

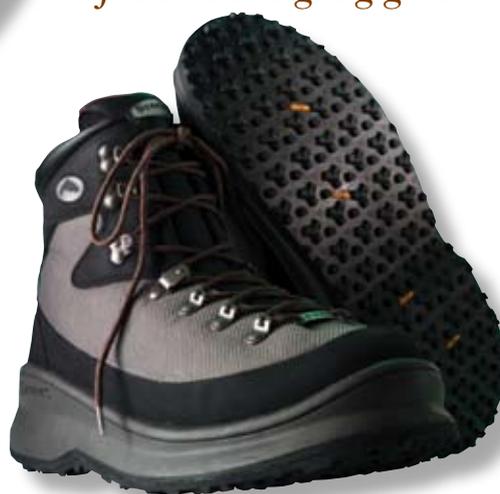


# Fly Fishing

By Todd Tanner



*Whether you're talking rods, reels, waders, sunglasses or fly lines, 2009 is shaping up as an innovative year for top-of-the-line angling gear.*



*From top: Abel's "No Pebble Mine" reel can double as both a conversation and conservation piece. It was produced in a limited edition of 100 reels for holding 5- or 6-weight lines. • Simms StreamTread Guide Boots feature a Vibram rubber sole that provides superior traction. • The 7 Plus reel from Hatch Outdoors is designed for steelhead, salmon and bonefish.*

A voice spoke from on high, the words powerful and clear, echoing down from the lofty pinnacle of Mount Classics. The next fly fishing column, scheduled for the March/April issue, should focus on the most innovative, interesting fly fishing gear of 2009. Period. So let's get right to it . . .

I'd like to start out with **Abel**. The noted reel manufacturer has created a limited edition "NO PEBBLE MINE" Super 5N trout reel to focus attention on a major threat to Alaska's stellar Bristol Bay trout and salmon fishery. Abel only produced a hundred of these striking salmon-red reels, which hold a 5- or 6-weight fly line and retail for \$775. The company is donating \$200 per reel to the Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska, which has been actively opposing the Pebble Mine. If you're in the market for a trout reel that will double as both a conversation and conservation piece, give Abel a shout. They only have a couple dozen "NO PEBBLE MINE" reels left.

**Patagonia** has two notable entries in this "coolest gear" column. The first is the Stormfront Pack, a relatively small waterproof

pack that doubles as a dry bag and a boat bag. You can wear the ultra-comfortable Stormfront on your back when you hike in to your favorite stretch of river, or detach the padded mesh harness and use the Stormfront as a handy dry bag for your lunch, fleece and rain jacket the next time you float in a canoe or drift boat. With a waterproof zipper, a hydration pocket, rod tube straps and an inner padded gear case to

protect your camera and cell phone, the \$275 Stormfront is one of the handiest pieces of gear I've run across in years.

Then we have Patagonia's new Guidewater Waders (\$425). They're everything you'd expect in a great pair of breathable waders, with one serious twist. Patagonia has figured out a way to bond a patent-pending merino wool grid to the inside of the neoprene booties. Which means no more cold and clammy neoprene against your socks. Your feet stay warmer, dryer and more comfortable. Hallelujah!

I have it on good authority that until the first shipment from the factory arrives in the next week or two, there are only three pairs of the new **Simms StreamTread Guide Boots** in the United States. As luck would have it, I have a pair sitting next to me as I write this. And as luck would also have it, they're way too small for my size eleven and a half feet. Bummer.

Still, the StreamTread Guide Boot (\$199.95) is a serious wading shoe for serious anglers. Not only



is it a technical juggernaut, with Schoeller-dynatec high abrasion-resistant mesh panels, ToughTek material around the ankles, and water-repellent, full-grain Nubuck leather construction, but these new Simms Guide Boots feature a proprietary rubber sole – the StreamTread. Simms teamed up with Vibram to create an easy-to-clean, hard-gripping rubber sole that provides superior traction, but doesn't give nasty aquatic diseases a home-away-from-home like felt. These cutting-edge wading boots are a major line of defense against the spread of waterborne disease, which is something we should all be focused on. Well done, Simms!

Glass is making a comeback on the dry fly scene, and **Hardy's** 7-foot, 6-inch fiberglass 4-weight ("The Test") will scratch an itch for all you small stream aficionados looking for a rod that loads with no more than a long leader hanging from the tip. Sure, this handsome pixie will also throw 50 feet of fly line in a pinch, but it really excels at the shorter casting distances typical of smaller creeks and streams. The handle and reel seat are all cork, with some of the most unusual hardware you'll see anywhere, and the \$450 price tag won't break the bank. If you like dry flies, tiny creeks and slow-action glass rods, this Hardy deserves your consideration.

**HiDefSpex** makes both shooting and fishing glasses. I can't speak to their shooting models, but their fishing sunglasses are top-notch. I just finished testing a design called the Cuda and it's a true *tour de force* combining both serious technical achievement and outstanding on-the-water performance. From the state-of-the-art, lightweight, wrap-around, vented frames to the HD Polarized Lenses featuring ColorTrast color enhancement and perfect polarization, the Cuda is a glare-cutting, fish-spotting wonder.

Even better, by the time this

column goes to print, the \$349 Cuda, which currently boasts HD Polar Light Management technology (three separate, interchangeable lenses for full sun, partial sun and low light situations), will be available with the brand new HD Varia lens. The Varia is a stand-alone lens that adapts to a wide range of light conditions and eliminates the need for changing glasses or lenses. A Cuda with the Varia lens option runs \$279. To quote Jerry Lee Lewis . . . Nah, on second thought, that will just get me in trouble. Forget about Jerry Lee. I just want to state for the record that HiDefSpex is making some fantastic high-end fishing shades.

**Cortland Line Company** created the first-ever bonded synthetic fly line back in 1953. Now it looks like they're poised to take another giant step forward. Cortland's Precision PE+ Saltwater Fly Lines (\$80) are the company's – and as best as I can tell, the planet's – first ever clear, non-PVC, nylon monofilament core, polyethylene co-polymer fly line. What does all that mean? Well, according to Cortland, this new line offers exceptional strength, unsurpassed durability, an ultra-smooth finish, a super-low co-efficient of friction and superior buoyancy. Oh, and not only does it cast like a son-of-a-gun, but it's actually recyclable when it's time for a new line.

I haven't had a chance to put the PE+ to the test in actual saltwater conditions – just so you know, I've only had the line for a couple of days and there's no ocean close to my Montana home – but I can tell you that it's every bit as slick, clear and high-floating as Cortland claims. Even better, Cortland is planning on following up with a freshwater version of the PE+. I'm not going to jump on the polyethylene co-polymer bandwagon until I spend some time actually fishing these lines, but if Cortland is right, the



PE+ may well prove to be the next big thing in the world of fly fishing.

A while back I wrote about a sweet little trout reel from a up-and-coming manufacturer by the name of **Hatch Outdoors**. It's been brought to my attention that Hatch also makes a serious steelhead/salmon/bonefish reel – the obliquely named 7 Plus. (The 7 Plus tag indicates that the reel will handle a 7-, 8- or 9-weight line.) With a sealed, self-lubricating, maintenance-free Rulon and stainless steel drag – 5 Rulon discs sandwich four stainless steel discs – along with exquisite craftsmanship and a choice of both mid- and large-arbor models, the 7 Plus is destined to set a new standard for high-end fly reels. Oh, and while I haven't figured out how Hatch machines the reel seat directly into the frame – that's right, no screws to shear or fall out – it's far and away the best design I've ever seen. As my friend Rich Paini of TroutHunter put it, the Hatch 7 Plus is “a perfect example of form following function.”

If you've ever run across one of **Kerry Burkheimer's** rods, you know they're beautiful. Exquisitely so. In fact, Burkheimer's Presentation Series boasts the kind of fit and finish that move past the realm of craftsmanship and touch on sheer artistry. Yet at the same time, I rarely, if ever, fish the Guggenheim or the Museum of Modern Art. So while I appreciate a stunning rod as much as the next guy, I'd still rather head for the river with a stick that throws a handsome line.

Which the new CF Burkheimer – the CF-590-4DAL – certainly does. Only I'm going to quibble just a bit. Kerry calls this sweet, \$795 nine-footer a 4/5/6-weight. At the risk of offending folks with different casting styles or preferences, I don't think it's a 4-weight. I don't even think it's a 5-weight, although an angler who routinely throws 70 feet of line



might argue with me about that.

Instead, what this particular rod does, perhaps better than any other fly rod I've ever cast, is generate tight, effortless, sublime loops with a 6-weight line. So there you have it. A wonderful new 6-weight from one of the finer rod builders on the planet. And it's gorgeous to boot.

Okay, before I wrap this column up, let me set the stage for you. It was a dark and stormy afternoon on December 31st, the last day of 2008. It had been spitting snow all morning, there was a foot and a half of heavy powder in the yard, the temperature was right around freezing and the wind was gusting twenty plus. I was wearing my hunting boots and my ski pants, along with a new **Sitka Gear** Stormfront Jacket (\$479) and Traverse Zip-T (\$99). That's it. Just a light, stretchy shirt and an uninsulated foul-weather jacket. And because I take my job seriously, our high-pressure outdoor spigot was feeding into a beefy garden hose, sending a serious amount of water up into the grey Montana sky and then down on yours truly.

Oh, and as if that's not enough, my wife eventually came outside and handled the hose herself. No point wasting water, right?

What did I learn? Well, I guess I could critique the cutting-edge GORE-TEX fabric, or the micro-taped and laser-cut seams or the innovative high-tech design, or Sitka's obvious attention to quality and detail. But I'd just be beating around the bush. The fact of the matter is that I stayed dry and comfortable in conditions way beyond what you'll typically experience on the water. Sitka creates stellar gear for hunters, but the Stormfront Jacket and the Traverse Zip-T perform every bit as well on the river as they do in the woods. I don't know what more you could ask for. 