

How Rod Action Can Affect Your Cast

by Bruce Richards

All fly rods are not born equal. Most of the fly rods built today cast very well, but differences in flex or 'action' can have a big impact on how they cast. Understanding the differences in these basic rod "actions", and what you need to do to adjust your casting stroke to make them cast well, can make you more effective with any rod.

Over the years I've heard many times that a beginner should start casting with a soft, slow 'forgiving' rod. In reality, very soft, flexible rods can be difficult to cast, especially for beginners. These rods are prone to throwing tailing loops because they are easy to overload, causing the rod tip to travel in a downward, arcing path. To prevent this from happening takes a very smooth casting stroke, something that takes most anglers some time to master. A beginner may be doing everything almost right but still get consistently tailing loops that can be very frustrating, all because of the slow action of their rod. Casting a lighter line can help some, but a long, smooth stroke is still necessary.

At the other extreme are stiff, 'fast action' rods. These rods are very tailing-loop resistant, but there are other issues that can make them difficult to cast, especially for inexperienced casters. Because these rods don't 'load' or bend much when casting at normal distances the angler doesn't have the feeling of direct contact with the line. This vague feeling can make it difficult to determine the timing of the cast. Since there is little rod load at short to medium distances, it is often necessary to cast harder with a stiff rod - which often results in wider, inefficient loops if the stroke isn't just right.

Fast rods are excellent for long distance casts. They are made to work well when carrying longer-than-normal lengths of line in the air. This loads them properly. If an angler doesn't want to cast long, or isn't capable of doing so, fast rods can be very frustrating to use. Fortunately there is an easy fix to this problem. Using a line which is one or even two sizes heavier than the rod is rated for supplies the load that the rod requires to work well, but at a shorter distance.

As you have probably guessed, a rod with an action somewhere between very slow and very fast is right for most anglers in most applications. Fortunately, most of the popular rods made today fall into this 'medium action' category. They are stiff enough to cast non-tailing loops when cast reasonably well at normal fishing distances. They are soft enough to load well at the same distances, while giving the angler good 'feel' of the line. While maybe not the ultimate short distance 'spring creek' rod, or long distance cannon, medium action rods handle most day to day fishing casts with ease, without major casting stroke adjustments.