





Fly Fishing

By Todd Tanner

To keep yourself out of trouble with the law, break out your credit card and order at least some of these great new products for fly anglers.

I've never really thought of myself as a crime fighter, but after reading the following bit of wisdom from former President Herbert Hoover, it's obvious that our annual fly-fishing equipment review has helped hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of *Sporting Classics* readers stay on the straight and narrow:

"Lots of people committed crimes during the year who would not have done so if they had been fishing. The increase of crime is among those deprived of the regenerations that impregnate the mind and character of the fisherman."

So if I may be so bold, my advice is to step back from temptation, spend a few extra dollars on new fly-fishing gear this spring, and steer clear of potential trouble with the law. With that simple admonition, here is this year's equipment review. Enjoy!

Patagonia River Salt Jacket (\$349) The Missouri River, near Wolf Creek, Montana, is a great place to test fly-fishing gear. When you're there in December, with the cold wind blowing and the squalls racing in from the distant horizon, you find out in a hurry whether your foul-weather gear is up to the task. The Patagonia River Salt is the kind of no-nonsense, built-like-a-truck jacket every serious angler needs. It stopped the cold Montana wind, handled



River Treads Studded Wading Boots from L.L. Bean offer excellent traction, even on slippery river rocks. • *Costa Corbina sunglasses cut glare while transmitting as much light as possible.* • *The Orvis Guide Sling Pack is ideal for toting everything you'll need for a day on the water.*

snow and rain with ease, and was as comfortable and well-designed a rain jacket as I've ever worn.

G. Loomis Lite Presentation 1085-5LP Rod (\$755) Let's imagine that you're one of the world's most talented fly-rod designers and you want to hold on to the features that make your G.Loomis NRX fly rods stand out – the exceptional quality, pinpoint accuracy and superior performance – while, at the same time, optimizing the taper for delicate presentations and dry flies. Chances are good that you'd end up with a rod just like the new Loomis Lite Presentation. This particular 9-foot 5-weight is . . . well, let's just cut to the chase. This may be the smoothest, sweetest Loomis I've ever had in my hands, and I'd be happy to fish this particular rod for the next 30 years. It is a truly wonderful dry fly rod and perfect for small- to medium-sized flies and light presentations. Serious kudos to Steve Rajeff and the G.Loomis team.

Costa Corbina Sunglasses with 580P Sunrise Lenses (\$169) If you're like me, you enjoy fishing early and late and you love to be out on the water when it's cloudy or overcast. To be as effective as possible in these situations, you'll want low-light, high-contrast lenses that cut glare and transmit as much light as possible. You'll also want comfortable, stylish frames that look and feel great. In other words, you'll

want Costa's Corbina frames and 580P Sunrise lenses. I've been using these glasses since last July and they are hands down the finest low-light sunglasses I've ever worn.

Orvis Guide Sling Pack (\$139) More and more anglers are leaving their vests at home and switching to sling packs. The Orvis "Guide" model is an oversized pack, and it will carry your jacket, your lunch, your water bottle and pretty much all the flies, leaders, tippets and assorted accessories that you'll need for a day on the water. I particularly liked the magnetic strap that locks in the forceps, the interior fly-drying patch and the digital camo pattern. If you're looking for a well-designed and well-constructed sling pack that will hold a ton of gear, Orvis has you covered.

Montana Fly Co Madison II Reel (\$224.99) I took one of these beauties up to British Columbia last summer, and I was truly impressed. The Madison II is lightweight and strong, with a solid drag system and the kind of handsome artistic finish that will have your buddies casting envious glances in your direction. I actually beat the hell out of the reel, dropping it in the river and bouncing it off rocks, and despite all the abuse, it still looks great and performs like a champ. Long story short, the Madison II is one heck of a reel and a great value for the price.

Thomas & Thomas LPS II 905-4 Rod (\$800) I had two different reactions to the first T&T rod I've cast in a number of years. First, when I had it out on the (freshly plowed) driveway, I liked it – a lot. Then, once I got it on the water, I simply fell in love. I'm not sure what caused the shift, but every once in a while I find a rod that just shines in actual fishing situations. This 9-foot, 5-weight LPS II is a perfect example. It's smooth, it's accurate and it throws a gorgeous line. T&T calls it a "medium action" and while I'm not so sure I agree – it feels like more of a "medium fast" to me – it's a truly stellar fishing and casting tool. If you're in the market for a new 5-weight, especially an all-around rod that will excel in multiple situations, this LPS II is more than worthy of your consideration.

Simms Bulkley Jacket (\$279.95) As the name "Bulkley" suggests, this is the kind of warm and weatherproof jacket that's perfect for destinations like Alaska, British Columbia and Patagonia. If you fish early in the season, or late, or if you enjoy traveling to places where the steelhead and salmon are big and the weather is sketchy, the Bulkley, which combines a GORE-TEX shell fabric with PrimaLoft ONE insulation, will keep you warm and dry. Simms is known for exceptional quality and meticulous engineering, and this jacket, which is loaded with fishing-friendly features, does a great job of keeping you comfortable without adding weight or bulk.

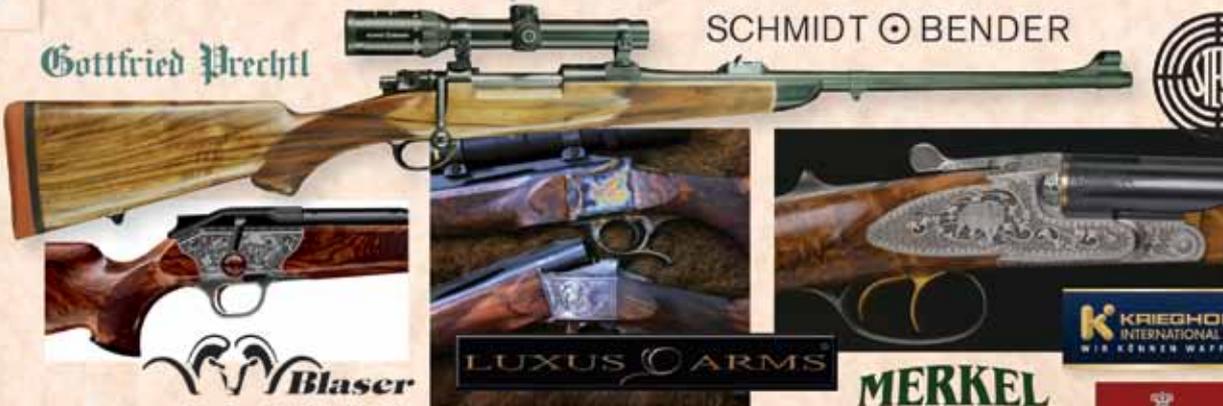
Fishpond Westwater Boat Bag (\$219.95) If you're a gear junkie like so many fly fishermen, you probably hate heading for the water without all the stuff you might – and I should emphasize the word "might" – need. I typically haul along a camera, two or three reels, a couple pairs of sunglasses, an assortment of leaders and tippets, a spare spool or two, a spare line and about a dozen different fly boxes. Now, with Fishpond's Westwater Boat Bag, I can keep all my various and sundry gear



The four-piece LPS II from Thomas & Thomas is "smooth, accurate and throws a gorgeous line," according to Tanner.

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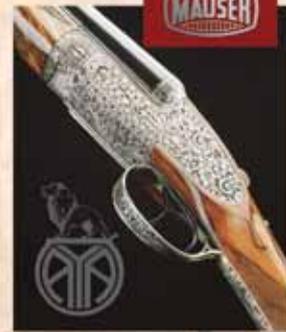
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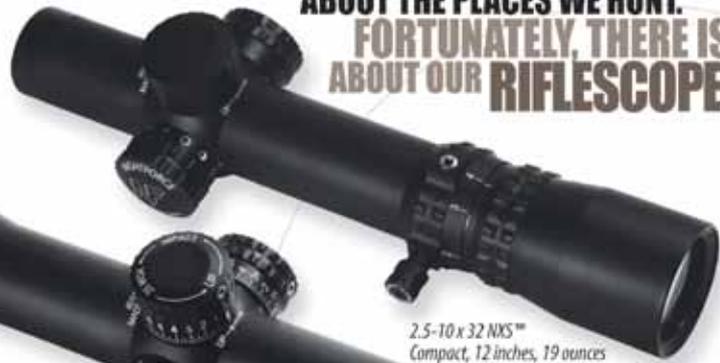


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Our new IHR™ stands for International Hunting Reticle, with good reason. Illumination is standard.

safe, dry and well-organized. Even better, this boat bag – which is really more of a sturdy waterproof box than a weatherproof bag – works just as well in my truck as it does in a drift boat or a raft. I'm not quite sure how I managed all these years without this incredibly handy little storage unit, but now that I have one, I have no intention of giving it up.

LL Bean River Treads Studded Wading Boots with Boa-Closure (\$199) These solid, no-nonsense wading boots offer excellent traction, serious protection from sharp river rocks, and tons of foot and ankle support. They're reasonably lightweight for such a beefy boot, and they're very comfortable. This is the first time I've ever used the Boa lacing system, and I have to say it's awfully handy. Push the knob in and turn to tighten the fit, pull the knob out to loosen. If the system has a downside, it's that it puts a little more tension on the cable near the top of the boot,

and a little less down at the toe. Fortunately, that wasn't a problem for me. The boots fit perfectly, and once the Boa system was tightened up, it seemed like everything was snug and secure. Overall, the River Treads are well-thought-out and well-executed wading boots that live up to LL Bean's longtime reputation for quality.

Orvis Silver Sonic Waders (\$259) Orvis packed a ton of value into their new Silver Sonic waders. The "sonic" in the title stands for the patented sonic seam welding technology, but I was just as impressed with the overall performance. The waders are light, comfortable and breathable, with features like anatomically correct neoprene feet and a flip-out waterproof pocket for a phone or camera. Yet in spite of their light weight, they held up just fine to the serial abuses of our Montana winter – crusty snow, jagged ice and frigid water temperatures. If you're looking for reasonably priced, well-

designed breathable waders, the Orvis Silver Sonic deserves your serious consideration.

Winston 10-foot 7-weight BIIIx (\$810) This BIIIx isn't your father's Winston. It's quick, it's powerful and it will throw a laser into the wind – or to the other side of the river. At the same time, it still has a touch of that old Winston feel; a hint of that smooth and supple action that defined the brand for decades. This 7-weight is ideal for steelhead and silvers, as well as for big Alaska rainbows. That said, I wouldn't hesitate to fish it for pike or smallmouth bass, especially if you're throwing poppers or topwater flies. All in all, it's another solid addition to Winston's stellar BIIIx lineup.

Sitka Duck Oven Jacket (\$249) Every year I try to throw in a crossover piece for folks who want to stretch their equipment dollars and use the same gear for both hunting and fishing. Sitka's Duck Oven Jacket is making waves with

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waterfowlers, and deservedly so, but it's also an excellent early or late-season wading jacket for fly fishers. With Windstopper fabric, a DWR finish and Primaloft insulation, it will keep you cozy and comfortable on a Great Lakes steelhead stream or when the cold wind starts blowing on a Pennsylvania bass pond. The Duck Oven fits like a glove, offers great freedom of movement, and is designed to be worn with waders. Another excellent jacket from the good folks at Sitka.

RIO Gold WF-5-F Fly Line (\$74.95) When RIO sent out a press release last summer touting their new MaxCast line coating and their new MaxFloat tip technology, I was a little skeptical. Not because RIO doesn't make excellent fly lines – they do – but because most marketing hype is just that: marketing hype. Well, I have some good news to report. RIO wasn't exaggerating. Their new RIO Gold fly lines cast beautifully, float like a

champ and mend with ease. If there's a finer fly line on the market today, I haven't had a chance to fish it.

Hatch 7 Plus Finatic Reel (\$600) The problem with the Hatch 7 Plus Finatic is that it makes the vast majority of its competitors look shabby in comparison. There are very few fly reels that combine such elegance of design with truly bullet-proof execution. The 7 Plus, which is ideal for salmon, steelhead and bonefish, is one of those rare reels where form and function come together seamlessly. Hatch combines great design, stellar engineering and a killer drag system into one of the nicest reels that money can buy. What more could we ask for?

Sage CIRCA 489-4 (\$770) This rod won our 2012 *Sporting Classics* Award of Excellence for fishing equipment. As I said at the time, it's "one of the sweetest, smoothest casting rods to ever grace a trout stream." If you're in the market for a high-end 4-weight and you haven't

cast this new Sage, you owe it to yourself to take it out for a test drive. It's a truly extraordinary fly rod.

Patagonia Men's Rio Gallegos Zip-Front Waders (\$599) Until recently, it was hard to imagine how Patagonia would ever top their epic Rio Gallegos waders. Then the news broke that a 2013 Rio Gallegos model would feature an easy-on, easy-off, easy-to-recycle-that-last-cup-of-coffee zip-front design. So here I sit, just back from a couple days on the water where I put the brand new Rio Gallegos Zip-Front waders to the test. Long story short, they performed beautifully. I stayed dry and comfortable, while the zipper worked exactly as advertised. I saw the prototypes for these waders at Patagonia's headquarters last fall, and I've been looking forward to fishing with them ever since. I'm happy to report that they are most comfortable, most technologically advanced waders I've ever had the pleasure to wear.