Demystifying Spey Casting
An Introduction to Two-Handed Casting

By John Peterson

A working definition of a "Spey cast" involves any cast which water loads the rod, beginning with either a sustained (water loaded) anchor or a touch-n-go anchor (quasi airborne anchor). We are referring to casting two hand rods, knowing that most of this discussion can be applied to single hand rods as well. The "magic" that makes Spey casting work involves matching the three following elements: rod, line & casting style. I refer to these elements as a "three legged stool" where miss-matching any one of the components: rod, line or casting style will result in faulty casting.

We cover the basic Spey cast, introducing the term "anchor point" & to some degree, "setting-up" a cast that involves relocation of the fly by various means with respect to, water direction or speed, wind, obstructions behind or around the caster, etc.

Rods & lines are provided for this introductory lesson by GBF (Granite Bay Flycasters) & represent a balanced/ matched outfit allowing one to develop a working Spey cast (ultimately one's casting style).

SPEY CASTER'S MANTRA: When all else fails "slow down"! Let the rod do all the work

RODS:
For our purpose a typical two hand Spey rod ranges in length from 12' to 14', rated for line weights 5 thru 9. The rods are graphite & considered medium action. Many modern Spey rods also show an appropriate range of grain weights that the rod can cast efficiently.

The purpose of the rod is to transfer energy from the caster to the fly. Due to their length & design they are very efficient to cast & are easy to cast if you pay attention to proper motion. Remember: Rod length significantly magnifies relative small hand movement into large tip movement; the quickest way to blow a cast is to add a lot of power.

LINES:
For our purpose today we are using 6/7/8 wt. floating lines sized to match individual rods. They are "Scandi" type lines which are somewhat shorter than traditional Spey lines, more forgiving & easier to learn with. Spey leaders are usually sized as the length of the rod.

Spey lines are not all that different than single hand lines. One of the more significant characteristics is that the lines are designed where there is more mass in the rear portion of the line compared to familiar single hand lines commonly referred to as weight forward (WF). The reason is simple: The rod is water loaded & more mass is needed near the rod tip (& in the "D" loop) to pull the line off the water in order to complete the cast. Spey line weight ratings are different than single hand sizes; in general they are two to three

line sizes heavier than comparable single hand lines. Most Spey lines are also listed by grain weight.

All lines have the following: running line, rear taper, body & front taper. The confusion comes as lines can be purchased either as an integrated line, where all the elements are one piece or where they are distinct separate individual sections usually looped together (allowing for mix & matching).

Remember: There are many different names/types of lines usually associated with casting styles: i.e. short/medium/long Spey lines, Scandi & Skagit to name a few. Shorter lines are easier to cast & more forgiving.

CASTING STYLES:
For our purpose we are talking about two hand Spey casting techniques which changes casting dependency from single hand, now referred to as the top hand & introduces the use of the lower hand. The challenge here is learning to share the application of motion between the two hands where the top hand guides the rod acting as a fulcrum & the lower hand pulls the rod thru its' range of motion & adds power. A rule of thumb: short rods, short lines require a shorter stroke & longer rods, longer lines, require a longer stroke.

At this stage it is imperative to understand that there are several components within the cast that are needed in order to cast successfully. A successful cast requires continuous fluid motion linking these individual elements. In my mind the key is to sustain continuous power throughout the cast in order to maximize energy transfer. Interruption (a pause) will invariably result in the cast breaking down. One's physical makeup affects our casting style. Body kinetics play a major role in how we cast.

Remember: It is important to develop muscle memory associated with two hand casting. Developing a consistent cast increases our comfort level which in turn result in better casts.

BASIC SPEY CAST:
Many refer to the Spey cast as an offshoot of the roll cast as it is similar, but different in several ways. A roll cast is a water loaded cast where the rod is raised in front of the shoulder resulting in a minimal "D" loop, with power applied on the forward stroke to "roll" the line continuously forward on the water. The Spey caster "draws" the rod horizontally along the water loading the rod, then "rounds-up" at right angle to the shoulder where a "D" loop is created (the rod is the straight side of the D & the loop becomes the curved part of the D), the rod moves forward where the top hand guides the rod acting as a fulcrum while pulling down with the bottom hand applying power creating "acceleration" & finally the rod is "stopped" high allowing the energy in the rod to transfer to the line; the line follows the tip! The casting stroke requires that the rods path be 180 degrees straight line from the draw to the stop, again, the line will follow the tip of the rod. I cannot over emphasize the importance of a distinctive "stop" as it is critical in transferring energy to the line; There is no "haul" in Spey casting.

There are four elements to the basic Spey cast: The "draw", "round-up", "acceleration" & "stop". Every cast will have these same four motions, in the

same sequence. Other elements will be added to "set-up" a cast which involves relocating the fly by various means with respect to, water direction or speed, wind, obstructions behind or around the caster, etc. The objective is to combine these four elements in a smooth/continuous motion. Usually the cast starts with a "lift": The lift puts the fly line under tension& raises it off the water in order to reduce water tension.

The "draw": Begins loading the rod by sweeping a horizontal arc, rotating (turn the torso) until the rod extends out parallel to the casters body keeping continuous tension on the line.

The "round-up": Continues the stroke raising the rod in an arc upward to the top of its reach keeping constant tension on the line.

The "acceleration": Achieved by pulling the rod forward where the top hand guides acting as a fulcrum & the bottom hand adds power by pulling down in a straight line keeping tension on the line. Notice that I did not say push the top hand forward!

The "stop": Where the forward motion of the rod is stopped fairly high & the rod unloads stored energy forward into the line along a straight path.

VISUALIZATION:
Something that has helped me is picture a champagne glass as a visual aid in what the elements of a cast should look like. A champagne glass has the base of the glass, a vertical stem, the rounded side of the glass & a straight top lip. Here we go & it may sound somewhat silly: You "draw" the rod horizontally approximately chest high along the base of the glass, "round-up" the side of the glass, here the stem represents the rod in the vertical position (the line follows the tip becoming the curved arc creating the "D" loop) then the "acceleration", top hand pulls the rod forward guiding acting as a fulcrum where the bottom hand pulls down adding power keeping the rod tip straight along top of the glass to the "stop" which completes energy transfer to the line. OK it may be a stretch but it works for me!

Remember: Practice, practice, practice to gain consistency & slow down, the rod will do all the work.
My personal goal is to achieve effortless casts, highly repetitive, best described as utilizing a silky smooth stroke.