

DEER #1: 5x7, unofficial gross score 166 2/8

Ever since I was nine years old, I have followed the hunting trails of my father with big hopes of seeing him get the big one. Eleven years later, he is still my very own personal guide and I now have a new understanding of the term "buck fever."

spruce tree stood a buck. I could hear him rooting around and smelling the air. He knew I was there. When he finally stepped out, I was completely taken aback by the huge velvet rack in front of me. Before I could make a shot, he looked over at me and took off running.

The 2002 hunting season passed, and before I knew it the 2003 season had already begun. It was time once again to hunt for more big bucks. I always told my dad my first

November

BY CRYSTAL FAESSLER

Crystal Faessler of Lone Butte, British Columbia, took this great mule deer in November of 2003, and her dad couldn't be more proud. It's sure nice to see hunters like Crystal enjoying the great outdoors. The 12-pointer has a gross score of 166 2/8 inches. These excellent photos were taken by Meridee Faessler.



Bucks

It was September 2002 when it all started. Dad and I set out on our usual hunting trail one morning. We headed towards a nearby clover field, where we spotted a group of mule deer does feeding just outside the treeline. All excited, we planned our stalk, hoping to stir up a buck. I went ahead and waited where the game trail ended at the next field, while Dad worked at pushing the deer towards me. There I sat waiting, not knowing what to expect. Then I heard a noise, and only 15 yards away behind a thick

buck had to be four points or better. I wasn't interested in any small stuff. He tried a few times to persuade me otherwise but knew I was pretty serious.

On November 14, 2003, Dad met me as I arrived home from school that evening.

He had spotted deer in a swamp earlier that day and figured we had a good chance of seeing a buck. I was excited but knew we had little time because daylight hours were coming to a close.

When we reached the swamp, a buck was standing about 50 yards away by the creek. Since the area was shaded, when I raised my gun it was too dark for me to make a comfortable shot.



Crystal with a bigger deer taken six days after her 139 5/8 buck. This one grossed 155 6/8 inches.



Crystal with her 4x4 that grossed 139 5/8 inches. It was taken in 2004.

The next morning I was ready to go! We headed back to the same area and began calling the buck, but there was no sign of him. All day I thought about that buck. That afternoon I told my dad I had to go look again. I just had a really good feeling about it. So off we headed.

When we entered a small clearing, I spotted the buck with a group of does. He was standing broadside behind a pine tree. My adrenaline was pumping as I waited and waited. He continued to stand there, not interested in moving at all. A doe had stepped out in front of him, blocking more of his body. We were losing daylight again. As the time passed, I managed to take a few breaths, calm myself and concentrate on the shot. Then all at once the doe stepped back and the buck stepped forward. Kaboom! It all happened so fast that Dad asked me, "Did you even aim, kid?"

We looked at the buck and could see he was hunching up, but I kept asking, "Did I get him, did I get him?" Although the buck began to run, it wasn't too far before he fell. Dad went to check if he was down for good and then called me over to see my trophy. It was the same buck we had seen the previous year. An incredible first buck, it was a beautiful 5x7. We stood there celebrating, yahoo, yahoo! I was so excited to take such an awesome buck and have my dad there with me. It was the best hunting experience ever.

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NEW EDITION

DEER #2: 4x4, gross score 139 5/8, after deductions 128 6/8

After harvesting such an amazing first buck, Dad asked me the next fall how I was going to beat it. We joked about “five points or better this year, I guess.” I spent a lot of time roaming around alone on my days off from work. I had seen a few smaller bucks, but I was waiting to spot one of the big ones I had heard were hanging around. I jokingly told my dad that I guess I would have to wait until November 15 again to get another big one, an anniversary deer!

When November 15, 2004, finally came around, I woke up that morning and headed out alone. There was a pretty wild snowstorm that day, but I was so determined that I just kept on hunting. That afternoon, frozen and thinking the day was looking uneventful, I headed home. Mom was working outside, so I sat on the front steps and visited with her. I was bummed right out, thinking it wasn't going to happen for me this year.

Suddenly I heard a vehicle driving pretty fast up our driveway. “Who's that?” I asked Mom. Before she could answer, I knew right away who it was. Dad had spotted a big one again on his way home. He was so happy to see me sitting there ready.

“Get in, get in!” Dad yelled.

We took off, and when I saw the deer, it was me who was yelling, “Dad, he's huge, he's huge!” I jumped out and prepared to shoot. The buck was standing behind a group of trees in an area I had just passed through not even an hour earlier. When he stepped out, he was looking right at me. I raised my gun but all I heard was “Click.” What the heck was going on? Not even thinking, I unloaded the shell and put it back in. “Click.” Dad thought I had forgotten to load my gun, but when he saw me unload the shell, he knew there was something wrong. It was a dud shell. I looked over at him, panicking because the deer was standing there looking at me and I didn't want to lose my shot.

Luckily Dad had brought his gun. “Here,” he said, “use my gun!” I raised his gun and pulled the trigger. All I saw was the deer hit the ground flat. I can't even remember what I said, but I let out the biggest sigh of relief ever. I was just so happy not to see the deer take off! Dad went back home to get my mom. When they returned, together we walked up to my deer, a nice 4x4 with a good heavy rack. Not the 5x5 I had talked about, but that didn't matter. It was an awesome deer that almost got away. It truly was my anniversary deer, same day and even about the same time.

DEER #3: 5x5, gross score 155 6/8, after deductions 150 6/8

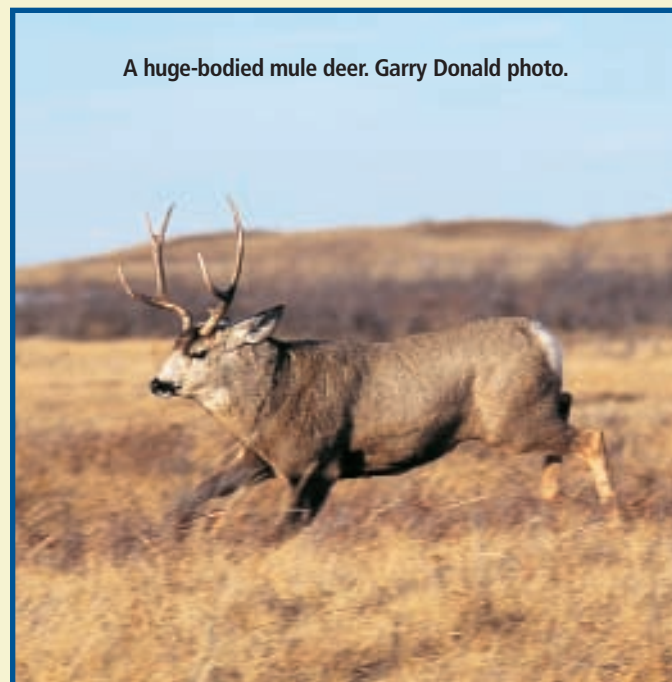
After taking my deer to the local sporting goods store to qualify for our local big buck contest, the owner asked me if I was going to try for another one. Not realizing I could, I took him up on the offer, bought another tag, and off I went again, determined to hold out for five points or better this time. However, I had my doubts. What if my luck had finally run out? Regardless, all I could do was try.

Only six days later, Dad and I were hunting on a logging road. What luck! Another nice buck was bedded with a doe on a fir ridge. We spent about 10 minutes looking at him through binoculars, trying to decide what to do. I didn't want to take a shot until he stood up. We snuck around the ridge to see if we could make him rise. When he stood up, I pulled the trigger. Although I was sure I had missed, I headed up the ridge and looked for blood.

Nothing. I was so disappointed, but then we spotted him. He had only jumped a few feet down the hill and died in the thick brush. I had made a perfect shot, and this time the buck was a 5x5. Now when I am at work, people always ask me if I am that little gal who shoots all those big bucks. You bet I am! I can't wait till next season.



Crystal and the three sets of antlers.



A huge-bodied mule deer. Garry Donald photo.