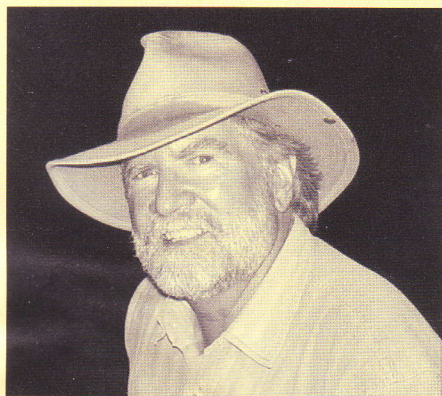




# Remembering Pete

*Many years ago, Tony Henley, a professional hunter with Safari South in Botswana, explained to some younger hunters that the most significant aspect of the safari business were the clients. Many, he said, are captains of industry, well-heeled and powerful. As their professional hunters, we would come to know them as few outside of family members ever would. With each season, as I came to know more and more clients, I saw the truth in Tony's words.*



briefly in the Army Air Corps in World War II, and afterwards immersed himself in the burgeoning world of customized automobiles in California. He helped create the first hot-rod show at the Los Angeles Armory. In 1948, to publicize the event, he borrowed \$400, launched *Hot Rod*, and hawked the magazine at local speedways for 25 cents a copy. The more upscale *Motor Trend* and dozens of other specialty automotive titles followed.

In 1958, Petersen began publishing magazines about his other passions, starting with *Guns & Ammo*. *Petersen's Hunting Magazine* began in 1973, followed by *Handguns*, *Bowhunting* and *RifleShooter*. Later came magazines about motorcycles, bicycles, and photography—just about any hobby you can think of.

"As fond of automobiles as he was, his first love was always guns and hunting," says Ken Elliott, former publisher of *Petersen's Hunting*. "He hunted most of the world, collected Africa's Big Five, a grand slam of North American sheep, all the bears, and most of the other animals in Boone & Crockett.

"Along with hunting came his love of guns! He loved working guns, fine guns, historical guns, old, new, hunting guns, and guns just to look at!" Elliott said. "His collection included some of the finest British guns ever built, guns from all over Europe, and the best guns America ever made."

On safari, Pete was a delightful companion. He was a veteran of several safaris, and it was pleasant to spend time with someone who had as much knowledge as he did, especially hunting dangerous game. He was a sure, capable shot and wanted to hunt in the most sporting manner possible.

Two incidents illustrate Pete's character as a hunter.

We were hunting sitatunga, a new species for him, the spiral-horned cousin of the kudu found deep in the Okavango. They are shy, wary creatures. In this watery world we hunted in dugout canoes called *mokoros*. Easing down



**Robert E. Petersen—entrepreneur, automobile enthusiast and avid sportsman, who created the largest special-interest publishing company in America—died in March in Santa Monica, California, of neuroendocrine cancer. He was 80 years old.**

*Photo courtesy of the NRA*

In 1987, I had the honour of hunting with Robert E. Petersen. Not only did I hunt with Pete (close friends called him Bob, or Pete), but a few years later, I went to work for *Petersen's Hunting Magazine*, one of his favourites among the more than 20 magazines he published monthly. I was not hired as a result of the safari, but it certainly didn't hurt.

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A native of California, Bob Petersen's mother died when he was 10, and his Danish-immigrant father raised him. From his father, who was a mechanic, he learned to weld, de-coke engines, and nurture his fascination with cars.

After high school, Petersen worked at MGM studios in Los Angeles as a messenger, served

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narrow channels and gliding across flooded meadows, we were often able to sneak in close.

Nosing around a tall stand of papyrus, we spotted a sitatunga bull belly-deep in water, feeding. Pete's only shot was off-hand, standing up in the wobbly mokoro. The sitatunga plunged into the tall reeds. I suggested Pete wait while the trackers and I waded over to see if the sitatunga had been hit, but Pete insisted on coming even though his back was still sore from a recent surgery. As it turned out, he missed the sitatunga, but he was right there with us, searching. Because of that trudge through the slop he suffered from an aching back for the rest of the safari. And never complained about it once. Well, maybe once.

But it was Pete's lion hunt that impressed me the most. We discovered a big lion late one afternoon while making our way back to camp along the edge of the Okavango. We spotted vultures in trees, and drove to within sight of a giraffe killed recently by a lion and two lionesses.

Vultures still in trees meant the lions were close by. We got out of the vehicle, rifles in hand, and found a lion track wider than my outstretched hand and with pads worn smooth from age. A good lion, indeed! On the drive back to camp, I suggested we track him the next day when he'd be resting close by, keeping an eye on his kill.

Our chances of bagging a big lion were much better when he was fed and drowsy than when hungry and on the move. After a big feed lions want to sleep it off, and they are much less wary. If wind, cover, and tracking conditions are favourable, this is one of the few times a big lion might be approached close enough for a shot. But it must be done quietly, carefully, and on foot!

I have seen people turn pale with sudden ailments when I suggest following a lion into thick bush. Although Pete had hunted lions previously, this was his first time on foot. Tracking a lion into heavy cover is one of hunting's greatest thrills, but it's not for the faint-hearted. If I had any doubts about Pete's enthusiasm, he quickly quelled them by asking, "When do we start?"

We went over the details. I explained that we'd start tracking at noon and track single file; Galabone, my number one tracker would be in the lead, then me, then Pete. My second tracker, Sanga, would come last. While the trackers studied the ground, our task was to search ahead for the lion lying in the brush.

Judging by the undergrowth, it would probably be a close encounter. When a lion is lying on his side he blends with his surroundings incredibly well. The trick is to spot the big cat before you are too close to him.

We'd been tracking for about an hour when

Galabone froze. I knew the lion was in sight. Galabone had caught the flick of an ear just a few feet away and he slowly eased back behind Pete and me. Less than five yards off, in a small grassy clearing, lay the lion! He was lying beside a fallen log with his back to us. I hoped he was fast asleep, for we were far too close. We needed to back up to put some distance between the lion and us.

Walking backwards, Pete and I felt our way to the broad base of a termite mound. At 10 yards we were still too close, but any farther would obscure the shot. If the big cat woke up suddenly, at that short distance, he might attack.

and struggled to his feet as Pete fired a second round. The lion slumped back down and remained still. Pete refilled his magazine while I kept my rifle on the lion.

We waited, watching for any sign of life, but he never moved again.

As Galabone went for the safari car and we admired the big cat, Pete nudged me. "You know, I think I'm paying too much money to be taken that close to a lion."

"You think so?" I asked. "Well, believe me, I'm not making near enough to take you that close to a lion." Then we laughed and shook hands.

Pete hunted his lion in the most exciting



*Robert E. Petersen (right) and the author in 1987 with Petersen's Okavango lion. Petersen, a veteran of several safaris, didn't want it easy. He tracked his lion on foot in the most sporting manner possible and was thrilled with the excitement of moving in close for the shot.*

I motioned to Pete to aim between the lion's shoulder blades, which would take the bullet through the backbone into the heart. The shot was tricky and we had little time—a shifting breeze could carry our scent and wake the lion at any second.

Pete calmly brought his .375 to his shoulder and aimed. The lion's tail began to lash and he may even have started to sit up to see what was going on when Pete's shot boomed. The bullet slammed through the backbone and heart, exiting between his front legs and throwing up a big cloud of dust.

The lion reacted with a deep snarling growl

and sporting way it can be done, and was more pleased with the hunt itself than with the shooting. And as we sat there, Pete became more friend to me than client.

Ken Elliott summed it up: "Pete's special skills enabled him to get his vocation and avocation all confused; his work was his fun and his fun became his life and he created a life that became a legend."

Here's to you, Pete, my friend: Thanks for the chance to know you and share a friendship bonded in the hunt. You lived your dreams and some of us got to come along on the ride. You will be missed, and never forgotten. 🐾