

MAGNUS ANGUS and MARK BOWLER put the latest fly-fishing products to the test

Tackle bag

Exceptionally light LA saltwater-ready cassette reel.



Refreshing salt

Wychwood Salt

It came as a very pleasant surprise when Leeda allowed me to preview their Salt reel last year. This year the Salt is in production. It is still white, still machined from barstock aluminium, still fitted with plastic interchangeable cassette spools, still has a captive nut attaching spool to body, and still has a small plastic drag-knob. Gone, however, is the small, plastic-housed drag. This has now been replaced by a sleek, sealed blue-anodised unit at the heart of the Salt. The only other noticeable change is a larger, more finger friendly handle – it is now shaped and rubberised.

Take a step back. Wychwood's design team had to work through the purpose of this reel. For example, they looked at how fast a reel turns when playing a saltwater fish,

what amount of drag will be applied and what effect will friction and speed have. The product designer eventually decided on carbon-fibre drag-washers. These have no danger of melting because they're housed in a sealed aluminium case, which should absorb some of the heat and radiate away, and the surfaces are secure from contamination.

The drag does indeed seem rather smooth, and the range seems fair to me. As I type this, I have in front of me, the larger 8TEN model, a size I would use for larger bonefish – maybe edging into baby-tarpon country – and I can set a drag which suits me for those fish. For larger tarpon I doubt I would use a cassette reel, and it seems to me this drag can't be cranked up tight enough for those giants anyway.

Wychwood's sales-speak talks about the white finish keeping the Salt cooler in tropical sunlight – possibly, fractionally. To my eye, in a crowd of black, silver and gold reels the Salt simply (and refreshingly) stands out because it's white. I see no reason why much of our fishing tackle should be dour and conservative and if fish can see my reel then, well, I'm too close.

The smaller 6EIGHT model handles a WF8 and 100 yards of 20lb backing. The 8TEN model holds up to WF10 line with 250 yards of 30lb backing – easily enough capacity for light tropical saltwater fishing and enough for heavy fresh-water use. That capacity is for conventional lines, the 8TEN could easily suit one of the current generation of short double-handed rods or Switch

rods, but I would want to fit the line I intended to use and check the backing capacity.

As saltwater-proof reels go, at 7.7oz and 8.8oz these are not heavy and these are large arbour cassette reels – exceptionally light LA saltwater-ready cassette reels. However, unlike the heavy reels I have used when saltwater fishing, I see no reason why Salt reels should be confined to saltwater. Nicely put together large arbour reels, of reasonable weight, with a good drag and the convenience of cassette spools – why not get as much service from them as possible?

Salt reels come in a fitted case with two spare cassette spools.

Prices:
6EIGHT £279.99
8TEN £299.99
From: Wychwood stockists.



Sealed drag built around carbon fibre drag surfaces.



Salt reel and two spare cassettes in their fitted case.

Beautiful presentation

Charles Clemes Split Cane 7ft No.3

The default package is a two-piece rod with a spare tip in a tweed rod-bag. As an extra, Charles Clemes can provide a luscious dark leather tube into which the butt and twin-tip sections slide gracefully. Or, if you want to go all-out, the presentation package is a long, slim, dark wooden case, inside which the butt and tip sections are cosseted in felt-lined slots, a Charles Clemes Model 278 reel nestles in a niche at one end, and in the example sent for review a silk Phoenix line lies tucked under the rod sections.

The default rod and bag looks simple and purposeful. The leather tube feels and even smells special. The display case takes it to whole other level. Somehow the ceremony of unlatching the brass catches and lifting the heavy lid seems appropriate with a cane rod. I suspect I would find it all a little too much, too ostentatious, for a carbon rod. Maybe that's because I know cane rods are hand-made, that someone spent years learning the crafts needed to make this, and then spent days making the rod in my hand.

Similar attention to detail has been paid to the parts brought together here – the reel seat is solid nickel-silver, the walnut spacer is turned from 400-year old Turkish walnut! And it's an up-locking seat, which breaks with cane traditions but suits my taste. This grip is reverse half-wells – fairly long and plump – actually larger than I like on a rod this size, but the grip can be customised so no

worries, and the cork is first-class. The butt ring is lined with agate, and the high arched snakes above that are neatly whipped to the shaft of the rod.

Based on a Garrison taper, this has pretty much the action I expect from a cane rod, words like through and slow are followed by mellow and forgiving. The cane sections are precisely put together. The culm was split rather than sawn and the nodes have a Leonard stagger. To my eye, despite the American taper and choice of high-arched rings, some things about this rod hint at traditional British cane rod building: the medium-blond blank, those wine-coloured whippings with a tiny contrasting tip to each tying (thankfully black, rather than gold) a modest build-up on the excellent varnish work.

Then casting. To level the field, I chose a conventional synthetic #3 floating line rather than a silk line. This is a seven foot 3-weight. I would fish a rod that length on small streams and choose that line-weight for delicate presentation, so the emphasis has to be on short casting and loop control, the leader must straighten.

OK, so, the first few casts were complete nonsense! With a few yards of line outside the tip I feel I want a short, sharp stroke, the Clemes sort of slaps me around and I have to go along with its rhythm. Slower, longer, smoother. Even when I find that rhythm my loops are not needle



Two-piece rod with extra tip section.



The display case – home for the ultimate rod-kit!



The agate butt-ring looks great and looks right on the butt of a cane rod.

tight, not at all, but the leader unfolds and the slender line floats down.

I found I could shoot line, but frankly at the distances I was casting I had no need. I suppose hauling simply reduced the amount of rod movement I needed; it did make sure the line was tight at the critical time – where simply holding the line in my line-hand doesn't maintain tightness, when the rod is moving forwards, towards the line-hand.

Accuracy can mean forcing, punching a fly to the target or just above it, alternatively it can mean being able to repeat the same time and again – this is more about time and again.

According to the makers this weighs 120g. Naturally, it feels heavier than an equivalent carbon rod and I think I have less feel, less sense of the line. Thing is, when casting short there is simply very little line mass and drag to feel, so perhaps feeling the rod more actually helps. The line-rating given seems to suit short-range casting where most equivalent carbon rods often want a heavier line or suit longer casting.

If you have a taste for cane rods the Charles Clemes Split Cane 7ft No.3 is beautifully made and presented, hints at traditional British rod making, and as a fishing rod as far as I can see this is exactly fit for its function.

SPECIFICATION

Sections: 2 (spare tip)

Action angle: 55°

Stiffness: 42.1g

Rings: One lined butt-ring, snakes

Handle: Half-wells

Fighting butt: No

Cork quality: High

Reel seat: Nickel-silver with walnut spacer

Blank: Cane

Thread: Claret, black tippings

Build quality: Very high

Rod bag: Tweed

Rod tube: Optional extra,

heavy duty leather

Price: Rod £1,800; leather tube: £200; display case: £450

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