ROLL CASTS BY GARY EATON

Gordy,

Another pre-emptive starter for the next topic- GE

Task 6. Demonstrate a normal roll cast in which the leader straightens completely at approximately 50 feet (15.2 m). Allowances will be made if casting on grass — candidate may opt to cast with or without anchoring the leader or use a grass leader. Repeat from opposite side of the body. No hauling allowed.

Expectations: The D loop should be dragged into position slowly and come to a complete stop; not done as a switch cast with a dynamic, thrown D loop. Consistent loops with the top of the loops no higher than the caster's head.

I still do not know why this limitation exists - "*the top of the loops no higher than the caster's head*." I doubt I have ever seen a vertically-oriented roll cast with the fly leg lower than the casters head that was not thrown with the rod leg of the loop partly anchored in the water and making an awful splash that would scare-off any self-respecting quarry.

If the intent is trying to make it so that the loop ends-up straightening below head height - then they should so state. If the intent is a side-arm roll cast, then they should so state, that. It seems they really are describing a fly leg that stays lower than head height - *right?*

The only way I see for an *aerialized* roll cast loop to form and stay below head-height is as a near-horizontal roll cast. I firmly believe that the idealized delivery is with the fly landing first (or close to it). That comes from a down trajectory on the delivery cast (wind not considered). In this picture, the loop must start higher than the caster's head and turnover the leader close above the surface.

TEACHING ONE - I enjoyed Tom White's tutelage and his roll casts were impressive. I just watched two of his videos and, in his longest roll casts, the loop did not get below his head until the end of the delivery of the loop. Tom reminds us, "The more line you put behind the rod, the longer you can roll cast."

The best diagrammed method I have seen is "*slide-down-a-wire*" concept that prevents premature rotation is in Tom Deck's **2003 The Orvis Fly Casting Guide** on page 122-3. The need to preserve the back-sloping angle while the arm is brought forward, the hand is lowered, & while leaving a bit more line behind the rod really sets up a very strong wrist rotation that powers out long roll casts matching the length of the head of the line. Often a caster needs to

develop, through stretching exercises, increased radial deviation tolerance to approach those long roll casts.

TEACHING TWO - I adopted the concept that the roll cast is really half of a forward cast. This works especially well with the youth, but applies very well to any age. I prefer starting a caster with the roll cast because-

1. Fewer variables (no timing, stroke length, look back, slack issues)

2. Faster start to fishing, no tangled leaders

3. Good foundation if taught as a true half-of-an-overhead cast

4. Develops appreciation for benefits of delayed rotation, timing and controlling power.

(I hate using the word "*power*" with most *guys* as this seems to stimulate a charge of testosterone that impairs their progress. I fielded a question in Loveland from a smart, young Canadian woman taking her CCI about the many female students she saw that were injured or developing pain from fly casting. I told her they were probably started by men instructing who did not comprehend the danger of overpowering casts, as that was my experience with students carrying smaller muscle mass.)

Mentoring CCI's, I reached for an overhead casting model that perfectly matched the half-a-cast model to carry into basic overhead casting. The *prime directive* was that the roll cast stroke should *mimic exactly*, the forward stroke of an overhead cast.

Through my reading of hundreds of casting books, that magical-union appeared with an extreme application of Tom Decks' aforementioned "*slide-down-a-wire*" forward stroke coupled with Charles Ritz "*high-line-high-speed*" overhead cast, though I limit any mention of the "high-speed" portion.

In my copy of **Charles Ritz - A Fly Fisher's Life: The Art and Mechanics of Fly Fishing** *revised 1972 edition*, emphasis is made of casting a very high back cast line to simplify the performance of forward casts (See pp 38-56). Ritz also coined the term "*up*cast" and drew the first wrist rotation limiter to prevent this common cast destroying error. This section is fascinating reading that, when comprehended and applied, super-charged my instruction.

To mesh Deck's *sliding-down-a wire* forward cast method with literal application of "high-line" back casts, I started with the rod a bit higher up-the-line by putting the roll-cast starting point higher and further back than Tim Rajeff's "answer the

phone" back cast position (with the reel at the level of the ear). In my teaching application, the rod butt *may* reach the higher than the top of the ear as the point from which the roll cast is initiated.

From this position, the rod is moved absent any rotation, along the line described by the starting angle of the rod, down and forward, as in Deck's description. As this slide is made the *lower wrist-rod angle* goes from acute (@30deg) to obtuse (>110 deg) in translation. As the rod hand approaches the *run out of arm* point, abrupt, controlled rotation happens nearly instantaneously to a firm, high stop.

Additional benefit comes from leaving a bit more line behind the rod tip as the slide moves the rod forward (absent rotation) as well as downward (toward the surface). The longer this sliding translation persists, the more forward the tip travels and the more line is left rearward of the caster (one of Tom White's tenets), resulting in more powerful roll cast propulsion and potential for longer - and more controlled- roll casts. A primary indicator of the application is this *Trifecta* of 1) delayed rotation 2) longer translation 3) high-to-low /rear-to-forward set-up is the noticeably tighter roll casting loops (with flat fly legs) versus more conventional practices.

Other advantages include:

1) Students very early, sense rod-loading (a Tom White tenet)

2) Delayed rotation / long translation, concepts become ingrained

3) Wrist control becomes required (Tom White point)

4) Observable loops start self-analysis of casts early-on

5) STOP mechanics become an essential detail

6) Transfer of this forward cast stroke to overhead casts abbreviates the learning process for the rest of casting sequence.

TEACHING THREE

I developed and teach a curriculum entitled **The *Compleat* Roll Cast**, over 3-hours long for 6 or fewer, intermediate students.

The first hour is spent eliminating all forms of premature rotation that kill casting power and learning to apply Tom Deck's "slide-down-the-line" mechanics. Many casters need to re-learn the concepts of casting in this section and I emphasize Tom White's ...more line behind" and "feel rod load" words.

When they start the inevitable whining, I break out my 7-weight, MCI test rod loaded with SA Expert Distance line and static roll cast the entire 70+foot head plus 7.5-ft practice leader with minimal effort and a true dry fly loop width.

Some claim the rod-line is "special" so I let them have a few tries. Others want me to use their outfits - I explain that the length of the head/belly will be a mechanical limiter, but that there is no excuse for a shoddy loop absent parallel legs and proceed to demonstrate that shape with every rod presented to me (I find a few WF lines wound backward on reels, too).

After the basics foundation is established we move relatively quickly through**:**

- Static roll casts (water anchored for head-winds and straighten above the surface for others)

- Accuracy roll casts,

- Off-shoulder roll casts,

- Shooting roll casts,

- Roll cast pick-up,

- Side arm roll casts,

- Roll casts changing loop size for specific applications,

- Hauled roll casts,

- Dynamic roll casts (aka switch casts or Forward Spey),

- Combined skills for distance roll casts

- Introduce Spey type maneuvers as change-of-direction roll casts.

I make a point to demonstrate roll cast anchor systems for land these may include, but are not limited to:

1) Partner stands on line and releases at proper time

2) Al Buhr's grass-leaders

3) My version of Tony Vitale's anchor post platform

4) Tom White's long, narrow trailing loop

5) 5-ft long portable anchor pond - with plastic sheeting & board or pipe edges

6) Clip board variations including weighted clothes pin

7) Weight on the ground

8) Peter Hayes' staked & padded casting *quoit* also used for practicing hook-cast, loop control.

The end result is that their "*key position*", in Al Buhr's terms, is a powerful starting point with single-handed rods. I finish the class with a single-cast competition for accuracy at 35-feet to target and a distance cast contest. I wrap-up with an evaluation form they fill-out, gear recommendations for best roll-casting (I like SA™ Sharkskin for release from the water), and a Q & A that can go quite long, so I place limitations (water-anchored cast questions only etc). I send everyone home with a practice leader (often a grass-leader Ala Al Buhr) and a complete set of printed class notes for after-study.

Gary Eaton, MCI