

Rebranding; Ethics and Practicalities

No matter where you are and what kind of fishing you do, you probably have heard the term "re-branding" before. In the fishing world this word means printing a brand name on a reel which doesn't exclusively come with this particular branding. There are several forms of this practice, each carries different moral and practical repercussions. In this blog entry I will try to discuss the most common types of rebranding, but note though that I'm trying to simplify things as much as I can using a few select examples, so this is by no means a comprehensive list of everything that's out there. If you have questions about specifics or particular details of any reel feel free to contact me.

OEM reels - Before I start with types of rebranding, we need to briefly discuss the star at the heart of it all; the OEM reel. This is the reel at the source coming out from the assembly line of the Original Equipment Manufacturer, which are large factories that manufacture fishing reels either to their own design, or to a customer's design with the customer in this case often being a known brand. The vast majority of those OEMs are located in China. They are too numerous to list, but some of the more prolific ones are Ningbo Haibo Machinery Co, Cixi Haiwei Tackle Co, Guangzhou Taide Metallic Products, Cixi Yule Fishing Tackle Co, Cixi Raistar Tackle Co, and Foshan Nanhai Zhongyu Co. When the reel is made for a known brand, there are usually clauses that prevent the OEM from selling or marketing the same reel to anyone else. I call these "contracted" reels. On the other hand when the OEM itself designs and produces their own reel, it's called a "shelf" reel that they would sell in quantities to anyone bearing whatever brand the customer wants printed on them. So you can basically place an order tomorrow for 200 shelf reels with the brand "Cleveland Steamer" printed on them, and they will do it since they probably have no idea what that means!

Reels of this second type, "shelf" reels, are usually made with a number of options for the buyer to choose from. Normally they will be available with two sets of gears, high speed and low speed, different styles of handles, different spool cosmetics, and the buyer can decide on the number of bearings he wants then the factory would install the requested number of bearings and put bushings in the remaining locations. There are also different qualities of bearings on offer. I once saw a fax offer that stated quite candidly the price of a reel per an order of 100 units with "standard quality ball bearings", and the price of the same reel with "high quality ball bearings". Good bearings are actually not that costly, but bad bearings (so-called "standard") are extremely cheap.

Types of rebranding - The first type of rebranding is the outright fraud. That's when someone, usually a one-man garage operation, buys shelf reels in bulk and puts his own brand on them, then with the help of covertly affiliated people spread lies about their origin and construction along with fake reports of supreme performance that leaves high end reels in shame. Will not dwell on this type for long since you're probably familiar with the less than a handful times it happened, and thankfully these operations are now either dead or dying. I don't see this sort of thing happening again in the near future since the embarrassments of the past have created a deterrent, but you never really know. About two years ago a charter operator contacted me to help them test and debug what they claimed was a new high quality reel that they have supposedly designed

themselves and had it custom built from European and American parts. I replied with a single line that I needed to see a photo, then I received a link showing that reel along with some garbage talk about how they would be glad to give me "complimentary" fishing trips to test this and my future reels. Although that reel was unusual looking and quite different to the common OEM reels, I still recognised it as a shelf reel and managed to pin-point its Chinese factory. I then ignored them completely and wouldn't answer their contacts, and apparently that sent them a message that I was on to them and that I can't be buttered up, and eventually that project was quietly dropped. I kinda liked how they were spooked into scrapping it, which spared me the trouble and cost of getting the bare OEM version for a part by part comparison and all the familiar nonsense and threats of law suits that would potentially follow.

There is another variant of this behaviour that is not explicitly fraudulent, yet it remains dishonest and misleading. Look at these advertisement posters of another retailer of rebranded OEM reels, Ajiking



Ajiking I Light
能钓起高达40倍其自身重量的大鱼

Japanese Rhinoceros Beetle
能举起高达800倍其自身重量的物体



www.ajiking.com

特坚固构造金属机体

娇小玲珑，坚固耐用及强大有力

3枚滚珠培林。单向离合培林。超强驱动齿轮。特坚固构造金属机体及旋臂。电脑设计平衡旋臂。特粗壮释线环。



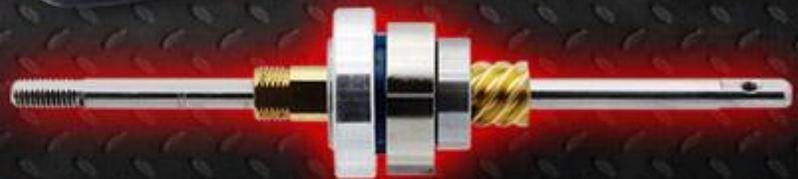
SUPER HEAVY DUTY



**NEW 2014
Wahoo Jigsaw**

- 5+1 ball bearings
- Super strong drive gear
- Computer balanced rotor
- Super strong graphite construction
- Stainless steel main shaft
- Excellent and steady drag system
- Infinite anti-reverse system
- Curved aluminum spool
- Aluminum CNC handle with soft knob
- Durable aluminum bail wire

Line capacity:
 15000 (mm/m): 0.50/270 0.45/340 0.40/420
 20000 (mm/m): 0.50/320 0.45/400 0.40/500



**SUPER HEAVY DUTY ULTRA THICK
STAINLESS STEEL MAIN SHAFT**



No, not talking about the shameless copying of the cuts in the spool skirt from the 2013 Stella. Rather for years they have been adding this "Italian Technology" logo (red arrows) to their ads. Needless to say there is nothing remotely related to Italy in these rebranded shelf reels, yet they just put it there. In addition to giving the wrong impression to the buyers, this also allows local sellers to feed their customers all sorts of lies. It is very common for the sellers and shops stocking these reels in parts of South East Asia and Africa to display the posters and falsely tell buyers that the reels are designed and made in Italy, but only assembled in China to reduce cost. The words "Italian Technology" are intentionally vague so if a regulatory challenges Ajiking on that claim they could say something stupid such as the sales and accounting software on their computer was programmed by an Italian company. In this case let me tell you that this post comes to you with the best German technology since I've just sprayed some Fa deodorant on my stinky armpits before sitting down to write!

Now that we've talked about those who do it wrong, let's talk about those who do it right. These are also retailers who buy shelf OEM reels and market them under their own name, but they make absolutely no false claims about their origin or build. Those retailers are everywhere from South America to the EU and Australia. These are the likes of Akios, Bulldog, Maguro, Hart, and tens more like them. The mark-up in price ranges from acceptable to obscene, but in any case they are not doing anything objectionable or dishonest. This type of retailer is supposed to provide service and parts, and while many of them sincerely try to do exactly that, some others in the past have failed to provide proper service and a few of them even went out of business leaving owners desperately needing parts that are almost impossible to obtain. Unlike mainstream brands which can be reached for parts easily from virtually anywhere in the world, a rebranded reel whose seller is no more accessible or isn't willing to help will be deprived of parts since the Chinese factories don't cater for individual orders by end users.

Momentarily moving away from "shelf" reels, mainstream brands do their share of rebranding as well, although quite differently. In one such practice some mainstream brands sell the same reel under different names



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An example of this is the Fin-Nor Sportfisher (first photo) being sold as Fin-Nor Biscayne (second photo) in some markets.

In the previous example both reels are still "Fin Nor", but in other forms of rebranding the brand changes





The "Penn" Conquer is sold with some cosmetic alteration as "Abu Garcia" Salty Stage. Both Penn and Abu companies are owned by the same parent company though.

Another form is when the reel sells under a known name, and another name that's new or unknown



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This is the Fin-Nor Offshore

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And it's sold in Europe branded "Black Cat" with the model name "Extreme". Black Cat brand is owned by the same parent company of Fin Nor, so still falls in the same general category.

Unlike shelf reels, the reels in this category are almost always exclusively made for a particular company which then cross-brands it between the different brands it owns, and in most cases they are proprietary designs as well. This practice could be quite confusing and a fisherman could pay a certain amount for a reel only to find that he could have bought the same reel named differently for a lower price. There isn't anything unethical or fundamentally wrong about it though.

All is not good - Everything above this point can be considered an introduction to what's coming next, which is a new trend that I'm finding especially troubling. Have a look at this



Looks like Penn have introduced another of their reels. Well, not really..

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Same reel, bearing Fin-Nor's name this time with the model name "Bahama". This is nothing like the previous examples, because Penn and Fin-Nor are two different companies each belonging to a different parent company. Pure Fishing owns Penn, and W.C. Bradley owns Fin-Nor. This is simply a shelf OEM reel that is being bought and branded by various companies.



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Here is the same reel, branded "Ryobi" this time.

Another example



The "Royal" model by DAM (Deutsche Angelgeräte Manufaktur). Except that it's not really what it looks like..



The same reel being sold as ATC Astromac. This reel is neither a DAM nor an ATC. It's another shelf OEM reel sold under different names and as usual it will keep appearing bearing more brands with different cosmetic tweaks.

In this type of rebranding we see something different and quite disturbing. While in earlier examples we saw OEM reels being sold under some obscure retailers' names, this time we have those shelf reels bearing known and respected brands such as Fin-Nor, DAM, and Penn, and I take an issue with this. When people buy a reel by one of the known companies, they expect that the reel is the creation of that particular company and assume that it would have the same level of quality associated with the name. No one expects them to be just putting their name on a reel that they haven't designed or engineered or supervised in manufacture nor was it examined by their quality control. They put their name on them because they know that the name is a selling point, and I find this to be unfair to the angler who wouldn't buy the exact same reel if it comes with the name of the

OEM on it. None of these companies told buyers that these reels were different and adopted, rather in promotional material every effort is made to associate these shelf reels with the traits of the brand. Here is an example



Fin-Nor have a name for tough reels that do the work at the business end of things. One of Fin-Nor's new spinning reels, the Bahama 3000, once again lives up to its manufacturer's reputation and is a perfect little number for soft baiting with.

Featuring a full metal body, this is a solid reel. Perhaps a little heavy for some soft baiters but you get the feeling whilst using it that it won't let you down once a big fish becomes attached on the other end.

Micro-n

by Paul V

This is p
fishing a

+ A

LAT

How To:

- Press fin

- Angle lik

- Clear joi

So, the Bahama 3000 "lives up to its manufacturer's reputation"? Nice indeed, except that the bloody thing is NOT a Fin-Nor to begin with and its manufacturer is an OEM that he has never heard of. This is one of the usual "honest" and "objective" reviews you always find in magazines and on the web. I'm not sure why this sort of thing still exists at all and who exactly takes it seriously, but we're living in a world where people believe in acupuncture and astrology, so I won't wonder much. Same applies by the way to the awards given in fishing shows and expos, unless you really think that judges actually took

every reel in the show out and fished it hard to test its real life performance and reliability before deciding on what's the "best" reel on show. But let's not digress now and leave this to another time

One final example. Ardent, a company known for its quality care products and its discontinued USA made spinning reels is introducing the new Ardent Wire reel



But isn't this Ardent actually a Snowbee Kuroshio LE?



Nope, it's neither an Ardent nor a Snowbee, it's a yes, you guessed it; a shelf OEM reel. Actually in a vulgar display of the lack of objectivity in the information commonly found on the web and magazines, I found the following short article on one of the biggest fishing tackle sites in the world

➤ EFTTEX Awards 2014 - Best New Fixed Spool Reel

EFTTEX Awards

- Best New Accessory
- Best New Braided Line
- Best New Clothing
- Best New Fixed Spool Reel
- Best New Fly Line
- Best New Fly Reel
- Best New Fly Rod
- Best New Footwear
- Best New Hard Lure
- Best New Metal Lure
- Best New

Snowbee Kuroshio Limited Edition

The new Kuroshio Limited Edition model takes fixed spool design to a new level. Utilising a unique stainless steel wire frame arm and reel handle, this new reel is bound to find favour with all lure fishermen looking for something different.

Precision cast in lightweight aluminium, with a CNC machined spool, the Kuroshio 'LE' features 9+1 stainless-steel ball-race bearings, S/S anti-reverse bearing and brass main gear, making them totally saltwater resistant.



They promote the *supposedly* "limited edition" Snowbee and tell us how it takes the design of reels to new levels of blah blah. Sadly though several months earlier the same site featured this

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Cixy City Yule's combination is a winner

POSTED ON 10/03/2014 BY ANTHONY - COMMENTS (0)

Creating a reel that combines fashion with functionality has proved to be a winning formula for Cixi City Yule Fishing Tackle' Yolo brand.

The company picked up the Best Reel Award during the China Fish Awards Banquet for its IM-3000, much to delight of the company's Vice General Manager, Jacky Fang.

He told Angling International: "We like to look at our reels as fashion items and not just tools that catch fish. This award is tribute to that ideal and we are very proud to have won it."

The IM-3000 is also different from its competitors in that unlike most reels it is made of stainless steel instead of graphite or aluminium. "We are the first company to do this and the design is appreciated by our customers," he added.

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↑ The IM-3000 from Cixi City Yule Fishing Tackle Company - winner of the best reel at the Chi

An article about the exact same reel, but this time with its original name from the real OEM manufacturer; IM-3000 from Cixy City Yule factory, and there is nothing limited edition about it since you can order 10 million reels if you have the money. One would think that they would have said something when they promoted the same reel later with another name, but nothing at

all. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is exactly the level of credibility that's prevalent today in the fishing tackle trade. I can't go through a fishing magazine or read a fishing website for 10 minutes without spotting at least three butt-loads of crap. In case you were unfamiliar with this unit, 1 butt-load equals 3.7 cubic metres according to the international standardised system known globally as "Le Système international d'caca".

To get back to the subject, the case with Ardent is definitely less severe than it is with Penn, DAM, and Fin-Nor selling rebranded reels, but the main issue remains which is a known name that comes with a certain level of expectations is selling something that they picked from a catalogue without telling us that they have nothing to do with its creation.

A question of quality - Since this write up is about Chinese made reels, it's inevitable that the issue of quality will be brought up. The whole subject of the quality of Chinese products is pretty simple indeed. If someone invests in R&D, materials, and quality control, a very good product will come out of the assembly lines, and if corners are cut we can expect mediocrity and below. In that China is no different than any other country. Thinking of a wide variety of products, fishing related and otherwise, that I've used through the years, I have seen trash coming out of places that are generally associated with quality such as Germany, England, Japan, Switzerland, and the USA. As with anything else, preconceived notions aren't helpful, and each product should always be evaluated based on its own merits without looking at the reputation of the origin. Most known brands that contract a Chinese factory would enforce enough controls over materials and quality to make a proper product, so we don't have much to worry about here. When it comes to shelf reels though I have to say that my first hand experience with close to a hundred different ones leads me to believe that maybe only 1 in 10 such reels is of an acceptable quality. Let me give you an actual example.

I took these photos of an ATC Astromac (DAM Royal) after I tested it a few years ago

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Corrosion in the flange of the drag knob, and inside in the nut and spring.



Corrosions in the top drag plate.



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And on the spool hub.

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The horrible seals allowed salt to deposit around the base of the pinion.

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The main shaft and the pinion itself have also corroded.



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Even deep inside the gearbox, the pin of the backup anti-reverse dog rusted.

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And the pin holding the ball bearing of the traverse block got bent up and out.

What I am saying here is not that all OEM shelf reels are bad, there are good ones but they are quite rare.

There you have it. I tried my best to showcase a few types of rebranding and what I personally feel about each. Times have changed and gone are the days when most spinning reels were truly created "in-house". There still remains a few reels that are made in-house, but those are the exception not the rule. In my latest review I examined a Saltiga Expedition that is fully designed and made from propriety parts in Japan, but it costs close to one and a half thousand dollars because that's what something made with this old world philosophy costs nowadays. Globalisation and the lower costs of producing goods in China have pushed most manufacturing to that country, and with that came invertible consequences in quality and cost, along with new tactics devised to sell us these products. All of this might seem confusing and sometimes even risky, but not if you maintain realistic expectations and arm yourself with knowledge and vigilance as you decide where and how to spend your money.

Tight lines.

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**Alan Hawk
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