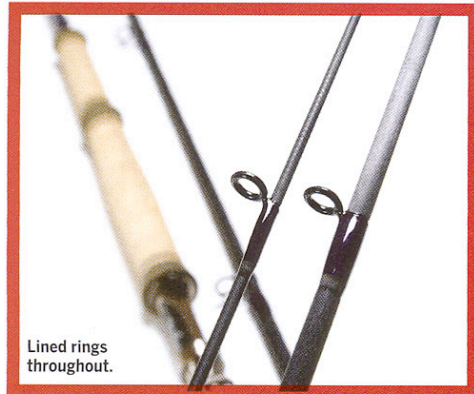


Fly Fishing & Fly Tying

TACKLE BAG

Chris Ward Custom #4/5 Switch Rod 10ft 6in 4-pce



Lined rings throughout.



Natural and composite 'burl' cork handle.

A touch of déjà vu here. Remember when some longer or stronger single-handed fly rods came with extension grips? The idea was that a lower grip made Spey and roll casts that bit easier and, one way or another, helped when playing a fish. Well they're back, re-branded Switch rods.

First, US rod builders rename Double Handed fly rods Spey rods, and now we have Switch rods?

In my mind, partly because of the rod lengths and weights, single handed rods with extension grips are associated with sea trout fishing, but they were not at all uncommon on stocked fisheries. Fashion more than function saw that style of rod and handle become less popular in the UK. Lighter, faster rods with little fighting butts arrived from the US. Long rods looked and felt dated, heavy, clumsy and sloppy. Even the tradition of rating a rod with more than one line weight seemed old-hat, imprecise or uncommitted. Imports seemed sleeker, newer and more desirable; in many ways were superior to home grown product.

In the US, according to one fishing writer, "a single handed fly rod had to be 9ft long and if not why not?" Ironically, it looks like that same US market has re-invented a wheel it caused to disappear in this country.

So, what do we interpret as 'Switch'? Is it a casting technique, or the option to change from double to single handed use? The handle on this rod states its purpose. Above the reel seat a full wells grip with an extension above that grip, below the seat and short lower grip. The idea is that I can switch from



Closely spaced rings reduce 'line wrap'.

single to double handed as I like or need.

Explaining this next part becomes convoluted. In short this rod is rated #4/5 and it is clearly not suited to conventional #4/5 lines. It is designed for and suits #4/5 Spey lines.

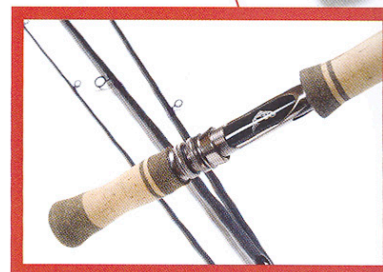
We talk about line standards and AFTMA (American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers Association) – the organisation who first set standards for modern fly lines. In fact, that organisation was superseded some years back by AFFTA (American Fly Fishing Tackle Trade Association) who now maintain fly-line standards for both Standard and Spey lines, for single and double-handed rods respectively.

Spey line specifications officially start at #6 but calculating the weight and length of a #5 line is not difficult and several line manufacturers market suitable lines. Chris Ward provided two Rio lines to match this rod, a #4/5 Windcutter Spey and an AFS Shooting head. By grain weight, those lines equate with much higher Standard lines (roughly #9 or #10.)

My apologies for the long explanation, but the rating of Switch rods is still in the melting pot. Some makers rate their rods by grain weight, some for Standard lines, some for Spey lines. Chris Ward knows his rod and has rated it for the right lines.

I cast 10ft #7 rods often, so I found casting this Switch rod natural with one hand and rather less intuitive with two. The

Single or double-handed – your choice.



action is distinctive and slightly unconventional. The delicate tip and powerful butt combine to create a fast action in terms of the way it bends but this is not a stiff rod thanks to the line rating. Casting normally, single handed, with 'hard stops' the tip tends to bounce. As soon as I slowed and started roll casting, then Spey-casting, it began to make more sense.

Using rolls and Spey casts I was able to cover a medium-sized river and the casting (single-handed) was quite leisurely and relaxed. Casting double-handed did not come easily to me with this rod. I think I wanted a longer rod and or a longer grip. But it worked. Loops were consistent, reasonably well formed and I could cover water comfortably.

Anglers accustomed to longer single handed and double handed rods may initially find Switch rods are neither one thing nor the other. I suspect anglers coming from shorter fly rods for lighter lines will have a completely different experience.

I'm sure Switch rods will attract a following, particularly on smaller rivers. Whether you view this rod as a very light double-hander, or as a grilse/sea trout single will depend on your usage and possibly your physique. It may make life easier for summer salmon anglers and double up nicely at night for sea trout.

Build quality is excellent. Chris has fitted a full set of lined rings, including a distinctive pair at the butt, placed quite close together. The handle shape is made from good cork, and is very nicely sized and shaped.

Chris Ward Custom #4/5 Switch Rod 10ft 6in

Sections: 4

Weight: 167.3g (5.9oz)

Rings: Lined

Handle: Natural and composite 'burl' cork

Upper grip: Full-wells with extension

Lower grip: Three inch

Reel seat: Cut away frame, solid spacer

Blank: Natural carbon grey

Build quality: Very high

Guide price: £625.00 including rod tube

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(www.rodcraftsman.com)

This is a custom-built rod so price will vary depending on the specification.

