



Kyle Stelter photo.

As the morning sun slowly began to rise, casting a gorgeous pink hue onto the high peaks of the Alberta Rockies, my dad rode his horse up ahead of my horse and me on the first day of a week-long hunt. He stopped on a high mountain trail, and as I rode up beside him, he pointed down to a horseshoe lying on the ground. He said, "Well, Jeff, there's your horseshoe and it's pointing lucky side up."

Well, I honestly didn't think my luck would continue after the 2006 hunting season, but here I was on the opening day of the 2007 season on a horseback bighorn hunt with my father, our friend Blain and my uncle Nick, and by day's end, I already had a gorgeous, heavily-broomed 176 B&C ram on the ground. I guess my lucky streak was still alive and that I was "packing" that horseshoe.

My parents had bought me a new Matrix ground blind in August and I was getting anxious to try it out. I was patiently awaiting our annual whitetail hunt in northern Alberta, still on a high from killing a triple drop-tined buck in November 2006.

Our group of guys arrived to mediocre conditions, with zero-degree temperatures and about an inch of snow. I spent a great deal of time trying to get a little farther into the woods to try to escape the above average number of hunters due to the warmer weather. I thought I had found a great spot on a wide cutline where a pipeline had been buried probably 10 years earlier. The regrowth provided some excellent cover and the deer trails I found proved that this area could produce a great buck. I sat in my ground blind, day in and day out, without seeing much of anything to get excited about. I thought that this year's bighorn had finally ended my run and that the hunt was going to go by pretty much uneventfully.

After a slow first week, the second week was starting to look great with about 18 inches of fresh snow and the temperature was finally starting to drop. We hoped that this would send the type of bucks we were after into the main stage of the rut. Everyone began seeing more and more bucks with some of the bigger boys showing

BY JEFF SCHLACHTER

Jeff Schlachter of Wadena, Saskatchewan, with a great Alberta whitetail he took in 2007 when he lived in that province. The antlers carry good mass with an above average spread of 23 2/8 inches. The longest main beam reaches out to 24 7/8 inches. Jeff's whitetail ends up grossing 180 6/8 and netting 168 7/8 typical points.

Where's the lucky horseshoe?

themselves more frequently. I had tried some rattling sequences, put out some scent, and made a scrape line in hopes of drawing in a big buck close enough for a shot. I was trying to look two ways, not sure which way would produce the type of buck I was looking for.

When "the one" finally showed up, he appeared like a ghost, holding tight in the shadows of the treeline. It was tough to get a good look at him, but judging by his frame and mass, he had "shooter" written all over him. I figured he was only going to give me the "split second" those big classic whitetails are so famous for, so I pulled up my trusty .300 Weatherby and levelled him with a single shot from one of my hand-loaded 180-grain Nosler bullets. He dropped on the spot, but I still gave him a few minutes, with my rifle drawn on him, to make sure he wasn't going to get up and perform a disappearing act.

I took my time as I walked up to him, my mind drifting back to the previous year and the 199+ non-typical I had been fortunate enough to harvest. As I arrived at the fallen trophy that lay before me, I couldn't believe the weight of his antlers



Jeff with his bighorn sheep.

Jeff travelled to southern Alberta to try to fill his draw elk tag. He couldn't believe his luck when he downed this huge 6x6 bull that scored 344 inches.



and the beautiful, dark mahogany, 6x5 typical rack he carried. I just took a moment to take it all in and count my lucky stars as I stared in awe at what a gorgeous, amazing buck I had just put on the ground. I had such a surreal feeling and didn't know what I had done to deserve these two tremendous whitetails in back-to-back years, but hey, I sure wasn't complaining. The fall of 2007 was shaping up to be another that dreams are made of, and I couldn't believe that horseshoe was still working for me.

The buck's left antler is absolutely amazing with 24 6/8 inches of mass, a 24 7/8 inch main beam, and a score of 81 3/8 typical. With a 23 2/8 inside spread, he has a gross typical score of 180 6/8 and a net score of 168 7/8 B&C. If his right antler had matched his left, he would have netted around the magical 180 typical mark. However, a weak G-2 and G-4 on his right antler cost him dearly on the score sheet. Nonetheless, he is a tremendous buck.

I then headed straight from the boreal forest of northern

Alberta to the prairies of southern Alberta to hunt bull elk on a late season tag that I was grateful to get drawn for. I was starting to tread on thin ice with my wife, Jodi, after being gone so much already, but I reassured her I'd do my best to kill a big bull and come home as soon as possible. The heat was on and I was starting to worry that if I didn't come home soon the locks would be changed! Well, I may be exaggerating a little and it actually wasn't that bad. She has always been extremely understanding with my time away from home in the fall and very supportive of my so-called "hunting obsessions."

I hunted hard for a big bull and came across a great, heavy, 344 B&C 6x6, which I was fortunate enough to put on the ground. For the third time in 2007, my .300 Weatherby barked, leaving me with my third incredible animal of the fall.

I definitely know I can't keep up this pace, but I sure hope that my lucky horseshoe is going to stick around for another season!