1. High speed casts allow freedom from the line weight and, consequently, use extremely high-performing casting trajectories. The fly and the tip are already on the water surface while the leader and the line are still in the air (A). In this case, the landing of the line will be silent because, as a result of the angular trajectory, the portion closer to the fly will land close to the surface. This is crucial in still water. In addition, the angular trajectory permits both the leader and the fly to go deeper under vegetation (B).

the energy developed during the cast and to produce extremely high-line speeds? Increasing the speed of the line to the limit allowed by current materials allows us to use casting trajectories (and, consequently, fly presentations) that are not possible if we depend entirely on the weight of the line. If we primarily cast by using the weight of the line, we are confined to (i) casting more or less parallel to the water surface and (ii) passively waiting for the descent of the line on the water at the end of our last forward cast and the even more passive descent of the leader and the fly. By accelerating the line, we become free of its weight (and we can cast lighter weight more efficiently), and we can model the line on different trajectories. This acceleration automatically affects the leader, making this the most useful tool for diverse fly presentation: the energy retained before landing allows for better control of its trajectory and positioning on the water surface.

One of the most thrilling TLT casting trajectories is the angular one expressed at very high speeds, where the speed of the line allows the fly (mainly dry flies, for which the weight does not limit the casting possibilities) to reach the water before the line (and, if needed, before the leader) at a relatively high casting distance (more than 15m [45 ft]). This means that the fly begins to be presented to the fish before the line touches the water (consequently reducing drag). Due to the inclination of the line, the line does not reach the water from a considerable height, but rather from a few centimetres (mainly the section closer to the fly), reducing the noise of the line landing on the water surface. Another aspect of the angular trajectory is the extreme control over the precision of the fly presentation. We cast directly onto the target because our line is not deploying on a parallel trajectory above the water, and the energy we retain across the entire casting step is able to tension the leader until the fly touches the water. That is, we do not passively await the descent of the fly at the end of our cast. Imagine the potential of angular casts during windy days and/or on still waters, when even minimal disturbance of the surface may alarm fish.

Finally, the control of the leader due to the saved energy transmitted along the line allows for several different fly presentations as a function of the shoot (delayed or anticipated). We are able to control which portion of the leader touches the water first. How can we generate this high casting speed? By concentrating the energy in a very short, spatio-temporal bracket along the entire forward cast. This means that the hand must accelerate the line by pressurising the grip in the shortest space. This acceleration is benefited by the peculiar TLT method of holding the grip: enveloping the reel between the palm and all of the fingers except the thumb, the pressure of the thumb determines most of the speed of the line at the end

Tighter loops

2. The combination of extremely high speed and energy during the cast creates particularly small and tight loops (A) and the ability to reach extremely difficult fishing spots silently and with high precision (B).

of the last forward cast. Moreover, the peculiar acceleration that TLT conveys to the line in a very short space over the entire cast path forms an amazingly tight loop. As we will see in more details later on, this loop is a crucial element for (i) minimal dispersion of the energy accumulated during the cast; and, (ii) efficient control of the leader, which does not land passively on the water at the end of the cast.

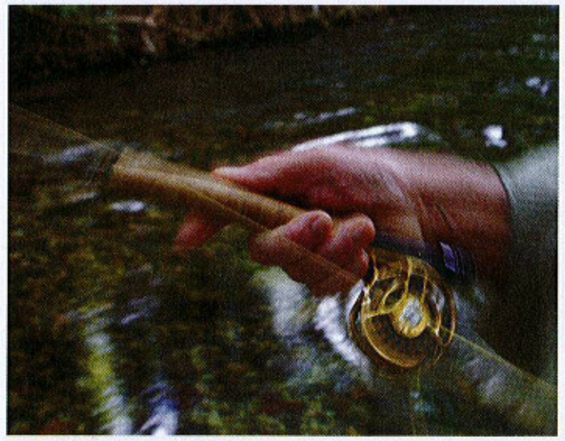
Consequently, both high casting speeds and extremely tight loops allow lighter equipment to be used, because we do not need the weight to cast. This is why the TLT has frequently been associated with relatively short, but extremely strong, rods (say, 7.5-8 feet) and light (#3-4) DT lines. But this does not mean that the TLT is a casting technique only for short rods and light lines. All of the TLT casts can be performed with a 9-foot rod with a WF 8 line, but this is unnecessary. Over the years, especially in the last decades, several other casting techniques and well-known casters have introduced greater acceleration and power into the original basic cast. The results have conceptually approached some of the elements of TLT, but these approaches have never obtained similar technical performance (as evidenced by the uniqueness of Roberto's casts). The angular trajectory (in its range of speeds, from extremely high to extremely low speeds) is the foundation of many novel presentations specifically designed to reduce drag; consequently, these presentations are extremely effective in running waters.

The secrets of a 'razor' loop: the TLT perspective

The most efficient cast is the one that is able to create the best loop. What is the best loop? Undoubtedly, a tight loop. However, the best loop is not necessarily the tightest one. A high-speed 'razor' loop is the most advanced loop that it is possible to shape with a fly line. How is it possible to execute this high performance manoeuvre? Such performance simply requires a perfect combination of wrist rotation and thumb pressure. Thumb pressure is the origin of most of the line speed at the end of the last forward cast, and this razor loop is one of the main features of the TLT flycasting technique of Roberto Pragliola.

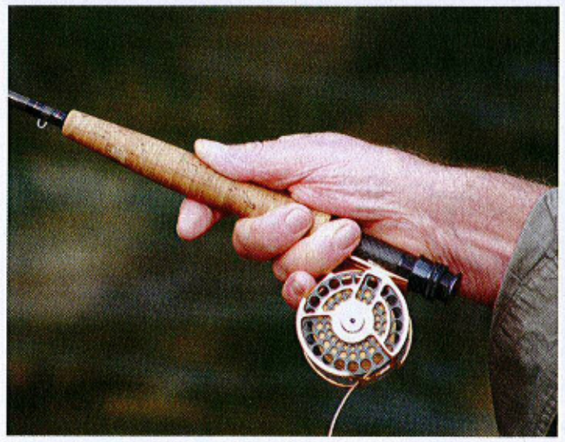
How can we generate this unique loop? Again, the loop is created by both concentrating the energy in a very short spatio-temporal range along the forward cast and the TLT way of holding the grip. From a technical point of view, it is also essential to apply the final thumb pressure to the grip at the very end of the forward cast, when the rod is at approximately 45 degrees, and after a very long acceleration initiated with the rod behind the fly fisher and nearly parallel to the water surface. In addition, the thumb pressure needs to be applied suddenly. In fact, the loop is not shaped by the whole trajectory of the rod during the forward

The power of the thumb



Dynamic perspective of the hand and thumb position at the point of maximum acceleration of the line, just before the sudden thumb pressure that will start to shape the razor loop.

Detail (from below) of the hand and thumb position at the point of maximum acceleration of the line, just before the sudden thumb pressure that will start to shape the razor loop.



Detail of the hand and thumb position at the beginning of thumb pressuring, when the razor loop starts to be shaped due to the sudden thumb pressure.

Dynamic perspective of the hand and thumb position at the moment of the shoot.

cast, but is a direct consequence of the space traversed by the rod tip solely during the application of thumb pressure! Because rapid pressure can only occur for a short time, (1) the rotation of the rod tip at that moment will be very limited (the tip will be displaced between two points that are extremely close) and, consequently, (2) the loop will 'lose' its rounded shape to shift into the cuneiform shape, typical of the razor loop. Such tight loops are a combination of an extremely high speed and energy during the last forward cast. These properties are easily obtained if the entire cast develops in a wider arc, the 180 degrees characteristic of the TLT. Accordingly, if our forward cast (i) starts with the rod behind us almost parallel to the water surface and (ii) ends with the rod again parallel in front of us, the thumb pressure will act on a line that is moving very rapidly in the air because of the large space we have used for its acceleration.

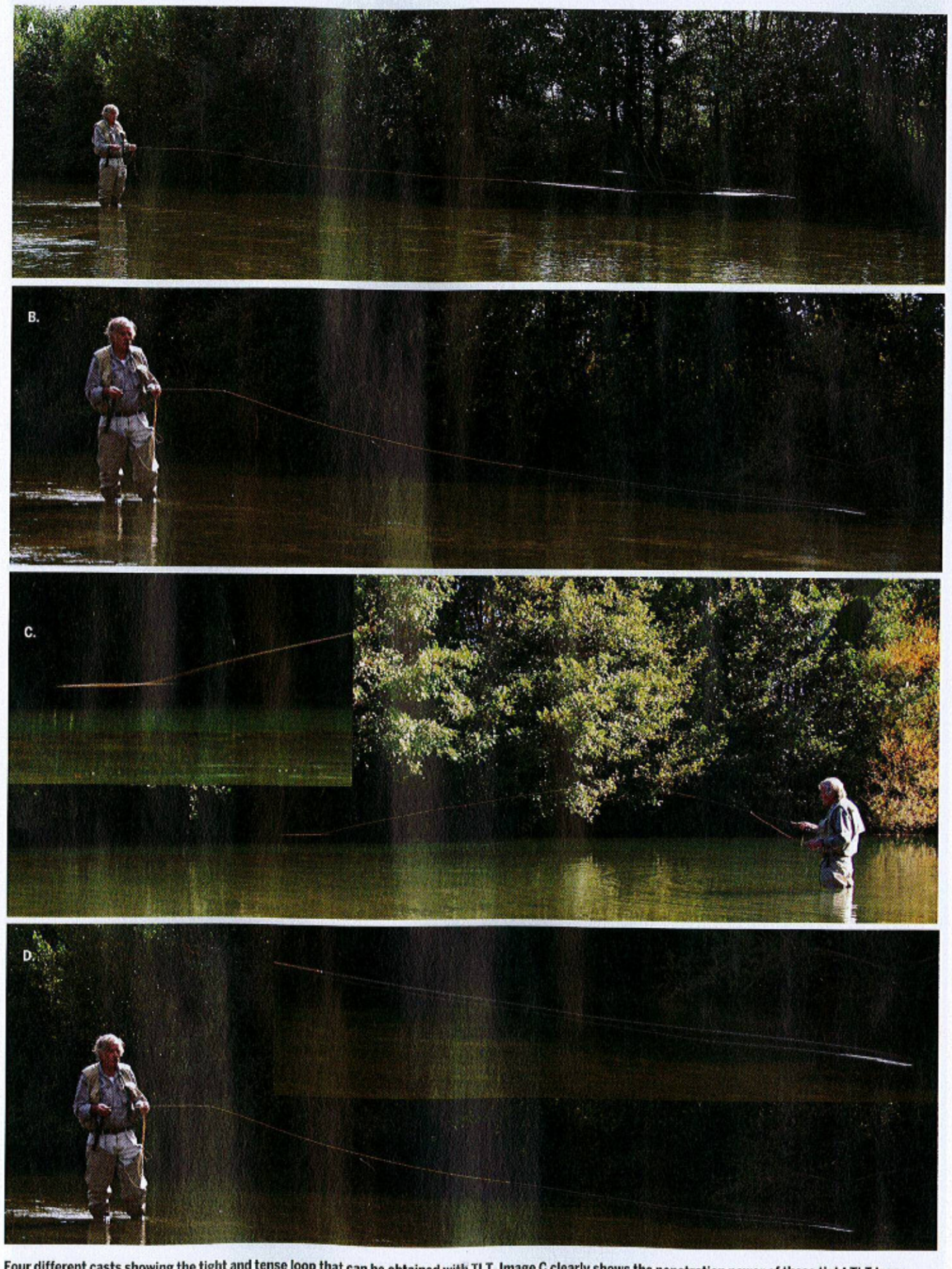
> 'THE TYPICAL TLT GRIP ALLOWS THE THUMB TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF THE WHOLE HAND AND, CONSEQUENTLY, TO ASSUME A PRINCIPAL ROLE IN THE CAST.'

The classical methods of fly casting have generally overlooked the crucial role played by the thumb in shaping an effective loop. In fact, the thumb is primarily used in a constant manner across the entire forward cast in a way similar to that associated with the line acceleration. The line's speed and thumb pressures never vary. If they happen to change, this change is simply a function of the different lengths of the cast. However, this is not a 'modulation' of both pressures and speeds; it is simply a differential use of force. The typical TLT grip allows the thumb to act independently of the whole hand and, consequently, to assume a principal role in the cast.

TLT casts, trajectories and presentations

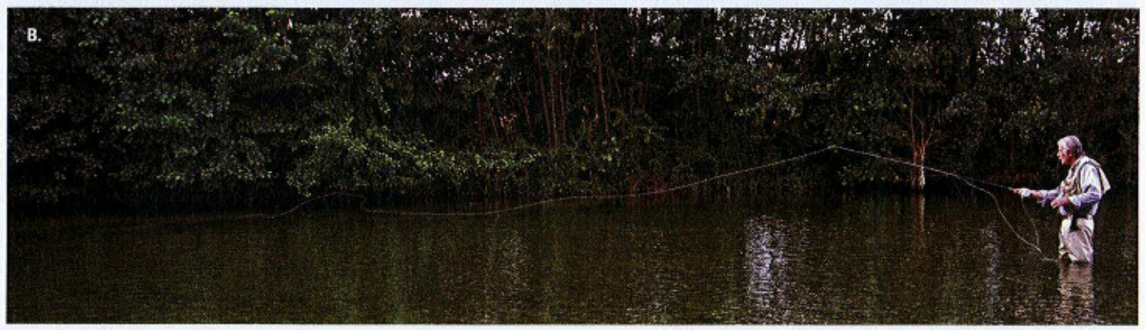
TLT is unique in developing a large number of different casts, as well as fly and leader presentations that are extremely effective when fishing, which are largely unknown among the classical casting techniques. It is unrealistic to expect the problems of fly fishing to be solved without an adequate number of specific casts. TLT casts range from very slow to high-speed casts, depending on the features of the fishing spots. TLT casts follow four main trajectories: (1) angled, which also include the

Cast control



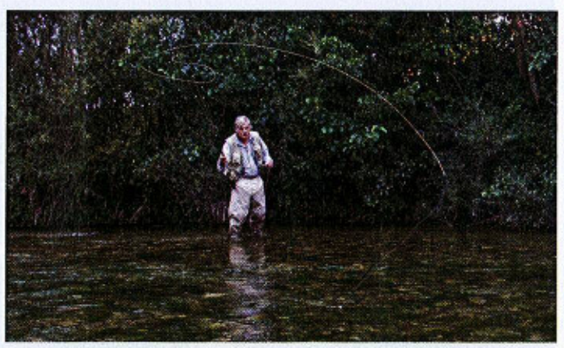
Four different casts showing the tight and tense loop that can be obtained with TLT. Image C clearly shows the penetration power of these tight TLT loops under obstacles, especially if the loop is shifted on a horizontal plane as is typical of one of the TLT casts, the 'under-tip' cast.

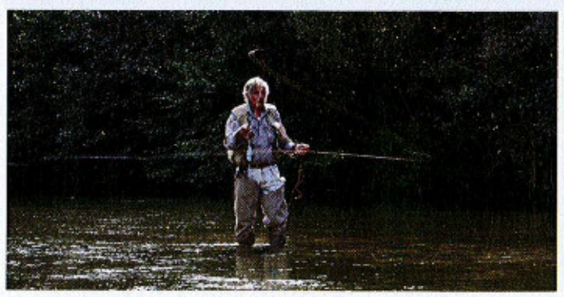
Drag delay

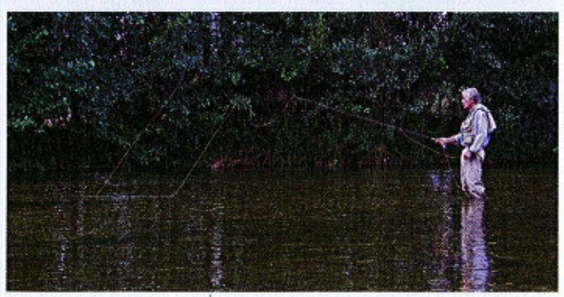


Two examples of how the angular trajectory delays drag. First, the fly is already fishing when the line has not yet touched the surface. Second, due to the high energy of the cast, when the leader lands on the water, some portions of the line groups into several spirals (A) or accumulates within the same spot (B), which delays the moment when the fly is taken away by the stream.

Silent Spey casts







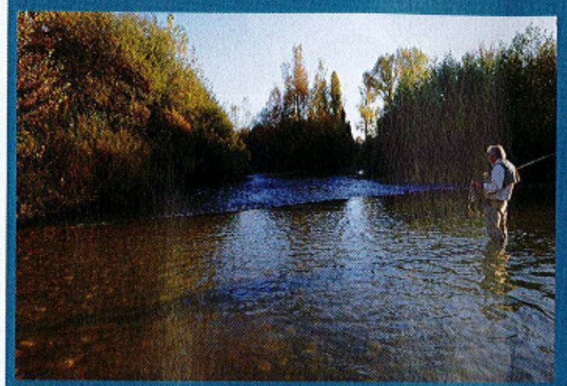
A limited sample of the TLT casts that use wavy and rotatory trajectories to form a delayed drag cast with obstacles behind, and silently lift the fly off the surface.

TLT angular basic cast, (2) parallel, (3) wavy or undulating, and (4) rotatory.

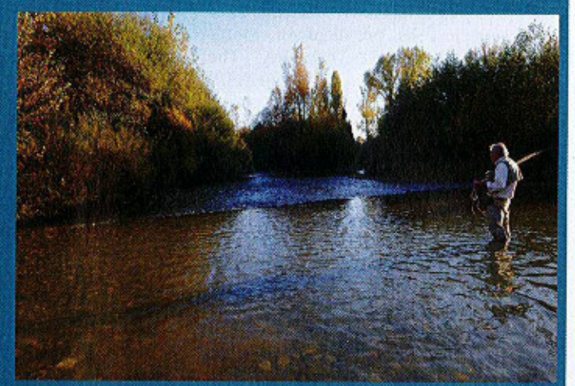
In the dynamic and changing world of fly fishing, a significant step forward in the evolution of fly casting must introduce novel casts and presentations that are appropriate for every situation, allowing fishing in every type of water. TLT, by combining (a) the four principal trajectories of a line, (b) a huge range of line speeds and (c) the active control of the leader, has opened a new window onto the world of fly fishing and some overlooked aspects of the cast, and it has enhanced the perception and enjoyment of the diversity of flycasting.

Vincenzo Penteriani is a Spanish biologist and an overseas area secretary for the Grayling Society, as well as a keen pike fisher.

The main steps of the TLT angular cast

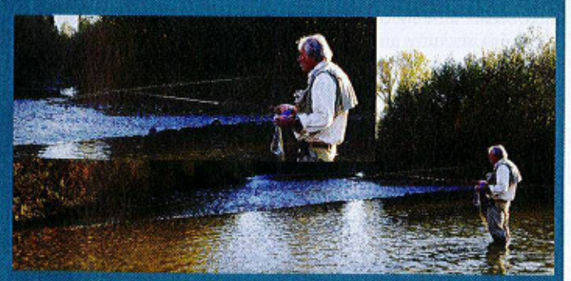


STEP 1.



STEP 2.

STEP 3.



STEP 4.

The forward cast begins with the rod at a position of ca. 180° (Steps 1 and 2) in relation to the water surface, which allows the rod to move in a wider arc and, consequently, produces more energy and speed. Several loops of line are held in the left hand, ready to be shot at the end of the cast. Long shooting is a determinant of distance and better control of the energy that arrives through the leader. The tiny and powerful loop of the forward cast begins to take shape (Step 3). The bending of the rod shows the enormous amount of energy that has accumulated since the beginning of the cast. During the development of the forward cast (Step 4), the loop is still tight and small, preserving all of the energy accumulated since the start. The portion of the line between the ring closest to the grip and the left hand retains energy that will allow for a long shoot. The TLT grip on the rod is also shown. The fly lands on the water while the line is still moving (Step 5). At this moment, the (delayed) shoot is begun, which will allow for both distance and an extremely quiet landing of the leader on the water's surface.

STEP 5.