

THE GARRY DONALD EARN-A-BUCK PROGRAM

BY ROB MANLEY



Garry Donald of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with his 4x4 whitetail that also grew two extra stickers. It was taken on November 30, 2009. Main beams are impressive at 26 inches, the longest tine is 13 inches, brow-tines go 5 5/8, with circumferences at the bases at five inches. The antlers gross 157 and net 152 7/8 typical points. Bill Longman photo.

They say good things come to those who wait. When the story involves Garry Donald and the act of pulling a trigger, you best add "and wait" to the age-old saying. Ol' Nerves-of-Steel Donald seems to have more patience than an owl during full moon when it comes to letting deer walk. Over the years he has probably saved more bucks than most conservation organizations. How can he let huge bucks stroll through his crosshairs you ask? The answer is simple: he's nuts. Nuttier than a fruitcake. So nuts you could use him as a squirrel decoy. How else do you describe a guy who inextricably, season after season, lets trophy animals of many different species waltz in and then waltz out of range when hunters of normal persuasions have speed-dialed their taxidermists many times over. Perhaps we need to look deeper into the inner workings of Garry's mind in order to understand

where his patience afield comes from. There. That didn't take long at all.

The bottom line might be that he is deathly allergic to fur and he runs the risk of a serious seizure if he touches a dead animal. Hmm, sounds like a good story, but that isn't the case either. He just has too high of standards and too much of a vested interest to turn the lights out on an up-and-coming buck. No matter where he hunts, he always imagines that buck "if it had one more year of growth." Me, I'm imagining that buck on my wall or next to the potatoes and gravy. Garry is far more charitable. He usually has had some type of history with most bucks he sees, therefore it is harder for him to end the relationship with a bullet. He spends large quantities of time on the deer trails every year and is a devout believer in the adage, "How can my wife miss me if I'm never gone?" For her part, Elaine Donald keeps the gears in the *Big Buck* office turning while her partner is prowling the woods. I've heard she also pins his house number to the inside of his jacket in the event that his steel-trap-like mind is still preoccupied with solving another whitetail mystery on the drive home. It is clear who really has the patience gene in the *Big Buck* family.

It was September of 2007 when Garry was set up on the edge of an alfalfa field hoping to get video footage for his second DVD of *Where Legends Roam*. A nice young 4x4 whitetail slipped in near the large round bale where the blind was hidden. He had 10-inch G-2s and was just out of velvet. Nothing too eye-popping about this 135-class buck, but he looked content in his world. He

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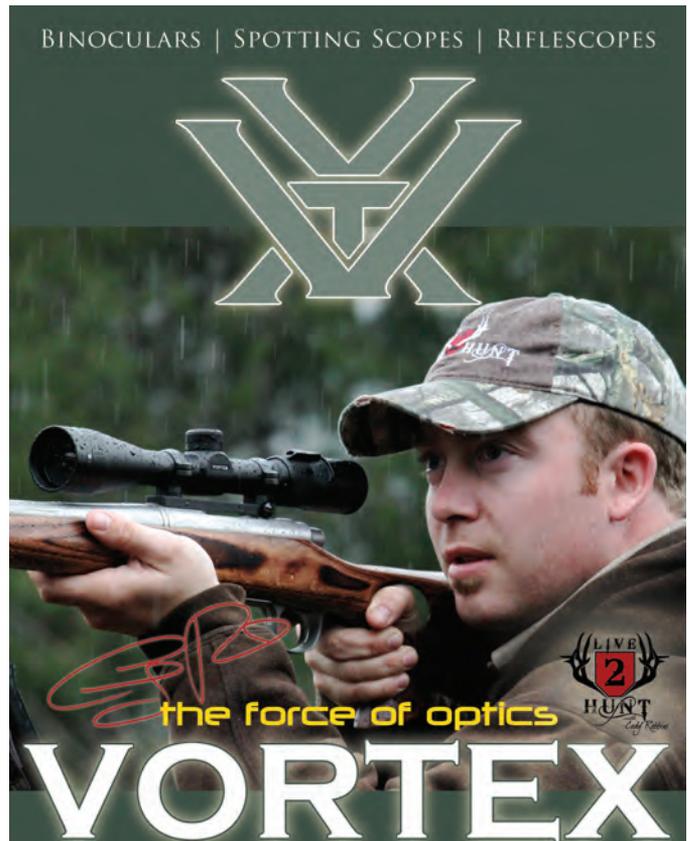
was joined by a number of nice bucks that had the rest of the fall to look forward to, as do the hunters. Garry didn't hunt much during the season of '07. His attitude towards all the CWD tags the government was handing out really stuck in his craw. Rather than participate in the kill-off, he focused his time and attention on tracking down some outstanding footage for his DVD.

During one of his first sits of September 2008, Garry had another look at the 4x4 buck from the previous year as it came in to the same alfalfa field. Now the whitetail was a 5x4 and had added mass and three inches to each G-2. He was much more impressive this time around as he walked into another spectacular Saskatchewan sunset, making for some wonderful camera work. Later in October, Garry crossed paths with the tall-tined buck once again in all his fully rutted glory. He was a tempter, but of course he needed "one more year of growth," so this whitetail specimen was safe for another day.

Garry put many hours into his photography blinds during the 2008/2009 winter. He was rewarded with all kinds of great footage of some super bucks, but the high-tined up-and-comer was conspicuous in his absence. As always, when we are aware of individual bucks, the question was, did he make it through the hunting season and a tough winter? The spring shed hunt of 2009 provided no clue as to the whereabouts of the buck or what hand destiny had dealt him.

The show must go on and accordingly our intrepid cameraman was back in the blinds for the 2009 fall season. I've received

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This side view shows the long main beams this whitetail grew. Bill Longman photo.

Hunting season arrived and Garry vowed to make a better effort at putting something on the ground. It should be noted that this “vowing” was done well out of earshot of Elaine, who was barely visible under a mountain of mail, freshly delivered to the *Big Buck* office. At least eight different morning hunts with the muzzleloader produced poor results. The crazy weather had the deer abandoning their usual routines. Perhaps rifle season would be better.

Opening morning saw Garry parked in his blind and the mature bucks parked somewhere else. After a quiet sit, the hunter decided to check out a trail camera he had set up on another piece of territory where hunting wasn't permitted. A real nice 5x5 showed up on camera at 8:00 that morning and the site was only half a mile from Garry's hunting blind, so he once again went home with optimism. The next morning's hunt, however, turned up about the same results as previous sits. The mule deer rut was peaking and there was videoing to be done. Plan B was put into place.

conflicting reports as to exactly how much time Garry was out in deer territory. He says “quite a bit” with a twinkle in his eye, Elaine says “more like every second day” with a bit of a twitch in her eye. Regardless of statistics, many different mature buck sightings helped the image of the tall-tined buck evaporate from consciousness.

First, though, Garry wanted to check out where the big 5x5 had gone through, and upon arrival at that site, he saw three really nice whitetails hanging around. As he watched them through his spotting scope, the biggest buck got nervous and looked back into the trees. A large mulie buck charged into the picture and turned out to be the notorious “Majestic 2,” which is also in Garry's second DVD. This huge non-typical



Bill Longman with Garry's 2009 whitetail. With Bill's help, the two friends ended up with great field photos to remember this moment. Notice the neat sticker on both G-2s. Garry Donald photo.

mule deer had a bit of an attitude that morning, chasing other bucks around the area. He had made it through another Saskatchewan mule deer season and was really feeling aggressive! As Majestic disappeared into cover on the tail of a pretender, Garry didn't realize this would be the last time he would see the buck until he discovered its cape and antlers in a local taxidermy shop, obviously taken well after the legal season. An investigation is pending and hopefully justice will be served.

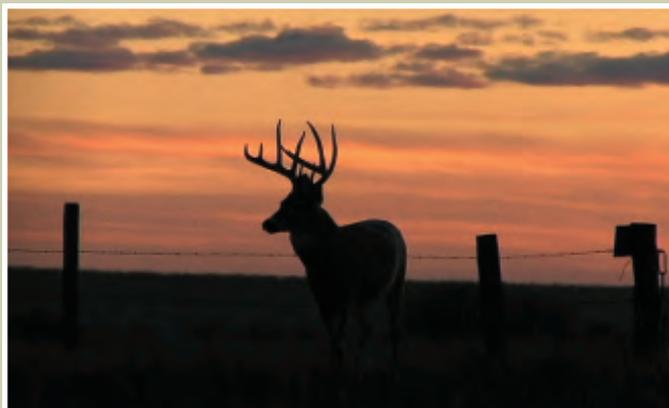
The warm weather prevailed, further limiting daytime deer activity. My haunts weren't producing either, so Garry and I decided to head to his blind one morning to commiserate over our poor results. As usual, the hardest part of our hunts together is to stop giggling at the latest jokes we've heard.

I got the sightings off to a fast start in the early morning light. I excitedly whispered to Garry that a nice buck had just crested the rise and was making its way towards us. He quickly checked it over in his Vortex binoculars and informed me he wasn't interested in a bull moose. I then informed him that I had my contacts in backwards and wouldn't be making anymore announcements. He seemed fine with that.

Not much more happened for the rest of the morning sit, so we decided to go see what the mulies were doing. It was a great afternoon of action as the rut was still rock'n and this species of deer does not mind doing their thing out in the open, making for outstanding photographic opportunities. It was exactly what I needed after a year of meagre deer activity. For Garry it was just another day at the office, but he still, after all these years, brings an amazing enthusiasm for getting these creatures on film.

On November 30, Garry's persistence paid off. His morning vigil produced some doe sightings, but despite reports of a heated-up whitetail rut, no bucks were following. The mule deer were still playing the mating game and that was enough to keep the cameraman busy during the day in anticipation of some late afternoon action around the blind.

The weather finally began to turn during midday with snowflakes the size of silver dollars floating down. The wind began to pick up and visibility waned. Garry figured the bucks might move. As he settled into the familiar confines of his ground blind, a real good buck appeared on a nearby hillside. At 150 inches, it wasn't the kind of animal that would get Garry to pull the trigger, but it certainly was encouraging. Off to the left another whitetail in the low 140s materialized. Things were starting to look interesting. The smaller buck stared intently off into the buckbrush, and the hunter's heart rate doubled as a brown body worked its way clear. Dang! A good mulie buck slipped from the bush. Both bucks stared each other down, then imperceptibly settled their inter-species differences and started moving together towards the grain fields in the distance. Yet another body ghosted out of the swirling snow into view. It was the long-lost, almost forgotten high-tined whitetail! He immediately bluff-charged the other two bucks and quickened their pace. Garry had his video camera on a monopod and was rolling tape. When the buck changed course and headed towards the blind, his rack began to look real tempting. Stickers, long tines, big main beams, Garry's aiming eye must have begun to quiver as the decision (and this is big news, folks!) to try to take him was made. Anyone who has ever been in this position knows it can be an excruciatingly difficult process to



This video image sunset photo was taken in October of 2008.



This photo was taken two weeks later and shows the 5x4 frame the buck grew that year.

change from camera to weapon in a quiet, efficient manner. As the buck began to move past the blind, the manner shifted slightly into organized panic. A gun was eventually stuck out the window and a bullet sent on its way. At the shot, this particularly elusive whitetail pulled another disappearing act, this time into the soupy gloom of the snowstorm.

Left with little choice from the rapidly accumulating snow, Garry had to bust loose almost immediately and try to find the buck's tracks. He was rewarded with a spray of blood on the whitened ground. The buck was headed for posted land, but after 30 yards, Garry saw tines sticking up. Once he got his hands on the buck's rack, he knew he had made the right decision. He probably also knew that had a few of us seen the video and watched the huge whitetail walk off we might have given him a swift kick to the backside!

Bill Longman was called right away and he was thrilled to hear that Garry had put a good one down. The highways were so bad from the snowstorm that Garry stayed over at Bill's that night, then they went out the next morning for some photos. From there it was on to my acreage, and my new shop was christened with the rare honour of skinning Garry's buck. I was very impressed with this deer. As a 4x4, whitetails do not get much bigger. No one has earned the right to harvest an animal like this more than my dear old friend. He has put in the time and deeply appreciates his moments shared with these incredible animals. This buck is a fine reward for one of the good guys in the world and a nice payback to him and his lovely wife, who have provided us with many memories over the years through their magazine's exciting pages. 🍷