

Smooth caster with hidden power

Aleka 3XT rods from £84.98

THE 3XT is the latest to join the Aleka fly-fishing portfolio and consists of six four-piece models that will cover everything from small stream fishing to reservoir and single-handed salmon sport. The range goes from a 7wt 6in 3wt at £84.98 up to a 10ft 7wt at £124.98 and I had the 9ft 5wt and 10ft 7wt for review.

The rods have an attractive matt silver finish and the overall build quality looks very good with neat whippings and not too much epoxy finish on top. The reel seat is also smart and, more importantly, functions really smoothly. Just a flick of the uplocking rings sends them spinning on the thread, and they lock off tightly on the reel foot. Both the full wells and the half wells handle on the lighter rod fitted well in the hand for a comfortable grip.

The 10ft 7wt is not the lightest rod of its class on the market but I didn't find it tiring on the arm through the day. Matched up with a 7wt floating line the rod loaded quickly, aerialised the line comfortably and the first cast onto the water was smooth and precise. It didn't take long for me to get a feel for how the blank was working and how I could get the best from it – it is very much a middle to tip action but progressively more tip. I experimented with different lengths of line outside the rod tip ranging from short quick-fire casts to double-hauling much longer lines. At short and medium range I found that I needed a shorter arm action and had to concentrate a little more on line control, while at

distance I adopted a slightly longer arm stroke and the rod just took over, doing all the work for me.

It also had quite a hidden depth of power that I could call on, especially when trying to punch out denser medium to fast sinking lines into cross or head-on winds. I could really lean into the blank and push it that little bit further without it folding, ideal when fishing those more exposed larger waters. The 7wt rating is about spot-on both for floaters and a range of sinking lines and this rod will even handle one line weight above quite comfortably.

The 9ft 5wt has a similar action to its big brother but is obviously lighter in the hand and has a little more in the way of a progressive arc in the blank, especially noticeable when playing a fish. I could quite happily fish with light tippets as the tip and the blank's action gave that extra cushioning to protect them. Aerialising and false casting was very smooth and presentation was very good indeed. It will handle a multi-tip line and intermediates with no problem, and even denser sinkers if you need to.

VERDICT:

The 10ft 7wt is perfect for larger waters and can handle a good range of lines. The 9ft 5wt suits small stillwaters and top of the water sport. Very good price too.

Web: www.alekasports.com
Tel: 0845 5280566



The rod features a matt silver blank and neat whippings.



"The rod had hidden depths of power that I could call on."

TECH-SPEC

MODEL: 10FT 7WT
Price: £124.98
Weight: 4.8oz (136gr)
Sections: 4
■ Full wells cork handle with rubber/cork mix top and bottom, a 1.25-inch cork and rubber/cork fighting butt, skeletal anodised silver reel seat with carbon insert and double uplocking rings
■ Matt silver blank with dark greys whippings and metallic silver highlights
■ Two aluminium oxide stripping guides, nine single leg snake rings, tip and keeper ring
■ 34-inch grey cordura covered tube with zip top, and adjustable shoulder strap, with a nylon rod bag

MODEL: 9FT 5WT
Price: £104.98
Weight: 3.8oz (109gr)
Sections: 4
■ All other specs the same except it has a half wells handle (right), no fighting butt, eight single leg snake rings and a 31-inch tube



Shakespeare tackle box £49.99

IT seems you can't go to any fishery these days without seeing a Shakespeare tackle box, and that's not surprising considering they have sold 750,000 of them worldwide!

Although originally targeted at coarse anglers they soon found favour with the trout guys, and especially the boat anglers – including me!

Now the original box has been given a revamp. It is still made from the durable filled-polypropylene but the water resistance has been greatly improved. In the old design, there were little recesses around the top edge of the box to hold additional trays, plus two holes in the front to take the lid catches and a slot for the shoulder strap. These have all gone so when the lid is closed water cannot get into the box.

The catches have also been improved. Instead of 'push-in' catches there are now twin catch-style locks on the front of the box that hook onto the lid and push down to snap shut.

The positioning of the shoulder strap attachment points has also changed. On the old box they were on the back edge and the strap went through a slot to the inside. This meant the box had a tendency to tilt forward when you picked it up, potentially spilling the contents if the lid wasn't secured. On the new design the two-inch wide webbing shoulder strap is attached more centrally, rectifying this earlier fault. The strap also attaches to the outside of the box with metal buckles.

The box itself measures 20 x 16 x 15 inches, almost



the same as the old one, but the new one feels more rigid and robust. It weighs 7lb 14oz and comes in blue or black. It also comes with a tray that clips to the outside edge (of more use to coarse than trout anglers probably).

Inside is one main storage space so you can configure your contents however you want. I also noticed that the reinforcing panel on the inside of the lid encroaches a little more than on the old one and this is where I used sticky back ethafoam to create a large fly patch measuring 18.5 x 11.75 inches. If I wanted to do the same on the new box, the patch would be restricted to 15.5 x 10.5 inches but is now framed by a nice solid edge.

Additional accessories include a padded strap at £8.99 and a cushion for the top of the box at £12.99.

VERDICT:

If you are looking for a boat fishing tackle box this is perfect and the contents will stay absolutely dry. Although there are other tackle boxes specifically aimed at fly anglers, this one represents excellent value.

Web: www.shakespeare-fishing.co.uk

Keeper Alu reel £99.99

THE Alu reel is really quite eye-catching with its matt black finish and metallic orange accent colours.

It is a nice sized large arbor format with an open face design and the reel cage and spool are made from die-cast alloy, while the drag knob, reel foot and retainer cover are made from machined alloy.

Both the spool and cage have been heavily ventilated with a series of holes to keep weight down but without affecting the structural stability. There is virtually no movement between the spool and reel cage such as the high tolerances.

The spool is removed by releasing a small lever in the centre of the spool which reveals the semi-sealed disc drag unit. The drag is smooth throughout its range and is adjusted in 'click' increments using the large drag knob on the back of the reel. The reel is silent when winding line in, and has an audible click when the fish is taking line out. The handle has a soft polyurethane grip so your fingers won't slip in wet conditions.

It comes set up for left hand wind, and if you need to switch it over just remove the spool, remove the e-clip that sits around the spindle with a screwdriver, flip the one-way bearing and reassemble.

The Alu reel comes in two sizes, a 4/6 and a 7/9, both at £99.99, and is supplied with a black nylon drawstring pouch.

VERDICT:

A striking looking reel with its two-colour finish. A compact large arbor design and functions well. Only disappointment for me was that there were no spare spools.

Web: www.visionflyfishing.co.uk
Tel: 07703 609513



The Keeper Alu has a distinctive design.

TECH-SPEC

MODEL: KEEPER ALU 7/9
Price: £99.99
Weight: 6.9oz (196gr)
Diameter: 97mm
Width: 44mm
Capacity: WF7 plus 80 metres of 20lb backing
Spare spool: Not available