

New reel with lots of appeal

Bill Hollander of Boulder is a professional scientific instrument maker. He works in an astrophysics lab where he designs and builds prototype devices. He has one of those minds that revel in mechanical design, fine tolerances and materials application. He also happens to be a fly fisherman, so it was probably inevitable that he would turn his skills toward the design of a new fly reel.

Last summer on a trip through Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, I carried a Hollander reel that I had been asked to field test. When I returned the loaned reel to Bill, the report was favorable. I had played several large trout on it (one that weighed 8 pounds) and had found it to be sturdy and smooth running. I hadn't had a chance to try out the unique thumb-operated brake because at that time all Hollander reels were made for people who reel with their left hands. I reel with my right hand and when you spool the reel that way, it puts the brake in the one place where you can't reach it.

My only criticism was aesthetic: The reel had no click and I found that disconcerting. Not that I'm complaining, but when that 8-pound rainbow took off on a quiet Montana evening, I missed what has become one of the classic literary conventions of our time, the "screaming reel."

Since then, Bill has added a click to his reels — a quiet one that actually has nothing to do with the drag mechanism. It's like a playing card stuck in the spokes of a bicycle to make it sound like a motor bike. Bill didn't mind doing that. "People wanted it," he said, "and it does provide some information." That is, it tells you how fast the line is running.

He also now makes a left handed version of the reel so that people like me who reel right handed can reach the brake.

Last winter the Hollander Company moved from Bill's house to a small machine shop in north Boulder. I went to the grand opening — complete with champagne and finger food — but it was only the other evening that Bill and I finally got a chance to talk. We were alone in the shop; a heavy spring rain was pattering on the thin roof; classical

music was playing and tea was brewing slowly on a hot plate.

Bill said he started designing the reel about 4½ years ago for his own use. He wanted to address all the functions that a fly reel has to perform from the ground up. "In a sense, as if I'd never seen a reel before," he said.

He did look at other reels, however, looking for the best way to accomplish each operation. In some cases the best way didn't exist, so he had to invent it. "I didn't think about the cost then," he said, "because I was just going to make one for myself."

Working part time, it took about two years to come up with the basic design, working on paper, in a machine shop and, of course, on the stream. It's hard to say how many prototypes there were because each one was changed and adjusted several times.

The company was born the way these things often are. People saw the reels and liked them. More than one fisherman wanted one. Bill geared up for limited production and made a few for people by what he describes as "really hideous means." He had some of the machinery he needed, but the first production reels took "hundreds of hours" to make.

Interest in the reels grew and Bill made more and more of them by hideous means. Finally he went to a bank and convinced them that he could make and sell fly reels. He bought some machines and moved into the shop in north Boulder. Now, he said, "I know how to build reels, but I'm still trying to figure out how to run a business."

The frame and spool of the reel are made of an aluminum alloy, anodized black. The foot and axel are made of titanium, which is both very strong and very light. The bearings, knobs and prings are of stainless steel, as is the roller on the line guide. A guide that rolls as the line is pulled over it cuts down on wear on fly lines. The handle and brake shoe are made of a material called delrin. The whole thing is corrosion-proof and can be used in salt as well as fresh water.

The brake and drag designs are unique and smooth running, intended to take the stresses of speed and heat.

Bill describes it as a high performance reel that is hand machined to close tolerances and nicely finished. It's slightly futuristic looking, but is still completely recognizable as a fly reel. The most unusual and obvious aspect of the design is the way the handle is balanced on the spool. Most reel makers balance the handle with a counter weight, but Bill has done it with a series of different sized cut-outs, thus achieving the same thing by removing material instead of adding it.

The reel also is available with a solid spool that has a more traditional look. It's the one you might choose if you were going to put a Hollander reel on a fine, vintage cane fly rod.

The reel sells for \$350 and Bill feels there's a place in the market for a fine piece of machinery made by a real live craftsman. In that price range, there are only a few makers working today, and their reels are often hard to get. Bill hopes to get his production to where you can get one of his reels if

you want one without waiting for years as you now have to do for a Bogden.

Working on 20 to 25 reels at a time, he currently averages four or five finished reels a month. That's working 15 to 20 hours a week. They're all hand machined and Bill is still working on production procedures that will speed things up but still maintain the quality.

Currently, there is one model, known as the "Cutthroat Trout." It's a light to medium trout reel, but is not limited to that use. With a line capacity up to a weight forward 9 fly line, it also will work on steelhead and light salmon rods.

On the horizon is a larger reel that will be designed especially for salmon and saltwater fish. It will handle an 11 weight line and 230 yards of 30 pound backing. This will be similar to the current model, but it will not be just a larger version.

Eventually there will be two additional models, one for light trout and another for tarpon and marlin,

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