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Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Conservation, preservation, and restoration of Michigan's cold-water resources.

Fishing letters

Why a Custom Rod?

by Art Neumann

The first trout rod I ever owned was a steel telescope affair I bought at the neighborhood hardware store. It cost me about a dollar but I sure was proud of it. "Balanced" with a 10-cent cane pole reel and a length of equally expensive line, it took many a brookie from those small brush covered feeders where I learned my first trout lessons.

It wasn't until I was introduced to the thrill of buggin' for bass that I realized how inadequate my outfit was. I went straight to Rose City and bought a \$2.49 split bamboo rod. With it I mastered the rudiments of fly casting but I wore it out in the process. So I graduated to a \$10 job I secured from a mail order house. It caught many bass but with flies on a trout stream it nearly broke my arm. So it was that I invested in my first good flyrod. It cost me a week's pay back then but it sure was worth it. It was well made, light, and delicate and I showed it off plenty. My casting improved and I caught more fish. I was satisfied. That is, until I met IT.

It happened on the main stream. We were talking tackle like fishermen do. I handed him my rod. He handed me his. That was IT. IT was like a thing alive, perfectly balanced, powerfully resilient, amazingly delicate. IT fairly danced in my hand. With IT I could drop a fly as softly as thistle down. I examined IT more closely. Its cane was clear and straight-grained, the nodes perfectly staggered. Its finish was flawless, like a sheet of glass. Its richly appointed fittings, its precisely spiraled wraps, its hard, clear cork grip, even its personalized inscription convinced me that IT was a work of art. Yes, IT was a custom rod.

I've acquired several fine custom rods since that first meeting with IT, but I still remember how I felt when the first one was finished. Had I stepped out of my class? Was I getting my money's worth? Would the boys think me snobbish? Did I really need a rod as fine as this? To find the answer I asked other fishermen, bankers and carpenters, lawyers and tool makers, doctors and factory hands, businessmen and farmers, anyone who owned a fine custom rod. The answer invariably was the same. It takes good tools to do good work. If you're a serious fisherman, it naturally follows that you're the same way about your tackle. Maybe you can't make it at first, but owning one becomes an obsession—a life's ambition. And then one day you make it. You have come of age. It's a thrill you can't describe. When do you figure on graduating? ♦