

# Epic Fibreglass Fly Rod Building

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For me, the ultimate appeal of fly fishing was always the idea of hiking and fishing remote streams; so from the first time my old friend Aaron showed me the basics of casting I knew that I wanted a rod that was light enough for mountain streams and could pack down for ease of travel.

Knowing that I also love to build things, Aaron sent me a link to Swift Fly Fishing, a company that produces fly rod kits under the Epic brand name. They have a large range of both fibreglass and carbon rods; for my needs/wants, Aaron suggested their 476 'packlight' – a 4wt 7'6" fibreglass rod that breaks into 5 pieces. The 'studio built' finished Packlight retails at \$1209 AUD currently; the kit version is \$540.

At first, I shied away from the purchase as, with a newborn at home, this still seemed a bit extravagant. I signed up to their mailing list intent on waiting for their yearly 'blemished' sale, but they kept sending better discounts until I could justify it. In my head at least...

The kits come beautifully packaged with almost everything required, bar some basics like a Stanley knife, bobbin holder and masking tape. The one specialist tool it does not include is a rod dryer – I was able to borrow one from Aaron, but I would recommend purchasing this as it turns the rod while the epoxy dries and allows it to self-level. Swift wouldn't include a rod dryer in the kit as it is a reusable tool - so if you were building a second or third kit, you'd be paying an extra \$70 for something you don't need



Figure 1 The rod package - instruction book, epoxies, thread and fittings are all underneath top layer

The inclusions all seem top quality. This particular rod has options for either a cap and ring reel seat or uplocking; other sizes have options for fighting butts. I chose the cap and ring as simplicity is key in my mind, and after using it I am very happy with my choice.

The instruction booklet is thorough and leaves very little to chance. The kit comes with natural and black silk threads; the detail explains how, using natural silk thread and thinned rod finishing epoxy for the first coat, completely clear wraps can be achieved. I think this finish really complements the fibreglass blank. It is a fiddly process but not unfamiliar for anyone who ties flies; after the first

couple of wraps I was surprised at how quickly I could finish one. Clear instructions are given on how to start and finish each wrap with the thread tag tucked under to hold everything in place until epoxy is applied.



*Figure 2 a natural silk wrap pre finish*



*Figure 3 clear wraps under preliminary coat – final topcoat smooths out the visible dimples and rough patches*

The build proceeds surprisingly quickly; the cork is already reamed so the first step is just to epoxy the handle and seat to the blank. The kit includes epoxy paste for this as well as finishing epoxy for the threads. There are detailed instructions for ‘spining’ the rod – and explanations for the various schools of thought on how to position the guides in relation to the spine. Essentially, rod blanks tend to be stiffer in one direction due to the manufacturing process (unless helically wound). This can be felt by bending each section; then there are several schools of thought about how to align the guides with it. I decided to place the guides at 90 deg on the basis that the rod will be the same stiffness on both forward and back casts.

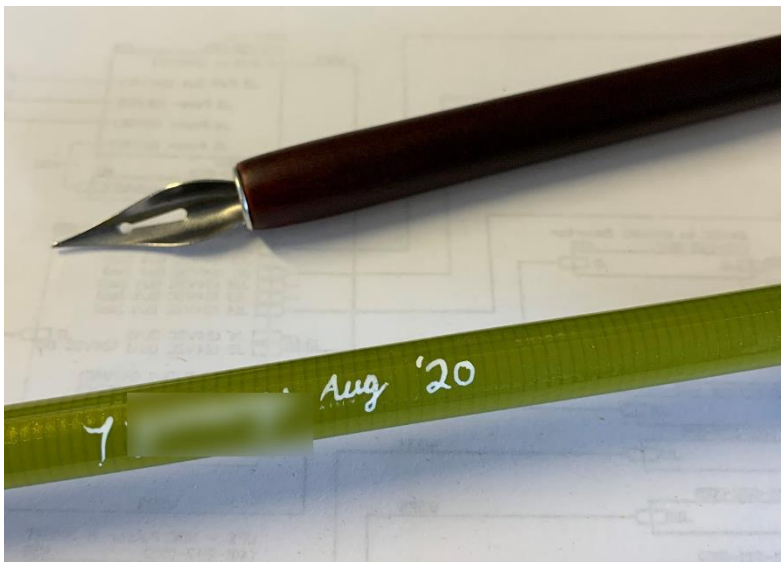
*(Ed: this intrigued me and I found a comprehensive discussion on spining and why you might want to factor it into your construction at*

<https://swiftflyfishing.com/blogs/news/8251935-spining-a-fly-rod-to-spine-or-not-to-spine> )

From here, the included china pencil is used to mark out guide locations, and then wrapping can start. Pre-cut pieces of cardboard fold together and fit into the box to form a clever support stand. I think I ended up redoing one wrap, but generally I found this reasonably easy.

Finally, the rod is ready for finishing epoxy; this is where a dryer is invaluable. The rod is assembled in the dryer and the included stands, epoxy mixed (and thinned) and carefully applied to the wraps on each guide. The thinners allow the epoxy to fully 'wet out' the threads and go clear – credit to the instructions for allowing a first timer like me to get such a decent finish. An un-thinned topcoat is then applied with self-levels and leaves a smooth surface.

The rod is then technically finished, but I also took the liberty of signing the finished rod and dating it. This is probably a little indulgent, but I am optimistically hoping that I might be handing this down to my daughter one day. It took me a while to find a white ink I was happy with; I ended up using a technical white ink (by Rotring) with a speedball calligraphy pen. This was then coated in epoxy to protect it.



*Figure 4 handwriting attempt #5,443... probably*

I'm not the best person to give testimony on the performance of the rod as a relative beginner; I can say that after a bit of expert guidance from Aaron and CAA members, I can cast almost anywhere I want to on the water. I use a WF5F as I find it casts a little nicer than a DT4F, and I can comfortably roll cast to the running line and overhead cast a bit further, although I rarely need much line out given I'm fishing on the Cotter. I ended up pairing it with a Hardy Ultralite FWDD reel. Another indulgent choice, but it balances very nicely. CAA members who have cast this rod tell me that while slower than a carbon rod, this rod is much faster than a traditional fibreglass blank.



*Figure 5 finished rod with included fibreglass rod tube*



I've now landed 4 trout – including my first ever on fly - using this rod on the Cotter. I absolutely love it, partially for the look, feel and performance, but there is also a huge sense of satisfaction in having built the rod myself.



*Figure 6 First trout on fly - courtesy of BJ's Fly Fishing Adventures*

I would highly recommend a Swift kit. The quality and attention to detail is great, the build is quite achievable for anyone, and the feeling of accomplishment when fishing with a rod you built with your own hands is fantastic.



*Figure 7 a slightly more respectable fish*

I'm really happy with it. It feels really easy to control and very relaxed. Heading out for a walk with it tomorrow...

I built another rod after this on a Composites Development blank, specifically for beach fishing - 8'9", 7wt. Feels good for distance but definitely not as accurate. No luck at the beach, not sure if there just weren't any fish but I did notice that the surf candies I tied were a lot more fluorescent and bright than the baitfish there, so I'll be tying some more subdued versions!