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Fly show to boast bamboo rod

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In addition to the much-anticipated lineup of noted authorities from around the country, next weekend's Fly Fishing Show will feature the latest space-age advancement in the design of rods, reels and a panoply of contemporary gear.

Surrounded by all this technological splendor, one product stands out. Rather than boron or titanium, it is constructed from bamboo, a venerable angling material virtually unchanged since the origin of the sport.

Taking innovations from the manufacture of snowboards, Montana resident Wayne Maca has revolutionized the art of cane rod building to produce a casting tool that rivals the performance of graphite.

Sacrificing nothing in the beauty and artistry of wood, Maca brings forth a product comparable in strength and quickness and identical to most graphite rods in weight. How this former Colorado resident achieved this minor miracle is a case study in innovation and how a breakthrough achieved in one product can be transferred to another.

Before moving to Twin Bridges, Mont., in 1999, Maca designed and manufactured custom snowboards at a small shop in Idaho Springs, attracting a clientele that included racers from the U.S. Ski Team. From this knowledge of materials and adhesives, he used trial and error to create a rod that vastly outperforms anything made from bamboo.

Its remarkable strength rises from a variety of things. Maca begins by using sound frequency to precisely test and choose those segments of bamboo that best transfer energy.

"Cane is all over the charts in modulus and density," Maca explained of a novel step that gives him the optimum material to start.

He then radically shaves the inner wall to remove excess pith, a weight reduction measure that also sets the stage for the most revolutionary part of the process. Maca replaces the pith with an epoxy to create a stiff, solid inner wall.

"This is what nobody has fully explored. It increases the compressive value of the rod. It can't buckle from side to side," Maca explained. "That's the failure of any rod - other than car doors."

Much of the secret rests with a special epoxy Maca describes only as "nasty stuff, something you wouldn't want lying around your basement."

Maca also departs from the norm by using auto clear coat as a finish rather than varnish - half the thickness with more resistance to nicking. Maca has a patent pending for parts of his process.

"It's a tough rod, the first full-combat bamboo," Maca says of toll that will be on display at his Beaverhead Rod Co. booth.

The show that runs Friday through Sunday at the Denver Merchandise Mart Pavilion will feature the usual suspects familiar to area fly-fishing enthusiasts.

The list of seminar presenters includes a cluster of Coloradans: Barry Reynolds, Brad Befus, AK Best, John Gierach, Ben Furimsky, Ed Engle and Phil Camera.

Casting instruction comes from Jerry Siem, principal designer of Sage Rods and arguably the nation's leading distance caster. He'll be joined at the pool by Bob Jacklin, Cathy Beck, Doug Swisher and Joe Humphreys.

In addition to sessions on all aspects of fly-fishing, the show also offers continuous theater showings on destinations near and far.