

BOW REPORT

BY STEVE FLORES

LIBERTY I

Take that first step outside the box and discover a truly unique shooting experience.



At only 20 1/2 inches axle to axle and only 2 1/2 pounds heavy, the Liberty I is the lightest, most compact compound on earth. However, due to its unique engineering this bow is surprisingly forgiving and accurate.

When *BOW & ARROW HUNTING* Editor Joe Bell asked me to test the unique offering from Liberty Archery, I was intrigued, to say the least. I am admittedly slow to embrace change, so you can imagine the initial skepticism I felt as I began to open the rather small box waiting at my doorstep. Stored inside its very own custom soft-shell case was the Liberty I. To be honest, I didn't know what to think about this super-short, super-light, futuristic looking bow. I can imagine its inventor, Howard Winther, felt the same way when he first conceived the idea for the world's shortest, lightest, compound bow back in 1999.

The first thing I took note of as I pulled the bow from its plush foam housing was how extremely light it felt in my hand. With a mass weight of a mere 2 1/2 pounds (accessories included), you almost forget that you're holding a completely functional compound bow. The second thing I noticed was the ergonomic, synthetic rubber grip. By nature, its 29-degree angle felt unusual, but at the same time somewhat natural, if that makes any sense. Holding this unassuming piece of machinery in front of my cynical eyes, I knew the only way to answer the countless number of questions floating around in my head was to just shoot it.

THE TEST DRIVE

Surprisingly, the draw cycle on the Liberty I is very smooth. Thanks to the large, somewhat rounded cams, the cycle builds over a longer distance, rather than reaching peak draw weight early and then remaining there until the end of the draw cycle when the let-off occurs. I also found the transition from puling weight to holding weight (the moment when the bow breaks into the let-off phase) to be

seamless. With some bow models this changeover can feel more like a "hump," or a sudden "drop," into let-off at the end of the draw cycle, making for an unpleasant shooting experience. If you've ever shot such a bow, you know what



Although the Liberty I is extremely light and compact, it's surprisingly comfortable to handle and shoot. The author found its 29-degree angle grip comfortable to use.

I am talking about.

Upon reaching full draw, I knew immediately I was holding back something very different, due in large to the lack of weight, but also the size of the Liberty I. With virtually no riser, and extremely undersized split limbs, there was little for my peripheral vision to pick up on, creating the illusion that I was grasping nothing more than a grip with sight pins.

Looking through the specialized peep I let the fiber-optic pin float around the target spot; slowly squeezing the trigger until the bow fired. Bull's-eye! I attributed my success to beginner's luck and quickly

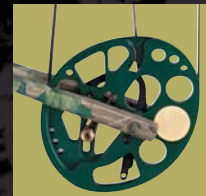
loaded another arrow. Coming to anchor once more, I watched as the pin hovered and then cut the shot. Another bull's eye! This trend continued for several more shots with some just missing the X on the bag target.

Eager to test its limits, I moved further away from the target. Consequently, it didn't take long before I realized that the Liberty I was just as accurate at longer distances as well. In fact, the very first time I shot the bow at 30 yards I split one of my arrow nocks. Talk about a good first impression! The five Easton Flatline shafts were waded together in a baseball size group as I walked up to

retrieve them from the target. Those combined characteristics proved to me that this bow is capable of holding its own against most models on the market today, even though it is half the size and half the weight of anything presently being offered. Not to mention it is very, very quiet. With little more than a set of precisely manufactured split limbs, and a soft, synthetic rubber grip, there is little else that can vibrate or emit sound on this bow.

DESIGNED ACCURACY

Without a doubt, when manufacturers set out to make a bow it must be accurate. According to Liberty



BOW REPORT



The Liberty's large, rounded cams produce a smooth draw cycle.

Archery there are three main reasons for the accuracy this bow displays. For starters, the high let-off (85 percent) allows more concentration to be applied to the aiming process; rather than fighting the holding weight once you reach full draw. Also, thanks to the shoot through cable design, there is no cable guard, therefore, there is no side pressure placed on the cams. Lastly, shooters will immediately recognize when they are torquing the bow, via the sight picture, simply because of the very short axle-to-axle length.

This was actually the first thing I noticed upon reaching full draw. Even though the bow appeared stationary to bystanders, I could see

lateral torque during the initial phases of shooting the Liberty I. Consequently, I began to really concentrate on what I needed to do to eliminate the movement, and thus, the torque I was applying to the grip. The result was better shooting and tighter groups after only a few shooting sessions.

APPLICATIONS

Now, I know what you're thinking because I thought the same thing myself. Yes it shoots fast, yes it is accurate, yes it is forgiving, but there are a lot of bows out there that do all of that. So what makes this bow so special? When trying to answer this question I began to think of certain situations in which the Liberty I would excel when compared to the average bow. The first thing that popped into my mind was...ground blinds!

One week before testing this bow I was at a 3-D event with some friends and at the end of the tournament was a "novelty" shot. The circumstances called for the archer to shoot from inside a ground blind at a turkey some 25 yards away. The blind was average; though smaller than most seen on television today. To say that I struggled with my 6-foot, 1-inch frame inside the blind would be an understatement. No matter how hard I tried, I could not get myself, my bow, and the target lined up in a remotely comfortable position.

To make matters worse, some of my bow was actually sticking outside of the opening in the front; making for a costly mistake had it been a real-life hunting situation instead of a tournament shot. Still, when my arrow sailed about a foot over the foam gobbler's back I was shocked! Had I chose the Liberty I that day, I am sure the outcome would have

been much different. At the very least, my concentration would have been centered on the shot rather than how awkward I felt about the whole situation.

An additional area that may prove to be a perfect match for the Liberty would be on very long hikes into remote country. Speaking for myself, I routinely hunt very rugged terrain, and hike rather long distances in pursuit of whitetails. Therefore, I often try to pack as light as I can, taking only what I need. However, being a big proponent of a heavy shooting rig, I keep my bow as heavy as possible. With this bow I could actually lighten up my overall set up without sacrificing shooting accuracy. This would allow me to cover more ground quicker and still be able to bring along an accurate setup—a definite advantage in my book.

Also, those who routinely engage their quarry via "spot and stalk" could find this bow to be a tremendous asset when crouching in tall grass, snaking around rock ledges and downed timber, or peeking over subtle rises in the terrain for that perfect double-lung shot. With less "bow" to catch the watchful eye of cagey game, reaching full draw could prove to be much easier with a very short, inconspicuous killing machine such as the Liberty I.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is only natural to expect certain visual and dimensional characteristics in a compound bow. Although speed, forgiveness, ease of draw, and vibration has changed dramatically over the years, the overall look is basically the same. However, the Liberty I could very well be the bow that changes all of that, taking us in an entirely different direction. Not to mention, this thing is just plain fun

BOW REPORT

Continued from page 18

to shoot! And, just in case you're still a bit skeptical about trying out the Liberty I for yourself, the company offers a 35-day trial period to help you decide if this is the bow for you; a nice bonus rarely offered in the industry today. My bet is the Liberty I will amaze you as it did me—if you will give it a chance. ←

BOTTOM LINE

The Liberty I will make you re-think almost every aspect of a compound bow. Not only in how one should look, but also in what you think influences shooting accuracy. Although this bow is extremely short, 20 1/2-inch axle to axle, it is deadly accurate and well balanced, thanks to the split cam and split cable eccentric system that works in terrific harmony with the shoot-through riser design.

SPECIFICATIONS

Model: Liberty I

Manufacturer: Liberty Archery, 120 Saratoga CA 95051 (408) 983-1127; www.libertyarchery.com

Draw Weights: 30 to 80 pounds

Draw Lengths: 25 1/2 to 32 inches

Axle-to-axle length: 20.5 inches

Let-Off: 85 percent

Limbs: Gordon composite core laminated w/Ultra S on the outside and Bow Tuff on inside

Riser: A357-T6 aluminum

Grip: Lightweight cushioned synthetic rubber; angled at 29 degrees

Eccentrics: Split Cam, Split Cable

Brace Height: 7 inches

Mass Weight: 2.3 pounds, 2.52 pounds fully loaded. Advertised IBO speed: 308 fps

Suggested Retail: \$831 ready-to-shoot kit w/carrying case

Color: Realtree Hardwoods Green HD

PERFORMANCE RATINGS

True Speed: Liberty I, 278 fps; 28-inch draw length. Draw weight, 70 pounds, respectively; special peep sight w/tube. Arrow: Easton FlatLine 300 w/100-grain point, Blazer vanes; total arrow weight: 365 grains.

NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS

- In theory, a shorter bow should be less accurate when compared to a longer one because of the ease in which lateral torque can be applied. However, this bow seems to challenge that presumption. I am not really sure how it does it; I just know that it shouldn't shoot as well as it does.
- Super quiet thanks to shoot-through riser design and installed Bow Jacks.
- Soft Shell Carrying Case is top notch; stylish and functional.
- Craftsmanship is excellent. Realtree Camo looks great.
- Would make for an excellent ground-blind bow.
- Holding the bow with an extreme "high grip" pressure point, between the thumb and the index finger, will bring about the best shooting results.