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Fundamentals of Fly Rod Action

Reduced to its simplest terms, there are really only three rod actions: full flex, mid flex and tip flex. Rod engineering amongst the various manufacturers has resulted in an array of rod actions, at least in name, and from there, any two rods from different manufacturers are not likely to have the same action by the same name although the weight and length may be the same. Here are the basics that you should know about the three basic fly rod actions:

- A rod with a **full flex action**, often referred to as a “slow” action such as fibreglass, is softer than its counterparts...having more flex or bend throughout its length. Considered by many as an “older style” action, it nevertheless remains a favourite of many veteran fly fishers for very prudent reasons. If a soft, precise and accurate cast is required over a short to medium distance, we know of no better choice. Besides, the full flex action is the most forgiving of the lot should you make a casting error. With this type of action, if you make an error on the cast you will still be playing in the ballpark. Make the same mistake with a tip flex and the result will send you to the dugout to repair your snarls and wind knots. If “feel” is important in fly fishing, no other rod action that will compare to this.
- The **mid flex action** is somewhere between the tip flex and full flex actions. Like anything in the middle, it does not represent either extreme and is often referred to as a medium or medium fast action depending on where it comes in on the scale. This action is very popular with many fly fishers and well suited to anglers of all skill levels. In several instances, the manufacturer’s advertising spin suggests you need a fast action rod and almost try to compare the action of a fly rod to it’s owner or a car. Who wants to be a slow or medium fast fly fisher or worse yet, who wants a slow car? For us, we actually tend to prefer this type of action for a relaxed day’s fishing under clear skies and not fighting big winds. As to distance and presentation, that rests in the skill of the caster and we believe that in particular for those learning this sport, this is perhaps the best action on which to learn and grow quickly in your casting skills.
- A **tip flex action** or fast action rod is the opposite extreme of the three actions. The tip does most of the initial work with the rest of the rod responding and flexing only on demand. This too is heavily dependent on the definition of the manufacturer and in some cases, rods are being produced that are actually too fast for most fly fisherman to enjoy. In fact, these same manufacturers have begun to tame their tapers in response. If you intend to fly fish where you are battling high winds, need to cast consistently to the horizon or are fishing saltwater for any number of tough big game fish, this is the action for you. However, in the hands of an inexperienced caster, this type of action can be difficult to control. While it is not forgiving of casting mistakes, the fast action rod throws a very tight loop a very long way, even in the face of adversity. Adversity in fishing, particularly in the salt is something we call “the wind.” On occasion, many fly fishers have come to refer to the wind by a number of other four letter words.

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