



Set Up for Extreme Accuracy

By Joe Byers

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If you want to achieve the highest amount of bowhunting accuracy, then you should tailor fit your equipment and take long-range practice shooting seriously.

“I practice regularly from 120 to 150 yards,” Dan Evans, inventor of the Trophy Taker rest and long-range shooter extraordinaire. “One of my bows has 12 pins. I’d use more, but the sight window can’t handle that many. When people use me in camp, they often ask, ‘why so many pins?’”

Aside from his successful rest manufacturing business in Montana, Evans has had excellent success as a target shooter and western hunter. His top-five finishes at amateur and professional IBO shoots are only superseded by a phenomenal success with trophy elk. His long-range practicing is an important factor, yet he rarely takes a shot beyond 60 yards.

“I keep the long-range pins on my bow in case I need a follow-up shot,” says Evans. “If you shoot an animal and get the chance to shoot again, you should do it. Say I hit an elk and it runs to 140 yards and stops. If I can range it and it stands still, I’d put an arrow into its vitals.”

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

Evans grew up in the Northwest, the child of vegetarian family. Without a hunting family member, he sought out friends who helped him learn archer and develop an instant love of hunting. During his professional tournament days he practiced two hours a day. Since his business has skyrocketed, he has had to reduce his practice time, yet he actually practices smarter rather than harder.

“Perfect practice is what you want to strive for, not quantity. You must have good form,” he says emphatically. “As you approach perfect shooting form, you can reduce practice time and still maintain your skills.”

Evans has a 180-yard range behind his shop along with 3-D animals. “I like to shoot at long range because it forces me to focus,” he continues. “If you make a mistake at 100 yards, you miss the whole bale. The follow-through is critical. Even at long distances, you must keep your form until the arrow hits the target. Putting an arrow in the bull at that distance builds confidence, especially when you get a 40-yard shot.”

A downside of Evans’ long-range setup is the potential for pin confusion. With 10 or more to choose from, Evans has developed a consistent approach to practice and hunting. His 20-, 40- and 60- yard pins are painted white, while the 30-, 50- and 70-yard pins are black. The 80- yard pin is painted orange which separates those to be used from the long-range (emergency) sights. The alternating black and white paint allows him to select the correct sight without conscious thought. He has used this system for many years until it has become instinctive.

One of Evan’s best hunting trophies reinforced the need for skill at long range. “I had heard several bulls bugling in darkness and sneaked into close range, being careful of the wind,” he says, the excitement of the hunt still ringing in his voice. “As daylight arrived, the elk separated. I followed the one with the best sounding bugle, but I had to make several hasty circles to get in front of him. Eventually, I cow called his harem past me, yet the bull hung up in the open. It finally gave me a broadside shot as I delivered the arrow. On impact the bull whirled and ran, offering just a glimpse of fletching. The bull ran to 140 yards and stood in the open. With a pin sighted to 120, I could have judged the gap distance and delivered an insurance arrow. Instead I had to watch it walk away. Fortunately, that first arrow was lethal and the bull didn’t go far. The 370-class animal is among my finest trophies.”

Steve Koblina-another accomplished archer and bowhunter-grew up near Washington, D.C. at a time when deer, foxes, even a bear, wandered through his back yard. Not long after he could walk, he was fashioning bows and arrows from sticks. A natural artist, he soon began crafting "self bows" –stout sticks strung with a strong string. One day a copperhead snake made the mistake of entering his yard and its skin became the facing for a longbow work of art. As an adult, he developed a passion for adventure-bungee jumping from the bridge at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and maintaining a mental toughness that embraces any challenge.

Koblina killed a rhino with a recurve, yet today he relies on cam technology to enhance his muscular energy. His elephant bows had draw weights in excess of 100 pounds that accounted for two pass-through arrows on mature bulls.

100 Yards of More

"If you expect to stalk your game as I often do, you must expect to shoot at 50 to 60 yards," says Koblina. "Many animals will give you a standing shot at that distance and they tend not to jump the string like they may do at 20 or 30 yards."

Koblina practices regularly at 120 yards and hopes to develop a tight group at 150. He and I hunted together in Namibia and spent two days at his home in South Africa. I watched him place a small piece of paper on his practice butt, back off 100 yards and put an arrow nearly dead center.

Koblina stands 6 feet 6 inches tall, pulls 87 pounds and draws an arrow a full 33 inches. He has long been a fan of Martin bows and uses the Fury for long-range endeavors. "I like the extra energy of twin cams," says Koblina, who showed me where one of his 100-yard shots pierced a ¾ inch thick sheet of plywood a full 16 inches.

Koblina love the Trophy Taker drop-away rest. Although this device has a short cable that could be a problem, he used peep sights aligned with rubber tubing for many years without a hitch. "This cord is a lot tougher than rubber," he reasons. Three sight pins are set at 40, 50 and 60 yards, with an extension bar that allows moving the pins to longer ranges. Although Koblina does not shoot at three-digit ranges in the field, he believes practicing at extreme distances makes closer opportunities much easier.

"When you practice at 120 meter and step up to 100, the shot looks easy," says Koblina. "Longer ranges force you to fine tune your form and equipment. If you can shoot tight groups at long range, you will be that much better close in."

If you've ever shot a basketball, you've practiced at the foul line, eventually mastering this known distance. However, put a hundred screaming fans in the stands with the game on the line and all of a sudden that attempt from the charity stripe takes every ounce of skill. The added excitement has caused even experienced athletes to shoot an air ball. The moment of truth is very similar. Put a stack of bone on that pie plate's head and your nerves go crazy. Even a slight change in form can cause a miss. Long-distance practice can correct this problem. If you will practice at three, four or even five times your normal shooting distance, you will force yourself into perfect form, or go broke buying arrows. Such practice takes no prisoners and allows no room for error, exactly the kind of shooting habit and form you want to develop. When opportunity knocks at much closer range, you will be confident, more in control of your emotions, and allow that refined form to take over.

A Long Distance Affair

Ironically, closer shooting distances aren't always better, Koblina believes. Game animals may jump the string at close ranges. They may suddenly become alert from the scent of an entrance trail, a sudden bout of environmental silence, or detect arrow friction on a rest. Additionally, having a longer effective range means you can take advantage of animals that present optimal shooting angles, especially those approaching a call or a waterhole. They may stand broadside at 40 yards, bugling or allowing females to approach.

Koblina has success at longer range because his form is textbook consistency. He grips the bow with a high, open-hand style that allows the bow to swivel after the shot. Although he shoots a trigger release, he uses back tension to unleash the shot. This technique makes the exact release a surprise, allowing total concentration on pin placement. Like Evans, he maintains his form until the arrow hits.

At 100 yards, an arrow strikes a target about one second after release. Powered by the long draw length, Koblina and Evans' arrow zips to the target with little noticeable arch. A lot can happen in a second, and it's worth stating again that triple digit ranges

aren't desirable in hunting situations. However, one can never be too accurate. Arrow deviation from point of aim is a function of distance. The farther you can place an arrow in a tight bull, the better you will shoot at closer ranges. All athletes train beyond normal performances threshold and Evans and Kобрine's bullishness to push the envelope increases their hunting effectiveness. Thanks to today's advances in technology, archers can become more proficient at longer ranges if they will condition themselves physically and mentally. The key is to practice beyond your normal shooting range. To be proficient at 40 yards, practice at 60 yards or beyond. Evans and Kобрine use their physical size and mental preparation to launch powerful arrows with incredible consistency. At this writing, Evans just concluded an amazing elk season. On three unguided sorties, he bagged three record-book elk with the longest shot at 30 yards. You may not need 10 sight pins for hunting, yet long-range practice is almost a guarantee for short-range success.

Pump Up the Kinetic Energy

Evans and Kобрine's physical size is an advantage to develop long-range, hard-hitting arrows, yet those of us less than 6 feet tall can still increase our muscle strength, draw weight and arrow speed. Phil Physioc owns The Fitness Priority in Hagerstown, Maryland. As a personal trainer for strength development, he gives the following tip:

1. An athlete who wants to be at the top of his game must be in good physical shape. Build your body as a unit, then go to specific training.
2. Although you want to develop specific muscles, you will have greater success by strengthening the upper body as a unit.
3. Rowing exercises will strengthen and develop the muscles used to draw the bow. Increase resistance as you progress.
4. Weight lifting with your draw arm from a vertical position will strengthen specific draw-force muscles. Push-ups work well too.
5. If you devote one hour three times a week to a strengthening program, you can increase your draw weight from 70 pounds to 90 pounds in about three months.