

Perspective of a Low Tech Man in a High Tech World

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ROBERT DALEY

It was October, 1971. I was eleven years old. My dad and I had gone to the deer camp, a place called Buck Snort in Claiborne County, to enjoy a weekend of squirrel hunting. As we were walking through the clubhouse I looked down at a bunk bed and noticed something that instantly grabbed my attention. To the adventurous mind of this eleven year old boy it was something of beauty I would later learn was called a recurve bow. Now, I have a twenty pound yellow Ben Pearson fiberglass Jet Bow and wood arrows with crimped metal tips that came from the hardware store, and I had shot kid bows with play arrows since I was old enough to pull one back. Yes, even as far back as the arrows with the rubber suction cups on them. But never had I seen anything like the amazing instrument of archery I was looking at on that bunk, a real hunting bow with real hunting arrows tipped with

razor sharp broadheads. I asked my dad, "What's that?" He said, "That belongs to one of the bowhunters." This was a term I had never heard before. I said, "One of the what?" "Bowhunters," he said. "They hunt deer with those." I just stood there in amazement, staring at it and wanting so much to pick it up and hold it, but, as my dad has taught me well, I didn't dare mess with anyone else's "stuff." And this was grown-up stuff, the real deal. I was drawn to it like a teenage boy to his first love. As I watched and listened to the bowhunters that weekend I became more intrigued and was so fascinated by the concept of hunting deer with a bow and arrow that I told my dad I wanted to do that. And one year later in October of 1972 at the age of twelve, a new passion manifested and I became a bowhunter. I didn't have anyone to teach me about shooting a bow at that time. I was pretty much on my own with it

except for learning what I could by listening to the other bowhunters of the deer camp. So it wouldn't be until four years later on November 13, 1976 with a fifty-two pound Damon Howatt Super Diablo that I killed my first deer, a spike buck. There would be no stopping me now.

A few years prior to this a new invention came into the arena and took the archery industry by storm. Enter the compound bow. With its cables and pulleys it was designed to shoot farther, flatter and with thirty percent let off being a big deal back then, a person shooting a sixty-five pound bow would only be holding about forty-five pounds at full draw. Nowadays, seventy-five to eighty percent let off is the norm with a person shooting a seventy pound bow holding about twenty pounds at full draw.

I was the last one at Buck Snort to purchase a compound, mainly because

I didn't have the money. But when I did in 1977 my choice was a Damon Howatt Warthog that had a peak draw weight of sixty-five pounds. I would hunt with my Warthog for the next sixteen years, taking many deer with it. The one thing that made me different from the other bowhunters at Buck Snort was the fact that I never used sights or a mechanical release in all the years I hunted with the compound. I did put a pendulum sight on my bow once but found I was more confident and more comfortable shooting instinctively, which, basically is simply looking at my target, focusing on a spot and shooting. I'll discuss this more later.

Around 1992 I made the transition back to traditional archery and was again shooting my Super Diablo. I had been very fortunate in meeting and becoming friends with many others whose preference was traditional archery. I joined a club, got into shooting 3D and was having more fun than I had with my compound. Now, let's fast forward to the present. I still enjoy shooting a recurve and I've learned there is so much more you can do with a traditional bow that you cannot and will not do with a compound. I am a member and co-founder of Southern Traditional Archery Association and for the past twenty-four years the Mississippi Wildlife Federation has been so gracious in allowing us to have our traditional archery booth at the Mississippi Wildlife Extravaganza. While the majority of our shooters are kids, what we are is a traditional archery booth where anyone of any age can come in and shoot a traditional bow. We are equipped for everyone from the tiniest tot to the how-big-a-boy-are-ya. I meet and



Robert Daley at the Southern Traditional Archery Booth

talk with a lot of die-hard compound shooters each year at 'Ganza and we have conversations about compound vs. traditional.

In today's archery world there is a friendly rivalry between compound and traditional. There are pros and cons to each one. I want to stress "friendly rivalry," because it should never get more serious than that. We jokingly refer to their training wheels and they likewise refer to our stick and string... no big deal, no problem. We are all out there to have fun and it

is no one's business but the individual shooter as to what he or she prefers, when hunting both are quite capable of taking care of business.

Let's look at the modern compound with its high-tech sights and mechanical release, a very fast shooter with speeds up to 360 plus feet per second using today's carbon arrows, which have also become popular with traditional archers. It's no wonder that a compound shooter with a rock steady bow arm and magnification lenses on their sights



can nail the twelve-ring on a deer target from fifty or sixty yards. That's awesome! Let's just go ahead and say you won't likely see a traditional shooter do that! Nor should you bet your money on someone with a recurve or longbow shooting groups as tightly as that of a compound shooter. So there are some obvious advantages to shooting a modern high-tech compound including that fact that when the bow is sighted in there may not be the need for frequent practice like there is with traditional bows. Some people, due to work schedules, may not have sufficient time to get the practice they need with a traditional bow and so they opt for the compound with sights and release aid. My son, Curt, had to make this choice last year. He called me one day to tell me he was getting a compound because he didn't have

time to practice with his recurve. He said he still wanted to bow hunt but didn't want to take his recurve to the woods and end up gut-shooting or crippling a deer. I was very proud of him for making such a mature and responsible decision.

Let me explain something about the compound that differs from the traditional bow. It has to do with form, which is very important. The shooter must be able to hold the bow vertical because the arrow is sitting a few inches or more above the bow hand and tilting or canting the bow would move the arrow two to four inches to the side and out of the sight picture. If you're a compound shooter, picture in your mind what I am talking about. Got the visual? This is you every time you shoot. No change. No variety. It is the same every time you shoot. I've gone through

this scenario with many compound shooters at the Extravaganza and they have all agreed with me on this. If you're hunting and you see a deer and there's a tree limb in the way of your being able to draw your bow in perfect form for the shot, you depend on that deer moving to give you a more open shot. Of course, if you're hunting in a food plot there likely won't be any tree limbs to get in your way and this scenario won't apply to you. Now all you have to do is get the yardage right and use the correct pin.

Now let's look at the traditional bow, a thing of beauty that actually looks like a bow and not a machine. Okay, that was a little pinch of that friendly rivalry humor. With a traditional bow form it is also important in terms of how you grip the bow, draw, anchor and release. A grip that is too tight can cause you

to torque the bow when you release, which will usually cause the arrow to go left or right, depending on a left- or right-handed shooter. Next is a smooth draw coming to a consistent anchor. Some people pull the string back with three fingers under the arrow nock and two under, which we refer to as the split finger. I like to anchor with my middle finger in the corner of my mouth. Now, to release just let the string slide off the fingers. Never pluck the string. A few years ago a friend shot a two inch group at twenty-five yards with his recurve. Compound shooters are thinking, "So what?" But for a traditional archer shooting instinctive that was pretty darn good. I noticed each time he shot he kept his hand pressed against his face until his arrow hit the target, instead of letting his hand recoil back upon release. The only thing that moved was his fingers, allowing him a much smoother release. After watching him I tried this little variation in my release and couldn't believe the improvement. Sometimes the smallest change can make the biggest difference.

People ask me all the time, "How far can you hit something with one of those bows?" And my answer is simple, as far as you are used to practicing. If you never practice farther than twenty-five yards I would not suggest attempting a forty yard shot on a game animal. I have watched people nail targets in the kill zone from fifty yards because they practice long distance shooting. I don't practice farther than about thirty yards because where I hunt it's fairly thick and a ten to twenty or twenty-five yard shot is much more typical.

What about penetration? Don't underestimate a traditional bow.

I've made pass-through shots on a deer from thirty yards with a fifty-two pound recurve and wood arrows with two-blade broadheads that I sharpened with a file. People who have never known anything but the compound may not realize that you don't have to shoot three hundred feet per second to make a pass-through shot on a deer. A recurve that shoots two hundred or more feet per second is considered a fast shooter. A very good friend of mine has a sixty-two pound recurve that was chronographed at two hundred twenty feet per second. For a traditional bow, that's smokin'! Just a little FYI: a recurve, typically, is going to shoot faster than a longbow because of the difference in design. But the longbow will also get the job done quite well.

In the scenario I talked about earlier with the compound, that tree limb doesn't bother me too much. I can tilt, or cant, my bow as much as I need to, bend at the waist, get down on one knee, both knees or as I have demonstrated many times at the Extravaganza, I can lie on my stomach and shoot if I have to because with a traditional bow it doesn't matter how you contort your body. If you can pull the string back you can shoot that bow.

What is instinctive shooting? How do you aim at that thing? These are two questions I hear often. At 'Ganza, we can't help but get a little tickled when we see someone closing one eye and trying to look down the arrow shaft as if they're looking down a gun barrel or looking through a sight that isn't there. To explain instinctive



shooting, I usually start by asking the boys if they ever played baseball. Most of them say yes. I asked them if they were pretty good and throwing the baseball and putting it in the other guy's glove. Well, of course, they all say yes. Then I ask them, "What kind of sight did you use for that?" and they first look at me as if I am some kind of nut. Maybe I am, but then it begins to make sense to them when I explain about hand/eye coordination and how it applies to instinctive shooting. We all have this ability, although some people do seem to be more gifted at it than others. I met a guy once at one of our shoots at Enid Lake who had such a gift for it that he could split one arrow after another on purpose. I've never seen anyone else do that like he could. He said he didn't like to do it too much because arrows were expensive. I can't

speaking too much for what others do, but when I shoot I pick my spot and don't look at anything else. I raise my bow arm to "instinctively" point to the spot I am looking at. As my bow arm comes up my other arm is pulling the string back, all in one fluid motion. I come to anchor and after a one or two second count, I release, still not taking my eye off the spot until my arrow hits. When I've been practicing a lot, I shoot well. When I haven't shot my bow in a few months, I may not shoot as well. But, if you love to shoot a bow, what is practicing but getting out and doing something you love to do?

I've talked a little about the modern high tech compound and a lot about the traditional archery because traditional is where my heart is. If the compound is where your heart is then you should absolutely stick with

it. And I will enjoy watching you nail the twelve ring from fifty or sixty yards. We are all out there to have fun and that is the way it should be. So whether you are a modern high tech shooter with a training wheel bow or a shorter range stick and stringer shooter, we all have one thing in common. We all love to sling arrows. Shoot straight, have fun and enjoy the wonderful fellowship.

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