

I have been using two reels lately, an Academy H2O Express and a Quantum EXO. I am impressed overall with both, in different ways.

Academy's reel comes with an incredibly low price, and is therefore one of the best bargains I've found in fishing equipment. I bought mine for \$29.99 and used it a couple dozen times. I did identify a problem with it during this time. The thumb bar sometimes closes while a cast is attempted. Eventually, the thumb bar would not respond to the reel handle and close after a cast. When I took the reel back to Academy, they replaced it with their "upgraded" version of the reel, which retails for \$49.99, still an incredibly low price for a reel which casts like a champ and feels so smooth when the handle is turning. The weight of the tool is not ideal; it comes in a bit over 8 ounces. But, to Academy's credit, they did lower the profile on the new model, and it is definitely light enough to work for me, especially if I use it sparingly.

I've been using the Quantum EXO reel more of the time lately. It is feather-light, under 6 ounces. This fact alone makes it an attractive piece of equipment. I bought the model with the slowest retrieve speed they make, because I feel a slow retrieve speed enhances my ability to work Corkys and topwaters, and because I rarely fish from the boat. The EXO casts beautifully, feels incredibly smooth, and has a sophisticated, efficient drag system. It has a large handle, with fat grips. Placing rubber covers over the grips makes them even more plump, which I really like, since it allows one's "handle hand" to remain relaxed during use. Can't speak to the reel's long-term durability yet, but so far, it is holding up like a champ. The side plate is a bit troublesome to open, but I'm getting the hang of it over time. The retail price of this reel varies from about \$199 on Amazon up to about \$249 at tackle shops. The price is about in line with other medium to high-end reels. If the EXO gives several years of dependable use for the average angler who fishes 30-50 times a year, it will be well worth the extra money spent (compared to the H2O Express), mostly because it is so lightweight and pleasantly functional, reducing fatigue during extended use on a long day of chunking and winding.