For some years now, I have groused about not having my fair share of exceptional hawks. It seems as if I always see the more advanced specimens in the hands of my friends. After the 2007 season, however, my friends are looking at the hawk in my hands.
Jean Harlow started her first sea-
dove from day one. Jean Harlow was intensely bonded wording, “intensely bonded,” and close-in, I call, for want of better consistency and deliberately works and fast-flying. Any aplomado that of the box, it was also cooperative only was it perfectly tame right out in falcon’s clothing” just right. Not with its name. She raised this “hawk ing project, christened this hawk aplomados from Jim Nelson’s breed-
Dorothy Van Note, who hand-raises records on mourning doves. For the Arizona desert by breaking my son in our rather open southern “This Was Their Finest Hour”

Dove Harlow started her first sea-
season in our rather open southern Arizona desert by breaking my records on mourning doves. For the past few years, I have taken doves while the adults are still molting and the young are not quite up to speed. During the early part of the season, these doves tend to bail out and plunge into the bush after a flight of several hundred yards, making them a most challenging prey. In these flights, the falcon charges after the dove in direct pursuit. Often, the falcon “tests” several doves before locking on to one and pressing it to the end of its life. Waiting-on and stooping are not part of the aplomado’s repertoire. Flights at dove may be long and complex, with numerous charges from above with wings whir-
ing, or they may cover only a few hundred yards before breaking off the pursuit. The flights may occur in the open or in heavy cover. The female aplomado will thunder into the bush behind an evading dove, and it is some help to have dogs to refush or point during a chase in the bush. A few of the more frightening pursuits cover over two miles, and many falconers know the mourning dove may seek refuge at human dwellings. My approach for several years has been to fly a pair of aplomados in this hunt, but so far I have not done well in this ambition. Thanks to Nelson’s generosity, I’ll include a tiercel again in 2008.

Quail The 2006 season was the poorest for quail in 30 years of surveys made by the Arizona Game and Fish Depart-
ment. Our southeastern state region, with both Gambel’s and scaled quail, was particularly hard hit with 10 years of below-average rain fall. It was some relief to have near-normal rain during the 2006 winter and spring. Our 2007 quail season saw a slight recovery, but not enough to encourage shooters, of whom we saw very few in the field. Early this season, the birds were very difficult to find, but after some time I had about 18 locations—care-
fully recorded—where birds could be found. When hunting with friends, we went to one of these locations, but when flying alone I often sought out various locals where the quail had been found in years past. Many of these ventures of the latter were birdless searches. Harlow started so late this season that the opportunity for flights at young or molting dove had past, so we concentrated on quail. She was flown off the horse in my usual free-flight style, accompanied by two pointers and a feist, Schubert, serving the refush. Sadly enough, Schubert often ignored her flushing responsibilities and in cover caught many of the quail herself.

Despicable Creatures The dog support during the ’07 season was very nearly a disaster. Our old English pointer, Mozart, now 10, was in poor health and only run every third day because he would not retain weight despite special dietary and medical attention. He almost never fails to make finds with his unique ability to control the difficult desert quail. Because of his health problems, I had taken two pups—a Brittany and another English pointer. Between the two pups I just about had to turn myself into the mental ward. I won’t bore the reader with a detailed descrip-
tion of these two, but allow me to make a comment or two. At one point they ran away from home. We ran an ad in the paper and received reports from locations several miles to the east. Our rancher finally called to report them at her place 11 miles east of here. The Brittany returned after six days, and the English pointer after seven. Each was loaded with porcupine quills, and the English pointer required expensive extraction by our vet because many of the quills were deep in her mouth and around her eyes. Because this young pointer was so mystifying, I had a friend who is accomplished with dogs make a five-day evaluation of her. He was not enthusiastic about the prospects of home training, and his suggestion was to consider re-
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I now fly the imprinted, once-intermewed aploma-
do falcon, “Jean Harlow.” Dorothy Van Note, who hand-raises aplomados from Jim Nelson’s breed-
ing project, christened this hawk with its name. She raised this “hawk in falcon’s clothing” just right. Not only was it perfectly tame right out of the box, it was also cooperative and fast-flying. Any aplomado that consistently and deliberately works close-in, I call, for want of better wording, “intensely bonded,” and Jean Harlow was intensely bonded from day one.
inherent gluttony, and I allowed her to take several more than doubles, but her behavior on following days made me return to more sensible hawking with a two-quail limit. Even toward the end of her second season, Harlow redoubled her effort to fly with increased determination and speed. She became what I call “wedded” to quail—she could be called off small birds in mid flight and would bank around at the whistle.

SOMETHING WITHIN

Falconers seem split down the middle on the reason some hawks are exceptional performers. Some state that heroic technique is involved while others merely shrug their shoulders and surmise that it is the result of individual differences. To each his own, I suppose, but I tend to go with the latter because I use the same general conditioning and training approach with each, while allowing for differences. So, when I have an exceptional hawk, I think in terms of the individual.

THE LAST HURRAH

Lights on the last two days of the season were not remarkable—b ut presented the usual entertainment. On Sunday, February 10th, the day before the end of the season, friends came by to watch Harlow one last time.

With our assembly of dogs and horses, we headed for the open area beside the railroad tracks east of home. This grassy domain offers easy walking and normally a clear view of the flights. In the group was: Ron Palmer; Tim Riordan; Bob Carlson; his two apprentices, Sean Canterbury and Lane Ellwood; Nathan and Claire Charlton and their baby Isaiah; and Steve and Dorothy Van Note. I walked, turning the horses over to the guests so they could experience the thrill of the spirit and smooth gait of the Peruvian Paso. They took turns and cruised all over the area. We were all surprised to see that they were accomplished riders.
After a walk of some distance, we were scattered all across the desert, with the main group headed east along the tracks, when I realized that I had not seen for some time the old pointer, Mozart. I consulted the receiver and heard an “on point” signal far behind us near a slight drainage. We found him locked up in heavy grass, and as we moved in Harlow went up a few feet. At our approach the covey dispersed, some flying and others running. Harlow dove in to take a bird on the ground. I’m not entirely sure what happened on the second quail, but one of the dogs caught it, so we decided to continue hawking. The following day, February 11th, was the last of the season and I hawked it alone, riding my horse, Juanito, and running the two pups with the feist. This area is in gentle open hills with cover in the drainages. I started early in the afternoon, with about three hours of light remaining, and actively searched through the usual areas where quail had been found during the season. We found no birds there. I decided to ride a few miles to the north to an area along the tracks again, notwithstanding that location usually proved too rough for consistent and comfortable hawking. Over the years I had taken few birds here, what with the deeply-cut ravines, a few well over the horse’s head. There, some ravines ran parallel to the tracks, and others from drainages in the hills, but there were few places for the horse to enter or exit. There were cattle trails leading along narrow crumbling ridges, but a good memory is necessary to locate them, and riding the narrow ridges carries some risk. It all but carried the odor of the owl. This area has heavy cover, and I well remember losing a previous falcon here late one afternoon—she drifted far down the tracks during the night and came in the next morning before light. I suppose by hearing the beep of the receiver. We were running low on luck and time was passing in this last day. I could think of no alternative for the last search. At our approach quail lifted up in a cloud with some flying overhead and others scattering in all directions. As luck would have it, Harlow selected one that flew toward the heavy cover and she dropped down in a low flight and was out of sight instantly. The radio led me toward the tracks, and I worked my way through the ravines along a cattle trail following the beep.

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I approached the very hackberry tree where I had lost the falcon years before just as the signal grew loud. I slipped out of the saddle and pushed my way into the heavy brush, trying my best to locate her and push in and charge toward her, but the hawk repeatedly dove in and then back up to hover. Before I could do more than enter the weed stand, the feist pushed the bird into the air and the alette took it just above the ground in a stoop from 10 feet. I had not seen a quail but suspected that the long high flight was made with birds in mind. I saw the pups run in and charge toward her, but before I could get close, the dogs flushed a bird at the base of the tree. The hawk made another high flight back toward the hackberry. I had to backtrack to find the cattle trail to get through the main drainage so I was quite late in arriving at the site. The radio led me back to the hackberry, and I found her hovering above a generous stand of cockle burr weeds beside the tree. The feist was inside chasing the quail around, and Sousa stood outside the weed patch on staunch point. The Brittanys, Rachmaninoff, stood well to the side, as usual, only mildly curious about the commotion and refusing to get involved. I ran in with the flushing stick as the hawk repeatedly dove in and then back up to hover. Before I could do more than enter the weed stand, the feist pushed the bird into the air and the alette took it just above the ground in a stoop from 10 feet.

I must have walked through every blade of that grass patch three times. We could not find the signal established by an unusual record set years ago during some previous records set years ago during better quail years with either the passage Cooper’s or passage Har- ris’. Not only had she started the season late, but I had been out of the field for a full two weeks with a respiratory infection. Considering my age, well into advanced senility, any claims by me of heroism would be completely ludicrous. It is only my opinion, of course, but I see this record established by an unusual performer, Jean Harlow, the alette. Long live the alette.