



Archery Talk

with Jeff Murray

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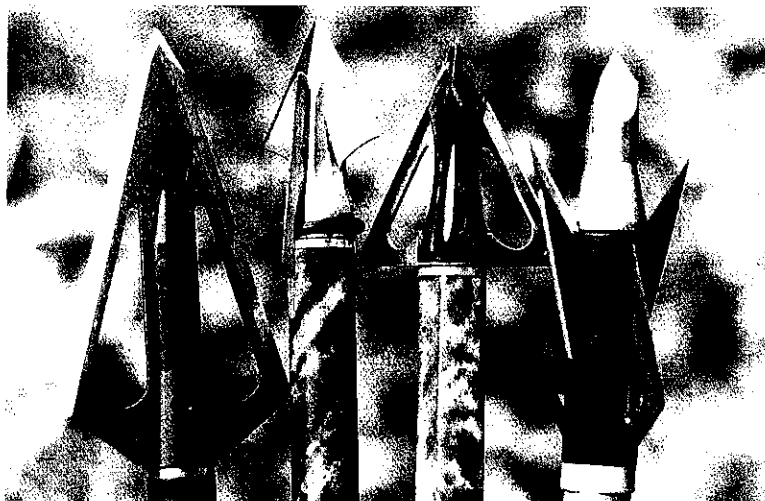
The Best Broadhead

No question, broadhead choice is one of the most important decisions a bear hunter can make. Despite all the tech-talk and rhetoric, our singular goal is a quick, humane kill. And while we all have our favorites, there are a lot of ways to skin a bear. The beginning point is accepting the fact that the wrong broadhead matched to a good setup can affect accuracy, reduce penetration and even rob forgiveness. Briefly, there are three categories of broadheads with an emerging fourth category to choose from. Each has pros and cons.

FIXED-BLADE BROADHEADS

History records the first category of broadheads to be the fixed-blade design. Flint Indian heads notwithstanding, the original Snuffer, Zwickey and Bear come to mind. Made from steel, these models are heavy and far from compact. In spite of new spin-off models, these particular heads continue to win hearts among traditional bowhunters. The pros: They can be re-sharpened with a whet stone, are tougher than diamond nails and have a history of success. The cons: They are heavy, somewhat bulky and therefore do not fly particularly well at conventional compound bow speeds.

The list does not stop here, however. Today it is possible to purchase a solid one-piece fixed-blade that cuts on impact, flies dart-like and can also be re-sharpened. Top models include: G5 Outdoors' 3-blade Montec; Magnus Archery's two-blade Stinger and Snuffer SS 3-blade; and the similarly designed Hellrazor from New Archery Products. Each model sports needle-sharp tips and comes in 100-grains, thereby matching up to the standard of the industry, lightweight carbon arrow shafts.



Examples of broadhead types: Stinger, Tekan II, Striker, Gladiator.

Who should consider these models? They are an excellent all-around choice because they deflect less than other designs, but they are particularly ideal for poundage-challenged archers; women, youth, elderly. All factors being equal, cut-on-contact heads tend to be most efficient at starting a wound channel and finishing the job.

EXPANDING (MECHANICAL) HUNTING HEADS

This second category became the rage in the 1990s when carbon knocked off aluminum as the King of the Arrow Mountain. The sudden increase in arrow velocity created by the lighter and stiffer carbon shaft caught archers by surprise: conventional fixed and replaceable-blade hunting heads suddenly became more fickle to tune. No wonder the aerodynamic mechanical, with its hidden main blades, became a handy band-aid. Granted, some early designs failed to open; others cart-wheeled at impact; and still others suffered excessive deflection when encountering bone and cartilage. Nevertheless, the mechanical's increasing popularity stimulated competition that has led to some impressive designs. Current models are stronger, sharper and more reliable than ever. The main attribute of the mechanical is its flight characteristic, most fly similar to field points of the same weight, even from bows that are slightly out-of-tune.

Who should be candidates for this design? This question

is trickier to answer than the previous one. To begin with, the top designs are largely dependent on your type of rig. For example, the faster your arrow flight, the more precise your bow must be in tune. So the first candidate is the beginner bowhunter; this person should get excellent results without having to dote over minute center-shot and nock-set adjustments. Moreover, since the mechanical typically delivers excellent blood trails with pass-through shots, a novice should experience less frustration recovering his or her bear.

Another candidate is the bowhunter unexpectedly forced to switch gear in the middle of the bear season. This individual likely will not have enough time to fine-tune broadheads and would do well to convert, at least in the short-term, to a top-performing mechanical. This is exactly what happened to me two years ago when I was struck with a rare form of leukemia. In a matter of months I lost 25 pounds and saw my draw weight dip from a comfortable 70 pounds to a begrudging 50 pounds. This meant my once-perfectly spined 350 Maxima Hunters were now too stiff. I am happy to report that I did not skip a beat. I shot bear, deer and turkeys that year. The broadhead doing all of the damage was a 100-grain Tekan II. I chose it for its rear-blade deployment system and its rugged, once-piece steel construction.

Coincidentally, two other rear-deployment designs are the Rage and the Undertaker from Trophy Ridge. The advantage of this concept is how the blades, at impact, slide back along the ferrule rather than flipping 180 degrees to open up. You get your cake (less loss of energy) and get to eat it too (extra-forgiving with most setups).

REPLACEABLE BLADE HEADS

Bow technology drives broadhead technology. An excellent example occurred back in 1998, when Mathews introduced the MQ-1, their first model producing straight-and-level nock travel. This advancement, as much as any other, enabled bowhunters to achieve better arrow flight with conventional broadheads. Why? Because the arrow now exited the bowstring without an "attitude." Realizing that speed alone does not cause broadhead planning, more and more bow manufacturers have tinkered with cam designs to improve nock travel. Gradually, a preference for compact, dart-flying hunting heads evolved. Some current examples include: New Archery Products' Nitron; G5 Outdoors Striker; and American Broadhead's Sonic; to name a few.

Take a close look at these heads, and you will notice they boast all-steel construction. This is superior to the prevailing broadhead standard that typi-

cally incorporates an aluminum ferrule with steel or carbon blades. This is noteworthy, considering that steel is up to three times stronger (elastic modulus) than aluminum.

Candidates for this style of broadhead? Bowhunters in search of razor-sharp heads which are relatively easy to tune. In my book, the beauty of the replaceable-blade concept is being able to field-test every arrow, then quickly swap out the old, dull blades with scalpel-sharp new ones. While some find broadhead sharpening a rewarding pastime, many others consider it a chore that steals valuable time from family, friends, work and play.

These compact heads deliver a lot of bang for the buck: They create quick hemorrhaging and pinpoint accuracy from rigs delivering moderate to fast arrow speeds. So who would not be a candidate for this head? Most likely those who have not quite perfected their craft. The glaring weakness of these heads is their modest cutting diameter. While this is a non-issue for shots puncturing the thoracic cavity of any bear, it is a significant limitation with paunch shots. For stomach hits, nothing beats the mechanical for its extra-wide wound channel that is most likely to cause accelerated bacterial infection.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?

An emerging fourth category is the "hybrid" hunting head. It combines fixed blades with expanding blades. If designed properly, it should fly well, handle bone and cartilage with relative ease, and produce an entry and exit wound that is hard to forget.

Presently, you only have a few models to choose from. Gold Tip's Gladiator might not appear to be a top contender, due to its synthetic ferrule. But its replaceable steel blades lock up against the screw-in chisel point and complement the carbon mechanical blades, which are as sharp as any blade I have ever tested. Next is the sexy Crimson Raptor that helped put Crimson Talon on the map. And Eastman Outfitters' hybrid FirstCut EXP Magnum 100 is the company's top seller in archery shops across the country.

The hybrid concept is intriguing because it overcomes the main limitations of mainline broadhead designs. As alluded to, mechanicals are notorious for deflecting when a bear is not perfectly broadside. Conventional fixed and replaceable blade models, on the other hand, often lack the cutting advantage of mechanicals on marginal hits. But sooner or later manufactures will get the message. When an all-steel hybrid rolls out, you can bet I will be first in line. 🐾

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