



“What’s the best length rod?” is a regularly heard question during the classroom sessions of the Outer Banks Surf Fishing Schools. In my opinion, there is no "best length". Almost any choice is going to be a compromise sooner or later, because of the constantly changing conditions of the Outer Banks surf. But I have found a couple outfits that will cover the fish and fishing conditions I encounter on the beach about ninety per cent of the time.



The longer of the two is a nine-foot, graphite composite rod that comes in two pieces. The manufacturer says it can handle weights between two and six ounces, but I feel the rod loses its effectiveness on extreme ends of the range. I use it to throw lures from 2 to 3 ounces, or cast bottom rigs and bait with up to 4 ounces of lead. I've caught 15-pound drum and ½-pound sea mullet with it, and lots of fish in between. It is a pleasure to fish with.

This rod is comfortable and versatile, but the action is also key. If the rod is too stiff, it cannot handle the lighter weights very effectively, and a soft “buggy whip” loses most of the power of a hard cast when throwing heavier weights. It has just enough backbone, and the light weight of the graphite composite material allows me to make dozens of casts, and make it less tiring to hold the rod while soaking a piece of bait.

The rod is mated to a medium weight salt water spinning reel, and by carrying a few spare spools I can enhance the rod’s versatility. Each spool is filled with a different pound test monofilament line. If summertime Spanish mackerel are on the beach, and a long cast with a 2-ounce Stingsilver lure is the only way to take them, I'll use 10 pound test line, with a ten foot piece of 20 pound test mono tied in as a shock leader to absorb the stress of every cast.

Four months later, big stripers might be at Oregon Inlet, hitting pieces of fresh menhaden on bottom rigs. Then I use the spool filled with 17-pound test monofilament. Three spools are filled with 10, 14, and 17 pound test mono. This combo is a great outfit when I travel, and might have an opportunity to fish on the beach, but do not want to haul a variety of outfits.

My particular, nine-foot rod and reel combo is a Team Daiwa spinning rod, mated to a Daiwa BG-30 spinning reel, but several other manufacturers make similar top quality combos at a very fair price.

I frequently like to cast lightweight lures to speckled trout, puppy drum and small blues, and the nine-footer is rod is too heavy and cumbersome to do this effectively.

That's where a lightweight rod shines. It's a 7-foot rod, mated to a light saltwater spinning reel, filled with 10-pound PowerPro line, and the rod is just right for tossing lures that weigh between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce. I'll also use this outfit to fish with bottom rigs. I can toss baits or lures with this rod for hours and never grow tired of casting, and it's a great combo for matching tackle to the smaller species that roam the summertime surf.

When the surf is booming and big drum or stripers are the quarries, I'll opt for a heavy-duty rod and reel that's up to the task of handling big fish and rough conditions. But most of the time, you'll find me fishing the surf with one of the above combos.