

The Casters' Corner

Investing in your first fly rod

by John Hogg

For local freshwater fishing, I suggest a 9 foot, 5 weight or 6 weight rod. Most are now 4 piece so that they breakdown more conveniently for travel – but 2 piece rods are just fine, and some casters feel that because they have fewer ferrule connections, the casting action of a 2 piece is superior. 5 and 6 weight rods are light and can be cast all day without fatigue. At the same time, they provide enough power to punch through the wind, and they also have the capability to cast a line over 100 feet if the need and skill is there.

The action (stiffness) should be described as “moderate fast” to “fast”. Not “medium action”—that is a term that usually signals slow action, and not extra fast, (usually called tip action).

9 foot fly rods all look alike – they are black with cork handles and have line guides. You can pay from \$19.95 to \$800 for a rod. For starters, you don't need the \$800 rod, but also know that the \$19.95 rod won't work. Good rods can be had in the \$150 to \$200 range from many manufacturers. And if budget is not a factor, go for that high end rod – you will always enjoy it.

We are fortunate to have four excellent fly shops in the area: Kiene's Fly Shop, American River Flyfishing, Fly Fishing Specialties, and Orvis. All of these stores will let you try out their rods, and help match your rod to reel and line so that you have a balanced workable outfit. My experience is that at our local shops, you can get good rods and great rods – but they won't sell you a bad rod.

For a fly line, a “weight forward” tapered line of matched weight to your fly rod is recommended. The line you choose is really important as its length, taper and finish is critical to how the rod disseminates its energy to the fly. Expect to pay at least \$50 to \$75 for a quality line. (Cheap lines really don't work in properly.)

Fly shops often suggest that you over-line your rod, meaning that if you buy a 5 weight rod, they recommend putting a 6 weight line on it. The primary reason for this is that many casters, especially novices have difficulty loading a fast action rod, and the extra weight of a heavier line makes the rod a little easier to cast. If you get this suggestion, have them mount both line weights on the rod, and then you cast and choose which feels best for you.

What kind of reel do you need? For smaller fish the reel serves primarily as a storage device for line. Bringing in the fish can usually be done by retrieving line by hand. But for large fish, the smooth action of a reel, and its braking system become critical for slowing and controlling the quarry. Be forewarned that reels with smooth, efficient drag systems, can get really pricey, and if usage in saltwater is a factor, that also adds to the cost. But to get started, you should be able to find a reliable reel for \$60 to \$150.

You will also need backing which mounts as a filler between your line and the reel arbor. The store should mount all of this for you, and also attach a butt section of monofilament to the end of your fly line. This will be your connection to the various leaders you will need.

And what about building or buying a custom rod?

Thanks to club member Larry Lee who builds upward of 125 rods per year, GBF members have the unique opportunity of helping to build their own custom rod under Larry's watchful eye. And, over the years, between 50 and 100 club members have done just that.

Decisions have to be made as to the rod blank, type and style of handle, line guides, reel seat, and overall styling of the rod. Larry teaches you how to glue up and install the handle, space out the line guides, and mount them. He takes care of all of the epoxying. (Thank goodness.) And I love the fact that Larry won't let you leave with a badly built rod, even if he has to do it all. (Whew!)