

Valley Angler New Lines by Bill Thompson

It took a while, but I finally got my hands on one of the new Sharkskin fly lines from Scientific Angler. These lines made their appearance last September at the Denver Fly Tackle Dealers Show. They made quite a stir at the show for a couple of very different reasons. The first, as you might expect, was because of a new design concept and the added performance. The second reason was the price for these new lines. The Sharkskin line comes with a manufacturer's suggested retail price of ninety-nine bucks.

What separates the Sharkskin from other lines is that instead of having a smooth surface it is covered with microscopic bumps. Scientific Angler calls it "Microreplication Technology" which creates precise repeating structures that mimic natural surfaces. The result is a line that has less friction as it travels through the guides on the rod which enhances shootability. The manufacturer also claims that "microtextured" surfaces will increase flotation, reduce drag on line pickup and shed water on the backcast.

Now to be honest the idea of creating a line with a raised surface is not new. I have been using an Airflo "Ridge Line" all last season which also features a ridged surface. This line also promises to reduce surface contact resulting in less friction and better shootability. For the record, I have been favorably impressed with the Airflo line. It does seem to shoot line better than a conventional line and it proved to be a most durable line. Whether or not it floated any better than any other line is up for grabs. All and all I was very pleased with the line and would recommend them to anyone confidently.

The fact is that previous to the introduction of vinyl lines all lines had raised surfaces. I have on the desk right now in front of me a brand new, still in the original box with paper work, Ashaway "Golden Nylon" GBF fly line that was probably made in the 1950's. It has a very visible raised surface. Silk lines also came with raised surfaces. There are many that claim that these lines, because of their textures, would cast farther than modern smooth plastic lines.

The folks at Scientific Angler would no doubt be aghast at the thought of comparing their new line to any other line. In fairness I would agree with them as they have come out with an entirely new technology, but I still would maintain that the idea is firmly rooted in the past.

When the sample Sharkskin came in the mail Monday morning I was delighted, of course, but disappointed that it was a six weight rather than a five weight. I quickly got over it when I reminded myself that I was complaining about receiving a hundred dollar fly line for free. The problem was that I was so excited to try it out and there wasn't a single six weight rod in the shop. The next morning I brought three six weight rods from home and despite the cold immediately strung one up and went outside to cast.

The first thing you notice when casting the Sharkskin is the noise that it makes. There is a definite zip as the line travels through the guides. There are some anglers that will probably find this annoying, but if they can get past it they will immediately notice the difference in how well the line shoots.

Different rods respond differently to different lines. The first rod that I tried the line on was an older model Sage. The rod was too soft to really make much of a difference with the new line. The second rod was Janet's favorite Winston. This rod also has a mid flex action, however the line did perform quite well with it. The last rod we tried was A Temple Fork TiCrX which is a fast tip flex rod. This was the rod that matched perfectly with the Sharkskin. This rod has all the attributes required to shoot line and make long casts.

There are lots of variables when it comes to selecting a new fly line. One must take into consideration the action of the rod and the ability of the one casting. I think I can say in all confidence that matched with the right rod and in the hands of a competent caster this line will indeed add distance to the cast. Both Janet and I were very much impressed. Before the cold drove us back inside we were both making some very long casts.

Another favorable thing about this line was how well it performed in the cold. The manufacturer claims that it has very little memory and we certainly gave it a good test considering the day's low temperature. The line comes in two colors Blue Heron and Chartreuse. The line we have is the Blue Heron and I like it very much, however the Chartreuse will make the line more visible and may prove to be more effective for nymph fishermen. How well the line floats and roll casts are unknown and unfortunately we will have to wait awhile before we can make the ultimate easement; that will come when we actually get to fish the line.

The big question in my mind is how well anglers will embrace the price of these new lines. The price of fly lines is going up next year. For a while now fifty-nine has been about average for a premium line it looks like sixty-three will be the new standard. Whether or not fly anglers will be willing to make the jump to a hundred bucks remains to be seen.

See you on the river.