

A four-weight floater is the preferred choice for fishing small and medium-size trout streams.



16 RIVER LINES TESTED

Mike Weaver and Richard Slocock put 16 of the latest weight-forward four floaters through their paces



MIKE WEAVER

Mike Weaver has been a fly-fisher for more than 50 years and has cast a fly on countless trout rivers throughout Great Britain and Ireland, as well as farther afield. His speciality is river trout and he frequently fishes the streams of the South-west, where he lives. He writes regularly for *Trout and Salmon* and is author of *The Pursuit of Wild Trout* and contributor to several other angling books. He was the first chairman of the Wild Trout Trust.



RICHARD SLOCOCK

Richard Slocock has fished for around 50 years from a very young age, and became qualified as a fly-casting instructor nearly 30 years ago. He is the proprietor of Wessex Chalk Streams, which offers trout fishing on the Piddle and Frome in Dorset. He was the founder of REFFIS and is a past chairman of the Wild Trout Trust, of which he was a founder.

THE TESTERS

A FOUR-WEIGHT FLOATING line is an ideal choice for fishing small and medium-size streams, enabling one to present a fly delicately without disturbing fish. On larger rivers it can provide the light touch that is needed to avoid spooking fish in low, clear water, and even a light weight-forward line will push out a surprisingly long cast when required.

To compare like with like, all of the lines tested were weight forward. Before sending the lines to the testers, *Trout and Salmon* removed them from their boxes and spools, making it possible to carry out genuine blind testing. The testers only learned the identity of each line after scoring for performance had been completed – thus ruling out the possibility of being influenced by the maker's reputation or the price.

The day of testing, in late February, was fortunately dry and windless, so conditions were similar to those in which a four-weight line is often used. All test casts were made over water, without which roll casting would have been impossible. Each line was given three hard pulls to remove coils before the first test cast.

The first test casts were between 20 and 30 feet, which is typical of the distance used when actually delivering a fly on a small or medium-size river, with particular attention paid to the presentation of the fly. As well as a dry-fly, the lines were tested with a small goldhead nymph (2.8 mm bead) and all lines coped well with the heavier fly. A few longer casts were made, for the odd occasion when distance is needed, followed by a roll cast. Each line was left sitting stationary on the surface for 10 seconds

to ensure that it really did float.

Some lines are slicker than others; they create less friction through the rod rings. This attribute can cut both ways: a slick line will shoot better enabling longer casts, but a line that shoots too well can lack feel and make a longer cast more difficult to control.

It was not possible for us to assess durability and it is possible that the higher-priced lines tested will have a longer working life. It was also not possible to easily assess line memory – experience tells us that some of the lines that presented some memory may straighten with use.

Line colour is a personal choice – as revealed in our comments about each line. Some fishers prefer a bright line because it is easily seen by the angler; others fear it is too visible to the trout and for this reason prefer a dark-coloured line.

Airflo Ridge Tactical £34.99



Colour: Lichen green or two-tone peach.
Profile: Tip 1 ft.
Head 38 ft (front taper 6 ft; belly 24 ft; rear taper 8 ft).
Running line 51 ft.
Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Welded loops at both ends. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

The lichen-green line under test was a restrained colour but easily seen. Casting and presentation was very good at all distances. Slick but not so slick that it lacks feel.

RATINGS (OUT OF 10) Performance 9 Value for money 8 Overall 8.5

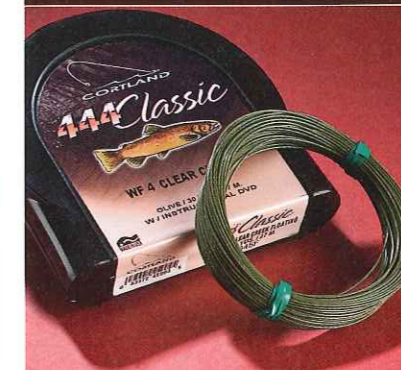
RICHARD SLOCOCK

A sound performance. The welded loop at both ends was very convenient. My impression was that it is slightly bulkier than some of the other lines and this pulled its mark down.

RATINGS Performance 7 Value for money 7 Overall 7

Airflo: 0871 911 7001; www.fishtec.co.uk

Cortland 444 Classic Clear Creek £57.99



Colour: Olive.
Profile: Tip 4 ft.
Head 35 ft (front taper 8 ft; belly 24 ft; rear taper 3 ft).
Running line 51 ft.
Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: DVD on fly-fishing and tactics. Line-cleaning pad. Line-weight reminder sticker. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. No loops.

MIKE WEAVER

Presentation was good at short range and this very slick line made longer casts easy. Keeping sight of the line on the water was far from easy due to the dark olive colour. The most expensive line on test.

RATINGS Performance 7 Value for money 4 Overall 5.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

The dark green colour was hard to see even without much ripple. Super slick and shoots very well. Almost too well – a little more grip in the rings would improve feel and control. Doesn't float as high as some.

RATINGS Performance 6 Value for money 4 Overall 5

Cortland (Masterline): 01684 299 000; www.cortlandflylines.co.uk

G. Loomis East Fork £39.99



Colour: Yellow.
Profile: Tip 1 ft. Head 32 ft (front taper 8 ft 3 in; belly 22 ft 1 in; rear taper 1 ft 8 in). Running line 49 ft. Overall length 82 ft.
Features and extras: Supplied with rigid zip box for holding flies or a spare spool. Integral braided loop. Line-weight reminder sticker. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

An excellent line at a reasonable price. First class at all distances, delicate presentation, and easily visible on the water. The braided loop seemed a bit stiff at first but did not impair presentation.

RATINGS Performance 9.5 Value for money 8.5 Overall 9

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Another fluorescent yellow line. Someone must love these bright colours. Has a very long braided loop sleeve and presentation was expected to suffer, but it didn't. Excellent all-rounder – no faults except colour. Perhaps slightly bulkier than most of the others, but this didn't seem to affect performance.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 9 Overall 9

G. Loomis: 01386 425 824; www.gloomis.com

Grey's Platinum £34.99



Colour: Heron grey or high-visibility orange.
Profile: Tip 2 ft. Head 43 ft (front taper 9 ft; belly 22 ft; rear taper 12 ft). Running line 45 ft. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Braided loop connector with fluorescent sleeve. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

A splendid all-round performer with just the right degree of slickness – and all at a very affordable price. The heron grey colour of the line on test was highly visible on the water. Floats high. Roll casts were smooth.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 10 Overall 9.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Yet another superb line. Everything works beautifully. Good colour (off white). High floating. Great!

RATINGS Performance 9.5 Value for money 10 Overall 9.75

Grey's: 01665 602 771; www.greysfishing.com

Orvis Wonderline Generation 3 £49.50



Colour: Blue dun.
Profile: Tip 6 in. Head 37 ft (first front taper 3 ft 8 in; second front taper 1 ft 10 in; belly 24 ft 6 in; rear taper 7 ft). Running line 53 ft. Overall length 90 ft 6 in.
Features and extras: Welded loop. Velcro line wrapper. Line-weight reminder sticker. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

Super presentation at short range and longer casts were made effortlessly by its slick surface. Smooth pick-up for roll casts and very visible on the water. At the upper end of the price range.

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 8 Overall 9

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Very high rider resulting in outstanding roll casting. As slick as any. Faultless at any distance with any cast. Tiny criticism – the welded loop was not the neatest (there was a noticeable lump at the back of the doubled section). This could have been a one-off problem with the line supplied for test.

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 9 Overall 9.5

Orvis: 0870 066 4177; www.orvis.co.uk/fishing

Partridge of Redditch Dry & Delicate £56



Colour: Olive.
Profile: Integral leader 3 ft. Tip 6 in. Head 36 ft (front taper 7 ft 6 in; belly 21 ft 6 in; rear taper 7 ft). Running line 53 ft 6 in. Integral backing line 82 ft. Overall length 175 ft.
Features and extras: Line winder. 3 ft leader butt and 27 yards of backing integral part of line. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. Line-weight reminder sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

Very unusual – the leader and backing are continuous parts of the line. The dark olive colour was difficult to see on the water. The light weight of the line did not flex the rod at close range, but overall casting performance was good.

RATINGS Performance 7 Value for money 6 Overall 6.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Strange! Handles exactly like an old silk line. Very thin and light. So light that my rod struggled to load with a short line – but once used to its unique feel, it worked well. The dark green colour makes it invisible in all but the calmest waters.

RATINGS Performance 6 Value for money 4 Overall 5

Partridge: 01527 513 802; www.partridge-of-redditch.co.uk

Guideline 4 Cast £43.99



Colour: Ivory (head)/faded green (running line).
Profile: Head 34 ft 6 in (first front taper 6 in; level line 4 ft 9 in; second front taper 9 in; belly 22 ft 6 in; rear taper 6 ft). Handling line 10 ft. Second rear taper 1 ft. Running line 44 ft 6 in. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: "Attach this end to reel" sticker. No loops.

MIKE WEAVER

Super all-round performance at a mid-range price. Presentation at short range was precise and longer casts were effortless. The two colour tones were muted yet gave excellent visibility. Did everything just right.

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 9 Overall 9.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

The last to be tested and perhaps the best of a fine group kept till last. The two-tone colour cleverly showed where the shooting line (pale green) starts and the loading line (a nice pale grey) finishes. Superb in every department. Can I keep it?

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 9.5 Overall 9.75

Guideline: 0780 2508 483; www.guidelineflyfish.com

Hardy Marksman £44.99



Colour: Buckskin straw
Profile: Tip 6 in. Head 38 ft (front taper 6 ft; belly 27 ft; rear taper 5 ft). Running line 58 ft. Overall length 96 ft 6 in.
Features and extras: Two braided loop connectors. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. Instructions leaflet.

MIKE WEAVER

Very smooth and easy casting but with a tendency towards a tailing loop and so some compensation was needed to ensure that the fly did not catch the line. The buckskin colour is ideal for visibility without being garish.

RATINGS Performance 7 Value for Money 7 Overall 7

RICHARD SLOCOCK

We both seemed to notice that this line caused tight loops – care was needed not to produce tailing (tangling!) loops. Perhaps it was caused by a subtle weight distribution problem in the line; could be a one-off problem. Otherwise, good quality and it has a lovely buckskin colour.

RATINGS Performance 6 Value for money 6 Overall 6

Hardy: 01665 602 771; www.hardyfishing.com

Rio Selective Trout II £54.99



Colour: Camo green.
Profile: Tip 6 in. Head 48 ft (front taper 7 ft; belly 32 ft; rear taper 9 ft). Running line 41 ft 6 in. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Welded loop. Line-weight reminder sticker. Good information on box.

MIKE WEAVER

Very good all-round casting performance with smooth presentation. The colour is restrained but easily seen. At the top end of the price range.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 6 Overall 7.5

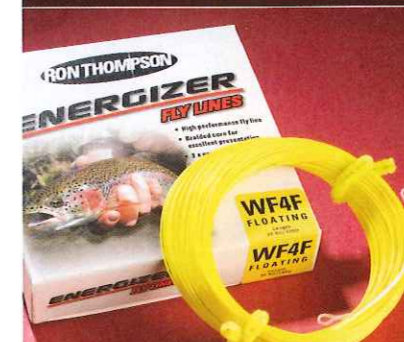
RICHARD SLOCOCK

Slick but not too slick. No memory, yet supple. The light olive colour is adequately visible. My impression was that this line was thinner and more delicate than some of the other lines in this test. Very good indeed.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 5 Overall 7

Rio (Guide Flyfishing): 01757 210 160; www.rioflylines.co.uk

Ron Thompson Energizer £19.99



Colour: Yellow.
Profile: Tip 3 ft. Head 48 ft (front taper 10 ft; belly and rear taper 38 ft). Running line 49 ft. Overall length 100 ft.
Features and extras: Two pre-mounted loops. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. Line-weight reminder sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

Very good overall casting performance at all distances. Smooth roll casts. Highly visible. It was a real surprise when the price was revealed – I'd had no inkling of the very low price while testing. Great value for money.

RATINGS Performance 8 Value for money 10 Overall 9

RICHARD SLOCOCK

The colour is not my favourite: custard yellow. The crudest/bulkier of the braided loops supplied – one even pulled off and I had to resort to a figure-of-eight knot – but superb performance. High floater, great for roll casting, but colour not preferred.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 10 Overall 9.5

Ron Thompson (Svendens): 029 2079 1700; www.svendens-sports.co.uk

Royal Wulff Triangle Taper £54.99



Colour: Olive, ivory or orange.
Profile: Head (continuous front taper) 36 ft. Running line 54 ft. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Welded loop. Good leaflet about knots and line care. Line-weight reminder sticker. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

An instant feeling of slimness, but it loaded the rod well and the casting performance was good. This has much to do with its distinctive continuous front taper. The olive line was a bit dark and difficult to see, so I would go for the ivory or orange options. A bit pricey.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 5 Overall 7

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Noticeably slim. The olive colour was hard to see – a lighter colour option would be preferred. It struggled with the roll cast, which is probably because of its unique continuous front taper (there's less weight at the very front of the line). It may require a step up in line weight to load the rod at short distances.

RATINGS Performance 8 Value for money 4 Overall 6

Royal Wulff (Fordham/Wakefield): 01892 770 344; www.royalwulff.com

Sage Performance Taper II £45



Colour: Yellow.
Profile: Tip 6 in. Head 33 ft (front taper 5 ft 6 in; belly 19 ft; rear taper 8 ft 6 in). Handling line 15 ft. Running line 42 ft. Overall length 90 ft 6 in.
Features and extras: Line-weight reminder sticker. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. No loops.

MIKE WEAVER

One of the best for casting performance, with delicate presentation at close range and smooth longer casts. A bit bright at first but worth the high visibility. Floats high. Easy to roll cast.

RATINGS Performance 9.5 Value for money 7.5 Overall 8.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

A super line – very supple and smooth, leading to great presentation. Longer casts roared away! But I didn't like the yellow colour.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 9 Overall 9

Sage: 01606 882 891; www.sageflyfish.com

Sonik SK4 £29.99



Colour: Ivory.
Profile: Tip 2 ft. Head 47 ft (front taper 11 ft; belly 25 ft; rear taper 11 ft). Running line 32 ft. Overall length 81 ft.
Features and extras: "Attach this end to reel" sticker. No loops.

MIKE WEAVER

I had absolutely no awareness of the budget price when testing this line. Lovely presentation at 20 feet and very good performance at longer distances and when roll casting. A good choice for anyone seeking real value for money.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 10 Overall 9.5

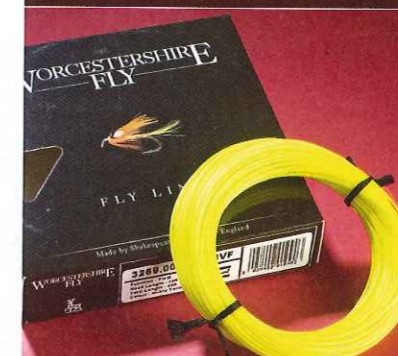
RICHARD SLOCOCK

A fine all-rounder. Lovely ivory-white colour. High floater. Excellent shooter.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 10 Overall 9.5

Sonik: 0845 307 6300; www.soniksports.com

Worcestershire Fly HV £42



Colour: High-vis yellow.
Profile: Tip 2 ft. Head 47 ft (front taper 11 ft; belly 25 ft; rear taper 11 ft). Running line 41 ft. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Two braided loops. Line winder. "Attach this end to reel" sticker. Line-weight reminder sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

The presentation was precise at all distances. The line is high-floating and picked up smoothly for the roll cast. Very good performance at a reasonable price.

RATINGS Performance 8 Value for money 9 Overall 8.5

RICHARD SLOCOCK

A very high floater. Easy to pick off the water and lovely to roll cast. It's less slick than some, but being a little slower through the rings can improve turnover, particularly at distance. The bright fluorescent yellow is not to my liking – it's such an unnatural hue.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 9 Overall 9

Worcestershire Fly (Pure Fishing): 01527 510 570

Scientific Anglers Mastery Series £54.99



Colour: Dark willow, fire orange or mist green.
Profile: Tip 6 in. Head 37 ft (front taper 5 ft 6 in; belly 21 ft 6 in; rear taper 10 ft). Running line 53 ft. Overall length 90 ft.
Features and extras: Welded loop. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

A bit pricey but the performance really compensates. Short casts, longer casts, roll casts – all first class with precise presentation.

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 6 Overall 8

RICHARD SLOCOCK

Casts like a dream, longer casts presented superbly – fine and delicate for the short work. Very neat welded loop.

RATINGS Performance 10 Value for money 7 Overall 8.5

Scientific Anglers (Leeda): 0800 130 0621

Snowbee XS Delicate Presentation £42



Colour: Pale olive.
Profile: Head 75 ft (front taper 16 ft; belly 16 ft; rear taper 43 ft). Overall length 75 ft.
Features and extras: Two braided loops supplied. Bottle of liquid line lubricant. Good instructions for line care and knots. "Attach this end to reel" sticker.

MIKE WEAVER

A first-class line at an affordable price. Pleasant but visible colour, high floating, smooth casting and presentation – and just the right level of slickness.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 9 Overall 9

RICHARD SLOCOCK

A good to excellent all-rounder. A very good choice both for performance and value for money.

RATINGS Performance 9 Value for money 9 Overall 9

Snowbee: 01752 334 933; www.snowbee.co.uk

FINAL VERDICTS

THE QUALITY of the lines tested was very good right across the price range, which led the testers to wonder if there was any need to pay more than around £45. The overall high quality made it very difficult for the testers to allocate their final scores and both had to resort to "nit-picking" to separate the winners. Each tester selected his top five lines but these were only just ahead of as many again.

Methods of linking the line to the leader varied considerably. Some lines came with braided loop connectors, some with welded loops and others with nothing. The testers have argued over the best method for years but agreed that a smooth welded

loop is the most convenient link. Braided loops can be spoiled if the plastic sleeve is too long and stiff, and, to avoid slipping, some line makers recommend applying a drop of super glue where the line goes into the braid – but care is needed to keep this to the minimum as too much glue can stiffen the join. When nothing is provided both testers are happy to use a needle knot or add a braided loop connector – or use a figure-of-eight knot in an emergency.

Even after a short test, the lines were mostly free from "memory". Where a few coils remained it was thought that these would disappear with use.

Both testers feel that they fish far better with lines

that are easily seen on the water so visibility was a factor when gauging performance. Good visibility was achieved with a number of colours, from ivory and light olive to bright yellow, and here the choice becomes a matter of personal preference.

In some cases the testers stated that lines are "high floating". It is often said that brightly coloured lines appear to float high in the water when this might not be the case. In this test we made doubly sure that our findings were not just impressions, by carefully observing the way the lines sat in the water and, most importantly, judging how easily the lines could be lifted from the surface.



MIKE WEAVER'S TOP FIVE

FIRST (TIED): Grey's Platinum and Guideline 4 Cast.
RUNNERS-UP (TIED): G. Loomis East Fork, Snowbee XS Delicate Presentation, Sonik SK4.



RICHARD SLOCOCK'S TOP FIVE

FIRST (TIED): Grey's Platinum and Guideline 4 Cast.
RUNNERS-UP (TIED): Orvis Wonderline Generation 3 Superfine Trout, Sonik SK4, Ron Thompson Energizer.

BEST IN TEST (TIED)
 Grey's Platinum and Guideline 4 Cast

BEST VALUE FOR MONEY
 Ron Thompson Energizer