

THE BEST WOMAN ARCHER IN THE WORLD

By Paul Grescoe

Seven years ago, Dorothy Lidstone didn't even know how to hold a bow. But at the world archery championship at Valley Forge, Pa., last year, she outshot the best that Canada and 27 other countries had to offer

She stands, this modern Maid Marion, with her lips touching the taut string of the bow. She is Dorothy Lidstone of North Vancouver, and she is the world champion woman archer.

Her bow is a Hoyt Pro Medalist with a full working-recurve and it is something else.

It stands five-foot-six (an inch shorter than Dorothy), a thick third of which is a Brazilian rosewood handle fitted to her own grip, the rest of it fibreglass that curves in from the handle, then out again at the tips of the bow.

Jutting out five inches from the handle like skinny steel breasts are two spring-loaded torque stabilizers that absorb the shock of a shot and send the arrow on a straighter course. Snug against the handle sits a sliding gunsight, marked in metres, that moves up and down, depending on the target's distance.

The arrow rests on a plastic holder and slips under a draw check, a strip of springy metal that hits the handle when the arrow pulls out and lets Dorothy know, with a click, when she's drawn the bowstring back enough.

The string is dacron, rubbed with beeswax, but in the middle it's a monofilament fibre with less friction. On the monofilament is a red nocking point that holds the notched end of the arrow in place and, three inches above that, a red kissing button, so-called because Dorothy makes sure it's brushing her lips when she draws the string (if it isn't, she's holding the bow badly).

The arrow is an aluminum tube 27 inches long — every archer has his own length — with a steel tip and a plastic nock, or notch, and plastic vanes that have practically replaced turkey feathers for outdoor shooting.

Dorothy wears a white plastic arm guard to protect her left arm from the bowstring's snap, a black leather patch that fits over her middle finger and covers three fingers to save their skin from the string, and a leather wrist sling fastened to the handle so

she can't drop the bow, and —

Lord, what ever happened to Robin Hood and his simple wooden long-bow? Did sport desert archery as science stepped in?

No, Dorothy Lidstone insists, archery remains as sporting, as demanding of skill, as it was in the 12th-century England of the legendary hero.

"Now we're working for perfection," she says. "As you improve equipment, you improve scores."

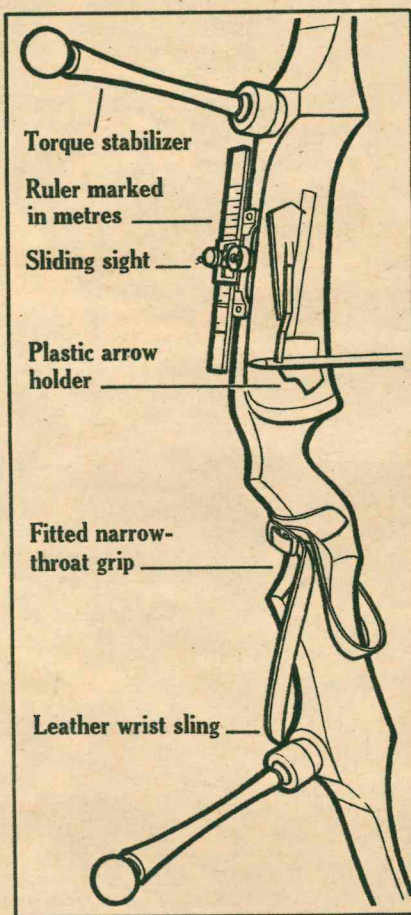
Yes, but aren't those torque stabilizers and gunsights making it too easy to hit that target? What about that ancient Chinese saying: "In archery, we are given an insight into the way of the wise. When an archer misses the centre of the target, he turns around and seeks for the cause of the failure in himself." Does the archer now blame his equipment for his failure?

But no, Dorothy says, even with all these mechanical aids, the skill still stays in the very shaky hands of the individual archer. Don't drivers at Indianapolis have the best possible cars on the course to go faster and farther than ever before? "All we're working for," she says, "is to get all 144 arrows a round in that little bullseye."

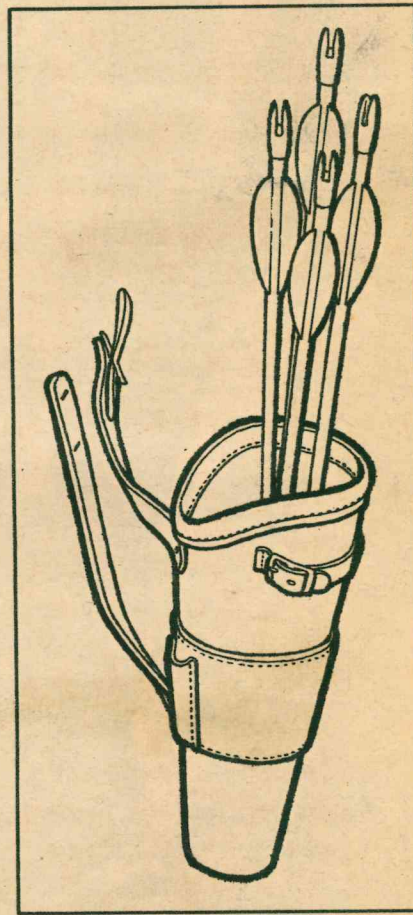
Last summer, more of her arrows found their mark than any other woman's at the world archery championship in Valley Forge, Pa. She took the women's title from a Pole and bettered the world record by picking up 1,184 and 1,177 points in two possible 1,400-point rounds.

Dorothy Lidstone, who wraps bakery products in a department store for a living, is one of an estimated 8,000 amateur archers in Canada who keep shooting despite the massive indifference of most of the public and press.

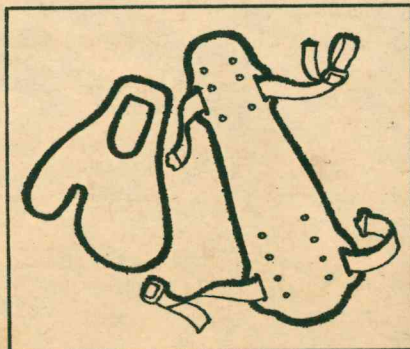
Quebec, where handsome club-houses attract monied members, has more archers than any other province. But Ontario has active clubs, too: Belleville's, home base of Carol Armstrong, who was twice Canadian women's champ until Dorothy Lidstone beat her this year, and Cornwall's, where the Seaway Valley Archery



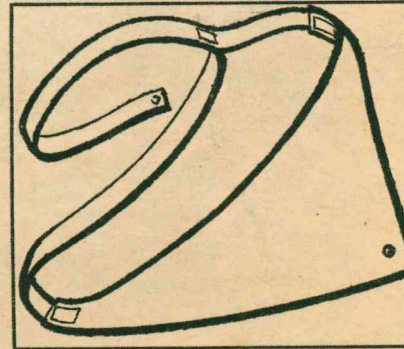
The bow used by modern archers bears about as much resemblance to the one used by Robin Hood as a jet airliner bears to the Wright brothers' first airplane.



There are also differences in the arrow. The shaft of a modern arrow is aluminum, the tip is steel, the notch is plastic, and plastic vanes are used, not feathers.



A leather patch protects the archer's fingers, a leather sleeve, his left arm.



A vinyl shield (above) protects the chest at the moment that the arrow is released.

Club sponsors an International Carp Derby for bowfishermen on the 100 square miles of Lake St. Lawrence. In

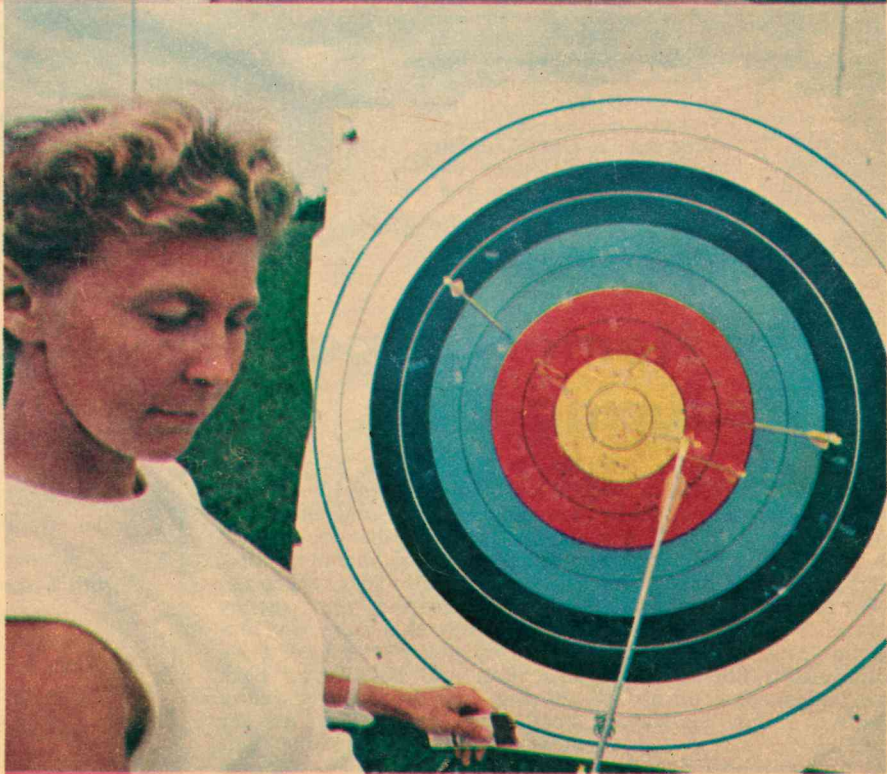
British Columbia, bowhunters can bag big game in the regular hunting season and during two weeks set aside



Top: If the red kissing button on her bowstring isn't touching her lips, Dorothy's draw is faulty.



Left: Despite improved equipment, the sport is just as demanding as it ever was, Dorothy says.



Right: When Dorothy shot these arrows, she was so far away she needed field glasses to see her hits.

Photography: Jorgen Halling

continued

SHE QUIT HUNTING AFTER ONE KILL

especially for them.

Archers across the country stalk animals with big hunting bows or crossbows; play archery golf on regular golf courses with arrows instead of balls and a target instead of a cup; compete in novelty shoots with balloon, apple and paper-animal targets; clout-shoot at flags stuck in the ground; pit expert archers against beginners on a handicap field — and buy as many gadgets for their bows as their budgets allow.

But nowhere in Canada is the sport taken to the extremes it is in the United States where professional archers tour circuits like golf pros, where many cities have automated archery lanes like bowling alleys, and where at least two archery magazines run articles with such esoteric titles as *Archer Versus The Viet Cong*, along with advertisements for bowstring silencers, telescopic sights and bows with "a close-grain die cut aluminum handle section, locked cell neoprene gasket and wood buffer and feather zone epoxied to concealed internal aluminum mounting wedge."

In Canada, where golf and spectator sports are the smart thing, the archer is considered an eccentric — which makes Dorothy Lidstone's winning of the world title all the more remarkable.

Dorothy is 30, a no-nonsense Saskatchewan farm girl with wiry, wavy blonde hair, a ruddy face and a trim body tanned from hours outdoors with her bow. She moved to Vancouver and married her husband, George, a truck driver, 11 years ago (they have no children).

Both of them had tried water-skiing, skin-diving and hunting and George was hungry for something fresh when he bought a small bow in 1962. They both sampled shooting at one of Vancouver's six archery clubs (with mostly a working-class membership) and Dorothy developed her skills quickly.

At first, she discovered the number of errors a novice can commit. The grip of her hand on the bow can change between shots, she can line up the string too low or high on her face, she can pluck the string instead of simply releasing it. "There should be no pressure on the arrow when you're holding it," Dorothy says now. "You'll get a big blister on your finger and if you've got pressure on the nock, the arrow will be bending, it will have to go up first before it can straighten."

She learned how hard it is to aim even with a sliding sight. "A quarter-inch movement from your sight on the bullseye will put you on the outside edge of the target when you shoot."

And she experienced the exquisite pain of archery practice — in the wrists, the fore-

arm and the back of the shoulders — "pain like you wouldn't believe."

Dorothy began to prefer outdoor competition to indoor. "I hate indoor," she says curtly. "It's kind of boring — the same distance all the time — 20 yards."

She tried bowhunting with her husband one year, but she quit after killing one deer. "Most people think it's much more sporting because you have to stalk so much more. That's true on the first arrow, but if you have to get in close on the second arrow . . . That's what finished me. I'd sooner hunt with a rifle. With a rifle, you can shoot the deer from 200 yards and they're still not lying there alive when you come and see them."

In bowhunting, the arrows are broad and often double-bladed, with the main blade milled temper spring steel and the smaller one similar razor steel. "An arrow kills an animal by bleeding," she says. "It can hardly go through any place on an animal without cutting a main artery." From 60 yards an arrow has as much penetrating power as a bullet. "Most shots, without hitting bone, will go right through the animal."

She laughs swiftly. "I'm not a killer, that's all." So she stayed with competition and, as her living room reveals, she was a crack shot. To the left of the Lidstones' fireplace where her bow and her husband's two bows hang, a buffet bulges with gold trophies topped with tiny ladies pulling stringless bows, and a desk is covered with still more trophies and a picture frame full of medals, commemorative arrowheads and teaspoons won in Canadian contests.

By 1969, Dorothy was ready for the major leagues, the world competition sponsored by the *Fédération Internationale de Tir à l'Arc*, or FITA (roughly, the Federation of International Target Archers), which is the archery world's governing body based in France.

First, Dorothy had to make the Canadian team. She did, in July at Victoria, when she set two records. She collected an incredible 1,000 points of a possible 1,080 in the Canadian round (shooting at a 9½-inch bullseye from 60 yards), and 1,168 of a possible 1,440 in the Canadian FITA round (a 4¾-inch bullseye from 76 yards, or 70 metres).

She went to the world championship in August with Carol Armstrong of Belleville, the previous Canadian women's champion, Virginia Parkhurst of West Vancouver and Marge Saunders of Haney, B.C., who was a standby.

They came to Valley Forge in their maroon team jackets and grey skirts and changed into whites with their competitors from all 27 countries except Mexico — whose team members wore brilliant red shooting uniforms.

Dorothy hadn't practised much for three

days; if she had, and had made some little mistake, she might have dwelt on it too much.

"It was a real pressure shoot," she remembers. It was hot - the temperatures 95 and 100 - and the humidity was 101 per cent. One Swedish girl collapsed. The competition was stiff. "For the four days, I was never a dozen points below first and never 10 points above second."

In the world contest, the targets are mounted on burlap-covered straw mounds. The bullseye is gold, the next concentric circle is red, then blue, black and white. But each colored circle is divided in half and their values, from the bullseye out, number from 10 down to one.

Women archers shoot from 70 and 60 metres at a target with a 48-inch diameter and a 4³/₄-inch, 10-point circle; and from 50 and 30 metres at a 36-inch target with a six-inch bullseye. In two days, they shoot 36 arrows from each distance and then repeat in a second round of two days.

After an individual shoots six arrows, alternating with two other competitors, the score is posted. Sixty points are possible for every six arrows and a perfect round would be 1,440.

Dorothy stepped up to the white line the first day, raised her bow and stared down the 76 yards separating her from the speck of a target. A telescope stood behind the line to show her exactly where her arrows had landed, and she could use binoculars on the line. But telescopic sights attached to the bows were banned by the federation.

On her hip hung her white leather quiver, containing three arrows marked with her name and all with vanes of the same color.

She stood with her right foot slightly angled away from the left, a stance not recommended for novices. Her left thumb was wrapped around the right side of her \$300 bow. The handle was resting on the meaty part of the thumb. Her elbows and shoulders were locked - straight and stiff.

She held the aluminum arrow (\$35 a dozen) in her right hand, lightly, the index finger above the notched end and two fingers below, the thumb tucked safely into the palm. She drew the bowstring back 27 inches - her full draw - and let her little finger touch her chest just below the shoulder. Her lips grazed the kissing button.

The arrow struck gold, the second did, too, and after six shots, she had 50 of the 60 possible points - and the lead.

After four days, she had 2,361 points, which was 110 more than the previous women's record and only 62 less than the men's record. Competing against 40 women from as far away as Venezuela, New Zealand and Mongolia, she had won the women's gold medal at the 25th world archery championship.

(The Canadian women's team trailed Russia's which, Dorothy claims, "spent the last six months in training - government subsidized.")

Less than two weeks later, Dorothy was at Joliet, Que., for the annual Ambassador Cup contest for the three leading male archers and the three leading women in Canada and the United States. She placed second in the women's match to the American Linda Meyers, a trifling 88 points behind her 3,498 total.

Dorothy Lidstone's next target is the 1971 world meet in England. But her ambition is to be in her best form for 1972 when she tries to make the Canadian team for the first archery competition to be included in the Olympic Games since 1922.

"I think," she says, "my chances will be fairly good."

Which is as modest as Robin Hood saying he *might* have a chance of out-shooting the Sheriff of Nottingham.