

FULGOR 02 SEMI-AUTOMATIC FLY REEL

BY PEUX FISHING | Review by Brian Clark

Those of a certain age will recall a tagline from a series of unironically tacky television commercials from the late 1980s which haven't aged any better than the doomed automobile manufacturer they advertised: "This is not your father's Oldsmobile." Seriously, go watch a few of those old clips on YouTube – but consider yourself warned, they're cringey.

Many of us associate "automatic" fly reels with the beastly spring-loaded contraptions of that same era, and perhaps also with our fathers. Fortunately, in this case, the "new generation" of gear-driven semi-automatic fly reels couldn't be more different from the clunky, gimmicky, fault-prone originals. Modern semi-auto reels don't use springs, and the best among them are smooth, elegant, and extremely versatile.



At first glance, the "Fulgor" model from Peux Fly Fishing looks sleek and refined, and it feels solid in the hand. The magic lies in the lever, and with the gears on the inside: if the interior mechanism reminds you of an analog watch, that isn't an accident. These fly reels are quite literally made by Swiss watchmakers in a Swiss watch factory. The reel was designed a few decades back by a local fisherman who worked in precision manufacturing for the watchmaking industry, and today the reels are built in the small villages of Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds, both of which have legitimate claims to be the birthplace of Swiss horology.

Valentin Daubre, the mechanical engineer who runs the Peux operation today, started fly fishing when he was 10. He grew up surrounded by avid anglers and fine timepieces, so it's only natural that those pursuits would eventually merge. He joined me for an extended discussion about the reel's design, his background, the rise of Euro-style nymphing (ESN) in Europe and in North America, and the myriad of applications for semi-automatic reels beyond ESN.

Let's start with the design: although some spools for the Fulgor have traditional handles and can be cranked like a common direct-drive reel, they're designed to retrieve line with a touch of the lever, usually operated by the ring and pinkie of the rod hand, or even just the pinkie. It takes shockingly little effort to spin excess line back onto the spool using the lever, and a great deal of control over the speed of retrieval can be acquired with just a little practice.

Why might you want to do that? The primary objective is line management, specifically the minimization (or even elimination) of loose line between the reel and the stripping guide. Although guides constantly admonish their clients for keeping out more line than necessary, many of us are still very lazy about putting excess line back on the spool, and we've all paid the price in the currency of lost fish and frustrating tangles. After a bit of acclimatization, picking up loose line using the Fulgor's lever is so quick and easy that even using the reel for a short amount of time clearly illustrates the merits of more active line management habits. It's particularly nice to be able to do that with just one hand, an advantage that no other style of fly reel on the market can offer.

Many competitive anglers in Europe have been using these reels for years, and they're catching on quickly among ESN practitioners and other fly anglers in North America. Maintaining "contact" with your flies is a huge part of that game, and being able to feather the lever to keep tension is useful. Many "dynamic nymphers" have gone to full monofilament lines, and it's critical to keep those lines off the ground and away from snags. That's one of the reasons why some Fulgor spools don't have handles – one less thing to get wrapped around. Thin mono lines have also driven another of the design features: the removable line guide that solves problems with line entrapment between the spool and frame. It's a clever little device with a ceramic insert (see top right photo) that's easy to reposition and completely interchangeable across all the Fulgor models.



Many of us aren't in much of a rush while we're fishing, but everybody can appreciate spending less time untangling line from roots and rocks and our own boots. The ability to spin up line single-handedly helps while landing fish, releasing fish, fly changes, drift adjustments, and moves to new water. Less line on the water or ground means fewer snags and tangles, fewer lost fish, and less frustration.

I'll admit that the Fulgor system took some getting used to for me, and I was skeptical at first. After more time with the reel, I realized that most of my apprehensions seemed to be leftovers from distasteful encounters in my youth with my father's demonic spring-loaded automatic reels. I was worried about snarls, durability, and the general sense that the whole thing is over-engineered. I'm pleased to report that the reel's fine engineering neuters those devils; a bit of practice bred familiarity, which then grew into fondness. It's hard to overstate how nice it is to not be constantly worried about my line getting snagged, and I've found it particularly useful when fishing from boats and kayaks which offer protrusions that always grab fly line at the wrong moment. Fishing the Fulgor has even changed my line management habits when I go back to direct drive reels.

Other more subtle aspects of the reel provide confirmation for those initial impressions of thoughtful design and meticulous engineering. Spools can be swapped very quickly and easily, and the mechanism which holds the spool is intuitive and secure. The handles are machined aluminum anodized to match the spool color, and they're just as smooth as every other part of the system. The reels are offered in a dozen colors ranging from black and gray to vivid blues, green, gold, scarlet, and even a striking purple. The reel foot can be adjusted to tweak rod balance. Right-handed and left-handed retrieves are available, although they aren't reversible – naturally, considering the lever

design. The drag knob is easy to access, offers a great deal of range, and the drag itself offers no noticeable startup inertia. The retrieve is silent, but the outgoing click is pleasant and – fine, I'll say it: it's downright melodious, like the ticking of a clock.

Right, but how will it do in the salt? Every part on the reel is saltwater ready: it's a mix of anodized aluminum, stainless steel, brass, and various composites. Sand would definitely be problematic, but sand isn't good for any fly reel. A freshwater rinse after every salty excursion will keep the reel working fine for years. Right now the challenge is capacity; the Fulgor is currently offered in two sizes: the 01 is meant for lines #2-4, and the larger 02 model takes it up to #5-6. Also, some spools have large arbors – that helps with fast line pickup, but it limits room for backing. The 02 works fine for the inshore game; the drag will handle redfish and speckled trout without a problem. However, bonefish and other speedy saltwater species will have to wait until larger sizes are available. Plans are in the works!

We look forward to seeing what new and innovative applications anglers come up with for this stunning design. We've heard that some folks are using the lever to activate streamers in order to simulate baitfish movement, and even that someone has caught baby tarpon on a Fulgor!

MSRP: US\$1,085

Website: www.peuxflyfishing.com

The price is the same for either the 01 or 02 model. Select left- or right-handed retrieve and choose from any of a dozen colors, then mix-and-match spools with and without handles. Custom engraving is available at extra cost, and the reel comes nested in form-fitted foam in a protective clamshell zipper case complete with an extra spool and detachable line keeper.