

HOW NOT TO LOSE A FISH (from page 1)

2. GUIDE TO FAILURE

Inspect your rod guides periodically, especially if the line is breaking for no apparent reason. This happened to a friend a few years back. His braided line kept breaking when he put pressure on it, and he wound up losing some nice fish.

At first he blamed the line for being faulty, but closer inspection revealed a chipped tiptop guide with a sharp outer edge that was slicing the line neater than a knife.

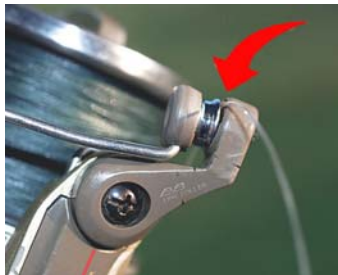
Ceramic guides can be checked for damage with a piece of cotton or section of pantyhose. Either material will snag on any cracks or rough spots in the guide, alerting you to the hazard.

If you use heavy rods equipped with roller guides, make sure they are operating smoothly. If the rollers don't turn easily when a piece of line is passed over them, they probably need to be cleaned or replaced.



3. LOW ROLLERS

The line roller on the bail arm of a spinning reel can be a source of problems. As with roller guides, make sure the line roller turns freely and that there are no gaps between the roller and its mount where the line might become wedged. Sometimes all it takes to fix the problem is tightening the little screw that holds the roller in place.



4. WHAT A DRAG

There's no telling how many fish have been lost to a sticky or improperly set drag, but I'll bet the number is pretty high.

Always make it a point to test the drag by pulling line off your reel before making that first cast. If the drag feels jerky or sticky, have the reel serviced.

Lastly, remember to back off the drag after you've finished cleaning your reels. This will release pressure on the washers and prolong the drag's life.

Speaking of drag, fighting a fish with a drag that's set too light will lead to a prolonged fight, thereby increasing the chances that the fish will win the battle due to line or equipment failure. This is especially true of species such as tuna or false



albacore. Knots can slip, monofilament can stretch and the repeated sawing of the line over the guides or the fish's body itself during a long fight will eventually create a weak spot. Also, the hook will have a chance to wear a larger hole in the fish's mouth, making it more likely to fall out.

5. KNOT LIKELY

Nothing points a finger at an angler's incompetence more concisely than a pigtail in the end of his line. That curlycue of monofilament is the unmistakable calling card of a hastily or poorly tied knot.

Take your time when tying each and every knot, and only use the ones you have complete confidence in. Further, test every knot by securing the hook to a stationary object and pulling on the line. Make sure the knot is fully seated and looks right. If you have any doubts, cut it off and retie.



6. LOOK SHARP

Here's an old chestnut that still holds true: **Keep your hooks sharp.** Hooks get dull pretty fast, especially if you fish around structure, and a dull hook is yet another way for a fish to win its freedom.

Fortunately, it's not hard to bring back the point with a few swipes of a file. The key is reminding yourself to inspect your hooks often, and keep a hook file handy.

To test the hook, lightly pull the point over your fingernail. If it digs into the nail with little pressure, you're good to go. If it slides over the surface without catching, it's time for a tune-up.



7. RUST NEVER SLEEPS

Rust is another area of concern.

If the hooks on your lures or in your tackle box show any sign of rust or corrosion, exchange them for new hooks. No sense risking the fish of a lifetime over a 30-cent piece of terminal tackle.

Keep a supply of hooks in various sizes and a good pair of split-ring pliers on your boat or in your tackle bag, and you'll be ready to make an upgrade on short notice.



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