

The early history of the Hi-Lo plug



In January 2016, when it was too cold in Holland to fish and too hot in Australia to do likewise, Wayne Real and I (Hans van der Pauw) decided to delve into the early history of the Hi-Lo plug: its origins and development in the 1950s. Our e-mails flashed around the world by satellite, while vintage plugs in dusty boxes went the shortest way, by pneumatic post directly through the center of the earth. And here's what we've come up with.

How great would it be to have just one plug that you could use at different depths, according to what circumstances might require. That's what many anglers must have thought in the past. But Göte Borgström, the founder of ABU, decided to try and put this idea into practice. Somewhere in 1952 or 1953 he constructed a plug with an adjustable diving lip. His son Lennart wrote about it in his book 'ABU and Garcia - What happened?' (2006):

"While fishing for pike, my father came up with the idea that it would be very convenient to use the same bait at various depths. On the first prototype, however, the spoon's [= diving lip's] angle changed too easily on impact with the water's surface. Since Åke Murvall happened to have come along on this test-expedition it did not take long before a better design was in place."

The problem with Göte's prototype was that its diving lip worked on friction only. As the plug hit the water, the splash tended to move the lip, resulting in an unwanted position: too deep or too shallow. The man who solved this problem was ABU's engineer Åke Murvall, the same man who had designed the famous Ambassadeur reel in 1951-1952. Åke saw the problem, thought it over and came up with a clicker mechanism that would allow the lip to be adjusted easily, while at the same time it would hold it firmly in the right position when casting and retrieving the plug. This clicker mechanism was clever and with a few minor changes it has worked flawlessly for over 60 years now. The picture below shows the parts of this mechanism. It comes from an early Hi-Lo plug.



The clicker mechanism of an early Hi-Lo plug.

It consists of a spring-loaded ball (a short pin in the original patented design) pressing against a flat serrated part, looking much like a bird's head, which holds the diving lip in its beak. A small axis (not pictured) runs through the 'bird's eye' as well as through both holes in the diving lip and thus fixes everything in its place. Both parts - bird's head and lip - can turn on this axis to adjust the lip and thus change the diving depth of the plug. When this is done and the bird's head turns, the ball clicks over the teeth of the serration. The pressing power of the spring is strong enough to hold the lip in position in fishing circumstances. A patent for this clicker mechanism for Sweden was applied for on October 8, 1953.

PATENT 166 070

BESKRIVNING OFFENTLIGGJORD AV KUNGL PATENT-OCH REGISTRERINGSVERKET



KLASS 45 h:30/10

INT. KLASS A 01 k
ENTTID FRÂN DEN 8 OKTOBER 1953
BEVILJAT DEN 20 NOVEMBER 1958
PUBLICERAT DEN 27 JANUARI 1959

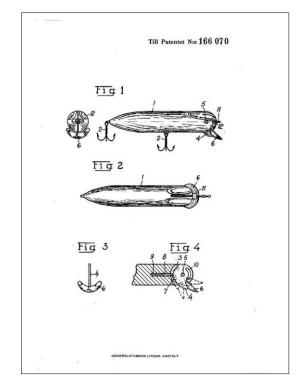
Ans. 8948/1953 den 8/10 1953

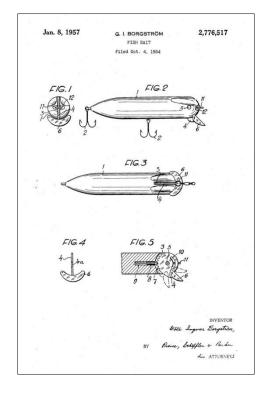
Härtill en ritning

AB URFABRIKEN, SVÄNGSTA ning vid fiskdrag, särskilt s. k. wobblers

— 166 070 —

4. Anordning enligt något av föregående patenlanspråk kännetecknad därav, att armen
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tenlecknad därav, att i aktiva är upptaget ett
erischlänformigt spår, varjämte vid dragkroppens främre ande förefinnes en spåret
285 738.





Above and below left: the three pages of the Swedish patent, 8 Oct. 1953. Below right: the drawing of the USA patent, Oct. 4, 1954. The patents mention as the inventor: Göte Ingvar Borgström. LARGE images of these four pages are added at the end of this PDF document.

The images of the Swedish patent were generously supplied by John Fishkat.

The next year, 1954, Göte Borgström got into contact with the famous American lure company Heddon. This resulted in Göte and his son Lennart visiting the Heddon factory in Dowagiac, Michigan. Heddon was interested in the adjustable diving mechanism and the Borgströms were interested in using the world famous Heddon body shapes for their plugs. The result was a deal between both companies, in which Heddon was allowed to use the patent for the adjustable diving lip which Göte had applied for for the USA on October 4, 1954, while ABU got permission to use two Heddon body shapes for their plugs: the long Vamp Spook and the shorter River Runt. Also ABU received permission to use the Heddon method of painting the plugs, as well as some of the Heddon colour patterns, like the well-known 'pike scale' finish (M) and the 'yellow shore' colour (XRY). Next to that, ABU was granted permission to sell Heddon lures in Scandinavia.

Knowing how all this went about, you can now understand why the original patent drawings for the adjustable plug didn't look like a Hi-Lo yet: the patent for the clicker mechanism preceded the final body design, adopted from the Heddon plugs.



Heddon Dowagiac Minnow, a 'Vamp' model from the 1930s in 'red dace scale' colour (7509N).

What happened next was that ABU and Heddon both started producing these plugs, which consequently made them very similar. ABU brought out the 'ABU Hi-Lo' in Sweden and other European countries in 1955, while Heddon started producing basically the same plug in the USA, marketing it as an adjustable 'Heddon River Runt' or 'Heddon Dowagiac' on the box, while it read 'Heddon ABU Hi-Lo River Runt Spook' on the belly of the plug. The name Hi-Lo, which referred to the plug's high-low adjustability, was thought up by Lennart Borgström. And what other name could have been more appropriate? Over the past 60+ years the name Hi-Lo has even become so familiar that probably very few people will still associate it with the plug's adjustability. It has become a household name. A few years ago ABU even introduced a 'Hi-Lo Jerkbait', which of course wasn't high-low adjustable at all. It was just because the lure had the familiar pike-like Hi-Lo 'face', which is actually a Heddon face - but hey, how many anglers are that historically conscious?

In Sweden and other European countries the ABU Hi-Lo was introduced in 1955 in two sizes: a sinking one of 8 cm at 18 gr and a floating one of 11cm at 26 gr. These two sizes were the only ones available in the 1950's. It wasn't until 1960 when as smaller size was added: a sinking one of 6.5 cm at 12 gr. Two more models were finally added in 1969: a jointed sinking Hi-Lo of 9 cm at 20 gr and a large floating one of 15 cm at 40 gr.

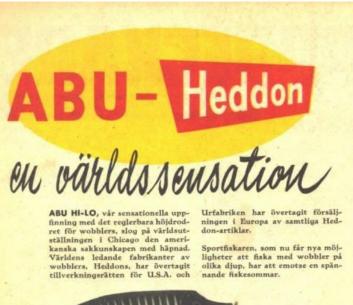


ABU Hi-Lo plug in the scarce XBG colour, 11 cm, made in Sweden.

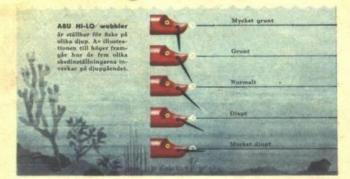
As to the American market, from the information we've gathered thus far it seems likely that the Hi-Lo was produced by Heddon in the USA from 1955 as well, just as in Sweden. This USA made plug was marketed as the 'Heddon Abu Hi-Lo'. It was produced in one size only, the smaller 8 cm at 18 gr plug, probably until about 1961, but it never appeared in the Heddon catalog. From about 1961 until the early 1970's Swedish made Hi-Lo's in the smallest two sizes (6.5 and 8 cm, called 3/8 and 5/8 oz.) were imported and marketed by Garcia. These plugs had 'Garcia ABU Hi-Lo' on the box and 'ABU Hi-Lo Sweden Patent' on the belly. After that (at least from 1974 onwards) Hi-Lo's were no longer distributed in the USA. Len Borgström suggest this may have been because the Hi-Lo's were too expensive for the American market, compared to the similar non-adjustable Heddon plugs, the regular Vamps and River Runts.



Heddon ABU Hi-Lo River Runt, 8 cm, made in USA.



ABU HI-LO med den ställbara skeden, som kan ge denna plastwobbler 5 olika





ABU HI-LO — Flytunde plastwobbler. Denna modell representerar världens populäraste modell för gåddiske. Den är förredd med Urfabrikens stora nyhet för året, den för 5 olika djup ställhara skeden. 8 färger. Längd 110 mm, ykt 20 gr. rikepris kr. 9-50.



ABU HI-LO. Sjunkande plastwobbler med ställbar sked för 5 olika djup. Vid utkastet sjunker den tille inspinningen hörjar, då den automatiskt uppsiker det djup till vilket skeden ogr anvinning. 8 fårger. Långd 80 mm, vike 18 gr, riktpris kr. 878.



ABU - Heddon - RECORD

AB URFABRIKEN - SVANGSTA

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Haddon
Tiny Ruat nr 350,
En sjunkande dvårgwobbler av plast, en perfekt
ministyr av den välkånda "River Runt". Samma fiskliga gång och begjärlig
för all slags rovfisk. 5 fårger. Längd 46 mm,
vikt 6 gr. riktpris kr. 8:--,

THE

Hedden
Punkinseed Spook nr 9631
är en fullständigt ny typ a
sjunkande plastwobbler. Den a
turtrogna färgerna och mönst
ren ha verksamt bidragit til

ren ha verksamt bidragit till fenomenala fångster. 4 färger. Längd 55 mm. vikt 15 gr. riktpria kr. 8-50. Pinns även i lättssinnutförande en 300. Riktreia kr. 8-6-



Hedden Tadpolly Spook nr 9000. Fly-

Jer, som omedelbart dyker till rått djup när inspinningen börjar. 5 färger. Längd 75 mm, vikt 10 gr. riktpris kr. 6:50. Pinns även som sjunkande wobbler i lättspinnutförande nr 190. Oktracis kr. 80.



Heddon

Standard River Runt Spook nr 9110. Sjunkande, transparent plastwobbler med en myeket lockande, kviekt vaggande gång, 6 färger. Längd 63 mm, vikt 12 gr. riktpris kr. 8,50. Finns även som flytande wobbler nr 9400. Riktpris kr 8,50.



Heddon Jointed River Runt Spook nr 93:

Jointed River Runt Spook nr 9330. Sjunkande plastwobbler i samma utförande som nr 9110 fastän delad. 6 färger. Långd 75 mm, vikt 13 gr, riktpris kr. 9.—. Finns även i flytande modell nr 9430. Riktpris kr. 9.—.



Haddon Vamp Spook nr 9750. En flytande plastwobbler, som dyker till es 14 m djup när inspinningen börjar. Den har en mycket apriteretande, vickande gång, 6 färger, Långd 110 mm. vikt 18 gr. riktpris kr. 9.—,

Förglarta für samtliga här arbildade wabblers finns i Napp och Nytt 1955.



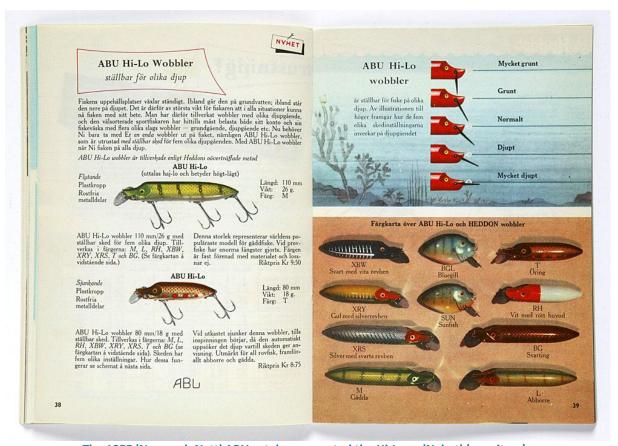
med alla årets store my beter från Urfabriken ulbommer i dagaren. Den är mer änen hundbok, mer än en hundbok, mer än en hat, legt, den är omnbärlig der aportfakuren. Be att få den hos Er handlandg.

A 1955 Swedish ABU advertisement for both ABU Hi-Lo and Heddon plugs: 'A World Sensation'! I reads that the Hi-Lo plugs caused a sensation on the world fair in Chicago that year and that the world's leading plug manufacturer, Heddon, has taken over the rights to produce the Hi-Lo for the USA, while ABU has taken over the rights to sell certain Heddon products in Europe.



An early Swedish ABU Hi-Lo box, stating the plug is adjustable for five different depths.

During the first years of production however ABU made a small mistake with the information on the boxes that they sold their plugs in. On the short side of the box it read: 'Inställbar för fem olika djup' (adjustable for five different depths). The mistake was, that when adjusting the lip from the highest to lowest position, or the other way around, you could hear five *clicks*. But obviously these clicks were in between *six* positions. This mistake - which was later confirmed as such by the former ABU manager Åke Anderson - was also made in the ABU 'Napp och Nytt' catalogs of 1955-1957, the first three years of the Hi-Lo's production. Now you may say: five or six positions, what the heck? But this mistake would have grave consequences. Well grave... It led to the misunderstanding among collectors that the earliest ABU Hi-Lo plugs, or at least some of them, had a 5-position diving lip and the ones from 1958 onwards a 6-position one: because a 'surface' position was then added.



The 1955 'Napp och Nytt' ABU catalog presented the Hi-Lo as 'Nyhet' (new item), stating it was adjustable for five different depths.

Many collectors must have clicked the lips of their early Hi-Lo's to see if they were perhaps lucky enough to own one of these desirable 5-position plugs - I know Wayne has done so! But alas, in vain. Next, it started many collectors out on a wild goose chase. Sometimes desperately, they tried to get hold of such an - apparently extremely rare - 5-position Hi-Lo. However, up to now we have found no specialized Hi-Lo collector who has ever found or even seen one. The simple reason of course is that they do not exist. Whereas the Swedish 1953 patent drawing show a mechanism where a small pin can fall into 7 separate positions, the 1954 USA patent shows 6. And so does the picture shown before, even though it was allegedly of such a rare 5-position mechanism (the sixth 'surface' is beyond the lowest tooth of the serration, in the throat of the bird's head so to speak).



The 1958 'Napp och Nytt' ABU catalog first stated the six adjustable depths. A 'new' feature, you may think?

Just as 'NEW!' as the latest improved washing powder.

There were even theories constructed that explained just *why* a 6-position lip was introduced in 1958. One such explanation was, that after the Hi-Lo's were introduced to the USA market an extra 'surface' position was added because this was considered very suitable for the American technique of 'surface popping' for bass - a technique not known in Europe at the time. A somewhat similar hypothesis may be that although the plug (the 'bird's head' part in fact) was designed for five positions - between the six prominent teeth of the serration - it was actually possible to push the lip one step further down, beyond the last tooth. But this was considered useless and irrelevant, as it would only make the plug slide through the surface, which was not considered a realistic way of fishing for pike in Scandinavia - at least not in the mid-1950s. Therefore only the five useful and purposeful designed positions were advertised on the boxes and in the 1955 through 1957 catalogs. Both these theories can also be combined, if you wish. They may sound plausible and attractive, but remember: they are 'post hoc' theories. And, take it from a historian, with a 'post hoc' theory it's just as with thy neighbour's wife: embrace with caution!

When asked about it by Wayne, Len Borgström remarks on the issue, that he thinks the unintended 'extra' surface position you could push the lip in only became clear when the plug was already on the market for some time, and that's the simple reason why it was mentioned from 1958 on: " One just

found out that one could adjust to 6 different positions, so why not use it?". Len is sure the American style of fishing had nothing to do with advertising a 6th (surface) position and also that "the US market was not big enough for Hi-Lo to have an impact". And he adds: "Wayne, I can guarantee you that the question of 5 or 6 positions never was even discussed at ABU. I know that I never heard about until you brought it up! Great research!"



A highly desirable early ABU Hi-Lo plug: the rare XBG colour in the first version with black diving lip.

There *are* however a few genuine differences between some very early Hi-Lo's and later plugs - apart from the colour patterns. Some colours of the earliest plugs have black diving lips instead of steel coloured ones. Among them are the XBW colour (black with thin white stripes) and the rare XBG colour (brown with thin black stripes). Also the earliest Hi-Lo's in the smaller (8 cm) sizes have narrower, slightly more oval diving lips instead of the broader round ones on the larger models of that time. By the early 1960's the round model was present on all Hi-Lo sizes.



The slightly oval lip clearly shows on this 8 cm Heddon ABU Hi-Lo. (Coll. J. Fishkat)

But here I am already entering Wayne's domain, who knows far more about all these variations that are so delightful to collectors. So for more on the subject you are invited to return to his special Hi-Lo webpage. Meanwhile, I'm off into a Dutch polder. My Hi-Lo's are getting impatient!

PATENT 166 070

BESKRIVNING
OFFENTLIGGJORD AV
KUNGL PATENTOCH REGISTRERINGSVERKET





KLASS 45 h:30/10

INT. KLASS A 01 k

PATENTTID FRÂN DEN 8 OKTOBER 1953 BEVILJAT DEN 20 NOVEMBER 1958 PUBLICERAT DEN 27 JANUARI 1959

Ans. 8948/1953 den 8/10 1953

Härtill en ritning

AB URFABRIKEN, SVÄNGSTA

Anordning vid fiskdrag, särskilt s. k. wobblers

Uppfinnare: G I Borgström

Föreliggande uppfinning avser en anordning vid fiskdrag, som äro försedda med en kring en horisontell, tvärgående axel svängbar styrfena för reglering av dragets djupgående. Uppfinningen har till ändamål att åstadkomma en enkel lagring för styrfenan, och anordningen enligt uppfinningen kännetecknas i huvudsak därav, att styrfenan är fäst vid en arm, som är svängbar i en vertikal slits i dragkroppen och dold i denna.

På bifogade ritning visas en utföringsform av uppfinningen. Härvid visar fig. 1 dels en vy framifrån och dels en sidovy av ett enligt uppfinningen utfört drag, under det att fig. 2 är en planvy av samma drag. Fig. 3 är en vy framifrån av en i draget ingående styrfena samt fig. 4 en sektion genom dragets främre ände

I figurerna är med 1 betecknad själva dragkroppen, som på i och för sig känt sätt kan vara utförd av trä, så att den flyter i vatten. Dess tyngdpunkt är dessutom så belägen, att den strävar att intaga ett läge, i vilket dess symmetriplan är vertikalt. Dragkroppen uppbär på vanligt sätt krokar 2.

Vid dragkroppens 1 främre ände är i symmetriplanet upptagen en vertikal slits 3, i vilken är införd en skivformig arm 4, som är svängbart lagrad på en horisontell axel 5. Axeln 5 är belägen väsentligen i nivå med dragkroppens längdmedellinje. Vid sin fria ände uppbär armen 4 en i föreliggande fall något kupad styrfena 6 under det att det inne i slitsen 3 belägna partiet av armen är utformad med ett med axeln 5 koncentriskt kuggsegment 7. Detta samverkar med ett i en urborrning i dragkroppen lagrat, i slitsen 3 inskjutande stift 8, som påverkas av en fjäder 9, så att dess koniska eller mejselformiga spets ingriper mellan kuggarna eller tänderna på segmentet 7, vilka äro så utformade, att stiftet 8 föres undan vid armens 4 vridning för hand för styrfenans 6 inställning men kvarhåller armen i inställt läge med tillräckligt stor kraft för att förhindra oavsiktlig vridning av densamma.

I det visade exemplet är det i slitsen belägna partiet av armen 4 utformat såsom en cirkulär skiva, som väsentligen helt utfyller slitsen 3. I denna skiva finnes ett cirkelbågformigt spår 10, i vilket är anbragt en ring 11 för fästanordningen för reven. För detta ändamål är dragkroppens främre ände utformad med en urtagning 12 (fig. 1), som frilägger spåret 10. Härigenom erhålles samtidigt en begränsning av armens 4 vridningsrörelse, så att stiftet 8 aldrig kan komma utanför kuggsegmentet 7.

Såsom framgår av ovanstående beskrivning är lagringen och spärranordningen för styrfenan i sin helhet förlagd inne i dragkroppen, vars utseende icke alls påverkas därav. Anordningen är dessutom synnerligen enkel till sin konstruktion men det oaktat mycket effektiv och tillförlitlig. Självfallet kan uppfinningen till sina detaljer modifieras utan att ramen för efterföljande patentanspråk överskrides.

Patentanspråk:

 Anordning vid fiskdrag, som äro försedda med en kring en horisontell, tvärgående axet svängbar styrfena för reglering av dragets djupgående, kännetecknad därav, att styrfenan är fäst vid en arm, som är svängbar i en vertikal slits i dragkroppen och dold i denna.

2. Anordning enligt patentanspråket 1, kännetecknad därav, att armen är utbildad med ett kuggsegment eller dylikt, som samverkar med ett i slitsen inskjutande, fjäderpåverkat stift för armens fasthållning i olika svängningslägen.

 Anordning enligt patentanspråket 1 eller
 kännetecknad därav, att axeln är belägen väsentligen i nivå med dragkroppens längdmedellinje.

4. Anordning enligt något av föregående patentanspråk kännetecknad därav, att armen är utbildad såsom en slitsen åtminstone delvis utfyllande skiva.

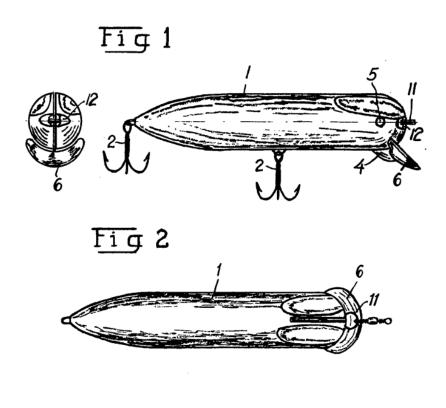
5. Anordning enligt patentanspråket 4, kännetecknad därav, att i skivan är upptaget ett cirkelbågformigt spår, varjämte vid dragkroppens främre ände förefinnes en spåret

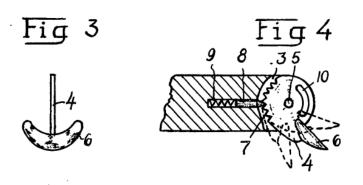
delvis friläggande urtagning för en genom spåret gående ring.

Anförda publikationer:

Patentskrifter från U. S. A. 1 220 921, 2 561 750, 2 578 786, 2 580 733.

Stockholm 1959. Kungl. Boktr. P. A. Norstedt & Söner. 590089





GENERALSTABENS LITOGR. ANSTALT

Swedish patent, page 3

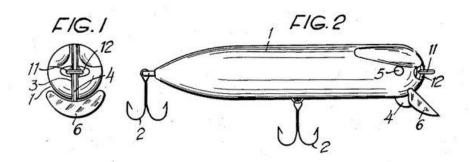
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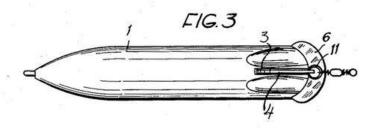
G. I. BORGSTRÖM

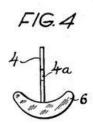
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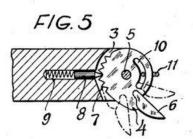
FISH BAIT

Filed Oct. 4, 1954









INVENTOR

Göte Ingvar Borgström,

BY Piece, Schiffler a Packer

his ATTORNEYS