

Recently, I've been considering what kind of reel to purchase and use next. My Shimano reels have gotten old, and I have not found a manufacturer who will provide me free reels to use, though several companies offer programs where guides can purchase their products for a discounted price. Most likely, I will purchase and begin deploying a Quantum EXO reel in the near future. As soon as I've been able to put it through enough use to have opinions, I'll create a blog and offer a product review of it.

While discussing the topic of which reels to buy and use and where to get them with Everett Johnson, publisher and owner of *Texas Saltwater Fishing Magazine*, I learned he had gone to Academy and purchased one of their H2O Express reels, after seeing so many of his customers using them and hearing them speak positively about their experiences. "The cool thing is, they cost only about \$50," he told me. He also said he'd used his a couple dozen times without taking it apart, and that it still functioned about as well as it did the day he bought it.

Intrigued, I looked up the reels online. They do weigh a tad over 8 ounces, a bit heavy compared to the ideal weight I prefer, somewhere between 5.5 and 6 ounces. Seeing this, I became a little concerned, but then I realized I'd been happily using a Curado 100 for quite some time, and it weighs just over 7 ounces. How much difference could 1 ounce make, I thought?

Then I found some H2O reels for sale, on "close out". Seems the government of California doesn't like some component used in their construction and has banned them. Currently, Academy is redesigning the reels, and wants to get rid of the remaining stock of this model. I purchased mine for \$29.99 on Amazon! In order to receive free shipping, I ordered some braided line and the reel and line came to my door for less than \$45!

I've used the reel several times now and find it to be highly functional and (so far) admirably durable. The gears do make a little noise when I cast, something I wouldn't expect from a reel so new, but the casting distance compares well with the Shimano reels I've used for years, the spool feels smooth when the handle turns, and the drag works efficiently. The extra weight which had me worried originally is noticeable, but not a "deal breaker".

I like the reel and would recommend it (or the new version Academy comes up with to replace it, assuming it is of similar weight) to anyone who can't afford to plunk down a couple hundred bucks or more on a lighter reel made by one of the high-profile manufacturers.

I still intend to start using Quantum's reels in the near future, but I now believe it is possible to find a functional reel for a low price, one that won't affect how many fish are caught. Academy's H2O Express reel passes the test.