

Build your own...

Spin/Fly

Combination Travel Rod

A modern twist
on an old idea
whose time may
have come
around again.

by Tom Kirkman

The idea of a one-size-fits-all, do-anything rod, has always piqued the interest of a good many fishermen. Of course, it's not something that anyone has yet been able to successfully design and create, although many have tried.

In the 1950's and 1960's, the U.S. market saw an influx of Japanese bamboo rods, packaged in attractive wooden boxes no less, that allowed the user to switch between fly and spinning reels on the same rod. A couple of decades later, Daiwa launched the "Executive Travel Pack" comprised of a compact plastic container enclosing a composite rod in 5 short sections. Inside the compact case was the rod and both a spinning and fly reels. The user could employ either one by simply choosing one of the 2 enclosed handles.

The Daiwa unit proved tremendously popular. To this day I still talk to fishermen that either had one or who would like to find one today. The concept of a multi-piece, multipurpose rod for either fly or spinning use that can be carried under a car seat is still attractive to many. A few years ago, a local custom rod builder approached me about ideas for creating a modern high quality version of these older type fly/spin rods. The trick was to figure out a way to successfully implement both type rods in a single package that utilized as few pieces as possible.

I steered the builder to the older Japanese design. The unit employed a single handle which was simply flipped end for end, depending on which type reel the user decided to use. With a fly reel the handle was employed with the reel seat to the rear. For use with a spinning rod, the handle was employed with the reel seat to the front. At both ends of the handle, female ferrules had been installed so that the rod, fitted with a male ferrule on the butt end, could be inserted into either end. Simple and remarkably effective.

With that in mind the builder began constructing what for him has turned out to be a very nice light-duty spin/fly rod that appeals to many of his customers. It's not hard to do and with the right design and associated pieces you can build a unique spin/fly rod for your own use or to offer your travel oriented customers.

Rod Blank

Almost any multi-piece rod blank will work. In most cases, the spin/fly rod is an Ultra-Light to Light power affair intended for use on small streams and ponds. While this concept could certainly be employed on heavier rods, we'll limit this discussion to applications where lighter rods are the norm. If you choose to use the concept on a heavier version, simply make sure to take into account the changes in length and style that your handle will require.

For now, select a rod blank that you feel works well for such a dual application. In most cases I recommend finding an Ultra-Light or Light power spinning blank in a multi-piece design, preferably in a 3 or 4-piece model. In order to comfortably cast light lures as well as a 4 or 5-weight fly line at reasonable distances, I suggest looking at blanks that are rated by their manufacturer to handle lures in the 1/8th to 1/4 ounce category.

Ferrules

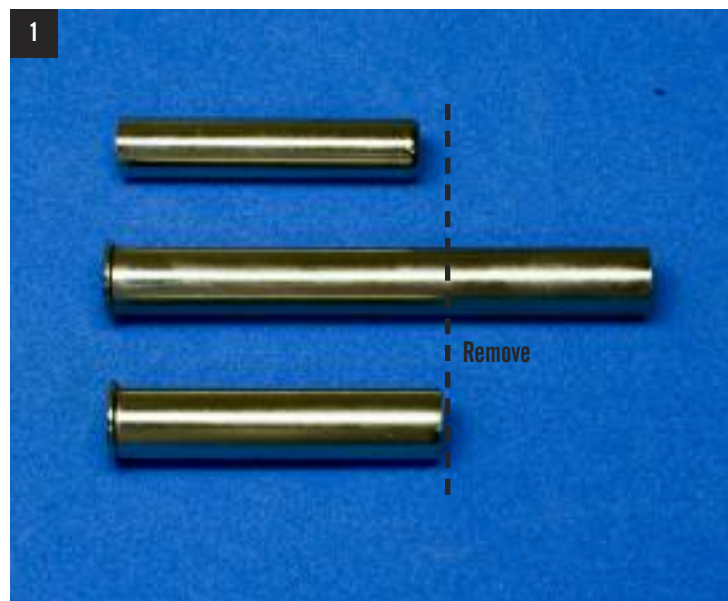
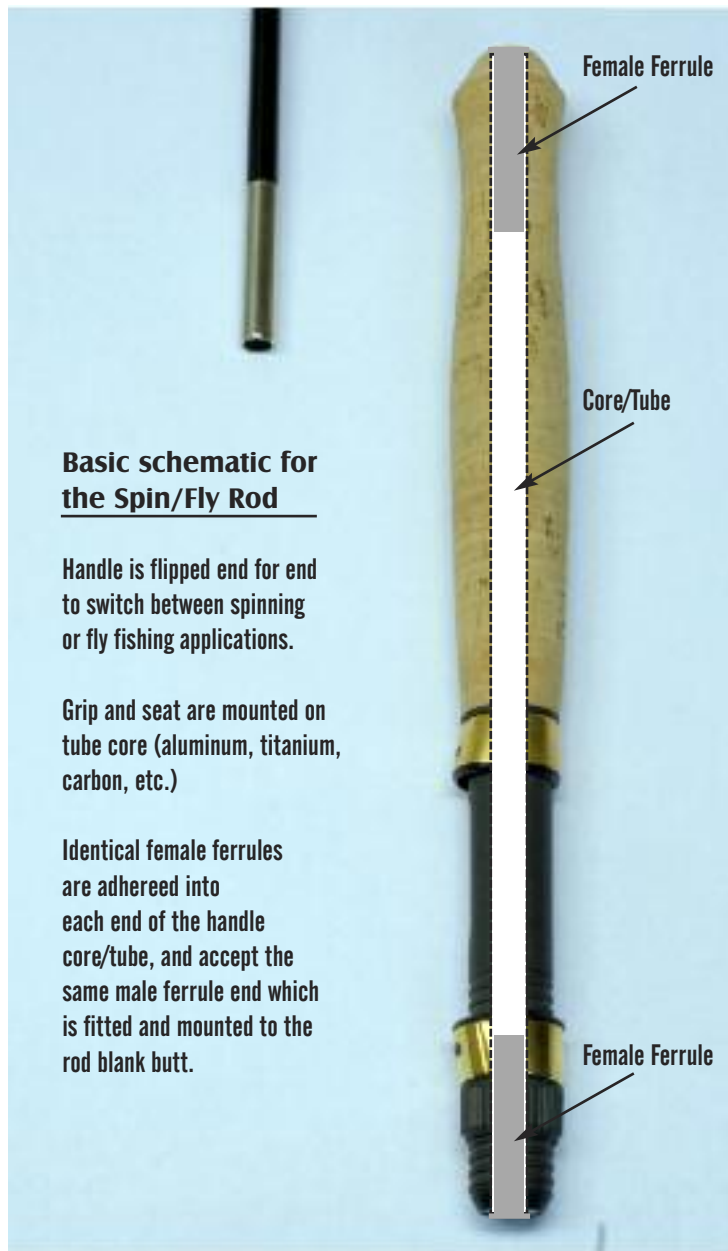
Old style metal ferrules have become obsolete with the advent of integral composite ferrules. But they're still available and ready to serve as the heart of our new spin/fly rod. They make such a system simple and effective.

Many companies still offer these older type metal ferrules. You'll want to carefully measure the butt end of your blank and then obtain two complete and identical ferrule sets. The male end of the ferrule should fit the rod blank butt.

Because the female ferrule will be mounted inside the handle core, rather than onto a blank section end, the lower half of it can be removed. This will reduce the weight of our finished rod by a noticeable amount. Determine the depth of insertion required by the male half and remove the portion beyond that point (1).

Handle

The core of the handle can be a scrap section of rod blank, or an aluminum or titanium tube. We're seeking to build a lightweight rod, so be mindful of weight. The





inside diameter of the tube should be large enough to accommodate the female ferrules, one at each end. If the tube is much larger than the ferrules, you can shim the ferrules with foam arbors, or even wood plugs bored to the proper size to hold the ferrules.

**If you choose to use a scrap section of rod blank as your handle core, wrap both ends snugly with a thread reinforcement wrap and coat with a thin, but wet application of thread wrap epoxy. This will prevent a split out at the ends of the handle core.*

Here we've chosen to use a very simple handle configuration which features a Western/Fenwick type grip, followed by a size 16 or 17 nylon/graphite type reel seat. With the seat to the rear, we have a nice spinning rod handle featuring a 6-1/2 inch rear grip (2). This is generally sufficient for light spinning rods in the 5 to 6-1/2 foot range. With the seat to the front we have a perfect light-line fly rod set-up (3).

Mounting the seat in either up or down-locking position is up to the builder, but keep in mind that either position reverses itself the instant you flip the handle around. So determine the lengths and balance you desire for each rod type and try to position the seat so that it works well for both applications.



Finishing The Rod Ends

It's important to finish off the ends of the handle core nicely to preserve good fit and finish. Simple means are often the best. On the reel seat end we've employed a rubber winding check which works nicely (4). On the cork grip end, due to the close fit of the ferrule, core and grip, we've elected to do nothing and still have a trim, neat appearance (5). If you prefer, you could easily lengthen the core just a tad and use a winding check on the face of the grip. Use your rod building talent to determine how best to complete the handle ends.

Guides

The spin/fly rod works exceptionally well with the New Guide Concept or Microwave guide systems. Ring guides will work equally well with either spinning or fly rods so their use is encouraged. Remember, you'll be using the same rod for both applications so it's important that the guide type and system you use will be effective with either. Fortunately, a set up that is primarily designed for use with a light spinning rod tends to work extremely well with a fly reel and fly line. So set up your guides as if you were interested mainly in a spinning rod and you'll find you're covered on the fly rod end of things as well.

Compromise

Obviously, any time you combine rod types you're likely to end up with a rod that is less than optimum for any particular use. However, when employed for mostly Ultra-Light and Light power rods our spin/fly system works remarkably well in either configuration.

Don't be afraid to tinker with the handle or grip design - just keep in mind that you'll be using the same handle, flipped end for end, for both spinning and fly rod applications. If you need a longer fore grip, build it. It will function as a bit of a fighting butt when used in the fly rod position. However, do keep in mind that foregrips are rarely used nor needed if building a light power rod.

Ideas

When selecting your handle core/tube, try to use a piece that is very close to the outside diameter of the ferrules. This eliminates the need to shim the ferrules by a large amount and thus ensures that your ferrule to rod butt junction will be straight and true. At the same time, however, remember that the smaller the diameter of your core/tube, the less stiff it will be. Therefore when using a smaller diameter handle core, try to select something with heavy walls. You'd like to keep your handle core at least as stiff, or stiffer, than the blank butt section. If using a larger diameter handle core/tube, you can get by with thinner walls thus reducing weight but keeping good stiffness.

If you do need to shim your female ferrules to fit the handle core/tube, use anything that will allow you to keep the ferrules concentric to the handle core. Small differences can be taken up with guide wrapping thread - larger differences with common hard foam reel seat arbor. The important part is to ensure that the ferrule is mounted squarely so that when the rod blank is inserted, it will align with the handle and not be thrown off on an obvious tangent. Careful fitting and precision alignment are indeed important here.

The spin/fly is not only compact and versatile, it's a darn good fishing rod (or is that "rods?") to boot! Using the concept of a flip-around handle, let your imagination work on similar concepts for other rod types and uses. With the lack of modern "Executive Travel Packs" the custom rod builder has a unique opportunity to fill a void that continues to exist in the finished rod market. 🦅 Tom Kirkman



Ferrule Types

Generally speaking and with all else being equal, a lighter rod is a better rod. Perhaps the one downside to using older-style metal ferrules on any spin-fly rod is the weight of such articles. Granted, they are located low on the rod, in the handle itself, and therefore do not incur the same penalty as they would if they were used further up the rod. However, the builder should realize that there have been other similar ferrule systems on the market that were crafted from aluminum (Featherweight) and nylon/plastic (Fuji) and which could be implemented in similar fashion to what has been outlined in this article. Experimentation is encouraged.