

ALBERTA BRUTES

—by Mike Ukrainetz—



Matt Rehor with his first mule deer.

As owner of Mike's Outfitting Ltd. in Alberta, Canada I always get hunters asking me, "How big are your mule deer. Do you get any 30 inchers?" Though some of the hunters are disappointed to hear that we rarely shoot 30-inch plus bucks, they are thrilled to hear about the high gross scores, about the great mass, deep forks and big brow tines on our deer. They are also shocked to hear about body weights nearing 300 pounds field-dressed! Most of our huge bucks simply don't grow wide antler spreads, normally measuring a mere 24 to 27 inches outside. Many are even narrower than that. For example, one of our hunters from last year, Scott Newman (who is a guide from Alaska), killed a 192 gross score non-typical that was only 22 inches wide (outside spread) but which had honest 8 1/4 inch bases. They weren't palmed either, just Coke-can heavy. A true brute of a deer. That was just one example in the southern part of Alberta, and in my new, northern Alberta area finding a deer with big mass, deep forks and a high score is even more likely. This was really evident in the first few hunts last season.

The first couple of hunters this past fall (2006) were Charlie Rehor and his son, Matt, both from Massachusetts. They came on a bow hunt and Matt, who had never taken a mule deer, killed a fairly young buck, but it still scored 171 inches and had a modest 25 inch wide spread. It had 19 inches of mass on each antler, though, which is heavy for most places, but really only average for northern Alberta. It was a great first muley and Matt was thrilled.

After Matt's kill it was Charlie's turn. We set out in search of a giant Alberta typical that we had scouted out earlier in the summer. We had seen him the day before but he had gone onto land where we didn't have permission to hunt, so we had to let him go. The buck was about 26-27 inches wide on the outside main frame, with nice brow tines and good mass. We estimated that he'd score in the 180's. The next day we went back to the same field where we had seen him previously. It was our lucky day! At first light we found him bedded in a wheat field with a little buck. All we could see of the big guy was his thick velvet tines poking out of the crop. We thought about putting a stalk on him, as there was a stiff breeze in our favor and he was near the crest of a low hill giving us a bit of an easier stalk. I didn't trust him to stay bedded at such an early time, though. It was a good thing we held off because in a short while he rose out of his bed and started feeding. We would have been busted. He wandered through the rolling field eating while we hoped he would bed in the crop. It didn't look like he would. Soon he and his little buddy started to slowly head toward the land of "no permission". When he'd gone there the day before he had passed by a group of trees in a low spot. If he did the same thing this time, and we could get there before him, we might just get a crack at him. With this thought in mind we quickly drove off, parked the truck, and hustled to the ambush spot. The field rolled off at the back, hiding our approach.

We soon made it there and waited. Before long, the buck showed up on the horizon heading our way. With our hearts in our throats it was a painstakingly long wait. The deer fed our way...500 yards, 450, 400, 350, then at 300 yards he turned and fed out into the field away from us. We cursed our luck as he slowly walked out of sight. "Come on, Charlie," I urgently whispered, "I think we can still cut him off." With Matt in tow doing the videoing we hustled to a small bush line. As we peeked through the bushes, deathly afraid we would get busted, we spotted the buck, oblivious to our presence. He was feeding just 100 yards away and was headed right towards us. He worked our way excruciatingly slowly while I whispered probably unnecessary tips to Charlie. At 45 yards the buck turned almost perfectly broadside and then the little buck busted me moving. "You'd better shoot while he is still feeding." Charlie drew, held and nailed him. It was angling back slightly but plenty good enough. The buck ran about 300 yards and piled up. He was awesome with 5 1/2 inch circumferences and big deep forks, grossing 185 7/8 inches and netting 180 4/8 inches typical. We estimated the deer's live weight at about 300 pounds, big but not huge.

