

WIDE LOAD

In *Beyond the Score* we generally feature Boone and Crockett-caliber trophies, but as the column's title suggests, it's about more than a number. A brief story and photos were submitted for advice on how to get a score for her trophy, but Stacy's email told me there was something to her story worth sharing. After an email exchange, she put a story together and included this statement "I am writing to you my every detail that I witnessed that evening when I killed "Wide Load." I did not hold back any details and spoke from my heart as a female hunter. The emotions I felt are real but at the same time, I understand the importance of thinning the herd and it is part of the food chain and life cycle. This is my story."

Reading this should remind us that we are taking part in a time-honored tradition of putting food on our table. The score is not what the hunt is about and the humanity aspect is a very real situation we all must face. Think back to the first animal you took, whether with a bow or rifle. Recall all the emotions, questions, and ultimate satisfaction; enjoy as you follow along as Stacy takes her first animal with a compound bow in the whitetail powerhouse state of Ohio.

For Stacy, a compound bow is much easier to pack around and she enjoys how it shoots, with more of that "primitive feeling" when drawing back and shooting.

Saturday, September 27, was the first day for the 2014 archery season in Ohio. I was full of excitement. I could not wait to get back out there in the woods and sit in my stand. I was especially excited about this year's archery season. While I normally hunt with a crossbow I had decided to make the switch to a compound bow. I enjoyed hunting with a crossbow but I wanted something more challenging that requires more skill. I also wanted something that was more lightweight. I have to

climb a steep ravine to get to my stand and during the winter, the extra weight from a crossbow does not make this an easy task. For me, a compound bow is much easier to pack around. I practiced all summer with my compound and enjoyed how it shot, with more of that "primitive feeling" when drawing back and shooting.

That evening I was able to do just that. It felt so good to put my camo gear and safety harness back on and douse myself with scent blocker. I



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never leave for the woods without scent blocker. Every hunter knows that scent is a very important piece of a successful hunt. The final piece, and the most important, was my compound bow. I had been waiting for this day for months. This was my first year hunting with a compound and I was ready!

My excitement surged while walking back to my stand for the first hunt of the season. It was very warm that day, but it didn't bother me. That earthy smell and the leaves gently falling like snow soothed my soul. I felt connected. This is where I belonged. I climbed up into my stand, situated myself, ensured my safety harness was connected to the tree, and waited patiently. Soon the "golden hour" had arrived. The setting sun cast its shadow upon the leaves of the oaks where I was sitting, as well as the bean and cornfields which lay before me. The light reflected from the disappearing sun at just the right angle to give the whole scene a golden hue. The woods and the fields were illuminated. The sight of Mother Nature displaying her beauty once again was reward enough for being in the woods on this opening evening, but she had more in store for me.

As the sun fell below the horizon and a gentle breeze passed through the trees, I noticed movement to the right



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of my stand. Initially, I thought it was the top of the corn swaying, though I quickly realized that it was a buck working through the corn 100 yards away. All I could see was a wide rack but could not make out his body or count how many points he had. He was eating the corn and his head would bobble up and then down. I could not believe how wide he was. The first thing that came to mind was wide load so I began referring to him as such.

I remember thinking to myself, “Please, please over here, give me the opportunity.” I recall praying to myself and mentally instructing this deer to head my way, knowing that he could not hear me but I did not care. I wanted this opportunity so badly. I felt silly inside because I was having such a conversation in my head, almost like I was selling my soul to the devil—I would do anything to get that shot. I call this the Hunter’s Prayer. All hunters know what I am talking about. All of us do this when we see a big buck! I sat there quietly observing him along the cornfield. At times it appeared to me that he was headed my way. I would feel the butterflies in my stomach, my heart would start beating faster, and my hands would start twitching, nervously grabbing my bow slowly. I made sure that my release hook was attached to the D-loop just in case. I was ready to draw back. But this particular evening, the opportunity did not present itself. Sadly, Wide Load decided to go a different direction. Even though I didn’t get an opportunity that evening I was still elated to get

the opportunity to see him. I was especially pleased to spot such a nice deer, as he had avoided being caught on my trail camera during my pre-season scouting.

Sunset settled in and I had to come down from my stand. On the walk out I was slightly disappointed that I had not gotten an opportunity at the buck, though my spirits were still high from the experience of observing such a deer in the distance. Every season I set out with the goal of taking a good deer, and this encounter had renewed my hopes of obtaining my desire.

My next chance to go hunting was two days later. It was another warm evening without much deer activity. While I did see a doe, Wide Load never showed. The next morning dawned with rain and continued most of the day but finally cleared off early afternoon. It was a chilly day and I decided that I was going hunting after work. After leaving I hurried home, changed my clothes and off to the woods I went. I started towards my usual stand but for some reason decided to try a stand that I had never hunted from before. The new stand was located between a cornfield and a bean field. I had to walk a little ways but I managed to get there and got myself situated.

As always, I pulled on my tree stand before climbing to ensure safety, and slowly climbed up and connected myself to the tree. I went through my same pre-hunt ritual and settled in. I sat there patiently; mentally noting that the slight breeze I could feel

was in my favor. The air on my exposed skin was chilly but the Under Armour Cold Gear underneath my clothes kept me comfortable and allowed me to stay put, motionless in the stand. As in most sits, I stayed in the tree keeping my eyes wandering while trying to keep my mind focused on the task at hand.

I remember reaching in my pocket to grab my gloves when I noticed to my left a deer walking along the fence. Though I wasn’t able to determine if it was a buck or doe, I remained still. When the deer came around the tree I saw it was a small 4-point buck. He was 20 yards from me. Honestly I wanted to arrow a deer so badly with my Hoyt, but I thought to myself “No, I will let him walk by.” It was good to see the little buck, and shortly after I was rewarded with three does to my left feeding in the distance. I admired how well these animals blended in with their surroundings, until

I decided to begin looking over the grounds to see if I could pick any more deer out.

Almost instantly I saw something moving down below me and to my right. I looked and “OH MY GOD,” all I could see was antlers. I had to look again and could not believe what I was seeing. I felt my heart starting to pound, it seemed like everything was happening at once! He was slowly working the cornfield edge along a ravine; he had *no clue* that I was there. Where did he come from? How could I not hear such a massive animal walking in beside me? These animals are like ghosts, they appear from nowhere!

As all of these thoughts were racing through my head I slowly rose up and began to pull my bow back, but I couldn’t! I knew then that I was getting buck fever. I remember thinking, “No, this is not happening, I refuse to let this happen.” I verified he hadn’t detected me and

This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

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Stacy with her buck of a lifetime, Wide Load.



paused, taking a moment to regain my composure, and again attempted to draw my Hoyt with all of my might. This time I managed to get it back and slowly let the bow settle with my top sight right behind his front shoulder. My finger touched the release, though the shot was slightly errant, striking his spine. I don't know if I had buck fever or if his proximity to the stand caused the arrow to sail high. While the spine is indeed a fatal shot location, it is small in comparison to the vitals, usually resulting in passing up a deer instead of risking it, but in this case fortune was with me.

I just remember hearing the “thwark” noise from my bow and the arrow smacking him. To my astonishment, he just dropped in his tracks. He did not know what hit him. He rolled and kicked and to be honest, I was not prepared for what was about to happen. This was my first year hunting with a compound and the first animal I had ever seen hit in the spine. He finally rolled over and began to move off. My emotions kicked in and I started to choke up and feel terrible. Keep in mind, I come from a family of deer hunters so I understand that you respect the animal and it is part of the life cycle and food chain, but it hurt my feelings to see him suffer like that. I could not bear to watch him suffer. I went through so many emotions in such a short period of time. I was extremely happy when I dropped him—I had just shot a big monster buck my first year with a compound—but then I became remorseful. It was crazy to go from



happy to sad and then happy again. Most guys won't admit to having feelings like this, but I am in touch with mine and I am speaking from the heart as I tell you my story.

As he was dragging himself to the brush, I knew that I had to do something; he would not die right away so I knew I had to come down from my stand and shoot another arrow into him to end it. I made my way toward where he lay in the brush approximately 15 yards from my stand. I had nocked an arrow and eased up on him as he tried to get up. He lifted his head and I could not believe it was Wide Load. I was in complete shock, but still more concerned with quickly dispatching him. I drew back

to arrow him in his lungs and he looked at me; this bothered me some. I told him, “I'm sorry buddy” and released my arrow. This was the end for him.

I fell to my knees on the ground, it seemed surreal. Was this really happening? My first year with a compound and I just shot a monster buck, let alone Wide Load. I reached for my deer tag—I couldn't think straight. I couldn't even pull my tag out at first. I couldn't write because I was shaking all over. I even felt light-headed and was breathing hard. It was such an experience. I knew I had to get it together and calm myself down. Finally I gained my composure and realized that I had just shot a buck of a lifetime. ■

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