

THE NEW ARCHERS' GUIDE TO SELECTING A BOW
OR
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU HAND SOMEONE MONEY

1. How much are you willing to spend? A new bow can run anywhere from several hundred to more than a thousand dollars. A used bow can be anywhere from \$5 to \$500.
2. What kind of bow do you want? Do you need a bow to match your persona or just a bow that will pass inspection? How much bow, meaning draw weight, do you need?
 - a. modern recurve bows
 - b. modern flat bows
 - c. d-section longbows
 - d. horse bows
 - e. crossbows
 - f. 20 – 30# good starter bow/30-45# nice medium weight although not terribly effective at long ranges/50-65# heavy bows can also be used for hunting/70# plus – yeah, there are nutcases like me who love these.
3. How do you afford your bow?
 - a. Don't spend more than you can afford.
 - b. Save a little every week. It may take a year or more but a good bow is worth waiting for.
 - c. Credit card purchases can protect your investment.
4. Where will you purchase your bow?
 - a. sporting goods stores i.e. Gander Mountain, Cabella's or your local hardware store
 - i. Pro- you can see and handle the bow. Some stores even have a range where you can try a new bow.
 - ii. Con-the selection is often limited to one or two styles and draw weights of modern recurves or longbows. You may have to special order the right draw weight or a bow for a left-handed archer.
 - iii. Prices-moderate usually \$300 to \$400 for a new bow. Some stores also have model closeout sales and may offer returned bows at reduced prices.
 - b. factory direct – Bear, Martin et al
 - i. Pro-no muss no fuss as long as you know exactly what you want. Prices may also be lower for brand new bows.
 - ii. Con- you need to know exactly what you want.
 - c. Adds in magazines-i.e. Primitive Archer or Traditional Bow Hunter
 - i. Pro-you can find just about any kind of bow imaginable.
 - ii. Con-you don't get a chance to handle the bow before purchase. You don't know how long this bowyer has been making and

- selling bows so you need to ask for references. Prices may be much higher, \$1000 or more, for what is truly a one of a kind bow.
- iii. Protect yourself by simply watching the magazines for two or three issues. A fly by night operation can't afford that kind of advertising for long.
 - d. on line – i.e. ebay or direct
 - i. Pro-you can save a lot of money this way. A reputable site will have security and all the bells and whistles.
 - ii. Con-you can get taken to the cleaners very easily. Not only do you not get to handle the bow ahead of time, you might never see it at all. Be especially wary of used bows sold on line.
 - e. thrift store or yard sale
 - i. Pro-you can get really lucky and score a nice used bow for very little.
 - ii. Con-unless you know how to inspect a bow, you may be buying a pretty piece of fire wood.

5. Basic Bow Inspection – if you insist on shopping thrift
- a. Overall impression. Does the bow look good or like it got dragged behind a truck?
 - b. Check for delamination. This is where the layers of laminated wood and/or fiber glass start to separate. This happens most often at the tips and where the riser, where the hand grip is, tapers into the limbs. If you can get a finger nail into a gap, walk away.
 - c. Check for cracks and checking. Cracks are self-explanatory but checking, at best, looks like hash-mark or grid-like patterns on the surface finish; at worst, may have sections of finish lifting away from the bow. Very common with older fiber glass bows. Again, if you can get a fingernail into a gap, walk away.
 - d. Check for limb twist. This is where the upper and lower limbs twist in opposite directions and is caused primarily by hip-stringing a bow. A little limb twist won't automatically fail a bow, but a lot can cause the bow to unstring itself unexpectedly. You can't really tell how much if any limb twist there might be until you string the bow and most thrift store bows don't have strings. Having a bow stringer along will allow you to test draw the bow or you can put one end of the bow on a flat surface and the other end near your eye. Try to line both ends of the bow up. If they don't, you have limb twist. Walk away.
 - e. Be ready for disappointment. In the last 20 years, I've seen bows from thrift and yard sales that looked okay at first glance but just would not pass inspection. This is not the marshall throwing his/her weight around. This is for your safety and the safety of everyone else on the range.
6. What kind of bow and how do I decide?
- a. Expanding on the bows mentioned earlier

- i. I lost my heart to a longbow decades ago but they do have drawbacks. Modern longbows are pretty much all about six feet in length, which can be really awkward for someone who only stands five feet tall or less. Custom made bows can solve this issue but at an increased price. If your persona is English, Welsh, Scots or Irish these are for you.
 - ii. Modern recurves are very efficient at throwing arrows down range and can be easier to find at sporting goods stores. Prices for new bows are actually quite reasonable. Unfortunately they look, well, modern.
 - iii. Generically called horse bows, these are the types of bows used by the horsemen of the European steppes. They are especially user-friendly for those vertically challenged gentles or those gentles who want a bow that will really send an arrow down range without the additional effort required for a longbow of similar poundage. They would work well for any gentle with an eastern European, Russian, Mongol or Middle Eastern persona. If you just google horsebows you'll find a number of vendors. Just start at the top and price check.
 - iv. Crossbows are a whole different kettle of fish. The only bows of this type available at sporting goods stores will not pass inspection on an SCA archery range. Why? Rifle stocks primarily. You will probably have to have one made specially which costs, or pick the brains of SCA crossbowmen about where they got theirs.
- b. Hands on
- i. Check out archery ranges or sportsmen's clubs in your area. Many will have a variety of bows you can try. Before you spend gas money getting there, ask if they have traditional bows available. Some only have modern compound bows and we don't need training wheels.
 - ii. Sporting goods stores, especially the larger ones, have ranges where potential buyers can try a bow. A little homework on the phone ahead of time will pay off again.
 - iii. The best, and my favorite, way to try bows is to go to an archery event and hang out at the archery range. SCA archers tend to be a standoffish lot. It might take them all of five minutes before they are showing off their bows and offering you a chance to try them. SCA archers know that the more people who want archery, the more event organizers will attempt to satisfy the need.

See you on the range. Want to try my bow?