



BAMBI, a pet deer on the Harry Obenchain ranch near Bly, trots along behind Obenchain as he walks across a pasture. Dogs and the deer at heel make a curious sight.



CIGARETTES are a tasty morsel for Bambi, who chews and swallows them with obvious relish. Here he takes an unlighted cigarette from Obenchain's mouth.

Pet Deer Loves To Munch On Cigarettes, Run With Dogs, Hitch Ride In A Truck

By DEAN A. KRENI

Bambi looks like most buck deer hereabouts—he has big brown eyes, the lithe grace of his species, and the quick movements of an animal of the woods.

But there's a big difference in Bambi's case. He's as domesticated as a cocker spaniel.

Bambi's home is the Harry Obenchain ranch near Bly. For the past 11 years Bambi has been as much a part of the Obenchain family as Old Red, senior among the ranch dogs and the same age as the deer. In the community Bambi long ago ceased being the object of curiosity. Now he's an institution, and folks aren't a bit surprised when people from way back East stop by to visit the pet deer.

Bambi is thoroughly domesticated, there's no question about that. He loves cigarettes, chewing and swallowing them whenever the treat is offered by Obenchain. The deer gets a boot out of riding in the ranch pickup, a trick he learned when he was just a young "feller," and has revealed in joining the dogs in the chase of a rabbit. Bambi's favorite "dishes" are grain and hay, which Obenchain says the deer eats like a cow.

Although he's a little nervous about going in the house now, Bambi used to feel right at home and would plop himself down on a bed for a nap.

Bambi has had a pretty soft life of it most of his life, but his debut in the world was fraught with trouble. His mother shot by a hunter, the sick fawn was found nearly dead in a ditch by Earl Smith, then a construction boss for Weyerhaeuser. After futile attempts at nursing the miserable creature back to health, the Smiths turned it over to the Obenchains.

After some experimentation, Mrs. Obenchain discovered that a mixture of sugar, water and a little whisky was a fine tonic for the deer.

"It was all that would stay with him," she said.

Under her care, the fawn soon took canned milk from a bottle.

"One time when we were away from the ranch for a few days we had an elderly gentleman take care of the place. One of his duties was to give Bambi his bottle," Mrs. Obenchain said.

"But the fawn refused to take food from the stranger, and it wasn't until the man put on one of my dresses that the deer would accept the bottle."

Bambi retains a fierce, protec-

tive devotion to Mrs. Obenchain.

"When a stranger comes to the ranch, Bambi is right beside her, ready to rear back and go after anyone he thinks is threatening," Obenchain said.

The Bly rancher said that Bambi doesn't take to all strangers. If he takes a fancy to you, he's as friendly as a puppy. But if for some reason his reaction is dislike, Bambi will snort a warning, and the visitors usually get the message.

Bambi's younger days were not without troubles. When he came of age there were times when he became mean. The Obenchains decided they would put him out with some nearby does, expecting never again to see their pet.

After Bambi left them reluctantly, Mr. and Mrs. Obenchain returned sadly to their pickup truck parked nearby. Their sorrow was short-lived, for standing in the back of the truck was Bambi.

An operation soon afterward quelled Bambi's mating instincts and made him a docile pet the year around.

In his wanderings, Bambi won many true friends and some real enemies. And he could tell them apart. When mistreated by someone, he would very likely return the "favor" by rooting up the person's garden or stripping clothes off a line.

A few years ago it was common to see the Obenchain dogs and Bambi in hot pursuit on a hunting expedition. After the chase the deer and dogs would stroll back to the ranch together.

"It was quite a sight," Obenchain remembered as he teased the animal with a cigarette. "I don't suppose filter tips would be good for him," the rancher joked. "I've been tempted to see if he would eat a cigar."

Obviously, hunting seasons have been anxious ones at the Obenchain ranch. Bambi is put in a pen.

"He watches the cars and seems to know about hunting," Obenchain said. "Sometimes he gets pretty wild during the season."

If anyone has taken a shot at Bambi, a hit was never scored. Other dogs have never been much of a problem for the pet, who has taught more than one intruder a quick lesson with his horns. Many other deer frequent the Obenchain ranch, and Bambi gets along with them fine. But he never has succumbed to the call



PICKUP RIDES are a treat for the deer that will be 12 years old next spring. Displaying agility despite his age, Bambi jumps to the truck box with little effort.



OLD RED and Bambi are life-long friends; both are nearly 12 years old. Old Red nuzzles his pal who has shared many a hunting chase around the ranch.

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