



Casting Heavy Saltwater Outfits and Heavy Flies

An excerpt from *Fly-Casting Finesse*, © John Field 2014



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Fly fishing with heavy one-handed outfits is the most physically demanding casting in our sport. The number of casts you make per day, the cast length, fly weight and the wind speed, will determine the physical requirements. The demands become greater and the rods stiffer and heavier as you increase line weight, fly size and weight. Therefore, it pays to learn efficient technique and also prepare your body in advance, if you don't participate in activities or train in a way that get you ready.

An angler mainly uses these rods from boats in saltwater. The major techniques are blind casting, bait and switch and sight fishing. I would include structure fishing within blind casting, if no feeding fish are visible at the surface. The structure could be shore or exposed reef, or submerged structure only indicated by mapping or sonar. I would also include casting to blitzing schools of fish in sight casting. In some cases, you only need to make short casts, in other cases, the object is to cast as far as possible.

Blind casting requires the most numbers of casts per trip and usually requires your maximum casting distance. An example would be blind casting in a muddy basin for tarpon with a 12 wt. Bait and switch fishing for billfish might

require making anywhere from zero in the worse case, to maybe a hundred casts in the best. When you're sight fishing on the flats for permit, giant trevaly, sharks or tarpon, the number of casts is few and fighting these fish will be far more fatiguing than casting to them. The same is true if you're cruising the Gulfstream casting for dolphin along Sargasso weed or flotsam. In the western Atlantic, the most common schooling gamefish are striped bass, bluefish, little tunny, tuna, redfish and jack crevalle. Fishing for them when they're surface feeding usually requires long casts, so the boat will not put them down. If the fishing is good, you might be required to make a couple hundred casts in a full day! On the other hand, if you're live-chumming with the engines off, you won't need to cast far, or often.

I've already covered the Saltwater Quick Cast (in a previous SL Daily Cast). In addition to those techniques, I use some others exclusively when using heavy tackle. An angler mostly uses floating lines for sight fishing on the flats. Fly fishing in the deeper inshore and offshore locations, sinking heads or full sinking line are best. Not only do they sink deeper but their thinner diameter makes them less wind resistant and therefore, easier to cast. For some species and circumstances, you'll need to throw a large wind resistant fly. One tip before you fish one is to attach it to your line and sink it to saturate it in water. Wetting it will streamline it and give it more casting weight. If your first cast is an important one, this tip will also help it sink to its intended depth, instead of sitting on the surface until it sinks.

The most difficult part of casting heavy tackle is getting the fly safely out of the water and moving fast enough to load the rod with little line out. If I strip a fly all the way in, I'll combine a Roll Cast with shooting to extend the line and load the rod. It starts by holding the rod to the side, close to the water and slowly enlarging the little oval with the rod tip with accelerating speed, shooting line on each pick-up and lay-down. Start raising the rod tip as the oval enlarges and when you've got about twenty feet of line out, shoot the fly either backward or forward until it lands on the water and waterload it into the next cast. Once you've done this, you can double-haul and shoot a couple of false casts to present your fly.

If you're retrieving a fly when swinging on rips, as I detailed in my 2012 Fly Fisherman Magazine article, *Squid in the Rips*, heavy current is an added difficulty. When the boat is stemming the tide, the tide will swing your fly until it's straight astern and you have to strip-in to the beginning of the head in order to start a change of direction cast. I've found using a Snap-T Cast

effectively repositions the fly for a pick-up into an overhead cast, regardless of whether I'm delivering with my forward, or my back cast.

Blind casting heavy loads with heavy rods for hours on-end can cause a blister on the base of the index finger of your casting hand. I've practiced casting heavy outfits months ahead of fishing season to toughen my hands and it doesn't help. Constantly wet hands in saltwater soften calluses which soon detach internally and rip off. Gloves don't even help! To prevent this from occurring, don't squeeze the grip so hard and limit the number of casts per day. If a guide wants you to kill time blind casting when there is no tide or real prospects, you can say no thank you. If possible, fish half the day with your dominant hand and the other half with your non-dominant hand. If that doesn't work for you, try a two-handed rod.

The way for healthy muscles and joints to become conditioned for heavy tackle is to start with a lighter outfit than your goal and increase the weight of the whole outfit every two sessions. For most people used to lighter tackle, they will find a point in rod/line weight where they begin to lose distance before special training. So if you're used to light trout gear, you might start practicing with an eight weight and go up the ladder until you've reached your goal. This is an example of the principle of overloading used in weight training. Always warm-up before strenuous activity and train with the approval of your physician. You can also train using tools for strengthening your wrists, like the Digi-Flex or Powerball. A cable machine or resistance bands are great tools to overload your muscles to practice the stroke or the haul.

After becoming used to casting with a yarn fly, practice with a hookless practice fly that is the same size and weight as the fly you'll be fishing with. I usually make one by sacrificing a chewed-up fly and cut the hook off at the bend. Start your casts slowly and build speed. The goal will be maximum line speed and tight loops. This will require using your body, making very long forward strokes, positive rod stops and long fast hauls.

Practice your Saltwater Quick Casts for boat or wading. When you're comfortable with your outfits, try using the wind like a sailor. Get used to feeling the wind direction with your ears. Practice your wind casts from all directions. Cast at targets at all distances if you're training for sight fishing. The mechanics, or form used to make faster, longer, more accurate casts in any weather condition can be learned, controlled and practiced. It will just

take your desire, time and sometimes some help.

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