

Hot Hookups

Your string nocking system may be more important than you think!

A quick, self-serving string nocking point is darned near bordering on dirty pool. If you have such a thing you: (1) are serious about accuracy; (2) have tried them all, canned the losers, and gone with your gut on a winner; (3) can hookup to it with utter ease and control, then draw and shoot - just like that - no frills, no fluff. Sad to say many bowhunters have never enjoyed the sheer bliss of a plush nocking point. It seems many bowhunters simply don't consider them a hot topic.

If you consider your nocking system to be the least of your worries, shame on you. Think about it. Everything on your bow, including the string accessories should be shuffled through with open eyes. Don't disregard your string nocking point as too minute to harp on; it's not. There's always room for improvement in arrow groups. Alternating to a different nocking point may raise the bar for you. Luckily for finger shooters the choices are not so complex. But if you draw and launch the string with a release aid (as most of us do), open your eyes and fiddle a bit, a little dab might just do you. You'll be happy you did.

Brass Nocks

Clamp-on brass nocking points have stood the test of time. They've been around practically since Moses parted the Red Sea. Chances are you've toyed with this style a bit. The normal nocking point setup usually is as follows: Two clamp-on nocks fastened one above the other. You clip the arrow below this and clip your release aid below the

arrow nock either directly or non-directly. The latter in which case you may place a rubber eliminator button or pinch of extra serving to lessen contact between the release aid and arrow nock and this somewhat decreases the amount of pressure between the two.

While this all sounds hunky-dory in theory, this type nocking system is not nearly as celebrated as it once was. It's far less than perfect, particularly by today's standards. Consider this: clamping a release aid directly onto the string (metal jaws or rope release) creates constant upward pressure (pinch) to the arrow nock. Larry Wise is former world field archery and national target archery champion, a top-level international archery coach who presents seminars nationwide and in other countries, has also penned several informative books on tuning and shooting the compound bow, and is one of the best archery technicians in the world today. He told me that he shied away from this



It seems most every bowhunter has tried this hookup—a brass nocking point (or two) and an eliminator button, with the release latched right onto the string.

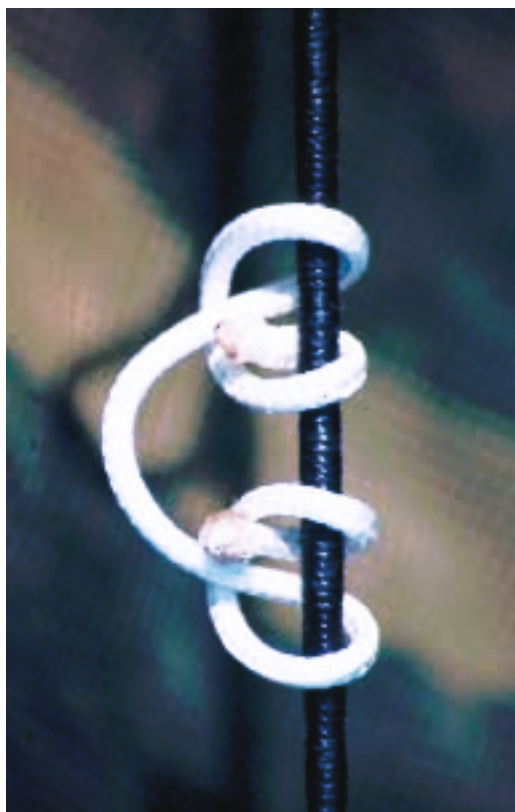
type nocking method years ago. "I was never really satisfied with this style of nocking system to be honest," Wise said. "There is always at least a little pressure crowding the bottom of the arrow nock and this is never constant. In my testing this has often created a tendency for the rear of the arrow to travel downward during the power stroke of the shot. Archers who shoot bows with a shorter axle-to-axle length (under 38-inches or so) are at even more disadvantage with this style of arrow nocking system," clued Wise. "The angle of the string is so acute that the arrow nock is practically sliding down the string when fired. You need to be able to 'trap' that arrow nock on the string somehow or another. If it moves as the bowstring springs forward then you should look into an alternative method."

There are ways to check this if you are using a clamp-on style nocking method with a rubber eliminator button. When you shoot consecutive shots on the target range examine the eliminator button after every shot. See if it looks like it has moved at all. If it has slid down the string even a smidgen you know that you've got some arrow nock travel as you shoot. This shouldn't go unnoticed.

Derek Phillips, the man who heads up the Mathews Archery Field Staff program, is a top-rated tournament shooter and a dead serious bowhunter. He's also one heck of a nice guy. He told me that he no longer dabbles with this style of nocking method either. "I turned the other way on this string nocking setup long ago. There are just too many variables for me to contend with using this style anymore," directs Phillips. I don't know about you, but when people as seasoned as Phillips and Wise say something like this, I'm all ears!

String Loops

Nowadays considered the cream of the crop, a string loop is simple but greatly effective. It's a breeze to install and will last thousands upon thousands of shots.



This photo of how to tie a string loop from my last article is worth repeating. String loops (as easy to tie on as indicated in the photo) have big advantages in the field.

According to Larry Wise he shoots a string loop 100 percent of the time, for target archery and hunting. "You can't beat a string loop in my opinion," replied Wise. "I'm sold on them. I started using them years ago and I haven't looked back since. String loops can be so advantageous to every release aid archer out there." Just a few reasons: for one, you get zero nock pinch from your release aid. Second, serving wear is eliminated from the jaws of a release aid because the release head never touches the center serving. Third, depending on the type of peep sight you shoot you can affix the string loop in such a manner so that your peep sight aligns to your eye every time

you draw the bow.

Another, and most important, reason is accuracy. Arrow groups and arrow flight, particularly with broadheads, seem to tighten noticeably when shooting a string loop. Why? Derek Phillips says you are not twisting (creating torque on) the bowstring or pinching the arrow nock whatsoever and the arrow comes off of the string more uniformly each and every time. Is that enough to make a difference? "There is no question that a loop of some kind will improve your accuracy. Without a shadow of a doubt it will upgrade your arrow flight and bulls-eye groups consistently," Phillips said matter-of-factly.

"I use a string loop in two different ways," adds Phillips. "On some bows I use the typical D-style loop, one knot above the arrow nock and one knot below. On others I slide both knots of the string loop together and seat the arrow above this then rig a top nocking point from a piece of waxed leather string (available at any local leather store) in a half-hitch type knot and shoot my bow this way. I'm still attaching to a loop and reaping its benefits just in a slightly different (below center) manner. Some of my bows tend to tune/shoot better this way. I would say that it's beneficial to those setups that can stand more downward pressure against the arrow rest. Experiment with paper tuning for best

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results.”

You know, I’ve seen some hunters belittle string loops for hunting just for the fact that they think it makes it more difficult to “hook up” a release aid quickly. I say, “Not so fast.” So does Derek Phillips. He says that with plenty of practice fumbling to latch the release head onto the loop will be nothing less than a distant memory. He does admit, however, that he’s shot so much that it’s completely second nature to him. “If you don’t practice much, you may find the latching onto the string loop to be a bit slower,” Phillips adds. “But if you’ve practiced hard and shot one a while, I seriously doubt it.”

Here’s another thought: if you want more proof, have two experienced archers, one with a string loop, and one who attaches directly to the string stand side by side on the range with an arrow loaded. On your mark watch them “hook up” their release aids and see if there is a difference for yourself. You can draw conclusions from there.

An experienced string loop shooter is usually at no disadvantage once he or she masters the art. Attaching a release aid to this after time becomes completely a fluid action not a thought out, controlled, timely

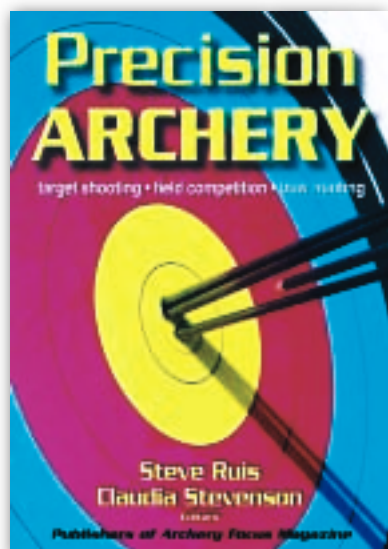
response. Almost all of the pro shooters I’ve seen shoot string loops for competition and hunting. And in certain tournaments where shots must be quick I’ve never seen one of these guys fumble trying to load up their release aid onto a string loop. Not once.

Even during tense, soul-stirring encounters with big game animals almost all of these guys will tell you they feel just as confident “hooking up” to a loop even under these circumstances. Why? Because they’ve done it a thousand-and-one times! Get the “feel” of one and you will be able to clip onto it without haste.

All-Metal Loops

Not quite as popular as their related-member, the string loop, but they’re not wasting away in the shadows, either. “I prefer the string loop,” Wise said. “You get a little twist (play) with the loop material and I like that a lot. So hands-over-fist I favor the string loop.” Derek Phillips had a similar opinion. “I’ve never really tested the water with the all-metal loop either. Rope loops work some kind of nice for me so that’s what I use.” To each his own.

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"The accuracy is just there with a back tension release aid over any other once you become deeply familiar with it. I'll hunt animals with it in situations where shots tend to be much more rehearsed and deliberate. For instance, a pronghorn antelope hunt out of a pit blind where you can watch the animal approach from a good distance and ready yourself completely is a good example.

Let's flip the coin and say I'm chasing an animal like the elusive mule deer on foot, a situation where shots can spring at the drop of a hat then I feel I need to be able to have more control of the shot and the ability to shoot quickly then I'll use the caliper-style Carter One Shot."

Conclusion

When you consider your options and weigh the plusses and minuses, choosing a sound hookup point to your bowstring isn't black magic, but it is something you should give considerable thought to. Allow yourself time for general trial and error, fussing and musing, to pick what you want. The wrong nocking point can create no end of trouble trying to tune and shoot effectively. The proper one will make tuning a breeze, and shooting a snap.

In theory, there are really many different ways that you could tweak the aforementioned nocking methods and change them up a bit if you so wished. But it seems the most practical and practiced ways lie somewhere in the mentioned methods. That's good, it keeps things simple. Simple's always good. Anytime you juggle equipment choices keep a watchful eye on your bowstring; remember that dead-center of it lies an accessory with great effect on your success as a hunter or target shooter. Mull over your choice and watch 'em fly!



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