

GOTTA HAVE GEAR

RIO ELITE MDC VERSITIP II FLY LINE | Review by Brian Clark

This'll be heresy for some, but I've never been a fan of Swiss Army Knives. Heaven knows it's not from a lack of exposure — my dad had literally hundreds of them, and he carried one pretty much everywhere. MacGyver always carried one as well, and if there's any archetype I've ever aspired to emulate, it's Mac. Still, I've always preferred a simple, single-bladed pocketknife that does a handful of tasks extremely well rather than a do-everything gadget that isn't particularly great at anything. And yet, sometimes a multi-tool is EXACTLY what you need.

Believe it or not, these ideas also apply to fly lines. As we've discussed elsewhere, a plethora of extremely specialized fly lines are now available. While freely admitting that this array can be bewildering for a newcomer to the sport, I'm mostly a fan. I like having a variety of tapers available for different purposes, plus sink tips in a slew of sink rates, and coatings for every temperature range.

Naturally, there's a dark side to this equation: to benefit from all those specialized lines, you either need to commit to fishing missions with narrow objectives — just throwing streamers, for instance — or bring a pile of reels (or at least spare spools) or even rig separate rod + reel + line setups, then drag them around the backcountry. Not ideal. All-purpose taper fly lines are one alternative, but to my knowledge, all of those are floating lines — even the best among them can't magically turn itself into a sink tip. Sure, it's possible to loop a sinking tip into a floating line, but those setups usually don't cast very well.

That's where the VersiTip MDC line kit from Rio really shines: it's effectively a Swiss Army Knife disguised as a fly line. The set includes a body section that attaches to your backing — it's something like a normal fly line that has been truncated about halfway up the head and ends in a welded loop to which one of the four provided 12FT tip sections is attached. There's a floating tip, a clear intermediate tip, and two sink tips. They've put a great deal of effort into tuning the weight and taper of each tip, aiming for a consistent feel while casting the different tips — perhaps as siblings, so to speak. Chris Walker, the line design guru at Rio (owned by Far Bank), explained it this way: "All the tips are designed to have the same total weight and weight distribution.

Obviously, a fast-sinking tip will never cast exactly the same as a floater, but we should be approaching the theoretical limit of how similar they can be."

I played with one of the earlier MDC generations a number of years back, but the new version boasts an improved taper and the latest generation of coatings. More from Chris: "We redesigned that line with a couple of applications in mind. Our previous interchangeable tip line mostly sold into either trout fisheries for streamer anglers or anadromous fisheries for anglers who prefer swinging with a single-hand rod. We figured we could make a better line for both applications."

The new MDC VersiTip II is heavier, roughly two AFTTA sizes heavy at 30FT. At just 35FT, the head is relatively short, and the trade-offs discussed in the previous review apply. Still, it's great for bending faster modern rods and for shooting line when blindcasting to cover water. It's comfortable for slinging streamers on 5-7WT rods and works well for all appropriate fishing distances.

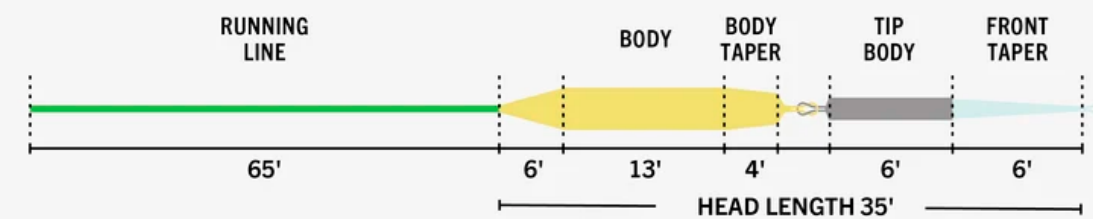
Each tip is split between two densities — that's the MDC part: Multi-Density Control. According to Chris, that made it tricky to get the diameters right, but the fastest sinking section gives you more depth where it counts, closer to the fly. The overall taper is designed to be rear-loaded, and most of the head weight is in the body rather than the interchangeable tips. This makes it easier to get a sink tip out of the water to recast and the entire system roll casts more efficiently — many of us also prefer rear-loaded tapers for turning over heavy streamers. They're pretty nice for single-hand Spey techniques too, if that's your thing.

When would you need a Swiss Army fly line? In warmwater, I've been using it mostly on runs to lakes and ponds where I don't know whether I'll be dabbling flies with a floating line to carp or chucking heavy bass streamers on a sink tip. So long as I've got my tip wallet — included in the kit — then I'm covered no matter what style or species. Similar scenarios apply in the mountains, both on bigger rivers and at alpine lakes. If you can fish on top, rig the floater; if you need to dig deep, let fly with a sink tip.

Downsides? Two that I've noticed, both tolerable as trade-offs for versatility and transportability. One is that I

Elite MDC VersiTip + MDC Tip

Example: WF8F



Tip Example: 12ft #7/8, H/I

can be picky about rods; left entirely to my own devices, I'd probably throw the sinking tips on a different rod from the floater. Heck, I might even throw each of the sinktips on a different rod. That's hardly a fault of the line, and it obviously defeats the entire purpose of going light on gear. We threw all the tips on a variety of rods, and the differences are subtle. One rod will suffice.

Second, that loop-to-loop connection will rattle through your guides during the course of normal fishing. It's as smooth as those connections get, far better than most Skagit connections. Still, it gets a little tiresome after a day of fishing it — but again, that's a fine trade-off for being able to fish at all different depths with one reel, one spool, one line, and a convenient wallet with spare tips.

Another obvious application for the VersiTip is when you're limited on weight or space, like for some exotic trips (weight limits on small planes can be challenging) or when you're sneaking fishing gear onto a business trip or vacation where fishing isn't the primary objective. With the VersiTip MDC, you can still be ready to exploit whatever opportunities arise. It's not only lighter and easier to transport and rig than four separate lines, it's also cheaper — both in terms of lines and spools or reels. One line to spool them all?

MSRP US\$199

Website: www.farbank.com/products/rio-elite-mdc-versitip-fly-line

