

# Bowhunting very different than portrayed on TV

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Special Correspondent

What is needed to become a successful bowhunter? Wow, this could get complicated!

Shooting a bow and hunting with a bow are vastly different things, but bowhunting without shooting skills and the correct equipment designed for the task will not work.

I will try to explain the relationship between equipment and shooting first, and then how these relate to bowhunting and what successful hunters have in common.

As I browsed recently through a mail-order catalog that specialized in archery equipment, I was amazed at the offerings for the modern archer. More than 40 compound bows were presented from about a dozen manufacturers.

Each manufacturer offered the good, better and best of their designs. This usually equates to this year's technology as best, last year's and the year before as the other choices. Price is reflected in the same order. If you have shopped for a computer or a television lately, you have seen the same marketing strategy in a different category.

So what should the consumer buy?

If you watch Saturday morning television, you may be led to believe it takes today's technology to harvest today's game.

If you watch a video that is five years old, you will notice that trophy animals readily fell to equipment that is now extinct or marketed as barely worthy of consideration. A 10-year-old video will provide a perspective of truly ancient weapons at work. Another observation will lead you to believe the hunter and the quarry look remarkably alike on all three videos!

The bows and arrows and other equipment really look about the same. Most bows in the older videos are no longer produced, but their replacements have been modified and improved incrementally.

There is no argument that today's bows and arrows and accessories outperform the ones used in years past. If the goal is to be a successful bowhunter, will you need the most up-to-date, fastest-shooting, high-tech turbo-charged equipment? Probably not. If you are new to archery, you will find that

you really need to know how to shoot a bow and develop a "style" of shooting before you even purchase a bow and all that goes with it.

An experienced archer can shoot just about any modern bow as long as it is set up to match his or her style of shooting and tuned to use the accessories that complete the outfit.

The demands of a bowhunter are much different than those of a target archer or 3D competitor. Real-life hunting expectations also are much different than what we see on television.

I love to watch hunting shows but find myself gnashing my teeth when risky shots are taken at game. We seldom, if ever, see an animal wounded and not recovered on these videos, but I can't imagine anyone except a very experienced hunter pulling off what they do. I just hate to see the extreme presented as the norm.

Hunting is really nothing like shooting a 3D course. Hunting involves almost no shooting at all. Points are not given for marginal hits while hunting. If things go as expected, one shot is the goal and precedes the actual recovery of game by about a half-hour or more.

After learning how to shoot a bow and becoming proficient with the skills needed to deliver the arrow on target, we are ready to start learning about bowhunting. My occupation puts me in contact with bowhunters who range from the complete novice to the very accomplished. Hunters who have spent their time, effort and money on scouting and setting up their locations properly are the ones who more often reach their goal.

Most archers can shoot a tuned bow very well with regular practice, but those who fail to prepare their hunting locations usually come home empty-handed. I see quite a few hunters who have spent their last dime on everything they have seen advertised that might give them another advantage over their quarry, but they have not even made a trip to scout for game.

After shooting the bow becomes second nature, you can proceed to hunting.

The common recipe for success is really very simple.

1. Become familiar with the ground you



**Jed Dunning used a bow to take this trophy buck several years ago on a South Texas ranch. The buck had 13 antler points and gross-scored 156 Boone and Crockett points. The deer field dressed 180 pounds.**

will be hunting. Scout!

2. Prepare a blind or stand downwind of a trail or food source. Be invisible.

3. Wear clean, quiet clothing that will not inhibit your shooting form. Be silent.

4. Position yourself in a concealed, comfortable position that offers a close shot (20 yards or less). Deer can move faster than your arrow.

5. Do not take a shot that offers less than a perfect opportunity. Murphy's law will get you every time!

6. After you make the shot, give the animal time to expire. There will be blood; find it. The blood will lead to your animal.

7. Congratulations.

Even though I am equipment-intensive, I am convinced that an archer who has well-tuned equipment suited to delivering hunting-weight arrows at reasonable speeds can harvest just as much game as the one who has the most expensive, up-to-date equipment. I think more effort directed toward stand placement and research of the movement patterns and habits of the quarry would pay off big-time in the field.

As bowhunters, we owe it to ourselves and the game we pursue to do whatever it takes to make responsible, ethical judgments as we practice our craft.

Have a safe and enjoyable hunt!

*Jed Dunning, a rifle and bow hunter, owns and operates a deer processing facility and taxidermy shop in Lampasas. He also is a veteran hunting guide.*

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