

Distance Casting: Not just for show!

By Jeff Wagner

Distance casting has proven to be a measure of flycasting stature. Books, articles, pamphlets and web-sites have been created to help anglers increase their long line. Tournaments such as the Best of the West at the International Sportsmen's Expositions have been centered on casting distance. Even some of the recent fly fishing tournaments have had casting qualifiers and always a component of distance casting.

So why is distance casting so often touted, is it simply for the crowd appeal, watching someone throw an entire line and some backing, doing what seems to be the impossible? Is there merit to being able to cast the long line? Steve and Tim Rajeff have mastered casting distance, both in conventional form and in ACA form. They have also been extremely successful at casting accuracy. Winning countless casting competitions and becoming the prominent flycasters in history. Steve and Tim won the Western regional qualifier of the Outdoor Life Network Fly Fishing Masters (2003) and went on to win the entire tournament. Proving that great flycasters can also be great fly fisherman. Their casting in competition does relate to fishing on the stream, making them more successful fly fisherman.

Are there technical merits to casting the long line? If one can cast 115' of line, will that really help someone in a real fishing situation? Many people I have heard in fly fishing and flycasting circles say no. That casting distance is only for show, making statements like "you'll never catch a fish at that distance" and "does that really do you any good?"

Remember "flycasting is the essence of fly fishing" (Krieger).

Let me say to start with that I have never seen someone cast the long line that couldn't also control the short line, or cast well in a variety of other situations applicable to fly fishing. So what are the benefits of practicing distance casting? Let's break down the cast and look at how practicing the distance cast can help your casting in real fishing situations

Double haul and the single haul are used extensively and are a primary component to distance casting. The haul increases line speed directly by pulling

on the line and also indirectly by increasing the load in the rod.

When distance casting; the timing, length, and speed of the hauls must be almost perfect to accomplish a long distance cast. By working on the double haul in the distance cast one becomes more familiar with this technique and comfortable using it when fishing or applying it to many situations. Hauling can be used to pick line up off the water, increase line speed, and perform other casts.

Casts such as curve casts can be accentuated by using a properly timed haul. The haul increases the line speed on the final forward motion of an over powered curve cast and increases the load in the rod, accentuating the final curve of the fly line and leader with greater power.

Hauling increases line speed, which also helps combat wind and make quicker casts. Making tight loops can be aided by hauling and tighter loops are more efficient making wind casting much easier.

Shooting line into the fore and backcast is a necessity when distance casting. The timing and length of the shoot can be tuned to almost perfection by distance casting. The ability to shoot a certain amount of line into the backcast takes practice. This practice can be put to good use when fishing in adverse conditions.

Wind casting can be aided by being able to shoot line. In windy conditions it is often not possible to carry large amounts of line in the air; even shorter lengths of line that can often be carried in less windy conditions can become extremely difficult to control.

By being able to shoot line in the forecast one can maximize fishing with a tail wind. Also, by shooting line into the backcast it is possible to load the rod properly for a strong cast into the wind where a head wind may affect a forward shoot.

Keep in mind shooting line is a good technique in countless situations including dry fly fishing, fishing in areas with little backcast room and when fishing with a strong wind into the casting arm where it may only be possible to make your backcast your presentation cast.

An often unrelated benefit to distance casting is

accuracy. A good accuracy cast comes from having the ability to make tight parallel loops and a straight line path of the rod tip. Remember this principal; the fly line will only follow the path of the rod tip. Meaning, if the rod tip moves to the right or left of the desired path in line with the desired target on the final presentation cast the fly line will also move to the right or left, the fly missing the target.

Distance casting is also accuracy casting. The same requirements of accuracy casting are also true of distance casting. When false casting 60 feet of line, if a caster does not have a straight line path of the rod tip or parallel loops the line will not lay out straight. The ability to hold that line in the air will deteriorate because of the inefficient loops created by the movements of the hand and consequently the rod tip.

Keep in mind slight nuances present in the cast at short distances may be hindering your accuracy. These imperfections in the cast will be compounded when casting distance and carrying more line. Often by working out more line little problems will become evident. By working on distance and accuracy soon you will have the ability to hit a 30 inch target at 55 feet 9 out of 10 times in a variety of conditions.

Another benefit would be trajectory change. When false casting large amounts of line the amount of time it takes for the loop to unroll often allows the fly line to drop towards the ground. If the next cast were made without trajectory change the next loop may be too low and come in contact with the ground or water. Controlling the amount of line in the air and at times compensating for the drop of the line in the back or fore cast means a greater ability to make those changes when on the stream.

Such changes can be a necessity when casting into a head wind by aiming the forward cast down and the back cast up or the opposite, making a low back cast and high forward cast when casting with a tail wind. Also, specialty casts like steeple casts, parachute casts, pile casts and the like require a change in trajectory.

All combined the final result of practicing the distance cast is control. The ability to manipulate the rod and consequently the fly line in various ways to present the fly to the fish in a variety of possibly fishing conditions is the key to catching more fish. As most any fly fishing instructor or guide has stated, "if you can not

get the fly to the fish, you will not catch any fish". All of the following points are about practice. Most flycasters today are familiar with such terms as SLP (straight line path) of the rod tip, RSP (Rod Stopping Point), power application, speed, stroke length, stop, and rod control. All of these terms are components of a well-performed distance cast. The ability to execute them properly is the key.

To take it to the next level, being able to use them efficiently is also essential. Practicing distance casting means working on various aspects of the cast and the components that make up the cast.

Each of these individual components could have an entire article written about them, too much for this article so we will only cover a few that are most pertinent to distance casting.

To make a point let me make an analogy. If a person can hold 60 feet of line in the air and can shoot out to 90 feet with a 5 weight rod - the power, speed, and timing in that cast may be used when fishing and not necessarily in a way that is evident.

If the same caster were casting into a 15 MPH head wind with a 5 weight rod and trying to present a dry fly to a fish rising at 35 feet that fisherman would have a much easier time casting in these conditions than someone that has not practiced such casting.

To make a parallel: if a fisherman can cast 100 feet of line - the power, speed and timing it takes to cast that 100 feet would be approximately the same as a fisherman working to cast 50 feet into a 20 MPH head wind

All of the following points are about practice.

#1. Falsecast using continuously less power.

Many casters use too much power when casting. Begin casting a comfortable amount of line and then progressively use less power until the cast almost fails. This helps many casters realize that it takes very little power to keep even large amounts of line in the air. When confronted with a longer cast or windy conditions, many fisherman begin overpowering the rod, instead of using the rod. The way to make the fly and the fly line deliver to the target is by loading the rod and then unloading the rod. This means that in windy conditions or long casts, more power may be needed but often a more positive stop is also required. Then add a little longer casting

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stroke. Do not get mad, get even. Learn to make that cast effortlessly.

#2. *False cast the most line possible without failure with hauling.* Increase the amount of line being false cast foot by foot until the loops disfigure to the point that the cast can no longer be maintained. When that point of failure is found, decrease the amount of line being false cast by several feet then false cast again.

Continue this process until you find your maximum falsecasting distance. The distance where adding one more foot of line would cause the cast to fail. Mark this point on your fly line. Practice casting this amount of line. Working on loop control, having loops that are parallel and keeping the line from ticking the ground. This exercise will increase your stamina and your efficiency making it easier to cast into a wind, shoot line, and cast larger flies and even cast more distance.

#3. *Increase casting and hauling speed continuously to max speed then false cast very slowly.* One of the best ways to beat the wind, cast more distance, or get the fly to the fish faster is to increase your false casting speed. To do this, simply continue to increase the amount of speed in the haul and the casting hand speed while maintaining proper loop shape. Line speed is a pivotal part of any casting, but may be more important for distance, wind, off vertical casting and quick casts. In these situations the fisherman must make the next cast before the line has time to touch the water or before the fish move out of range. The best way to do this is with increased line speed and increased casting cadence.

#4. *False cast the most amount of line possible without hauling.* After learning to double haul many casters forget about casting without the haul.

The casting hand is the foundation for the cast. Build on this and you strengthen your casting stroke. Start by casting a short amount of line then slip the line through your hand while holding the grip (not incorporating the line control hand) increasing your casting distance after every two to three false casts, trying to maintain good loops and control. When fisherman start casting they rely 100% on the casting arm. Then

they learn to double haul at first the relationship is 75/25 casting hand to hauling hand. When the fisherman becomes more comfortable with the haul the relationship becomes 50/50. After a short time many casters begin to rely on the haul more making the relationship 75/25. In some situations it is certainly understandable to increase the hauling power without increasing the casting hand power. Hand casting (without the use of a rod) is an example of casting almost 100% with the haul. Almost any percentage relationship is possible, but may not be the most efficient. The key when casting in adverse conditions or for distance is to find a relationship between the two that is most comfortable, usually that would be close to a 50/50 use of each.

#5. *False cast using a wide casting stroke and narrowing the stroke progressively.* Often many casters use a casting stroke that is wider than what is needed, which is fine. The wider the casting stroke the easier the cast, however, every person has a max casting stroke that they feel comfortable with. When going for more distance and power it is necessary to get the most amount of power out of the shortest casting stroke possible. Start with your normal casting stroke and try decreasing the length of the casting stroke being used until the loop shape begins to deteriorate. In a short time many casters find this very refreshing. They are able to make a 20 foot fishing cast with very short casting stroke. This exercise is great for learning to load the rod with a progressive speed up to a positive stop.

#6. *Start false casting 20 feet of line and shoot as much as possible without slack in the line, then add five feet at a time, each time repeating the shoot with as little slack as possible.* Shooting line is a necessity in many presentation casts.

Reach casts, aerial mends, pile casts, straight line casts, casting distance, roll casts and wind casts can all be manipulated and can become more effective by being able to shoot line.

This exercise will greatly help when casting streamers from a drift boat to a stream bank or casting in lakes from a float tube.

Shooting line is also a must when fishing from the bow of a boat, casting to bonefish or other species

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Two Handed Fly Casting

Spey Casting Techniques

by Al Buhr

BOOK
REVIEW



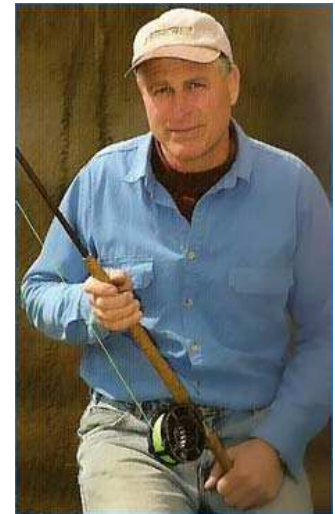
If you are looking for a “*Three Easy Steps to Spey Casting*” book, this is not it. Al Buhr has managed to create a book of significant depth that covers the needs of the thinking man, from beginner to expert.

This is a book about using two-handed rods to fish. It is not a book that is all pure theory, but a book that will transition you from historical background (there are descriptions of casts developed in the 1600’s) to modern casts that are as new as 16 years. *This book is designed to get you onto the river and get you fishing in some of the toughest spots you could imagine.*



Al’s unique approach to teaching is reflected in his book. Ordinary men begin their lessons at the start of the cast, or the pick-up, and progress through the cast to the “stop” and forward cast. Al starts you at the

end of the cast, the stop. From there he details all of the elements of a good two-handed cast. Particular attention is given on how to do those elements correctly and why those elements are important. There are also discussions on common errors that beginners make and faults that may begin to appear in even the most experienced caster’s delivery. All the two-handed casts are described. The novice may already know the names of many of them, and there will be some of those casts, which even seasoned casters may never have heard of. The Circle cast, Perry Poke, Chip cast, Torque twist and other specialty casts are not only concisely described but also beautifully illustrated and photographed.



Author - Al Buhr

If you are a two-handed casting student or practitioner you will appreciate the well-organized fault diagnostic tables at the back of this book. The problems or fault symptoms are worded in every day language so that the reader can track down what is going wrong with his cast. From the description of the symptoms, you can simply look up the fault correction.

This book will be found in any serious casting student’s library. It is both a student’s handbook and a professional’s resource manual. Al has created a valuable piece of two-handed casting literature that will become a “need to have” resource for generations to come.

Published by Frank Amato Books
(503) 653-8108.

Book Review by Dan McCrimmon, member of the CBOG from Vancouver, B.C.

that cruise the flats. Often the fisherman will be required to have fly in hand and with as few false casts as possible present the fly to the fish. Having the ability to shoot line in the fore and backcast will allow the fisherman to present the fly in 2-3 false casts at 30-70 feet with ease. line and start over after the shoot. This will also help when your back cast needs to be your delivery cast.

#7. *Another exercise at any distance is loop control.* In this exercise hula hoops, the 3 foot diameter size, are placed on an upright pole.

In a park this pole could be a light pole, a small tree, or a stake that you provide. The hoop is placed on the pole at various heights and the caster throws a loop through the hoop. This should be done without the loop touching the sides of the hoop.

It sounds simple, but, it can make one realize how large and inefficient of loops they are casting. The loops are the foundation of all casts.

Wide inefficient loops or crossed tailing loops unquestionably hinder the cast.

Tight loops that are parallel and from 1-3 foot in height are most efficient. Tight loops allow for greater line speed, better fly turnover, greater distance, less wind resistance, and better rod load.

#8. *Change of Trajectory.* When carrying large amounts of line it is necessary to change trajectory. For example if a caster were holding 70 feet of line in the air with moderate line speed by the time the loop unrolled it would have dropped from its original expected elevation from the trajectory of the cast.

To maintain the 180 degree rule it would then be necessary to make a higher backcast and to allow for line drop on the next forward cast. To practice this, use an amount of line that is comfortable and easy to handle and adjust the trajectory from the loop touching the ground on the forward cast to the loop touching the ground on the backcast.

#9. *Accuracy.* Accuracy is a huge part of distance casting. We know that a small change in direction at the caster means a large change of direction at the end of a long cast, being able to cast accurately means being able to control the line. Place

a 4 foot section of PVC pipe at your maximum casting distance (this may be 40' to 100' and may differ with conditions), work on lining the pole with every cast. Casting distance does not mean competing or throwing 120 feet of line.

It may mean casting 40, 60, or 80 feet of line. The point is the practice and the pursuit of increasing your distance cast has definite merits that can be seen in your fishing situation.

Keep these techniques in mind next time you are fighting a nasty tail wind, casting to fish eager to take a fly.

NOTE: Added to this should be other exercises:

- * *Making Backcast into a tail wind.*
- * *Hard Stop*

And Possibly most importantly would be:

- * *Making backcasts with a perfect loop, parallel and straight.*

Find the distance at which the loop begins to deteriorate, work on this distance.

Increase line speed, decrease line speed, learn to manipulate this line like it was 30 feet.

Then add 2-3 more feet and do the same. The amount of line you can false cast may not be the most efficient amount of line to false cast.

Jeff Wagner is a Master Casting Instructor from Fort Collins, Colorado

For Your Information.....

- 1. There is now a new search tool on the FFF Web Site. You can search for Casting Certification Instructors by name and state.*
- 2. There is also a new members only section. You need your FFF membership number to enter and then change the password.*

Check it out at:

www.fedflyfishers.org