



# HIGH QUALITY COMMERCIAL WHITETAIL EARS

*HQC Is Where It's At!*

By Gene Smith • Photos by Jeremy Morgan

**THIS IS THE FIRST ARTICLE THAT I HAVE** written for Taxidermy Today Magazine. But, before we get started, I will have to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for my life. Without Him, nothing is possible for me. I thank God for giving me the ability to appreciate His creation. We are just imitators, and He alone is the Master.

In this article, I will explain how to incorporate High Quality Commercial (HQC) ears into a mount. In today's commercial taxidermy studio/shops, I think it is important to offer different grades of taxidermy. Most taxidermists I know use the "bondo method" for general commercial taxidermy. The ear liner method is by far the best at creating a natural life-like ear that will not curl or drum when done properly. Here is a step-by-step process that will give you competition results on a commercial mount.

First, you need a good quality tan. This particular skin was wet tanned at Carolina Fur Dressing. It has excellent stretch and softness. Once your cape has been final fleshed and ready for mounting, select the proper ear liners for mounting. I always keep all sizes of ear liners on hand for a good fit. The ear liners I chose for this mount are the Eppley 360 ear liners with inner ear inserts.

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*Here's how to incorporate High Quality Commercial (HQC) ears into a mount.*



The first thing you do is snip the ball off the end of the ear liner. Turn the ears inside out. Using the rounded end of an artist brush, push the edges of the ears all the way out and, going all the way around the ear. Once you've done this, take a scalpel and cut across the cartilage, about a quarter a way up the ear. Cut through the cartilage but not the skin. Peel the cartilage away from the skin all the way out to the tip of the ear. Save the piece of cartilage. It will be used later to mark the ear liner. Then peel the bottom part toward the ear canal and cut the ear skin off in the inner ear. Flesh any cartilage left on the skin at the ear opening.

Using the piece of saved cartilage, lay it on the back of the ear liner. This will give the proper shape of the natural ear. If you need to trim the ear liner, mark it while the cartilage is in place with a marker and trim it with scissors. Next, sand the whole ear liner, including the edges so they are good and thin.

After completing this, wipe the ear liner down with acetone and set it aside to dry. This helps the ear liner adhere to the skin. Repeat all the above steps on the other ear.



Snip the ball off the end of the ear liner. Turn the ears and using the rounded end of an artist brush, push the edges of the ears all the way out.



Cut through the cartilage but not the skin and peel the cartilage away from the skin out to the tip of the ear.



Peel the bottom part toward the ear canal and cut the skin off at the inner ear.

Flesh any cartilage left at the ear opening.



Use the piece of cartilage as a pattern to determine if you need to trim the ear liner.

Sand the surface and edges of the ear liner to make them as thin as possible.



Clean the liner with acetone and let it dry.

## SETTING THE EARS TO THE FORM

Reference is a must! You need to collect all the reference you can. You cannot have enough.

The form I selected for this mount is a W01-6215L. I sculpted the form myself and it is only available from HQ Taxidermy Supply. I want to give the deer a semi-alert, listening pose based on the reference I've chosen. Once the position has been chosen I set the ear in my desired position and set the base in clay. Next, I sculpted the ear muscles in with critter clay, based on the anatomy of that ear in its position. I then smooth the clay with water.



W01-6215L sculpted by Gene Smith

Once I've set both ears in position, I dip a scalpel in water and cut the ears off the form. After doing this, I will place the ear butt flat on a piece of plastic wrap in the freezer. Freezing the clay ear butt will let the clay get hard without drying to prevent distortion when mounting.

**Choose the ear position and set the base in clay. Sculpt the ear muscles according to your reference.**

**To remove the ear liner, dip a scalpel in water and cut the ear liners off of the form**



While the ear liners are in the freezer, this is a good time to degrease the ear skin. Dip the ear skin in a small pail of acetone. Just enough to cover the ear and wipe it down with a small towel or paper towel.

After the clay is hard (approx. 20 minutes), quickly remove ear liner from the freezer.



Apply Red Label Derma-Grip hide paste to the inside and outside of the ear liner, including the ear butt. Slide the ear liner into the ear and adjust the skin around the ear liner. Work out the air as you go. Repeat these steps on the other ear.



Once this is completed, apply Derma-Grip to the form. Then slide the skin on and press the ear back into the position it was sculpted in. At this time, go ahead and set the antlers because a portion of the earbutt muscles have to be sculpted in behind the antler area, that is not there. After this is done, mount the deer and adjust the skin as necessary ( sewing, eye work, nostrils, lips etc.) This is where the mount really comes to life.



Make final adjustments on the ears at this time. It is important to make sure the ear butt anatomy flows with the form.

Now apply the natural creases and detail to the ear butt. Be careful not to make them harsh. It is a good idea to start with light pressure and work them in. Remember to pay attention to your references while doing this. Next, detail the ears by going over the hair patterns with a soft bristle brush—an old toothbrush also works well. Set the mount aside to dry, checking the inside of the ears periodically (every few hours) until dry.



Once the mount has dried, proceed with finish work. Before finishing, I wipe down all the bare skin areas with a clean cloth with acetone on it. This cleans off any residue and gives a good base for painting. Shape in the inner ear insert next. When you have done this, use a small roll of Fixit Sculpt to blend the skin to the inner ear insert. When the material is dry, proceed with painting.

Make sure to use a paint schedule that matches your mount for the time of year that it was harvested. This will vary slightly from animal to animal but should have similar basics. Example: off white base with flesh tones in deeper areas. When finished, this will add a life like touch that your customer will be proud of.



Use a small roll of Fixit Sculpt to blend the skin to the inner ear insert.

All materials used in this article are available from  
**Head Quarters Taxidermy Supply**  
1-866-365-0130



*Gene Smith has been a taxidermist for over 24 years. A full time game head sculptor for Head Quarters Taxidermy Supply Company, Gene is the only taxidermist to win Best in World Whitetail two times. We welcome Gene's expertise as a Contributing Writer at Taxidermy Today and look forward to his contributions in each issue. •*