

First, with a straight handle, the rod blank can be extended the full rod length with the grip built around the blank rather than attached to it. The through-handle blank gives a rod added sensitivity.

Second, this design adds to the overall rod strength both in setting the hook and fighting the fish. Long handled rods may have a trigger to aid in casting, but the true advantage of the length is how easy it makes two handed casting. For many people that is a physically more comfortable technique. Particularly if there is a lot of casting to be done.

Third, pistol grips do not fit in many boat rod holders, which can be bothersome when one is trolling or just putting the rod down for a minute.

The guides of a casting rod should be ceramic or an oxide for saltwater fishing. Since most local anglers fish both fresh and saltwater, it is better if fresh-water rods also have those type guides.

Like spinning equipment, baitcasting rods have the lure weight and line weight printed on the blank. These rods are classified from ultra-light to heavy. Newer rods have a larger range of lure/line weight than older traditional classifications. It is important when buying a rod to have a clear idea how the rod will be used.

Of course, no one rod meets all uses and most fishermen own a number of rods. When a casting rod is matched with the proper reel and lure/line weight, it will cast farther and with more accuracy than comparable spinning equipment.

Casting rods range in size from 5 to 7 foot. The most preferred length around Charlotte Harbor is a medium heavy 6 1/2-foot rod.

CONVENTIONAL REELS

A baitcasting reel belongs to a type of reels called conventional. On a conventional reel, cranking the reel handle turns the line spool. Conventional reels are used for casting, bottom fishing, and trolling. The bait-casting reel is designed to be cast, although it also has features which allow it to be used for trolling and bottom fishing. There are a number of features



unique to a conventional casting reel. Some have level-wind, anti-backlash, constant anti-reverse, free spool, and the star drag.

Level Wind: The level wind plays retrieved line across the spool evenly to facilitate easy exit when cast. For conventional reels handling line over 30 pound test, a level wind is not used, primarily because of the stress placed on it when a large fish makes an extremely long and powerful run. On reels without a level wind, the angler nudges the line with the thumb during retrieval to help it distribute evenly on the spool. Monofilament lines above 30 pound test are usually not cast for long distances, rather they are used in trolling, heavy jigging in very deep water and in downrigger applications. Braided lines, due to their smaller diameter can be used to 50- or 60-pounds.

Anti-backlash: The anti-backlash feature slows the spool and stops overspin. To adjust the anti-backlash, a lure is attached to the line and the rod is held at a 45 degree angle. The reel is put in free spool and the anti-backlash adjusted until the lure barely pulls line from the spool by its own weight.

The Free Spool: The free spool is operated by either a button or a thumb bar on the reel, which when pressed, disengages the line spool, allowing it to spin freely.

Drag System: The drag system of a conventional reel has an alternating series of stainless steel and leather-like composites or teflon washers. The drag is adjusted by tightening or loosening the large star located on the same spindle as the cranking handle. Proper adjustment of the drag is based on 25 per cent of the test weight of the line.

Anti-reverse: All casting reels have as part of the drag system an anti-reverse. This feature, when engaged, insures the spool can only be cranked in one direction and stops the handle from spinning backward.

Ball Bearings: Ball bearings in conventional reels are critical for a smooth and long lasting life. Three ball bearings are recommended for baitcasting reels and two for other conventional reels. More than that significantly increases general maintenance and a fewer number reduces smoothness.

Conventional casting reels come in a variety of body shapes and materials. Most are made for right handed operation, but some left handed models are available.