BY **DOUG KOENIG**

Offhand Shooting vs. Shooting from a Rest

The general consensus is that a crossbow is much easier to shoot than a vertical bow. My feeling is the "general consensus" is only applicable if the crossbow is being used with some sort of rest.

You may be holding the crossbow like a rifle in the offhand position, but it does not make the device any steadier than a vertical bow. You still need all the same fundamentals you execute with a vertical bow. The biggest factor is the follow-through.

As you squeeze the trigger on a crossbow, you must keep the sight on the target until you see the bolt hit. The lock time of a crossbow is nothing like that of a rifle. A crossbow shoots roughly 280-340 feet per second. A typical deer-hunting rifle shoots around 2,700 fps. You can see the difference here — it is tremendous. This is where the follow-through becomes critical. You must wait and see the arrow hit the target to have an accurate shot.

When shooting a crossbow offhand, just like with a vertical bow, you will have movement in your hold. The amount of movement varies from shooter to shooter. I've seen some archers who are able to hold and execute the shot with a vertical bow better than they can with a crossbow in some situations. Either way, you must practice, practice, practice shooting offhand. Practice your follow-through. Work on your shooting techniques; squeezing the trigger, breathing, and again, the follow-through.

Rest Options

One big advantage a crossbow has over a vertical bow is the ability to use a rest. You can attach a monopod or conventional bipod as you see many rifle hunters use. When a crossbow is used with a rest, it becomes a super accurate, precision hunting weapon. You could also use shooting sticks with a crossbow. Just be sure the sticks are in front of where the string rests! You don't want the string hitting the tips of your sticks. But whether it's a bipod or shooting sticks or the rail of a treestand, you must make sure the limbs never make contact with anything when the shot goes off. Anything that gets in the way of the limbs during the shot will throw the bolt off.

What makes an ideal rest for crossbows? That depends on the hunter and whether you want to have a rest affixed to the crossbow or carry it with you. The disadvantages of affixing something to the crossbow include added weight, more awkward handling and additional noise.

Terrain can also determine what type of rest you may be able to use.

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The ability to use a rest to steady your shot is one of the major advantages crossbow shooters have over vertical bow shooters. There are a variety of rest options available, from crossbow-attached monopods, such as the one shown here, to shooting sticks and shooting rails on treestands.

One of the most stable shooting positions is prone. If you know you will be able to take a prone shot, a bipod with short legs will be ideal. But that won't work if you're hunting where the sagebrush is two feet tall! The hunter has to choose what will work best in a particular situation. I personally like shooting sticks because they're quick and easy. If I can sit on the ground, I use the sticks in the sitting position. If I can't sit, I can still use the sticks to steady the shot while I'm standing.

When to Use a Rest

When do I use a rest? Whenever I can! Typically, if the shot is less than 40 yards and conditions are good, I won't use a rest. That rarely happens while hunting. So, if it's a little windy, there is steep terrain or I am in an awkward position, I try to use a rest whenever possible. If I'm forced to shoot offhand because of the terrain or conditions, that definitely limits my effective range. With a steady rest, I can extend my range about 20 yards. I would not hesitate to shoot out to 60 yards (under good conditions) with a rest, at larger animals – but everything would have to