

A Yearling Record?

By Dave Heltzel

It was over a month ago when the rumblings started. It was rumored that a yearling on a North Texas ranch was destined for greatness, carrying a mass of meaty tissue on his head fit for a king. With the growth of the deer industry, and the explosion of younger deer producing large racks, it wasn't hard to fathom such a thought. But being that it was mid-summer and bucks still had a long ways to go, an optimistic outlook for any single deer that early on can provide for just as much disappointment. A wait-and-see game, there are many scenarios that could put an end to what might be an impressive rack. With time still on the clock, anything was possible.

Could it be true? Perhaps a new record? I had to know.

Fortunately for me, the North Texas ranch is one that I get to visit often. An invite was eminent, and it wasn't but a week and half ago that I got to lay my eyes on what just might possibly be a new record for Texas.

For many within the deer industry, Sullivan Whitetail Ranch has come to be known for an aggressiveness that spans all aspects of the deer business. Busting on the scene just six years ago, Brad Sullivan, owner, and Jeff Dean, ranch manager, could be found at Texas deer auctions and ranches procuring top genetics from the state's top breeders. In just a short time they were well on their way to assembling a promising deer herd.

Showing signs of an improving breeding program, the two didn't stop there and continued to identify and acquire whitetail genetics needed to take their program to the next level. With the industry growing rapidly, and more monster bucks making the headlines, the process was difficult. Many options confronted them, but in their minds one buck stood out amongst the others, a buck that not only had the antlers, but was a proven producer.

Which buck you ask? Maxbo. One of, if not, the most well known bucks and prolific breeders within the North American deer industry. A buck that today continues to consistently produce outstanding offspring within several breeding programs across the nation. Luckily for Brad and Jeff, their acquisition of Maxbo semen, for their artificial insemination program, couldn't have come any sooner. One of the first movers on Maxbo semen within the state of Texas, their purchase started them down the road to where they are at today.

I arrived at the ranch around 7:00 in the morning. I was there to shoot video footage of the yearling I had yet to see. In traditional form I was met by Jeff with a package of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and a Coke, a sort of "breakfast of champions" for those with a sweet tooth. After a brief conversation and rounding up my camera equipment, I was ready to go. The light was right and I couldn't wait any longer.

We pulled up to the pen and made our entrance. Jeff poured some treats into a trough in effort to entice the bucks closer. It was soon after that, the first yearlings began to emerge from the mesquites in the back of the pen.

Several bucks approached the trough where the tasty morsels lie and I was more than impressed by their appearance. Several of the bucks, standing just 20 yards away, were well above average yearlings, several of which were crowding the 200 B&C mark. If these yearlings weren't the best in the group, then I knew I was in for a pleasant surprise.

For several minutes we waited for the yearling I had heard so much about to work his way from out behind the trees, but he never came. I caught brief glimpses of him milling around in the brush, not once did he give me a clear view of his antlers.

Time to change tactics, we were there to capture video as well.

Jeff fired up the utility vehicle and worked us closer to his position. None of the yearlings were alarmed by our new course and instead continued their morning routine. As we cleared the first row of mesquite trees, there stood the yearling we had waited so patiently to see, and it was evident that he was more than worthy of all the talk.

Protruding from this yearling's head was a mass of antlers representative of his sire, something that would make any father proud. Carrying over 30 tines, I didn't know where to begin admiring such an awesome yearling. He has it all, mass, spread, tine length, kickers, and the look. He was indeed the biggest yearling I had seen, and quite possibly the biggest Texas yearling ever.

Co-owned by David McQuaig of Cougar Ridge Whitetails and Sullivan Whitetail Ranch, the yearling is a cross between Maxbo and a Bambi 727 daughter. Accordingly the yearling now carries the name Maxbo 727. Both bloodlines are well known throughout Texas for their proven results, and both remain a hot commodity. I'm sure as the news about this yearling spreads across the state, for those breeders lucky enough to have Maxbo semen, they will be looking for opportunities in their programs for similar breeding pairs.

The deer industry continues to one-up itself, and with this very impressive yearling now in the limelight, the race is on for producing an even bigger yearling. With many aggressive breeding programs within the industry, the next big yearling could come from anywhere in Texas on any given ranch, possibly at the home of this yearling. Or, this yearling might remain at the top for a time to come. I guess we will have to wait and see.

