



Website: <http://www.HeadsAboveTheRest.com>

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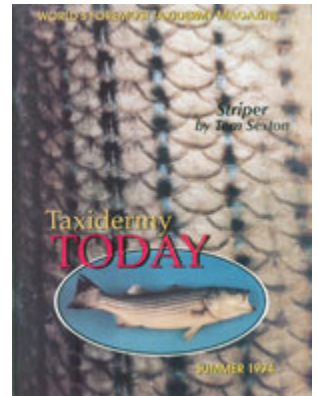
## Don't Be Afraid To Change What You've Got To Get What You Want

Written and Photographed by Ron Schaefer

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It is not unusual to need to form a in a particular size or pose that is not standard and not available from any supply source. Too often taxidermists give up in frustration when a simple and reasonable solution is right there with you. With a little common sense, the skin for taking measurements, and references, you can easily alter just about any form to the specifics you need. Though this problem is most often encountered with the less frequently mounted species, Ron Schaefer's technique works just as well on a javelin, deer, or coyote. Don't be timid, just take it step-by-step.

In this case I needed a lying form for a small African Red duiker. I could get a standing form that was close to the size I needed, but no lying form was available. So, having the wet tanned skin, the skull, and the standing form in hand, I set out to alter the form to a lying pose.



**#1** The first cut was a slice off the rump to give the red duiker shape.



**#2** Since this is a lying pose, the excess length of foam and rod were removed at the hoof joint.



**#3** The hind quarters were removed as if processing a deer.



**#4** The backside front leg will be tucked under the lying antelope. The front side leg will be straight, so the elbow joint was cut and bent.



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**#5** After determining the length of the leg bones, the legs were marked and cut with a hand saw, down to (not through) the support rod inside the leg. The rods help hold things together when you bend the joints.



**#6** The body looked stiff, so the backside front leg was cut off and the body tilted back some. The scapula (shoulder blade) was cut down and then everything was cemented back together with bondo (automotive body filler).



**#7** Still the pose was stiff, so the main torso was cut in half, and a wedge was inserted to give the body a little turn and that relaxed the pose.



**#8** Turning now to the back legs, the skin was measured again and I needed to take out about two inches between the hock and knee.



**#9** After removing the excess leg length, the rod was cut.



**#10** The leg was bonded back together. A new 1/4 inch support rod was bent to the shape of the leg, and the leg was grooved underneath to accept the new rod which was bonded into place.



**#11** The right rear leg was also cut to proper length and the upper thigh was then removed from the leg.



**#12** The upper thigh of the right rear was placed on the form and bonded into place.



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**#13** Then the lower part of the leg was positioned beneath the body and a groove cut in the form to accept the leg. Bondo cemented the leg.



**#14** The head was leveled by cutting the neck at the base and removing a wedge of foam.



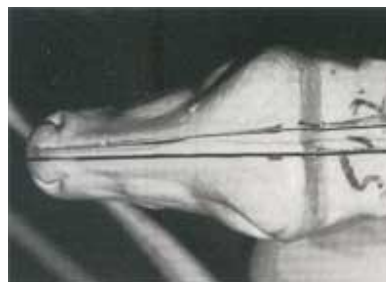
**#15** You can see the new shape of the lying form. Test fitting the skin at various times ensures a proper fit.



**#16** Now the form is sanded and rasped to smooth it and add detail.



**#17** Measure the width of the eye orbits on the natural skull and compare to the head of the form.



**#18** A wedge needed to be cut from the head of the form to match the width measurements. The wedge is wider at the rear, narrowing to the nose.



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**#19** On a species such as the duiker which has an unusual skull shape, I like to use a large portion of the skull. Comparing the natural skull to the form showed that a section needed to be taken from the muzzle to shorten the face.



**#20** Finish up the form with mache. Leave grooves in the arm pit areas to tuck the skin. Prefit the hide and, if necessary, adjust the form.



**#21** All duikers, bushbuck, nyala, and sitatunga have usually stiff hides with little stretch. Therefore, I prefer to use a wet tan from the tannery. Not only are they softer, but you have much less epidermal loss which saves you hours of time in retouching and re-coloring skin on than haired animals.



**#22** I used 24mm eyes and set them in the head at about a 40-42 degree angle and tilted them downward by just 3-4 degrees. The horns were bonded and each secured with a single drywall screw.



**#23** All the clay work was done around the bases of the ears and Buckeye hide paste was applied and the skin was put on the form.



**#24** All details were worked into the skin, paying particular attention to the red duiker's special anatomy including its mouth and lip shape, the gland on the side of the face, and its puffy nose. The incision on the head and neck was sewn with nylon thread and a small round sewing needle.



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**#25** The edges of the skin were thinned to make a neat seam. The skin on the parts of the legs that are hidden were held together with super glue. Visible areas were sewn with small tight stitches.



**#26** A groove was made in the underside belly to accept a U shaped section of threaded rod that was bonded into place to anchor the mount to a base.



**#27** Groomed and carded, the mount was set aside to dry. The combination of an excellent skin and wet tan left little finish work upon drying and an excellent and pleasing mount was the reward

Whenever a pre-made form is available and is what you and your customer want, your job is simple. But, when the size you need is not available or the pose is not what you need, don't be afraid to alter that life-size form. Really, it is only a matter of using the skin for measurements, cutting the form piece by piece, and repeated test fitting of that skin, and making adjustments. It's not tough; it gives you a tremendous amount of flexibility and opens up a whole new range of possibilities for your creative imagination.

Two good books I recommend you have on hand are An Atlas of Animal Anatomy for Artists, and Animals in Motion. Also collect as much reference as possible on many different kinds of animals. Death masks, skulls, contact sketches of bodies and limbs, and pictures, pictures, pictures. The more reference you have and the more you know about any animal, the better taxidermist you will be.

### **About the Author**

Ron Schaefer offers full spectrum [Taxidermy Services](#), [Bronze Sculptures](#) and [Wildlife Drawings](#). Ron Schaefer, a Texas taxidermist, founder and artisan for [Heads Above The Rest](#), Inc.® and has been studying the fine art of moving and adjusting skin since 1975. He specializes mainly in life size African and Exotics with his passion being Cats.

Heads Above The Rest, Inc.® is not a large production firm. Ron Schaefer strives for low volume, accepting a limited number of clients each year, enabling him to maintain high quality craftsmanship and customer care. He leads the industry in higher standards and you will see a definite difference when working with Heads Above The Rest, Inc.®.

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