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most effective handgun load made).

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Cartridge	Bullet	Velocity*
380 AUTO Reserve	88 JHP	1000 Ft/Sec.
9mm LUGER Marshal	100 JHP	1315 Ft/Sec.
M-P	125 JSP	1120 Ft/Sec.
38 SPECIAL		
Special Agent	110 JHP	1245 Ft/Sec.
Detective	125 JHP	1425 Ft/Sec.
Patrolman	125 JSP	1425 Ft/Sec.
Deputy	140 JHP	1200 Ft/Sec.
Match	148 HBWC-lead	825 Ft/Sec.
Service	158 SWC-lead	975 Ft/Sec.
Service	158 RN-lead	975 Ft/Sec.
Trooper	158 JSP	1025 Ft/Sec.
S.W.A.T.	158 JHP	1025 Ft/Sec.
38/357 Shotshell	#9 Shot	1150 Ft/Sec.
357 MAGNUM		
Special Agent	110 JHP	1700 Ft/Sec.
Detective	125 JHP	1900 Ft/Sec.
Patrolman	125 JSP	1900 Ft/Sec.
Deputy	140 JHP	1780 Ft/Sec.
Trooper	158 JSP	1625 Ft/Sec.
S.W.A.T.	158 JHP	1625 Ft/Sec.
44 MAGNUM		
Sheriff	200 JHP	1675 Ft/Sec.
Sheriff	240 JSP	1650 Ft/Sec.
44 Magnum Shotshell	#9 Shot	1200 Ft/Sec.
45 AUTO		
Inspector	200 JHP	1025 Ft/Sec.

\*Test barrel velocities.

no one else does—a tough, reusable plastic box, with a grid that holds each cartridge separate.

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# SECRETS TO MONSTER BUCKS

PAGE 8 BONUS SECTION

CONDENSED FROM JOHN WOOTTERS'S CLASSIC BOOK,

# Hunting Trophy Deer



## Maybe Tomorrow . . .

It was a December night, the kind that hunters know better than those who pass the winter inside a house, when the cold plucks and probes at every seam in a man's clothing. The five of us around the dying fire sat hushed, listening, wrapped in the splendor of the night sky. All our minds ran to the same theme: somewhere out there in the dark thickets there moved a great whitetail buck with Orion's light on his antler tips.

At last, one man rose and nudged the stub of a smoking stick back into the coals, stirring a flicker of flame. "Five a.m. comes early," he murmured. "I'm for the blankets. Tomorrow's a good day to kill a deer."

Excerpted from *Hunting Trophy Deer* by John Wootters. Copyright© by the author 1977. Reprinted with permission of the publisher: Winchester Press, 205 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017. Copies of the book may be obtained from the publisher at \$13.95, plus 55¢ postage.

"Cold, for sure," put in another figure, "and no moon and no wind. Maybe it'll be the day."

Nobody had to ask *what* day. "The day" means the day a deer hunter catches up with a good buck.

Another man stood up. "Maybe tomorrow's when I get my big one. Lord knows, I'm overdue. Twenty years, and I've never gotten lucky on a really good one. Maybe tomorrow..."

Have you heard it? Have you *said* it? So did I, for about the first 25 years I hunted whitetails. In the breast of almost every meat hunter there beats the heart of a secret, frustrated trophy hunter. Almost every one of America's millions of deer hunters is at least conscious of the possibility of encountering that buck of a lifetime on any given day in the woods. They may not be holding out for him, but they'd love to find him just once—yet, somehow, they never do. They have no luck with big bucks.

The truth is that there is—almost—no such thing!

Think back on the hunters you've known who have taken the biggest racks. Not many of them, I'll bet, have knocked over only *one* big one; these are the same men who show up year after year with exceptional heads, the fellows who *usually* (not occasionally) produce the biggest buck in camp every season or the best one killed in that particular area. They're consistent, and nobody can be that consistently lucky.

The reason is simply that these men know things most hunters haven't bothered to figure out, and they do things most hunters don't do. They don't go out and walk around in the woods, *hoping* for a better-than-average buck; they work at finding him, and they never rely on mere "luck."

The truth is that most hunters reading this already have most of the know-how and hunting skills needed to nail a big buck on purpose, not by chance. For, in fact, the difference between a trophy hunter and a meat hunter is mostly a matter of *attitude*.

I've been fortunate enough to hunt most of the world's most glamorous big game, and I still think that a trophy whitetail is the single most exciting and most demanding animal on the face of the earth. You can't buy one, and when you hang one on the wall you can be justly proud, because he's the best proof in the world that you're a *hunter*.

No one begins as a hunter of trophy bucks. I suppose I've shot 30 or

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40 small whitetails, little three, five, and six-pointers, even spikes and fork-horns, and small eight-point heads, deer not more than two and a half years old, and I'm certainly not ashamed of a one of them. That was my apprenticeship. But make no mistake about it; the man who has a row of giant antlers nailed up in his garage is a master hunter. He may very well knock over a forkhorn, or even a doe now and then, for the larder, but he knows something most hunters don't know about whitetails, and he knows how to put that knowledge to the best use.

And he is a conservationist in the best sense. People—even some hunters, to my constant amazement—condemn trophy hunting as some sort of weird exercise in *machismo*. They say that trophy hunting strips out the finest breeding stock and impoverishes the herd's gene pool, but such critics merely reveal their own ignorance.

To begin with, a real trophy hunter shoots far fewer animals than the meat hunter, which, in itself, means he affects the population less. Then, his highly selective hunting is focused on very old animals, since no buck can be considered a real trophy until he is in his sixth year, at least. This means that he has already made whatever contribution to the herd that he is likely to make and may be well past his breeding prime.

The truth is that trophy hunting and all that goes with it is biologically sound deer management. The incidence of trophy-class males in a deer population is a very good index to the health, vigor, and balance of the herd.

In herds managed merely to produce some kind of a buck for as many hunters as possible, there can be few or no trophies, even though hunters may see plenty of deer in the woods.

It turns out, then, that the average size of the bucks' antlers in a deer population is a pretty good index to the overall health and quality of that herd, and that any herd with animals that interest a true trophy hunter is a well-managed herd. It is also a herd, for the information of the few anti-hunting preservationists who may read this book, that most closely resembles a "natural" unharmed herd in its age and sex composition.

That's why I say it's time to quit cowering on the defensive from the assaults of the anti-hunters and hiding behind the "I eat everything I kill" argument. I, personally, do eat most of what I kill, but I eat it because I *like* it. I hunt, however, for sport, and trophy bucks provide the grandest sport the outdoors has to offer. No ethical hunter has anything to apologize for to the anti-hunting faddists and freaks, knowing that he and his kind have been the only salvation for American wildlife to date. The same men who launched the American conservation movement also founded the Boone and Crockett Club, the very mecca of trophy hunters. I regard it as an honor to be called a "trophy hunter." I hope they carve it on my gravestone!

In the meantime, may there be many more starry nights around a murmuring, flickering campfire, with good companions saying, "Maybe tomorrow..."



Despite broad experience with the world's most glamorous game, Wootters still calls the trophy whitetail the most exciting and demanding animal on the face of the earth. When you hang one on the wall you can be proud because you have proof you're a hunter.

## What Is a Trophy Buck?

I've used the terms "trophy buck" or "trophy deer" several times without definition of the word "trophy." The reader may be surprised to find that I'm perfectly satisfied with the dictionary definition: a memento of a personal achievement. That dictionary says nothing about number of points, inside spread, or dressed weight, and I say that there is no single set of such specifications which can cover all regions, all hunters, and all situations. Under some circumstances, even a spike buck might qualify as a legitimate trophy, as in the case of a youngster's first kill.

Many regions simply haven't the genetic potential to produce outsized antlers, and the hunter who sets his heart on a Boone and Crockett Club record in such areas is beaten before he sets foot in the woods. Yet he may still be able to collect a trophy head there, under my dictionary definition of the word. Personal tastes and standards vary between individuals; a buck you might disdain could be the one-in-a-lifetime trophy for me... or vice versa.

The ultimate achievement in trophy deer hunting is, of course, a head which is listed in the Boone and Crockett Club Records of North American Big Game, but it must be understood that this is not the definition of a trophy head that will apply through this book. The best statistics for the last few seasons, as I write this, suggest that not more than one whitetail rack out of each *one million* bucks killed in the U.S. qualifies as a B&C record. I'm not certain what percentage of the antlers taken of any species of deer should be recognized in a records-keeping system, but I'm pretty sure that it should be more than the top .000001 percent!

For purposes of clarity, I shall use the terms "record" or "record-book" buck to mean a head scoring at least 170 points under the Boone and Crockett system of measurement, and the term "record-class" buck to indicate one scoring between 150 and 170 points. My rationale for this distinction is that whitetails scoring 150 B&C points were admitted to the record lists as recently as 1962. These numbers apply, of course, to whitetails in the *typical* category; the same rationale will be used with reference to nontypical whitetails and both typical and nontypical mule deer. If a

head would have qualified as a record under the 1962 rules, I'll call it a "record-class" trophy here.

Two things are for sure: as my friend and mentor Jack O'Connor says, the *big* ones always look big (at first glance), and if you find yourself wondering if a buck is big enough, he probably isn't.

In the meantime, the establishment of personal goals in terms of antler size and the discipline to make certain they're met *before* you shoot, however great the pressure, are the two steps to ensure against disappointment as a hunter accepts the challenge of the great trophy bucks.

## Field Judging Heads

Since relatively few of us are privileged to see that many live bucks in the field, most of the process of learning to evaluate trophies must necessarily be carried out on mounted heads or photographs. Unfortunately, taxidermists' forms are deliberately designed to minimize apparent ear spread, in order to make the rack look as wide as possible, and the ear-tip spread is rarely much more than 14½ inches, often less. But my measurements on dead deer indicate that the spread is much closer to 16 inches as a national average (big bucks) and possibly as much as 18 inches on a big northern whitetail.

I haven't measured nearly as many mulies as I have whitetails, but those I have measured ranged from 18 inches ear tip to ear tip on desert mule bucks, up to a full 22 inches on big Rocky Mountain deer.

Again, ear position is highly variable, and you must be careful to make spread estimates only from the full-alert frontal aspect.

With practice, a hunter should be able to estimate maximum inside spread very quickly in the field. Take 15½ or 16 inches as the ear-tip spread (on all except Coues and other small subspecies of whitetails), and figure how much wider the inside spread is. With this figure in mind, it shouldn't be too difficult to grab a quick estimate of the longest tines and to make an eyeball guess as to whether there is a great difference in tine length on each side or whether the points are fairly near the same length. I usually find myself arriving at a quick *average* tine-length figure, excluding the brow tines or eyeguards, rather than trying to estimate each one separately. In the process, I have automatically counted at least the normal or "typical" points and noted the

presence of any nontypical tines.

The only other elements to be figured are beam thickness and beam length. Beam massiveness is self-evident; if head is particularly heavy, it will be the first thing you notice. About the only clue I can offer for making a really serious guess at circumference is to note that the average rifle's pistol grip is about 4½ to 5 inches around the smallest point. It happens also to be at about that circumference at the bases that whitetail heads begin to get into the most commonly accepted "trophy" category. With some sort of comparison to your rifle's pistol grip established, you can check in an instant to see whether the antlers carry their massiveness at the base well out toward the tips or whether they tend to taper rapidly.

As for beam length, I know of no way except simple experience to even guess about beam length, but there are a few tips which may be helpful. If the head has great inside spread—say, 20 inches or more—and the tips of the beams come close together in front, beam length will probably be greater than 25 inches and maybe much greater. This much can be seen when viewing the deer from the front. If you can see him from the side as well, try to notice how close his beam tips come to touching a vertical line drawn upward from his nose. If they're close, his main beams will be respectable and may be very long.

## Big Bucks Are Different

If big-buck hunters are different—and usually better—than run-of-the-mill deer hunters, so are the animals they seek. Every deer-hunting book ever written has stated that bucks are not like does in their habits and behavior, and that's true. But mature bucks—that means five-year-olds and older—are so different from the younger males that they might as well be a separate species.

The most obvious difference is simply that a mature buck has survived at least five hunting seasons. He has experience that a younger buck cannot have. Various sensory perceptions have more meaning to him, and his life-style must necessarily have been altered by his experiences, or he would not have lived to maturity in most areas today.

At three and a half years, he shows his potential for body size and antler pattern. His skeletal growth is nearly complete, and his musculature is developing into heavy shoulders, blocky hams, and a powerful neck to wield



For the herd's dominant bucks, the primary biological function is breeding. During the brief rutting season, they will cut their food intake by half and may lose as much as 20 percent of their body weight within one month, as can be seen on these bucks.

the antlers that are beginning to be taken seriously by other deer in the herd. During this season's rut, he is likely to be a definite factor. And if he makes it through this third full hunting season, he has been awarded a sort of master's degree in evasive tactics. For the rest of his life, he will be very, very difficult to catch in a set of rifle sights.

During the fourth full year of life, the buck is, for all practical purposes, mature. Depending on the composition of the herd, he may well be *the* dominant buck in his neck of the woods. If there are older, bigger bucks in the area, he may now challenge them boldly and win his share of the battles. By now, his antlers are big (though they will continue to improve somewhat over the years), and their characteristic pattern will be very obvious. Tendencies toward extra-wide spread, many points or abnormal points, great weight, or whatever will be clear in this fourth set of antlers.

By now, too, his life-style is well-established. He has learned that certain patterns of movement, certain bedding areas, and certain hours offer him fewer frantic alarms and greater serenity. He probably has retreated to terrain into which few hunters penetrate, and where none *can* penetrate without his knowing long before he is in danger and from which two or more well-tested escape routes exist. He has gained courage and cunning and knows how to stand motionless, controlling his nerves, as an unseeing human passes within yards, crashing through the woods and spreading his nauseating scent about. Unconsciously, he has begun to order his daily routine more toward the hours of darkness and to route himself to avoid openings; now he leaves the trail to skirt the margins of a meadow in the shadows at the edge of the for-

est, rather than follow his companions blithely across the sunlit center of the clearing.

His armor has become almost complete. Indeed, he may have, by now, become completely unkillable. There are such bucks, deer whose chosen habitat protects them so perfectly that no legal hunting technique can take them. I've hunted several such, together with many other veteran hunters of proven skill, and been defeated year after year.

There was one, a monstrous ten-pointer, which could be seen on almost any day with binoculars, but simply could not be approached within rifle range. He lived in a broad, shallow draw on the side of a rocky hill, and any daytime approach sky-lined the hunter for many minutes long before he could try even a desperately long shot. An approach before daylight was inevitably so noisy, in the loose rocks, that the buck was alerted. We tried big, noisy drives and slow, subtle, one-man drives with a gun at each end of the buck's known escape routes. We attempted to install brush blinds, and he never came near them. We tried to rattle him up, without success. Not only did we never kill that deer, but none of us ever fired a rifle at him. Unless he died of old age, he's still there.

That is the sort of animal the trophy hunter seeks by choice.

We tend, however, to give such animals too much credit for sheer, human-type intelligence. In fact, they are not really smart, but rather superlatively clever and wary, the absolute masters of their habitat. A big buck behaves as he does because that's the way he was programmed by nature. He reacts so effectively precisely because he cannot think in the way that we do, and he therefore never suffers from the indecision that

consideration of several alternatives can present. He doesn't move mostly at night because he knows that sportsmen cannot legally hunt him then, but because his experience has been that he is less often disturbed during the hours of darkness.

He doesn't select a bed-ground after an intellectual appraisal of the surrounding terrain and wind direction. Instead, he lies down in an impregnable spot simply because he has learned, in his dim animal mind, that this is a good place and a safe place.

We can handicap ourselves psychologically by believing that a trophy buck is invulnerable, with supernatural abilities, whereas, in fact, some of these characteristics can actually be used against the old fellow by a hunter who knows what he's about.

## Mule Deer & Whitetails

The life-cycle of a mule deer is not so very different, in most ways, from that of a whitetail. A mulie, too, is a trophy at age five and a half (and seldom before), if he is ever to be one.

There are two major differences in the mulie's life-style, compared to his whitetail cousin. First, he is not territorial. The whitetail usually spends his entire life within a 1-square-mile area, commonly much smaller. This permits him to learn the territory with an uncanny thoroughness, understanding all the subtle relationships of contours and knowing every trail, shrub, rock, and tree.

A mule deer, however, covers a lot more ground during his annual wanderings and, although he certainly knows his range better than any hunter could ever hope to, he cannot have the familiarity of the whitetail with his home territory. I believe this is why mule deer bucks tend more to *run* for safety, in contrast to the whitetail, which relies much more on *hiding*. It is also why the hunter will occasionally see a mule buck make what seems to be a simple blunder in trying to escape, sometimes boxing himself into a canyon or rimrocking himself.

The other chief difference between mulies and whitetails is that the former are migratory, at least to some extent. There are records of mule deer herds regularly migrating more than 100 miles, twice each year. Much more common, however, is a relatively short migration in the vertical plane. The summering grounds are high up in the mountains, often above timberline, sometimes at elevations of more than 11,000 feet above

sea level. The onset of winter, however, eventually drives the herds down into the valleys, away from the impossibly deep snows at high altitudes, and this descent often involves horizontal movement of a dozen miles or more even in sedentary herds.

In past years, the mature bucks tended to migrate downward somewhat earlier than the does and fawns, it seemed to me. But over the last dozen years or so it appears that a distinct change has occurred in the habits of the animals, presumably because of heavier and more pervasive hunting pressure. Now it seems that the major bucks are the very last to leave the high country, and furthermore that they can endure the alpine winter and deep snow even longer than the longer-legged, bigger elk which share their ranges. I do know that it takes real, honest-to-gosh *winter*, and not just a few snow flurries, to bring the big bucks down in certain heavily hunted regions now.

The hunter, therefore, has an extra dimension to contend with: he must not only find deer, and then the bucks, but he has to try to figure at what elevation they'll be tomorrow or next week, whereas the whitetail hunter can be confident that a big whitetail will almost always be within a half-mile radius, the year around.

While the whitetail buck consorts with only one female at a time and remains with her only a few hours at most, the mulie collects a harem—if he's dominant enough—of three or four does, on the average, and defends his breeding rights to these females from other males. The ladies have much more to say about the permanence of this relationship, however,

than do cow elk, for example. If a doe wanders away to take up with another buck, the herd buck never tries to bully her back into line. If the other buck comes too close, however, and the two males are reasonably well matched, there may be a battle.

Mulies are by no means as aggressive as whitetails, and serious fights between bucks are neither as frequent nor as savage as those between whitetails. Mule deer antlers are quite often damaged in these late-winter battles, however, apparently because the extreme cold makes the antler material brittle and more easily broken.

Finally, there are distinct differences between the two species in general personality. The mule deer has had a reputation for dumbness for many generations, while the whitetail has always been conceded a high ranking on the IQ scale. I believe that the mule deer is a bit more trusting, overall, than a whitetail, but I'm not sure the difference is really one of intelligence. After all, the whitetail has about 400 years of experience with white men armed with guns, whereas the real pressure on the mulie has developed only since the end of World War II.

But the real trophy-class mule bucks are almost as distinct in their habits from the other deer in the herd as big whitetails are, and the hunter who counts heavily on stupidity in record bucks of either species to put his trophy on the wall is going to have a long wait for a taxidermist's bill. Except in herds that have been totally protected from hunting, the biggest trophy deer simply don't get that way by being stupid.



Photograph By Leonard Lee Rue III

As the seasons change, this fine nontypical mule deer buck will migrate and gather a small harem as the rut begins. His smaller whitetail counterpart is a homebody, though, and stays in one area. He also differs by attending one doe at a time during the rut.

## The All-Important Rut

I am constantly amazed at the number of fairly experienced hunters who really do not understand the biological mechanics of whitetail reproduction. Without such basic knowledge, a hunter's chances of catching up with a trophy buck range somewhere between none... and none *whatsoever!*

Once his antlers are cleaned and polished in early autumn, the buck is capable of breeding. At about the same time, he begins to feel a restlessness and a sudden resentment toward other bucks in whose company he has spent the summer. As the season progresses, he becomes downright belligerent and settles any small differences of opinion as to his proper place in the dominance rankings with his gleaming new weapons. Note that these fights have nothing to do with any particular doe; they're purely for the purpose of establishing status for the exhausting days to come.

Finally, the dominant bucks stake out breeding territories, which are marked around their boundaries with a secretion of a gland at the forward corner of the eye, called the preorbital gland.

These so-called "breeding rubs" are entirely different in appearance from those made a couple of months earlier in the process of polishing the antlers. They are much more savage, with the bushes or saplings severely damaged and sometimes killed. The ground at the base of these rubs is usually torn and pawed, and sometimes the buck kneels and gores the soil.

A breeding territory can sometimes be identified merely by several, or even dozens, of minor rubs along with a few major ones within a 100-yard radius. Somewhere in his territory, the dominant buck makes one or more *scrapes*. A scrape is a pawed-out spot in the soil, perhaps a couple of feet long by 15 inches wide, almost always located on a trail in a clearing, and invariably located so that twigs and foliage from a shrub or tree overhang it. The maker urinates in the scrape, in such a posture that the urine runs down over his tarsal glands and carries their secretion to the ground. He paws like a mad bull, until the scrape is muddy and smelly. In the process, he will mesh his antlers with the aforementioned overhanging branches and twist and bat-

concentrating, he can learn to notice detail that would escape him in his normal environment. Most of all, the hunter's eye can work in conjunction with his brain, which can tell it where to look and what to look for.

The hunter must learn not to look for *whole* animals, but merely objects which somehow don't fit the patterns of the brush, and he must constantly search into the *edges* of the cover with his eyes, never expecting to see the whole animal standing in the clear. This is an art that the still-hunter *must* develop, else he is better off on a stand.

The fact is that a flesh-and-blood buck, especially one in the trophy category, will damn seldom be observed standing boldly in the open, and if you are going to see him at all, it will have to be by picking out pieces and parts of him and mentally fitting him together like a puzzle.

As to still-hunting technique, the all-important mandate is to go *slowly*. This is the most difficult thing to learn in still-hunting. Depending on the cover, a few hundred yards in an entire morning may be too fast! Very commonly, I've still-hunted from sun-up until noon, and then turned and walked back to my car, at a normal pace, in less than 15 minutes.

A good rule is as follows: never take a single step until you have visually examined every possible cranny in the cover which is visible from your position. Then take one step, or ten, smoothly and quietly, to secure a fresh vista and stop and stand motionless while you probe the cover again with your eyes.

Every hunter can learn a lot from the deer he hunts as to how to handle himself in the woods. Keep yourself inside the edges of the brush, as a buck does. When you must cross an opening a few yards wide, do it smoothly and swiftly, after satisfying yourself that you're alone. When you stop, always choose at least a wisp of cover into which your motionless figure will merge. Never skylight yourself, and remember your silhouette.

If all this sounds like an awful lot of trouble, be assured that it certainly is. That is why there are so very, very few skilled still-hunters on the face of the earth.

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## Stand Hunting

If still-hunting is the epitome of the hunter's arts, then stand hunting is the peak of his wisdom. I know many serious trophy hunters who have never killed a buck in any other way. The reason for this outstanding success is twofold: first, whitetails are

inclined to follow similar patterns of movement from day to day if not disturbed, and second, the hunter is motionless while the deer is moving. Since whitetails' eyes are incredibly keen for motion, and those of the typical hunter not so hot for anything *except* motion, this situation shifts the odds considerably in the hunter's favor.

Stand hunting is by no means devoid of skills. Perhaps the most important of these is selecting the stand location, which requires considerable scouting for sign, and considerable understanding of what is found, not to mention sun and wind directions. There are several things covered by the word "stand." Where legal, tree platforms are probably the most common type. In regions like my beloved Texas, where stout trees are few and far between, the same function is served by tower stands. Either kind of stand elevates the hunter's eyes high enough to cover a good deal of country that couldn't be seen from the ground, and, in theory, places him above the normal line of vision of the animals he hunts.

There are problems unique to tree and tower stands. In their simplest forms, they are downright dangerous. I know of a few deaths resulting from a rotten branch or board suddenly giving way. There are also cases of a dropped rifle landing on its butt and firing straight up, with regrettable consequences.

Another problem is wind, which can not only freeze the hunter in his perch, but because of the movements of a tree, waving in a gusty wind, offers a fascinating new challenge in long-range shooting.

Despite these drawbacks, elevated stands are just the ticket in many areas and good ones are well worth the trouble and expense to set in place. Which should be done, I might add, many months in advance of the hunting season to permit the local whitetails to become accustomed to their presence.

Certain deer "stands" are really nothing more than well-located stumps, logs, rocks, or tree trunks which offer a hunter a fairly comfortable place to sit, overlooking a trail or attractive area which deer are known to "use." The comfort of such places is important simply because a man can sit motionless a lot longer if he's comfortable than if he's cramped, cold, twisted, or jabbed, and motionlessness is the key to hunting this kind of stand.

One other trick to stand hunting concerns the approach to the standing place. I try to approach upwind, of course, if possible. If not, I'll walk straight *downwind* to the stand, pref-

erably across the middle of the most open area visible from where I intend to sit. In this way, I'll have my chance at a buck before he reaches either my trail or my scent stream, provided the wind is steady.

## Horn Rattling

In essence, horn-rattling is nothing more than the simulation of the sounds of a fight between two white-tail bucks, to attract bucks within gunshot range. "Rattling" is neither a myth nor a tall Texas tale. It will work anywhere whitetails roam if conditions are right. About those special conditions: First, the local deer herd must be in or near the peak of the rut. Second, there must be a fairly good balance to the herd. Where five or ten (or more) does exist for each breeding buck, rattling may work but too rarely to rely on as a regular hunting method.

Third, for *consistent* results, a horn-rattler must know what he's about. If there's a secret, it's in knowing when and where to rattle, rather than how to rattle.

There is also the matter of knowing where *not* to rattle, and heavily hunted public land is one of those places. Expert rattling on public land may be tantamount to suicide. Imagine the state of mind of the average public-land hunter when he hears the sounds of two bucks fighting furiously. As he approaches the scene of the supposed battle, he sees a movement in the bushes, and he *knows* it has to be a buck. Guess what happens next.

We see two different kinds of responses, the "chargers" and the "sneakers." The chargers are the bucks which literally charge the sound of the horns, eyes blazing, nostrils flared, hair standing on end, ears drooping and laid back (a characteristic threat gesture). They come at a dead run, swatting and slashing with their antlers at shrubs that get in their way. It's quite a sight.

The chargers are always exciting, but very few bucks put on such an exhibition when coming to the rattling horns. Most appear walking briskly or actually stalking the sounds, circling and testing the wind, reluctant to expose themselves until they have the situation sized up. Really big bucks may respond in either way, and no one knows why the differences. Whatever they are, the hunter must set himself up for the sneaker in every case; the charger will be easy if one happens to show up.

The ideal rattling spot is one near an active scrape or at least in an area known to be inhabited by a dominant

buck, with good concealment for the hunter, and good visibility in all directions, especially downwind. However, rattling is largely futile on really windy days. Cold, dead-calm, bright weather is perfect, and a little breeze is acceptable, but a strong wind cancels out rattling as a viable technique.

The trick is to make a *lot* of noise, but the right kind of noise. According to my lights, the right sequence of noise is roughly as follows. I try to locate my position next to some dry brush, and if the locality is gravelly, so much the better. I begin by clashing the two sawed-off antlers together as loudly as possible and then mesh



Experienced horn "rattlers" can take advantage of the rut to bring bucks in especially on calm days when sound carries far.

the tines and shake them, pushing them together very hard, to produce a somewhat disjointed sequence of rubbing, clattering sounds. After perhaps 30 seconds of this, I rip them apart and immediately use them to thrash the dry brush and pound the ground to simulate thumping hooves and antlers against the shrubbery. I often rattle standing up, in which case I stomp furiously with my own feet and bash the limbs of whatever tree I'm using for camouflage. All this is done as loudly as I can make it; the more I can sound like a pair of bull moose having at each other, the better.

I then lay the rattles aside and get my hands on my rifle. It's very common to have a buck on top of you even before you complete this whole sequence of racket. If nothing shows up within 10 to 15 minutes, I go to work again. This time, I omit the loud clash, merely meshing the tines and tickling them lightly for a few seconds. If a buck fails to appear after a minute or two, I thrust one rattle into the dry bush and shake, twist, and scrape it violently, then go back to the ground-thumping and

gravel-raking. Of the hundreds of bucks I've drawn to the rattling horns, I think most of them appeared during or just after this second sequence, and I stay on hair-trigger alert to grab the gun.

## Choosing a Firearm

I will now infuriate the archers, muzzleloaders, and pistoleros by pointing out that these weapons are unsuitable for serious trophy hunting. I hasten to add that I often hunt with a muzzleloading rifle or a handgun. Furthermore, I have the deepest respect for the serious bowmen and the skills they must develop. Nevertheless, archery tackle, charcoal burners, and belt guns all share one fatal limitation for trophy hunting, and that is range. A chance at a really superb trophy buck comes very seldom. It's often a difficult shot. The trophy hunter is unwise, in my opinion, to rely on a primitive weapon (the exceptions being the special primitive weapons seasons now common in good deer states).

Although not normally regarded as a primitive weapon, perhaps the shotgun should be, as it suffers from the same limitation on effective range, even with slugs, as the muzzleloading rifle. It is, however, the only type of firearm permitted in several states.

If you pinned me down, I'd have to say that—for honest-to-gosh trophy hunting, remember—I'd want a cartridge driving a bullet not lighter than .26 caliber, and would impose a minimum velocity on such rounds of about 3000 feet per second. At the other end of the spectrum, I feel no need for anything more potent than a .30 caliber 150-grain bullet traveling at least 2800 feet per second.

Pin me down even harder, and I'd say get a .270, .280, 7x57mm, or .308.

Yes, I'm aware that I probably left out your favorite. Please be advised that I have killed deer with nearly all the applicable commercial rounds, quite a few deer with some of them, and that among them are some particular favorites of mine. But they have gradually been supplanted by other chamberings as my experience has increased and my orientation toward trophy bucks has become more fixed. Big deer are just that—big. They take some serious killing. The smaller cartridges will do the job some of the time, perhaps even most of the time, but not all of the time, which is the minimum acceptable criterion.

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