

BOWHUNTING

Do You Measure Up?

I like bowhunting for deer, so much so, I often mourn when my state's deer season makes the transition from archery-only to the firearm season.

Of course, I hunt with a rifle, too, but rest assured a world of things change in the deer woods when the firearms begin going off.

The deer go into a more pressured mode, and the woods just aren't as peaceful as before.

But of course, there's more to my affection for bowhunting than peace and quiet. Another reason I like the sport is because there are so many sides to it. And from where

I sit all these sides are good (especially when I happen to be sitting in a tree stand on a crisp, autumn day.)

Sure, there's always the sheer fun of being outdoors, but there's much more to it when using a bow and arrows.

At its foundation, bowhunting offers many hunters more opportunity. For example, throughout the country many states offer archery-only hunts at times of the year when other firearm seasons are closed. Early archery seasons often give you a head start on the other hunters. And what more does any outdoorsman need than another opportunity to hunt...another season to take part in?

But really, there's more to bowhunting than simply extending your season. More notable is the fact that when you grab the bow in place of the firearm you've moved onto another playing field—a field where you soon learn the saying, "a whole new ballgame" really carries a lot of truth.

Everything becomes up close and personal and learning to be successful comes in volumes, taught hunting trip by hunting trip, rather than page-by-page.



It's no doubt, there's a frustration factor involved in bowhunting. Beginners soon learn to understand the meaning of so-close, but-yet-so-far.

You also celebrate your successes and failures, because both teach you a little more.

It can also be addictive.

Oh sure, like that famed blind hog, every hunter finds an acorn now and then...and gets lucky and takes a game animal. But trust me on this; to be routinely successful, season-in, season-out, with a bow, you have to become a better hunter. For me, that alone is bowhunting's greatest reward—lessons learned.

Here's a look at a few more things that bowhunting teaches.

• **The ability to judge distance.** True laser rangefinders have made it easier, but you still have a limited range you need to know, normally within 30 yards. You have to know when game animals are in this range and when they are not.

• **Patience.** Unlike with a gun, bowhunters seldom can shoot a deer, turkey or other game animal as soon as they see it. With a bow you have to wait, for the right range, the right angle, the right moment to draw, etc.

Bowhunting can even help some hunters overcome the troubles sometimes caused by buck fever. Because of the close quarters required, many hunters learn to become more at ease when game animals are at close range.

• **Limitations in lethal range and firepower force you to watch—and learn.** Of course, there is much to be learned from simply watching the animals we hunt, and we certainly have to watch them closely when bowhunting—especially when it comes to waiting for the right shot.

It's true, you will get a better understanding through

PICK A SMALL SPOT AS YOUR POINT OF AIM

Bowhunting is definitely not point-and-shoot. Precision is everything with a bow.

The hunter often thinks not only about the flight of his arrow to his target, but to a very specific place on his target AND even where the arrow will pass through and exit.

Shot placement is everything. To be lethal you have to put the arrow in the right spot.

You also have to know your limitations and know when to pass on certain shots. Knowing when not to shoot is as important as knowing where to shoot. Poor judgment

in either case can result in failure or worse (i.e., a wounded, lost game animal).

One long-shared practice among archers is the "aim-small, hit-big" theory. Here is how it works.

It's a lot like when your baseball or softball coach tells you to pick out a spot on the ball. You concentrate so intently on "the spot" that even if you miss, you are actually still on target.

For example, while bowhunting you pick a tiny spot out on your target, like a fleck of

different hair coloring on a deer's vital area. Then you really concentrate your aim on this small spot before releasing the arrow.

True, you may not hit that small spot, but you will find that by "aiming small" you will consistently put more arrows in the required zone—whether it be for a clean kill or a high score in an archery tournament.

So aim small to score big. It is a technique worth considering the next time you practice and later when you head to the field.

bowhunting (even if it is only because we are waiting for a better shot). It is very likely you will say to yourself when you first take up the sport, "Why I never knew deer did that," or, "I've never seen that before."

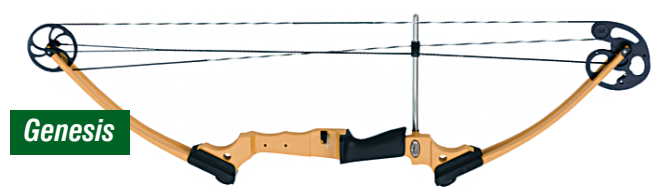
• **All-around woodsmanship.** Bowhunters have to know more about their game. They have to know where and why a game animal will be—and at close range.

You do this through learning food sources, habits, feeding areas, bedding areas and all routes in between.

Also in the skilled woodsman department, bowhunters have to learn how to hide better. You soon learn when you can move, when you can't and what you can do to otherwise go undetected within bow range (for example taking advantage of wind direction and scent control).

For some, bowhunting carries a frustration factor, and you really have to work harder at being successful. A lot of effort goes into it. And oh yeah, these are the same reasons some people enjoy it so much.

• **Strategy.** Bowhunting requires the hunter to put some thought into the game. You have to combine all of the above into a plan. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. But regardless of the outcome, it's always a lot of fun.



SELECTING YOUR FIRST BOW

Younger hunters looking for a first bow have several things to consider reports Art Henderson, warranty technician with Mathews, Inc.

The physical weight of the bow in hand and the poundage or amount of pull it takes to draw the bow are the first and foremost factors to consider.

Getting exactly what you want to shoot accurately and comfortably also falls into this category. It's also a reason young hunters may want to consider purchasing a bow at a business that can set it up for them—match the draw length to the shooter's arm and the draw weight to their strength.

"Having to shoot a bow that's uncomfortable and inaccurate can give anybody a sour taste for the sport, and that's unnecessary," Henderson said.

"Hunters of all skill levels should want their bows almost tailor-made."

Henderson also added that Mathews' new Mustang model is great for young hunters starting out. It is available in draw lengths ranging from 19- to 26-inches and has draw weights from 20- to 50 pounds.

"If you have a growing factor, as in you think you might outgrow your bow, the Mustang also works with you. You can change limbs, for relatively little cost (especially in comparison to buying another bow) and crank it up to max.

Another thing to consider when buying your first hunting bow is, "How easy is it to tune?" The easier you can tune a bow, the better performance you are likely to get out of it.

ARCHERY ACCESSORIES

So you have got the bow, now, what to go with it?

Yep, arrows, but that's a given.

Since it's your first bow you need to keep it simple—you need an arrow rest and sights.

In regards to an arrow rest, don't get anything too complicated or expensive. Get a rest that works and can take a lot of abuse.

Today's fiber optic sights certainly make it easier to see your target. There are some really good ones on the market with affordable prices.

Starting out, use only one or two sight pins. Incorporate more pins as your skill progresses.



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