

TRADITIONAL Focus

By Dale Karch & Todd Smith

Gloves & Tabs

How many releases do you stock? How do your customers know where to start? “Back Tension”, “Caliper”, “Wrist-strap”, you name it, when it comes to releases the selection is endless. The same holds true with gloves and tabs for the traditional bowhunter. There are as many as stars in the sky. Well, maybe not that many...

In this column, we plan to shed some light on the multitude of gloves and tabs available for traditional archers. We'd like to leave you thinking you have a good understanding of the offerings available in today's market as well as a feel for which are the best sellers and which one's might best suit your specific clientele.

When you see someone shooting a longbow and recurve, 99% will be shooting with a glove or tab. It's no wonder there are so many choices of quality finger protection. Which one, gloves or tabs, should an archery shop offer? Both! Like the age-old “Ford vs. Chevy” debate, there are two schools of thought in traditional circles. “Gloves vs. Tabs.” We'd never be able to end that debate in this column, and

fortunately there's no need to. Some folks go for the Chevy, and some the Ford, some for gloves, some for tabs. Neither is better than the other, only different. No two archers are exactly alike, so gloves and tabs are available in an almost endless supply of unique designs and varied materials. Sales of both gloves and tabs are strong and we strive to always offer whatever types and styles our customers request.

We have found, however, that a high percentage of traditional bowhunters use gloves and most target archers, like serious 3-D, FITA, and Olympic shooters, prefer tabs. Bowhunters do sometimes use tabs though. Dale Karch is one of them. He prefers shooting a tab for everything and anyone who's seen him shoot knows he can shoot well in any situation. When shopping for just the right glove or tab for you, pick out a couple that appeal to you and test-

drive them. See what feels best and shoots best for you. Your customers will also want to try them out for themselves. When they find what they like, encourage them to stick with it. You might also suggest they pick up another one as a spare and suggest that they break them both in by shooting them for a couple of weeks. There's nothing worse than having your glove or tab all broken in and then losing it when you don't have a back up. It always seems to happen at the worst time like during a big hunt or just before an important shoot. Having a “ready to shoot spare” is a wise strategy.

When it comes to shooting gloves there are plenty of choices. You'll see; full palm “Damascus” types, “open end” and “closed end”, “nylon tipped”, “Cordovan tipped” and specialty types like the “Skookum Mega-Tuff”.



Closed-end glove



Damascus glove



Super Glove

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The choices are many!

Most beginners start with the standard “open-end” or “closed-end” gloves, like the ones from the Wyandotte Leather Company. They’re straightforward, simple affairs, single leather thickness with adjustable wrist straps. They work. They protect your fingers like they’re supposed to, and they’re the least expensive on the list. Lower-end gloves like these are a must in any shop.

Full palm gloves, most often called a “Damascus” glove come in quite a few popular configurations. The official Damascus glove is one of our top sellers. It’s form fitting, comfortable, and allows a good feel of the string. The Berlin Glove Company has its own version of the full-palm glove. It’s supple deerskin with reinforced fingertips. A little thicker than the regular Damascus glove, it offers a bit more finger protection. For that reason it has become a top seller.

Ed at Alaskan Bowhunting Supply is always thinking. He took the basic Berlin Glove and improved it by creating two best sellers, the “Super Glove” and the “Skookum”. The “Super Glove”, a Berlin glove with Cordovan leather on the face of the fingers rather than a second layer of deerskin, is designed for those shooting medium to heavier bows. Cordovan leather enjoys a reputation of being the best leather anywhere for slick, smooth releases. His “Skookum” is best suited for light to medium bow weight shooters. Instead of the Cordovan material, he’s uses “Mega-Tuff”, an industrial “fabric” that is perfectly suited for use on shooting gloves. It almost feels fuzzy. It’s soft, smooth, and bowstrings just “sing” off its surface. They’re fairly new shooting gloves and they’re flying off shelves all

over the country.

James at American Leathers is another of those folks who thinks outside the box. His “Big Shot” and “Wet Shot” gloves with their nylon-faced fingerstalls have created quite a stir within traditional circles. The nylon he uses is durable, slick and greatly reduces the amount of friction between glove and bowstring resulting in faster arrow speeds and cleaner releases for most archers. It’s one of those ideas that make so much sense you wonder why it took so long for someone to think of it. His “Big Shot” gloves are available in your choice of top grain elk hide or premium buffalo hide. They’re about as good as it gets in shooting gloves. Before we move on, let’s touch on the “Wet Shot”. This glove was inspired by bowfishing forays that destroyed normal leather gloves. The body is made from a combination of neoprene and chamois skin and the same slick nylon is used as a facing on the fingerstalls. Nothing fazes this glove; it’s impervious to rain, snow, hot or cold. It’s very comfortable, form fitting, soft, and it’s the least expensive of the nylon-faced gloves. If you have a strong following of bowfishing enthusiasts, they’ll consider this glove the catch of the day! For those who require the top of the line, try the gloves from American Leathers.

Howard Hill is arguably the greatest bow shooter who ever lived. His superhuman feats of accuracy with the bow and arrow made him a living

legend. Even today, all these years later, there are those who emulate the late great Howard Hill. For that reason, and because they really work, we have shooting gloves with inserts. Howard Hill shot a glove with two layers of leather and a nylon insert between. He also shot heavy bows. Bows over 80 pounds. These gloves are recommended for anyone shooting heavy bows that need the extra protection of the nylon inserts. E.W. Bateman offers an excellent version of the Howard Hill glove in a Cordovan leather style that is very popular with the devotees of the Howard Hill system of shooting. If you have some Howard Hill fans in your area, or have some heavy bow shooters, this glove may suit them perfectly.

What about tabs? If you’ve been around bows and arrows long enough, you’ll remember when everyone who was anyone was shooting the good old “can’t pinch” style tabs. If longevity is a measure of success, the “can’t pinch” tab may be the most successful form of finger protection of all time. We still sell literally thousands of them every year. They’re available in both smooth leather, and clipped calf hair. If you’re new to the “can’t pinch” concept, you may be wondering why they call them a “can’t pinch?” There’s a rubber spacer attached to the tab that’s positioned between the index finger and the next two fingers. This pad allows just enough friction between your fingers and the arrow nock for you to hold it, but it also keeps you from pinching the nock during your draw and release. It’s an excellent shooting aid and helps eliminate much of the archer’s error as far as a clean shot sequence goes. These are the workhorses of the tab world. Wyandotte Leather offers excellent examples of the standard “can’t pinch” tabs. They’re very reasonably priced, they function well, and they’re readily



Big Shot gloves



Wet Shot glove



Howard Hill glove by E.W. Bateman



Can't Pinch tabs from Wyandotte Leather

available. Every shop should offer them in both right and left hand and in all sizes. (Side note: Approximately 10% of the archers in the United States are left-handed. We recommend stocking your gloves and tabs with that ratio in mind.)

Very well made and quite well known, the Black Widow tab evolved from the respected Wilson Brothers tabs of the 1950's and 1960's. Black Widow tabs are available in either leather or calf hair. They come in regular split-finger or even a 3-fingers under style. These tabs enjoy a loyal target archery following and there are quite a few bowhunters switching to them now as well. They offer an adjustable Velcro finger strap for a custom fit and have unique leather spacer pads included in the design. We recommend these tabs highly for bowhunters and target archers alike.

Cordovan leather has long been



Black Widow tab for "3 fingers under"

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**E.W. Bateman's
Cordovan tab**

recognized as the most slick, most durable, and most desirable leather for gloves and tabs available anywhere. Tabs made from cordovan leather are available in a split-finger, "can't pinch" style as well as a 3-fingers under version. Dale has been shooting one of the regular split finger models for about three years now. He switched to these because, as he puts it, "They don't wear out." It's hard to beat cordovan leather for gloves or tabs, not only does it give you great releases, it lasts for years. The E.W. Bateman Cordovan tabs utilize an elastic band for keeping them where you want them and a "can't pinch" spacer for even finger pressure on your nocks. Tough and long lasting, Cordovan tabs are becoming the tab of choice for those bowhunters who prefer tabs.

There are even sealskin tabs! Before you skip over these exotic tabs, consider the merits of sealskin. Sealskin itself is covered with tough seal-hair that's very slick and applies little friction to the string. (Sealskin is so "slick" that it's even available in an arrow rest-arrow plate configuration.) These exact qualities are what make it so well suited as a tab. As far as we know, the Skookum sealskin tab from Alaska Bowhunting Supply is the only one of its kind. They're a luxurious yet functional item with a dedicated group of shooters using them exclusively.

There's one in every crowd! They're called "SAM" tabs or "Super Archery Mitts". They're not really a true tab or a glove. SAM tabs are more like a tab than a glove, but your fin-



Sealskin tab



SAM or Super Archery Mitt

gers slide through the fingerstalls, allowing them to wrap completely around your fingers. Then, at the shot, they travel with your fingers much like the finger stalls on a glove. They've been proven to increase arrow speed and they're quite comfortable. This has made them very popular with traditional bowhunters. They can even be slipped over thin hunting gloves when out in the field for double protection. Super Archery Mitts are especially popular with bowhunters and the 3-D crowd and are worth serious consideration when outfitting your shop with gloves and tabs.

So which is it? Ford or Chevy? Glove or tab? Regardless of your personal choice, or your customer's choice, they're all good. The journey to find the perfect glove or tab is actually quite enjoyable. There's the test-driving part, and lots of it. That means lots of arrows are flying and after all, that's the best part of shooting bows isn't it? Gloves and tabs are easy to sell, required equipment for all long-bow and recurve shooters, and since they do eventually wear out or get lost, repeat sales are phenomenal. If you've been stuck with one style for a long time, do yourself a favor; try some of the new ones. You never know when changing something as small as your glove or tab might improve your own shooting. Stock a good selection; your customers might be ready for a change as well.

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