

The Belgian Cast

AKA: Horse shoe cast, oval cast, constant tension cast, swing around cast, side arm back cast, circle cast (not to be confused with a spey cast by the same name) elliptical cast and the Belgian wind Cast

It was late December; winter had arrived in Southern Ontario. I was desperately trying to squeeze in one more day of Steelheading. While working my Skagit system down a run I somehow got my reel wet. As I tried to strip out a bit more line. I realized the reel had frozen solid. Having had this happen before it gave me only a few options, pack it in for the day, or go back to my truck and set the reel on the dash board turn the defrost on full, and thaw the reel, then go back fishing. Who was I kidding; frost bitten hands, numb toes and a frozen reel. It was over for another season.

As in the past, when my steelhead equipment was stowed away my thoughts turned to salt-water fishing. A trip had been planned for late February, unlike other trips south which have been later usually May-June chasing Tarpon. This trip was to concentrate on Permit and Bonefish. I've been very fortunate to have Dr. Gordon Hill (FFF BOG) as my saltwater mentor. As with any trip south, Gordy and I will play with numerous different fly patterns, we'll work out new and different designs or tweak well known patterns. My task is to tie these counterfeits and Gordy's the field tester. During one of our phone conversations we got on the subject of the best cast to throw a Permit fly. Gordy assured me that his experience has lead him to believe that the Belgian type casts are by far the cast of choice. Interestingly during our early conversations Gordy was kind enough to share some of the history and his experience with the cast. I asked Gordy to please e-mail me the information we had just discussed. With his permission here are the contents of his e-mail:

Rick:

As I look at it, The Belgian Cast, belongs in the category of Elliptical Casts, one defining feature of which is the distinct change in rod planes between the back cast and the forward cast.

It embodies the principle of continuous tension as the back cast is made with an off-horizontal rod plane, low and climbing at its conclusion with no defined stop of the rod tip which continues in an elliptical or orbital path around to make the forward stroke using an off-vertical or vertical rod plane with a straight line rod tip path for delivery. Done correctly with perfect timing, it allows for the use of a tight loop despite the weighted fly which translates to better distance with minimal effort, greater accuracy, and a straight leader/line layout needed for Permit fishing

Permit, you see, will often pick up the fly and eject it immediately. No hook-up results unless the angler can come tight instantly. The straight layout with no slack is mandatory for this.

Credit for popularizing this class of cast in Europe has been given to Hans Gebetsroither of Austria. Hans was head keeper on the Traun River during the 1930's. It has been labeled the, "European Continuous Tension Cast" in many circles.

It became known as the "Belgian Cast" when it (or variation of it) was used by a Belgian distance competition caster named Albert Godart to win an international event in Europe during the late 1930's.

My Grandfather (Clifford Hewetson) was present at that event. Years ago, he described the actual winning cast as what one might call a, "Reverse Belgian Cast"; since he claimed that the back cast was made with the rod in the vertical plane, while the forward cast was made with a horizontal rod plane and a climbing rod tip. He described Albert as a very heavily muscled stocky man with tremendous arm strength.... A body habitus sometimes associated with champion soft ball pitchers.

Confusion sometimes exists as casters discuss the uses of this cast. On the salt-water flats, I find it most useful for Permit fishing when the need for accuracy, a straight leader layout, and the ability to handle bulky weighted crab flies on windy days is needed. As such, it is one of my most valuable options.

I use it as the, "Belgian Wind Cast" as one way to solve the problem of casting with a strong wind from my casting side. Here I exaggerate the

change of rod planes in having the rod tip pass over my opposite shoulder or directly overhead, after swinging around with continuous tension from a more horizontal back cast

When I need distance when casting a heavy weighted fly a Belgian cast, I hesitate as the back cast loop straightens. This can be considered a pause even though my hand keeps moving as I change rod planes. With careful timing, as the back cast loop comes completely straight, I come forward with a tight loop forward cast. That is a modification of the Belgian cast which works for me because it yields good distance with a tight loop despite the weighted fly.

**Gordy Hill
Fla. Keys**

After receiving Gordy's e-mail I contacted Al Crise (FFF-Master Casting Instructor & FFF-SOC VP of Education) I asked Al if he would be so kind as to ask his Certified Casting Instructors Study Group their thoughts and opinions on the Belgian Cast, the information I received was outstanding, thanks to all who participated. Al was kind enough to summarize this information. In part this is what he wrote.

The constant tension means that you do not have a back-cast "stop" to put the fly and rod leg in collision. This alone is a great help with Saltwater casting where you have heavy or large flies.

Al goes on to list some other situations that you might use the Belgian cast:

- **Bass flies that add increased drag**
- **When casting a "Brace of flies" (two or more) tangle free**
- **When making casts that could be bothered by wind, from the casting arm side.**
- **When the wind is strong from behind you.**
- **Using it as a low impact cast.**
- **Placing the fly under a low obstruction.**
- **Raising sinking lines that are near the surface.**
- **Water loading the rod on the pick up.**
- **Change of direction cast up to 90 degrees.**
- **Faster presentation for change of direction**

- **When using split-shot reduces the tangle of the bolo action**
Authors Note: Bolo is a South America catching tool, two dissimilar weights on a cord; this causes an entanglement of small game
- **When fishing from a drift-boat can help keep the line fly out of the boat**
- **Added accuracy in placing the fly. Reduced back-cast area is needed due to the “circle” not the straight back-cast.**
- **Also you can add a haul to increase line speed on both the pick-up and presentation cast.**

Al Crise
Texas

I believe my first introduction to a Belgian type cast was with Barry Beck some 25 years ago. Barry had shown me a modified type Belgian cast that he used for fishing dry flies. This circular type cast, where the line is under the rod tip on the back cast and over the rod tip on the forward cast, is a great way to present a dry fly. For many years after, I’ve used this type of cast not only to present a dry, but also nymph fishing pocket water. Using a big open loop cast, it is relatively easy to present the weighted leader and fly in one continuous movement. Although not a true Belgian cast, it is a continuous load type cast. As of late I’ve been using the Belgian style of casting to present big bait fish type flies for Musky. Dealing with 8-10wt rods and 200-400 full sink lines, if your timing is right and you add a haul in the back-cast and forward-cast you will get good line speed and achieve the distance required.

Note: when dealing with a sinking line it’s a good idea to roll the line to the surface before making the presentation cast.

At the beginning of this article I mentioned the Skagit System as the method I employ when steelheading. The Skagit cast allows you to cast heavy tips and large heavily weighted flies (often needed to entice a strike in cold water). The first time I saw the Skagit cast was on the North Lewis River in Washington State. Marlow Bumpus was giving us this demonstration, watching Marlow set the cast up I realized that its foundation was in the Belgian (continuous tension cast). Once he made the sweep up-stream for the “Double Spey” he made a stop. He then

proceeded into a continuous tension cast; the rod didn't come to a complete stop till the conclusion of the forward cast.

Note: There is more information on the Skagit system on my web site www.flycastingschool.com

The Belgian Cast is an extremely import cast, well worth learning.

Time to put another stainless hook in the vice, drop in a Jimmy Buffett C.D. and day-dream about Belgian Casting to Permit

Rick Whorwood

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