

# ROD BUILDING

BY LARRY LEE

## Rod Building 105 — Reel Seat

There are many colors, shapes, and materials used in reel seats that a rod builder can choose from when building a custom rod. Reel seats, which can range in cost from a few dollars to \$150, come in various sizes, and are either up-locking or down-locking (to be discussed in a later article). It can be fun to have a large selection, but it can be really hard to make a decision! Your decision should be primarily based on weight, strength, durability, appearance, and price. There are primarily three basic types of reel seats to choose from: (a) **graphite**, (b) **all metal**, and (c) **skeleton** (metal, graphite, and wood inserts). A discussion of each follows.

**Graphite reel seats** are light, durable, strong, and inexpensive. Their graphite-filled bodies and stainless-steel hoods will never corrode, and the nylon liners inside the hoods grip reel feet firmly while preventing corrosion between the steel hoods and aluminum reel feet. The tightening nut and sliding hood of the graphite seat ride in a keyway, which means you do not have to align anything to mount your reel. You just insert one end of the foot of the reel into the fixed hood and tighten the locking nut on the other end of the reel foot and your reel is securely mounted. These reel seats can also be swapped end for end to make the rod up-locking or down-locking, based on your preference. If you are looking for value and a lightweight rod, graphite reel seats are the best choice.

**All-metal reel seats** range from stamped aluminum (a few dollars), to machined alloy with hard anodized finish (approximately \$30), to machined titanium or titanium alloy (approximately \$150). These seats are typically used in 7-weight size rods and larger, and are often used in conjunction with fighting butts. Also, these seats will typically have double locking nuts so your reel will not come

loose fighting large fish. If you want to build a saltwater, or big fish rod, these seats work great. One word of caution: avoid super-cheap reel seats because their finishes will corrode, threads wear, loose fitting nuts can jam, and flimsy hoods can easily split.

**A skeleton seat** uses the ends of a tubular metal seat – the fixed hood, threaded portion of the barrel, sliding hood, and nut – but fills the space between the fixed hood and barrel with a wood or woven graphite insert. Typical wood types used are cocabola, birdseye maple, tiger maple, maple burl, walnut, box elder burl, and cherry. You would tend to use skeleton reel seats on nearly any freshwater graphite fly rod and even some light to medium saltwater rods. These reel seats can cost from \$10 to \$150. Another skeleton reel seat that uses woven graphite is used on some factory rods for both durability and its modern, high-tech appearance. You can also find a few skeleton reel seats that have lightweight cork inserts.

There are many manufacturers to choose from, however, a few to consider are Forecast, Fuji, Struble, Angler's Workshop, and Pacific Bay. If you do not find the exact reel seat you want, you may want to consider making your own. We will discuss this in a future article. Finally, make sure that the reel you are using will fit into the reel seat. If the reel seat turns out to be larger than necessary to accommodate the foot of the reel, you can adjust the reel seat to fit by a tightening ring. The North American Fly Tackle Trade Association has specified a standard reel foot length of 2.50" plus or minus 0.10" and many seats conform to this standard.

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