

Blockhead Foam Poppers

Tying Foam Blockhead Style Bass Poppers

By Brad Miller | FlyBass.com

The light weight foam blockhead popper is now a standard “go to” popper for many surface loving bass devotees. The unique blockhead shape provides stability to avoid “listing” or rolling to one side. They are easy and fast to tie and don’t require a lot of extra finishing work.



These poppers work better than any other common type of popper, such as hair-bugs, wood or plastic bodies. They work equally well in saltwater for snook, baby tarpon, redfish, and others.

Finding the Foam

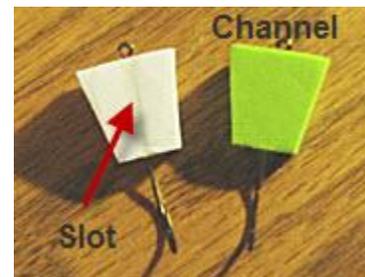
The key is shaping the poly foam to the correct dimensions. While there are plenty of sources for foam material, blockhead shaped bodies have not been available commercially until recently. Many folks buy sheets of foam and cut bodies with a band saw, using homemade cutting jigs.

Experiment until you get the size and proportion that rides correctly in the water. Remember the key here is getting the front angled at a slight 5 -10 degree slant; and the top profile to slope down to one half to two thirds of the front face height.

(Shown above - left)

Blockhead Shaped Popper Bodies (shown above - right)

There are now [commercially pre-shaped blockhead bodies available](#). These bodies are correctly proportioned in all dimensions to float correctly. We will now cover how to prepare either type of body.



Hooks: Kinked shank Mustad 33903 sizes #6 - #2. Size #4 is the best all-around size. The kink shank provides a more solid construct. For saltwater applications, the TMC 8089NP works well, though heavier and lacking the kink of the Mustad. The key is to ensure the hook shank is long enough to extend well beyond the butt end of the body.

Body: Foam Polyethylene Block-shaped and tapered in three planes (front, top and sides).

Tail: Choose from: Marabou, Bucktail, Squirrel Tail, or Saddle Hackle, Synthetics, or Flashabou. I prefer a stiffer material that will not foul around the hook shank when wet.

Hackle: Colored saddle hackle, Estaz, or anything you want.

Eyes: Any commercially available stick-on or glue-on type eyes.

Hole Placement:

You can create SLOT or CHANNEL to hold the hook.

Slot Cutting: We refer to a slot as a longitudinal cut or slice. It is critical to get a precise, balanced center cut on the bottom about ¼” deep into the bottom or ventral aspect of the body. Use a razor blade, Exacto knife, mat knife or other extremely sharp instrument and simply eyeball the cut. You want the hook shaft to be near the bottom, and inset about an 1/8 inch, with enough foam below the hook to pinch it to a tight seal.

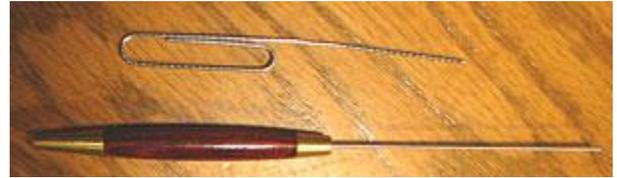


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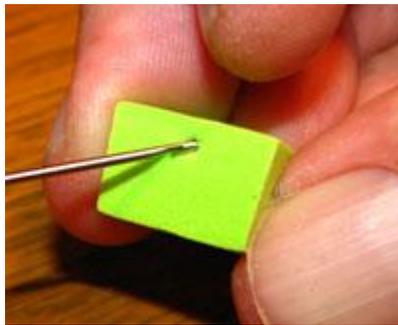


Channel Hole Punching : A hole can also be bored or punched through the popper body to house the hook. A well positioned center hole provides a properly aligned channel for the hook shank and exposes less glue and a minimal interface, making for a cleaner fixation.

Use a fly tying tool or a large paper clip as a punch. You may find your own method of placing a hole. Some folks set up a Dremel tool with a 1/32" drill bit and drill them out. Shown is a large ribbed paper clip and a Rainy's E-Z Bobbin threader, [available here](#). Other boring tools work well, just make sure not to make the channel too big.



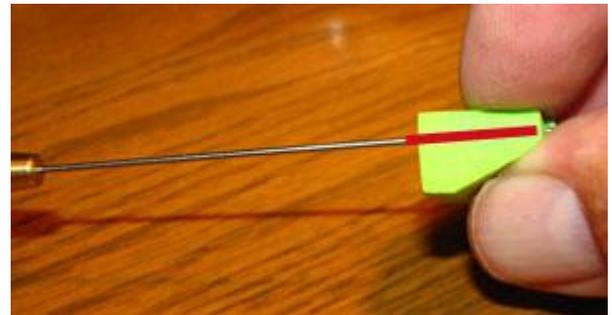
The technique to get a proportionally balanced hole is important. Here's how we do it.



Place your punch at the precise point on the popper body face positioned for the proper depth, usually about 1/8" up from the bottom, as shown.

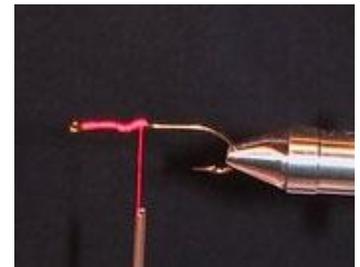
If you place it too close to the bottom, you'll get a ridge that will emerge when the hook shank is driven into the hole.

The critical part comes next. You then turn the popper and punch to the side to keep it aligned correctly when pushing the punch into the body of the popper. See inset right.



A bit of practice and you'll get the holes coming out straight every time. If you are out of alignment, simply redo the hole until you get the correct track. I find by placing extra pressure and aiming the tool slightly away from me, as I insert it into the popper body, it comes out perfect. I do not know why, it just works.

Step Two: Wrap thread around the front half of the hook shank. This is to provide an interface for the glue to help hold the foam to the hook (use some old thread). Wrap the thread back and forth three or four times. It's smart to wrap a bunch of hooks at one sitting.



Step Three: Apply a bead of quick drying super glue along the thread wrap.



Step Four: Spread the sliced area and mount the popper body on the shaft. This is best done on a rotating vise. I start the fly upside down (180 degrees) and roll it upright allowing the glue to better coat the inner slot. You only have a few seconds to orient it properly, so make sure you check for the proper depth - both fore and aft on the shaft. A rotational vise makes it easy to view different planes of the assemblage to ensure proper placement.

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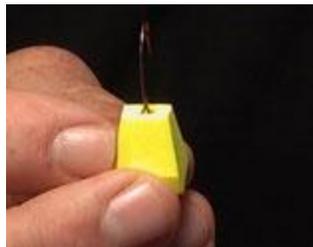
Gluing Tip: Take a tip from orthopedic surgeons who know - **pressure applied to any glue or cementing process is critical to eliminating air bubbles and dramatically increasing the bonding process and durability of the junction. Always apply pressure when possible as suggested in the steps below.**



Step Five: For the Cut Body, squeeze the foam together applying pressure to close the gap under the hook as best you can. Flip the popper upside down or rotate on your vise and apply more Zap-A-Gap to the outside seam. This is optional and not used by all tiers. This helps solidify the fly to the hook and takes out any irregularities in the bottom contour. Use thin quick dry glue and run your finger over the seam, after applying the glue, to keep the surface flat.



Step Five: For the Channel-Hole Popper Body, slide the popper onto the hook shank and rotate 360 degrees twice, as you push it back toward the rear of the shank. This will allow the glue to coat all sides of the hook on to the tread interface. **Position the**



body so only the eye of the hook emerges from the front face.

I also tip the body “butt-up” and apply a bead of super glue to the shank. It will run down into the rear hole of the channeled body and provide added durability for the fly. Hang them in this position and allow them to dry thoroughly.

Step Six: Next apply the eyes by rotating the body on its side and applying the **eye** with a drop of glue (two-part epoxy works better than traditional super glues; and the gel super glue works better for eyes). Use a tweezers or hemostat for precise eye placement. If you use your fingers for eye placement, they will get glue on them and the whole process becomes quite messy.



Step Seven: Apply tail material which can be just about anything. I really like squirrel tail because it's stiffer than marabou and doesn't twist around the hook. I like marabou because of the sexy action, but it will foul around the shaft. The length of the tail should extend the length of the shaft, beyond the rear of the hook. Experiment with other materials.

Tip: Road Kill Popper Fly Material

When was the last time you saw a dead squirrel on the road? Yesterday, right? I carry a wire cutter in my car for road kill squirrels. Snip the tail at the base and nail it to the wall inside your garage for several months until dry. You can buy tails at fly shops or online, as well.



Step Eight: Apply hackle or other material palmering (wrapping one turn in front of the previous) forward. Stroke back the fibers before the each wrap. This will keep the hackle fibers angled backward and - out of the way. You can throw a couple of half hitches or whip

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finish to end - just behind the body. A drop of head cement will only help to solidify any fly construction. When using heavier hooks, apply more hackle to aid in proper flotation.

That's it! They are so fast to tie. You can knock out 20 or more in a few hours. Prepare these flies in stages to save time. One night, wrap the hook shanks with thread, the next night mount all the bodies, etc.

Yellow, White, Green (Lime or Chartreuse), and Black are always the mainstay colors with yellow being an all time favorite.

Shaped channel bodies are available now online at FlyBass.biz.

Watch videos on tying foam poppers [HERE](#).

Much of the information here is derived from the eBook: [*Top Ten Smallmouth Flies - How to Tie and Fish Them.*](#)

Get ready to hammer the fish with explosive surface strikes that'll make your blood boil!

P.S.: Want to try something different than a popper for trout-like dry fly action - [check out our Hoppers!](#)

