

GOTTA HAVE GEAR

SDX FLY REEL BY ABEL | Review by Austin Orr and Brian Clark

Abel introduced the SDX reel back in January of this year, their biggest and baddest saltwater reel yet. To understand where the SDX fits into the broader context, it's important to consider its lineage. The first Abel Sealed Drag (SD) reels first appeared in 2013 and represented a significant re-design from the workhorse Super Series reels which relied on an exposed cork ring to power the drag system. The SD evolved into the SDS (Sealed Drag Saltwater) in 2016, then got scaled down in 2017 with the SDF (Sealed Drag Freshwater). The SDX is a logical next step: it's effectively a beefed-up full-frame version of the SDS.

That makes good sense. With over a decade of reliable performance, the drag system — which leverages an alternating stack of carbon fiber and stainless steel

discs — clearly works. It ain't broke, so they didn't fix it — they mostly just made it bigger. Why so big? Geometry: the bigger the wheel, the more line it picks up with every turn, over 15IN per rotation. Does that matter? With big fish, yes — yes, it very much can matter.

Along the way they've also worked on the weight. The SDX reels are carved from 6061-T650 aircraft-grade aluminum, cold-rolled to improve strength without adding weight. Despite the larger sizes, the reels don't feel heavy. The 9/11 weighs in at 10.5oz with a diameter of 5IN, and the 12/14 comes in at 5.5IN in diameter and just over 11oz. That's noteworthy since they've also bulked up the reel handle and gone full-frame, ensuring that both line and backing will run true through their assigned frame gap.

Photos by Jordan Wells

We got to take an SDX 9/11 loaner on an epic Australian adventure this year and tested it on some of the meanest fish around, including queenfish and barramundi. Austin almost broke a rod thanks to the powerful drag system on the SDX; things were going fine while the fish was running away from the boat, but when it sounded and the fight went vertical, only a quick reflex to find the drag handle and relax the strain kept the rod from snapping. All's well that ended well, as this photo attests!

On the aesthetic side, the SDX might be a tad more restrained than some of Abel's other offerings. Although the reel is available in both a ported and solid version (and they've retained the delightful symmetry where you can discern a stylized "X" in the ported version), there are

only four colors currently available: black, platinum, deep blue, and deep green. They're all handsome colors, and the individual components — the reel cage, spool, handle, and drag knob — can be mixed and matched. Every reel is machined, anodized, and assembled in Colorado, and as usual, custom editions can be accommodated if you're willing to wait. Will the myriad of other colors and graphics that grace the SDF and SDS eventually be made available for the SDX? We really don't know, but time will tell!

MSRP: US\$1,199 for the 9/11

MSRP: US\$1,299 for the 12/14

Website: mayflyoutdoors.com/products/abel-reels-sdx

Available from the Abel website and at reputable fly shops everywhere

Photo by Austin Orr

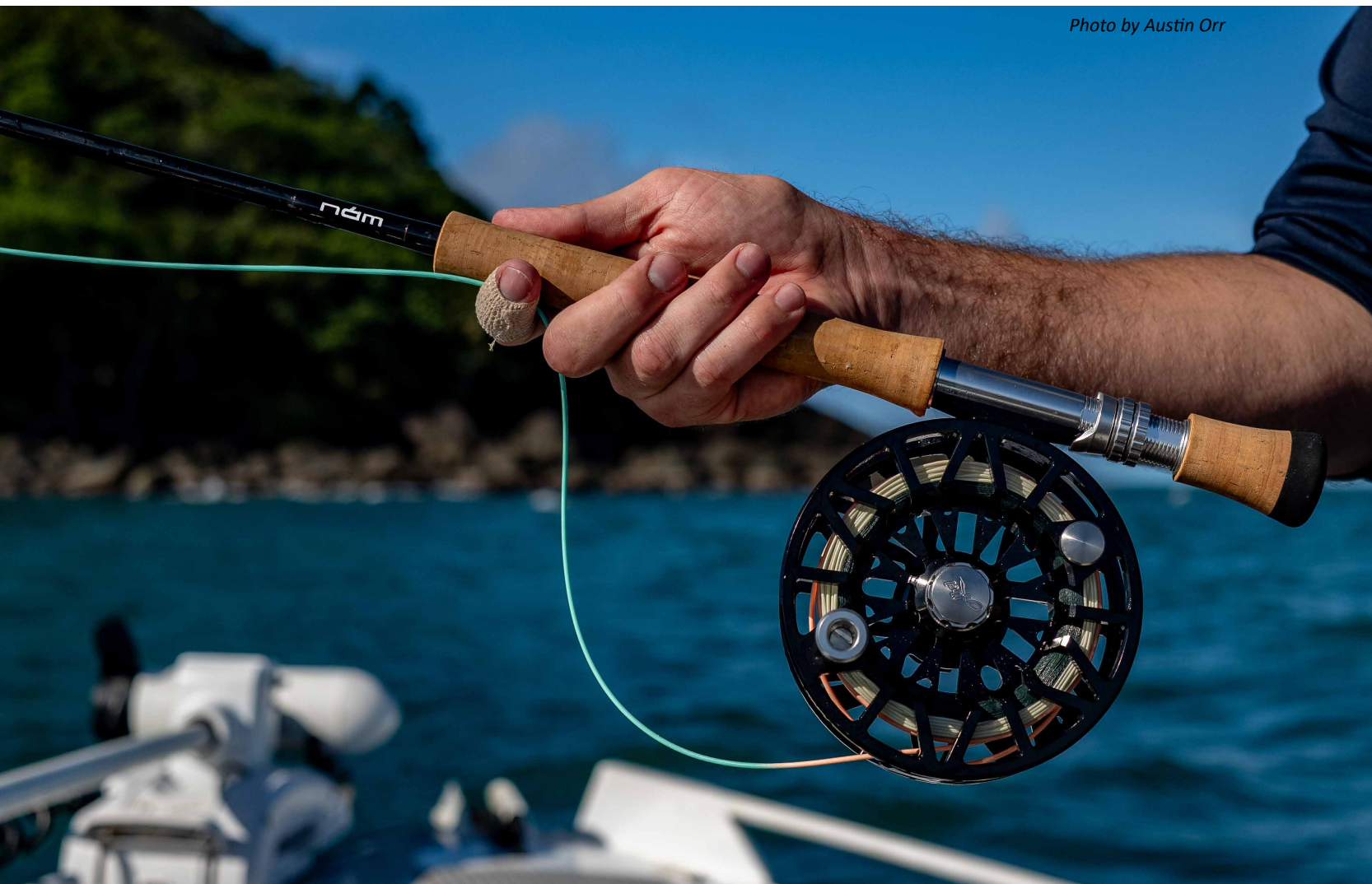


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