



THE MAGIC THREADS OF
SEMPERFLI

Success isn't something that simply comes your way. It is earned through putting in the long miles, learning hard lessons, and having the passion and persistence to succeed. TCFE's International Field Editor at Large **HANS VAN KLINCKEN** tells the story of one such a company.

I met Ann and Andy Kitchener many years ago during one of the Spring Fly Fishing Shows in the UK which always got so well organised by Steve Thornton – a pity that show doesn't exist anymore. During my breaks from giving demonstrations and classes, I like to walk around and meet up with old friends, make new ones and search for some new and interesting materials. At this particular show, Andy was presenting his range of superfine dubbing together with several other unique products he'd invented. I've been working with Fly-Rite's extra fine poly dubbing all my life, and, because I use it for the majority of my dry fly bodies, it always makes me

curious to compare my favourite product with other dubbing materials. The large amount of dubbing in Ann and Andy's booth intrigued me so much that I struck up a conversation with them and, after a lengthy discussion about dubbing properties, Andy showed me some of the other materials he had developed. It was the start of our amazing friendship to follow.

Due to the pressures of my work we lost contact for a few years. However, once I retired in 2012, I was able to spend more time writing, fly fishing, tying flies and visiting more international fly fishing shows again. My two main goals of retirement were to write more, to promote

fly fishing, and to increase my fly fishing and fly-tying workshops with kids to try to keep them away from computers, Nintendo and Play Stations. Everything went smoothly for four years until my main sponsor for the kids' classes let me down. Although I funded a few classes from my own pocket and using my own materials, I sadly had to cancel all the other classes for the rest of the year. Barely two months later, I met up with Ann and Andy again while they were presenting some new materials in their Semperfli booth. Our friendship was quickly rekindled after a few meetings, and when I mentioned my dilemma with the sponsorship, Semperfli was happy to step in

with serious support as the main sponsor for my children's classes.

I have visited the company quite a few times over the years and I've seen Semperfli grow from a small family business to where it is today. I have been an ambassador for their products since 2015, and I know the company and the people behind it all well. In this article, I would like to give you an insider's view of these people behind the scenes, their passion for fly-tying and their magic materials.

ily run business, led by Ann and Andy, their daughter Sarah and partner Thibault Mallier. Each family member has a key role in the company, each running their own divisions.

Ann, as CEO, heads up the company while being responsible for international sales and marketing. I have never seen anybody answering e-mails and letters faster than Ann. Speaking several languages, she is fantastic with social media and recruits and looks after Semperfli's

dealers and distributors around the globe. She is passionate about customer care and is also a keen photographer.

Andy runs the research and development department and is the big innovator of the company, focussing on the continuous development of materials that could make a difference in the tying world. Initially he spent a great deal of time researching the global fly-tying market, where he found too many mediocre products or products that were not specifically designed for fly-tying. Andy is an amazing trouble-shooter. I have also never seen him angry, and he is a typical English gentleman – always in a good mood. He quietly listens to the tips, advice and comments from Semperfli's ambassadors and pro members to keep improving their products. It's not difficult to see that his work is his passion and his knowledge about fly-tying materials, technical background and computers is unreal. He invented his own spooling machines, secret dyeing techniques and other machinery and equipment needed for fast and reliable production. For example, when you dye your own products, there is nothing trickier than colour changes in the threads, chenilles and several other products in your assortment, and the more colours you dye, the greater the risks. Semperfli does all their own dyeing so the techniques are highly confidential.



Above: Semperfli has become the new sponsor for the author's kids classes. Right: The author with Ann, the CEO of Semperfli, testing products while fishing. Main photo page left, from left to right: Team Semperfli's Andy, Ann and Sarah Kitchener, with Tibby Mallier far right.

A TRUE FAMILY BUSINESS

A lot of people may be aware of the Latin saying *semper fidelis* (always faithful) and the abbreviation Semper Fi is the motto of the US Marine Corps. Semperfli chose the name to reflect their dedication to fly-tying. Based in the beautiful county of Yorkshire in the north of the UK since 2010, Semperfli is a manufacturer of fly-tying materials with a drive to establish a quality and innovative range of tying materials that are completely focussed and tailored specifically for the fly-tying market. Semperfli was founded on four cornerstones: quality, innovation, passion and customer service. It is a fam-



Sarah manages the UK and Scandinavian markets specifically and she loves her travels to the Scandinavian countries. She also helps me with the materials for my kids' classes and workshops. Thibault Mallier, better known as Tibby, looks after production and logistics; the division that does the dyeing, spooling, packaging and more. He carefully oversees the products as they are made and dispatched, and having worked with him quite closely, I can vouch that his quality control is superb. Altogether there are 15 people who make the Semperfli magic happen and each person – whether they are running the high-quality spooling machines that turn out thousands of spools every day or packaging the products or picking and packing orders – genuinely has a passion for the products that Semperfli delivers.

By 2014, demand for Semperfli products was increasing. Ann focussed on recruiting partners based on their passion for fly-tying and the Semperfli range of materials – and they absolutely needed to understand and share the four corner-



stones of the brand. That effort has turned into a network of dedicated partners worldwide who sell the Semperfli range to fly-tyers today. These cover countries such as South Africa, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Ire-

land, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, France, Germany, Austria, Romania, Czech Republic, Latvia, Norway, Finland, Netherlands, Argentina, Belgium, Sweden, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and China, to name a few.

Above: Anne with UK Semperfli ambassador Paul Proctor. Below, from left to right: Max, Ben, Tibby and Sarah.



THE LARGER SEMPERFLI NETWORK

Semperfli also has a large group of ambassadors and pro-members across the globe who do a superb job in showcasing the materials. They form a very strong unit and work closely with the team at Semperfli headquarters, even to help decide on product developments and releases. Each year Semperfli hosts the Fly Jam event where all the ambassadors and pro-team members come together either in person or via a massive online conference. During this event everyone reviews and decides together on the planned new products for the following year. It is a very serious happening that coincides with many other fun activities. It is the highlight of the pro team year and it is unique in the fly-tying business globally.

fly-tyers I know uses Nano Silk exclusively to tie their entire selection of commercial Predator flies. It is also ideal for large pike flies and big blue water patterns. The white Nano is used a lot in salt water patterns. I use the very thin 18/0 Nano in my classes for participants that can't handle threads like the fragile Spiderweb, which breaks constantly if you don't know how to use it. In my personal tying, I use Nano Silk mainly for specialised work such as bugs and bombers, mice patterns, certain poppers and big Predator or salt water flies. This is why I call Nano Silk a technical thread as it suits specialised tying work. For all my other flies, I use polyester thread. Just as an aside, remember to only use a ceramic bobbin holder when working with Nano Silk.

use(d) a lot of peacock in my fly-tying, not just for the thousands of Klinkhamers I tie every year but also for many other patterns like those within my large Bondal series of Atlantic salmon flies and my Caseless Caddis series, so my search for the best substitute became a necessity. By developing Straggle String, Andy has produced an alternative to replace the peacock thorax on my Klinkhamers (Klinkhamer Special version 2.0).

PURE SILK THREADS

When just a few months later Andy's pure silk threads became available, I almost jumped table high. I used a lot of traditional silk from a private collection given to me in the early 1980s for special ribbing colouration and segmentation on my mayfly imitations and also for bodies



Above left: Nano Silk. Above right: Straggle String.

SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGHS

The product that catapulted Semperfli and took the fly-tying world by storm is their Nano Silk. It is a GSP type of thread that is virtually unbreakable and reported to be the strongest tying thread on the market (reference: *US Fly Tyer* magazine and *Global Fly Tyer*). Nano Silk gives the fly-tyer absolute confidence knowing their thread won't break. Not only do beginners love it, but also commercial and specialist tyers alike. A few close friends of mine exclusively use Nano to produce their bugs and bombers, which are immensely popular in Atlantic Canada. Nano works really well with deer hair and it's my favourite thread for my deer hair patterns. Another group of professional

WORKING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

With a very conscious and ethical view on the environment, Semperfli focusses its developments into offering a sustainable and responsible synthetic range. This is highly relevant as not all tyers are aware of how CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and IUCN Red List of Threatened Species affects them. Nowadays you risk having your favourite feathers and furs confiscated by customs, being fined, or even worse, if you travel internationally and are ignorant of the laws. For example, the wild green peafowl (*Pavo muticus*) is highly endangered and that's exactly the species we use the most feathers from. I

of my spiders, flymphs and small realistic nymphs. Sadly this thread became obsolete, which meant I couldn't use it in my publications, classes and workshops as I don't like to promote patterns using materials that are not readily available. I literally only had five spools left when Andy launched their new silk thread. It was almost 100% equal in quality to the classic silk I used for such a long time. Today I can once again use silk thread freely in my classes and workshops, thanks to Semperfli.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Andy has made enormous efforts on the second generation of Semperfli spools, the labelling and packaging. He



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also developed completely new specialist clear dispensing boxes for the dealers to have in store – making it easy for spools to be displayed and accessed. Each spool of thread has a super-strong waterproof label on it, created with a ready cut cross for the bobbin, and sold pre-barcoded, which makes everybody's life a lot simpler.

There are so many Semperfli products I can write about, but with space constraints, I would like to highlight their most popular products. Together with ambassador Paul Procter from the UK and some members from the pro team, we tested a new product during the last few months of 2018 like it was a top-secret army project. The subsequent launch of the Classic Waxed Thread in January 2019, really made a massive impact on the fly-tying market since a lot of customers wanted a high quality thread that can



Above left: Micro Glint. Above middle: Iridescent Thread. Above right: Flat Braid.

be split if required, and came in many different colours and sizes. It needed to lie flat for better grip on the hook and it had to have just the right amount of wax. The response to the launch of the Classic Waxed Thread was phenomenal and exceeded all expectations. I've read a lot of the feedback and comments from fly-tyers around the globe, and I was overwhelmed by their positive responses. So much so, that Semperfli's forecast of waxed thread sales for the whole year was achieved in its first quarter!

Phase two of the Classic Waxed Thread range saw the addition of the fluorescent colours, which was further welcomed. To meet this exponential growth, more spooling machinery was purchased. The new specialist equipment can even do touching turns when laying material, including wires on a spool down to a fraction of a millimetre. This means the fly-tyer gets the very best material with no "bird-nesting" or tangling of the thread as it comes off the spool. And there is no standing still for this company as they

continue to innovate and bring us fly-tyers more and more quality materials – all we ever dreamt of. An overview of all the Semperfli materials can be seen in its online catalogue, which is in true Semperfli style, very innovative. Rather than just lists of products, it showcases the materials along with examples of what can be tied with those products. The catalogue includes tying videos, tips from the Semperfli pro team to inspire tyers everywhere. The catalogue can be seen at www.semperfli.us/2019catalog/

