

ROD BUILDING

BY LARRY LEE

Rod Building 102— What About Blanks?

Fly rod blank materials have come a long way in terms of strength and weight in the last 50 years. Prior to the early 1900's, fishing rod blanks were made of green-heart wood or whatever suitable wood stick one could find. Bamboo cane and then split-bamboo were two other materials utilized for rod construction. Around 1950, fiberglass materialized in to both solid and hollow blanks. In 1974, the Fenwick Company introduced fishing rods made of a revolutionary new material called graphite or carbon fiber. This material has been patted, pinched, and tweaked over the last 30 years to become the outstanding fly fisherman's dream it is today.

While graphite will not solve all angling issues (such as operator error), graphite does possess some qualities that make them the best fishing instruments yet created (at least in the humble opinion of the author). Graphite rods are very sensitive to vibration caused by fish (or maybe a rock) striking the fly. They transmit vibration along the blank from the tip to the angler so you can feel the action. After hooking the fish, the extra sensitive graphite rod magnifies movement of the fish, while allowing the angler to experience greater joy in the fight between man and fish.

Graphite is much more responsive than wood, split bamboo, or fiberglass. Energy is stored and released more quickly, so a higher degree of control and accuracy is possible. Advantages include:

- Ability to control tighter loops for longer and more accurate casts.
- Sensitivity and responsiveness enabling a quicker hook set (which means more hookups, *woohoo!*)
- Dampens out more quickly at cast completion, meaning less vibration in line and higher

achievable casting distance.

- Allows for more tolerable casting in a significant wind.

When comparing similar weights, graphite is four times stronger than steel and 2.5 times stronger than fiberglass. This means that less material is needed to build the blank as opposed to fiberglass for the same strength. Smaller diameters can be used, thus cutting down air resistance resulting in even more carefree casting.

Graphite blanks do have drawbacks however. For example, the blanks are much more difficult to make than fiberglass. They also act as lightening rods during thunderstorms, and are more subject to breakage when hit by a hard object. There is one graphite rod, however, that is not as sensitive to impacts - *Hexagraph*. It is a solid blank which, when looked at in cross-section, is shaped like a hexagon and resembles split bamboo. The casting action is similar to split bamboo. This rod made its acting debut in "A River Runs Through It", in which it was used to imitate a bamboo rod. *Hexagraph* is more expensive (\$1500) and heavier than hollow graphite.

Graphite is a wonderful material for a fly rod, however fiberglass or bamboo can still produce an experience or feeling that you may prefer. Building your own rod with any material can add a certain amount of pride and enjoyment to each fishing day. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Larry Lee at 916-962-0616, or

email: larrylee@L3rods.com.