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Show & Contest

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One Oar in the Water

By Lou Tisch

You've probably heard about that fella with "only one oar in the water". Well, that would be me. Ok, let me explain. We manufacture a waterfowl hunting boat called a "sculler". It is a stable, low profile boat that you lay down in with only your eyes and the top of your head above the gunwale. One oar extends out through the stern. Sculling is a stealthy, active pursuit-style of hunting. You simply sneak up on the birds.



It was October, the leaves had turned and there was a slight nip in the air. It was sculling weather. We launched the Brant II sculler into a 25' wide rivulet, slid down in the cockpits and adjusted our gear. Gene Chandler was at the helm of the sculler and I was up front. We adjusted the volume on our walkie-talkies with the whisper microphones (this allows us to communicate without our voices traveling down the water and spooking the ducks) and we were ready to hunt. Shells were fed into our scatter guns and we slipped silently downstream. We hadn't been on the move but 3 or 4 minutes, when we had some Woodies spook beside the boat. We had moved in so quietly, they hadn't heard us until they were spooked by my rummaging around in the boat. I couldn't believe how close we had gotten.



We continued downstream for about five minutes when we spotted two more Woodies in full dress. I had wised up and knew enough to let Gene work us down to the birds. At just the right point for our skeet chokes and steel #4 shot, Gene pivoted the boat enough to give both of us a shot. Two feathered rainbows splashed down and we were on our way. We wanted to maximize our points so we decided to bypass Woodies (high point ducks) and go just for Mallards. Continuing downstream, we passed under fallen trees with Wood Ducks sitting on them and they didn't flinch. We came eight feet from a Great Blue Heron and it didn't even know we were there.

I was hooked. We didn't fill our bag that day but it was one of the most "successful" hunts I had ever had. It started me on the sculling road and it wasn't long before I bought the company.

Sculling comes out of the "sneak hunting" traditions of the old market hunters, and has a proven history of success. In a scull boat, two hunters slide down into their cockpits with merely their eyes and the top of their hat covered heads showing. The helmsman

handles the oar through a hole in the transom, just above the water line. A twisting figure-eight motion with the hand moves the blade just enough to propel water backwards and the boat forward. This sculling is so effective because it is silent and the birds are presented with only a low bow profile for their viewing pleasure. The scull boat really comes into its own when the weather is calm and the birds are not flying. All the other hunters are done for the day...except you.

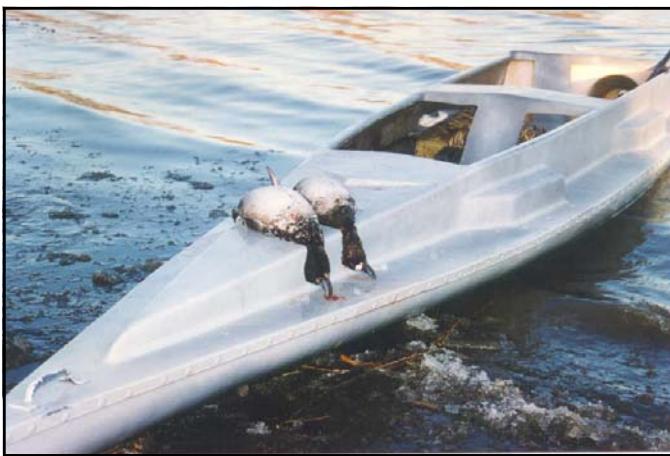
The sculler can go to where the birds are, whether it's out in the lake, tucked in the marsh or lazing in the crook of some meandering stream or river. The sculler will have his share of shooting and may even scare up a few birds for the fellows sitting in their blinds.



Scouting is one of the most essential parts of your scull hunt. You must do your homework to find where the ducks are spending their time. This information will allow you to plan your hunt. I like to glass (binoculars) a lake (i.e. Anchor Bay in Lake St. Clair) until I locate several rafts of ducks. We will then launch the boat and move upwind of the birds. I use an old reliable 4 hp Lawson to motor me into position. The motor is then stowed amidship, out of our way. We hunker down and the scull begins. The excitement mounts as you slowly close the gap between you and the birds. You let the wind help you and you work slightly to the side of the raft so as not to spook them. They begin to move about as you approach but they swim around instead of flying. They are confused by this slow moving object and merely mill around.



As you get well within range, the boat is pivoted to bring both hunters into shooting position (assuming both of you are same handed). It is not uncommon, at times, to literally "bump" the birds with the bow (especially up against the reeds) or have to look over the side of the boat to see the birds. Let me tell you, that's a heart stopper.



A very effective way to utilize the scull boat is in conjunction with a layout boat. The layout boat is positioned with its decoys and hunters in waiting. The scull boat goes out and hunts a raft as it normally would. Upon flushing, the scullers will get their shooting and the birds will often wing over to the layout rig (they see their "buddies" rafting over there). Thus, both sets of hunters are able to make use of the same birds.

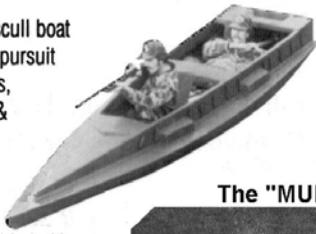
If you are hunting late seasons, you can paint the boat a flat white (primer) and you are an invisible ice flow out on the water. It's clever and you'll amaze yourself and friends.

One of my favorite days of scull hunting involved the camaraderie of a couple of my friends: Gene (from Indiana) and Fred Bremner (up from Texas). We were sculling with two boats in succession down a small river. I was piloting the lead boat with Fred in the front cockpit and Gene was following in the second sculler. Fred's eyes had to go the size of dinner plates as our first Wood Duck came straight at us, flying up this narrow river. It took all of three shots for Fred to connect on that highballing Woody. As we continued, I heard a shot from behind us. Turning around, I saw one of three Wood Ducks splash down. As it happened, we sculled right past those three Woodies, tucked up against the bank (you wouldn't think you could miss birds that brightly colored). As soon as we passed them, the oar movement behind the boat, spooked them and they flushed right in front of Gene. He had to shoot them...mentioning something about "self defense" and "being under attack". We could almost feel his smile...it was a good day with great friends.

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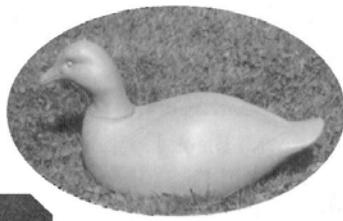
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