

Marius Kristiansen has spent his summer testing newly purchased Free-Flex #5 and #7 rods.

REVIEW OF THE ARCTICSILVER FREE-FLEX //

Free-Flex Salmon 10' #5

I have been fortunate enough to test the #5 and #7 ArcticSilver fly rods this summer – during our yearly trip to the Finnmark. A thorough test will be presented in the following.

Our trip starts in Masjokka, which is a tributary to the Tana, and this leg of the trip marks my first experiences with the rod concept. The Salmon rod, which is 10' #7, is the first rod to be rigged up.



My initial impression is surprisingly good. The first innovation element I'm acquainted with is the Quick-Lock reel seat, which offers a really modern-looking design. I just click the reel into place, and it locks firmly into position. I then proceed to test the system on three different reel models from Loop, Danielson, and Lamson Waterworks. Each one sits incredibly well in the reel seat, and it doesn't take very many reel changes to understand that ArcticSilver's Quick-Lock works a lot better than 'normal' reel seats. It is user-friendly, and no after-tensioning is needed while fishing. Personally, I'd say this is a very functional innovation and a game-changer.

Then there is the rod itself. The handle sits firmly in my hand, and it doesn't twist and turn while casting like many other rods tend to do. This means that my rod and reel setup is perfectly aligned with my casting stroke. The handle itself feels a little different to begin with, but after a bit of casting this isn't an issue. (Some female fly fishermen with small hands might find the handle a little bulky, though).

What I like about the Free-Flex handle is that it sits well in my hand. It is comfortable and gives me a sense of directional stability. The rod itself is a little heavier than other 7# rods, but when casting a full day up and down the river this isn't something I even notice. The handle is what causes the extra weight, but it only serves positively to balance the rod during casting. (As a matter of fact, the blank itself is as light as the Helios 2, which ranks as one of the lightest rods in the market). I also like that the blank has information about recommended line weight (grams) for the rod.



Marius Kristiansen with one of many silver catches during this summer

**BUT THEN THE QUESTION IS:
"DOES IT WORK IN REAL LIFE?"**

The rod itself is extremely easy to cast and the more I cast, the less force I need to apply. I achieve longer casts with less use of force than I would normally apply. It also note that the rod works deeper into the butt section of the blank than I'm used to, and I need to slow down my casting rhythm a little bit to compensate and let the rod load. When I do this, I cast very far with surprisingly little force. The Free-Flex concept allows me to better feel when the rod loads, and I get clear feedback about when to stop my casting stroke. What surprises me most, however, is that I don't really have to change my casting style to make full use of the Free-Flex concept.

The combination of short shooting heads and spey casts from tight positions is tricky, but the Free-Flex rod handles this challenge brilliantly. I normally do spey casting with various snake rolls – air snake- and anchored casts for angle – and I have to say that the Free-Flex 10' #7 is the best rod I have ever spey cast with. When overhead casting, I quickly find myself using fewer blind casts than I previously did.

Free-Flex Trout 9' #5

I have also tested the 5-weight Trout model. This is a rod that I find to be very deep, and it works well underhead casting, various anchored casts and overhead casting. It comes with two top sections, which I find a little cool: One medium action and one medium-fast. Both tips were tested and I did find them different, but not different enough to decide on a favourite. (If I have to choose, though, I would probably go with the medium-action rod tip, since I mostly use underhead-casting).

The rod itself is extremely easy to cast, it loads with minimum amounts of force, and it is a true pleasure to fight fish on. What I also like about it is that – for a five-weight rod – it has a lot of muscle, so I have been using it to look for small and medium sized salmon. The rod works well for different casting lengths, and it performs equally well for long and short casts. I have tested several top-of-the-line rods like i.e. Loop Cross S1 and Orvis Helios2, and I can honestly say that the Free-Flex Trout easily matches these. A lot of the more conservative fly fishermen out there might not readily accept this pink elephant of a rod, but as soon as you try it out, I can guarantee that a whole new fly casting world is revealed.

Innovation or 'the emperor's new clothes'?

Like we all know, the power potential lies in the butt section of the rod. If the blank is allowed to move freely, to load and charge with energy all the way through the handle, the full power potential of the blank will clearly be used more efficiently. This is pure physics, which most people will readily grasp. But then the question is: "Does it work in real life?" YES!!! It makes it much easier to load the rod, and I personally experience casting longer with less use of force. I also find that, what ArcticSilver has already communicated about their rod innovation, corresponds with my personal experiences. My experience with the Free-Flex concept is utterly clear! The Free-Flex concept works extremely well, and I feel that we're dealing with a genuine innovation!

I USE LESS FORCE TO FULLY LOAD THE BLANK,

After three weeks with the rod in the field, I brought the rod back home and took it to the local casting pool. I did this with the sole purpose of exploring the rod in depth – and to see if there were any differences in casting lengths compared to conventional rods.

The rods that were used for the test were the Loop Opti River #7 and the ArcticSilver Salmon #7.

The reason why I chose the Opti River rod for the test is that this rod comes rather close to the Free-Flex rod in terms of action and weight. Both rods have deep actions, but the ArcticSilver rod is probably a little deeper due to the Free-Flex handle. The Salmon #7 tip might seem a little flat compared to the Loop rod, which has a faster tip making it a more obvious choice for overhead casting. Anyway, here is the test:

50 measured casts were done per rod to make sure that the wind factor wasn't influencing my findings. The line that was used for the test was a Rio Outbound. The ArcticSilver rod works with me all the time. I use less force to fully load the blank, and it works well with the recommended line weight of 16-18grams. With the Loop rod, I need to apply more power to load and cast. After 50 casts with each rod, I conclude that I cast 3-5 meters longer with the ArcticSilver rod compared to the Loop Opti River. The ArcticSilver #7 rod excels in spey casting – this is where its true potential lies. Try it out with short casting strokes, marked stops and minimal amounts of applied force. That is when the rod really impresses and excels!

VERDICT: 6/6 This is innovation!