

**Fly Fishing with Doug Macnair:
Product Updates
"St. Croix's Legend Elite"®**

Doug Macnair

It's hard to imagine, but with each passing year fly rods get better – or so it's alleged – and, if not better, certainly more expensive. But do the rods *really* get better? I'm not at all certain. Recently, a friend gave me a fly fishing book written in 1978. According to the author, casts of 100 feet were common in those days.

Frankly, I don't believe it! At least not with rods rigged for fly fishing as we know it today – that's with a 9-foot rod and 9-foot leader



complete with tippet and substitute fly. I was alive and well in 1978 and am pleased to report that unless you were equipped with the "calculated eyeball," a cast of 80-feet was something akin to making an Eagle in golf. The fact is, the line can go no further than the velocity of the launch, given an aerodynamically slim loop. And just like the game of golf, the law of gravity applies to both ball and fly: sooner or later, when the propulsion system runs out of gas, both fall back to earth.

So what's to get better in fly rods? Perhaps the ease and precision of the delivery coupled with what appears to be reduced weight. Continued development suggests tomorrow's rod will weigh less than one ounce, feature *dial-an-action*, *extend-a-length*, and cast the *self-propelled line* now under development. The idea of having a mechanical-winged fly take-off and locate the fish by aerial reconnaissance is indeed enticing. Unfortunately, I doubt that I will still be around when that day comes.

Speaking of the ease and precision in delivery of the fly brings me to the **St. Croix Legend Ultra**. Over the last several years, I have yet to run into anyone that has fished the Ultra who has other than praise for it's quality, casting abilities, the components, and the value for the price paid. Thus, when St. Croix announced the **Legend Elite**, I asked permission to do a review of the rod. I suppose I was questioning whether fly rods are really getting better. St. Croix graciously responded in the affirmative and sent me their pride and joy, a 5-piece 8-weight Legend Elite that weighs a tad over 4 oz. My first impression? **Nice rod!**

So what's new? Quite a bit! But before going forward, allow me digress for a moment. As some of you know - and some may not - today's high-performance

rods are designed using compound tapers that employ several measured transition points along the blank where the slope of the taper changes. However, these same transition points are typically uneven and can create points of weakness in the blank. To counter this, St. Croix has pioneered **IPC**, otherwise known as **Integrated Poly- Curve Technology**. St. Croix claims that the advent of IPC enables compound tapers that form a continuous curve from the tip to the butt of the rod. By eliminating the relative weak transition points of the traditional compound taper, St. Croix suggests that a smoother casting rod results that is more obedient to its master's hand. (My words, not theirs.)



Traditional Linear Compound Taper

Linear Transition Points
Transformed into Poly-Curves



Fabricated from St. Croix's high-modulus, high-strain SC^V graphite, the Legend Elite features carbon-matte scrim and the absolute finest components available. For example:

- (1) Slim-profile tip-over ferrules.
- (2) Flora-grade cork handles.
- (3) REC nickel silver reel seats with stabilized black ash burl inserts on freshwater models.
- (4) REC hard-anodized aluminum reel seats on heavier-line models. (I am in love with the reel seat!)
- (5) Fuji® SiC stripper guides with titanium-plated frames.
- (6) Titanium-plated, single-foot fly guides on models through 6 wt. Titanium-plated snake guides on 7 wt. models and heavier.

If these components don't represent quality, I don't know what does! As an example, the cork is the best I've seen in several years. My best guess is that if a better grade were available, it would force the price of the rod up by 20%.

And here is an important point for those of you who might be concerned where the rod is made: be assured it is not France or Germany. The Legend Elite is made right here in the land of the Stars and Stripes and carries St. Croix's lifetime warranty.



So how does it handle? Very nicely, thank you! Given **IPC** and the slim ferrule design, you will never know that you are casting a 5-piece rod. I think this says a lot. Since I also enjoy popping caps for varmints, I draw a comparison between the

Elite and the .220 Swift. For those familiar with this cartridge and its characteristics, I need not go further than saying it is extremely fast and very accurate throughout its effective range. Firing the Legend Elite is a delight. The trigger pull is light and crisp. This rod is quick and accurate with more power than you will ever need. The more I played with the Elite, the better I liked it. Sometimes it doesn't work out this way. But, when it does, you feel warm and fuzzy inside knowing *you* are the one who made the *right* choice in fly rods.

During the work up to this article, I used 6 lines in experimenting with the Elite. Unlike some rods I've reviewed in the past, this rod has no apparent favorites. It willingly seems to throw anything, although the kitchen sink was a trifle too heavy. To give you an idea of the spectrum I covered, checkout this listing.

- (1) Cortland ST-8-F w/Mastery AST running line.
- (2) Mastery Saltwater WF-8F w/AST.
- (3) Orvis Big Bug WF-8-F.
- (4) Cortland 444 SL Tropic WF-8-F.
- (5) Airflo Multi-Head ST-8-I w/Airflo Trout running line.
- (6) Mastery Bonefish WF-7-F w/AST.

Those of you who follow my writings know that I do not favor overlining a rod other than for very short casts inside 30 feet. You also know that I frequently underline, especially when attempting to max out distance. The Mastery Bonefish WF-7-F performed with acumen on the 8-weight Elite. Don't be afraid to try this technique if you decide this rod is for you.

Is the Legend Elite perfect? No! On the other hand, I've yet to find such a rod in all my years of searching – and that dates from my earlier experiences with the Ancient Fish Gods during mid-summer solstice in those days now long past. If I had one wish for the Legend Elite, it would be for larger stripping guides, at least on the 8-weight I evaluated. Larger strippers would not only match the snakes but also reduce friction during the cast.

A word about price: the Legend Elite has crossed into the 500 plus dollar range and certainly cannot be considered inexpensive. But on the other hand, this year has seen other high-end rods move firmly into the mid-600 to 700 plus dollar range. It seems to me, either represents a lot of money. In fact, these prices encroach on the current price for a well-made Bamboo. Given these alternatives, the Legend Elite is a superb value. One other thing -- you will never take second seat in mid-stream when the other guy says, "I'm proud to say that I'm fishing a new Dumbar Dummy that cost me my marriage and my Porsche." You can respond, "Pity -- too bad you couldn't afford a rod as good as my Legend Elite."

For more information on the **St. Croix Legend Ultra** or the **Legend Elite**, contact St. Croix. Telephone **1 (800) 826-7042**.



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