



Sporting Wood Shooting Sticks

By Don Heath



Over the years I have watched with fascination the American attempt to produce a suitable set of shooting sticks. What various clients have bought out have ranged from ridiculous to gadget. Fold up, take down, give it a shake and - Sproing- it all flies into place! Monopods that attached to the rifle and could be extended to give you a rest while standing...pity about the 3 minutes that it took to set up, and so on and so forth. African game has a reasonable idea about hunters... Our hunting seasons vary between eight months and all year. They don't have a long "off season" to forget. The sight of a bipod/tripod flinging itself together with great gusto or ongoing surreptitious movement behind some bit of cover as a hunter tries to get an overly complicated arrangement to set up right is going to produce a lot of empty bush with perhaps the odd tail disappearing over the horizon.

Depending on the terrain where we hunt, a bipod or tripod is traditional. Light but sturdy sticks tied together with a strip of old car inner tube. (What we are going to do when tubeless tiers finally catch on in Africa is anybody's guess. Rekin, as old inner tube is known holds an awful lot together on most hunting vehicles and many bush aircraft as well!!!) There are several reasons for the African style set up. Firstly, the legs need to be ridged. Slightly flexible legs like I have seen on many imported shooting sticks do not provide a quick, stable shooting platform. If the shooting sticks do not provide a stable shooting platform you might as well shoot off hand, and if they take too long to settle into then you will have nothing to shoot at. Secondly, the hunter doesn't have to carry his own shooting sticks. The PH or tracker carries them and sets them up for the client if there is no suitable natural rest. Consequently they do not need to fold away and be easily portable by the hunter. Thirdly, The rubber inner tube provides a rest that will not cause

"bounce". As any experienced shooter knows, resting the fore end of a rifle on a hard surface causes the shot to go high. I firmly believe that the hunter should rest his hand in the V of the shooting sticks and use the sticks to support his hand, but most people prefer to rest the fore end in the V and hold forward of this. If this is your style (or your clients!) then you need considerable rubber padding on the sticks around where the rifle will fit in.

Also, one style does not suit all terrain. If you are hunting in the Kalahari or Karroo, shots tend to be long and a tripod makes a steadier shooting platform for someone inexperienced at using shooting sticks. In much of the rest of Africa the ranges are much closer and a bipod will suffice to give acceptable accuracy. Most of the areas where I hunt, the ground is rock hard during most of the hunting season and the sticks need some form of "non slip" base to them. Sharpening the sticks slightly works fine. Tying on an old pair of impala hooves works better and lends the sticks an element of class as well.

It is however, very hard to commercially market true African shooting sticks, and people do actually want to practice with some before they come on the hunt! A very good product that my tracker has been lugging around all year are the bipods and tripods from Sporting Wood Creations. They take down for air transport but I have left them assembled since they arrived. The Aluminium joints may be a bit shiny for some people's taste but nothing a bit of duct tape cannot solve in ten seconds, and they do make for a perfect, inflexible join.

If you would like a set of African style shooting sticks to practice off before your next safari have a look at their products on www.sportwc.com or give them a ring on (1) 423-975-7626 