



Photo by Phil Audibert
Flanked by newspaper clippings, awards and trophies he has mounted, Clint Cockrill holds up a bear skin that he will transform into a life-size "full mount."

in his neck. "I'm going to fix that. I've got to sew that back together somehow and make it look like something."

He then screws the antlers onto some plywood embedded in the form's head, and fits the cape on the form, complete with mouth, Bondo or plastic ears, and glass eyes. He reaches into a multi-drawer plastic box and produces all manner of eyes: dark ones for bear, eerie yellow for coyote, even white for albino. If he doesn't create the ears out of Bondo, he'll use plastic inserts to make them stand up. He'll even spray the nose with a clear coat to make it look wet and alive.

The whole process takes between five and eight hours, but you'll have to wait much longer than that to get your trophy. Because of lag time, he's usually six to eight months out before you'll have something to put on your wall. Besides, just doing deer heads day in and day out can be a little tedious. He likes to vary his routine by mounting fish, birds and small game.

A basic shoulder mount of a deer head at Cockrill's Taxidermy costs about \$500. A "full mount" of a bighorn sheep, for example, can be \$2,800 and up. But deer heads are generally

eaper to do than most
all game. "The reason
all game costs more
because the form's
ore and it takes twice
long to do one." And
with birds, the tanning
process is different. It's
so different if you want
hide to be soft, such as
bearskin rug, for exam-
e. In that case he will
eat the tanned skin
with a special oil to make
more pliable.

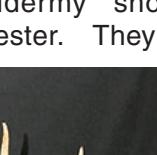
Clint's father walks to the shop and points a dusty looking deer head on the wall. He mentions that it was his first big deer, shot in 1974. "First buck I ever killed," he says.

ys proudly.
Then we look at the incredible deer head that

ngs to Quentin Flowers. It will be mounted
a free standing vine-draped dead tree trunk
will look good in a corner of a living room.
y discuss this deer head's Boone and
Crockett "score," and whether it is "typical," or
non-typical," and if there are any "drop tines."
There is a complicated formula that takes into
account the breadth, length and circumference
of the antlers. Before deductions, this head
scores 167, which is a monster, but not quite big
enough to make "the book." To make the book,
you have to score 170 net "and it takes a big
head to score 170 net, once you take off the
deductions," says Bob Cockrill.

look at the Boone and Crockett web site as the world record "typical" (symmetrical) mule deer trophy was taken in Saskatchewan in 1993. It scored 213 5/8 with 30 points. The world record "non-typical" deer trophy came from Missouri. It is something of a buck with 44 points, but many of those tines are broken off, which makes it non-typical. Still, this deer, which looks like it is wearing a brush on its head, scored 333 7/8.

The Cockrills originally hail from the Clifton area of Northern Virginia, and Clint used to have a taxidermy shop on Mount Paris near Winchester. They've been farming their 200-acre cattle and commercial hay operation near Unionville for nine years now. Cockrill's Taxidermy is located in a separate building in the barnyard. Sometimes when Clint shows up at the shop, hunters are already lined up with deer carcasses in their trucks.





Six months later they'll come back to collect the finished product and pay the balance right about when Clint is helping his Dad make hay. And, even though it's June, when he rolls out that trophy, you can rest assured that it is indeed that same monster buck that magically appeared before you in that frost-covered cut-over

Photo by Phil Audibert
A deer head, belonging to Quentin Flowers of J.E. Taylor Hunt Club, scored 167 on the Pope and Crockett scale before deductions. Note realistic muscle roll on the inside shoulder.

appeared before you in that frost-covered cut-over cornfield one memorable December morning.



'you're a hunter, you can relate to this. If not, proceed with caution.'

You've done everything right. You have your license and your tags and your written permission from the landowner. You've paid attention to the weather and the wind. You've rattled and lured and sat shivering in this stand since before first light.

And then it happens: a monster buck appears upwind of you. He stands there, magnificent in the morning light at the edge of a frost-covered cut-over cornfield. His brisket is full. He has the telltale sway in his back and belly of maturity.

And look at that rack! Eight broadly spaced upwardly stretching tines, symmetrical left and right. He might even score well enough to make the Boone and Crockett "book." He has had several years to spread his good genes through the burgeoning white tail deer population; he belongs to you now.

You may be 10 years old; you may be 70, but this might be a once in a lifetime opportunity. Don't mess it up. You will your shaking hands still,



Above, Bob Cockrill (right) took and mounted every trophy you see in this picture. The wall continues around the corner to his left. He started out in taxidermy in the 1970s and passed the tradition on to his son, Clint. Left, after the acidic tanning process the deer hide is neutralized in a baking soda solution.

Photos by Phil Audibert

put the cross hairs on him right behind the shoulder, squeeze the trigger and bring him down with one shot.

Well done! You have a trophy buck. You want to put him on your wall and remember this moment for the rest of your life. But what you do next is crucial.

Clint Cockrill of Unionville is a full time taxidermist. He's extremely busy this time of year and will remain so until early summer. He will be happy to mount this trophy buck of yours just as long as you are patient and you have followed the advice of his video entitled, *Field Dressing, Skinning and Quartering Deer*. The 42-minute-long DVD, by How To Productions, shows in graphic detail what you the hunter should do to ensure that you will have a fine looking trophy on your wall and plenty of unspoiled meat in your freezer.

Some typical mistakes that will make a deer more difficult or even impossible to mount include cutting the skin up too high on the throat of the animal. In the video, Clint uses a surprisingly small knife to expertly field dress the carcass. He never cuts higher than the bottom of the rib cage so that he has plenty of unmarred pelt to mount.

"Don't cut the throat on the deer," he cautions. If a coup de grace is necessary, "Go ahead and shoot him again in the heart and lungs. It's fairer to the animal that way." Besides Clint can only do so much with needle and thread, and you want this trophy to be, well, perfect.

The next thing he recommends is you bring him the carcass. "I would rather do the skinning than have someone else do the skinning and mess it up," he explains, adding "Don't let it ride around in the back of your truck in 70 degree heat for four or

five days before you bring it to your taxidermist. Get it refrigerated or cooled down as soon as possible, even freeze it," he recommends. "Bacteria is your worst enemy to your mount...You can't do anything if the hair starts to fall out of it."

So, you take his advice, load the field dressed deer into your pick up truck and bump down the long farm lane off of Route 522 in Unionville to Cockrill's Taxidermy. The first thing you see when you walk in is a wall of mounted heads, floor to ceiling. It stretches around two corners and features not just deer, but elk and moose, even a full size black bear. All of these animals

were taken and mounted by Clint's father, Bob Cockrill over the past 35 years.

With some formal training and a lot of learn-as-you-go, the father passed on to his son the tricks of the trade ever since Clint was eight years old.

"And then he went

to school and learned all the new stuff that they had come out with in the last 15 or 20 years that I didn't know about," says the father. "So, I taught him everything that I knew, and he learned a whole bunch of new stuff and would-

n't tell me what he had learned." His eyes twinkle, and Clint responds with an eye roll. "So, he's better than me," continues Bob. "You need to be good in this day and age because there's a lot of good taxidermists around."

Not long ago he

did a full mount of a Russian bear with a head as big as a trash can and paws the size of jagged oven mitts. He has a picture of it standing on its hind feet, towering over his six-year-old son, Ethan. How in the world



Photos by Phil Audibert

You can get everything from McKenzie Taxidermy Supply catalog: from left to right: a plastic deer ear liner, coyote eyes, a bear's snout.



A stuffed Russian bear towers over Ethan Cockrill, age 6.

Photo by Clint Cockrill

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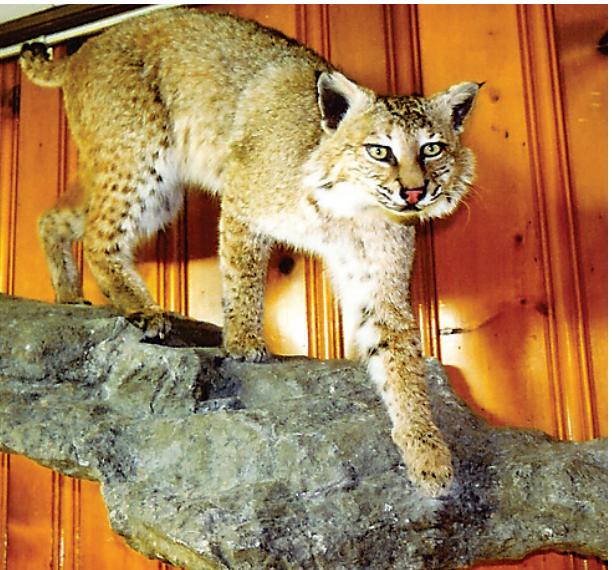
It's not just deer heads. Cockrill Taxidermy also mounts fish and birds, above, and small game such as a bobcat and a fox with a quail in its mouth, at right.

head to be looking left or right. "I believe that you don't show as much muscle on a straight form. When a deer turns his neck he'll have a muscle roll that rolls down through his neck." He demonstrates on a completed deer head belonging to Quentin Flowers, of the J.E. Taylor Hunt Club. Flowers was featured in an Insider about hunting about a year ago. "Guys like to see that muscle roll," smiles Clint. "I get a lot of compliments on that."

Once these decisions are made by the customer, Clint will "cape out" the carcass. Working swiftly and deftly with an extremely sharp knife, he skins the deer from its rear end to its head as it hangs from the ceiling in his blood-stained work area. Just like we take a sweater off, the "cape" rolls off of the animal as Clint carefully separates the skin from the fascia, totally at ease with the knife in either hand.

Exotic species aside, in this part of the world, Clint's bread and butter is deer heads. He'll do about 100 a year. On this particular day, Clint is working on a magnificent buck that was shot recently by an eleven-year-old. Clint had already taken measurements around the neck and from the eye to the snout to know what size form to order. And he had determined from the boy whether he wants the

process; one slip and you may ruin the mount. "The most important thing here is not to cut a hole in the man's cape." As it is, he has worked around bullet holes before, and on this particular cape, the deer "apparently got in a fight." His opponent's antler split his lip and gored a hole



tion of the skin that he will mount, basically from the armpits forward, into a five gallon bucket containing a tanning solution called "a pickle" for a minimum of three days. "It's got some nasty stuff in it," he says of the pickle, wrinkling his nose. "If you stuck your hand down there and left your hand in there, it would burn all the skin off of it." Still, Clint prefers to do all his tanning in house.

After the three days or more are up, he pulls the skin out of the tanning solution and washes it repeatedly. "I have to kill the acid," he says as he dumps sodium bicarbonate, basically "high end baking soda," into the pickle. It bubbles and froths menacingly; then settles down to become as inert as bath water.

He then rinses the cured hide, inside and out in a baking soda-laced bath to completely neutralize the tanning process.

After it drains, he moves over to an electric scraper/shaver to rid the hide of all excess flesh. "That's got to come off," he cautions. "You can't leave that on there or it will rot. It's all got to be smooth."



This is a delicate stage in the process; one slip and you may ruin the mount. "The most important thing here is not to cut a hole in the man's cape." As it is, he has worked around bullet holes before, and on this particular cape, the deer "apparently got in a fight." His opponent's antler split his lip and gored a hole