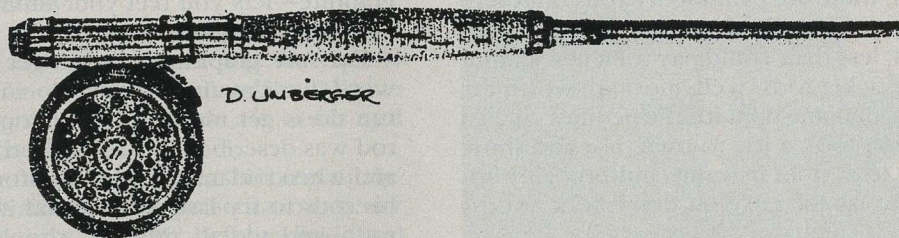


Buying a Bamboo Rod



Ten things to look for

1. Is it straight? It should be. Put the rod together and sight down the guides. If the guides seem to spiral off to one side it means there's a twist in the splines, which is not the sign of a good rod.

A set or slight bend in the rod tip will sometimes occur in a used rod. This is often a simple repair job for someone qualified to do the work, but a set in a new rod is unacceptable.

2. Look at the wraps. Are they clean, crisp and tight with no gaps or cross-wraps? Were the feet of the guides filed down so the wraps taper smoothly from the guides into the blank, or is there an unsightly bump? Attention to cosmetic detail is a mark of a good rod maker.

3. Check the finish. A good varnish job should be smooth and clean with no drips, smudges or dust spots and should have a rich, deep look to it. An impregnated rod should have a dull luster.

A good impregnated finish lasts longer and requires less care, but some rod makers say it dampens the action of the bamboo. This is probably a matter of opinion.

Speaking of care, no bamboo rod, be it varnished, impregnated or otherwise, should be stored wet or damp, as this can damage the wraps and the rod itself. Remember, bamboo is biodegradable.

4. How much does it weigh? A bamboo fly rod will be a bit heavier than a com-

parable graphite or fiberglass, but some bamboo rods are heavier than others. This is seldom a problem with the shorter, lighter rods, but some mid-weight to heavy bamboo rods can be real clubs.

5. What kind of reel seat does it have? Sliding-ring and cap and ring reel seats are very stylish and handsome, but some fly fishers find that their reel seats work loose during a day of casting and they prefer a locking seat.

A sliding-ring seat with a cork spacer is lightweight and good looking, but on some the ring has a tendency to bite into the cork and leave a scar.

Some exotic woods, like mesquite, have been found to be too brittle for use as reel seat spacers. For looks and performance, you probably can't go far wrong with walnut.

6. How big is the stripping guide? The traditional bamboo fly rod was designed for silk lines and has a very small stripping guide which, when used with a fatter, modern line, causes a "ballooning" of the line between the line hand and stripping guide that seriously cuts down the amount of line you can shoot. Today's bamboo rods should have a larger, roomy stripping guide.

7. Looking for an older rod to save money? That's an excellent idea, but beware. Some of the older production bamboo fly rods (especially the top models once made by Heddon, Granger and Phillipson) are excellent fly rods by any standard and real bar-

gains in today's market. On the other hand, *most* of the inexpensive bamboo rods made prior to the 1950s were junk and are not worth more than \$10 now. Genuine treasures still sometimes turn up at garage sales, but it's best to check with a reputable dealer before paying good money for any bamboo rod. In fact, it's probably best to buy the rod from a reputable dealer in the first place.

8. Don't know much about bamboo fly rods? There are ways to remedy that. Read, study and talk to any and all bamboo rod aficionados you can find. Bamboo rod nuts are like nuts anywhere, they're more than happy to talk about their passion, especially when the fish aren't biting. If you're real nice, they might even let you cast their baby, but don't be insulted if they don't offer.

It's also a good idea to order some, if not all, of the new and previously owned rod catalogs and lists to see what's available and to get a feel for relative prices.

9. Don't buy a rod sight-unseen. Okay, that's not always possible, but if you can't handle and, preferably, cast the rod, make sure you can return it if you're not satisfied.

10. Most importantly, please yourself. Get a rod that casts well and feels good. Price often reflects quality, but not always. The real test of a fly rod is how well it works for the fisherman who uses it.

