



# First-time Billy



**Mo Virtue, long-suffering wife of sporting agent David Virtue, heads into the scenic Scottish hills for her goat stalking debut**

**W**aking me up in the morning, David said the three little words I had been waiting months for: "We're going goat shooting."

So it was actually four words, but that didn't matter to me; I jumped out of bed, delighted. We had been attempting to go goat stalking for months now, but the severe weather conditions had spoilt our opportunities so far. However, a change in the weather and a free day had given us our chance. We were to be shooting goats on a Scottish mountainside. As we headed off I started to get really nervous. The last time I was out, I had missed two shots, the latter being a fox – a cardinal sin for which every gamekeeper probably now hates me.

David was going to take me for a quick practice shoot at a target to boost my confidence – or attempt to, anyway. However, standing there with .243 in hand and looking through the scope, I was still nervous about pulling the trigger – but that was what targets were for, so taking a deep, steady

breath I slipped off the safety catch and released the bullet. Fortunately, seconds later I saw the tell-tale hole in the target through the scope. I had punched the paper within the required four-inch circle, and David was confident.

"You'll be just fine," he told me. "Everyone has a crisis of confidence once in a while, especially if they have missed. Your shooting is fine – forget about your last miss and remember that you hit the target fine today. The goat will definitely be a dead 'un with shooting like that." I appreciated the sentiment and settled back to enjoy the landscape as we drove on. "Wow," I breathed – the scenery was truly spectacular, and the drive alone was worth it.

"Okay," David said, "we'll take a look round here. There are several groups working this area, and each will have a dominant Billy in it."

As we walked around the steep mountain face, the wind began to bite. The further we went on, the more respect I got for these tough, agile creatures – it was certainly hard going and I had to concentrate

just to keep my footing. David, meanwhile, managed not only to keep his footing faultlessly, but also to keep a look out for goats.

We had been walking for around an hour with no luck when, clambering over the top of a hollow, David announced: "Look! Over there, there's a group." My silence spoke volumes, and David tried again. "See that dead tree over there? Just to the left of it there is a group." He pointed into the distance.

I looked through my binoculars (I had got my own set, with co-ordinating camouflage no less!) About half a mile away there was indeed a group of – I counted – nine, ten, eleven, twelve... no, thirteen goats.

"Right, we'll stop here and see where they are headed – they are not in a shootable position at present," David informed me. We were in an area very popular with walkers, and the goats were right alongside the path – they had already passed two buses dropping off day trippers. We waited and watched for



around an hour or more, then David whispered urgently: "Look, there, quick."

I looked over and saw a marzipan-coloured hare hopping along in hot pursuit of another of its species. It was incredibly beautiful, and so unusual – we were both in awe of it. However, he was not for hanging around to show himself off and he soon disappeared after his Jill – nothing on his mind, no doubt, other than producing colour-coded leverets.

We waited a while longer. A group of walkers went close by the goats and we hoped it would be enough to chase them toward us; however, luck was not with us and the walkers changed direction, oblivious of the goats.

"Oh, look," I declared, delighted. "There, just by the whins." I pointed at a big Billy who had appeared from the thick bushes at the top of a steep bank just down from the group we had been spying. He was large – a bit like a Belted Galloway cow in miniature – but unfortunately he only stayed out for a couple of minutes, while we watched from just over half a mile away, before disappearing back into the whins. "Okay, plan B," said the ever-patient other half. "We'll have a quick check round the other side of the hill to make sure nothing has come in. If not, we'll head down to where that Billy disappeared."

Heading back down the steep cliff face was quite tricky. David went in front, sure footed and experienced; I followed behind, at one point slipping onto my rear. The hill proved bare, so we changed our course towards the last sighting.

"Okay, he must still be in the whins," David whispered as we approached. He went on to explain the plan: "We need to get over this dyke, then stalk along the other side, using the noise of the water to mask our approach." I nodded my acknowledgement and slipped quietly over the dyke. The descent to the stream was made doubly difficult by the thick vicious whins, their thorns stabbing and scraping at every available bit of me.

Suddenly I heard an unusual, almost eerie noise. It sounded like a hollow knocking. I nudged David inquiringly; he looked back, smiling, and whispered: "They're close – that's them fighting."

We walked on a few paces more, then David stopped abruptly. "Look up there." He pointed, and

through the whins I could make out two Billies. They made an impressive sight, standing on rear legs and clashing their horny heads together.

Stalking carefully in to around 50 yards, David deployed the rifle and whispered: "Okay, get yourself forward and soon as you get a clear shot..." He tailed off as we watched the Billies tire of their fighting place and move up the steep thorny banking. David, picking up the rifle once more, beckoned me to follow him. I fought past the thorns, and as he stopped I heard the unmistakable "clonk, clonk" of the Billies fighting again.

This time I lay prone behind the gun. A few branches were in the way but I had a clear enough view if I was careful. My belted Billy moved from left to right in combat, rearing up and clashing heads with his competitor, occasionally pausing to eyeball him threateningly. It was during one of these moments that I had him clear in the scope, broadside on. It was my long awaited opportunity. "Don't blow it," I told myself. "Keep calm." I checked I had a clear line of fire through the whin tunnel, and slipped off the safety catch. I took up the trigger; the bullet whizzed on its way to the target. Rearing slightly, the Billy let out a slight squeal and

immediately rolled down the steep bank toward the stream. With the smallest squeeze on the trigger I had settled their dispute, and the other Billy ran off, delighted in his victory, totally unaware of the help he had in winning his battle.

I looked round at David, a not very modest grin spreading across my face. "Well done," he said, relief evident in his voice. "Charming," I thought, but it was good to know some things never change – compliments from David are a rare occurrence.

We watched for a good few minutes to ensure the Billy was indeed dead before heading down to where he had finally fallen at the base of the steep banking. Approaching, I could see him in all his magnificent glory. Some call them ugly; I shall agree to differ.

A few weeks later I took my goat to the Scottish Game Fair at Scone Palace to be measured. I handed in my trophy and spent the rest of the day wandering around nervously, waiting on the result. It certainly made my day when I finally got my score – a certified CIC bronze medal, not bad for a first-timer. ■

For stalking and shooting trips in Scotland contact David Virtue: Tel 07866 901019 or email info@dvsporting.co.uk



A steady shot: Mo held her nerve to bag a CIC bronze medal trophy

EQUIPMENT REVIEWED BY MO VIRTUE

Product	Distributor	Price	Contact
Tikka Stainless T3 Lite .243	GMK	£950	01489 587500
Wildcat Predator 8 moderator	UK Custom Shop Ltd	£215	01527 832549
Schmidt & Bender 8x56 scope	York Guns	1in £609.95, 30mm £656.95	
Winchester power point 100-grain ammo	Browning	£21.70 for 20	
Swarovski 7x42 black binoculars	Swarovski UK	£595	01737 856812
Camo jacket/fleece	Game and Country supplies, Selkirk, Scottish Borders		Richard, 01750 725225

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★★★★★ = Excellent, ★★★★ = Very Good, ★★★ = Good, ★★ = Adequate for purpose, ★ = Poor