

The strong spines of Local Hooker Rods are the foundation of the equipment's durability.



# A Moment of Truth

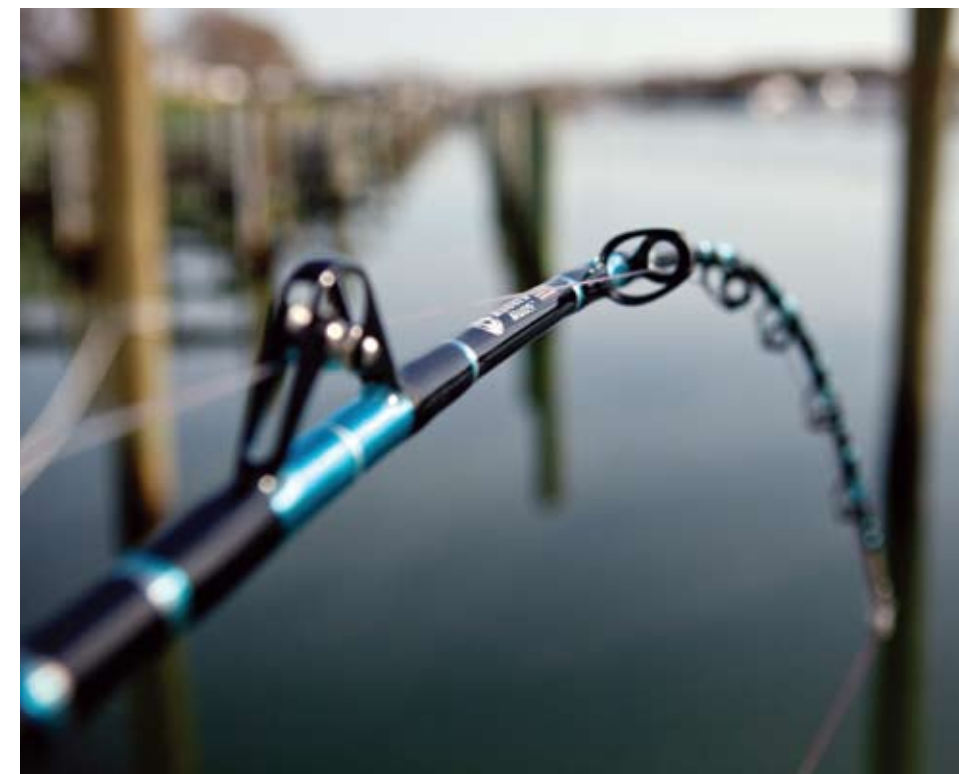
There comes a moment in every fish fight—no matter if it's bluefish or giant tuna or striped marlin—when the fish stops taking the line and the fisherman reels it toward the boat. Anglers call this “turning the fish.” It's a moment of truth for the rod in the fisherman's hands: the bigger the fish, the more important the equipment. It's the moment Local Hooker Rods were made for.

Originally from Connecticut, Local Hooker Rods founder Bob Jenkins has been visiting—and fishing—the Cape for as long as he can remember. His family has visited Chatham for many years, and he keeps his boat moored there in Ryder's Cove Boatyard. He dabbled in a variety of professions early on, serving as a Marine, working in construction, and patenting a medical device. He hustled hard. But in the midst of pitching a video teleconferencing service to Manhattan's Lehman Brothers, Jenkins got a wake-up call.

“I was on the 39th floor of the World Trade Center on 9-11 when the first plane hit,” says Jenkins. “I looked out the window, and I don't know if you remember, but it was a really clear day that day. You could see practically to Chicago. And I looked out and saw tons of paper falling, desks and chairs were flying around the room and I thought, OK...so this is where I die.”

## LOCAL HOOKER RODS COMPANY NETS A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ITS FOUNDER

by rob conery | photos by stacey hedman



Bob Jenkins, who has been fishing off of Cape Cod since childhood, returned to the region after a close call on 9/11. As the main man behind Local Hooker Rods, he's turned his lifelong hobby into a dream job.

Through smoke and the stink of jet fuel, Jenkins made his way downstairs, crossed the lobby, walked uptown, and never looked back. That fateful experience put things in perspective. Jenkins wanted a simpler way of life, and in 2004, he left the hustle of big-city salesmanship to catch fish on Cape Cod's salty shores. The following year, he launched Local Hooker Rods in Chatham before moving the operation to Falmouth a few years later.

Along with simplicity in his life, Jenkins wanted quality in his rods. "As a fisherman, I just got tired of all the junk that was being pumped in from overseas, all that mass-produced garbage," he says. Each Local Hooker rod begins with a blank—a bare-bones fishing pole—built exclusively for his company. The blank is "spined," a process in which the rod is balanced to determine its true arc—a particularly important step because more fishing rods break from being improperly spined than any other reason. But the key difference between Local Hooker's custom rods and their mass-produced counterparts is the placement of the "guides," the hoops through which the line slips and the pieces that bear most of the load after a fish has been hooked. Custom deflection tests are performed on each blank to determine the strongest points where the guides can be placed. Mass-produced rods don't account for the subtleties of each rod and instead use the same guide placement on thousands of rods, pumping out the final products to the big-box stores by the truckload.



Today, Local Hooker offers about 40 models—everything from eight-foot, light-tackle, spin-casting set-ups for a day at the beach to five-foot six-inch rods with twist guides, built to battle offshore leviathans. Because they are each made by hand, no two Local Hooker rods are the same. Rods can be custom-made with different color combinations or a name embossed on the shaft. Some of them have real striped bass skins embedded above the handle, a very cool-looking touch for which Jenkins has a patent pending. Buyers can order custom models and name their speci-



Local Hooker rods are designed to catch bounty, from Cape and Island waters to far away deepwater regions where big fish are legendary.

fications to the millimeter. "I'm in the manufacturing business, but I love the outdoors," Jenkins says. "There's nothing I enjoy more than seeing someone catch a fish on one of my rods." He reminisces about one group who used his rods to reel in five big tuna and a 160-pound swordfish during one particular trip.

Jenkins runs the company in a hands-on way: He is his own sales force, marketing team, and delivery man, spending months on the road. It was a tough path, but Jenkins believed in the product and he kept pushing. Today, having bought out his two founding partners, his custom rods are available in shops along the East Coast from New England to Florida. Here on the Cape, Local Hooker rods are sold at Chatham Bait & Tackle, Badfish Outfitters in North Falmouth, Falmouth Bait and Tackle, Goose Hummock Shops in Orleans, and Sports Port of Hyannis. Local Hooker's future, Jenkins says, involves expanding into foul-weather gear, gaffs, harpoons, and leisure wear. "My goal is to build a brand right here on Cape Cod based on customer service and top quality," he says.

But the core of Local Hooker Rods boils down to that moment on the water. The fish starts to give line and the angler closes in. The fish makes a few more runs, each progressively shorter and with less gusto. Once the fish is within gaffing distance, the fight is over. The difference in the fight has come down to the skill of the angler and the quality of his equipment. The sharpest of hooks. The thinnest of lines. The strongest of rods. It's a simple life and a good one. 🎣

*Rob Conery is a freelance writer and an avid fisherman.*

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