

7 December 2015

RE: OUTDOOR OUTFITTERS No. 1 LEG-HOLD TRAPS

I received a consignment of 3 x standard leg-hold traps and 3 x soft jaw leg-hold traps couriered to me at Haast in early November for evaluation. I used the traps in the Cascade Valley in the course of my possum trapping operations during the latter part of November. My assessment of the traps is as follows:

General

The traps have a bright nickel finish but this began to weather after a couple of weeks use. In my experience most Chinese manufactured traps have a similar finish, often billed as 'reducing trap losses'. However, I know a number of experienced trappers who discriminate against traps with a bright finish on the grounds that trap shy possums will avoid them. Indeed the American manufactured Victor traps (generally considered a top brand) do not have a protective finish and quickly tarnish. The distributor of the Victor traps actually supplies purchasers with written instructions on how to make up a solution to achieve a 'weathered' appearance of the traps before use. In my trapping operations in South Westland I have used both 'weathered' traps and bright finished traps and have not encountered possum avoidance of the latter. However, I believe a matt finish or no protective finish at all on the traps would give them more initial appeal to experienced trappers.

I weighed the traps on Trade scales and the average weight was 370 gms which is about 25 gms heavier than Victors but not unreasonably heavy (weight becomes an issue if back-packing large numbers of traps).

The dogs on Chinese manufactured traps are often of poor quality and bend easily. However, this is most definitely not a problem with the Outdoor Outfitters traps. None bent even when I deliberately used the dog to lever down the trap jaw. Such practice is totally incorrect setting procedure but often done by inexperienced trappers and will routinely bend dogs of poor quality. The dogs have an upturn at the engagement end. I prefer flat as I believe it is easier to achieve a more uniform release pressure. Trappers are divided on this issue and the Outdoor Outfitters traps set and released satisfactorily.

The pans (trip plates) have an adequate attachment weld, unlike some other Chinese traps. I deliberately subjected the pan of each trap to significant pressure and none broke.

Attachment chain quality is good and the length appropriate.

The trap springs have an extra coil and very good tension although not quite as strong as the Victor springs. I have not used the traps for a long enough period to evaluate the longevity of the spring tension.

The levers on these traps are heavy duty and strong. This is an excellent feature. Whilst Spring strength dictates the speed of closure of the trap it is the strength and rigidity of the levers that will determine whether or not an animal is held. Years ago I used some inferior quality traps that had inadequate, flexible levers which resulted in a 36% loss rate!

Quality Control

In general these traps were a good uniform standard however the following problems were encountered:

The engagement end of the dogs of 2 of the 6 traps had a significant burr which was seriously detrimental to achieving a satisfactory and uniform release pressure. This is a common problem with traps of any brand in my experience. A couple of years ago I purchased 65 Victor traps and about a third of those had the same problem. However, it is a simple and fast process to rectify this problem with a fine file and most professional trappers will routinely dress the engagement end of the dog with a fine file prior to using a trap for the first time.

A jaw of 1 of the 6 traps had a bend profile different from all the rest and as a result did not 'mate' properly with the opposite jaw. This would almost certainly result in most animals escaping from the trap and is totally unsatisfactory. In field trials I did not use this trap.

Field Trials - Soft Jaw Traps

With some trepidation I briefly experimented with the soft jaw traps. My trepidation was based on the well-established inadequacies of soft jawed traps. My own experience and my understanding of the experience of others is that such traps result in an unacceptably high escape rate. The Outdoor Outfitters soft jaw traps proved no different. If an animal is caught across the wrist or ankle they will hold but if across the paw or toes near the claws they will routinely escape whereas a hard jaw trap will generally hold them. The latter situations regularly occur and with the Outdoor Outfitters soft jaw traps about 66% of animals escaped which is unacceptable but no surprise and totally consistent with other brands of soft jaw traps. The Vendor of one brand of soft jaw trap sold on Trademe instructs his purchasers to remove the rubber sleeves prior to using the traps - and for good reason! The only practical use of rubber sleeves on leg hold traps is to appease the Trademe management whose decision to allow only the sale of soft jaw traps is based entirely on emotion and not at all on matters practical, i.e. you can only sell traps that allow most animals to escape! (This attitude is to be expected from politically correct 'townies' but is one they might change if they witnessed the final 24 hours of a possum with a gut full of 1080).

Field Trials - Standard Traps

I removed the rubber sleeves from the soft jaw traps after brief use and used those and 2 of the hard jaw traps (refer above re the 6") along with 60 Victor traps in my trapping operation. The results achieved were totally consistent with the Victors. I trapped 23 possums with the Outdoor Outfitters traps of which just 2 escaped. At particularly good trap locations where I was catching a possum nearly every set I alternated between a Victor and Outdoor Outfitters trap with consistent results.

Summary

The Outdoor Outfitters leg hold traps are a strong, well-constructed trap with good quality componentry. In the hard jaw configuration they worked well and in field trials achieved similar results to significantly more expensive American made traps. Based on the listed Trademe price they are excellent value for money.

In respect of Trademe sales, which are restricted to soft jaw traps, in my opinion it is essential that customers are made aware of the inadequacies of the 'soft' jaws and are instructed in how to

remove them (craft knife or similar). Experienced trappers will be aware of the problem but others probably not so and their inevitable high loss rate could become detrimental to the reputation of the traps.

Please contact me if you require clarification of any matters above or have other queries

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Freer', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

(Marshall Freer)