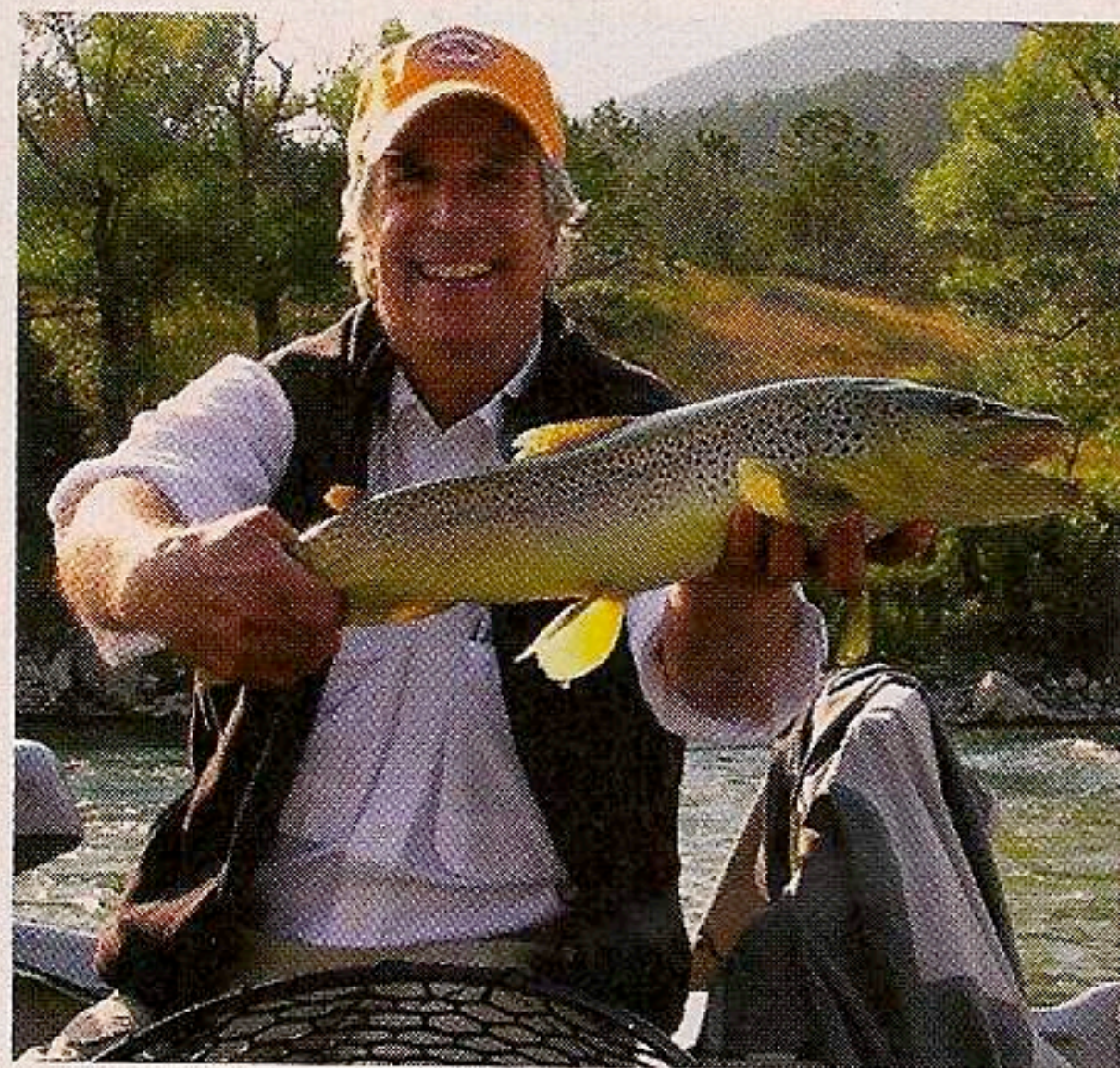


Cool Caster Henry Winkler



THERE IS NO QUESTIONING THAT fly-fishing is cool, particularly when Henry Winkler, Arthur Fonzarelli, The Fonz, has been a dedicated angler since the 1980s. An American icon from his days donning the leather jacket on *Happy Days*, the Golden Globe-winning Winkler has succeeded at every aspect of show business from acting to directing to producing. His recent roles in *Arrested Development* and *Out of Practice* show he's still a prime-time player, though nowadays Winkler channels much of his energy into co-writing with Lin Oliver the children's book series *Hank Zipzer, the World's Greatest Underachiever*, which are based on Winkler's childhood dealings with dyslexia. *Fly Rod & Reel* chatted with Winkler upon his return from England where he was, fittingly, trodding the stage as Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.

How did you get started fishing?

I grew up in Manhattan and we sometimes spent our summers north of Manhattan in Mahopac, but I never really fished. Then more than 20 years ago, my lawyer Skip Brittenham, a famous fly-fisher person, took my wife Stacey and I to Helena, Montana, for four days. We floated down the Smith River and, no pun intended, we were both hooked.

Is Montana where you consider your home waters to be?

We've been going to the Firehole Ranch in West Yellowstone every August for at least 15 years. The Firehole is right on Hebgen

Lake and is breathtaking. The other thing you need to know about Firehole Ranch, except for the guides being fantastic, is that Chef Bruno [Georgetown] is brilliant.

Do you catch something and bring it to him to cook up?

I have never eaten a fish out of the river. I think they are too majestic.

But you like to catch trout?

I dream about it, I talk about it to anyone who will listen. I really find it to be a washing machine for your brain. It's really Zen. It's either you are calm as you can possibly be or you will never catch a fish.

Do you ever lose your cool?

No, but I'm always competitive with myself. I want to get the fly in the right place, just under that overhang and not get hung up. When a guide says to me, "Great float," that's one of the great compliments in my life. And the hardest thing in the universe, aside from communicating with your fellow human beings, is keeping that line tension while letting the fly float so it looks natural. Holy mackerel! Mending. Mending. I mend in my sleep.

How would you describe yourself as a fly fisherman?

You know, after all these years, I am still an intermediate. My style, my form is horrible. But my result is okay. I could never, like Skip, enter the One Fly contest and then win it.

Any fly-fishing-gear obsessions?

No, but I must say I am emotionally attached to my green Winston rod—it's so beautiful. At the time when I went to the factory at Twin Bridges there were 25 women who built the rods so I got to meet them. It's just brilliant and I've caught such beautiful fish on that rod.

Is fly-fishing an escape from your stressful job?

That is just a sidebar. I actually like the

interaction in fly-fishing. I have never met an idiot on the river. The guides I have met all over the world are some of the most extraordinary people. All seem to be enthusiastic and encouraging. They are teachers, they are strong-willed and they want you to catch that fish. People in Australia, in Montana, in Wyoming, in Tennessee, have been just extraordinary to me.

Tennessee?

Oh yeah, the Blackberry Farm is one of the great resorts anywhere in the world. They have their own stream on the property and I caught the largest fish of my career there. That one was a brown and he had a name because you couldn't catch him. I went under the bridge day after day after day and finally got him. He was at least 26 inches long; it [took] a hopper and it was at 5:35 in the evening. I'll never forget.

Any trips stick out?

New Zealand was the hardest fishing I've ever done. I was there for 10 days and I caught three fish, but I remember each and every one of them. One of them I could have ridden back to the lodge. He was a big, big boy. It was a brown and he was plump, delightfully plump. I don't remember what I caught it on but every fly that I have caught a good fish on is on some hat.

Other fish come to mind?

I was at [film director and owner of Winston Rods] David Ondaatje's ranch in Montana with Max, my youngest who was turning nine at the time. We went out for the night hatch and we couldn't see, but I heard the slurp of trout feeding. My son said to me, "Come on Dad, I know you can do this." I threw it out there and caught a 16-inch brown on sonar alone. Can I say that that is one of my great accomplishments in any area, outside my children, of my life? Still, I'll be driving in the car and I'll go back to that moment, remembering my son saying you can do it and catching that fish, and I smile like I am possessed. ✨