

SLT SALTWATER FLY REELS

FROM BAUER | Review by Brian Clark

Is it a powerful drag that makes a saltwater reel battle ready? Maybe. Some of us would argue that the smoothness of the transition from silence to violence is just as or even more important, but collectively we seem to spend much less time talking about clutch mechanisms than top-end drag strength. Fortunately, the new SLT saltwater fly reels from Bauer offer industry-leading designs and performance in both categories.

First, let's indulge in some déjà vu: recently we assessed the Air 2 MAX saltwater fly rods from Winston, Bauer's venerable rod-making sibling (see *A Short Tale of Two Short(ish) Rods* in Issue #32, Fall 2024), and that review addressed a lingering question about whether or not Winston had finally dipped more than a toe into saltwater (spoiler: yes, they definitely have). Given that Bauer has long been mostly focused on freshwater applications, similar thoughts might be circling about these reels, but the answer is again decisive: yes, these reels are seriously salty, and they're also still very much part of the Bauer family. Along with some aesthetic features, the SLT's new clutch gives a nod to Bauer's lineage going all the way back to the much-loved cork-based M-series.

I've been running Bauer reels on a number of my trout and spey rods for many years, and they're both beautiful and bulletproof. I hadn't given any Bauers a spin in the salt since the old cork-drag M-series, so I was keen to get my hands on the new SLT reels. John Radle, the General Manager of Bauer, kindly arranged three loaner reels for us to smear with fish ju-ju. After a number of outings with them, I'm pleased to report that they're living up to the hype. The all-important start-up inertia is almost non-existent; the reels go from static to spinning without hesitation.

MSRP

- SLT 7/8/9 = US\$895
- SLT 9/10/11 = US\$995
- SLT 11/12+ = US\$1,095

Website: www.bauerflyreel.com



The drag doesn't crank down as tightly as some reels on the market, but they're very much aligned with the range of drag that I've come to expect from the perennial saltwater standards. The 7/8/9 offers a range from 8-13lbs, and the big 11/12+ reel tops out around 15lbs. The 9/10/11 falls somewhere between those poles, and all of them feel like they're appropriate for the respective fish you'd be chasing. The drag is sealed, but the hub (with a cool topo map graphic) can be unscrewed without a tool for cleaning and/or direction reversal, so long as you're careful not to pinch the O-ring during reassembly. No lubrication or maintenance is necessary, but having enjoyed my reel maintenance routines on cork drags for many years, I like that you could hack into the guts if necessary.

All of those interior parts are corrosion resistant or anodized, and the spool and frame are dual anodized. The spool sports a nice balance – not too narrow, not too wide, and the arbor is large but not to the point where it'll be problematic in terms of backing. It's a classy, no-nonsense reel that feels robust but not tanky – except for the chunky oversized metal retrieve handle, which is excellent!

