

Last Hunt of the '06-'07 Season

By Kirklan Oler

The end of the 2006-2007 season ended much better than it started off. After being out of commission with a horrible case of bronchitis (coughed so hard I bruised my ribs) for the first 3 weeks of January, I finally got out after the little devils the last weekend of the season. The last day of the season was going to be a solo hunt with just Darko and myself.

Darko my 9 month old DD has performed better than I could have imagined. He's had countless retrieves, with more than one trailing a running chukar 200-300 yards over rocky terrain. He's had dozens of points from pheasants to huns to chukar and even his first point ever, an unlucky pack rat that didn't get away.

My usual hunting partners were busy doing something else more important than going out after chukar on the last weekend of the season. Not to worry, I really enjoy hunting in the West Desert of Utah by myself. It has a certain wildness to it, whether it is the lone antelope buck on the dusty alkali flats, or the wild mustangs you sometimes meet face to face while climbing the chukar slopes.

On this, the last morning of the hunting season, Darko and I decided to sleep in a little and get a later start than usual. We were at the desired destination at 9:00am and it felt great to actually get geared up at the truck with the suns rays heating us up rather than in the cold darkness that we usually do. With not a cloud in the sky and 20 degrees (almost perfect), it was shaping up to be an excellent day to be chasing devils in the desert. I also decided to take it easy and skipped my usual death march to the Devil's Playground.

After putting on all my equipment, Darko and myself headed up a little trail that had been created by years of use by wild horses. The West Desert mountain ranges have these horse trails strewn everywhere. It can really make it nice as the horses usually know the easiest route to take through the rough terrain. On the way up we ran into a stallion that I have seen a few times on this particular range. He barely tolerates us and usually does a lot of posturing, trying to intimidate us. He actually followed us for about a half mile along the ridge line while his harem took off the other way to safety.



The plan today was to hit the high ridges. Darko will work both sides of the ridge line and uses the breeze that blows up each side in order to locate coveys of chukar. After



getting to the top, it didn't take long for Darko to locate the first covey of chukar. He had started to pick up his pace and was getting birdy well before he locked up on point. With the favorable breeze, he was picking up scent from 200-300 yards away. He held steady until I could catch up to him and I moved forward to flush the first covey of the day. Now I'm not a very good shot, and chukar only enhances this lack of

ability. It is for this reason that I carry a Remington 11/87 semi auto with 5 shells. I downed my first chukar of the day with an easy rising shot and then proceeded to miss on the next four. I had dropped a leg on one of the birds I missed and following my own personal ethics, I included that bird as part of my "bag limit". Darko quickly retrieved the bird to hand.

With Darko rocking and rolling after the first covey we continued down the main ridge looking for another covey. Darko really started to add some range to his search and he



was out a good few hundred yards when he disappeared over a rise on the ridgeline. I made my way over the rise expecting to see Darko working one side of the ridge or the other, but he was nowhere in sight. I thought for sure that he must be on scent on one side or the other, so I chose the East side first. After a few minutes of searching, I soon realized that he was not on that side and climbed back to the top to try the West side of the

ridge. It didn't take long for me to see Darko 200 yards down the slope making his way slowly with that, point, move another 10 yards, point again type of working scent. I dropped down the slope and made my way over to him holding point.

As I walked in for the flush, the cheat grass below erupted in what was a solid 30 birds. I was able to knock one down, but it was not hit hard and was doing that half flutter, half run down the steep slope with Darko hot on its tail. As he was putting on the chase there were even more birds getting up in singles and doubles. While I stood there watching Darko chase down the chukar, I heard a loud flush about 50 yards above me and slightly across the bowl I was in. I looked up just in time to see another 20 birds diving kamikaze style past me to my left. I proceed to empty the rest of the shells in my gun without even pulling a feather. I was able to quickly reload 1 shell just in time to send some copper plated sixes in the last birds direction. The bird was hit, but not very hard. It locked its wings and soared half way down the slope until it lost momentum on a flat plateau and skidded to a stop in the snow. Darko, busy with the other bird was making his way half way down the slope in search of the running chukar.

I marked the downed bird and proceeded to make my way down to assist Darko with the retrieval of the other bird. Now, Darko had not lost a bird all season and even found a couple of birds that were given up on by my hunting partner's dogs. Try as he did, Darko could just not locate the



bird. After an extensive search, I concluded that the bird was able to finally catch some air under its wings and probably soared the rest of the way to the bottom of the slope. Not knowing for sure where it went, we decided to leave it and pick up the other bird I had marked. We made our way over to it and Darko locked up on point right where it had skidded to a stop under some sage brush. I went in to flush it and when it tried to run Darko quickly caught it and delivered it to hand.



Only about an hour and half into our hunt and we had jumped 2 coveys totaling around 75 birds. I had a personal bag limit of 4 birds and had the daunting task of hiking halfway back up the slope to get to the top again. Not wanting to quit early on the last day of the season, Darko and I set about hiking to the top. We were slowly making our way at an angle across the slope when Darko locked up again on point 200 yards above me in a rocky cliff area. Knowing the birds wouldn't hold for long, I stepped up my speed to try and reach Darko as quickly as possible. Before I could get halfway to Darko a covey of about 20 chukar flushed and proceeded to make a dive bomb flight path 30 yard across from me going down hill fast. I took my time, picked out the lead bird and dumped it with my first shot. Darko made the retrieve to hand and we had our 5 bird limit not 2 hours into the hunt.

The hike and drive out of the West Desert was easy as I was content that the last hunt of the season ended with 3 fantastic points by my dog and a limit chukar (minus the two that got away) in the bag. Darko's first season was a tremendous success and I was already making plans for the upcoming season before I even got home. The '07-'08 season can't come soon enough.