

Reed - the Ultimate Velvet and Trophy Sire

The aspen- covered slopes of Manitoba's Duck Mountains have some kind of magic about them. The world record non- typical Boone and Crockett elk trophy came from there. Last summer, a status Indian shot another elk bull there that was even bigger. These were both wild bulls, with no special feed available. On farms, where everything is just right, imagine what they would produce? Actually, we don't have to imagine. We have the proof, on hundreds of elk farms all across North America. That proof is in the progeny and descendants of the ultimate velvet and trophy sire - Reed. Think of Weapon, Stealth, Extra, Frederick, Bullwinkle, Acceleration, Duke, Sioux, Manitou, Samurai. They are all Reed sons or descendants, and they are only a few of the hundreds of Reed- influenced elk that dominate our industry. No other bull has had a greater impact on antler production. Where did this awesome bull come from?

With enterprising spirits, five daughters and three sons that needed a summer business to keep them busy, the John Eisner and Bill Hart families began operating the Tent Town Game Farm on their farm near Minitonas in 1977. Along with several other species, they included a small herd of elk. Their game farm/zoo was the perfect place for orphans to be raised, and the Wildlife Management officers would bring any that were found to the Eisner's to care for and add to their herd. In the spring of 1978, two bull calves were found orphaned on the north side of the Duck Mountains, and John and family agreed to take on the task of bottle raising them. One of these had been on the farm of Reid Sheils (who is now an elk farmer as well), so the little bull was named "Reed". The other bull was named "Peter", and he later sired the bulls Taringa and Peterson, the sire of Les Nelson's King of the Mountain.



Reed was nothing special as a calf or as a spiker. He was healthy and spoiled, and many people went home from Tent Town with memories and photographs of him, but his simple spikes - although they were plenty thick, gave little indication of the masses of antler he would later produce.

In the late 1970's, John Eisner and his partner Les Nelson from Minitonas, in co-operation with Harvey Payne from Manitoba Wildlife Branch, began promoting the concept of an "experimental elk ranch". John and Les formed "Swan Valley Elk Ranch" (SVER). This was the first commercial elk ranch licensed in Manitoba. Reed was now beginning to show his potential, and he began to be the primary breeding bull at SVER.

Permission was given to the partners to increase the original Tent Town Game Farm herd by capture from the wild in 1980 and 1981, and ten cows were captured during those years. A further capture took place in 1986, when several cows and a bull calf called "Purple 25" were added to the herd.

In the early 1980's, the red deer farming industry was booming in New Zealand, and several enterprising farmers saw the potential of North American Elk, both as purebreds and for crossbreeding over the smaller red deer. Most notable among these forward thinkers were John Barber, Dr. Michael Bringans and Sir Timothy Wallis, all then from New Zealand. These men and others traveled to Canada to find the most promising elk sires, and quickly recognized the tremendous depth of potential antler production at Swan Valley Elk Ranch. John and Mike began purchasing bull calves and exporting them to New Zealand. One of these was sired by Peter and this calf, of course, turned into one of the most prepotent sires in the NZ elk industry, Neville Cunningham's Taringa. However, moving livestock is a complex and expensive affair, and Mike had a better idea.

In the mid 1980's, Artificial Insemination was a new concept for the elk industry. One of the pioneers of the development of successful techniques was Dr. Mike Bringans. Mike and his partners realized the tremendous potential of Reed, and made a deal with John Eisner and the SVER partners to collect semen for sale to the expanding markets in New Zealand and Australia. North American farmers were now catching on to elk farming as well. In 1986 and 1987, Len Shandruk and Hal Reynolds bought several calves from Swan Valley to start their Alberta elk farm, Aspen Acres, Grant Duckett from Cold Lake bought calves and bred cows and Trace Smith from near Saskatoon started his Manitoban lines. Out of these sales came the bulls Frederick, Bullwinkle, Elevation and Reemus.

In 1991, Swan Valley elk were sold at public auction for the first time. John Eisner and his new partner, son-in-law Ian McKay brought five young sons of Reed to the new Orr Lake Elk facility in southern Ontario. Orr Lake Elk is a partnership between Mike and Diane Bringans and Sir Timothy Wallis.



One of the elk bulls sold that day was to become one of the greatest antler producers yet known - Manitoba Weapon! He is the spiker farthest left. Weapon has set the standard for deep black coloured, porous and heavy velvet antler - antler that looks just like Reed's. Weapon sold for \$14,500 that day. Although Reed was never velvetted due to restrictions in the province of Manitoba, we can estimate what he might have cut by comparing the production of his sons to the weight of hard antler he carried. At the sale in 1991, John and Ian displayed Reed's antlers from the year before, at age twelve. Even when they had dried thoroughly by September, they weighed an incredible fifty-two pounds!

The strength of the Reed bloodline for production of large, heavy, dark coloured and high quality velvet antler is well known and unquestioned. The trophy potential has not yet been realized. John Eisner and Les Nelson recognized it a long time ago, but everyone was captured with Velvet, so little was said about the tremendous hard antler some of the Reed sons and descendants were putting up. Now, our entire industry is swinging around and appreciating the size and value of the market for trophy elk, and Reed shines again! Keystone, one of the bulls sold that day at Orr Lake Elk, is putting up 450 + inch racks at Lloyd Johanningmeir's place in Iowa. John Carson's Duke, a son of Frederick, won the 1999 Alberta competition at 451 inches. Manitoba Stealth grew over 400 inches as a *four-year-old* at Orr Lake Elk. Reedson and Weapon are also well over that 400 inches and many more of the same genetics are showing that kind of power.



Reedson and Weapon

Reed was never a big-bodied bull. He probably never weighed over 1000 pounds, even in his fattest condition. But some amazing collection of genetics had been put together from those Duck Mountain elk that really produced the antlers. Reed continued to increase his antler mass and non- typical complexity until he was in his mid- teens. He remained a very aggressive breeder right until the end, and passed that trait on to his sons as well. At the age of seventeen and in the rut, Reed met his end on the antlers of one of his aggressive sons. A single spike through his side meant that a new bull took over the throne at Swan Valley Elk Ranch.

Reed and John Eisner have left a huge legacy for the elk farming industry, partly because of the exceptional antler producing abilities of that bull, but also because of the breeding strategy that John has followed. His knowledge of livestock breeding, particularly with horses, gave him the confidence to try linebreeding with Reed and his offspring. Many people suggested he was heading down a dangerous path, but John could see nothing but good results, and he has continued to this day. And time has proven him right! Many of the bulls I've mentioned in this article are linebred, often Reed over one of his daughters, or a Reed son over a Reed daughter. There do not appear to be any negative effects showing yet, and the positive results are obvious.



This is Cobra from Bruce Friedel's herd. Reed appears four times in his recent pedigree!

The strength is coming through both the sons and daughters- Orr Lake Samurai, that tremendous 500+ Korean Gold son, is out of a Reed daughter. You should see the young ones coming up!



Samurai at time of harvest – 577 inches!

It's very difficult to predict how a young calf might turn out, especially an orphan. We should all give the Eisner's a nod of appreciation for raising this amazing bull, Reed and believing in him enough to produce all the exceptional offspring our industry enjoys and thrives on. Every elk herd in the world should have some Reed in it!

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