

*Mike Longman of Rosetown, Saskatchewan,
with his beautiful 2009 buck. The inside spread
taped out at an even 21 inches and the longest
brow-tine went 7 3/8. The buck was unofficially
scored at 189 2/8 gross and 170 5/8 net typical.
Bill Longman photo.*



The Hypnotizer

BY BILL LONGMAN

“DAD . . . hey, DAD!” I could hear a familiar tone, but I was paralyzed and couldn’t seem to move. I could see myself in the rear-view mirror, my mouth opening and closing like a goldfish in a pet store, but no noises would come out.

“DAD” . . . Finally the sound of my son’s voice and him tugging on my right arm brought me out of my catatonic state.

“Hey, Garret, I’m sorry buddy.”

“Dad, I think you were just hypnotized!” he shouted excitedly. He was correct; I was hypnotized, but to fully understand why, I should back up a little.

My little partner and I had headed out for a late August drive one evening to see what kind of velvet-covered magic Mother Nature had once again weaved. I started out for an area where my brother, Mike, had grazed a giant whitetail with a chunk of hot lead the previous fall. We had searched high and low for the buck and finally caught a glimpse of him late in the winter, looking no worse for wear.

As we bounced down the old prairie trail, I smiled as my then seven-year-old boy gave me a vivid play-by-play of all that he saw even though I was watching it myself. As the Heavy Chevy passed a bumper crop of standing wheat, an unseen deer suddenly stood up in his afternoon bed. The buck was a dandy 5x5 in full velvet. I tried to reach for my binos, still camera, and video camera all at the same time, but realized I didn’t have three hands so I just relaxed and went to check him out with my binoculars.

As I raised the glasses to my eyes, a very strange thing happened: the 150” 10-pointer had pulled a David Copperfield and morphed into a 180-class 7x6 with a row of points that would keep any whitetail hunter awake at night.



Here you can really see the row of tines and the long beam on the buck’s seven-point side. (Note: Mike changed to his camo hat for field pictures.)

This creature had taken a happy, content father on a beautiful summer’s night and turned him into a drooling, bug-eyed zombie in an instant! As the “rake head” bounced away with his smaller companion, I already knew where I’d be on opening day.

However, as so often happens with big bucks, once they scrape the “dumb” off their antlers, you may not see them again that season, and this monarch proved no different. My brother and I spent many hours in his backyard, but there was never anything big enough to make us raise our bows after seeing

“HIM.” As the geese began heading south and the leaves started to change, we also changed tactics and dug out the smoke poles. Along with muzzleloader season came our good buddy Kurt Schreiner down from the North country. He made numerous trips down to join in the search but to no avail.

September and October on the Prairies is a very busy time, as ranchers start the fall roundup and grain farmers work day and night to harvest their paycheques before the cold Arctic winds bring in the inevitable white blanket that will cover the countryside. Usually when the combines roll, deer get pushed out of the rich farmland and start to stack up in their traditional haunts. We checked every one of these hangouts religiously but always seemed to have more fails than old Uncle Charlie Sheen on a breathalyzer.

Finally the time of year I call “the great equalizer” started to show signs of arriving. The small bucks began to move in daylight as they vacuumed the ground like a Dustbuster. As if on cue, Kurt arrived for the late fall rifle season and we hit that familiar area again. If I know there’s a good deer in an

Bill Longman holds up the “Hypnotizer” with his brother Mike and their good friend Kurt Schreiner. Almost nine months to the day after this hunt, Mike and Kurt’s wives both delivered babies . . . guess maybe we can blame that on the rut! Lyle Slocombe photo.



The big prairie whitetail and the old .303 British rifle that did the deed. The gun was left to Mike and Bill from their father, Rick, when he passed away in 1999, and it seems fitting that it got to see the short grass hills one more time. Bill Longman photo.

area I won't leave it, but I think my partners on the S.S. Longman were ready to have a mutiny and make me walk the plank. You know that you've spent too much time in one place when you have parking spots worn in the ditches and your favourite "urinal" tree is starting to wilt and die from "overwatering."

After checking the dried up honey holes, we decided to drive back to town to drown our sorrows with pizza. But before we did, we thought of a small valley just off our beaten path that was so obvious we hadn't checked it. While Mike and Kurt walked one side of the brushy draw, I took the other. After reaching the end with only a mangy coyote to show for it, my partners stopped on a small hill as I pushed on another 100 yards to a small hawthorn bush that had held deer in past years. I'd just finished staggering through some knee-high hummocks on an old cattle path when the air around me erupted in gunfire and I nearly soiled myself!

I could still smell the rutting buck's musk glands as I rounded the spiny bush to see the "Hypnotizer" dodging .30-calibre bullets as he put the hammer down across a flat rocky pasture. I was too far now to shoot so I raced to meet my compadres, who were freaking out about missing this huge buck. Without

enough breath left in my big carcass, I couldn't even muster up the energy to make a smart-aleck comment about buck fever. We watched the wide deer disappear into a very manageable-sized red willow thicket over a mile away. Sometimes living in the flatlands can have its benefits!

We gathered our wits and decided to walk the mile back to the truck and drive to the other pasture to try to push out the cagey buck. Kurt, being the great friend he is, offered to go in after the deer while Mike and I took up positions in the best-looking spots. The minute Schreiner entered the jungle, we could hear antlers crashing in the middle. As the commotion got louder, I knew I had picked the correct side. Suddenly he was there in front of me at 50 yards and that old familiar numbness came flashing back. I levelled the .300 on him and touched off a shot just as he hunched to jump the fence. A clean miss. I composed myself and fired again as he jumped to enter another small clump of willows. He hunched up but kept going. Mike and Kurt were beside me in 20 seconds, and we all saw him try to jump another fence and then pile up on the other side.

YES! Cheers and high-fives were about to erupt when the monster buck regained his footing and trotted into a brushy pasture. OH NO! With no snow that fall, tracking him would be almost impossible. We all spread out to follow his path. Nothing . . . no blood . . . no hair . . . not even a fresh deer dropping. A sickly feeling began to build inside and I felt like I could vomit. How could I not kill him when he was so close? My crew told me to quit moping as we had work to do, and they were right, so I pulled up my big boy panties and marched on.

We did manage to track down our old hunting buddy Lyle Slocombe on the cellphone, and as usual, "Strokes" dropped everything to come help. Kurt and I decided to walk a low creek bottom while Lyle stayed high to glass. Mike decided to go get the truck and double back a mile once more to look for blood. Schrines and I were halfway down the valley when shots rang out from the south. Could that be Mikey? We ran back to Lyle's truck like two hungry kids chasing down a Smartie and headed towards the shots.

As we topped the hill, we saw my truck abandoned on the field's edge and a white blob a quarter-mile out by a tree row doing the happy-dance. My bro had decided to take a shortcut when he noticed a white patch out of place in the dry brown grass. The deer had tucked up under a caragana tree row with his chin on the ground and lying lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut. Mike had tried a sneak, but at 150 yards the gig was up and the buck broke out. The old .303 British our dad, Rick, had left to us when he passed away cut loose, and as the buck entered a grassy slough at 350 yards, a bullet found its mark.

Four grown men jumped around like they'd just scored the winning touchdown at the Superbowl! We snapped photos, groped antlers, and called everyone we could to share the news. Whenever you get hard-



Good friends Jason Peterson ("Hunting Canada and Beyond!" TV) and Shane Hunter were kind enough to share a picture of the "Hypnotizer" caught on one of their trail cameras that fall.

core hunters after a big buck, everyone wants to be the one to be the hero, and I've been guilty of it myself. Within our little group, when someone takes down a trophy, everyone is just as happy for the next guy and that's the way it should be. We never did find out for sure if I'd actually hit the deer or not. He was hit a little far back, and if my shot had done the same then we'll never really know. All that matters is we finally made it happen and there wasn't a wounded deer hobbling around out there. Besides, it's always good to have something to tease your younger sibling about.

What I do know is that I was very proud as I watched my little brother tag that beautiful buck that he took with my late father's rifle while standing between two of my best friends in the world.

Like the beer commercial says, "It just doesn't get any better than this!" ☺



Left to right: Kurt, Lyle Slocombe and Mike with the Hypnotizer.