

Choosing the Proper Rod/Reel Combination

This is an immense subject with numerous variables based upon species, presentation options, and personal preferences. I'll limit the discussion to spinning gear that is targeted towards Walleye's; in an attempt to relay a basic understanding of what constitutes a good combo.

Today's anglers are increasingly discerning and seek sophisticated gear, particularly rods and reels. And for good reason, as what we choose to use for our rod and reel combination is critical to presenting our baits in a fashion that will entice a bite and give us the ability to set the hook and bring our fish to the net. Besides, it's a lot of fun using the latest in an ever improving lineup of truly great equipment.

The one area in which most fisherman can expand their effectiveness and ultimate enjoyment of the fishing experience, is to upgrade and select at least one higher end rod for this season. The rods now available, are getting better each year, with many that can be deemed marvels of fine engineering and craftsmanship. Some manufacturers have even gone so far as to producing models designed for specific presentations and techniques. A good example would be St. Croix's lineup of Legend Tournament Walleye Rods. They go so far as to offer eleven different technique specific configurations, to fit most any application.

When deciding on a rod, there are two areas we need to be most aware of. One being power, and the other action. Power refers to how much pressure it takes to flex a rod. Different power classifications are designed to accommodate certain ranges of lure weights and line sizes. Action is determined by where the rod flexes along the blank. A fast action will flex closer to the tip, with moderate being more in the center and slow will be towards the butt section.

The important thing to keep in mind here, is that there is no such thing as...one size fits all, when it comes to rods. We need to put some thought into what we want the rod to do, and make an informed decision based on this. As a general rule, you will want a medium power rod in fast to extra fast for jigging, most likely in the six foot range. When using live bait methods, such as lindy rigging, a medium power rod in a touch slower action and more length would be more appropriate, six and one half to seven and one half foot works nicely. For light bouncers, a bit heavier power and slower action is in order, I recommend rods as long as you can comfortably handle for this task. Where casting crank baits and slip bobbering are concerned: you most likely can get double duty from one rod. A seven and one half footer with medium power and an action in the moderate range is in order. The length and action helps to deliver long casts with light bobbers and small lures. The softer action also acts as a shock absorber when throwing cranks on no stretch super lines to aggressive hard hitting fish. Please be aware that the definitions of action and power will vary among manufacturers. It is in your best interest to actually handle any rod you are looking to buy. This will ensure you're getting exactly what you want.

Now that we have a general range for the most common techniques we use a spinning rod for, we need to begin to take a serious look at what is available. First and foremost, this is not the time to go directly to the bargain bin. Rods are serious tools and we must view them as an investment in our overall success and enjoyment. High end models can run \$300 or more. With a little shopping and research you can find some very good ones from \$75 to \$150. One thing to consider is that you can choose a rod in this range and through the use of a no stretch line, such as Fireline; you build in sensitivity that will be as good or better than a \$300 rod using springy monofilament.

There are several reputable manufacturers to choose from and it would be hard to go wrong in looking at the models produced by St. Croix, Fenwick, or G. Loomis. Yes, the top shelf offerings can give you sticker shock, but they all offer some fine middle of the road options. Remember the Fireline? Once again I cannot stress enough that this is not the place to skimp. At the end of the day, the difference between catching a few fish and a lot of fish, often comes down to being able to detect subtle bites. This can be very difficult with an inferior rod.

Graphite rods, not composite graphite, are a must. Don't get too hung up on the modulus count, as there are rods with high counts and are poorly manufactured or have substandard guides and or placement that won't stack up as well. Lightness and balance comes to the forefront. A heavy unbalanced rod is a nuisance to hold all day, and your fishing will suffer. Throw in a high quality cork handle for comfort, and you now have a fine efficient tool in your hands.

On the subject of balance: Reel selection is critical to maintaining this. The one common mistake I see an awful lot of anglers make, is to have a reel that is much too large for the given rod. I have never been even close to being "spooled" by a Walleye, nor I have I heard an honest account of it happening. That being said, a 1000 series or 2000 at most, is more than capable of handling even the largest of fish and won't overload your otherwise light and comfortable rod.

There are a few features that you will want to make sure your new reel has. The first and most important being a true anti-reverse. This means that at any point in the spools' location, there will be zero (and I mean zero) play. Without this you will have to wait until the spool centers and stops, before any pressure (hookset) can be delivered to the fish. Extremely fundamental in jigging and live bait rigging scenarios.

The next consideration is a smooth drag. This is no longer a major concern as long as you stick to the major players such as Shimano, Tica, Abu Garcia, and Diawa. Avoid the cheap models and you can be assured of having a dependable drag system.

The last thing to bear in mind is the number of bearings. This is an area, that in my opinion, is greatly overplayed. Ten does not always equate to being better than five, etc. The true test is in the quality of construction, materials used, and tolerances observed in the manufacturing process. There are numerous reels with lots of bearings but are poorly constructed; that couldn't hold a candle to a well made model with less-and higher quality bearings. Makes for great advertising, I guess.

Actually put the reel on your intended rod and give it some serious spins and you can easily feel if it is well balanced and smooth. If it comes to a quick stop or wobbles even slightly, continue your search. No need to pick the most expensive reel in the store either. I would have to say that most anglers could not tell the difference between a \$100 reel and one that can cost three to five times as much. Overkill, if you ask me. \$75 to \$100 will easily get you a reel that will provide years of dependable service with just a minimum of maintenance.

Knowledgeable sales staff can be of great assistance in helping you to get a feel for what will serve your needs best. It's worth a couple of extra dollars to shop at your local retailer and get this personalized attention, versus going it alone in a big box store. Besides the service, you'll most likely get a few tips and information on where and what the fish are doing.

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