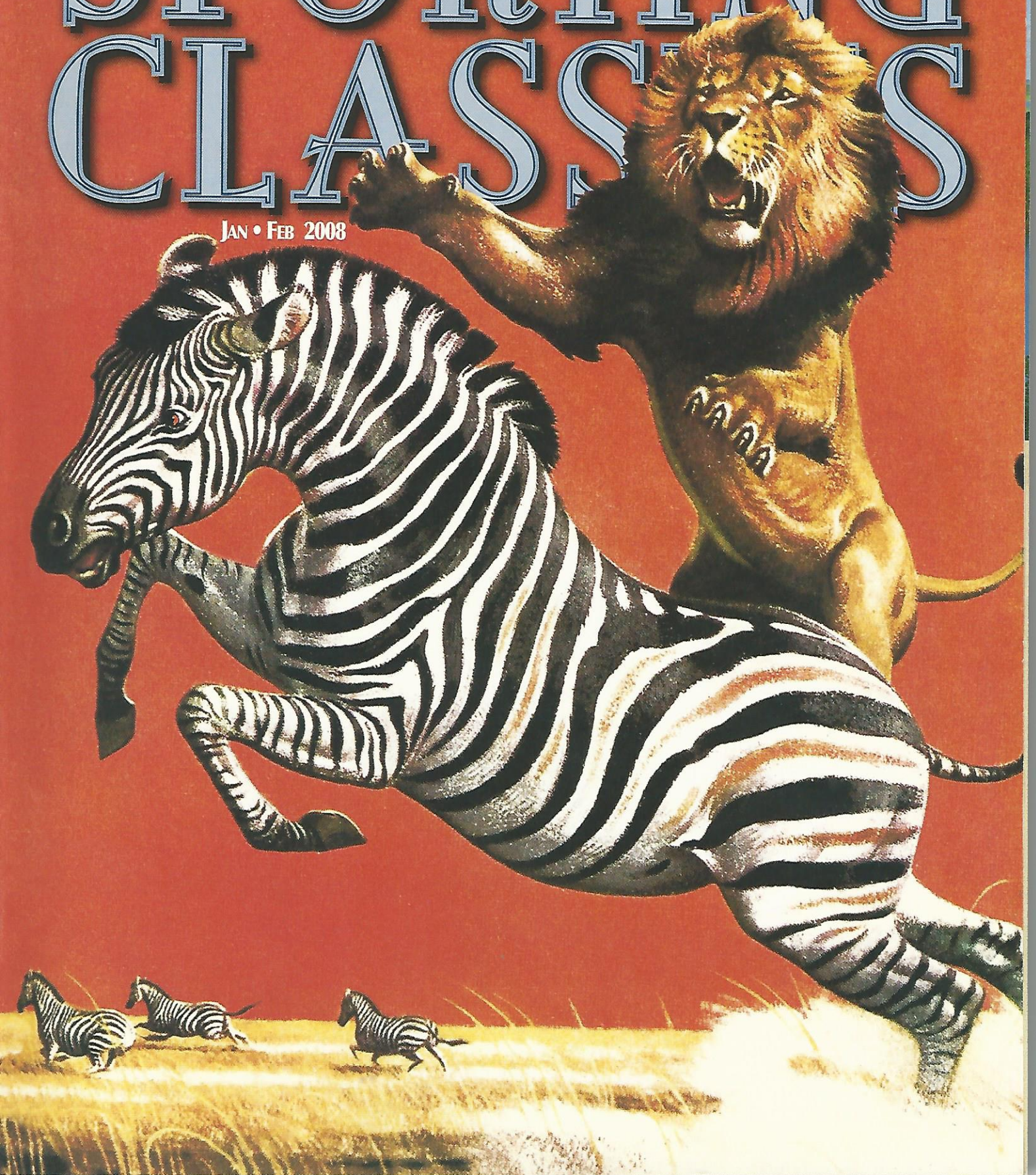


SPORTING CLASSES

JAN • FEB 2008



Travel

By John Ross



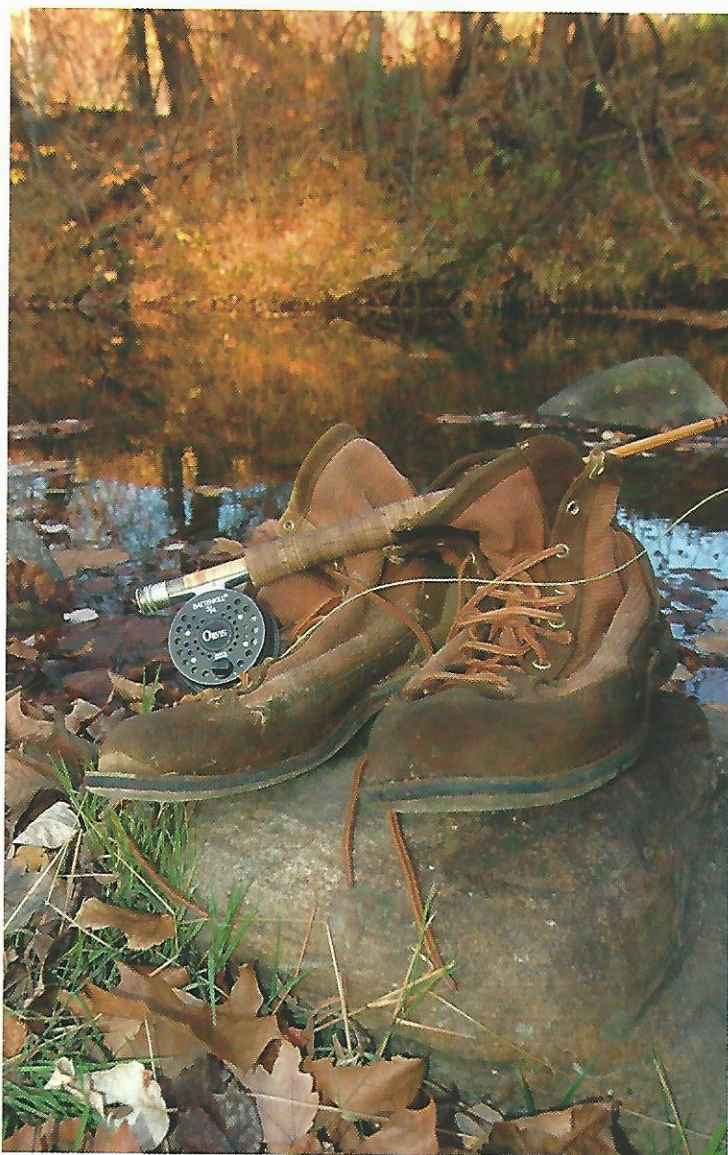
When you get right down to it, the most common conveyance for outdoor travel is Shank's mare, a phrase coined by a Scot who was too frugal to hire a nag and chose instead to walk on his own two "shanks." How we're shod makes all the difference between a trip that's safe and enjoyable and one that's painful and possibly downright dangerous.

In my closet reside more than a dozen pairs of outdoor boots and brogues. Each has its purpose, an evolution of my particular preferences for hunting and fishing and a response to my gathering frailties. Among my greatest fears is an injury to my feet or ankles that would limit pursuit of the sports I love.

My feet are long and narrow, about the only sign of aristocracy among my plebian genes. Just try to find 13 "B's" at your local bootery. Hen's teeth are more common. It was a pair of Fabiano *kletterschuhe* that fit as if made just for me and that shaped, ever since I bought them thirty years ago, my idea of what good boots should be.

Sewn of black rough-side-out leather, the upper encased my

*No one boot can do it all,
but whatever you wear,
it needs to fit your foot as
perfectly as possible.*



JOHN ROSS

foot snugly. No longer did I need the extra pair of socks and woolen army surplus insoles to keep my feet from sliding from side to

side as I hiked bouldery trails. Rows of eyelets were far enough apart over the tongue so I could draw the laces comfortably tight across the low arch of my foot.

The lugged sole did not extend beyond the upper, providing excellent purchase on ledges of rock.

Waterproof, they were not. Twice a winter, sometimes more often, I'd rub Sno-Seal into the leather. Primarily beeswax, Sno-Seal provides a barrier that keeps the boot from absorbing moisture while allowing it to breathe. Because of its ability to preserve leather without softening it, I use it even on boots with Gore-Tex liners.

For four years, the Fabianos were my day-in day-out working winter boots. But one night, after I'd waded White Mountain streams swollen with spring runoff and soaked them through, I dried them in what I thought was a mild oven. Wasn't mild enough. The leather shrank and curled

and killed my favorite boots dead. Such is the price of education.

What I learned from the Fabs was that my feet do better in

a boot made on a slender last. Lasts, the form around which a boot is built, vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. A "C" width for one maker may be wider or narrower than that of another. It may be tighter in the heel or broader at the ball of the foot. Boots made by Europeans tend to have narrower lasts than those from American manufacturers. The only way to learn what fits you best is to try and try again.

For me, lasts used by Danner fit my feet better than other American

manufacturers. The same may not be true for you. And I must admit, I haven't tried boots by Russell, Schnees or Zamberlan. Nor have I taken the custom boot path.


No one boot can do it all, of course. For bird-hunting, I've a six-inch, lightweight uninsulated boot. For big game in mountains, I want more ankle support and go with an eight-inch style. In my closet, you'll also find two pairs of waterproof brogues by Clarks of England. The first pair

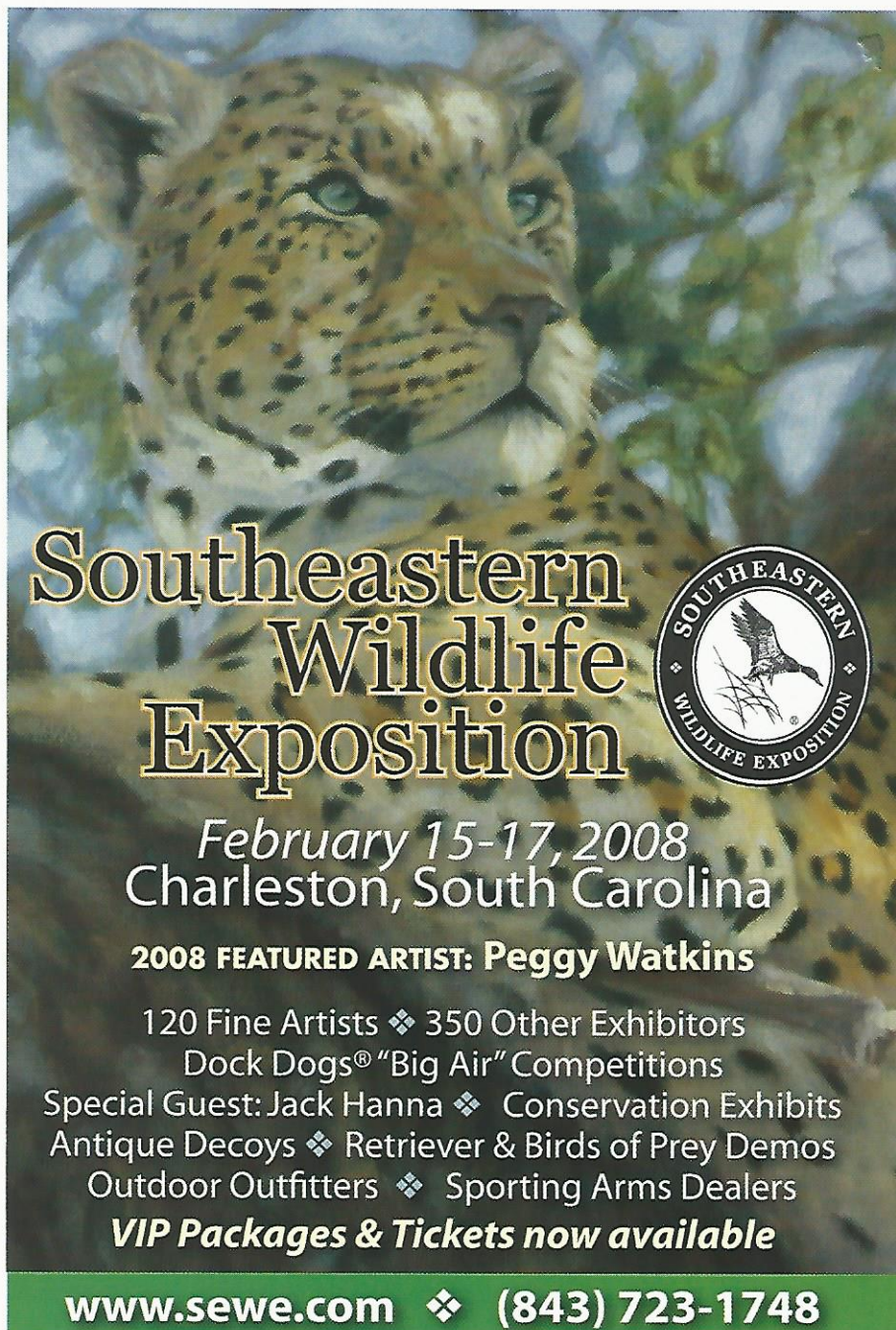
is a brown saddle shoe that goes well with chinos or cords, blazer and tie. The second is similar, but of chukka height and useful in sloppy weather. Both feature soles with tread aggressive enough to provide traction when it's slippery but which wipes clean on the mat by the door.

My biggest boot surprise came when Barb Genge of Tuckamore Lodge in Main Brook, Newfoundland, insisted that I bring rubber boots for a hunt for late-season woodland caribou. I'd owned a pair of Red Ball lace-up rubber boots and couldn't walk an hour in 'em before my feet blistered. The prospect of slogging miles in rubber boots was appalling. Times and technology, thankfully, had changed.

I picked up a pair of Le Chameau over-the-calf hunting boots thinly lined with neoprene. Their fit was and still is delightful. My guide and I trudged six to eight miles a day through the bogs before finding and killing a bull on the fifth afternoon. My feet never complained one whit. I use these boots now for fishing spring creeks where wading is verboten.

Well shod, it seems I am. Yet there's one exception. For fifteen years I've fished out of a pair of Danner high-top wading shoes built on their traditional narrow last. From casting for char in the Tree River in Nunavut to playing seatrout in the Warrah on West Falkland, these old wading boots have served me well. Like so many of things I've come to favor, these boots are, of course, no longer made.

The fabric uppers are tattering. The stitching is pulling away from the tongue. The sole is separating at the heel. Oh, how I hate to see them go. They've been rebuilt once by the team in Danner's Portland plant. I'm sending them back again. Maybe the good folks there can give my wading boots and me a few more seasons. That's all I ask. 



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