



Wham, Bam... Thank You, Ma'am!

By Steven Bridges
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I don't deer hunt much by myself at this point in my hunting life. I spend most of my time guiding friends, my kids, and my family. Last season, I guided my sister-in-law Lisa Thompson on a rare deer hunt.

Lisa and her husband Vince have three young children. Because she is always busy with the kids, she has very limited hunting opportunities. In fact, she hadn't been deer hunting since her youngest, Macy, was born three years ago.

So I jumped when she asked me to guide her on her one and only free afternoon last season. The pressure was on me to try to get Lisa on a good buck in a single afternoon.

Lots of factors can mess up a hunt on any given day. I have had hunts derailed when weather turned foul on me. Once a neighboring rancher decided to gather stock right in the middle of my hunt. He blew his siren for an hour as he drove around yelling, "Wooo Cows! HEY COWS! Come On Cows!" And I've had hunts ruined many times by reasons only known to the deer.

Scouting helps before these short duration, pressure packed hunts. Unlike most of the family, I'm at the ranch a lot. While doing normal ranch chores, I keep

track of where and when I see deer. I also keep my eyes peeled for deer tracks, rubs and scrapes. Over time, I have noticed patterns of deer movement on our ranch. These movements are more or less reliable. But on any given day, it is still a crap shoot. That is why it is called hunting and not shooting.

So given the constraints of Lisa's short window of oppor-

tunity, I chose my most reliable stand at the ranch. Now when I say that this is "my" most reliable stand, I mean that it is where I sit to watch deer. In addition, I had been seeing a nice ten point buck near the blind every day for a week solid. He liked to hang out under the many oak trees near the blind. Every time I saw him, he was either eating acorns or chasing does.

On the downside, this is a one man box blind on stilts. I have hunted with my nine year-old son in this blind several times. It was a tight squeeze inside with my son. It would be even tighter quarters with my sister-in-law.

In addition to the small area inside the stand, I placed the shooting windows up high in the stand. I had an old bar stool when I built the blind. I placed the shooting windows high up so I could sit on

the stool and shoot. But a storm blew the stand over a few years back and the bar stool didn't make it. Now I have a chair in the blind. I never cut new windows because all I do now is watch deer with binoculars. So now the windows are up at eye height on me with binoculars. But the window height would turn out to be a real shooting challenge for Lisa.

I told Lisa about the tight quar-

ters, but I didn't think about the windows being too high. She said a little desperately, "I just want to get a deer. I don't really care what we have to do to get it." She would live to regret that statement.

Since I only had one chair in the blind, I chose to pack along a little three legged stool for me. It was all I thought would fit in the blind next to the chair. I'd put Lisa up in the chair.

As luck (or three little kids) would have it, we got a late start on the hunt. We got to the ranch about an hour later than I would have liked and parked the truck. We'd only have a couple hours of shooting light for our hunt. We made a bee line for the blind walking into the wind, hoping not to get busted by any early moving deer.

Luckily, we didn't see any deer

on the way to the blind. I sent Lisa up the ladder into the blind first. I held Lisa's unloaded rifle, my little stool, and my blind bag that contains binoculars, grunt call, rattling horns, snacks, etc.

Lisa squeezed through the little door on the side of the blind and disappeared inside. I had just started up the ladder with the gear when I heard Lisa 'whisper yelling', "Hurry Steve! I see a buck!

Hurry!"

I got to the door and handed Lisa the rifle. I threw the stool and my bag inside

as quietly as possible. Of course, it sounded like I was banging on a drum set. I wrangled my body inside the tiny space feeling like a clown getting into the car before a performance at the circus.

Lisa busied herself loading the rifle while I dug in my bag for my binoculars. I hunched over to the window and put eyes on the buck a few seconds before Lisa told me that her rifle was loaded and ready.

I could see that this was indeed the buck I had seen in the area. He was standing in the shade of a wide oak tree facing a big doe. They were about 125 yards away. Both the buck and the doe were looking at us fumbling around in the tiny blind.

"When I said I'd do anything to get a deer, I didn't really mean ANYTHING!" said Lisa.

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