

Learner's Corner - Reels by Johnny Butler of Fly South (JohnBButlerIII-FlySouth@yahoo.com)

I. Questions to Ask

- A. What am I going to fish for? Trout, bass, sunfish, stripers, redbfish, etc.
- B. Where am I primarily going to fish? Saluda, small streams, western rivers, ponds
- C. What reels do I already have?
- D. How much do I want to spend? Cast aluminum vs. machined aluminum; spare spool vs. new reel.

II. Answers

- A. One reel cannot do everything. You cannot use one reel and effectively fish for small trout in Smokies headwaters and all trout on the Davidson and Stripers in the Congaree. You can compromise on reels and use one reel for several things but not for everything. Much of the time when you are fishing for trout or pond fishing, the reel is nothing but a place to store your spare line and a little backing, and the drag is really not that important. Sometimes, however when you hook a large trout the drag becomes supremely important and you hope it is up to the task of smoothly controlling a large brown without allowing him to break you off because of the limitations of the reel. The drag on striper reels and saltwater reels is vital; the reel does a lot more than just hold the line.
- B. Unlike rods, reels come in varying denominations based on line size. E.g. 3/4, 4/5, 4/6, 8/9, 12 etc. Generally you should pick a reel in the same size range as the line you will be putting on the rod. For example a 3/4 for a 4 weight rod and line, a 3/4 or a 5/6 reel for a 5 weight rod and line. Some reels are made for a variety of line sizes and regardless of what the reel is labeled, it can probably fit a couple of types of rods. As long as the reel has sufficient room for the necessary line and an adequate amount of backing, you can put any reel on any rod. The reel may not look good on the rod and it may be too large **or** too small but it will still work as long as you have the right size (or nearly the right size) line on the reel for the rod in question. That does not mean you should buy any reel and put it on any rod. Once again questions you should ask are: what are you fishing for; where are you fishing; how does the reel balance with the rod; how does the reel look on the rod; does the reel hold the necessary weight line and the minimum

backing; how much do I want to spend?

- C. Arbor (axis). Reels come in three basic arbor styles: large arbor, mid arbor, small/regular arbor. The arbor is simply the size of the middle axis (hub) of the reel. A large arbor has a large middle axis and supposedly picks up line faster than smaller arbor reel; a large arbor reel also holds less backing and may weigh more. Like color, size, style and other characteristics, the arbor size is really a matter of personal preference.
- D. Machined aluminum reels which are machined from a block of aluminum cost more but are more durable than cast aluminum reels in which molten aluminum is poured into a mold. Machined aluminum reels are hard to find at a price point below \$120. Another characteristic that adds cost to a reel is porting i.e., holes - the more holes there are in a reel the lighter the reel is; the trick is to make the reel as light as possible by incorporating more holes without compromising the strength and integrity of the reel. The more a reel is ported the more complicated the manufacturing process and the more the reel costs. The type of counter-weight, reel handle and ornamentation also add to the price of the reel without really affecting the performance.

III. Suggestions

- A. Even though spare spools for a reel are usually cheaper than a new reel, I would have at least two reels in case one of them fails. It is rare for a modern reel to fail, but it does happen and you do not want to be unable to fish just because you have only one reel.
- B. If you can afford it, buy machined aluminum reels; machined aluminum reels are simply more durable.
- C. If you bought a rod and reel package, think about replacing the reel in the future.
- D. Get a reel with a very adjustable drag and preferably one that does not use a lever drag adjustment.
- E. Backing. Most of the time when you are trout fishing or pond fishing, you will never see the backing on the reel unless you clean the line or change the line so the amount of backing on a trout reel is not all that important. Realistically if you are fishing for trout on the Davidson and a large trout takes your entire 75- 90 foot fly line and 10 yards of your backing, you are never going to land that fish and an extra 20 yards of backing will not make any difference. With respect to stripers

or saltwater fish, backing is important and you probably want at least 100 yards of at least 30 pound backing and perhaps more depending on the species of fish you are pursuing.

- F. Pick the reel you like! Once the size and cast vs. aluminum decisions are made, much of the remaining choice is based on personal preference.