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Taxidermy Forms on the Market

Written and Photographed by Ron Schaefer

Here is a statistic to look at. A large taxidermy supply company in the early 1990's. Had over forty thousand taxidermists on their mail out list. An inside source said that eighty percent of their taxidermists on file ordered only five manikins or less a year. Let me repeat that, eighty percent of all taxidermists order less than five manikins per year. If you're mounting five or less animals a year you most likely do not have the experience as a full time taxidermist. These taxidermists in my opinion are hobbyists and yet these hobbyists have more say so power than the twenty percent of full time taxidermists. If twenty percent are full time taxidermists then they are just a drop in the bucket compared to the eighty percent of hobbyists, in a supply manufactures opinion.

Full time taxidermists mount more far more animals per year compared to a hobbyist. Mounting on the form manikins over and over the full timer realizes the manikins offered on the market are inaccurate. Example - A full time taxidermist that will mount say 20 – 30 impala a year will notice the same problems over and over.



Now if a full time taxidermist so happens to call the supply manufacture and explains their manikins are not accurate, we just become an annoyance to the manufacture. The hobbyists run into the same problems but due to their lack of knowledge and experience they don't think the manikin is the problem but instead an odd size animal they just happen to be mounting. They will make an attempt to fix the problems but with the lack of alterations experience they will not go the extra mile to fix a manikin accurately even though they are trying. They will end up with a different look than they wanted. So if they decide to call the supply manufacture, their phone calls to the manufactures are them wanting the manikins to look different instead of your manikins are inaccurate. If less than twenty percent of complaints comes in that something does not fit and your forms are wrong, and eighty percent complain they just request to make a different look or style. This phone call is so much more appealing to the supply manufacture and their pride is not hurt, it makes sense the manufactures will listen to the majority of hobbyist instead of the twenty percent of full time taxidermists even though this is an inaccurate request. (major down fall in the industry)

In the slim chance a supply company so happens to listen to a full time taxidermist's complaint this will take a minimum of three years of phone calls for any decision to change and manikins to happen. Let's look at how the changes are made. One call does not constitute a reason for change so the supply manufacture will need years of calls asking for changes (2 years). The sculptor that will be making the new changes requested has to gear up and make new manikins (4-6 months). The new sculpted manikins are delivered to the manufacture. Now the supply manufacture has to make new fiberglass molds for the new sculptures (3-4 months, depending on how many and how intricate the molds have to be could extend up to 6-7 months). There is a method to introduce all new manikins to the taxidermy market. All new manikins introduced are advertised one to two months before the next hunting season normally around September (2-8 months). The taxidermists see the changes in the new catalogs mailed out and now they have to wait until their client collects that specific specie and size of specie that was sculpted new. (3-4 months – if the animal is an African animal the next African season is not until April the following year, 8-9 months) (Then the African hunter has to wait until their trophies are shipped back to the United States 6-8 months - Minimum). Then the skins are sent to the tannery for tanning (4-7 months). The taxidermist orders the new form (1-2 months). If you add up the time laps you are looking at a minimum of three and a half years.



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This should fix the problems but with the sculptors not using original skins, skull or bones we are right back to where we were before the changes were made. Now you're back to the 20-80 percent of taxidermists again. The twenty percent full timers will start to call first due to they have the biggest work log and will get the most work in, so they will be the first to recognize the problems normally because they get a higher number of animals in compared to a hobbyist taking in five or less animals a year. They do not recognize this is an everyday issue. Now the supply company has to start all over again (minimum another 3 1/2 years before any possible change is made). (What a down fall to the industry)

The conclusion is, just because there are so many forms available on the market today, this does not mean in any way the manikin the taxidermist buys will most likely fit.



It will be solely up to the individual taxidermist to have the knowledge to recognize, find, alter, correct inaccurate anatomy and make the proper alterations for their client's subspecies they happened to of collected. If the taxidermist lacks the knowledge or just does not want to take the time to correct the time consuming alterations then they will just make the skin stretch over the manikin and give a mount that was rushed, inaccurate and is full of flaws back to their clients. The hunter has to educate themselves and visit as many taxidermy studios as they can to see the different styles of taxidermists and the different quality they will receive in return. There definitely is a difference from taxidermist to taxidermist, do not fool your self in thinking there is not.

Read entire [How to Choose a Taxidermist](#) article.

About the Author

Ron Schaefer offers full spectrum [Taxidermy Services](#), [Bronze Sculptures](#) and [Wildlife Drawings](#). Ron Schaefer, a Master Taxidermist, located in Texas, is 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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