



Saltwater Fighting Gear



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Our selection of fly rod and reel for saltwater species puts the angler at a disadvantage, compared to other choices in tackle. One-handed fly rods are generally longer and with less leverage than a spinning or conventional outfit. Some big-game fly rods do have a fighting fore-grip located up the blank from the handle but they defeat the stiffness of the butt. Fly line has greater diameter than superbraid or mono and therefore has more water resistance and larger knots. In order to succeed, we must make good choices and strategies for tackle, rigging and fighting technique. Even when we do, saltwater fly fishing is a wonderful challenge. Since I touched upon leader design last Tuesday, I'd like to cover the other components before technique.

The variables in tackle are; rod, line, backing, reel and rigging. For me, most tackle decisions for big fish are based on casting and fighting. In order to enjoy the process, I like effectiveness but not overkill. I ask myself; how far and how big a fly will I have to cast, will there be wind, what species and size fish am I fighting and where will the fight will be waged? I also ask, what's the maximum length run under different drag settings and will current increase the fish's resistance against capture?

The variables in tackle choices for me start with the rod. I choose length, weight and action. I like 9 ft. rods in saltwater for casting distance and I don't have problems with one gaining line during a fight by pumping. Big flies, wind

and bigger fish necessitate stiffer rods. After testing a rod, it'll tell me what weight line it likes in order to cast a tight loop.

I'll choose line density and construction based on the location and presentation. That means floaters or intermediate for shallows, high density for presenting deep, or with monster flies on top in high winds. It might also mean short heads with mono shooting line to decrease water resistance during the fight with billfish or tunas etc.

I like big-game fly lines and heads with a minimum of 30lb. test core. I'll use 50 or 70 also, unless it drastically increases diameter, which would be counterproductive. I covered general leader design last Tuesday and I learned two new knots from Paul Arden in the process. After you've chosen the line, or shooting head system you want, it's time to select the reel and backing.

The backing should be small in diameter and abrasion resistant but not dangerous to your hands. I still use Dacron in 20lb. test for lines up to 7wt. and 30lb. for 8-12wt. when possible. If I'm afraid of being spooled when using a reel designed for a 12wt., I'll go to 80lb. or 65lb. test PowerPro Spectra. I always use it with my 14wt. outfits.

The most important reel design features are, spool and arbor dimensions, frame strength, corrosion resistance and drag performance. The spool and arbor dimensions will determine not just line capacity but also the line take-up rate, the change in effective diameter as the spool empties and the stored coil diameter of the line, which effects line memory

I recommend buying the top reels or you'll have problems with the drag and reliability. I've been relying on Tibor for thirty years but I'm sure Abel is equivalent in performance and quality. More recently developed, Nautilus may even exceed their performance and durability as a water proof reel. Although I've only used Waterworks Force reels in freshwater, all the way up to size 4, I've known anglers who swear by Waterworks for big saltwater fish. Recently I borrowed one of the biggest Mako Reels from Jake Jordan to use on tuna and think its carbon fiber drag system is the best drag ever built. Jake teaches his special techniques at his billfish school in Guatemala and has landed blue marlin weighing over 500lbs. on them!

A professional line machine is handy, so you can fill the reel spool to the level

you wish. Most fly shops can do this for you. To accomplish this, load your fly line on your reel first with temporary knots, then fill with backing to your preferred spool height and cut the backing to suite, before tying the final backing to line connection, like a double-Bimini. Next, wind the backing off, onto an extra bulk line spool and run your fly line onto another spool or winder. You could even strip it into a basket or on the floor. Next, tie your arbor knot to your fly reel spool and load or reel the backing on very tightly. If your using a superbraid, make sure you use a good cross wind pattern to prevent it from digging in during a fight. Next, tie the knot connecting the backing to the shooting or running line and reel-on your fly line.

If you don't do it this way, you can just slightly over-load your reel with backing and using temporary knots, start winding-on your fly line. Make adjustments by repeatedly removing your fly line and cutting length off the top of the backing and winding-on your fly line until the level looks right. Then finish your final line to backing connection.

Next Tuesday I'll revisit Stu Apte's "down and dirty," I'll share Jake Jordan's billfish techniques, the fly rod short-stroke and more!