



From left to right are Jake Beck, Brian Montgomery, Steve Brown, and Walker Montgomery

RELIGION, POLITICS, & *Crossbows?*

STORY AND PHOTO BY BRIAN MONTGOMERY

The topic of crossbows hanging in trees during archery season in Mississippi is a sure way to have a contentious conversation all across the state. I've found that there is no particular demographic that has any particular predetermined view of the subject, but almost everyone is passionate about how they see it. I want to discuss how we got here and how to go forward with open minds and open arms.

July 1, 2013, the law that made crossbows legal during archery season was passed with lots of opinions on each side of the argument. The primary opposition was from hunters who viewed crossbows as a closer cousin to a rifle than a bow. The primary argument in favor was from

hunters who viewed compounds in the same light and thought they were not much different than compounds. Regardless of your opinion, it's legal to hunt with a crossbow in Mississippi during archery season and the two camps have one thing in common, both groups are hunters. I want to bridge that gap between those with different opinions by the fact that we are all hunters in this argument. Hunters don't need any additional enemies and where there is anyone willing to go into the outdoors in pursuit of game animals, there is common ground.

The needle measuring the degree of difficulty related to any activity can always be moved in both directions by decisions to use certain equipment, location of activity, and time applied to the activity. You will hear some say "I only use traditional equipment" or "I bowhunt exclusively" or "I only shoot a rifle long range". What we are really saying is "I'm one or 10 steps ahead of my buddy or peer". That's not to say we don't truly love the challenge of choosing how we go into the field. I want to discuss the positives of crossbows in Mississippi and how they are being used to recruit more people to go outdoors, as well as challenge some to migrate to what others revere as more traditional equipment.

Archery hunting done right requires a time commitment, both in the field as well as in preparation with practice and equipment setup. If you are not committing time you will inevitably be disappointed either by lack of opportunities or opportunities that result in wounded game. There are three groups that utilize the crossbow to bridge the gap either in time requirements, physical requirements, or opportunity.

The first group that crossbows

has appealed to are young future hunters that are too young to be proficient with a compound bow. I have personally seen the benefits of the crossbow first-hand. I have four children and my oldest two have been successful in the past two archery seasons with the crossbow. In years past I would bowhunt during archery season alone and start taking them when rifle season came along. Nowadays I set double lock-on sets and they are right there in the shooter stand. It's just more fun to harvest a deer at 20 yards with a crossbow than have to wait until rifle season. There is no way they could have started enjoying the early fall at such a young age without the use of a crossbow. For one reason they would have had to use a compound with extremely low poundage and energy and potentially have been disappointed with wounded animals. The sport of archery should be fun and I didn't want to set them up for disappointment their first time out. The other factor is time to practice. All of my children are also very involved in athletic sports. Between academics, athletics, church, and hunting, time passes quickly. Because of the ease of using a crossbow, especially for youth, our family has been able to hunt together early in the season when the possibility of using a traditional compound was out of the question. That's my goal and I want to encourage others to focus on that as well, TIME with family and friends.

Another demographic drawn to the crossbow are those aging adults that may not be as proficient with the compound bow any longer. Many senior adults that want to be outdoors hunting but lack the physical strength to draw and shoot a bow can pick up the crossbow and they are off to the woods for a good hunt. Along with

this group are those with shoulder or other injuries that make shooting a traditional bow difficult. The theme here seems to be repetitive, we want more folks enjoying the outdoors in pursuit of game animals.

The last group I want to discuss are those regular old, able bodied, physically capable, good ole boys/gals that want to shoot a crossbow. Let's be honest, they are just fun to shoot. A good friend of mine who didn't have the time or interest to be a serious bowhunter once told me I was just one of those "bow snobs". I know the archery community wants to promote archery for others to enjoy but we sometimes find it hard to see that everyone doesn't love it as much as we do or they may have other obstacles that prevent participation. For the outdoorsman that works a 6-day week and long hours, the crossbow is a perfect tool to be proficient in harvest and allow him to go afield with confidence. This group of hunters are my favorite. They are our "target audience" for archery. These sportsmen are able and have an interest in archery and may, in the near future, choose to use more traditional archery equipment such as a compound or long bow. Each member of the Mississippi Bowhunters Association should look for and recruit these archers into becoming bowhunters.

As the President of the Mississippi Bowhunters Association my goal is to bring together those who enjoy the pursuit of game animals and the lifestyle we live. It matters little if you shoot a rifle, shotgun, bow, crossbow, spear, or sling shot if you enjoy this great outdoors that God has given us to preside over. Let us not look for ways to be divided but rather seek areas of common interest.