



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 Ambassador 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.

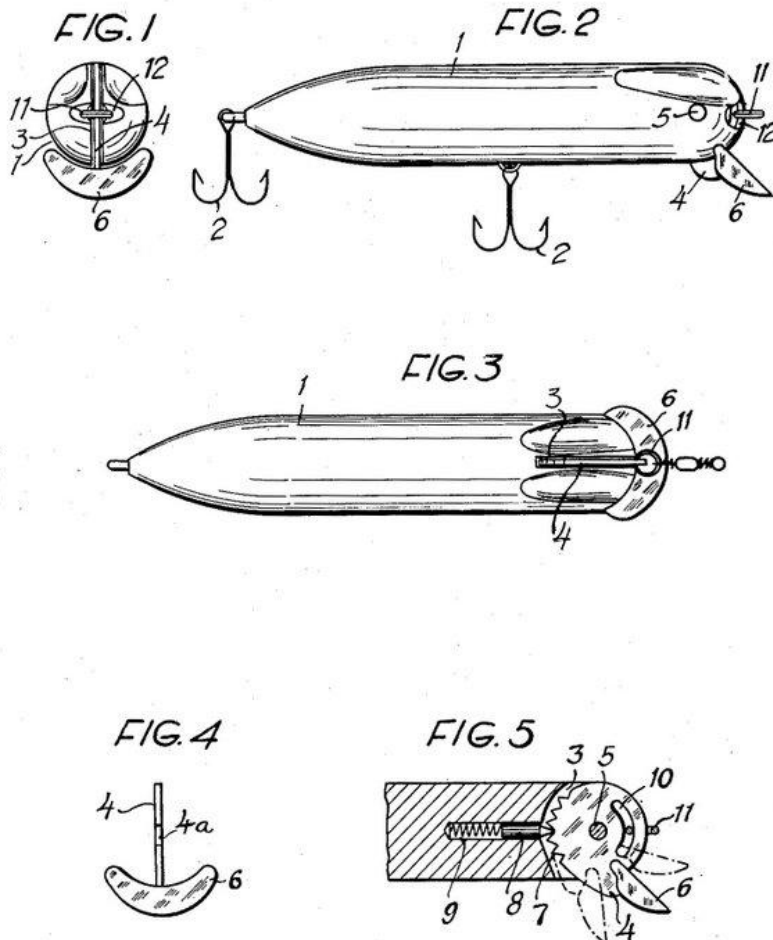
Jan. 8, 1957

G. I. BORGSTRÖM

2,776,517

FISH BAIT

Filed Oct. 4, 1954



INVENTOR

Göte Ingvar Borgström,

BY

Pierce, Schaffler & Parker

his ATTORNEYS

The USA patent for the adjustable fish bait, filed Oct. 4, 1954 and published Jan. 8, 1957. It mentions as its inventor: Göte Ingvar Borgström. We have not been able to trace the original 1953 Swedish patent, but in all probability the drawings on both patents are identical (given also that the pre-Heddon body shape is still present in the USA patent of Oct. 1954).

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 a 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 that the Hi-Lo was made by Heddon in the USA in the second half of the 1950's for just a few years. We've found the plug marketed by Heddon and as the 'Heddon Abu Hi-Lo' and by Garcia as the 'Garcia ABU Hi-Lo'. But neither of these companies ever included it in their catalog. Heddon produced its 'Heddon ABU Hi-Lo' in one size only; the smaller 8 cm at 18 gr plug. And as to the 'Garcia ABU Hi-Lo', that was the name on the box, but on the belly of the plug it read 'ABU Hi-Lo Sweden Patent'. Yet Russell Lewis, in his book *Heddon Plastic Lures* claims this plug was also made by Heddon. Anyway, the production and marketing of the Hi-Lo in the USA in those years was probably a short lived affair and 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 - Heddon

en världs sensation

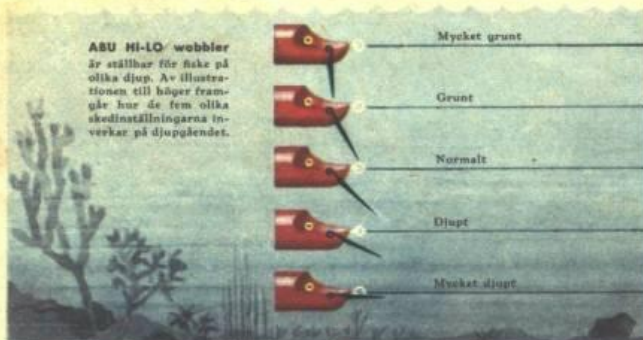
ABU HI-LO, vår sensationella uppfinning med det reglerbara höjdrodret för wobblers, slog på världsutställningen i Chicago den amerikanska sakkunskapen med häpnad. Världens ledande fabrikanter av wobblers, Heddons, har övertagit tillverkningsrätten för U.S.A. och

Urfabriken har övertagit försäljningen i Europa av samtliga Heddon-artiklar.

Sportfiskaren, som nu får nya möjligheter att fiska med wobbler på olika djup, har ett emot en spännande fiskesommar.



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



ABU HI-LO wobbler är ställbar för fiske på olika djup. Av illustrationen till höger framgår hur de fem olika skedinställningarna inverkar på djupgåendet.



ABU HI-LO - Flytande plastwobbler. Denna modell representerar världens populäraste modell för gäddfiske. Den är försedd med Urfabrikens stora nyhet för året, den för 5 olika djup ställbara skeden. 8 färger. Längd 110 mm, vikt 26 gr, riktpreis kr. 9.50.



ABU HI-LO, Sjunskande plastwobbler med ställbar sked för 5 olika djup. Vid utkastet sjunker den till inspinningen börjar, då den automatiskt uppnår det djup till vilket skeden ger anvisning. 8 färger. Längd 80 mm, vikt 18 gr, riktpreis kr. 8.75.



H. M. KONUNGENS HÖVLEVERANTÖR

ABU - Heddon - RECORD

AB URFABRIKEN - SVÄNGSTA

LULEÅ & SÄRLÖFEN JERNVÄRKS, UPPHÄR, SVERIGE 1955



Heddon Tiny Runt nr 350. En sjunkande dvärgwobbler av plast, en perfekt miniatyr av den välkända "River Runt". Samma fiskliga gång och begärlig för all slags rovfisk. 5 färger. Längd 48 mm, vikt 6 gr, riktpreis kr. 8.-.



Heddon Punkinseed Spook nr 9630 är en fullständigt ny typ av sjunkande plastwobbler. De naturligtvis färgerna och mönstren ha verksamt bidragit till fenomenala fångster. 4 färger. Längd 55 mm, vikt 15 gr, riktpreis kr. 8.50. Finns även i lättspinnutförande nr 380. Riktpreis kr 8.-.



Heddon Tadpole Spook nr 9000. Flytande plastwobbler, som omedelbart dyker till rätt djup när inspinningen börjar. 5 färger. Längd 75 mm, vikt 10 gr, riktpreis kr. 8.50. Finns även som sjunkande wobbler i lättspinnutförande nr 390. Riktpreis kr 8.-.



Heddon Standard River Runt Spook nr 9110. Sjunkande, transparent plastwobbler med en mycket lockande, kvickt vaggande gång. 6 färger. Längd 63 mm, vikt 12 gr, riktpreis kr. 8.50. Finns även som flytande wobbler nr 9400. Riktpreis kr 8.50.



Heddon Jointed River Runt Spook nr 9330. Sjunkande plastwobbler i samma utförande som nr 9110 fastän delad. 6 färger. Längd 75 mm, vikt 13 gr, riktpreis kr. 9.-. Finns även i flytande modell nr 9430. Riktpreis kr 9.-.



Heddon Vamp Spook nr 9750. En flytande plastwobbler, som dyker till ca 3/4 m djup när inspinningen börjar. Den har en mycket aptitretande, vickande gång. 6 färger. Längd 110 mm, vikt 18 gr, riktpreis kr. 9.-.

Färgkarta för samtliga här utbildade wobblers finns i Napp och Nytt 1955.

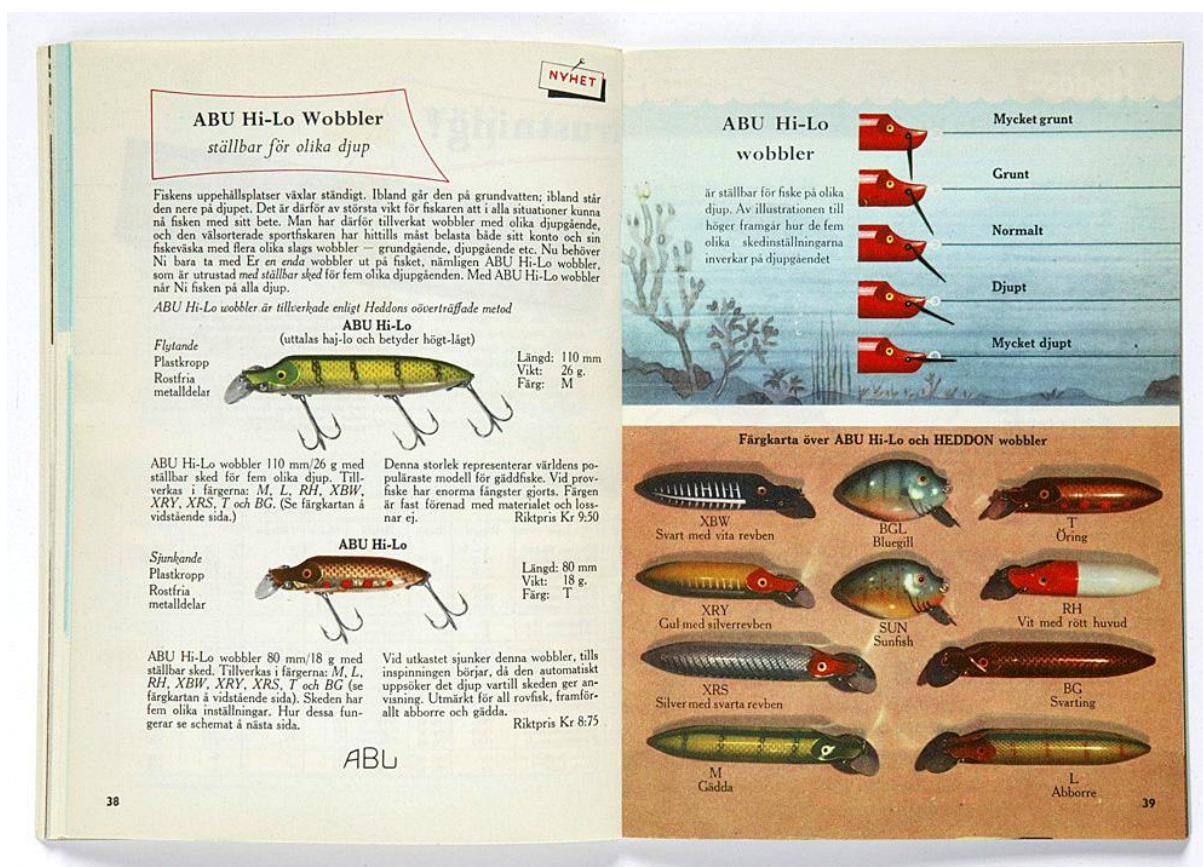


NAPP och NYTT 1955 med alla årets stora nyheter från Urfabriken utkommer i dagarna. Den är mer än en handbok, över all en kat, logg, den är oumbärlig för sportfiskaren. Be att få den hos Er handlande.



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. Even the old patent drawings show a mechanism where a small pin can fall into six separate positions on the serrated turning blade. 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).



ABU HI-LO

Patenterad
ställbar för 6 djup

Den enastående fiskligheten, den ställbara skeden, som söker fisken på alla djup och den oöverträffade kvaliteten har gjort ABU HI-LO till marknadens mest sålda wobblers. I år presenteras en ny sensationsfärg kallad D - doktor A Lithanders hemliga vapen under de senaste åren. Tillverkas i färgerna: D, M, L, T, RH, BGL, XBG, XBW, XRS och XRY.

ABU HI-LO 26 g/110 mm
Flytande, men uppsöker automatiskt inställt djup när inspinningen börjar.
Kr 9:50

ABU HI-LO 18 g/80 mm
Sjunkande, men uppsöker automatiskt det djup vartill skeden anvisar.
Kr 8:75



Årets nya färg D



ABU HI-LO är ställbar för fiske på olika djup. Av illustrationen till höger framgår hur de 6 olika skedinställningarna bestämmer djupgåendet.

Kontrollera att Ni får ABU HI-LO Wobbler i original!

Original Päijänne — den finska

Den välkända finska Päijänne-wobblern presenteras nu i original för den svenska sportfiskaren. Finns i färgerna silver och guld.

Storlekar:
10 g/130 mm Kr 10:—
9 g/110 mm Kr 9:—
6 g/90 mm Kr 8:—

succéwobblern äntligen i Sverige



ABU HI-LO och HEDDON wobblers färgkarta



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.

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! ■