

ROD BUILDING

BY LARRY LEE

Rod Building 104 b — Rod Alignment (continued from 104)

In the previous article, we discussed locating the spine or spline (the backbone) in graphite blanks for each segment of the entire blank. Finding the backbone is analogous to purchasing new tires for your car and balancing your new tires correctly for optimum performance. The eyes and reel seat should be put on in alignment with the spine, but whether on the spine itself or opposite of the spine is up to the builder.

Placing the reel seat and rod guides at a random place on the blank rather than the spine will cause inferior performance when casting or playing a fish. You will also tend to have shorter, less accurate casts. Also, if you are fighting large fish, the rod (with proper alignment) will not have a tendency to twist in your hands because of torsional effects set up by improperly placed spine. Some manufacturers mark the spines on their blanks. However, it is always important to check their marks for the following reasons: 1) the spine may be marked incorrectly by the manufacturer, and 2) no graphite blank is perfectly straight. Many manufacturers align rod sections so that the finished fly rod appears straight when sighted along the guides. It is more important to properly align the reel seat and guides with the spine rather than to adjust the blank sections so that they appear straight.

Another step to ensure the correct spine alignment is to join the pieces by aligning your spine marks or the manufacturer's marks (once you've verified that they do indeed mark the spine). This should be a good approximation of the spine for the entire blank. Next flex the entire blank to ensure that the spine of the each individual section is aligned with the spine of each of its neighboring sections. It may be necessary to rotate the tip section slightly to achieve a uniform spine in the joined blank.

The standard method for aligning the reel seat and

guides is to position them on the opposite side of the spine. This position allows the strength of the spine to improve casting accuracy and distance on the forward cast. An alternative to this positioning is to place the reel seat and guides directly on the spine. This positioning is used when forward casting accuracy and distances are secondary to fighting big fish. Consider this positioning when using a rod size of 13 or greater to catch large fish. Placing the guides on the same side of the spine allows the rod to bend more easily toward the fish without the rod twisting when a load is placed on the line.

In summary, it is up to the builder to decide on what is the primary function of the rod. Do you want to have a rod which

- (1) just appears straight;
- (2) is accurate with a lengthy forecast, or
- (3) is intended for the primary purpose of fighting extremely large fish (with a rod size of 13 or greater).

You may want to carefully experiment on your blank to test how correct spine alignment influences your rod.

I will be interested in thoughts you may have regarding the spine alignment. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact me at larrylee@L3rods.com

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