

Hot Rodding

Here is also an article on some baitcaster rods. As mentioned at the July meeting, I have been planning a trip to Tintangara, never having been there before. In the end, it was a solo trip, but I decided to try to improve my skills at bait and lure fishing to improve confidence in Luke coming with me – “I will only go if you take the yellow boat, as I never do very good!”

So, with Bobeyan Road opening during the week and a couple of stops on my way South (my third trip to Tuggeranong this year), I got onto Tintangara Road about midday. I was please to see you could still drive to the dam, and seeing a few groups down near the boat ramp, I followed the road to the dam wall and beyond...well, not too far as the gate was closed.



The weather was worse than expected – dead flat and sunny. Knowing I wouldn’t have much luck in these conditions polaroiding, I decided to heard down on the point in the hope of something cruising deeper waters and set to checking out my tacklebox that was still packed from my Christmas trip to Tintangara. Finding some old Powerbait (2009?, only successful on Keiwa River during a bike hike) and a bardi grub from recently split firewood - and finding a couple of hooks eventually - I flicked out a bait rig or two to check the new spin rods, which were quite nice to cast (but not as far as a fly line).

I’m usually quite bored bait fishing, so I took the opportunity to sort the tacklebox, have some lunch and a cup of tea, and try out my baitcasting rods.

Having spent over \$100 on an Ugly Stik back when I lived in Darwin, I was happy to find some 5’6” Ugly Stiks for \$30 on clearance, and noted the thick grips which might be good with cold hands, and

also for putting in the kayak rod holders as they won't rattle around like the two-piece grips. They seemed thick for the line rating, but unlike other Ugly Stiks, had a graphite rather than clear soft tip.

I haven't upgraded much recently towards the newer graphite blanks. As such, I took advantage of some mid year clearance sales to get some rods 1-piece baitcaster usually retailing for \$100 or more with the idea that if the kids break a tip or drop them over the side it won't be too bad.

As I was on my own, I decided to test each of my baitcasting rods with the same reel (Abu Garcia 4500 Abassadeur Pro Max with I think 8lb mono), leader, and lure (1/8oz jig head soft plastic with a Squidgy Tough soft plastic). With still good weather, this gave a good comparison.

The Ugly Stik cast okay, and would be much better with a heavier minnow. Not surprising with its short length, but certainly had potential. It would probably be good for my intended use of using on the boat with the kids, or in my kayak (watch out Brogo).



From the top: Quantum Pro Tour (~2006), Abu Garcia Black Max (~2014), Ugly Stik GC2, Berkley Amp Grunter rod (the hook keeper underneath the rod worked well for soft plastics)

I then moved to the Berkeley 5'6" or 6' AMP rod (\$25 on clearance). I was initially put off when I realized earlier that morning that the reel grip was the hand grip, especially as a lefthanded caster, as it had potential to unwind on my casting. I found when I did it up tight though, it felt solid, and cast well. The short butt on it was nice, and lighter to flick than the Ugly Stik. Certainly a rod I would like to hike with, and work light lures with. It cast about the same distance as the Ugly Stik, but with a little more accuracy and easier on the arm.

Moving to my Abu Garcia Black Max camo rod, I did notice that the longer butt behind the reel came down to my elbow, and made casting more difficult. Whilst this might help stop the reel bouncing on

the top of a rod holder, for casting it wasn't as comfortable as the other three, and probably traded length from the reel to the tip for casting compared with the similar length rod. The butt felt long enough to be like a switch rod, feeling like it wanted to be a surf rod cast two-handed. By this stage the wind had begun to start, but not too bad. The extra length did aid in the casting, getting another 5-10 metres of distance.

This longer butt gave the next rod – the Quantum Pro tour (2006) a bit of an edge, and it felt a bit more balanced and lighter. I did ease off the casting brake a fraction as the lure on both 7' rods wanted to cast more and I could feel it being retarded more than on the shorter rods. It also helped in countering the onshore breeze. This rod was easier to cast out of all four, even with a 1/8oz jig head, giving both the distance and not too annoying on the forearm/elbow. Indeed, I bought this rod at the same time as the reel, but(t) even so, the Berkeley 5'6" was just as nice just lacking the distance for shore fishing. I then moved spots, and kept that rod casting for a bit longer before packing up.



Note the butt lengths, with the baitcaster triggers in the same position. The different in grips is also apparent, and something worth testing when looking for your next rod. Even triggers are different, and worth checking for feel, grip, and comfort as they can get painful after a good day's casting.

In short (or long), the rods all had some advantages for different situations. Some are better for sitting in kayaks but the shorter butts may be more likely to bounce out and drop over the side if not careful. However, these shorter butts are better for flicking lures for any reasonable amount of time. Even with the light soft plastic, the Berkely rod was quite nice, and I may even stop at that tackle store again for a second one.

The other benefit of a shorter rod on a kayak, is that with “normal” rod holders being near-vertical, they keep your rod tip closer to the water, allowing your lure to work deeper on the troll, especially if it is a floating lure and you paddle slowly like I do. Often I find my lures skimming the surface (especially after picking up some weed, or slime from snags) so using a shorter rod is useful in these situations where you don’t need the casting distance. Now I have a Mirage drive, that isn’t as much of a problem as I don’t have to hold a paddle, but even for a second rod trolling, the short rod will be good.

Either way, the newer rods – especially with braid and other low-stretch lines – give a much more responsive feel to lures than twenty years ago, enabling slightly lighter lures to be worked by the old humble baitcaster. Even though I can (reasonably) cast a fly line, I still can’t get the hang of forefinger spool casting egg beater reels, but the thumb cast of a baitcaster still has a bit of muscle memory, even if casting these light lures isn’t as accurate as I used to be up the Goodradigbee casting my Wonder Wobblers.

PS One thing I did note reading the July/Aug Freshwater Fishing, and an older 2015 one, if except for the occasion burn of a lure, in freshwater it was noted for trout and yellowbelly to try and keep lure action quite smooth as sudden movements or twitches will spook fish nearby, and potentially in the area (weed bay etc). As such, using my flathead twitching I may have been a bit too aggressive, and it’s one thing to watch with PE lines and stiffer rods than the old 8lb mono and 5’6” fiberglass whip.



It may not have been a great day for fishing, but *reflecting* on it, it was a great day to test out some rods and get out of the house.

PS – a quick shot of the Berkely AMP and the Abu Garcia getting a proper christening

