



Multiple hunters or multiple dogs make the camera crew's job trickier.

Another not so fond memory they related was of an impatient guide, overly anxious for a successful hunt, who kept ordering Linden and the hunters back on their horses, ordering them to hurry up, and ordering them to "Reload! Reload! Reload!"

Most of the time, however, everything works out fine. People get used to the camera quickly, and the hunters relax, realizing they can behave the way they always behave, that it's another nice day in the field with the dogs. The dogs realize that, too, pretty much ignoring the extra humans stomping along behind them and the big camera lens held nearby to catch that point on tape. Good bird dogs being what they are, their prey drive, training, and the excitement of the hunt keep their minds on the work at hand.

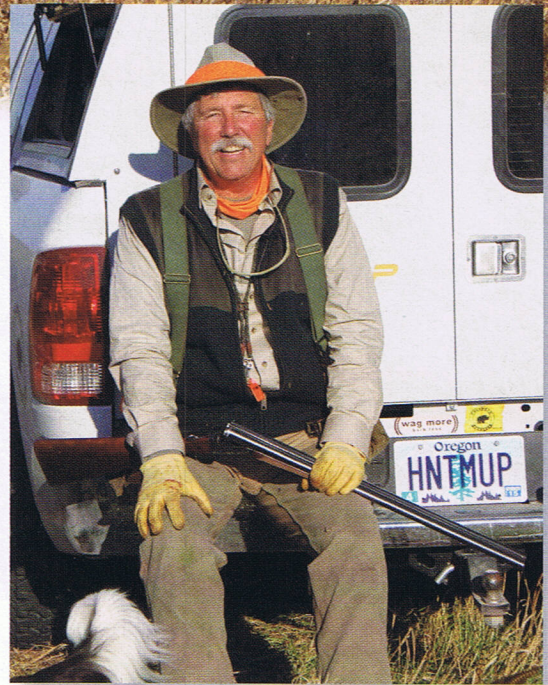
As for the film crew, they don't work their magic only when the dog points and the hunter shoots. Lots of collateral shots must be captured to fully tell the story — the truck rising over a hill, the dogs jumping out of their kennel boxes, the hunters gathering their gear, a whitetail deer across the field, hawks in the sky, sunset behind the lodge. ...

Technology offers challenges as well. Batteries need to be changed, which means batteries need to be lugged into the field. The cameras they use record onto a solid-state memory card that can hold up to about 13 hours of high-definition video and sound. The footage is downloaded onto Newberry's computer, and then promptly backed up to Blu-ray discs. (Blu-ray is an optical disc format designed for storing large amounts of data — more than five times the storage capacity of standard DVDs.) Before editing, the files are converted to whatever codec (COMpression-DECompression) is needed.

Keeping up with all the upgrades of the new technology is an issue in itself. "Just when you learn one solid, there's something new," Berland adds.

One other major challenge of bird hunting television that must also be recognized is sponsorship. "Finding sponsors who understand how active and passionate bird hunters and dog owners really are is difficult," Linden says. "One of the hardest parts of my job is convincing potential sponsors that they should talk to these hunters through our show."

Most of the time, everything works out. It's obvious that the *Wingshooting USA* film crew and its producer have developed a rapport that helps them handle



Scott Linden, host of *Wingshooting USA*, clearly loves his work — dogs, birds, and all the surprises along the way.

all the vagaries and surprises of their jobs. They all agree that this group has more chemistry than any other group each has worked with.

Their interaction in the field is fluid. The two cameras work in sync, sometimes crisscrossing paths, sometimes one high and one low, sometimes shoulder to shoulder, each aware of the other but not in each other's way. Berland and Newberry interact with Linden the same way, minimizing field direction, all three letting the hunt itself run the show.

At first glance, Linden looks like he's just having a fun time hunting, chatting with the guides, and handling his dogs. Look again, and it becomes clear that he closely watches the dogs to alert the cameras to a point. He comments frequently on the dogs, missed shots or good shots, the birds' flight, and the hunt in general, providing important audio material for later. He's always aware of where the cameras are and what they might need him to do to provide the best pictures. "We are like a jazz ensemble. We each know what we're supposed to do when we do it."

They love their jobs. And as Linden says, "If the group is having fun, everything will take care of itself." 🐾

(Note: For a schedule of channels and times for *Wingshooting USA*:

[http://scottlindenoutdoors.com/wingshootingusa/where-to-watch/.](http://scottlindenoutdoors.com/wingshootingusa/where-to-watch/))

TV's Top Shots:

The Challenge of Filming Bird Hunts

Story and photos by Nancy Anisfield



Lots of us like to watch bird hunting shows on television, but few of us think about what it takes to make that show. Filming wing shooting is not for the lazy, the impatient, or the easily annoyed. It's not for anyone who doesn't love the outdoors, wildlife, dogs, or the need to delete expletives. It's just not an easy job.

Furthermore, although we amateurs can now shoot our own videos with digital cameras and cell phones, that ability doesn't really help us understand the amount of work involved in portraying hunting in an educational and entertaining way for television. Accompanying Scott Linden and his *Wingshooting USA* team as they filmed a two-day hunt at Pheasant Bonanza in Tekamah, Neb., I saw things from the other side of the screen.

Linden has produced and hosted 45 episodes of *Wingshooting USA*, which currently airs on The Pursuit Channel and a few other channels. With his camera operators, Tad Newberry and Lynn Berland, he's shot bird hunts all over the country, in all kinds of weather and terrain. They know well the challenges of wing shooting television.

Picture this: The wind is howling, making hunters' comments sound like they have their heads inside a vacuum cleaner. The brush clinging to the rocky outcropping is chest high and tangled. The little Brittany is nearly impossible to see in it. And on top of that, the chukars have been flushing so far ahead that 90 percent of the shots are too long to bother taking.

Now imagine trying to film that scene for a TV show. You need shots of the dogs on point, the birds in the air, the hunters shooting, the birds being retrieved. You have to keep up with everyone, figure out where the action will be, and have your camera in the best position to capture it all.

"Getting the shot you want but can't achieve because of sun, shadows, dogs, the cover, etc. is the biggest challenge," according to Berland. "There's always the striving for the perfect picture."

Take the sun, for example. Early light is a videographer's delight because of the dramatic shadows and depth it creates. Early light also often makes colors more vivid before they wash out at midday. But when the sun is at an early or late day angle, its slanted light also creates a shadow of the camera operator. That translates into a lot of ducking and leaning to keep the shadow out of the shot.

Shooting bird hunts for TV is challenging if for no other reason than it's on the move. There's no deer stand or turkey blind to sit by

and wait. Newberry explains, "Guessing where to be on the flush is tricky, then instantly trying to jump next to someone's shoulder. From the time the bird is on the ground into the air, you have maybe four seconds max to get the shot."

If two birds get up, they try to get them both — both birds, both shooters. Not easy.

For better odds of getting the shot, be it the point, flush, shot, or retrieve — or all of them for a truly effective sequence — they have two cameras going at the same time. Berland usually focuses on the dog; Newberry stays with the gunners, although that means constantly making choices, depending on how many shooters there are. It takes at least three hours of filming to create 16 minutes of edited, finished hunt film for the show. The show itself has 22 minutes of content in a half-hour time slot, the other six minutes being regular segments for dog training advice, viewers' questions, etc.

Linden uses the word "organic" to describe the show's filming. Before heading into the field, he gives the hunters and guides a short introduction. "We're out to accomplish just a few things," he starts. "To have fun today, to be safe when we do it and to love the dogs. It's not about body counts. We love to shoot our guns, but that's not the goal. This is a very organic show; we're going to a place with no script. Whatever happens, happens."

Unlike other wing shooting shows that stage shots or prepare a plot of sorts, *Wingshooting USA* lets the hunt itself develop the story. They shoot first, and then discover the storyline.

After two days on a plantation hunt in Georgia, the first episode told contrasting stories of three dogs — a beautifully trained and finished German wirehair at peak performance, a still gawky young German shorthair just learning the ropes, and a seasoned veteran hunting at his own experienced pace. The second episode to come out of that hunt focused on two North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) Versatile Champions hunting together, showcasing the polish of a brace honoring points and alternating retrieves. The third episode is still in the discovery and editing process (stay tuned).

Sometimes, the weather and participants aren't completely cooperative. On one hunt they filmed, the fog was so bad they lost over a half day of shooting because it wasn't worth turning the cameras on. That might not sound like much, time wise, but on a two-day hunt, that means 25 percent less footage to work with.



Bird hunting is all about movement – birds, guns, and dogs.

The wind is howling, the brush is chest high, and the little Brittany is nearly impossible to see. ... Imagine trying to film that for a TV show.

Wingshooting USA does a lot of its filming on a tightly scheduled road trip, so lost time can't be made up.

They've had hunts with very few birds, hunts with extreme rain, and hunts where the guide's cranky dogs wanted to fight. On one hunt the guide wearing a wireless microphone spent the entire morning muttering "damn dog" under his breath, over and over, not even aware he was saying it. Although the camera crew doesn't like to interfere with the way hunters walk, talk, or act, they had to politely ask the guide to change his mantra.

On another hunt, one hunter kept turning to the camera after each bird was shot, asking, "Did you get that? Did you get that?" As Berland points out, "If we didn't get it, it doesn't matter at that point!"



Scott, Tad and Lynn work together like a jazz ensemble.



The camera crew has just seconds to get in position for a shot when the bird flushes.



Finding the right angle to capture the dog and the bird is critical.