

Guideline LPXe

£459



SPECIFICATION

A four-piece 10/11-weight rod with overfit joints. Matt black blank and black whippings with orange trim. Two lined stripping rings, eight single-leg intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring. 22.5 in cork/composite cork handle with a composite cork butt. Downlocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Alignment dots. Cloth bag and cloth-covered tube with carrying strap.

GUIDELINE:
0780-2508-483;
www.guideline.no

JIM'S COMMENTS

A rod for a job. In this case, casting shooting-heads. At which it is the best rod in this test. It has a short, thick handle that encourages a short stroke using plenty of bottom hand. It creates very fast line speed and some lovely loops. The blank recovers so quickly. It will cast a long-bellied spey line but not as well as others in this test, so it is not as versatile.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 8
Value for money 8
Overall 8

GARY'S COMMENTS

A very fast-action lightweight rod; the quickest in this test. You have to work quickly to keep up with it, while other rods have a slow build-up of energy. It is a shooting-head rod made for short strokes, hands close together, creating tight loops. If you attempt a long stroke, the loops open up. It coped well with the Skagit. Any fisher can use it as long as they use a shooting head. The cork is not great.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 8
Value for money 8
Overall 8

Mackenzie DTX

£595



SPECIFICATION

A four-piece 10-weight rod with overfit joints. Burgundy blank and burgundy whippings with gold trim. Two lined stripping rings, 11 snake intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring. 25.5 in cork/composite cork handle with a composite cork butt. Downlocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Alignment dots. Keeper ring. Cloth bag and cloth-covered triangular tube with handle and carrying strap.

MACKENZIE:
01463-231-614;
www.mackenzie-flyfishing.com

JIM'S COMMENTS

Timing must be impeccable. It threw the longest line on test and my best loops. It needs an 11-wt floater to work best – we cast it with an overhang. The longer my stroke, the better it performed. It doesn't flex quite as far down the blank as the Loop, which is a smidge more user-friendly. Ideal for long-range fishing on big rivers. A good functional reel seat.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9.5
Value for money 9
Overall 9.25

GARY'S COMMENTS

It took me a few casts to get used to this one but once in the groove, it felt better and better. It's a precise tool. Lovely to use. You need to be a good caster. Other top-end rods are more forgiving if your timing's out. It has a nice finish.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9
Value for money 9
Overall 9

Loop Opti Power Spey

£599



SPECIFICATION

A five-piece 10/11-weight rod with overfit joints. Gloss brown blank and brown whippings. Two lined stripping rings, 10 snake intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring. 25 in cork handle with an EVA butt. Downlocking and uplocking screw reel fitting with four locking nuts. Alignment dots. Cloth bag and cloth-covered pentagonal tube with carrying strap.

JIM'S COMMENTS

The reel seat has two pairs of nuts, which means you can move your reel three inches up and down the seat. Depending on casting style and the weight of the reel, you can fine-tune the balance of the rod to suit the individual. It makes a remarkable difference. The rod loads evenly with all lines, and the action works with you, and will do so even for a beginner. Stunning performance.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9.5
Value for money 9.5
Overall 9.5

GARY'S COMMENTS

I wouldn't have believed the difference the adjustable reel seat makes. By moving the heavy Nautilus reel to the front of the seat it balanced the rod exactly as the Evotec Lightweight did when positioned towards the rear. Interestingly, when casting with a shooting head, positioning the reel to the rear encouraged more use of the bottom hand. Excellent finish. A wonderful blank. Progressive, sweet and powerful.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9.5
Value for money 9.5
Overall 9.5



LOOP:
www.looptackle.se

Thomas & Thomas Double Handed

£967



SPECIFICATION

A five-piece 10-weight rod with overfit joints. Blue blank and green whippings. Two lined stripping rings, nine snake intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring. 27.5 in cork handle with a composite cork butt. Downlocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Cloth bag and cloth-covered tube with handle.

THOMAS & THOMAS:
01245-356-523;
www.thomasandthomas.com

JIM'S COMMENTS

It just about does a job, but I couldn't get on with this rod. I had tailing loops with every cast. The action is nearer smooth-progressive than fast-tip, but it's hard to define. The only way I could stop loops tailing was by using an open stroke and then bringing the rod tip down on the forward cast. I didn't like the thickness of the blank.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 5
Value for money 4
Overall 4.5

GARY'S COMMENTS

It has nice cork but I'm less keen on the tapered top handle which doesn't suit my grip. I like the five-piece construction for travel. I, too, had tailing loops with every cast. The rod has a soft action that's not progressive – it flexes and recovers at the tip and butt but not in the middle. It didn't cope well with the Skagit. I couldn't recommend it.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 5
Value for money 2
Overall 3.5

G. Loomis Stinger GLX (15 ft 1 in)

£969.99



SPECIFICATION

A four-piece 10/11-weight 15 ft 1 in rod with overfit joints. Light olive blank and brown whippings. Three stripping rings, eight single-leg intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring. 23.5 in cork/composite cork handle with composite cork butt. Downlocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Cloth bag and cloth-covered tube with handle.

G. LOOMIS:
01386-425-824;
www.gloomis.com

JIM'S COMMENTS

This new four-piece feels different to the three-piece rod it's replacing. It's not as pokerish as that one and flexes deeper into the blank. But I have to work hard to drive the rod through, whereas with the three-piece I just had to tap the rod forward. The old rod was superb with shooting heads – the best; this one is more of an all-rounder, without excelling. I'm slightly disappointed. Cosmetics and finish are very good.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 8
Value for money 7.5
Overall 7.75

GARY'S COMMENTS

It performs well although it's not the best caster in this test. It has a quick action but it's not as quick as its three-piece predecessor. Casts with the floater died a little at range. The shooting heads fared well and it did a great job with the Skagit. It's not got the "guts" of the best rods in this test. The finish is good, which hasn't always been the case with Loomis rods, and I love the new slimmer, shapely handle.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 8
Value for money 7
Overall 7.5

GARY'S VERDICT

LESS THAN £200

1st: Airflo Delta. 2nd: Redington Red Fly 2.

£201-£400

1st: Hardy Uniqua. 2nd: Enigma EMG3. 3rd: Vision GT 4 Catapult.

MORE THAN £400

1st: Loop Opti Power Spey. 2nd: Sage TCX. 3rd: Mackenzie DTX.

I really enjoyed testing the diverse range of rods with a variety of lines, and having adequate time to re-evaluate some of the closer calls. There were pleasant surprises as well as a few disappointments. All of the rods that I have selected I would happily fish with as they will handle most fishing situations.

I welcomed the opportunity to appraise several innovations in rod

design: the Loop reel seat is superb – why didn't I think of it?

Fifteen-foot salmon rods need to be versatile to meet different fishing situations while utilising a wide range of spey lines (from long-bellied floaters to short Skagits). I hope that we have taken some of the guesswork out of purchasing new tackle. Interestingly, the top rod is not the most expensive.



Bramble keeps guard on the rods.

Several hundred casts later, Jim and Gary discuss their verdicts.

Gary delivers another lovely straight line.



Zpey Instinct

£745



SPECIFICATION

A four-piece 10/11-weight rod with overfit joints. Gloss black blank and whippings. Two lined stripping rings, 10 snake intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring, 24 in cork/composite cork handle with a unique EVA/composite cork bent lower handle. Downlocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Alignment dots. Cloth bag and cloth-covered rectangular tube with handle and carrying strap.

JIM'S COMMENTS

The best-finished blank on test with a lovely reel seat. And it's made with amazing carbon. But despite spending more time with this rod than any other on test, I couldn't get on with its handle. When sweeping to form the D-loop, the rod twists under the weight of the reel and this strains my wrist. If I'd got on better with the handle I'd have given it a nine for performance.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 6
Value for money 6
Overall 6

GARY'S COMMENTS

I had the same twisting problems as Gary. To stop the rod twisting I had to anchor the D-loop too close to me (vertically), or grip the handle too tightly or overhead cast. I know it's supposed to encourage bottom-hand casts and I understand Zpey are offering lessons to their customers which might help, but I couldn't get on with it. A shame because it has a beautiful finish and an incredible blank that creates great loops.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 6
Value for money 4
Overall 5



ZPEY: (Donegal Fly Co.)
 +353 0749-560-871
 www.zpey.com

Sage TCX

£849



SPECIFICATION

A four-piece 10-weight rod with overfit joints. Green blank and green whippings. Two lined stripping rings, 11 snake intermediate rings and a bayfork tip ring, 25 in cork handle with composite cork butt. Uplocking screw reel fitting with two locking nuts. Cloth bag and alloy tube.

JIM'S COMMENTS

This feels very light in the hand; lighter than the Loop. The tip is deceptively powerful and can create some razor-sharp loops. It flexes progressively into the handle but I don't get the same feedback from the rod as the Loop or MacKenzie. Nor does it appear to have as much steel lower down as they do, for fishing sinking lines. However, Sage fans won't be disappointed.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9
Value for money 8
Overall 8.5

GARY'S COMMENTS

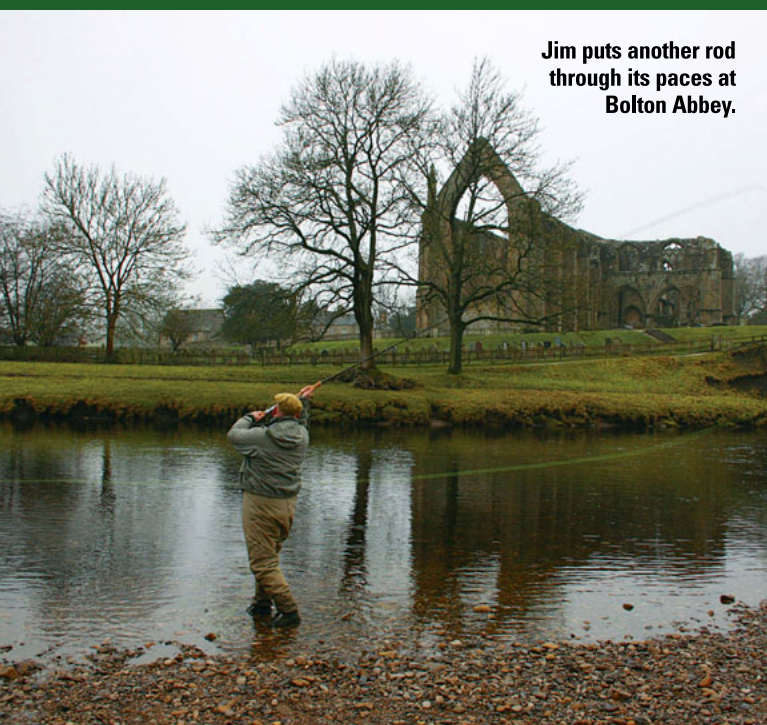
Spey and overhead casts are excellent. It delivers. Timing has to be spot on, but it's a very powerful rod. It doesn't talk to you the way that other top-end rods do and so it's hard to know where in the action the power is coming from. For floating line work, it is superb. It has less of a tip-action than previous Sage rods I've cast. The handle is not as well finished as the Loop's.

Ratings out of 10
Performance 9
Value for money 9
Overall 9

SAGE:
 www.sageflyfish.com

CONCLUSION

Jim puts another rod through its paces at Bolton Abbey.



JIM'S VERDICT

LESS THAN £200

1st: Airflo Delta. 2nd: Redington Red Fly 2.

£201-£400

1st: Hardy Uniqua. 2nd: Vision GT 4 Catapult. 3rd: Enigma EMG3

MORE THAN £400

1st: Loop Opti Power Spey. 2nd: Mackenzie DTX. 3rd: Sage TCX.

When you teach full time you cast many different salmon rods, but having 20 rods together over two days was fascinating. Pre-conceived ideas go out of the window because, ultimately, the loops don't lie.

There were goods rods at all prices. The Airflo and Redington are good options if you're on a tight budget. In the mid-price bracket the top three are all worth

a serious look. In my book, the Hardy is a cracker.

In the £400+ bracket, three rods shone. The Mackenzie is a top performer, especially at maximum range. The Sage threw great loops and was light and easy to use. Top of the tree was the Loop: a stunning performance in five sections, with an innovative reel seat and nearly £400 cheaper than the priciest rod on show.