



Comparing Ball Bearing Swivels With Barrel Swivels

By John Bette

We spend a lot of time talking about the snap on our leaders which connects to our lures, and rightfully so. However, we should address a few things at the other end — where the leader attaches to the fishing line.

In this column, I will break down your different options for connecting your line to your leader, focusing mainly on swivels. Two of the most popular style of swivels available on the market today are ball bearing swivels and barrel swivels. To keep things less confusing, I will go over each individually.

First is the ball bearing swivel, which is probably the most popular and widely used due to the fact they are very strong and rotate smoothly. These swivels are built from heavier stainless steel and have internal bearings inside to create a smooth rotation. A ball bearing application will allow the most freedom and balance in order to control any rolling of lures that have erratic action or rotation to them.

You want and need this smooth rotation with prop-style topwater lures, as well as in-line spinners or bucktails. At times, such lures require a lot of speed, so it is important they run balanced. A ball bearing swivel keeps them true and prevents them from rolling in the water, which also prevents your line from becoming twisted.

Trolling is another application for which ball bearing swivels are the best option. When trolling at any rate of speed, ball bearing swivels will help not only keep your lures running true, but allow them to move and utilize the full action for which they were designed. A lot of newer lures created by builders today are designed to have kick-out or “wandering” action. These swivels minimize the resistance between line and leader, giving your lures the freedom to do just that.

The drawback to ball bearing swivels

AFW Stainless Steel Swivel	Other Major Brands of Swivels	
<p>Stainless Steel Ring</p> <p>Stainless Steel Body</p>	<p>Stainless Steel Ring</p> <p>Brass Body</p>	<p>Brass Ring</p> <p>Brass Body</p>
100% Stainless Steel	Stainless Ring & Brass Body	All Brass

For the ultimate in durability, you should choose stainless steel swivels. Whether you should go with ball bearing or barrel swivels depends on the application.

is that in some cases they can be heavy and bulky. This is not a problem with large, heavy lures, or if moving at higher speeds while trolling. However, when using smaller or more finicky lures they might have a tendency to prevent the lures from obtaining their optimum performance. I'm going to be a bit partial and say my favorite ball bearing swivels are the Stealth Tackle brand. Other brands that are as solid as you will find anywhere are AFW, Sampo, Rosco, and Spro. You cannot go wrong with any of these.

Barrel swivels are predominantly made of lighter-weight material and have no internal bearing inside. They will not turn as freely and smoothly, but they do give you a degree of movement, which makes them great for use with smaller lures that are harder to balance and require more finesse. Smaller jerkbaits, glidebaits and twitchbaits can really be effective with the barrel swivel. You will also probably notice these lures have something in common — they do not rotate, or at least are not designed to spin. Thus, there is no need to have the quicker-moving ball bearing swivel.

Light weight or being weightless without any resistance is the key to the action of smaller lures, so having the right components for your leader plays a part. Barrel swivels are much lighter than ball bearing swivels, but will still help with balance and line twist. They do not, however, have the smoothness to correct

a fast-running lure as quickly as a ball bearing swivel because they do not have any internal bearings.

Now, barrel swivels sometimes have a bad reputation, and depending on the type you choose that may be correct. Many of them are made of brass, which over time will wear and crack. There is no internal bearing in them to keep the friction of metal against metal from building up and eventually wearing. On the other hand, higher quality barrel swivels and the ones that we should be using for musky fishing applications are made of stainless steel. These swivels are super strong yet still lightweight, and will hold up to almost anything a musky can dish out.

My personal favorites are the AFW Mighty Mini Barrel swivels. They are small and lightweight but still have superior strength compared to any of the brass models. While they may be a bit more expensive than brass, they are well worth the investment.

Being educated on something as small as a swivel, which is something that many just take for granted, not only helps put more fish in your boat but can also help prevent a mishap on the water.

I hope this helps clarify some of the differences between ball bearing swivels and barrel swivels. As always, remember that constantly inspecting your terminal tackle will keep the odds of success in your favor.