

TRIED & TESTED 19 BANK RODS

We've picked a range of 9ft 6in models rated for seven to eight weight lines, and put them through their paces to find the top performers

THE TEST CRITERIA

ALL the rods on test are three or four piece models, 9ft 6in in length and costing between £100 and £200. They either have a single line rating of 7wt, or a dual 7/8wt, or in the case of the Shimano XTA a 6-8 rating. Rods with these specifications are probably the most widely used by bank anglers fishing large stillwaters and reservoirs.

The rods were tested over a couple of days at Rutland Water by tester Robbie Winram. Wind conditions varied from a light breeze to a head-on north easterly.

These rods were put through their paces with a range of lines. The floating lines used were the Airflo Ridge, Snowbee XS and the XS Extreme Distance. Sinking lines used were Airflo Sixth Sense Fast Glass Di-3 and Di-7 and the Airflo Forty Plus Di-3 and Di-7. These lines have different profiles and head lengths and, although it was a time-consuming process, it was necessary to see how each of the rods handled these different lines and what suited them best.

For stillwater fishing we were looking for rods that coped with short, medium and long range casts, both with floating and fast sinking density lines. Our conclusions were that there wasn't a 'bad' rod among those tested – action, performance, quality of fittings and value for money were all very good, and although we have picked two overall winners, ideally you should always test a rod before you buy, so you get the one that's right for your style.

EXTRA DESIGN FEATURES



The self-centering grooves in the reel seat on the Sonik SK4 guide the reel foot into the recess in the cork handle, for a quick and easy fit.



A rubber (or Teflon) O-ring between the uplocking rings creates a tight fit and stops them working loose when casting.



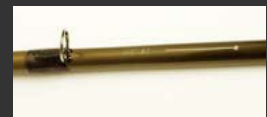
Fighting butts of all-cork (left), cork and rubber mix (middle) and cork and Duplon (right). Look for quality materials and smooth finish.



Single leg snake ring (left) and high leg snake (right). They should be a good size for unrestricted line flow and of a smooth quality.



Stripping guides should be large and smooth as they take a lot of wear. Those lined with silicon carbide are the hardest wearing.



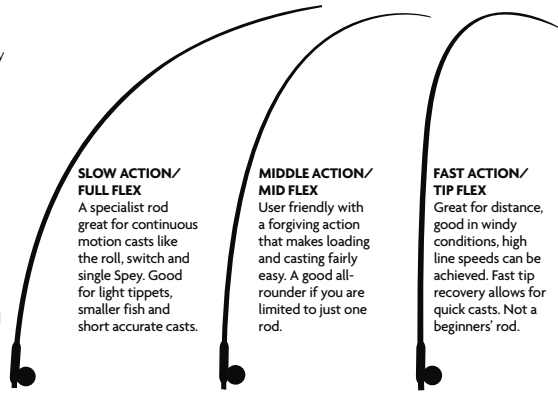
The Wychwood Aura sections are marked with the rod length and AFTM rating so you can't mix the sections up with a similar model.

ROD ACTIONS

ROD actions vary and what suits one angler won't necessarily suit another. For example, a fast tip action rod would not be ideal for a newcomer because of its power and stiffness. An experienced angler should have learnt good timing so will be able to control and flex a fast action rod at the right time to maximise its performance. This way they can aerialise longer head lengths which, in turn, will give maximum distance. A fast action rod calls for a short casting stroke.

A middle-to-tip action rod will flex exactly where it says and this is of a great benefit to newcomers and improvers as the extra flex will make it much easier to load the rod and, although timing is important, it is not as critical as with the fast action rod. Therefore it has the ability to iron out any timing errors so you can still get a good cast out onto the water. A longer casting stroke can be applied here so the rod does all the work for you.

We were looking for a winner in each of these two categories – the best fast or tip action rod, and the best performing middle-to-tip.



SLOW ACTION/ FULL FLEX

A specialist rod great for continuous motion casts like the roll, switch and single Spey. Good for light tippets, smaller fish and short accurate casts.

MIDDLE ACTION/ MID FLEX

User friendly with a forgiving action that makes loading and casting fairly easy. A good all-rounder if you are limited to just one rod.

FAST ACTION/ TIP FLEX

Great for distance, good in windy conditions, high line speeds can be achieved. Fast tip recovery allows for quick casts. Not a beginners' rod.

SNOWBEE DIAMOND £109 Available from Snowbee stockists, 01752 334933

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork and Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat with burl wood insert. Olive-green gloss blank with matching whippings.
VERDICT: This rod has plenty to offer the bank angler both in terms of performance and value for money. The powerful but light blank was able to cast a wide range of lines from floaters to fast sinkers. It was particularly good at picking up long lines from the water without the rod action folding, great when covering fish at distance. The extra large stripping guides and high leg snake rings allow maximum line speed, thereby achieving good line shoot at distance. The fittings are of a good standard and function well. You get a lot of rod for your money.

WEIGHT 4.1oz/116g
AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4

ACTION Fast tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 42 inch olive green cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle.



GREYS GRXi £109.99 Available from Greys stockists, 01665 602771

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle with a cork and Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Black gloss blank with matching whippings.
VERDICT: A good performer and, due to its dual AFTM rating, it handled both 7 and 8-weight floating and sinking lines with ease. More experienced casters will find that a 7-weight allows for longer head lengths to be aerialised, with an 8-weight probably more suitable for newcomers and improvers. For a rod of this price it's still light in the hand, responsive and fast to recover. Snake rings are all of a good size, allowing unrestricted and easy line shoot. The reel seat locking rings are smooth and free-running allowing for easy fitting and tightening of the reel.

WEIGHT 4.12oz/117g
AFTM 7/8

SECTIONS 3

ACTION Tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 42.5 inch black cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle. Partitioned cloth rod bag.



REDINGTON RED FLY2 £109.99 Available from Guide Flyfishing stockists, 01757 210160

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a cork fighting butt. Double ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Amber gloss blank with matching whippings.

VERDICT: When the Red Fly2 was launched it set a new standard for rods in this price range, becoming a favourite with stillwater anglers. Smooth but powerful middle-to-tip casting action, capable of handling floating and fast sink lines. Lifting, loading and shooting lines was all positive with the tip recovering fairly quickly. Stripping rings are massive and the snake intermediates bigger than most, resulting in fast, unhindered line speed and excellent line shoot. If you do get a tangle between the reel and first stripping ring, this larger ring often knocks it out when you shoot line, a real time saver.

WEIGHT 4.1oz/116g

AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4

ACTION Fast middle-to-tip
RINGS 2 lined stripping guides, 8 snakes with hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 32.5 inch beige cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle. Tube is partitioned.



SONIK SK4 £109.99 Available from Sonik stockists 0845 3076300

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle with thumb indent and a cork and Duplon fighting butt. Double ring uplocking alloy reel seat with carbon insert. Golden-olive gloss blank with matching whippings and rod alignment markers on each section.

VERDICT: This rod is up there with the Platinum XD and Vision Nite Catapult with a fast action but it has a slightly softer tip making it user friendly. Generated tight loops and high line speeds with a fast tip recovery. Lifting medium and long lines from the water was a smooth, controlled affair with the rod doing most of the work, keeping arm fatigue to a minimum. Handled a full range of floaters and sinkers at distance but perhaps better suited to medium and long head lengths to get the best out of the rod.

WEIGHT 4.20oz/119g

AFTM 7/8

SECTIONS 4 **ACTION** Fast tip
RINGS 2 aluminium oxide stripping guides, 8 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 32.5 inch triangular cordura covered zip top tube, carry handle and shoulder strap. Partitioned cotton bag.



DAIWA WILDERNESS XT £125 Available from Daiwa stockists, 01698 355723

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/rubber mix fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat with carbon insert. Olive-sand gloss blank with matching whippings.

VERDICT: A faster action than the Daiwa Signature and more suited to stillwater fishing. Lifted line crisply off the water, loading the rod with little effort at short and medium range. Needed a longer casting stroke to lift long lines and for distance. Well matched to the 7-weight line rating and performed better with short-to-medium head lengths. Reasonably fast tip recovery allowing tight loops and fast line speeds when false casting. Handled a range of lines from a floater to a Di-7, although it's not a sunk line specialist. Good-sized rings allowing the line to move freely for effective line shoots.

WEIGHT 4.7oz/133g

AFTM 7

SECTIONS 3 **ACTION** Medium fast
RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 42.5 inch olive triangular cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap, partitioned inside. Nylon partitioned rod bag.



WYCHWOOD AURA £129.99 Available from Wychwood stockists, 0800 1300621

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Sage-green gloss blank with matching whippings and section alignment markers.

VERDICT: A fast tip action rod with a fast recovery time that needed a short casting stroke to get the best out of it. Handled a range of sinking lines with ease and punched them out in fierce cross winds without folding under the pressure. For accuracy at short and medium range with dries and emergers the blank was crisp and responsive. The high tech reel seat not only looks good but functions really well, guiding the reel foot into place for a tight and secure fit. Rod alignment markers and rod length and AFTM labelling so sections can't be mixed up, a great idea.

WEIGHT 5.36oz/152g
AFTM 7
SECTIONS 4 **ACTION** Fast tip
RINGS 2 aluminium oxide stripping guides, 8 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.
TUBE 33.5 inch sage-green cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle. Nylon partitioned rod bag.



SIERRA FEROX £149.99 Available from Svendsen Sports stockists, 029 2079 1700

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/rubber fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Carbon-coloured matt blank, matching whippings, section alignment markers.

VERDICT: A fairly stiff blank, more than capable of casting 7 and 8-weights comfortably. Not as forgiving as some so needed a precise, controlled short casting stroke for best results. When I got a feel for the rod it generated tight loops, high line speeds and launched the line to the horizon. Lifting medium and long lines off the water was easily achieved, ideal for covering fish at distance. Its fast blank and tip recovery meant it coped well with medium to fast sinking lines, pulling them up from depth and cutting into head winds. Blank is quite thick but this didn't detract from its performance.

WEIGHT 4.51oz/128g
AFTM 7
SECTIONS 4
ACTION Fast tip
RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 7 snakes and hayfork tip.
TUBE 33 inch black cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap. Cotton rod bag.

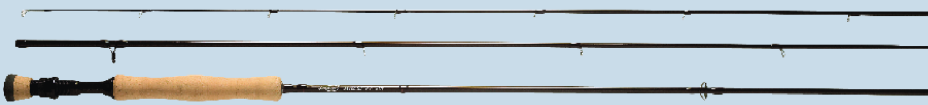


AIRFLO M-TEC S3 £129.99 Available from Airflo stockists, 01874 612612

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a cork/rubber mix fighting butt. Black anodised double ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Chestnut brown gloss blank with matching whippings and rod alignment markers on each section.

VERDICT: Although described as middle-to-tip it had a slightly faster action than most in this class. An easy casting action, loading smoothly from the off with plenty of power in reserve for long range work. Line pick up was smooth at medium and long range with the rod tip recovering fairly quickly, giving a nice tight loop for accuracy and good presentation. It handled a range of 7 and 8-weight lines from a floater to a Di-7 fast sinker with no problems. Although it has a dual 7/8 line rating, in most cases, I found the rod performed slightly better with the heavier 8-weight.

WEIGHT 4.7oz/135g
AFTM 7/8
SECTIONS 3 **ACTION** Middle-to-tip
RINGS 2 aluminium oxide stripping guides, 9 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.
TUBE 44 inch burgundy cordura covered zip top tube with adjustable and detachable shoulder strap. Rod supplied in cotton partitioned bag.



DAIWA SIGNATURE TROUT FLY £160 Available from Daiwa stockists, 01698 355723

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a cork and Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Natural carbon-coloured matt blank, burgundy whippings.

VERDICT: This rod's action is different from anything else on test as it is fairly progressive – described by Daiwa as a “fast action blank with progressive power”. This softer action is excellent for a range of continuous motion casts such as the roll, switch and single Spey. With the overhead cast I needed a longer casting stroke, allowing the rod to do the work and a controlled and precise casting style is necessary to get the best out of it. It's not a distance rod and is best for floating and intermediate lines as it struggled at times with fast sinkers at distance. Fittings are of a high standard and the overall finish is good.

WEIGHT 4.4oz/125gr
AFTM 7
SECTIONS 3
ACTION Tip, progressive
RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 7 snakes, hayfork tip and a fold down keeper ring.
TUBE 46 inch black cordura covered zip top tube. Cotton partitioned bag.



LOOP ADVENTURE G3 £138 Available from Loop stockists, 01933 412211

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat. Chocolate-coloured gloss blank and whippings, section alignment markers.

VERDICT: The quality of fittings and finish are excellent, even on this rod which is one of the cheapest in the Loop range. The rod is very much a middle-to-tip action and very easy to load, making casting a relaxed and easy affair. I did need a slightly longer casting stroke to get the best out of the blank. It handled both floating and fast sinking lines comfortably, although it excelled with floaters and intermediates. Even though it has a softer action than some, get the timing right and it will create high line speeds and tight loops, giving good line presentation onto the water.

WEIGHT 4.41oz/125g
AFTM 7
SECTIONS 3
ACTION Middle-to-tip
RINGS 2 lined stripping guides, 8 snakes and hayfork tip.
TUBE 43 inch black pentagon-shaped cordura covered zip top tube with shoulder strap. Cotton rod bag.



SHARPE'S GORDON 2 £160 Available from Sharpe's stockists, 01592 870331

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking alloy reel seat with burl wood dragon wood insert. Chestnut brown gloss blank with matching whippings and rod alignment markers on each section.

VERDICT: A slightly stiffer middle-to-tip action than most which meant the rod needed to go at its own pace and needed a longer casting stroke. Tip recovery was slower than with the Sharpe's SF4 so I didn't have to be so precise and could adopt a more relaxed casting style. The blank had enough flex in it to perform roll and switch casts with little effort and it was still up for overhead casts at distance. It coped well with a range of fly lines, performing best with medium head lengths which loaded perfectly. Good standard cosmetics including a stylish ventilated reel seat.

WEIGHT 3.84oz/109g
AFTM 7
SECTIONS 3
ACTION Middle-to-tip
RINGS 2 lined stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.
TUBE 42.5 inch green cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap. Cloth partitioned bag.



SHIMANO BIOCRAFT XTA £164.99 Available from Shimano stockists, 01386 425824

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a detachable screw-in cork and Duplon fighting butt. Double ring unlocking alloy reel seat with carbon insert. Chestnut brown gloss blank with matching whippings and rod alignment markers on each section.

VERDICT: Most rods in this test have a dedicated or dual AFTM rating, whereas the XTA is designed to take three line sizes from 6 to 8. Although the rod has a reasonably fast action it is also quite progressive so I needed a longer casting stroke to get the best out of it. The blank is deceptive as I could really pile on the power for distance and, instead of folding under the pressure, it delivered. The extra flex in the blank allowed for good roll and switch casts with crisp turnover. Not convinced by just one Fuji SIC stripping ring, I think it would have benefited from two.

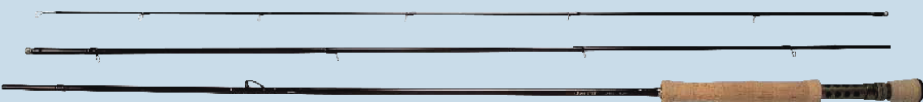
WEIGHT 3.63oz/103g
AFTM 6/8

SECTIONS 3

ACTION Fast

RINGS 1 SIC stripping guide, 9 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 42.5 inch black cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle. Cotton partitioned rod bag.



SHARPES SF4 £195 Available from Sharpe's stockists, 01592 870331

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a cork and Duplon fighting butt. Double ring unlocking alloy reel seat with hardwood insert. Matt green blank with matching whippings.

VERDICT: This rod is a pre-production sample but will remain as it is apart from a few cosmetic changes including section alignment markings. It's a light, responsive four-piece rod with a fast tip and plenty of power in reserve. Lifting off medium-to-long lines posed little problem and the blank responded crisply without any dead spots. It aerialised line comfortably and was capable of producing high line speeds with tight loops for accuracy on the water. Although fast in action it has enough flex to perform roll and switch casts with real accuracy. A stylish looking rod with quality fittings.

WEIGHT 3.53oz/100g
AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4

ACTION Fast tip

RINGS 2 lined stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE Square autumn gold cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap.



SNOWBEE PRESTIGE £179 Available from Snowbee stockists, 01752 334933

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/rubber mix fighting butt. Double ring unlocking nickel silver reel seat with Cocobolo wood insert. Burgundy gloss blank with matching whippings.

VERDICT: This blank was very deceptive as it was light and had a fast action but was also very easy to load, making it very user friendly. Tip recovery was also fast, allowing for tight loops and accurate casting whether I was using floating or sinking lines. It had a fair bit of power in the butt section which coped well when pulling sinking lines up from depth, and I should think will also cope with hard-fighting fish. Fittings are of a high standard and the nickel silver reel seat with hardwood spacer gives a stylish look.

WEIGHT 4.1oz/116g
AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4

ACTION Fast tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 31 inch claret alloy tube with brass screw cap and rubber O-ring. Cotton drill partitioned bag.



GREYS PLATINUM XD COMPETITOR SPECIAL £199 Available from Greys stockists, 01665 602771

FEATURES: Full wells hybrid rubber cork mix handle and fighting butt. Black hard anodised triple ring unlocking reel seat. Matt olive blank with matching whippings.

VERDICT: A very fast tip action, fast recovery, bags of power and capable of casting long distances. Handled long head lengths and fast sinking lines with ease and without a doubt one of the fastest rod actions on review. The original XD weighed 100g and this new model is 159g, making it one of the heavier rods in this class. The Competitor has kept the same well-tested blank as the original XD but it has had a facelift on fittings. The most notable feature is the handle, which offers a far superior grip, and the durable reel fitting. It has also dropped from £269.99 to £199 making it a cracking buy!

WEIGHT 5.6oz/159g
AFTM 7

SECTIONS 3

ACTION Very fast tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 43 inch black triangular cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap, partitioned inside.



REDINGTON RS4 £179.99 Available from Sportfish, 01544 327111

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring unlocking alloy reel seat. Moss-green gloss blank, matching whippings and section alignment markers.

VERDICT: Although described as a fast, powerful action I found this rod to be certainly powerful but more middle-to-tip action. It was not poker stiff and had enough flex in the blank to perform roll and switch casts with a crisp turnover. When it came to overhead casts it lifted and loaded medium-to-long head lengths of floating lines easily, whereas with fast sinkers it was happier with medium head lengths. I needed a relaxed, longer casting stroke although I found I could really pile the power on without it folding to get maximum distance. High standard fixtures and fittings.

WEIGHT 4.45oz/126g
AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4 **ACTION** Fast tip

RINGS 2 aluminium oxide stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 32.5 inch black cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle. Cotton partitioned bag.



AIRFLO AIRLITE £199.99 Available from Airflo stockists, 01874 612612

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and a cork/rubber mix fighting butt. Triple ring unlocking alloy reel seat. Carbon-coloured matt blank with matching whippings and rod alignment markers on each section.

VERDICT: Although described as fast action, I found the rod more middle-to-tip, suiting anglers with a wide range of casting skills. Lifting, aerialising and shooting floating lines, was crisp and controlled with good distance and presentation achieved. When it came to sinking lines, a longer casting stroke was needed to get the best out of the blank and a 7-weight line matched the rod perfectly, especially at distance. Reel seat is a nice design, guiding the reel foot into place for a tight, secure fit. The cork handle is slightly thicker than most but fits comfortably in the hand.

WEIGHT 3.92oz/111g
AFTM 7/8

SECTIONS 3

ACTION Fast tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 9 single leg snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 42.5 inch grey cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap. Cotton partitioned bag.



TACKLE

TRIPLED
TESTED

BANK RODS £100-£200

GREYS X-FLUTE

£179.99 Available from Greys stockists, 01665 602771



WEIGHT 3.52oz/100g

AFTM 7

SECTIONS 4

ACTION Middle-to-tip

RINGS 2 SIC stripping guides, 8 snakes, hayfork tip and keeper ring.

TUBE 33 inch green triangular-shaped cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and shoulder strap. Rod supplied in a partitioned cloth bag.

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle and cork and Duplon fighting butt. Triple ring uplocking anodised alloy reel seat with hardwood insert. Sage-green gloss blank with matching whippings and section alignment markers.

VERDICT: The X-Flute, which replaces the Greylflex MK2, is a very user-friendly middle-to-tip action rod. It is one of the lightest on review and, as far as I am concerned the lighter the better, especially if fishing for long periods. It balanced beautifully when mounted with a reel and line. A true 7-weight, it's a beautiful rod to cast with. It both lifted lines off the water and loaded effortlessly with short and medium head lengths and still had the power to deal with longer lines when I was going for distance, a great all-rounder. At no time did I feel that the rod was going to fold on me. As with any middle-to-tip action rod it needed a longer casting stroke to get the best out of it but this allowed the blank to do all the work. I was still able to produce tight loops and crisp turnover, resulting in good presentation on the water. Fittings and finish are of a very high standard. The large snake intermediate in front of the two stripping guides allowed the line to shoot freely.



VISION NITE CATAPULT

£159.99 Available from Guide Flyfishing stockists, 01757 210160



WEIGHT 3.55oz/105g

AFTM 7/8

SECTIONS 3

ACTION Very fast tip

RINGS 2 SIC lined stripping guides, 8 snakes and hayfork tip.

TUBE 42 inch black cordura covered zip top tube with carry handle and partitioned inside.

FEATURES: Full wells cork handle, cork/rubber fighting butt. Double ring uplocking hard anodised, black alloy reel seat. Grey gloss blank with matching grey whippings.

VERDICT: Although this is a prototype, all the specifications will remain the same except the whippings which may change slightly in colour. The rod feels incredibly light and really hides its true casting potential until you put it through its paces. It has an extra fast action and does initially feel very stiff – that is until you put a line on it and start casting. Suddenly it's a different creature. It was fairly easy to load with short and medium head lengths and I was able to produce tight loops and crisp turnover, but where it really excelled was with longer head lengths for effortless distance casting with the same turnover and accuracy. It proved more than capable of handling the whole range of lines, but was especially effective with the medium-to-fast sinkers. Fittings and finish are understated, there's nothing flash about this rod, but it is all of a high quality. Not an ideal beginner's choice, but then no fast tip action rod would be, but a rod for the angler who has improved his technique and is looking to upgrade and strive for greater distance and control. And at a cracking price.

