

Making sense of Switch rods and lines

Over the past few years there has been a marked change in the sales of Spey rods, and in particular the average length and line size of the Spey rods being sold. In the late 1990's/early 2000's the average length of two-handed rods sold was 14 ft long, and the average line size was a 9 wt. There weren't a lot of sales for these long rods, for the simple reason that these long, powerful rods were just not suitable for the majority of fisheries in the US.

Since those early days rod manufacturers have taken to heart the US fisheries and made shorter and lighter Spey rods – rods more suitable for steelhead, trout, smaller rivers and the average fly fisher and species likely to be caught. Out of this evolution of shorter and lighter Spey rods came the "Switch" rod.

The idea behind the name "Switch" rod is that an angler can switch between using them two-handed and single-handed, depending on casting skill and fishing situation. To do this they have to be light and relatively short so that the leverage does not work against the single-handed caster. While this name works and has stuck, these rods are best considered as mini Spey rods, with the added advantage of being able to use them single handedly if needed.

So why get a Switch rod? Well, they are shorter and lighter than their longer two-handed brethren, so require much less effort and work to use. They balance beautifully in the hand and are extremely nimble and fun to use. They also allow anglers to fish in much tighter casting situations than those longer Spey rods.

As far as comparing their advantages to a regular single-handed rod; being longer they are awesome for controlling the fly's drift and swing through a pool, and fantastic at mending and steering a fly along a seam. You will overhead cast them much further than a regular single-handed rod because of the length of the lever, so are a great choice when fishing in the surf, or on a lake.



Sage's ONE 4 wt Switch rod – light, balanced and serious fun

Switch rods are available in numerous sizes; from as light as a 3wt, to as heavy as a 9wt, and generally vary in length between 10' 6" and 11' 9". The beginner, who is told to get a Switch rod, can easily get muddled up as to which size of Switch rod to choose, so here is a simple guideline that is a starting point:

- #3 Trout, sea-run cutties – fish up to about 5lbs
- #4 Trout, summer run steelhead, sea-run cutties, sea-run browns – fish up to about 8lbs
- #5 Trout, summer run steelhead, sea-run cutties, sea-run browns – fish up to about 10lbs
- #6 Big trout, steelhead, sea-run cutties, sea-run browns, grilse – fish up to about 12lbs
- #7 Steelhead, Silvers, grilse, sea-run browns, stripers – fish up to about 15lbs
- #8 Steelhead, Kings, Silvers, Atlantic Salmon, stripers – fish up to 20lbs
- #9 Kings, Atlantic Salmon, stripers – fish up to 25lbs

This is no more than a starting point, as water height is a big factor (how strong the current is), so is how big a fly, or how fast a sink tip needs to be cast on the rod.

With the right rod for the fish species, size and river conditions all that is left is to match it up with a suitable line. While this sounds simple enough, the plethora of lines that work on a switch rod is mind-numbingly confusing, so this part of the document might be particularly helpful.

Switch rods are rated on the two-handed AFTTA standard, not the single-handed AFTMA standard. This means they take a very different grain weight of line to a single handed-rod. For example, a #5 single handed rod really works well with around 180 to 200 grains, whereas a #5 Switch rod needs 300 to 330 grains – a big difference. Here's another guideline for Switch rods, this time for grain weight windows, but again, this is only a guideline and can vary from rod manufacturer to rod manufacturer, from caster to caster, and from situation to situation:

- #3 200 to 275 grains
- #4 250 to 325 grains
- #5 300 to 375 grains
- #6 350 to 425 grains
- #7 400 to 525 grains
- #8 475 to 550 grains
- #9 500 to 600 grains

Okay, so there is a good guideline for the weight of the line to go on the Switch rod of choice, now what about the taper or design of the line?

It all depends on what you want to do with the line. The first choice is whether you are going to mostly overhead cast with it, or spey/roll cast with it – there is a big difference in line type and size depending on the answer to this.

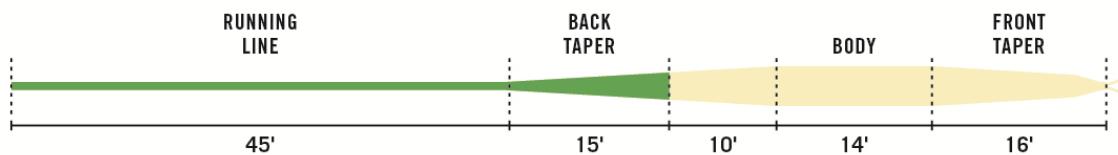
OVERHEAD CASTING

If you are going to mostly overhead cast with a Switch rod, you want to choose a line with more weight at the front end – something that will load the rod up from the first cast, with the minimum amount of line outside the rod. For the majority of overhead casting situations RIO's OutBound Short is going to be the very best choice. It is front loaded, has a short head, and shoots a country mile. Make sure you choose the right grain weight for the Switch rod, based on the chart above. If you put a WF6 OutBound Short on a #6 Switch rod, you will almost certainly be under-loaded by quite a few grains.



OutBound Short

One other option for overhead casting with Switch rods is RIO's Switch line. This has a much longer head length than the OutBound Short (55 ft as opposed to 30 ft), so is much better for controlling a fly at range and for mending. This line is an excellent choice for anglers looking for a line to throw indicators and nymph/egg pattern rigs, and who want to have control of the fly's drift at long distance. What is slightly confusing is that the Switch line (like most Spey lines) has a dual number rating (5/6, for example). It is rated on the two-handed AFTTA standard, and for overhead casting go with the last number - so if you have a #6 Switch rod, go with 5/6 line.



Switch Line

SPEY/ROLL CASTING

When you start looking for a line specifically designed for roll and spey casting things change. When Spey casting you actually want more weight at the back of the line to help load the rod against the minimal "D-loop".

Generally speaking you want to choose a line that has a head length no longer than 3 times your rod length, as the greater the ratio between rod length and head length, the harder it is to roll/spey cast with. As the majority of Switch

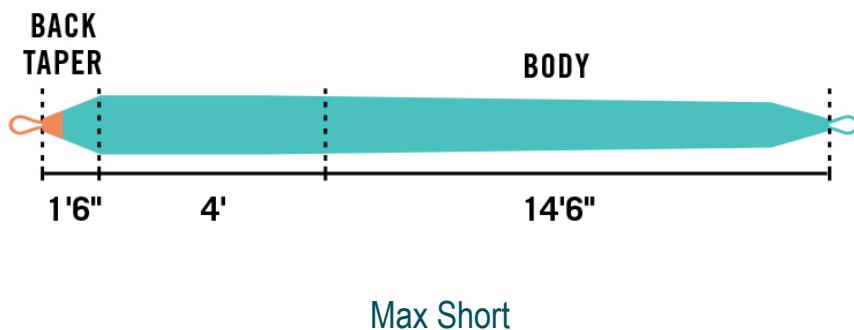
rods are around 11 ft in length, a good starting point is to utilize a line with a head length of around 33 ft. Simply put, this means either a "Skagit" type line, or a "Scandi" type line.

SKAGIT LINES

Skagit lines have thick and heavy front ends and are designed for one thing in particular – turning over weight. These lines (most of them are shooting heads, rather than "lines") are perfect for casting fast sinking tips and heavy flies. The power at the front end is also great for casting in tough wind conditions. The power of any fly line is related to how many grains per foot there is, and if there are more grains per foot at the front of the line, it will deliver a powerful punch. For example, the front foot of a 525 grain Skagit Max Short weighs just over 20 grains. The front foot of the equivalent weight of a Scandi head weighs just over 9 grains – far less punch!

Pretty well all Skagit heads that are on the market require the addition of some kind of tip to the front end – either sinking or floating - and a shooting line to the rear end, and the heads feature a neat welded loop on both ends to facilitate this. It is very important that the caster takes into account the length of the additional tip and adds it to the length of the Skagit head to find out if they fit close to that 3:1 ratio.

RIO offers four Skagit head designs - the "Skagit iFlight", "Skagit Max", "Skagit iShort" and the "Skagit Max Short". In almost all situations, the Skagit Short and iShort are the best choice of lines for a Switch rod due to their shorter head length (totaling no more than 20 ft). This means an angler can fish the very popular 10 to 15 ft sink tips without exceeding the 3:1 ratio significantly. Use the iShort when slower, deeper swings are required.



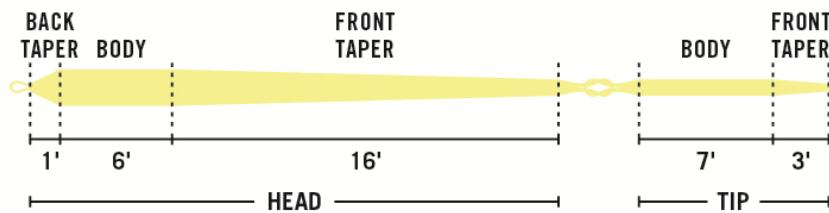
SCANDI LINES

Scandi lines again tend to be shooting heads, to which the back end needs to be attached to some kind of shooting line, though there is no need to attach a tip to the front end like the Skagit heads require. Scandi lines are built with long front tapers and have most of the weight at the back. This type of design creates the smoothest and tightest of loops when cast, and have the very best in presentation. They are really enjoyable and fun to cast, and ideal for fishing regular size flies. While you cannot add a sink tip to most Scandi heads (not enough grains per foot at the front), you can certainly add sinking (and floating) VersiLeaders to such Scandi heads, and use these to control the depth.

RIO offers a couple of Scandi head designs for the Switch rod user. Look for the full floating "RIO Scandi Short" heads that are sub 31ft, for a perfect complement to Switch rods. Alternatively, if you need more versatility, the Scandi Short VersiTip is a fantastic option, and has a short body, and a selection of 4 different density, 10ft long tips, so that anglers are covered in almost any fishing situation they come across. The entire head length (with tips attached) is only 33ft, so perfect for that 3:1 ratio.



RIO Scandi



Scandi Short VersiTip

The real selling point of the Scandi Short VersiTip is the versatility of it. If you attach one of the supplied 10 ft tips, it is a beautiful and easy casting Scandi head. If you don't attach the supplied tips, the 23 ft body is a great Skagit head that can handle the heavier fast sinking tips (such as the MOW tips) as needed.

SWITCH LINE (again)

The Switch line was last mentioned in the overhead casting section as a great line for overhead casting, and for fishing indicator rigs. This also would be a good choice of line for anglers who wish to spey cast with indicator rigs. It has been designed with a long head that is great for mending and controlling the fly at range, and is an easy choice for anglers who are going to combine overhead and spey techniques when fishing such rigs. It isn't the best choice of line for *just* overhead casting, or *just* spey casting, but does a pretty good job at both.

SWITCH CHUCKER

A final line to mention for Switch rods is RIO's "Switch Chucker". This is an integrated line (needs no additional shooting line) that has a short, very powerful head. The short head makes this a fantastic line choice for smaller rivers, for fishing tight to obstructions, and just for being really easy to cast. The powerful front end easily throws any kind of indicator and nymph/egg pattern rig, as well as a multitude of sinking tips.



SUMMARY

So, there are a lot of words prior to this part, and for those who like “details” it is worth reading through them, but if you just want a simple summary of the benefits of each line for Switch rods, this is the part to go to.

- Spey fishing almost exclusively with heavy sink tips and large flies – Skagit Max Short
- Fishing indicator rigs with nymph/egg patterns at distance – Switch line
- Fishing indicators rigs and sink tips, and just being “easy” – Switch Chucker
- Everything else Spey – Scandi Short, or Scandi Short VersiTip
- Overhead casting in the surf or on a lake for maximum distance – OutBound Short

Hopefully, this booklet will help you gain you a better understanding of RIO’s spey line assortment and when to use what. If you are still in doubt, or confused, do not hesitate to contact us, either by phone: 800 553 0838, or email: rio@rioproducts.com.

www.rioproducts.com