

Bag of Tricks

Learn three useful casts you've probably never seen.

BY JOE MAHLER

Fly-rodgers are among the most resourceful and innovative creatures on earth. If there is a shady nook in the mangroves, a fishy-looking eddy or a bait bust in a tidal rip, an accomplished angler will find a way to deliver his fly. Oftentimes a few adjustments will do the trick and a hybrid cast is the result.

There are, however, some casts that

are truly unique — usually developed for a specific purpose. The three casts that I present here — quick-change, misdirection and sky curve — are stand-alones. They might go against the grain of traditional casts, but they are certainly effective when mastered. Have these casts been done at some time by somebody? Perhaps. But they were new to me, and I suspect they will be to you too.

THE MISDIRECTION CAST

➔ How many times have you been wading and ended up spotting your quarry right in front of you? These are the most difficult fish to catch. Drew Chicone, who spends the majority of his time stalking shallow-water species, has a unique way of making presentations to these sneaky fish. His approach is unorthodox, but it's deadly when executed properly.

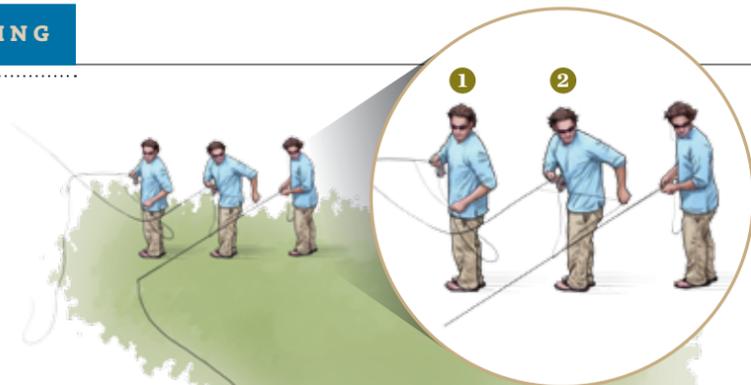
Nearly any movement will send a fish packing when it's in close range. When casting straight at the fish, if you are lucky enough to present the fly without sounding the alarm, you have a very short stripping window to draw a strike. If your fish is 20 feet away and you are using a 9-foot leader and a 9-foot rod, you will have only two feet of fly line beyond the rod tip. That equals approximately one strip. At this point, the angler typically tries to wiggle, jiggle or otherwise coerce the fly into looking alive without getting the leader inside the rod tip. With Chicone's method you will now have up to 18 feet (or roughly nine strips) of fly line beyond the rod tip and gain a favorable angle for which to set the hook. The other critical element of this presentation is that, because your back is turned to the fish, your stripping motion is concealed. Once you make the cast, keep the rod tip low and pointed at the line, not the fly. The line will maintain the circular shape in the water and will provide enough tension to set the hook

HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE:

Step 1: Once a fish is spotted, slowly turn your back to it. While keeping your rod tip as low as possible, make a false cast one rod length away and parallel to the target while slipping out the desired amount of line.

Step 2: On your forward cast, add a bit of speed and "shock" the rod to a stop in order to curve the line. Try this at various distances until you have the confidence to hit your target.

JOE MAHLER/JOEMAHLER.COM



THE QUICK-CHANGE CAST

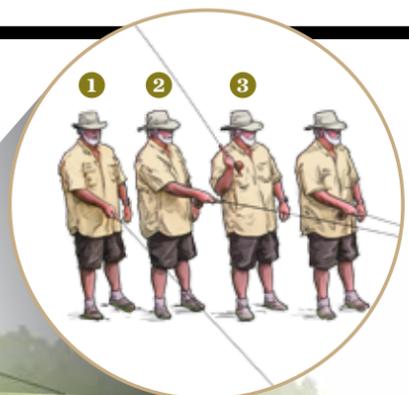
➔ Borne largely out of self-preservation, the quick-change cast is the work of Capt. John Hand, who guides in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area. Many of Hand's charters involve sight-fishing for redfish. Oftentimes, if the first cast is refused, a forgiving fish will give the fly a second look, provided it is not spooked. The quick-change approach eliminates false casts, keeps the angler engaged and, most importantly, keeps the fly from whizzing about the guide's head. This delivery works equally well whether the fish is traveling from right to left or vice versa, and is easily made at distances up to 45 feet. You can also add a haul to increase distance. When making this cast the direction opposite what's shown, the backcast will be made across your body, or, as Capt. Hand says, "just follow the line." A directional change of up to 45 degrees can be achieved.

HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE:

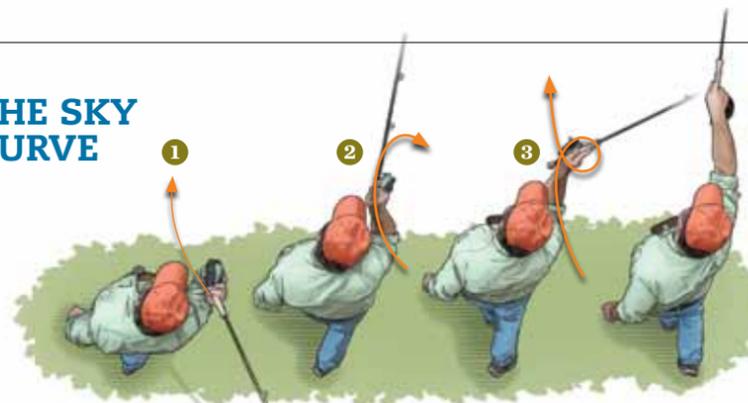
Step 1: Make your cast as you normally would. Keep your rod low and pointed at the fly.

Step 2: Forget about the line and follow the fish with the rod tip. Always keep your eyes on the fish.

Step 3: Raise the rod slowly and make a brisk backcast 180 degrees from your new target. Don't worry: The line will straighten beautifully behind and will be ready for the forward stroke.



THE SKY CURVE



➔ Of all the casts, to me, the outside curve is the most interesting and most difficult to wrap my mind around. I have worked to develop this one for a couple of years. Most often what is called an outside curve is actually an aerial mend. By definition, an aerial mend is a motion intended to adjust the line formation after the stop on the forward stroke. The aerial mend is useful for positioning the line in a current or going over the top of an obstacle, but it is not a true curve cast. It will not go around a tree or a bridge piling. Inside curve casts are fairly easy to do. Making a curve to the outside is much more difficult. A cross-body sidearm or backcast approach can achieve an outside curve, but these are cumbersome and accuracy will suffer.

Frequently, a casting instructor's mantra is "straight-line path of the rod tip," and don't get me wrong — that is great advice. However, for the pigtail, we must break the rules. This cast is an overhead stroke that features an elongated single spiral path of the rod tip during the forward stroke.

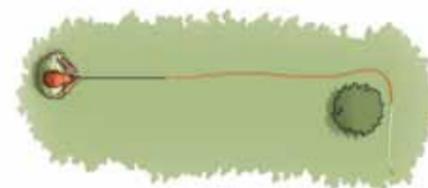


Figure 1

your line will end up in a heap of coils. With the pigtail, you can effectively make casts with up to 50 feet of line and achieve a sharp curve (Figure 1). Once the fly lands, usually out of your line of sight, keep the rod pointed at the line and the curved shape will hold during the retrieve.

This cast works in either direction but solves a particular problem when curving accurately to the outside. The pigtail curve is one of the rare instances in fly-casting when a weighted fly can enhance the cast.

These casts may seem strange and difficult at first, but with some dedicated practice they likely will help you catch a few fish that you otherwise wouldn't have.

HERE'S HOW IT'S DONE:

Step 1: Choose a target behind a tree or telephone pole. Now choose a secondary target beside and 10 feet beyond the pole.

Step 2: Make one false cast to the secondary target to build line speed.

Step 3: On the final forward cast, begin by bringing the hand slightly inward and move the hand forward in a single, spiraling motion (just like a proofreader's "delete" mark). A brisk stop at the end of the stroke should curve the line, leader and fly nicely around the pole.