

Hunting with Nevada.

Firecrackers have long been illegal in Minnesota.

One summer after the Croteau family's annual visit, Cousin Jerry mailed me a whole case of firecrackers.

(It was illegal to send explosives through the mail then too.)

The case contained many thousands of firecrackers.

That case lasted for years.

I read somewhere about training a horse so you could shoot from his back.

It took three months and about 500 firecrackers but after that training Nevada was bulletproof.

He would not even flinch when I fired my 12-gauge shotgun from his back.

Either while standing to shoot a squirrel in a tree, or walking in tall grass to flush pheasants, or at a gallop to shoot a fleeing jackrabbit.

I normally carried a lightweight bolt action 20-gauge.

One fall day, when I was picking corn, I came home at sundown.

I spotted rooster pheasant landing in the grassy, ten-acre field across the road.

As I frequently did, I grabbed the closest shotgun, which happened to be my double barrel 12-gauge.

I was riding Nevada bareback with a single lead rope his halter.

We kicked the rooster pheasant as expected, and that all went fine.

I had one live shell in my gun, so I thought I try for another pheasant. Instead, a jack rabbit shot up at a run.

I wasn't planning on that or I would have been carrying a lighter gun and riding on a saddle.

Nevada took off after the rabbit at a dead run.

This was not his first jack rabbit.

I was burdened with a dead pheasant, a heavy gun, while struggling to keep my seat on horse at a full run.

Fortunately, Nevada did not need any guidance from me.

He knew how to follow a jackrabbit racing for his life.



**In 1975, Nevada was 30 and retired from hard work.
Tom, Nevada, Leah, Joel, Shannon.**



12-gauge, double barrel shotgun.

I raised my shotgun, directly over Nevada's head and emptied the left barrel.
Close, but a clean miss.
In my haste I had only brought the two that I loaded in the gun, besides it was getting dark.
It was not too dark for me to see the small squirt of blood out the end of Nevada's right ear with each beat of heart.
I had off the tip of his ear.
Fortunately, he was a horse, he did not hold it against me, I doubt he even noticed.
I noticed though, I took care to not do that again.

It was Christmas vacation, 1962.
We had a lot of snow, wind, and cold.
I rode Nevada bareback for warmth; a saddle would have been too brutally cold.
I figured I could find pheasants hunkered down in the weeds around the wetlands.
I was wrong about that. The weeds were drifted over



1949, Tom, holding a jack rabbit shot by Uncle John.



1962, My brother Jim holding a rooster pheasant and my 20-gauge shotgun.

with snow and besides, the wind was so intense I was freezing on horseback. Four-foot snowbanks were making Nevada kind of bitchy too. I decided to change plans entirely. I let Nevada go home; he knew the way. I would be afoot mostly, in sheltered woodlands for warmth.
It ten in the morning when I let Nevada head home.
Soon I spooked a single deer out of a thicket.
I had read in "Sports Illustrated", that a man could wear a deer down by simply following it relentlessly. So, I tried that.
The yearling deer stuck to woods and walked in huge circles. Always in thin snow.
By two o'clock I was certainly gaining on the deer.
By three o'clock I was able to see the deer each time it stopped to rest.
By three-thirty it stood and looked at me within easy shotgun range.
I used that technique several times to hunt game.
The great disadvantage during deer season is that you are going to drive the deer into countless other hunters.

I was thoughtless when I sent Nevada home alone.
I never asked what time my brother John noticed Nevada, but he was anxious and searching for me until I got home for chores.
Never send your horse home alone. Tom.