SPLIT-CANE ROD BUILDING — the last of four articles by R. BARRAUD

Now to the fitting and finishing

Three sound reasons for having a rubber button — prepared and fixed in an unorthodox manner

IF YOU have made a good job so far and cleaned off all signs of glue from the cane the rod is ready for fitting and finishing.

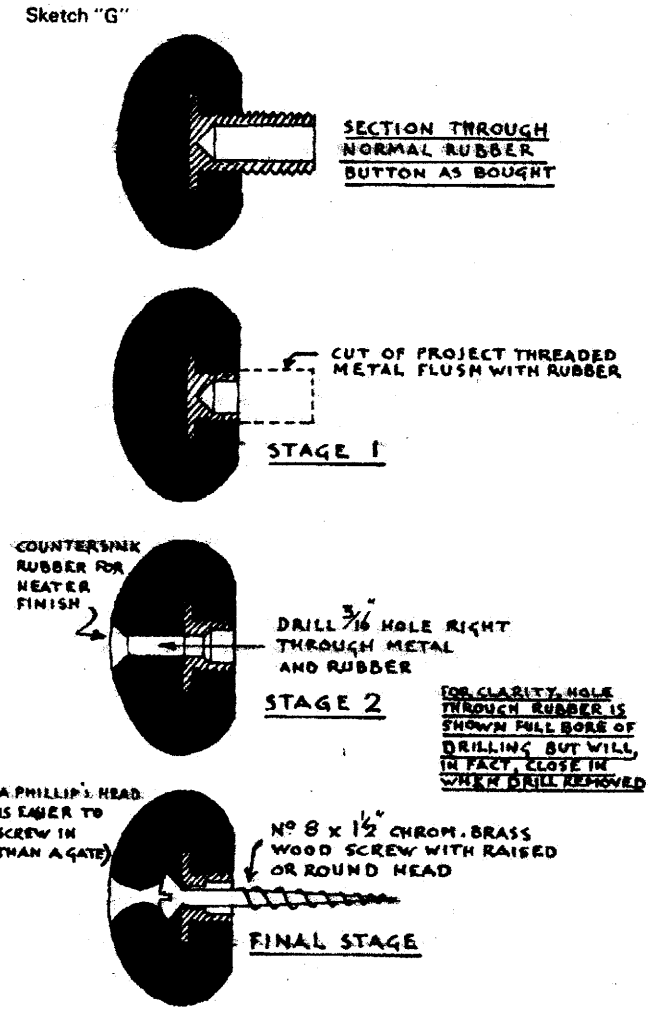
Everything to do with fishing rods must possess three essential qualities — strength with lightness, resistance to wear, and resistance to corrosion. A necessary subsidiary quality is that they should not get to *look* poor even if they are still mechanically sound. This can happen to enamelled, anodised, or plated fittings. A black enamelled winch fitting looks fine to start with but soon gets scratched to show the bright metal underneath and then becomes shoddy in appearance. *Plated* rings of any kind should be avoided because the razor-sharp edges of broken plating can play havoc with line dressings.

The winch fitting should be the simplest form of screw type with one sliding-grip ring forced on to the reel seat by a knurled, threaded ring. These fittings are made in aluminium alloy without any added finish, are remarkably hard-wearing and never look the worse for wear. I never choose the very bright polished ones because the polish is sometimes plating, but even if it is not it has too much flash to start with and soon gets dull in patches. Start with the duller natural alloy and it will remain like that for all time. For this rod get one five-eighths of an inch inside diameter which gives you approximately three-quarters of an inch outside and grips most reels well.

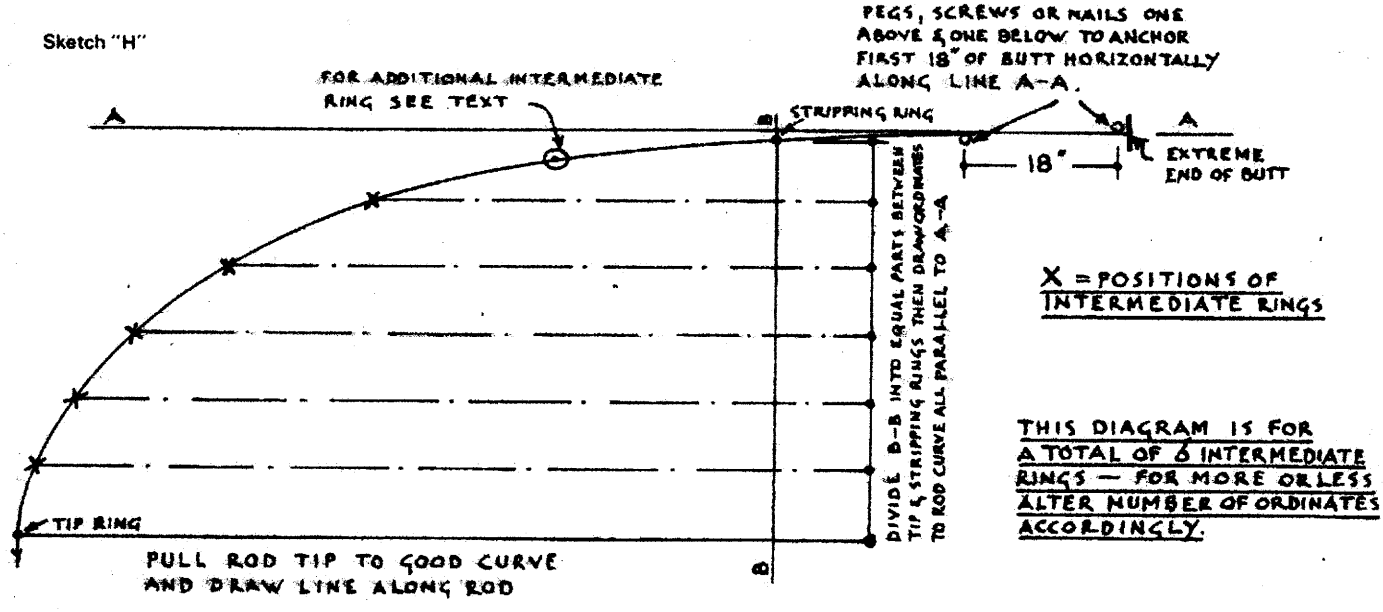
Rings should be stainless steel, solid nickel, German silver, or plain bronze right through, but not steel in any other form and not plated or lined. Rings on most trout rods are too small, especially the stripping ring, the hole of which should be 7/32nds of an inch minimum — 9/32nds of an inch is better. I prefer unlined rings for stripping and tip rings, because lined rings are heavier and, on the tip, tend to break if you happen to make contact with a rock. The stripping ring can be either a "full open" or snake, but intermediate rings should be snake. For one thing they are much easier to clean free of the grease which builds up in the awkward corners of full-open rings.

Continued overleaf

Sketch "G"



Sketch "H"



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The ring sizes for this rod then are: Stripping 9/32nds of an inch, next 6/32nds of an inch, all other intermediate rings and tip ring 5/32nds of an inch. Note how much better you can cast and shoot line with these sizes than with the traditional smaller ones.

Many people think a rubber button is uncalled for but I think it has at least three good, sound reasons for being fitted. It is a good buffer for letting the butt of the rod down on stones and rocks, and on soft, muddy ground its spread prevents the butt sinking in, with reel and line picking up mud and grit. Lastly, it is much pleasanter than a hard end against one's stomach at times. So this rod has a rubber button but it is prepared and fixed in an unorthodox manner that does away with the unwanted addition of the usual metal butt cap into which it normally screws. It also allows the reel to come nearer the butt end of the rod.

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Fittings should be placed in this order: Stripping and tip rings, intermediate rings, winch fittings, rubber button.

The positioning of rings can be decided in two ways, geometrically as shown in sketch "H" or arbitrarily. Geometrically gives correct, progressive spacing. But because of the slighter bend nearer the butt end of the rod an additional ring placed by judgment, and nearer the first plotted intermediate ring than the stripping ring, is sometimes found desirable. I think the sketch shows the geometrical method clearly enough without further explanation being necessary, except to say that a flat floor or wall with a piece of plain ceiling-lining paper on which to draw makes things easier. Once the line of the rod curve has been traced the rest can be done with a set square, long, straight lath and ruler to divide distances.

The broken-line ordinates must, of course, be parallel to line A—A and at right angles to line B—B. Arbitrarily, a good order for this rod would be, spacing from the tip ring: Five, six, seven, eight, ten, 12 and 24 inches to the stripping ring which would then be 36 inches from the butt end. This spacing nicely avoids the ferrules and there is only the stripping ring on the butt joint.

There are usually too many intermediate rings on fly rods; I think you will find six on this rod ample and shooting greatly improved in consequence. Fix the tip and stripping rings first and dead in line with each other along the same flat. Follow with the intermediates, using the tip and stripping rings as sights to look through to ensure that all subsequent rings line up. It makes things easier to anchor the rod along the edge of a plank of wood — ring side up, of course — with pieces of Sellotape and leave it anchored until the glue on the feet of the rings has set.

The feet of rings are often thick at the ends. File or grind them down to nothing on the top sides at the extreme ends. Put a dab of Araldite on the feet, place on rod (which must be held or propped ring side up and quite firmly for this operation), line up exactly, and leave to set overnight. When set, shave or file off any blobs of glue standing proud. Bind one strip of Sellotape, about $\frac{1}{16}$th of an inch wide, over the foot (halfway on the foot, halfway on the rod), which will allow the whipping to climb up over the end of the foot without the usual unsightly hump.

The many methods of whipping are well known so I am not going into that procedure, except to emphasise that after whipping do *not* coat the whippings with wax or cellulose. If varnish does discolour whippings, what matter? The varnish should soak right into the whipping and be as one with the varnish on the cane. If it is not (and it will always fracture or come away over wax or cellulose) a thin crack will develop between the whipping and the cane varnish to let in water. Whip the ferrules at this stage. Use Terylene sewing thread for all whippings; *not* silk or nylon.

It is a simple operation to fix the winch fitting. Roughen the inside of the tube with coarse sandpaper, smear it all over with Araldite and smear all over the cork you have sanded down to fit. Push with a twisting movement the tube, threaded end first, tightly up against the cork where it thickens out to form the grip. Wipe off all surplus glue that will be forced out. Do this very carefully and thoroughly so as not to leave any on the grip.

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The winch fitting must be lined up *exactly* with the rings and the best way to do that is to fit a reel immediately after wiping off the glue, holding the rod at balance out in front of you, looking along it, and watching the bits of rings you will see either side. If the amount of rings visible on one side is greater than the other move the reel and winch fitting together a little to the same side and let it hang again. When it hangs so that the bits of rings are evenly visible on both sides of the rod the winch fitting is dead in line with the rings. Leave the reel on until the glue has set. You are likely to disturb the position of the winch fitting by removing it.

Sketch "G" shows the various stages of preparing the button and the method of fixing. Stage 1 is a section through the button as bought. Stage 2 shows the threaded portion cut off and countersunk just below the rubber. Stage 3 is the last before fixing with a $\frac{1}{16}$th of an inch diameter hole drilled right through.

To fix, square off the cane and cork flush with (or better, a little sunk below) the end of the winch fitting. Bore a $\frac{1}{16}$th of an inch hole exactly in the centre of the cane and at least as long as the length of the fixing screw. Push a $1\frac{1}{4}$-inch or $1\frac{1}{2}$-inch raised head, chromium plated, *brass*, wood screw through the button and screw it into the cane until the head comes hard up against the metal, holding the washer that is moulded into the button. The rubber will close over the head to some extent and gives a neat job all round. Fixed thus the button also prevents the fixed reel grip ring from easing off backwards, which it is otherwise inclined to do if not tightly shrunk on.

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Varnishing is most important. Do not use any of the so-called "rod varnishes". A really good alkyd-resin varnish is excellent for our purpose. As good as any, and obtainable quite easily from decorators' shops and ironmongers, is Valspar Clear Varnish. Apply it by finger if you like but I find it best to use a small piece of soft plastic foam bound to a short stick handle.

But first use a small brush and paint the varnish, three coats, over all whippings and get the space between the rod and the whipping, as it lifts over the feet, full with varnish where water can collect.

Next give the whole rod, including whippings, two coats, then rub down all over (not the ferrules, of course) with dry pumice powder (the finest) on a bit of soft wash leather until all gloss has disappeared. Carefully remove, by tapping, dusting and blowing, all signs of pumice. Give two more coats of varnish and rub down finally — just enough to take off the top hard gloss.

Leave for at least a week, then polish with a silicone furniture cream. The result will be a pleasant-looking and feeling surface that is quite non-flash. Be careful to have each coat of varnish hard and dry before applying the next and add an extra day for the coat that has to be rubbed down.

Make or buy a cork-end stopper for your female ferrule and use it always with the cork well rubbed with the graphite from a soft pencil from time to time; never grease a ferrule! Finally, if you are no good with a sewing machine, coax someone who loves you enough to make a rod bag to fit. Be sure to use a good strong material.