

part 1
Ultra Mag & Mag



graphite REVOLUTION

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tradition vs greed

Reading between the lines in Tight Lines catalogues of the early 1980s you can sense an urgent need to explain ABU's philosophy of quality and precision. The work of assembling an Ambassador reel and the quality built into it is explained on almost every page. Not strange at all when you consider what was going on at ABU. New owners had stepped in and ABU's philosophy was under attack from a new generation of people with greed for profits. This change isn't a sudden one, but creeps in slowly, step by step and turns ABU into a different company. You can see this in the reels ABU launches in the second half of the 80s, feel it when you hold one in your hands, and you can spot something isn't as it used to be if you pick up a used reel and inspects its battle scars.



People I have talked to, workers on the factory floors of ABU, talk of how speeding up production became a priority. Rushing reels through the assembly line became the new number one policy. But at the same time this was happening ABU still kept their ambitions. It was as if a power struggle took place between the old and the new thinking, build the reels no other manufacture can build on one side, and cut a few corners on the other.



In 1983 ABU was ready to launch a new generation of reels. The Ultra Mag was in many ways just a modernized Ambassador 5000, new shape, but familiar mechanical lay out. It was ABUs first attempt to use a new material they presents as Polymer and claims SAAB used for the Viggen fighter jet. Well it's not entirely the same material and SAAB didn't really use much composite material in their fighter planes, but this is marketing and ABU introduces the new material with care. No too big words and no mentioning of a revolution, they had burned their fingers before, with the 3000/4000 plastic side covers and were vice to be cautious. But the new reel was good. Really good! It was a sensitive improvement of the original Ambassador design; a 5000 brought up to date in many respects, and built to the

same stringent quality requirements. I remember testing a few for ABU back then, before they went into full scale production. I found little to complain about and my main concern was how easy the side covers picked up scratches and how quickly the printed labels and décor faded away. There was nothing wrong on the inside, function was like clock-work and exactly as refined as you would expect from ABU. And the parts were built to last. I have heard people refer to them as being built like a tank, and that's not far from the truth. These reels lasts! The old philosophy can be said to still rule in regard to the design of the Ultra Mags and the Mags, but things were going to change...

Note:

Early reels Ultra Mags are known to make a nice clicking sound when the fish take line off the spool. This sound is gone from the newer reels which has a solid washer around the crank pin and misses the tiny spring which makes the click sound. Some fancy the clicks, others don't mind the silence.



Most significant improvements on the original Ambassador design:

- 1. Finer tolerances for internal parts.*
- 2. Level-wind disengages and automatically engages on retrieve.*
- 3. Magnetic brake (settings 1-10) counters overrun at the beginning of casts.*
- 4. Sideplate bayonet attachment for spool change without tools (quick-spool change).*



good & bad

Ultra Mag's magnetic brake offers better casting control than the traditional Ambassador centrifuge brake and makes it easier to throw light lures up against the wind. The tighter tolerances make these reels tick like clock-work and they are a delight to use. Level wind disengages during the cast, a good thing for casting distances! The system engages automatically on retrieve.

The easy and quick spool change is a helpful feature, but I have seen examples of the bayonet system failing.

In general nothing goes wrong with these reels, they are strongly built and mechanical problems are rare. If you know how to service an Ambassador 5000 you will also find it easy to service the Ultra Mag and Mag reels.

Weak points are the Polymer side plates which scratches easily and are almost impossible to keep good. Décor fades away with use and handling. If weight saving was the prime reason for the use of graphite and polymer is questionable, a classic 5000 C weighs in at 300 g and carries 170 m 0,35 mm line. The comparable model of the Ultra Mag weighs 270 g, just 30 g saved! If adding the 30 g and have the side plates made in metal had been an alternative, I would have chosen the metal...

One of the more interesting and strong sides of this family of reels is they come in so many different sizes. Models IV, V, VI are really big and bulky reels built for serious use. They are the first reels for offshore use built by ABU to offer a line guide system.

Over the years I have fished many of the models hard and for long and my verdict is, if you can live with a reel which you cannot keep good looking, these are among the best you can choose. Some models are hard to find these days and pick up high prices when sold, in general though, they are not as sought after as the classic Ambassadors, and therefore less valuable.

Models

| Model | Ratio | Weight | Capacity | Year |
|-----------------|-------|--------|-------------|------|
| Ultramag XL I | 4,7:1 | 255 | 170m - 0,25 | 1982 |
| Ultramag XL II | 4,7:1 | 270 | 170m - 0,35 | 1982 |
| Ultramag XL III | 4,7:1 | 295 | 170m - 0,40 | 1984 |
| Ultramag XL IV | 4,5:1 | 695 | 200m - 0,50 | 1984 |
| Ultramag XL V | 4,5:1 | 735 | 200m - 0,60 | 1984 |
| Ultramag XL VI | 4,5:1 | 770 | 200m - 0,70 | 1984 |

Mag I - Mag II - Mag III same as Ultramag XL I - XL II - XL III

