

Hunters Who Give Me a Pain in My Duck Blind

By BOB FOREMAN



Nero was a nice fellow compared with the guy who fiddles with decoys—while his hunting partner does a slow burn

AN AVID duck hunter I know maintains that choosing a partner for a duck blind is as serious a decision as choosing a wife.

The analogy falls apart a bit when you consider that the duck season is a lot shorter than the matrimonial season. Nevertheless, I'd like to be divorced forever from some of the people I've shared a duck blind with.

Take George H., for instance. George is a fashion plate. You'd think he was competing for Best-Dressed Gunman on the Housatonic River. When George comes to the house to pick me up so we can do battle with our feathered friends, his at-

tire enables—nay, encourages—my wife and daughters to make odious comparisons.

This isn't fair because George is the only man I know who has his waders shoeshined all the way up to the knees while mine are patched and muddy. George's shooting jacket is always pressed, and his hat is spanking new—he must buy a dozen of them a season. I try to explain to the women in my home that the gloss and glitter of George's clothing flares the birds away and that my well-worn equipment is just right. But, being women, they're convinced that I'm just naturally sloppy.

When it comes to being Beau Brummell of the mud flats, however, George doesn't rate with

Harvey M. Harvey's clothes make him as exasperating a blind buddy as George—but for a different reason. Harvey is given to wearing red shirts, jaunty mauve hats, and Technicolor neckties that would make even the bravest duck chicken out when it comes to landing near us. What's more, Harvey is also a poor sport. Once, I offered to rub a little mud on his shirt and tie, and he got mad. Some fellows just don't appreciate a friendly gesture.

Another pal I can do without is Grant L., the decoy fiddler. He burns the midnight kilowatts reading up on how to make designs with his decoys. He knows every pattern—the "J," the diamond, and all the others. It doesn't seem to bother him that every book he reads contradicts the one before.

Unfortunately, Grant has 120 decoys and insists on lugging every one along. He won't tolerate any help setting out his decoys, but he allows me the privilege of picking them up. This means Grant gets to toss them out in the morning when they're nice and dry and warm—while I'm permitted to lift them out at dusk when they're ice-coated and the temperature is minus 10.

Once, Grant and I got up at 4 o'clock to beat the other hunters to a spot where the only chance you have is that first big flight of birds leaving the marsh for the open water. By 5 o'clock we were in our blind, and Grant began to fiddle with his decoy designs. By 7, birds were streaming by, and he was still out there. I fell asleep and awoke at 9. By then, he had the decoy problem solved—and the duck problem, too. There wasn't a bird to be seen the rest of the day.

MARTIN L. is a garrulous nuisance in a blind. After I've carefully picked a place and assured him this is where the birds will flock in, it just so happens that we don't see a speck in the sky all day. This creates a perfect situation for him to launch into one of his epic tales about the great gunning he had the previous week and how we should have gone there.

The main trouble with Martin is that you can't get him to offer a single suggestion while you're planning a day of gunning. He's much too cagey for that.

A couple of other types I can do without as blind partners are the Moon Shooter, who blasts away when the birds are a mile out of range (so he can get the first shot); the Claim Jumper, who insists he's the one who downed the bird when we both shot at the same time; and the Sharpshooter, who picks off a bird after I've missed it with both barrels.

What kind of chap would I like to go gunning with? Well, I'm looking for someone who is a poor enough shot to make me look good, who would go all-out to make me comfortable, who won't make my wife mad at me (any more than usual)—and who would be gentleman enough to overlook it if I happened to commit any of the sins herein attributed to others.

COVER:



A duck hunter, photographed by Dennis Hallinan, places decoys to lure his quarry. For a comic primer on odd ducks (of the human variety), see the feature above.

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