

ABU goes ultra-light

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Ultra-light fishing is the fine art of using tackle that is very light for the size and power of the fish you are after. In that sense it's a relative notion. It can also be an absolute notion, by defining the maximum casting weight a rod can handle, that is without overloading it and losing distance. The idea about what rod can still be called ultra-light (UL) differs slightly per country. The French, who played a leading role in developing UL fishing from the mid 1930s, today consider UL fishing as the use of rods suitable for casting lures up to 6 g. But sometimes they will use rods for casting weights up to only 2 g, or even less. In the USA the upper limit of the casting weight for an UL rod is generally accepted as ¼ oz (7 g), which is slightly more than the French standard. And I propose that we'll stick to 7 g as the upper limit for our definition of ultra-light, as this is widely accepted in Scandinavia. I won't delve any further into this, you can read more about the origins of UL fishing and its definitions on my website.* Let me just add that ABU also followed the USA norm of ¼ oz, keeping 7 g as the upper limit for UL fishing, but they were late in the use of that term and in participating in the UL tackle scene. It wasn't until 1975 when they started making rods and reels for UL fishing.

Lines of course have to be very thin to be in harmony with an ultra-light outfit, 0.16 mm or 4 lb nylon lines usually being the upper limit nowadays. These thin lines are essential to cast UL weights far enough, and to provide enough stretch - in cooperation with the flexibility of the rod - to play a fish safely and prevent sudden lunges from breaking the line. The need for stretch is why nylon monofilament lines are usually preferred over the modern braided or fused superlines in UL fishing. Reels, finally, should weigh no more than about 250 g to keep the outfit light and well balanced.

The first fishing tackle 'AB Urfabriken' produced were simple baitcasting reels. That was in 1940 and still under the Record brand name. The only lure they offered at that time was the impossible 'Ideal X', a gadget that sprung open when a pike would take a bite at it, thus gagging the pike in a rather inelegant (and probably inefficient) way. It weighed 14 g (½ oz), heavy enough to be cast with a reel without a free spool mechanism. But soon some lighter lures followed. The first lure in the category up to 7 g (¼ oz) was the 6 g ABU Spinner in 1945. Their spoons however were mostly in the 15-30 g range initially, some a little more or less. But that weight went down to 10 g with the introduction of the Safir in 1948 and dropped to 7 g when a thinner Safir was introduced in 1950. That little 7 g Safir was in fact the first ABU spoon in the UL-range, although it was neither called ABU nor ultra-light at the time.



The Safir spoon in the 1950 catalog

* See: <http://jlvanderpauw.nl/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Waterlog-UL-SPINNING.pdf>

Spinning reels are more suitable to cast very light lures than reels with revolving spools. This may explain why ABU introduced lighter lures not long after they brought out their first spinning reel in 1950. This spinning reel, the Record 500, was a sturdy reel for which the parts were made in Switzerland after which it was assembled by AB Urfabriken in Sweden. It first appeared in ABU's *Napp och Nytt* catalog in 1951. In the same catalog ABU also offered, for the first time, a few rods that could carry a spinning reel. These were made by Asbjörn Hörgård, a famous Norwegian manufacturer. Two rods were made for 'light spinning' but exact casting weights were not mentioned.

The lightest ABU spoon bait in 1951 was only the 7 g Safir. But this changed in 1952 when aside the 7 g Safir four other spoons of the same light weight were introduced. Three of them were scaled down versions of existing spoons with the addition of the prefix 'Lill' (little): the Lill-ABU, Lill-Atom and Lill-Tommy. The other was a new lure, the Lill-Öringen (little trout), later also sold as the Little Wiggley in English speaking countries. Next to these light weight spoons a 6 g spinner was offered, the Baby Reflex, which was in fact the same lure as the 6 g ABU Spinner from 1945, but now equipped with a corrugated blade to provide more reflection.



Record 500 (1950)

Lättspinnbeten

Safir
För huggslö eller krokkygg fisk är detta bete mycket lämpligt, särskilt för laxöring, abborre, röding och id. Helt rödlackerat på insidan. Längd 35 mm. Vikt 7 och 10 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

Lill-ABU
En förminskad upplaga av ABU-draget. Längd 42 mm. Vikt 7 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

Lill-ATOM
Ett nytt utförande av Atom-draget. Längd 40 mm. Vikt 7 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

Lill-Tommy
Tommy-draget i förminskad skala. Längd 37 mm. Vikt 7 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

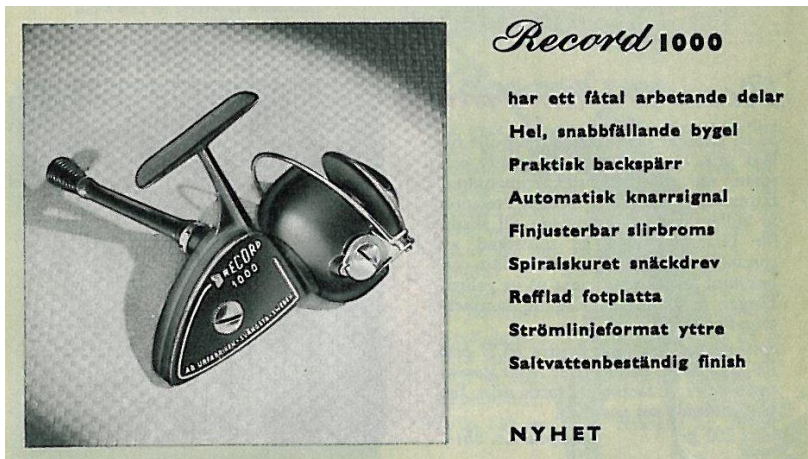
Lill-öringen
Ett nytt litet äggformigt drag med mycket fisklig gång i vattnet. Längd 34 mm. Vikt 7 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

Baby Reflex
En ABU-spinnare med reflexbehandlad sked. Längd 30 mm. Vikt 6 gr. Pris kr. 2:—.

Nyhet

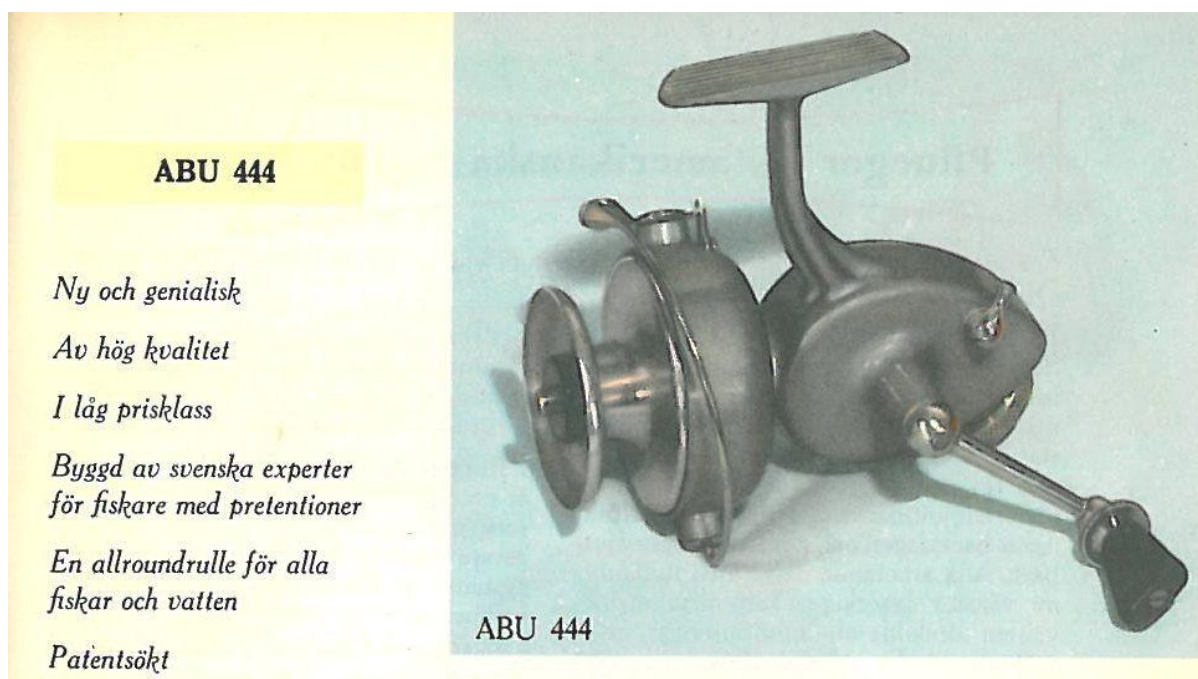
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'Nyhet' (new) : light spinning lures in the 1952 catalog



The Record 1000 from the 1954 catalog and an ultra-light Pelican 50, both made in Italy by Zangi
 (Note the dark green and creamy white colour of the Pelican, very similar to the later Cardinals)

The Record 500 that ABU sold from 1950 was a medium sized spinning reel. It weighed about 310 g. In 1954 ABU marketed the slightly lighter Record 1000. This (entirely different) reel weighed 300 g and was made in Italy by the Zangi company. It was in fact the same reel as the Pelican 100, which Zangi had introduced in 1947. By 1954 Zangi also produced a scaled down version of this reel, the Pelican 50. This weighed a mere 200 g and was a genuine, high quality ultra-light reel. But apparently ABU was not interested to incorporate this reel in their Record line as well. At the time the company may have considered its size too small for the Scandinavian market.



ABU 444 from the 1955 catalog

When ABU introduced their first own Swedish made spinning reel in 1955, this was designed to be the universal 'folkhaspeln' ('the people's spinning reel'), the equivalent of the 'Volkswagen'. The aimed-at all-round qualities resulted in a sturdy medium-light sized (320 g) work-horse: the successful ABU 444. Spinning reels of about the same size and slightly lighter followed in the years after, the best known examples being the encapsulated ABU 505 (1962) and the Cardinal 44 (1969).

In 1969 ABU introduced the four categories of fishing methods and corresponding tackle: Fishing 1, 2, 3 and 4. Fishing 1 was the lightest category. It was aimed at trout and perch (and other fish of that size). It comprised lures of 2-15 g and rods for casting up to 15 g. The catalog explained that reels could not be divided into these categories as they could often be used for more than one category. Yet a few pages further on the reels do appear grouped in categories just the same. The reels for 'Fishing 1' were the ABU 505 and 503 and the Cardinal 44 (new for that year, 1969). According to the catalog these reels were meant for lines of 0.20-0.30 mm. By now the ABU 444 had been replaced by the ABU 444A, which was put into the category Fishing 2. There was still no sign of a separate category for ultra-light fishing; nothing lighter than reels down to 300 g and lines down to 0.20 mm.



Först har vi Fiske I

I det här fisket föddes haspeln. Och verkar fortfarande. Med de lätta betena visar den sin överlägsenhet. För Fiske I tre rullar.

ABU 503/505 och nyheten Cardinal 44.

Största skillnaden mellan ABU 503/505 och övriga öppna hasplar är att spolen är inkapslad och att dom är utan bygel. De har istället en utlösningknapp framtill som bara väntar på ett lätt tryck från pekfingeret. Då frikopplas linan och hamnar automatiskt på fingertoppen. Klart för kast. En annan skillnad. Spolen står still och tvinnar inte linan. Så har rullarna Syncro-slirning. Sitter i veven så klart. Linförarkåpan och stiftet är av hårdförkromat, rostfritt stål. Haspelfiskets enkelhet och säkerhet fångade i samma rulle.

ABU 503

Ekonomiversionen av haspel utan bygel. Har fabriksinställd SYNCRO. Kan ändras enkelt med tex ett mynt. Spolen rymmer utan korktrumma cirka 230 m 0,25 eller 160 m 0,30 mm ABULON. Levereras med ca 160 m 0,30 mm ABULON samt kastvikt. Extra spole se sid 127. Lämpliga linor: ABULON 0,20—0,30. Lämpligt spö: ABU Suecia 321 resp 311 eller ABU 271. Vikt 305 g **Kr 58:— + moms**

ABU 505

En unik haspelrulle som ofta fått tillfälle att visa upp sina egenskaper världen runt. Och som skaffat enbart vänner med sin enkelhet. ABU 505 har ställbar SYNCRO-slirning med stjärnhjul som kan ändras under pågående fiske. Spolen rymmer utan korktrumma cirka 230 m 0,25 eller 160 m 0,30 mm ABULON. Levereras med korktrumma och ca 100 m 0,25 mm ABULON samt kastvikt. Extra spole se sid 127. Lämpliga linor: ABULON 0,20—0,30. Lämpligt spö: ABU Diplommat 751, ABU Suecia Duett eller ABU 281. Vikt 305 g **Kr 78:— + moms**

Nyhet!

ABU Cardinal 44

Här är tillökningen i Cardinal-familjen. Den som tar upp Cardinal-begreppen i det lättaste fisket. Bromsen bak, snäckdrev och kullager, kraftig bygel med dubbla bygelfjädrar. Du vet Cardinal! Linkapacitet utan trumma: 200 m 0,25 mm ABULON. Utfullnadstrummans kapacitet: 100 m 0,25 mm ABULON. Utväxling: 1:5,1 = 73 cm/varv. Extra spole medföljer. Lämpliga linor: ABULON 0,20—0,30. Lämpligt spö: ABU Suecia 311, 321 eller Duett. Vikt 300 g **Kr 88:— + moms**

Reels for 'Fishing 1' in the 1969 catalog

Meanwhile, during the 1950s ultra-light fishing had already become well established in many European countries and even in the USA, where angling journalist Tom McNally did much to promote it. Consequently several famous reel-making companies, particularly in Italy and France, had begun to produce fine ultra-light spinning reels. Probably the most famous and ubiquitous of these UL reels was the small Mitchell 308, introduced in 1959. But by the end of the 1960s ABU still hadn't joined the club, or perhaps they hadn't seen any commercial potential in ultra-light fishing as it wasn't a big thing in the Scandinavian countries (yet). It wasn't until 1975 that ABU introduced a truly ultra-light spinning reel. In that year the successful Cardinal range of spinning reels (started in 1965 with the Cardinal 66 and 77) was expanded with the small Cardinal 33.

The Cardinal 33 was - and still is - a little gem. It weighs no more than 220 g, yet it is a little power house that can take 200 m of 0.20 mm line (or half of that when using the red plastic arbor ring). It is equipped with a high quality steel and brass worm gear, that, together with a first class ball bearing, makes it run as smooth as silk. And double bail springs to finish it off. No negative points at all? Well, hmm, it came with a bit of a wobbly plastic spool, alas. False economy in my opinion. A reel of that quality should have had a metal spool - and the same applies to its bigger brother, the Cardinal 44. The 44 spool sits less wobbly on the shaft, but as with the 33 spool, problems started to arise over the years. After two or three decades - and I admit that's a long time, but these reels will last a lifetime when taken care of - the plastic gradually starts to deteriorate and the front of the spool may break off. This may not happen to all spools, but I had it happen to three of my Cardinal spools by now, so how can I still trust the other plastic spools when fishing? There is only one (rather expensive) solution: ordering some custom made aluminium replacement spools, at least for the line strengths that are most often used. In my case that means two for the Cardinal 44 (for nylon lines of 0.20 and 0.22 mm) and one for the Cardinal 33 (for 0.18 mm). I no longer use the remaining plastic spools anymore for active duty and keep them in the reel boxes, as the genuine parts.



**My own Cardinal 33, with the custom made metal spool fitted,
bought in 1977 and after 40 years still in perfect condition**



An original plastic Cardinal 33 spool with red plastic arbor (left) and a custom made aluminium one (right)

When the Cardinal 33 was first cataloged in 1975, a rod to match it was introduced as well. This was ABU's first UL spinning rod, the Suecia 300 Zoom. This hollow fiberglass rod measured 180 cm in two parts and was designed for casting lures up to 7 g. These 'Zoom' action rods had a strong tip action. Some models, among which the 300, were replaced the following year (1976) by rods with a more parabolic action, called 'Parazoom', which improved their casting and fish playing qualities.

Sist men inte minst det nya färgglada Suecia Colorit Zoom. Suecia-kvalitet rakt igenom, dvs. rörbyggt, korkhandtag, Allround-rullfäste och Streamlineöglor med verkligt eleganta lindningar.

Typ	Längd	Handtag	Delning	Färg	Vikt	Pris
Suecia 311 & 312 ZOOM	195 cm	enhands	2-delat	blå	220 g	100,-
Suecia 321 & 322 ZOOM	195 cm	enhands	2-delat	koppar	225 g	130,-
Suecia 300 ZOOM	180 cm	enhands	2-delat	brunt	85 g	150,-
Suecia 351 & 352 ZOOM	210 cm	enhands	2-delat	gulspå	260 g	170,-
Suecia Duett ZOOM**)	195-210 cm	enhands	2-delat	brunt	235 g	225,-
Suecia Safari ZOOM**)	195 cm	enhands	teleskop	brunt	185 g	155,-
Suecia Colorit ZOOM 1	195 cm	enhands	2-delat	orange	230 g	156,-
Suecia Colorit ZOOM 2	195 cm	enhands	2-delat	orange	235 g	156,-

*) levereras med två spötoppar för Fiske 1 resp Fiske 2. **) teleskopiskt spö i 6 delar, hopskjutet endast 48 cm.

Suecia rods in the 1975 catalog, second from below the new ultra-light 300, with sliding reel rings

In the Danish angling magazine *Sports Fiskeren* of May 1988 I once read an article by Orla Bertram Nielsen about how he went fishing for garfish some ten years before, together with the famous Danish angling writer Jens Ploug Hansen. In this article Nielsen described his fishing gear:

"My ultra-light outfit then consisted of an ABU Parazoom 300 spinning rod, that good old ABU Cardinal 3 and 0.20 mm Stren nylon. At the end of the line went a small 7 gram Salar spoon with a small, sharp 'eagle claw' treble attached at a short distance behind it [on a short end of nylon line]. Despite all space age materials still an excellent outfit!"

The fact that Nielsen talks about his good old Cardinal 3 means that the event took place in 1978 or later, because that was the year when the champagne and black Cardinal 3 replaced the green and creamy white Cardinal 33. The other members of the Cardinal family (44, 66 and 77) also changed over to this new look and shorter model number in that year.



The Cardinal 3 and 4 as they appeared in the German edition of the 1978 catalog

However great the small Cardinals 33 and 3 may have been, it seems inevitable that all good things must come to an end. In this case it was the popularity of the skirted spool that made ABU come up with a new line of Cardinals in 1978: the 50-range. The models 54, 55 and 57 were introduced that year. A small ultra-light Cardinal 52 followed four years later, in 1982, but that was also the only year this reel was made and cataloged. By the end of 1982 the whole Cardinal 50-series was discontinued and the production of the Cardinal spinning reels in Sweden came to an end. The original Cardinals (3, 4, 6 and 7) had been discontinued a year earlier; they were last shown in the 1981 catalog.



The tiny Cardinal 52 (left) as shown in the 1982 catalog



The Dragmaster Ultra Lite, from the 1989 catalog

I won't discuss the ABU spinning reels that were made in the Far East from 1982 onwards. But I'll make an exception for a tiny ultra-light reel with an innovative and - I think - rather appealing design (if you don't object to the bail turning the wrong way around). That is the Dragmaster Ultra Lite, introduced in the 1989 catalog. But as, by then, trends and models had come to succeed each other ever faster in the race for the appreciation of the customer, the Dragmasters didn't last longer than a couple of years and made way to other fantasies, each next one further remote from the fine old Swedish standard, in my humble opinion (and I'm neither a purist collector nor a grumpy old man). Meanwhile I still get along fine with my old Cardinal 33. ■