

Bookshelf . . .

the book at home. But in the meantime *The Fly Fisherman's Streamside Handbook* will serve its stated purpose very well.

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Rod, Reels and Georgia Fatwood

The Orvis Story by Austin Hogan and Paul Schullery. The Orvis Company, Inc., Manchester, Vt., 1980; 93 pp., \$8.75 (paperback).

IF YOU WALK INTO THE ORVIS retail showroom in Manchester, Vermont, bringing with you a fondness for fine sporting gear and the many accoutrements of the well-heeled outdoor life, I can almost promise that you'll be dazzled. You'll find a stunning array of merchandise from fly-tying materials to fly rods to loop-optic cocktail glasses to a super-efficient kindling known as Georgia fatwood.

I visit the store frequently—I live just down the road—and have been visiting the place for many years. I can remember going to the old rod shop as a youngster to have my father explain to Orvis rod maker Wes Jordan how the kid managed to break *this* one, and asking if the rod could be repaired. It usually could, and usually at no charge. Even so, I am still dazzled by the wealth and variety of products housed in the showroom.

If you haven't visited this store, you can still be dazzled by the Orvis catalog, which offers the products for sale through the mail. The Orvis catalog and the mail-order business is the way in which most anglers have come to know the Orvis name. Or you can visit the newly opened showroom in San Francisco, or wait a few months and visit the one planned to open in Houston.

The Orvis Story is a short corporate history published by Orvis in commemoration of its 125th birthday. The book is not a handbook about how to stay in the fishing-tackle business successfully for over a century (though you can glean some pointers); rather it traces, as the dust-jacket copy reads, "the story of American fishing and fishing tackle as seen through the progress of one vital and colorful company." Such an approach provides good reading for fly fishermen interested in the heritage of their sport.

The co-authors of this book are both historians affiliated with the Museum of American Fly Fishing. But the book is not

a simple arrangement of names and dates, for there are interesting twists to the company's history. For example, there is the story of the glass minnow trap and the manufacture of ski poles—products you wouldn't normally associate with a company that is essentially committed to fly-fishing—and how these items helped support the company in the 1940s. And there is the story telling how current company owner Leigh Perkins almost landed in jail as a result of establishing a source of Chinese cane for fly rods during the trade embargo with communist China. And you might wonder how a fishing-tackle company grew from producing fly rods to market at the low end of the price range to producing fly rods considered among the finest (and most expensive) available—and also to offering clothing whose label is gaining ground in some circles on the Brooks Brothers and Saks Fifth Avenue labels in, well, ah, *desirability*.

But there are important historical aspects to the company's past in the form of tackle innovations that have had a large impact on the tackle we use today. Notably, there was the Orvis reel—the first narrow-spool, ventilated fly reel—that was conceived by company founder Charles Orvis and first offered in 1874. There was also the Orvis impregnation process that makes rods impervious to heat and moisture damage; the patent for this process was made in Wes Jordan's name and assigned to Orvis in 1950. Other innovations include the Orvis CFO fly reel, the first fly reel to offer an exposed rim for the application of palming drag. *The Orvis Story* might easily have been published by someone other than Orvis and justified its existence as a book.

Co-author Paul Schullery told me in a recent interview that once the surprisingly extensive and complete selection of photographs for the book had been located, it was apparent the book should be produced in a "photo-album" style. The concise text you can read comfortably in an evening, but the photographs depicting Orvis history are cause to linger long and pensively. Portraits of Charles Orvis, Mary Orvis Marbury, Wes Jordan, and other Orvis personalities are included as well as scenes from the early fly-tying room where Mary Orvis Marbury oversaw the fly-tying of her female staff, scenes of Manchester, Vermont, in the "old days," and, of course, scenes of Orvis tackle in use throughout the world. Also included is black-and-white artwork.

The book design, by Randall Rives sets off the photographs and enhances the book with the same tastefulness that most people associate with the Orvis name.

I am glad, most of all, that the book points out the company's serious commitment to supporting nonprofit conservation organizations. In a quiet but significant way, Orvis has supported such organizations as Trout Unlimited, the Federation of Fly Fishers, the Ruffed Grouse Society and the Museum of American Fly Fishing. Contributions of time and services have accompanied financial contributions to such organizations by Orvis—and by other leading fly-tackle manufacturers—and this participation by "big business" is as encouraging to this angler as the sight of wild trout feeding on a healthy hatch of mayflies.

CRAIG WOODS