

The Right Rod For The Job

If anyone wonders whether there's a rod on the market to cover all eventualities the answer is very simple... no! Hardy & Greys Academy manager Andy Smith delves a little deeper.

The toughest posers I am ever asked are when someone quizzes me on what my favourite setup is, and if I only had one rod to choose from what would it be?

I am fortunate in being the manager of the Hardy & Greys Academy, so I have the latest fly-rod outfits constantly at my disposal. But that doesn't make it any easier in choosing a 'favourite' rod – it just means I have a far wider selection of rods, all suited to specific purposes.

And while there's no 'one size fits all' rod on the market, the dilemma of picking the right tool for the task in hand isn't as daunting as some may imagine.

Actually, when you break it all down it's not that complicated, providing you can be sure of fishing similar waters in the same sort of conditions at the same times

of year. Then it's a bit like being a child in a sweet shop who only likes caramel wafer bars – the decision is simple.

However, depending on whether you are fishing large or small stillwaters, streams

or rivers, or if you're focusing on small fish, big fish, or even alternative species, the dynamics of rod choice change to such a degree that having a range of rods is the only solution.

Well, that's what many of us have had to sell as an idea to our partners over the years as a reason for yet another new rod coming into the house each season. However, it's not a case of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of 'her indoors' but a necessity – an absolute must – as you develop your knowledge and experience in fly fishing. You learn that even the very size of fly being cast has a profound influence on the outfit that you will ultimately choose to help you achieve the greatest success in any given situation.

So while a 10ft 6-wt is my favourite for the local water, the one I fish on a regular basis, it's by no means the end of the story.

What could be better than catching a fantastic big rainbow on your perfectly balanced 7-wt outfit? Well nothing, unless it had been caught on a 5-wt outfit...



If you used this many rods half your day would be lost just getting ready.



Each of these rods are described as ideal for small waters, but surely they're not all needed?

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Feel Everything

I love fishing as light as possible for a given situation and find myself regularly opting for a 5-wt outfit more than any other, because it means that even a small stock fish will put up a fight that would delight the most seasoned angler and give the impression of a fish twice its weight and power. Get hooked up into any sizeable specimen on light tackle and you'll soon be seeing your backing streaming out over the water. If you have never played a good-sized fish on light tackle you are missing out on a real treat.

Also, a 5-wt or 6-wt setup is so much lighter to use and you will notice that the line benefits your presentation as it drops to the water with far less disturbance. That said, changing to lighter tackle might well give you a greater thrill, but then the downside will be that as soon as you attempt to throw large flies such as lures, the light line will not have the weight to carry them properly. This is

when a totally new setup is called for and you have to opt for a rod in the 7-wt or even 8-wt bracket.

It's All In The Delivery

In my experience as an instructor I have rarely found that the average caster achieves any more distance whether they use a 5, 6, 7 or 8-wt outfit, especially while practising with a small piece of wool on the end of the line to simulate a fly. It is only when they get themselves into actual fishing situations that their outfit choice may leave a lot to be desired.

What I mean is that small dries, nymphs and tiny buzzers can be cast on most rod weights but change to a largish lure and then start adding additional flies, plus longer leaders, and generally the lighter outfits I'm praising will fail miserably against the heavier rod setups. So in essence you are always going to need another rod, or two, or three, depending on circumstances!



“ This may surprise some folk, but for outright casting distance the length of your rod matters little. ”

The outfit should be well balanced, the reel and line not too heavy for the rod.



What To Use And When

I use a lighter outfit for delicate presentation, which, as an added bonus, also gives me increased pleasure when playing a fish, whatever its size. I then move up a couple of weights when I want to use bigger flies, like lures, and need to cast them further. But remember, the sacrifice is that you will lose some of the enjoyment of the fight and ultimately some of the feeling of connection with the fish as you move up in rod ratings.

As you become more experienced and broaden your horizons to fish a variety of waters, you can find it's all too often something of a compromise! One great thing about fishing the lighter outfits is that you can easily

drop down to very fine tippet material without much risk of breaking off, as the lighter, softer actions found in these rods will absorb the fiercest of takes and running fish.

If you are fishing the smallest of buzzers, and especially minute dries, you will already know that unless you go light, the thickness of the nylon at, say, 6lb just won't go through the eye of a size 16 fly and if it does, the fly often fails to sit right.

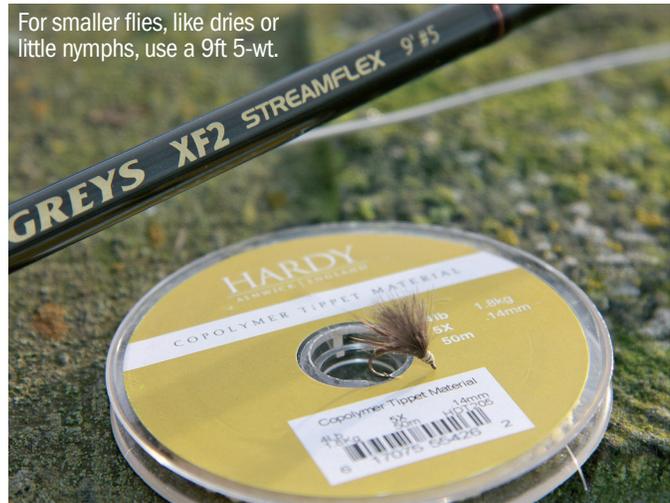
What Length?

Honestly, and this may surprise some folk, for outright casting distance the length of your rod matters little. You won't cast any further with a 10ft rod than you would with a nine-footer. The one great

For lures go with a heavier setup, a 9ft 6in 7-wt.



For smaller flies, like dries or little nymphs, use a 9ft 5-wt.



A rainbow gets slipped back, none the worse for wear after being played hard on a beefier setup.

advantage with a longer rod is that it will allow you to lift off a little more line from the water – a great advantage when fishing longer leaders or when fish are following right into the bank or near to the boat, and you need the flies in the water for those extra few seconds. The longer rod should, if you are casting correctly, have your back cast travelling higher behind you, so choosing a 10ft rod over a 9ft model becomes desirable if you are regularly fishing with a sloping bank behind.

Longer rods really are ideal for use when sitting down in a boat, as the reduced height of casting compared to what would normally be achieved when casting from the bank affects your ability to lift off and cast as normal.

It's worth bearing in mind, though, before going out and buying a longer rod, that if your casting style suffers from any sort of tracking problems – keeping things on a level plane – the longer rod will exaggerate that issue. Also, if you suffer from continually letting the rod fall too far back as you make an overhead cast, the longer rod won't change your ability to snag the flies in the grass behind.

As a rule of thumb, these facts should help with your stillwater rod selection and to a large extent it's the same for rivers, although it's generally

an even lighter selection – 3, 4 and 5-wt rods being the most widely chosen outfits in use. Rod length here is vitally important, as both restricted accessibility on a small river and/or overall reach for nymphing are what matter, so you need to be clear on just what you are targeting, and where.

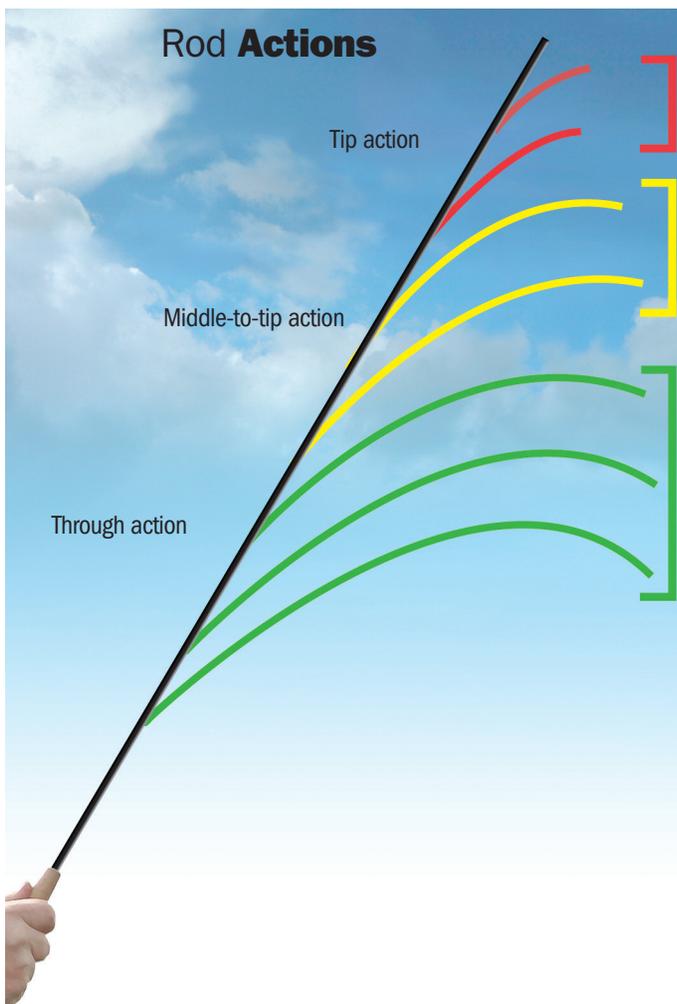
Try Before You Buy!

Even if you know what you are doing, you still can't beat trying something out before you buy. A lot of tackle shops now not only have access to some form of casting pool for a try-out, but many of them hold regular open days throughout the year where you really can get to talk with specialists who can help with your selection.

Ask your local dealer about events, as some are organised where you try out the outfits, even to compare manufacturers, and get some great advice at the same time. Dealer events go on all the time through the season and are well worth attending to build up additional information and experience.

The Best That Money Can Buy

If money is no object then there really has never been a better time to buy fly rods, with the latest offerings at the high end of the scale being



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A 7-wt, stiff-action rod will allow you to play fish hard, and get them in fast – something you couldn't do with a lighter, soft-action rod.

truly amazing. The quality put into what some may call these “eye wateringly” expensive rods is quite exceptional and in the right hands these rods cast like a dream and outperform standard rod blanks by some margin.

The pride of ownership in the best gear is more than enough for some, just as it is for those

buying high-end cameras, golf clubs, shotguns and so on. However, be aware that buying the best shotgun does not make you a better shot, a fantastic camera doesn't make you a top

photographer and the best golf clubs on the market won't have

you hitting the ball further unless you know what to do with them. Fly rods are just the same and if you can cast well you will get some amazing results and such a buzz from using high-end offerings.

Don't let this be any kind of put-off from buying the best, but the best gear does expose casting imperfections so it's quite possible to find that without a little casting instruction you may be a little disappointed first off. Get your casting right and one of these outfits are likely to be your most rewarding purchase ever!

If you have ever bought proper hi-fi you will know that it is vitally important to

discuss with the sales experts what music you actually like, and as you audition a variety of setups you can discover amazing differences not just by changing the source components such as the player itself, the amplifier or speakers, but even the connecting leads themselves have a massive influence in sound staging and quality.

In the same way, fly lines and even leader materials deliver to the very same extent and truly influence/enhance what you can achieve with any given fly fishing setup. Study the profiles of the lines you are thinking of buying but, again, better still if you can get to cast the line with the rod you are thinking of buying. Getting the

selection wrong can be really disappointing, but get it right and it will transform things to such a degree you'll be the one fishing all day while sporting a broad grin. **TTT**

A fish this size is a joy to catch on a lightweight outfit as you can feel every twist and lunge.

