A good cast starts with the very first move—loading the rod and getting the line off the water. The POWER SNAP, which follows rod loading in the casting sequence, was described by Joan in our Nov/Dec 1981 issue.

The First Move

It has been traditional to think of the casting stroke as one move, backward or forward. Why, then, do some anglers slide the line off the water smoothly on the backcast, while others rip it off, disturbing the water and the fish? Why do so many backcasts head downward instead of upward? The answers to these questions are often determined by the very first move the caster makes.

If we divide the casting stroke into two parts, each having a purpose, perfect pickups and backcasts can be made on every cast, regardless of its length. The first part of the stroke gets the rod and line moving along the desired path and starts the loading action. The second part continues the loading action as the rod and line are accelerated to a sudden stop, completing the stroke, unloading the rod, and forming the backcast loop. We call the first part the LOADING move and the second, the POWER SNAP. The LOADING move begins with the rod tip lowered and no slack in the line. As the rod is raised (with a straight wrist), the weight of the line combined with the drag of the water’s surface tension bends the rod tip. This bending of the tip is called LOADING.

If the angler has a very short line and starts the backcast with the rod tip high, no slack, and only his leader on the water, he can POWER SNAP the leader off the water with a small, precise move and no problems. The problems arise when the angler’s line is long and on the water. If the backcast lift-off is started with a slack line and the rod tip in a high position, the POWER SNAP is not adequate to take the line off the water smoothly, or to move it in the right trajectory for a high backcast. So, to repeat, we begin the casting stroke with the rod tip lowered to just above the water and with all slack taken out of the line. Now, in a smooth motion, lift all of the line except the leader on the first move (see illustration), following it immediately with the POWER SNAP to take the leader and fly off the water, completing the backcast stroke. By LOADING until only the leader is left on the water, the POWER SNAP can be a small move, as it should be, because of the relative weightlessness of the leader. By putting the POWER SNAP in the right place, the backcast trajectory will be properly high. The casting stroke, made in this manner, gives the caster narrow loops and smooth, clean lift-offs that don’t disturb the water.

The speed with which you do the loading move is important. If you move too slowly, the line will come in too far, as shown in the second illustration, and, by being slack, will not have started to load the rod. Both the rod and line will be in a bad position for the continuing POWER SNAP. There is a certain speed that must be attained so that the line doesn’t sag going into the POWER SNAP. The key is to move from LOADING to the POWER SNAP without hesitation at the precise instant the line is off the water and the leader is still on it. With only a few feet of line the LOADING move will be, perhaps, an inch long. With forty or fifty feet of line the move can be a foot or more, requiring that your arm be extended forward at the start to get more lifting space.

Notice in the illustration that the angle of the lift-off determines the general trajectory of the backcast. The casting stroke is all one smooth movement to the accomplished angler, but its component parts have been recognized and mastered separately somewhere in his past. For every angler who wants to be good at this sport, it’s worth the time and trouble.