

BassFans

Hoernke's Stick Picks: 5 Rods to Handle Everything

Rods have changed a lot in the past decade – BassFans know that. But rod-buyers have also changed. It's common nowadays for even non-sponsored anglers to equip themselves with rods from only one company.

Makes sense. When buying from a single company, you work with a single warranty program, a single salesperson or shop, and uniform components. You can also dial-in the actions for each rod to ultra-subtle levels – a pitching stick with a faster tip, a toad rod with a parabolic bend – but the feel of the cork and balance of the rods are the same from one to the next. Ultimately, though, whenever you retool your rod lineup, you have to make some difficult choices. You want to get the best rod for the money, but a lot of times, you can only afford to purchase a limited number.

It's therefore valuable to know which rods can pull double-duty for different techniques. And if you're a co-angler, it's even more important. One, you're limited in the number of rods you can bring. Two, you never know what kind of fishing your pro will throw you.

Truth is, rods today are more diverse than ever, and that comes with certain pitfalls, because the actions can be so specific they'll only work with a single technique. To help wade through some of the differences, BassFan enlisted the help of Texas pro Sean Hoernke. He's sponsored by Setyr Rods and fishes the FLW Tour, FLW Series and Strens. He used to fish the Bassmaster Opens too, and won the 2005 Red River Central.

Because Setyr's a new company that's building specialized high-performance rods – and because Hoernke's a relative newcomer who still remembers his roots – he's a perfect fit. So BassFan put the question to him: "Imagine you're a co-angler preparing to buy a new suite of rods. Which five rods would you choose to cover all the fishing you'd expect to encounter?"

What follows are his five recommendations.

Rod 1: Setyr DSF186MH

Specs: 7'2" medium-heavy spinning rod

Applications: Shaky-heads, tube-dragging, skipcasting, sight-fishing

"As a co-angler you'll need a spinning rod," Hoernke said. "This is the one I really like. It's 7'2", and you can use it for so many different things. In fact, I have several which I keep rigged up with different baits. It's the rod I use for my shaky heads, for dragging tubes up on Champlain, for skipping docks, and sight-fishing. It's an all-around good, versatile rod." He also noted that the length is a good compromise – not too short, not too long. So it's accurate, but long enough to set the hook in open water. And the medium-heavy action lets him load up for skipcasting, or to pitch light baits to cover. In short, "It's a must-have in the Setyr line."

Rod 2: Setyr FPT282H

Specs: 6'10" heavy-action pitching/flipping rod with extra-fast tip

Applications: finesse jigs, Texas- and Carolina-rigs, buzzbaits, Senkos, toads in lighter cover, spinnerbaits in open water.

The second rod Hoernke recommended was the obvious choice: a pitching and flipping stick. This one's cut from a different mold though. It's a heavy-action rod, but with an extra-fast tip (which means the tip bends quite a bit, then stops a foot or so down). The unique build makes it ultra-versatile, according to Hoernke.

"This rod is also a must-have," he said. "It's a pitching and flipping rod, but I would call it more of a pitching rod. Basically, it's just an awesome all-around rod, especially for the co-angler. When my co-anglers ask about rods, this is usually the one I tell them they want to have.

"Because of the tip, you can throw a tiny little finesse jig, which a lot of co-anglers use, or a worm, or even a buzzbait. It's just one of those rods that covers six or seven different baits."

He also noted it could handle a soft-plastic toad in lighter cover, and he can slow-roll deep 1-ounce spinnerbaits with it. "You can also Carolina-rig with it, and it's a real good Senko rod."

Rod 3: Setyr FNS194MH

Specs: 7'10" medium-heavy flipping stick with a parabolic bend and snapback guides

Applications: Flipping heavy cover and docks.

Another no-brainer choice is a true flipping stick. But Hoernke's preference has a few bells and whistles that set it apart. The rod was designed by fellow tour pro and Setyr pro-staffer Dave Lefebre to have a parabolic bend. That means the rod never stops bending until it reaches the butt section.

The bend makes it quite different from traditional flipping sticks because it increases the shock-resistance – key when fishing fluorocarbon or braid. The parabolic bend also creates a rod that can cast as well as it can flip.

"This is my main flipping rod," Hoernke said. "At 7'10", it's a little longer than some, but it's great for flipping anything from a 1/2-ounce jig around boat docks to plastics in real heavy vegetation. It's what I used to make the cut this year flipping hyacinth at Okeechobee."

Hoernke also noted that he likes the titanium snapback guides. "I was a little skeptical at first because I'd never used them," he said. "But they work really well with braid.

"They're so durable. A lot of times when you're netting or fighting fish, you tend to step on the rods that are on the deck. These guides won't stay bent – they snap right back."

Rod 4: Setyr CKN184M

Specs: 7' medium-action graphite cranking rod

Applications: small- to medium-size crankbaits

With pitching, flipping and all-purpose already covered, Hoernke chose a cranking rod as his fourth selection. It's a rod he has a special relationship with, because it's the one that convinced him to sign with Setyr.

"This rod is really one of (Setyr Owner) Jim Eldred's specialties," Hoernke said. "It's a 7' rod, and one of the top rods in his line. I was always a big glass guy when it came to cranking rods. My two main strengths are flipping and cranking, and one of the reasons I switched to Setyr was this rod.

"(Eldred) told me he had a graphite cranking rod that was as good as glass. I didn't believe him, so I had him send me some out. I was a believer after a few days. He won't tell me how he did it, and I quit asking, but all I know is he got it right. It has a real delayed, parabolic bend with the same feel as a fiberglass rod, but at a quarter of the weight.

"If there was one rod in his lineup I'd tell someone to take a close look at, it'd be this one."

Hoernke likes to crank everything from shallow-running square-bills to a Norman Deep Little "N" on it. And he said the 7' length isn't too long. Some 7' rods have a real long butt, but this has a shorter butt, so it really fishes like a standard 6'6".

"You can still pitch a crank around in the backs of creeks with it, and get under trees. The shorter butt doesn't get in the way of your elbow. It's a little light for deeper-running cranks like a DD22, but I have to choose one cranking rod, so this is it."

Rod 5: Setyr SPB178MH

Specs: 6'6" medium-heavy spinnerbait rod

Applications: 1/8- to 1/2-ounce spinnerbaits, light topwaters

Hoernke's final selection covers the all-important spinnerbait. His selection is a 6'6" model which can handle 1/8- to 1/2-ounce baits. That way you're covered for schooling fish – which often prefer smaller blades – as well as dock- and bank-pounding. Any spinnerbaits heavier than 1/2-ounce can be fished on rod 2 (FPT282H).

"The great thing about this rod is you can throw a wide range of spinnerbaits," he said. "But you can also fish light topwaters with it. It's a good rod for a Spook, because it has enough backbone that you can really launch it, but enough give in the tip that you won't rip the hook out.

"And at 6'6", it's real accurate."

Notable

Hoernke noted that a true frog rod wasn't one of his five selections. Setyr does have a frog rod though – the 7'2" FNR186H. "We spent a lot of this summer trying to design it," he said. "I wanted a rod to use for both a walking-type tournament frog, and a soft-plastic toad that you just reel in. (Eldred) built a toad and walking-frog rod all in one, which was a tough task. It has a weird bend – about 8 inches of tip before it really gets into the meat."

BassFan asked Hoernke the one factor that he thinks stands out most about Setyr rods. "I think it's the weight and the balance. Some rods are built so light, the walls are too thin and they have breaking problems. These rods are super-light, but very durable. I didn't pick up on it at first, but the longer I used them, the more I saw it. This year was the first where I had zero rod difficulties. I didn't break one rod all season." For more information about Setyr, or to order a catalog, call: (541) 956-2086.