

A notorious problem with the black plastic spools of the ABU Cardinal reels from the 1970's and 1980's is that over time some of them will crack. Usually it's the upper disk of the spool (the flange containing the push-button release) that breaks off the axis of the spool. I'm not sure if the plastic spools of all models from that era - plain and skirted - may suffer from this flaw, but I know the 33 and 44 spools sometimes do. My own experience is limited to my Cardinal 44 and 4 reels, of which two spools have cracked in the past few years.

On internet forums the cause of this problem that is usually given, is the pressure exercised by the line on the spool in combination with the deterioration of the plastic material. While I know that deterioration of the plastic used for the spools is a fact, as may also be observed by the black material getting dull and faded and the surface acquiring a white tarnish, I'm not sure if pressure is the only other factor involved. Both spools that I found cracked in my reel box gave away when in rest, not while fishing. I noticed that the surface on both sides of the crack was a bit oily. Therefore what may have happened may also be that oil from the spools shaft gradually penetrated into a hair crack between the upper disk and the axis of the spool, thus weakening the spool. Incidentally, these spools were never dropped, nor did they ever contain very heavy line (only 0.22 mm / 6 lbs nylon monofilament in fact).

I do have some original plastic spare spools that I could use as replacements for my broken spools, but the problem is that after two spools having cracked without any apparent reason, how can I be sure that this won't happen again while I'm fishing? How can I be confident that this will not spoil a fishing trip or that it will cost me a good fish? I like to be relaxed when fishing, with all things under control, as far as I can help it. And that's where the plastic spools have now started to bother me.

A few years ago I had heard about custom made metal replacement spools for the Cardinal 44. Recently I noticed they can still be purchased. These spools are made from high grade aluminium. I bought me two Cardinal 44 spools on the internet from Classic Vintage Fishing Tackle in England for £ 22.- a piece. You can also find them offered by other sellers; these appear to be exactly the same spools, only rather more expensive.

The spools I bought are well made and fit just as fine as the originals. One thing however, is that the spool width (the distance between the upper and lower spool disk) is just a fraction less than with the originals. It's less than the thickness of a postcard and you can hardly see it, but if you want to fit one of the original red plastic arbor rings, you'll find you'll have to cut off just a tiny fraction from the arbor rim with a razor blade or something similar to be able to push it on without force.

I have no relationship whatsoever with the firm I mentioned, so I can honestly recommend these aluminium replacement spools. They are available for the Cardinal 33/3 and 44/4, but also for the black skirted spool Cardinals 52/152, 54/154 and 55/155. The same firm sells the original plastic spools as well (new old stock) and also fabulous custom made metal spools for the 500-series and many, many parts for all sorts of vintage and modern ABU reels.

The URL is : <http://www.classicvintagefishingtackle.com/abucardinalreelparts.htm>.

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On both pictures above, to the left: an original plastic Cardinal 44/4 spool with red arbor ring; middle and right: two aluminium replacement spools, one with an original arbor ring slightly cut to size.

As yet I have no experience with the aluminium replacement spools for the Cardinal 33/3, but these may be even better alternatives to the original plastic spools than with the Cardinal 44/4, as those old 33/3 spools fitted rather wobbly on the spool shaft. When the Cardinal 33 was briefly reintroduced in 1993 (and later with the reintroduction of the original champagne-and-black Cardinal 3 in Japan) these plastic spools were fitted with a brass bushing to overcome this problem. Probably an all metal spool will fit at least as well. If I get hold of one, I'll let you know.

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