

Robert Taylor—Outdoorsman

He's nearly 50 with much of the same youthful handsomeness that made him a film favorite; his secret?—hunting, fishing, flying, and spinning yarns about them all

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

ON AUG. 5 of this year actor Bob Taylor will celebrate his 50th birthday.

Conservatively speaking, he looks 40.

Much of the credit goes to a vigorous outdoor life, the love for which dates back to his youth in Filley, Neb.

"I rode horses almost as soon as I learned to walk," he says. "I shot my first jack rabbit when I was only nine years old."

His father, a doctor, had a lot of confidence in his only son. He simply wished him good luck when the boy left the house with a shotgun under his arm.

College and the beginning of a motion-picture career temporarily interrupted Bob's outdoor activities, but a chance meeting with Gary Cooper at Sun Valley, Idaho, not only rekindled his interest but sparked it to the point where nowadays, if it's during the hunting season, one needn't ask Bob's whereabouts when he isn't working.

"Coop never went anywhere without his guns," Bob recalled. "When we met in Sun Valley back in '39, he persuaded me to go with him on a pheasant hunt. I've been hunting ever since."

Bob admits a couple of close calls on his expeditions, the most frightening of which occurred a few years ago just north of Bakersfield, Calif., during the duck season.

He was using an over-and-under 12-gauge shotgun. In his coat, among his 12-gauge shells, he also had a 20-gauge shell left over from a previous hunting trip. Accidentally, he put it into the lower barrel.

"The first time I fired, nothing happened, so I put another shell into the chamber, this time a 12-gauge." The first shell had simply slipped down the barrel, and when Bob pulled the trigger again, both shells went off simultaneously—and the explosion ripped holes in both sides of the barrel.

"Fortunately," says Bob, "we were holding a flock of flying ducks in our sights, and I was just swinging the gun around when it happened. Had I been shooting straight on, the shot coming out of the side would have blown my companion's head off. It missed him by inches."

Still, Bob's hand quickly swelled to the size of a grapefruit. "Get back to the cabin and soak your hand," his companion, Harry Fleishman, ordered. "Then get another gun and come back."

"It was the best advice he could have given me," Bob recalls. "It's just like climbing back on a horse after you get thrown. If I hadn't done it, I might have been too scared to go hunting again."

Most of Bob's hunting is done on the property of a friend in north-central Wyoming, 30 miles out of Sheridan. "He let Ursula and me take over an old homestead cabin shortly after we were married," Bob explains. Then, to answer a still-unasked question, he adds, "Ursula has made a fine outdoorswoman. She doesn't particularly like to shoot anything, but she comes along to watch and isn't squeamish when an animal is killed."

His German-born wife also excels in helping Bob clean and dress game, start fires, and generally rough it in Wyoming, or wherever his love for the outdoors takes them. In fact, she's far more patient than Bob when it comes to at least one outdoor sport—fishing.

"I've fished since I was six years old," Bob says. "Almost every day after school I got on my pony to join a friend who lived in a cabin near the river. We used to catch grasshoppers and put them on a series of hooks which we left in the water overnight. Most of the time we caught carp too full of bones to be eaten. Once in a while we caught a catfish. They were delicious."

TODAY, Bob has one of the most complete assortments of fishing equipment of any star. And on a moment's notice he will go deep-sea fishing in the gulf of Baja, California, trout fishing in the Green River, or he'll saw a hole in the ice to throw a line in a lake near Pinedale, Wyo.

"The trouble is that if I can't catch anything, I soon lose my patience and quit," he admits.

Does fishing or hunting relax him?

"Not really," says Bob. "If I have a professional problem on my mind, I stay home and worry about it till it's taken care of. I guess hunting does provide some sort of therapy. While you are doing it, you can't really think of much else."

Bob's favorite outdoor pastime is flying. His twin-engine plane has become as much a means of transportation to Bob, Ursula, and their children (Terry, 5½, and Tessa, 1) as a car is to most families.

Bob first became interested in flying in 1939, when he was starring in the movie, "Flight Command." A year later he bought his own plane, then took lessons for a pilot's license.

During World War II, he was a flight instructor in the Navy. When he got out of the service, he progressed from a single-engine to a twin-engine plane because "it's a lot safer."

Today, he considers his recklessness during his



A seasoned horseman, Bob enjoys riding around his

first years in the air as "pure foolishness."

He recalls the day he and a friend suddenly decided to fly to the Southern California-Notre Dame football game in Indiana. By the time they reached the airport to take off at 5 a.m., the fog was so thick they couldn't even see the runway.

"When I went out with a flashlight to look for the end of the runway," Bob says, "I found it only after I accidentally stepped off the pavement. My friend helped me look for the numerals which identified the center of the runway. When we found them, we lined up the plane according to the compass and, still unable to see more than a couple of feet ahead of us, climbed back into the cabin and called the tower over the radio."

"WHEN YOU GO BY, will you be flying or taxiing?" a voice inquired.

Bob considered this very funny, started the engine, and took off with visibility at zero level.

"Thanks to being older and having a family, I outgrew this sort of stupidity," says Bob.

Ursula likes flying, and so does daughter Tessa,



California ranch with actress-wife Ursula.

who's been flying since she was six weeks old. Son Terry, however, has a sensitive stomach and becomes sick when the weather gets rough.

Although Bob used to go for other forms of outdoor life, he no longer cares for golf, tennis, and the like. He prefers more rugged activities and a short while ago managed to bring the outdoors closer to home by buying 113 acres with 16 miles of bridle paths in Mandeville Canyon, Calif., where the Taylors now live with their 12 horses, assorted rabbits, goats, chickens, dogs, and other animals.

There's only one outdoor dream that hasn't come true yet for Bob. "I wish I could see the day I could afford to fly my own jet plane." He shrugs his shoulders. "I guess it'll be 50 years till they are cheap enough so I could afford one."

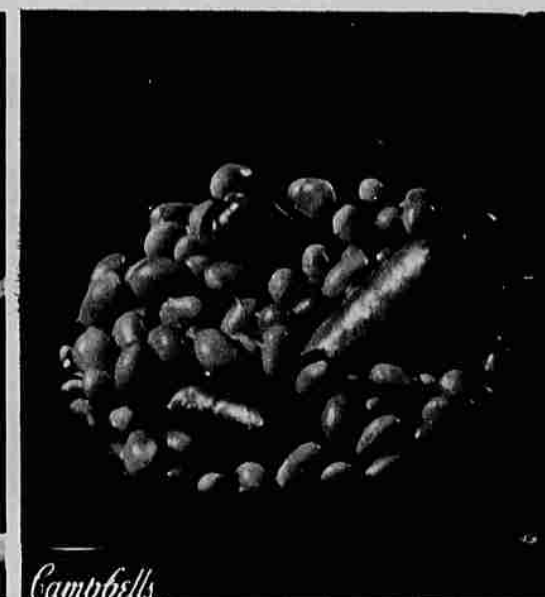
The way Bob's been going and with his kind of life, he could still be around then—tan, fit, and healthy.

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