ALVEY REEL

The popularity of these reels throughout Australia is undoubted, especially in New South Wales and Queensland, where they are a great favourite amongst rock and beach fishermen who find the simple but ingenious design and large line capacity ideal for casting long distances and tackling big fish.

Many Australian anglers regard the sidecast reel as an Australian invention, but in fact the first sidecast reels were made and marketed by the inventor, a Scottish engineer named Malloch, in the 1860s. The reel was developed initially to enable anglers to cast fly lines easily by the fixed spool principle. It is a wry comment on the outlook of the day that a British act of parliament banned the easy-to-use reels from their fly streams.

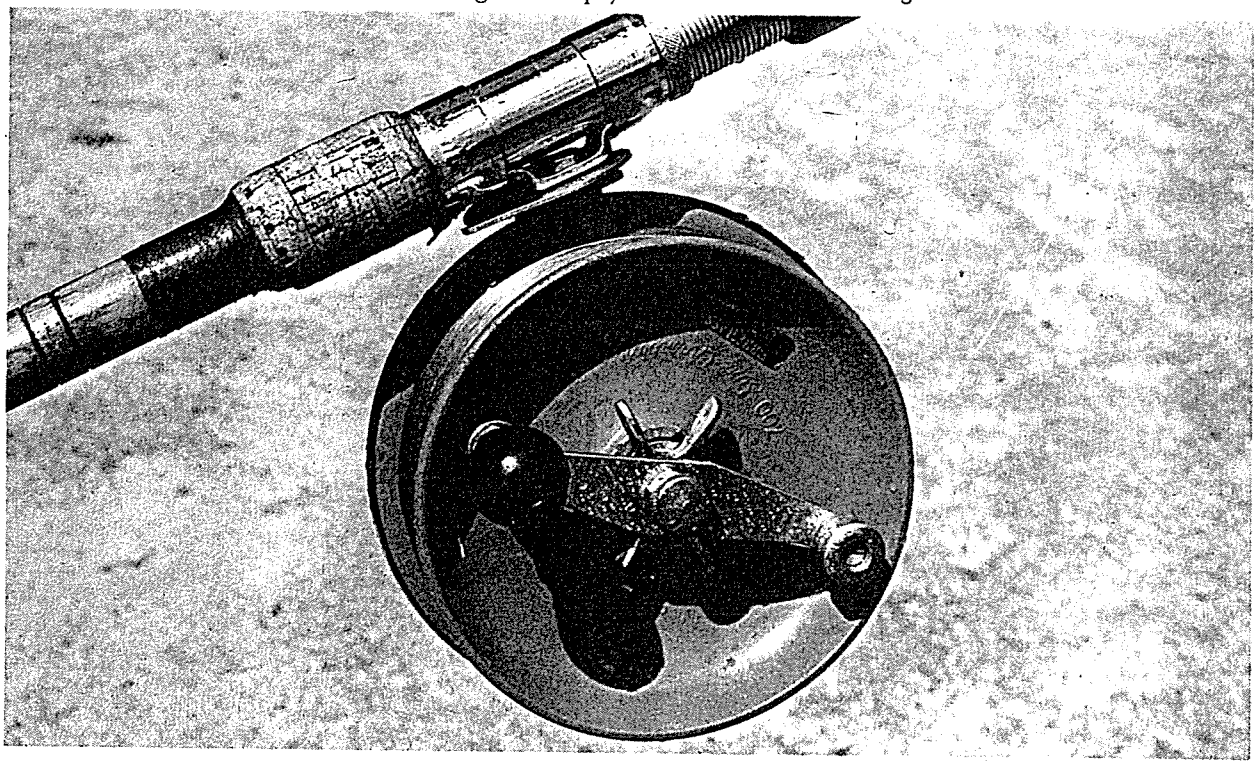
The original Malloch reel was a small, beautifully made brass reel. The spool was symmetrical and detachable. It was carried on a spindle mounted on a backing plate, from which the handle protruded through the backing ring. Thus, while the spool faced left when in fishing position, the handle suited right-handed anglers.

A new concept

The design was dictated by line twist problems. When a line was cast over the rim of the early fixed spool reels, every two whorls passing over the spool rim imparted a twist to the line. After a given number of casts the line became unmanageable. With Malloch's reel the angler simply

Above
The Alvey boat reel is standard equipment in Queensland. This mackerel was taken on a four hook rig with garfish bait trolled slowly.

Below
The sturdy, fibreglass construction of an Alvey sidecast reel fitted with star drag.



detached the spool and slotted it back into the reel housing in a reversed position. By periodically reversing the spool in this manner excessive line twist could be avoided. The sidecast reel remained an interesting oddity in Australia until a Queensland angler, Charles Alvey, investigated its potential in about 1920. Alvey designed a bigger sidecast for surf angling with an assymetrical spool which remained on the reel. The reel faced right when in fishing position with the handles mounted directly on the spool.

Alvey brought a new concept to sidecast fishing. He realised that the twisted line was under torsional stress. If it was free to rotate it would untwist itself. The use of small swivels proportional to the line diameter and strength would allow this if the line was properly rigged. The theory was born out in practice, and today the sidecast reel is in wide use throughout Australia in beach, rock and estuary fishing.

Materials used in its manufacture are plastic, and fibreglass, the latter being used more frequently because of its toughness. Spool diameters are used as a guide to model numbers, with alphabetic characters and numerals added to identify the material from which the reel is made, the type of drag system employed, and the type of fishing for which it is designed. As with the luderick centrepin reel, the spool rotates on a centre spindle attached to the back plate. An important difference is the spool design which permits the fisherman to make long casts with light lures and baits.

The lip of the spool is curved outwards allowing the line to flow over it unimpeded when a cast is made. To do this the entire reel is turned through 90 degrees so that its axis lies parallel to the rod shaft; that is, the face of the spool is at right angles to the rod shaft, as is the case with the threadline or fixed spool reel.

With some models, notably the 'A' type reels the handles are attached to the spool, while with others, for example, 'C' type models, the handles operate independently of the spool but control it via the drag system.

Drag

Always housed in the spool, the drags of sidecast reels are similar in construction to those of the fixed and free spool reels, that is, they consist of a series of metal or fibre washers.

On direct drive models, which have the handle attached to the spool, a knurled knob attached to the spindle varies drag pressure by squeezing the spool between washers on either side of the spool. When a fish decides to swim against the drag, the fisherman releases the handles and lets the spool rotate under control of this pressure.

On indirect drive models, where the handles operate independently of the spool, the drag is applied by turning a star-shaped control located immediately beneath the handle plate. The fisherman does not need to release the handle when fighting a fish, for the design allows the spool to rotate between the handle and the backing plate. The sidecast has no gears, thus giving it a retrieve ratio of one to one.

Casting

The design of the sidecast reel is unique in that the entire body of the reel is manually turned through 90 degrees for casting, then returned to the original position for retrieval. A thumb-release, built in as part of the reel foot, makes this possible.

Starting with the reel in the retrieve position, the caster picks up the line with his index finger and, at the same time, using the thumb of the same hand, presses the thumb release lever and turns the spool so that its axis lies parallel to the rod shaft.

When the line is released at the right moment during the cast, the lure or bait pulls it unhindered over the tapered lip of the spool. When the lure hits the water, the fisherman grasps the reel, thereby preventing the release of any more line, and turns it back to the retrieve position where it automatically locks in place.

Tough and reliable

The side cast is the most rugged of reels and can operate efficiently under extremes of weather and in most conditions and situations, including being dropped in mud or sand. It requires practically no maintenance. However, the spool should be checked occasionally for nicking or chipping, particularly around the lip which must be blemish-free if damage to the line is to be avoided. If chipping is not severe, it can often be corrected by sanding smooth or filling with an epoxy resin.

Purchase

The basic purchase considerations are size and purpose. The most popular sizes for rock and beach fishing are those with spools ranging from 15–19cm (6–7in) in diameter. Within that range are some models with shallow spools and others with deep spools, each type catering for the line capacity needs of the fisherman. Smaller models can be used for estuary and boat work, and are often chosen by the junior fisherman for these purposes.

The Alvey reel is a favourite among beach fishermen because of its reliability and ease of handling in most situations.