ANNUAL HUNTING ISSUE!

# FIREARMS NEWS®

GUN SALES, REVIEWS & 2A INFORMATION

SEPTEMBER 2025

# WEATHERBY & WILSON COMBAT

REVIEWS BY RIKK RAMBO

## MOUNTAIN PURPOSED, MARITIME TESTED

THE WEATHERBY 307 ALPINE CT RIFLE CRUSHES AN ALASKA OFFSHORE BLACK BEAR HUNT!

RAMBO DRAWS "FIRST BLOOD" WITH MAJOR INJURY DURING HUNT

## SMITH & WESSON'S PERFORMANCE CENTER-ENHANCED SW22 VICTORY TARGET PISTOL

FOR THE SQUIRREL KILLER IN ALL OF US!

## HENRY REPEATING ARMS' STEEL LEVER ACTION .360 BUCKHAMMER RIFLE

WELCOME TO 21ST CENTURY LEVER-GUN DEER HUNTING!

## ALASKA MOOSE HUNT WITH WILSON COMBAT'S TACTICAL HUNTER RIFLE

RIKK RAMBO ON ANOTHER ALASKA ADVENTURE FOR *FIREARMS NEWS*!


- ***CARRYING CONCEALED***
  FLYING WITH GUNS
- ***MUSINGS FROM THE AMMO BUNKER***
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- ***IN HUSHED TONES***
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  THE ONE BIG BETRAYAL IN THE ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL

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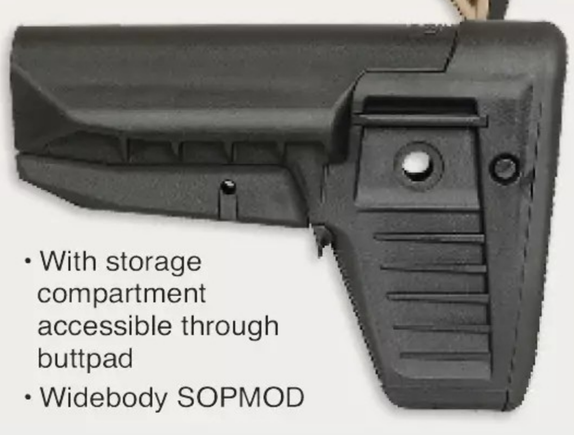

- With storage compartment accessible through buttpad
- Widebody SOPMOD

**BCM Stock Mod 2 SOPMOD**

- Widebody SOPMOD
- With removeable modular buttpad

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- Shown with optional BCM M3 Cheek Risers
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**BCM Compensator Mod 3**

**BCM Compensator Mod 4**

**BCM Compensator Mod 7**

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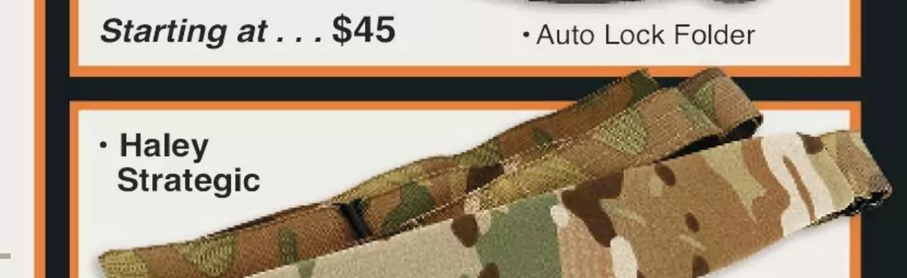
- Low-Viz Pro



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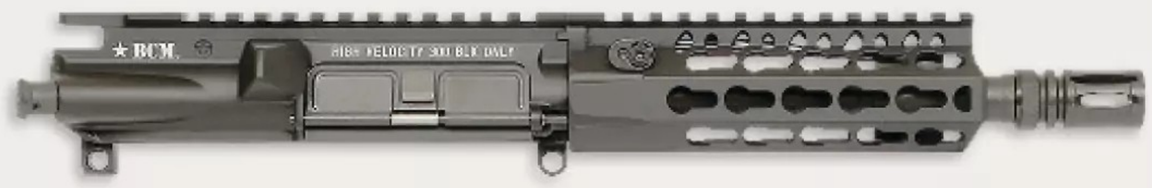

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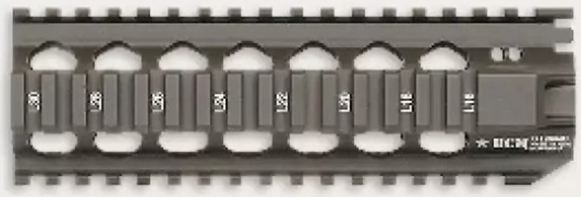

### BCM QRF-7 Quad Rail Free Float Handguard

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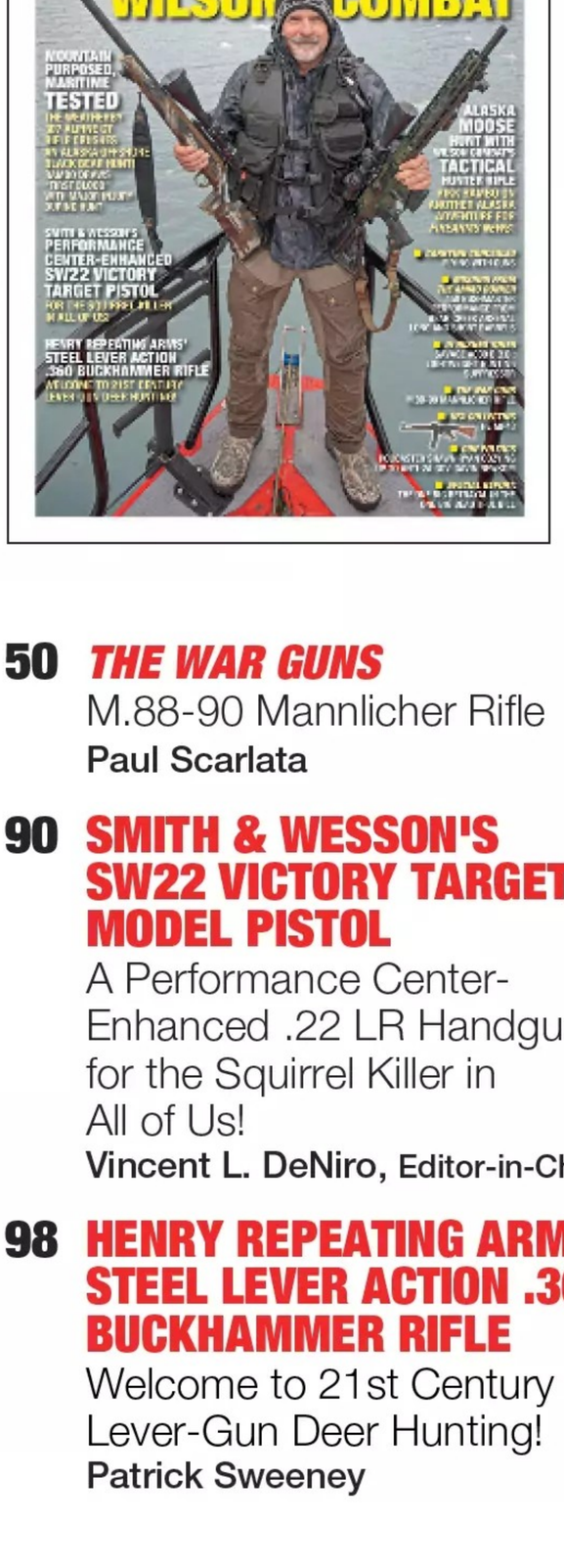


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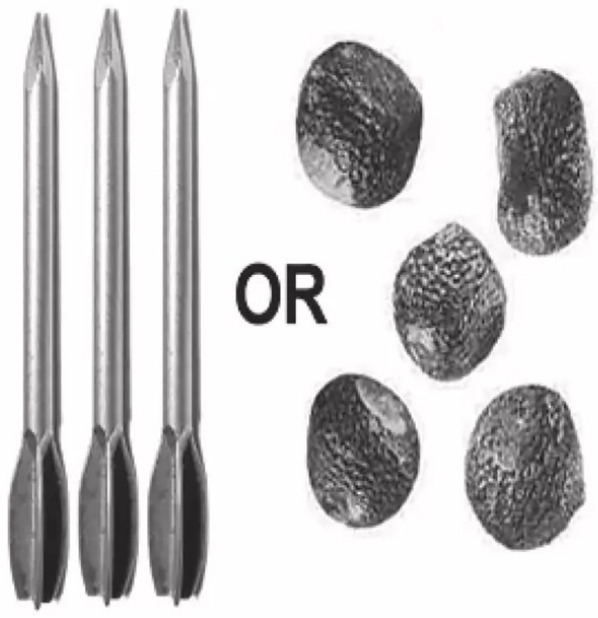


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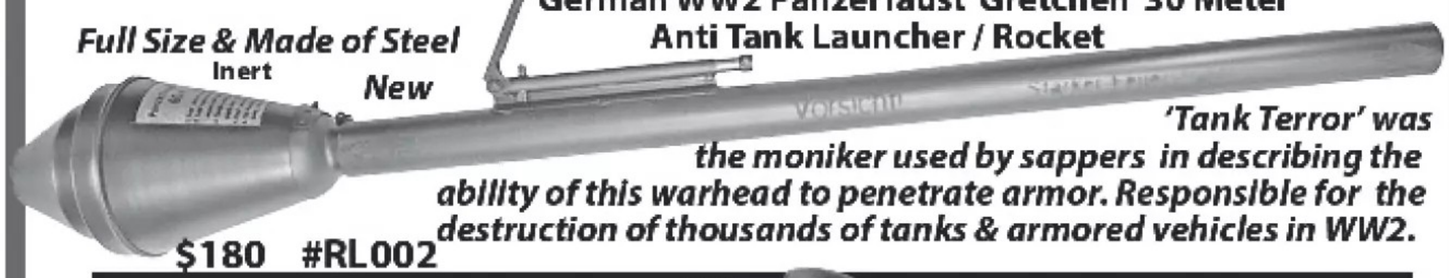

*'Tank Terror' was the moniker used by sappers in describing the ability of this warhead to penetrate armor. Responsible for the destruction of thousands of tanks & armored vehicles in WW2.*

$180 #RL002

Also Available

## Multi Cam Gorka Suits ( zip up) & Olive Drab Suits (zip up)

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New

FN MAG58 Tripod
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-no elevation knob.

$1,000. #MNT013

Photo MGM

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For Right & Left Hand Draw

Medium to Large Frame Capacity

Full Size & Compact models. Soft 'Suede' leather shell with hard leather 'upper' that allows mounting it at the vertical or diagonal, on either hip ,front, or back. Two colors: Tan or Brown.

Compact Capacity

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Comes w/ rosewood handle and a leather scabbard

$45. #BAY394

It throws pretty well too!

Steel 10 inch blade in 420C Steel with finely honed edge

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Brass Cross Guard and Rose Wood Grips

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7" Blade

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*(Sold for 'utility use'... Check your local/State laws on Stiletto use.)*

With..... Kydex Scabbard w/ Adjustable Belt Clip.

Overall Length @12" Long

*Blade 7"
*Finely Honed Edge on each side

7.62mm Bandolier w/ Strap, new, 6 pockets for 5rd. stripper clips. $6.95 ea., or 10 to 24 pcs at $5.95, or 25+ at $4.95 ea. #MISC1067

.30-06 Garand Bandolier w/Strap, new. 6 pocket. $6.95 ea., or 10-24 pcs. at $5.95 ea.,or 25+ at $4.95 ea. #MISC1068

.308 Nato

Spanish Army CETME-C RIfle Parts Set- all parts except,mag,barrel,oiler cap, and receiver. Wood furniture makes this look far nicer than the standard G3 Rifle, and many of the same parts interchange. $154.95 #CET016

Springfield 1903A3 Barrel , .30-06, 4 groove, new. $149.95 #SPF387

G3 Rifle Barrel,.308, new $189. #G3108
CETME C Barrel,.308 new $195. #CET019

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Steel&wood Inert

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Steel / Inert w/ markings.

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new

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New

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New

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# FLORIDA'S REPUBLICAN SUPERMAJORITY IS FAILING GUN OWNERS AND FREEDOM

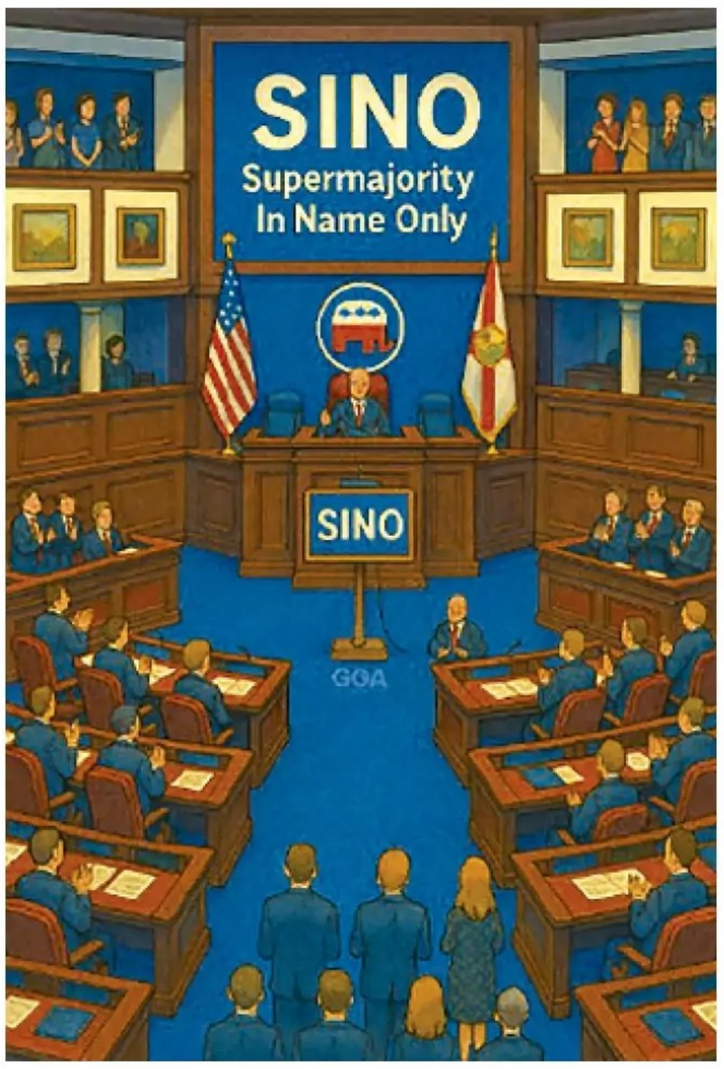
**By Luis Valdes**

Florida loves to brand itself as "the freest state in the union." With a Republican supermajority controlling the legislature, a conservative governor at the helm, and voters who want a pro-freedom agenda enacted, you'd think that claim would hold water. However, this year's legislative session proved just how hollow that slogan has become.

Despite holding a commanding majority in both chambers, Florida Republicans couldn't even finish the session on time. The sine die adjournment didn't happen until June 16—six weeks past the 60-day limit set by the Florida Constitution—because the GOP supermajority couldn't even agree on something as simple as the state's budget.

Governor Ron DeSantis wanted that budget to include meaningful property tax relief and other cuts to help Floridians. Instead, the House Speaker and his allies pushed for sales tax breaks that mostly benefit out-of-state tourists. While everyday Floridians struggle with rising house related costs, Tallahassee Republicans decided visitors mattered more than their voters. But the dysfunction didn't stop there—and it directly impacted your Second Amendment rights.

Among the governor's budget proposals was a "Second Amendment Sales Tax Holiday"—a window from Memorial Day to Independence Day where guns and ammunition would be sold tax-free. Gun Owners of America supported it, and while we'd prefer permanent tax relief on firearms like West Virginia offers, a tax holiday would have been a step in the right direction. Yet Florida's so-called "pro-gun" Republicans wouldn't even bring that up for debate. Let that sink in.



**(Luis Valdes)**

In a state run entirely by Republicans who campaign on a "pro-gun platform," with a governor who explicitly asked for it, a simple two-month tax break on guns and ammo was too much for the GOP supermajority to handle. That tells you everything you need to know about the political rot in Tallahassee. Believe it or not, it gets worse.

This session, Florida Republicans actively blocked or defeated every major pro-gun bill on the table:

- GOA's Open Carry Bill? Never left drafting. The bill's sponsor was threatened with political exile.
- Campus Carry? Shot down in committee, with Republican Sen. Ileana Garcia siding with anti-gun Democrats to defeat it.
- Repeal of the Bump Stock Ban? Never scheduled for a debate in either chamber, let alone a vote.
- Repeal of the Under-21 Purchase Ban? Senate President Ben Albritton refused to even hear it.

Meanwhile, one bill that did sail through without any fight from Republican lawmakers was a carve-out to the mandatory waiting period... for cops. There was no carve-out for domestic violence victims, or for law-abiding Floridians under threat—just for those with a badge.

As a former cop, I find that disgraceful. My badge didn't make me more important than the people I served. Yet Florida's Republican lawmakers clearly believe that the government's armed agents are entitled to more rights than the taxpayers who fund their salaries and vest them with their authority. This is what a Republican supermajority in Florida has delivered: delay, dysfunction, and betrayal.

Supermajorities can be dangerous because they eliminate accountability. In Florida, Republican legislators don't fear the voter anymore. Case in point: After passing gun control in 2018, they *gained* seats. Now, they face no real electoral threat—and it shows. That unchecked power allows leadership to silence the few true Second Amendment champions in the legislature. They strip them of committee assignments and sideline them in political exile. There's no Freedom Caucus in Tallahassee because the GOP establishment doesn't tolerate dissent—even patriotic dissent.

Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., where the balance of power is razor-thin, pro-gun lawmakers can punch above their weight. Thanks to GOA's grassroots activism and a few

courageous legislators, the Hearing Protection Act and the SHORT Act are gaining real momentum. But in Florida, the system is rigged. Term limits—a popular movement on the right—only make it worse.

The House Speaker and Senate President are untouchable—they're on their way out, so they answer to no one. That gives them free rein to strangle bills they don't like, reward big corrupt donor-aligned allies, and ignore the very voters who sent them to Tallahassee. Worse still, their successors are handpicked and groomed long in advance. It's a political machine, and its gears are greased with betrayal. Gun owners deserve better. Floridians deserve better.

If this is what a Republican supermajority looks like, it's time we reexamine who really stands for freedom in the Sunshine State. In states like Florida, Texas, Wyoming, and others where Republicans hold supermajorities, the real battle isn't between Republicans and Democrats— it's liberty-minded conservatives vs. authoritarian RINOs (Republicans-in-Name-Only).

The real fight is inside the Republican Party itself. Voters must stop assuming that every candidate with an "R" next to their name actually stands for conservative, pro-liberty values, because too often, they don't. Florida is a case study of that failure. Take Rep. Hillary Cassel for example. After the 2024 elections, one of the state's most notoriously anti-gun Democrats suddenly switched jerseys—from Blue to Red—and the Republican Party of Florida rolled out the red carpet for her, no questions asked. Ignoring her anti-gun voting record—the RPOF claimed she'd make a fine Republican. How did she repay that trust? As a newly minted "Republican," she voted *twice* against repealing Florida's unconstitutional Under-21 Firearm Purchase Ban—once in committee and again on the House floor—the Republican establishment at no point admonished her for that.

This is why primaries matter. And more than that, it's why getting involved in your state's political party structure matters even more. If you sit on the sidelines, you allow RINOs and political opportunists to hijack the movement—and soon, your state could end up just like Florida.

If you love liberty and cherish freedom, become involved. Don't let your state befall what has happened to Florida this year. FN

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# JUSTICE FILING BRIEF IN ILLINOIS GUN BAN CASE

## A Long Overdue Change in Course

**By David Codrea**

**(Shutterstock/J.J. Gouin)**

"The Second Amendment is not a second-class right. See you in court, Illinois," United States Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, Harmeet K. Dhillon, declared in a mid-June post on X.com. "Proud of my @CivilRights team — thank you, Jesus!"

She wasn't offering a prayer of gratitude. Rather, she was acknowledging the contributions of Deputy Assistant Attorney General Jesus A, Osete, who co-submitted an Amicus Curiae (friend of the court) brief along with Dhillon and three other Justice Department lawyers to the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in support of plaintiffs in *Barnett v. Raoul*, a challenge to the state of Illinois outlawing "some of the most commonly used rifles and magazines in America via a so-called 'assault weapons' ban."

Noting the state had enacted the ban "just a few months *after [New York State Rifle & Pistol Association,*

*[Cont. to page 104]*

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- Bushmaster 5.56 NATO 16" M4 Ultralight Barrel 1:8"
- M4 Handguard
- Carbine-Length Gas System
- A2 Flash Hider
- Flat Top Gas Block with Bayonet Lug
- Complete with M4 Feed Ramps, Forward Assist and Ejection Port Dust Cover

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- End Plate
- Castle Nut

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- A2 Flash Hider
- Flat Top Gas Block with Bayonet Lug
- Complete with M4 Feed Ramps, Forward Assist and Ejection Port Dust Cover

- Buffer, Tube & Spring

- Charging Handle
- Collapsible Buttstock
- End Plate
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- 15" SAMSON SXT M-LOK HANDGUARD
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- CARBINE LENGTH GAS • .750 STEEL GAS BLOCK
- COMPLETE WITH M4 FEED RAMPS AND EJECTION PORT DUST COVER

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## AR15 A4 FLAT TOP COMPLETE UPPER RECEIVER

S&W MARKED

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- M4 FEED RAMPS
- SHELL DEFLECTOR
- T-MARKED RAIL

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- 300 BLACKOUT 16" TARGET BARREL - 1:7" • BOWDEN TACTICAL MUZZLE FLASH CAN
- 15" SAMSON SXT M-LOK HANDGUARD
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- CARBINE LENGTH GAS • .750 STEEL GAS BLOCK
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- SMITH & WESSON UPPER RECEIVER
- CARBINE LENGTH GAS • .750 STEEL GAS BLOCK
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## CUSTOM AR15 UPPER 223WYLDE SAMSON HANDGUARD STAINLESS SPIRAL FLUTE BARREL

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- A2 FLASH HIDER THREADED 5/8x24
- COMPLETE WITH M4 FEED RAMPS, FORWARD ASSIST AND EJECTION PORT DUST COVER

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#CBC160036

## CUSTOM AR-15 UPPER 16" 5.56 M4 HANDGUARD BFI BUSHMASTER BARREL

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- BRAVO COMPANY M4 M-LOK HANDGUARD W/ HEATSHIELD
- S&W PERFORMANCE CENTER MUZZLE BRAKE/FLASH HIDER
- CARBINE-LENGTH GAS • FLAT TOP GAS BLOCK WITH BAYONET LUG
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- CARBINE LENGTH GAS • .750 STEEL GAS BLOCK
- COMPLETE WITH M4 FEED RAMPS AND EJECTION PORT DUST COVER

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M-LOK HANDSTOP

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**GUN POLITICS** By David Codrea | Political Field Editor

*David Codrea is the winner of multiple journalist awards for investigating/defending the RKBA and a long-time gun owner rights advocate who defiantly challenges the folly of citizen disarmament. In addition to being a regular featured contributor for* Firearms News, *he blogs at "The War on Guns: Notes from the Resistance," and posts onTwitter: @dcodrea and Facebook.*

# PODCASTER SHAWN RYAN COZYING UP TO ANTI-2A GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM

## Letting His Lies Go Unchallenged Has Gun Owners Questioning

(Shutterstock/Matt Gush)

"I'm not anti-gun at all," California governor (and potential Democrat presidential candidate) Gavin Newsom lied though his teeth in response to former U.S. Navy SEAL, CIA contractor, and podcast host Shawn Ryan presenting him with a "California compliant" SIG Sauer P365 X-Macro. "The last thing people would expect is I respect this gift," a broadly smiling Newsom assured his host. "I'm for just some gun safety common sense that I think vast majority of folks to the right and the left agree."

Where have we heard that contention before? Besides from anti-2A organizations like Everytown for Gun Safety, Giffords Law Center, the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence, and every Democrat politician trying to keep their mask from slipping so as not to scare off needed "Fudd" votes…?

The fact that it's "California compliant" puts another lie to Newsom's declaration. Those that qualify are administered by the state's Department of Justice on its "Handguns Certified for Sale" roster, which denies to citizens many guns that are available to those in other states. As is so often the case with general population disarmament edicts, it includes an obnoxious exemption for law enforcement that not only flies in the face of equal protection, but further perpetuates the widespread falsehood that police are the only ones qualified to possess such firearms. They're a danger to you, but the badge talisman means they're in the hands of a master.

A joke Newsom responded with when he accepted the gift, that, "You just want TSA to take this from me and my a** is arrested," ignored further laws. It's not like he could just walk away with it and legally take possession of the firearm without going through a background check and transfer through licensed dealers. He no doubt handed it off to his armed security detail.

So, what does he mean when he uses the "gun safety common sense" canard to deflect attention from "shall not be infringed"?

Existing federal "laws" and rules, combined with California's draconian diktats that have "earned" the state an "A" grade from Giffords Law Center (acknowledging it has "has the strongest gun safety laws in the nation and has been a trailblazer for gun safety reform for the past 30 years") are not enough.

Those include infringements from "assault weapons restrictions and strong background check requirements to extreme risk protection orders and domestic violence protections," or as the gun-grabbers portray them, "a good first step."

"There is no exact figure on how many gun control bills Newsom has signed while governor of California, but ABC 30 reported he signed 23 on September 27, 2023, alone," AWR Hawkins reported on *Breitbart*. "He also signed a number of gun control bills into law on September 24, 2024."

Newsom also went full Orwell with his proposed 28th Amendment, that would gut the Second Amendment, again with the lie that "universal back-

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ground checks, raising the firearm purchase age to 21, instituting a firearm purchase waiting period, and barring the civilian purchase of assault weapons" were "overwhelmingly" supported by "Democrats, Republicans, independent voters, and gun owners."

But he's "not anti-gun at all."

"I think we've lost a little touch with some common sense around background checks. I think there's an age appropriateness," Newsom continued in his manipulation of the platform Ryan provided him. "I'm challenged by large capacity magazine clips [!] in urban centers, you know, weapons of war that are out there sometimes outgunning the police… but otherwise, man, people have the right to bear arms, and I've got no ideological opposition to that at all." So much for understanding what the Second Amendment was supposed to be about in the first place…

late for lawsuits and discontinuance of use by Immigration and Customs Enforcement over what the FBI has called "uncommanded discharges") reflected prevailing sentiment.

"Look, man, I appreciate your openness cuz I say to everybody all the time, divorce is not an option, man, Newsom responded, capitalizing on Ryan's deference. We got to live together and advance together across our differences. So, no BS. I mean, this is critical that… because this zero sum, everyone talking past each other, down to each other. I mean, our kids are going to model that and it's just not sustainable. "What I really hope comes out of this is that people can use this as an example of how to talk to each other," Ryan naively agreed.

What's to talk about? Anyone who wants to disarm you to enhance his power over you is not your "friend across the aisle," he's a wannabe tyrant whose agents won't be talking about "advancing together across our differences" if you disobey them—they'll be using up-to-lethal force to demand your compliant obedience OR ELSE. That goes for affable Shawn Ryan, too.

For all his Kumbaya phoniness, Newsom showed the world the other day how he talks to those he disagrees with so that "our" kids (a collectivist presumption that deserves to be called out every time it's used) can model after the examples he sets.

"This fascist cuck in DC continues his assault on democracy and the Constitution, and his attempt to replace the sovereignty of the people with autocracy," the Governor Newsom Press Office posted on X in response to White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Homeland Security Advisor Stephen Miller's calling out a Democrat apparatchik judge for her ruling that ICE could not make arrests of illegal aliens at "Home Depots, car washes, and other locations."

Like all Democrats increasingly promulgating Antifa terminology, he's ignoring that dictator Benito Mussolini (like the Democrat party that embraces "The Squad" and New York City's Democrat Socialist mayoral candidate Zohran Kwame Mamdani) promoted Fascism after the Socialist Party kicked him out. "Do not imagine that by tearing up my membership card in the Socialist Party you can forbid my socialist faith or prevent me from continuing to work for the cause of socialism and the revolution," Mussolini responded.

And Newsom also knows a thing or two about cucks, having had an affair with his appointment's secretary, who was the wife of his campaign manager when he was mayor of San Francisco. If anything, his continued pejorative use of

**There's no agreeing to disagree with someone who employs coercion, force and fraud against you to swindle you out of your birthright.**

For his part, a jovial and cordial (some would say obsequious) Ryan let Newsom get away with it without objection, correction, or pushback, using the excuse that he's "been wanting somebody that thinks a little different than me and is maybe on the opposite side of the fence." "Little"? "Maybe?"

"Shawn, this wasn't neutrality. It was theater. You gifted Gavin Newsom a gun, smiled, and let him rebrand himself mid-campaign cycle. That's not 'both sides.' That's cover," X poster Counting Days critiqued the host. "Saying 'form your own opinion' after presenting him like a misunderstood hero isn't journalism. It's damage control. You lost trust [with] the people who live under the policies he sells. Most of us supported you. You just took a steaming dump on your base." That and "You should have given him a P320 instead" (referencing the SIG Sauer model that's been in the news of that term as a sign of contempt shows how sincere he was when he publicly apologized to the husband and "friend" he betrayed for his "lapse of judgment."

That Ryan apparently believes he had a sincere dialog suggests he also believes that Newsom was giving him return respect instead of just using him. There's no agreeing to disagree with someone who employs coercion, force and fraud against you to swindle you out of your birthright.

Not having much time for podcasts and preferring written sources for news relevant to my work, I'd never heard of Ryan before his Newsom interview (I'm sure he's never heard of me, either). Now that I have, there's little incentive to go back for more. People interested in advancing freedom won't find it with those who give platforms to and keep polite company with power-hungry political sociopaths who lie and smile with practiced ease. FN

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SPECIAL REPORT

By Darwin Nercesian | News Field Editor

*Darwin Nercesian is a long-time gun rights advocate and shooter of targets far, far away. As a News Field Editor at* Firearms News, *Darwin writes about the Second Amendment, firearms, and related gear. Follow him on Instagram, X, and YouTube @DTOE_Official.*

# THE ONE BIG BETRAYAL IN THE ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL

## With Republicans Like These, Who Needs Democrats to Destroy the Second Amendment?

(Shutterstock AI)

The One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) fought off a lot of competition for the media's center stage, from an ongoing conflict in Ukraine to munitions exchanges between Israel and Iran. In doing so, we witnessed significant fatigue in America's patience with out-of-control government spending on programs that do not benefit the taxpayer. Additionally, the reconciliation bill was an opportunity to correct course on the National Firearms Act of 1934 (NFA), an unconstitutional infringement upon gun rights hidden in the tax code almost a century ago when lawmakers knew that treating it any other way would trigger a violation of the Second Amendment, a caution thrown to the wind in today's political cesspool. As such, conservatives gathered the fruit of grassroots efforts to champion the Hearing Protection Act (HPA) and the Stop Harassing Owners of Rifles Today (SHORT) Act, but it seems we'll have to postpone the rewards of that harvest for a later date, if ever, thanks to the telling inaction and betrayal by Vice President JD Vance and Senate Majority Leader John Thune.

The HPA, in its entirety, survived the House Ways and Means Committee with language that removed firearm silencers completely from NFA regulation; however, continued phone calls and emails urging Representatives to stand firm for the voice of their constituents ultimately resulted in the Senate adding the SHORT Act to the OBBB, effectively removing short barreled rifle (SBR), Short Barreled Shotgun (SBS), and any other weapon (AOW), from the definitions of firearms regulated under the almost century-old draconian gun regulation.

One final step remained before sending the bill to the President's desk, the "Byrd Bath," a reference to the process whereby the Senate Parliamentarian reviews a reconciliation bill to ensure compliance with the Byrd Rule. Named after the late Senator Robert Byrd, this rule restricts what can be included in reconciliation bills, ensuring they primarily address budgetary matters rather than extraneous provisions. Unfortunately, the current parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, a Democrat appointed by Harry Reid in 2012, does not shy away from corrupt partisan activism, treating the position as one of an unelected saboteur.

The checks and balances of the process are where Senate Majority Leader John Thune and Vice President JD Vance become a factor. The parliamentarian serves at the pleasure of the Majority Leader, meaning Thune could have overruled or fired McDonough at any time. This is precisely what conservatives and their Representatives ended up begging him to do as she ripped and slashed key provisions from the OBBB in a manner unjustifiable by the rules of her duty.

Second Amendment supporters who stayed up past midnight on June 27 had the distinct displeasure of witnessing the writing on the wall come to fruition, as McDonough stripped both the HPA and the SHORT Act down to a seemingly simple tax reduction, from $200 to $0. I'll explain the "seemingly" part momentarily. With liberty and the Constitution under attack once again, Thune should have been poised to intervene and rescue the provisions by exercising his authority over the unhinged parlia-

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mentarian, but that would prove too onerous an effort, as the Majority Leader was occupied by the heavy lifting one might associate with throwing your own people under a bus.

You see, Thune telegraphed his betrayal only a day earlier, telling the media he would not move to overrule MacDonough's partisan obstruction, much to the chagrin of real conservatives and their Representatives who spoke out against what was looking more and more like a pre-determined demolition of the bill, one that has become harder to conceal from a population far too accustomed with America's two party political theater.

"How is it that an unelected swamp bureaucrat, who was appointed by Harry Reid over a decade ago, gets to decide what can and cannot go in President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill? The Senate Parliamentarian is not elected. She is not accountable to the American people. Yet she holds veto power over legislation supported by millions of voters. It is time for our elected leaders to take back control. @JDVance should overrule the Parliamentarian and let the will of the people, not some staffer hiding behind Senate procedure, determine the future of this country," Representative Greg Steube of Florida wrote on X.

Unsatisfied, I wanted to experience perfidiousness from the horse's mouth, so I contacted Thune's communications staff to express my thoughts on the Majority Leader's departure from the Republican Party to join the left, a logical conclusion of his behavior, wrapped in satirical language. I received the following response from Ryan Wrasse.

*"Darwin, I have no idea where you heard this nonsense, but no, the Senate Republican leader is absolutely not leaving the Republican Party. That is absurd. And you can quote me on that."*

Realizing that perhaps the mockery of my tone may require further clarity, I responded:

*"My apologies, Ryan,*

*I did not hear this anywhere, however, it is apparent in the Senator's position not to dismiss the partisan parliamentarian's gutting of the BBB. Of course, it is a free country, and the Senator can call himself whatever he likes, but we will be reporting it as it is. I have begun contacting the state legislature to campaign for censure and will make sure that South Dakota voters know which way he went on this so that they may make a more informed choice next election.*

*That is the context of this article and many more to come. If I am incorrect in believing Senator Thune's comments that he will not overrule or dismiss the parliamentarian, please let me know. I am happy to report it differently if that is not truly his position."*

Wrasse responded:

*"Won't dignify this with a response, other than I sure hope you include all of the heaping praise that President Trump has given Thune for how he's handled this process."*

This prompted the exchange's final message on the matter from yours truly:

*"To dignify is to attribute worthiness. Your response is perfect for my article, as it seems in line with the Senator's position not to dignify the will of conservative voters. I appreciate it.*

*I am a conservative and a Constitutionalist, not MAGA or any other type of sycophant beholden to any one politician, despite popularity. I praise the President when he does something good, and I criticize him when he does not. Things he has said in the past have no bearing on this subject or article.*

*On a personal note, because I care more about the country and the Constitution than I do about writing articles, I think it's time to take the temperature in the room before spouting off about what is to be dignified and what is not. If the Senator wishes to engage his base successfully, a quick review of public opinion is in order, as it seems he is more likely now to gain favor from Democratic voters than Republicans, but that doesn't mean those leftist voters will find him favorable enough to win an election. Just ask Liz Cheney."*

Thune kept his word to the media, at the expense of his oath, to those who elected him in South Dakota, and conservatives across the country, counting on him to preserve and defend their rights, a betrayal that I urge all South Dakotans to remember in the next election when it comes time to send this backstabber to the unemployment line.

Thankfully, we had Vice President JD Vance waiting in the wings to represent his own election assurances to the American people, including the Commander-in-Chief's firmly articulated stance on and support for the Second Amendment. Now, wait for it…

### Crickets…

JD showed up in the Senate on the day of, provided his tie-breaking vote necessary to advance the OBBB to House confirmation, and performed an astonishingly crass about-face, showing his back to gun owners and conservatives across the country. He did not overrule the parliamentarian, leaving the full HPA and SHORT Act subject to the necessity of sixty votes, a number that Republicans did not have, rather than restoring the language and requiring only a simple majority of fifty-one votes, as per the reconciliation process. While the Vice President is his own person, his partnership with and extension of the administration is undeniable, a dynamic that reverberated through me like a solid shot to the stomach, as it meant that the issue was not worthy of a Presidential order to intervene. For any American who has not pledged their loyalty to a politician over our Founding principles, the ipso facto here is that perhaps President Trump is not as supportive of the Second Amendment right now as he was when he needed our votes. Welcome to the Potomac two-step, or is it two-face?

With the OBBB headed back to the House for confirmation, I am compelled to highlight the work of real conservatives who fought to restore

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the full provisions of the HPA and the SHORT Act back to the bill, especially the efforts of Georgia Representative Andrew Clyde, who fought tooth and nail to the very end, enduring ridicule-laced hyperbole and petulant attacks from across the aisle until it was apparent that restoring this dignity to government reverence for the Bill of Rights was dead on arrival. With the OBBB moving forward like the neutered carcass it had become, President Trump got his wish, a symbolic signing on Independence Day, an important holiday that would have never been if not for American gun owners of the 1700s. I suppose the lesson here is never to let cruel irony get in the way of a narcissistic desire for optics over justice.

### What Did We Ultimately Get?

Rather than freedom and our inalienable rights recognized by the Constitution, Americans have been asked to celebrate a consolation prize, with the financial portion struck from the tax code while the government's illegal registry is set to live on in infamy. I certainly hope that, like Thune, JD will feel just as celebratory with a consolation prize come next election, and I'm already nudging alternatives to step up and primary both of these turncoats into political irrelevance. Andrew Clyde?

*"As an ardent defender of our Second Amendment liberties, I've also fought to use this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore our constitutional freedoms through budget reconciliation. While the current bill removes NFA taxes on suppressors and short-barreled firearms, it falls short of eliminating the registration of the tax because the unelected Senate parliamentarian erroneously deemed the provision violated the Byrd Rule.*

*That's why I offered a commonsense amendment to repeal the NFA registration for suppressors and short-barreled firearms. Unfortunately, my pro-2A amendment was not made in order — meaning it never received a vote in committee or on the House floor," Clyde said on X.*

Far from being over, gun owners will remember those who had the opportunity to dismantle one of the most significant infringements on their rights here, but didn't. Remember when I said I'd address the "seemingly" part of a simple tax reduction? Here it is.

In 1937, the Supreme Court ruling in *Sonzinsky v. United States* narrowly upheld the NFA as a valid exercise of Congress's taxing power, and therefore not a violation of the Second Amendment since it is part of the tax code rather than regulatory law. While the High Court was correct in recognizing the statute as having been hidden in the tax code, the decision was flawed, intentionally in my opinion, as abuse of taxation powers to suppress fundamental rights is expressly forbidden by the Constitution. Could you imagine the outrage if we taxed certain types of speech or religious worship? How about a tax that, if unpaid, revokes your right to due process, a speedy and public trial, the right to counsel, and the right to confront witnesses?

But I digress. The government, without outright admission of corruption, cannot have it both ways. If, as the Supreme Court has ruled, the issue of NFA regulation is strictly one of taxation, then it is a matter that must be addressed in terms of budgetary considerations, making reconciliation the appropriate venue. Odd that the Senate Parliamentarian didn't get the memo. On the other hand, if no tax exists, then the statute becomes purely regulatory and punitive in its nature. That's where the "One Big Beautiful Lawsuit" steps in.

### I Mentioned This Is Far from Being Over, Didn't I?

"Gun Owners of America (GOA) and Gun Owners Foundation (GOF), alongside our allies Palmetto State Armory (PSA), the Firearms Regulatory Accountability Coalition (FRAC), Silencer Shop (SS), and B&T USA (B&T), are announcing that we will file a federal lawsuit to dismantle the remaining provisions of the National Firearms Act (NFA) after the 'One Big Beautiful Bill' is signed into law by President Trump and goes into effect," according to a GOA press release written by Felisha Bull.

In truth, this should apply to the entire NFA, including the remaining taxed provisions covering machine guns and destructive devices and the 1986 Hughes Amendment, but since the OBBB only removed the monetary portions dealing with silencers and short-barreled firearms, it is that lion's share of the of the law with its jugular exposed.

"GOA's 'One Big Beautiful Lawsuit' will ask the courts to strike down the NFA's absurd new $0 tax and registration scheme for certain suppressors and firearms with short barrels… In *Sonzinsky v. United States* (1937), the Court ruled the NFA was permissible under Congress's taxing power. But once the tax is reduced to $0, the constitutional justification for the law collapses," the press release continued.

### So, Where Does This Leave Us?

NFA purchases are unlikely to change until 90 days after the July 4th signing, after which the OBBB provisions will cancel the $200 fee for the tax stamp on silencers and short-barreled firearms. Additionally, the GOA's One Big Beautiful Lawsuit lawsuit has been filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, so watch closely to see if the Trump Department of Justice (DOJ) contests or capitulates to that challenge. That's right. The lawsuit names the DOJ and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) as defendants, and those defendants serve at the pleasure of the Trump Administration, or dare I say the President himself. This challenge can be over before it even begins, so let's set aside my disappointment in JD Vance and the President for the time being and introduce a new litmus test. I'm willing to have my inferences proven wrong, especially if they are crushed under the righteous weight of Second Amendment preservation and restoration. FN

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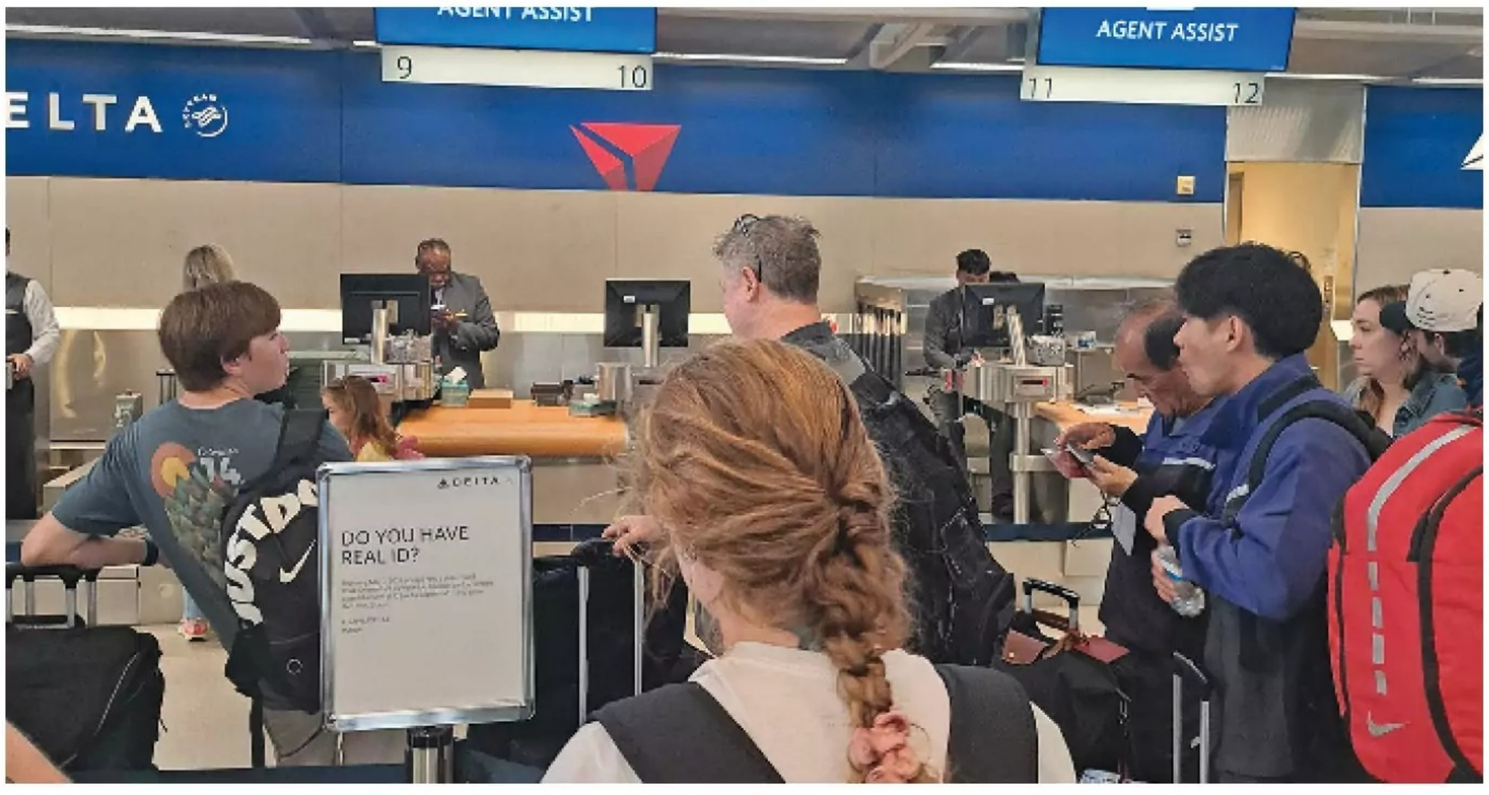
By James Tarr | Field Editor

Flying with firearms isn't difficult, but there are a few things you need to know to make your trip as trouble-free as possible. (James Tarr)

# FLYING WITH GUNS

## Whether it's Travel for Business, Vacation, or Hunting, You Need to Know the Procedures

I fly a lot compared to some people, but perhaps not as much as some business travelers. Unlike them, however, pretty much every time I fly inside the U.S. I travel with a gun. If you've never flown with a firearm before, there are certain things you




If you're flying with a gun you have to go to a special line like the "Agent Assist" queue used by Delta. You have to declare that firearm and go through a short process. (James Tarr)

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**Ammunition can be in the case with the gun, but has to be in "factory packaging." No ammo in your magazines. And don't pack your gun case loose like this, make sure nothing inside can bounce around, as baggage handlers will be tossing it everywhere. (James Tarr)**

**You're allowed 11 pounds of ammunition. Here, 160 rounds of 124-grain 9mm weighs 4 lbs. 10 oz., so unless you're heading to a competition, 11 pounds is far more than you'll need for a carry gun or probably a hunting trip. (James Tarr)**

need to know—some of which can be found on various websites (TSA, your airline), but some of which can't. And if you haven't flown with a gun in a while, a few things have changed.

First, if you've never flown with a gun before go to both the TSA website (TSA.gov) and the website for your airline to see their rules and restrictions when it comes to flying with firearms and ammunition. In the past, certain airlines have restricted the total number of firearms you can check. I don't know if that's still the case, but that's on you to find out before you show up at the ticketing counter. Some rules make sense, some don't—you can't have any gun parts in your carry-on bag, but you can have a rifle scope.

I've found flying with firearms to actually be easier than flying without, as when I arrive at the airport, I have to go into the special line for people who need assistance—as you always have to declare you need to check a firearm. That line is always much shorter than the general line where people are simply dropping off tagged baggage. Remember, they are used to dealing with idiots and a-holes all day, so when I approach, I smile and tell them, "*Hi, I'm flying to (insert city here) today and have to check a firearm.*" Don't get ahead of yourself and follow their directions.

Lately, the ticketing agents have been pretty good, but occasionally you'll get one that either doesn't know their own airline's regulations or just doesn't like guns in general, and they'll give you attitude, make you open the gun case and show them the gun is unloaded, that the ammo is in factory packaging, whatever. They will make you sign and date an orange tag that attests the gun is unloaded, and put the tag inside your luggage on the case, or inside the case if the gun case is a separate piece of luggage.

Let's talk about ammunition—you're allowed 11 pounds (5 kilograms), and it has to be in "factory packaging." What they mean by that is it can't be loose/bulk packed,

**I've found flying with firearms to actually be easier than flying without, as when I arrive at the airport, I have to go into the special line for people who need assistance—as you always have to declare you need to check a firearm.**

**However many spots your case has for a lock, a lock needs to be through every single one of them. (James Tarr)**

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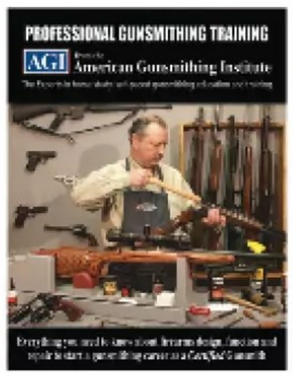


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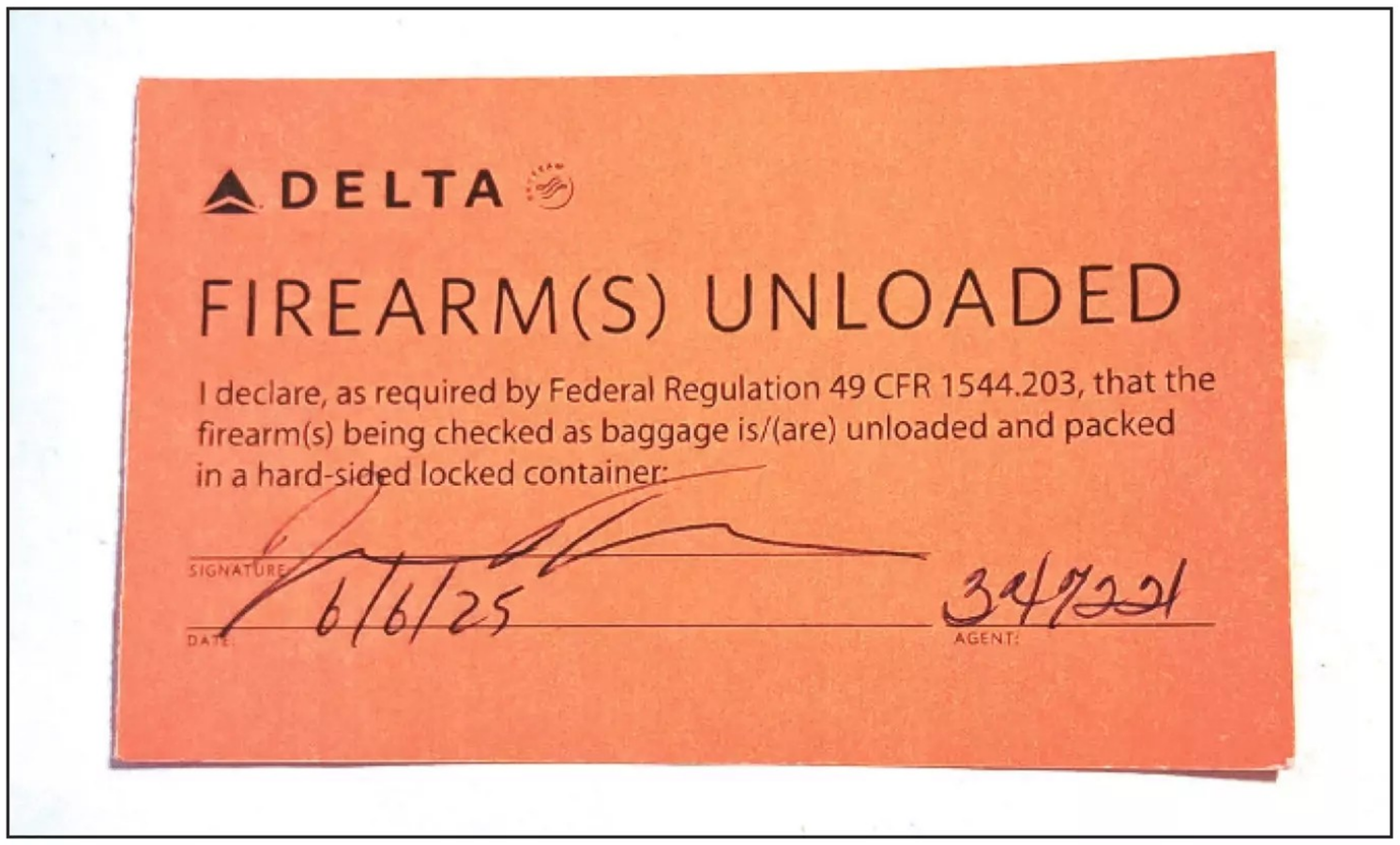


**You'll be required to complete this or a similar form when flying, and it will go in your gun case or taped on the outside but only if your case is inside your suitcase—thankfully out of sight, so nobody else knows there's a gun inside. In the past, many years ago, this red firearms tag would be hung next to your luggage tag on the outside of your suitcase. After many thefts at the baggage pick-up carousel, this practice was stopped along with allowing gun cases to go to the baggage areas unescorted. (James Tarr)**

because they don't want a sympathetic detonation from the rounds bouncing around during flight. They want each cartridge in its separate little hole in the styrofoam or plastic tray. Eleven pounds is a lot of ammo, more than you'll need for a carry gun (or three). Make sure the ammo is in the ammo box, and not in your magazines. The ammo box can be in the locked gun case with the gun.

You will need a hard-sided lockable case for your gun. If your gun case is large and is going to get checked as a separate piece of luggage, it might get treated differently—I've had some airlines/airports take those to a separate additional TSA screening point, whereas they didn't do that if it was a gun case inside a checked piece of luggage.

Here's what's changed recently—however many spots your gun case has for padlocks, whether that's one or two or four, you need to have a padlock through every single one of those holes or TSA/the airline probably won't let you check the gun case. And, with the locks secured on the case, if the ticketing agent or TSA officer can pop the latches and pry the lid open enough to get more than a fingertip inside, they probably won't let you check the gun case as it "allows access to the interior," potentially allowing the gun to be stolen—even if the gap is far too small to fit your gun. If your lid opens more than half an inch with your locks in place, you'll need to fix that. Get locks with shorter shackles or something.

I never use "TSA approved locks" because a "TSA approved lock" is one they can open whenever they want, and if I wanted strangers to be able to get into my gun case when I wasn't there, I wouldn't put locks on it at all.

Because I've usually got more than one lock on my case, one of those locks is a combination lock, which means I'm the one who has to open it, they can't just take my keys and open my case somewhere where I can't even see what they're doing. It's not that I don't trust the TSA (although I don't), it's that I don't trust anyone.

If the airlines are following their own rules, when you arrive at your destination, they won't put your luggage containing a firearm on the standard baggage carousel. They will take that luggage to the airport baggage office for that airline, which should be somewhere in the baggage claim area. You will have to show your ID to claim your bag. Still, occasionally, they'll not see the tag and your bag will end up on the suitcase merry-go-round, but check with the office first.

If you fly Delta Airlines, you are going to get an extra-special treat because somebody, in the past, grabbed their checked bag with a firearm in it, then pulled the gun out, loaded it, and shot up a Delta baggage claim area. Before they will hand you over your checked bag, Delta will zip-tie closed all the openings to prevent you from accessing that gun case inside, but the TSA allows you to put nail clippers or trauma shears or some sort of blunt scissors in your carry-on. You can use those to cut the zip-ties anytime you want. In fact, you can do it right in front of the Delta employees who just spent two minutes attaching those zip-ties. It's perfectly legal, although half the time they'll threaten to call the cops on you. Ask me how I know. FN

**You will have to show your ID to claim your bag. Still, occasionally, they'll not see the tag and your bag will end up on the suitcase merry-go-round, but check with the office first.**

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By David M. Fortier | Executive Editor

# .450 BUSHMASTER

## FROM LONG AND SHORT BARRELS

**The most popular of the AR-15 big-bores, the .450 Bushmaster has gained a reputation for being hard hitting, but what happens if you reduce its barrel length? (Photo by David Fortier)**

### How Does This AR-15 Big Bore Perform if You Drop the Barrel Length From 18 to Just 10.5 Inches? Bear Creek Arsenal Provides Two Firearms for Testing!

When it comes to big-bore cartridges developed specifically for use in the AR-15 platform, there are three main contenders to consider, the .50 Beowulf, .458 SOCOM, and the .450 Bushmaster. The .50 Beowulf was the first big-bore AR-15 cartridge and it helped to change how the AR-15 was viewed when it came to hunting. Designed by Bill Alexander, the .50 Beowulf was initially introduced at the 2000 Florida SWAT Round-up, and then publicly at the 2001 SHOT Show. Alexander developed the .50 Beowulf with one purpose in mind, to be the physically largest cartridge an AR-15 can accept.

The .50 Beowulf quickly became popular as a short-range brush busting hunting cartridge, and opened the eyes of many to the possibilities offered by the versatile AR-15 design.

The next big-bore design introduced was the .458 SOCOM developed by Maarten ("Marty") P. ter Weeme with rifles being built by Tony Rumore of Tromix. The .458 SOCOM was introduced in 2001 and it too quickly gathered a dedicated following among big game hunters.

The third and most popular of the AR big-bores is the .450 Bushmaster. Developed by Mr. Tim LeGendre, the owner of LeMag Firearms LLC, LeGendre had been intrigued by Jeff Cooper's "Thumper" rifle concept. Cooper wrote about the possibilities a hard-hitting big-bore cartridge might have on man or beast at moderate distances. LeGendre liked Cooper's idea, and in 2007 he began developing a cartridge using a large .45-caliber bullet. His design was suitable for use in an AR-15 and he dubbed it the ".45 Professional."

It wasn't long before Bushmaster Firearms became interested in the new cartridge for use in their rifles. This led to Bushmaster engineers working with Hornady to make the cartridge suitable for mass production. Hornady's engineering team suggested some changes to the dimensions

**An 18-inch rifle and 10.5-inch upper from Bear Creek Arsenal were used during testing. While the 18-inch gun ran flawlessly, the 10.5-inch upper was under-gassed. (Photo by David Fortier)**

***Firearms News* Editor-in-Chief Vince DeNiro selected four different loads ranging in weight from 245 to 300 grains to see how barrel length would affect performance. (Photo by David Fortier)**

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**Around 2020, Matthew DeNiro shot this buck with a Windham rifle loaded with Remington's 260-grain Accutip. It ran about 70 yards into the woods before stopping. (Photo by Vincent DeNiro)**

**Around 2021, Matthew DeNiro shot this doe with a Bushmaster ACR, in .450, from 60 yards away while aiming left-handed in a tree stand as the deer was at his four o'clock. It was taken with Federal's Non-Typical Whitetail 300-grain hollow point. The deer only ran less than 10 yards before collapsing. (Photo by Vincent DeNiro)**

of the cartridge, and it became the .450 Bushmaster in 2009. The parent case for the .450 Bushmaster is the .284 Winchester. This straight-wall design features a 0.473-inch rebated rim with a base diameter of 0.500-inch. Neck diameter is 0.480-inch and it has a case length of 1.700-inches and an overall length of 2.260-inches.

One interesting design feature of the .450 Bushmaster, a blessing or a curse depending upon your point of view, is the use of 0.452-inch diameter bullets. While Maarten P. ter Weeme chose to use traditional 0.458-inch diameter rifle bullets in his .458 SOCOM design, LeGrendre and the engineers at Hornady went with the same bullet diameter as used in the popular .45 ACP pistol cartridge. Back in 2009, there were not many hunting bullet options in this 0.452-inch diameter suitable for use at the high velocities the .450 Bushmaster generates. Sixteen years down the road though and there are a number of designs suitable for big-game hunting readily available.

Of three "AR-15 big-bores" the .450 Bushmaster has seen the most success. The .50 Beowulf is a good design, but Alexander Arms is a small company which holds the trademark on the cartridge limiting its reach. While I have a Tromix .458 SOCOM carbine I love, Maarten P. ter Weeme's cartridge has similar issues as the .50 Beowulf. Basically, they both suffer from a lack of support by a major company in the industry. The .450 Bushmaster is much more widely available, and has successfully moved beyond its "AR-15" roots into the realm of bolt-action rifles.

While I have quite a bit of experience with both the .50 Beowulf and .458 SOCOM dating back to the introduction of both of these cartridges, I have much less with the .450 Bushmaster. However, *Firearms News* magazine's Editor-in-Chief Vince DeNiro, and his son Matthew, have spent quite a bit of time with it hunting in the woods of Ohio, and Vince formed his own opinions based on observations of its performance on white-tailed deer: "Many of us were extremely happy when Ohio approved straight-walled cartridges for deer as 12-gauge slugs do have a list of disadvantages. I immediately gravitated to .450 Bushmaster once it was approved, because I liked the idea of hunting with an MSR-type platform. Although, we have hunted deer with handgun calibers such as 10mm, .460 Rowland, and .45 Win Mag in both pistols and carbines, these are primarily tree-stand guns inside of 35 yards. I have also hunted with .350 Legend. My younger son, Matthew, and I started off with Nosler-type 250-grain for .450 Bushmaster as that was all that was available early on. I was really impressed with the accuracy at 100 yards. Winchester's 250-grain Deer Season would consistently shoot less than 1.5 inches for a five-shot group, while Hornady's Custom FTX 250-grain came in at a little over an inch, 7/8 of an inch without the flier! This was out of a Windham 16-inch-barreled AR-15."

DeNiro continues, "But, I live in the heavily wooded part of Ohio with hills and deep hollows. You usually don't get a shot on a deer past 70 yards and most shots are under 45. After a couple of seasons, we had to switch to a heavier load because the deer would run 50 to 70-plus yards after getting hit in the lungs or heart, and they would always run deeper into the woods and down into a hollow; that meant a lot of exhausting work getting them out. A deer running even 100 yards after being shot on flat farmland, without a tree in sight, is not an issue, but here, deer disappear after about 30 yards in the thick woods. So, we tried Federal's Non-Typical Whitetail 300-grain hollow point. Matthew got the first deer with this load and the results were great—it may have run 25 feet at most before dropping. This fixed the issue. Last year, Hornady asked me to try their new American Whitetail 245-grain soft point. I was hesitant to go back to a lighter load, but they reassured me that the jacket design should do what I want. It did. I got a large six-point buck at around 70 yards and all it did was move in a half circle; it died where I shot it. Of course, these are not laboratory conditions, and it's only a result of

**Editor-in-Chief Vince DeNiro and his six-point buck taken (in 2024) with a Bushmaster ACR chambered in .450 Bushmaster. His load was Hornady's American Whitetail 245-grain soft point ammunition. (Photo by LAD)**

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**The 10.5-inch Bear Creek Arsenal .450 Bushmaster upper receiver produced higher velocities than expected, and it shot well, indicating this cartridge isn't handicapped if you drop below traditional lengths. (Photo by Rachel R. Fortier)**

one hunt, but I was impressed with the projectile. For .450 Bushmaster, I stick to my ACR rifle, and Matthew has been using his 16-inch Bear Creek Arsenal rifle for a couple of years. His is topped off with an ACOG since he played a lot of *Call of Duty* growing up!"

During a recent conversation with DeNiro, we mused on the performance of the .450 Bushmaster when fired from a shorter length barrel, such as from an AR-15 SBR or pistol—DeNiro was thinking along the lines of a handy tree-stand gun for deer season, or possibly bear defense. We were both curious as to how well the popular big-bore cartridge would perform from a short 10.5-inch barrel compared to the common 18-inch length. To find out, DeNiro gathered together four .450 Bushmaster loads and I contacted Bear Creek Arsenal requesting a 18-inch AR rifle and a 10.5-inch AR upper on short term loan for testing. Bear Creek Arsenal obliged sending a Flat Dark Earth-color rifle with an 18-inch barrel. I mounted the black 10.5-inch upper they sent onto one of my registered SBR receivers and got to work on the range.

The four loads DeNiro selected ranged in weight from 245 to 300 grains. They consisted of Hornady's American Whitetail 245-grain Soft Point, Winchester's Deer Season XP 250-grain, Remington's Premier 260-grain Accutip, and Federal's Non-Typical Whitetail 300-grain Hollow Point. Advertised velocities ranged from 2,200 fps to 1,900 fps and we both felt these four loads would provide an interesting look at how the .450 Bushmaster performs from these two barrel lengths.

Getting to work on a hot July day, the 18-inch .450 Bushmaster produced its highest velocities with Hornady's 245-grain American Whitetail SP load. This averaged 2,217 fps and generated 2,674 ft-lbs of energy at the muzzle. This load also produced the highest velocities from the short 10.5-inch barrel. It averaged 2,060 fps and generated 2,308 ft-lbs of energy. So, this load only dropped 157 fps going from the 18-inch to the 10.5-inch barrel. That's an average of 20.9 fps per inch of lost barrel. Frankly this is better than I expected. The accompanying chart reveals how all the loads performed in these two barrel lengths. The 10.5-inch barrel did better than I expected.

Accuracy of both barrels varied depending upon the load but both shot their best with Winchester's 250-grain Deer Season XP. Recoil with all four loads is noticeable from the bench. The .450 Bushmaster definitely hits hard, which is why many hunters pick it for big game and pig hunting. Performance on white-tailed deer is very good with proper bullet selection.

Overall, I was impressed by the cartridge's performance. It did well from both barrel lengths. That said, I did have functioning issues with the short 10.5-inch Bear Creek upper receiver. It seemed to be under-gassed and reliable cycling was an issue, with all four loads. The 18-inch upper though cycled without issue. The .450 Bushmaster is a popular choice for those interested in an AR-15 "big-bore" for both hunting and fun. While it's not inexpensive to shoot, it is a lot of fun, and it has proven to be an effective short-range hunting cartridge. FN

## .450 BUSHMASTER AMMUNITION BARREL TEST

| Load | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | SD | Muzzle Energy (ft-lbs) | Average Group (in.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BEAR CREEK ARSENAL 10.5-INCH BARREL** | | | | | |
| Hornady American Whitetail SP | 245 | 2,060 | 31.7 | 2,308 | 2 |
| Winchester Deer Season XP | 250 | 1,854 | 61.4 | 1,908 | 1.75 |
| Remington Premier Accutip | 260 | 1,909 | 20.9 | 2,104 | 3 |
| Federal Non-Typical Deer HP | 300 | 1,709 | 11.8 | 1,945 | 2.8 |
| **BEAR CREEK ARSENAL 18-INCH BARREL** | | | | | |
| Hornady American Whitetail SP | 245 | 2,217 | 29.5 | 2,674 | 2.6 |
| Winchester Deer Season XP | 250 | 2,087 | 30.1 | 2,418 | 1.7 |
| Remington Premier Accutip | 260 | 2,082 | 18.2 | 2,502 | 2.2 |
| Federal Non-Typical Deer HP | 300 | 1,878 | 9.2 | 2,349 | 3.2 |

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three five-shot groups fired from a rest at 100 yards. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded with a LabRadar Doppler chronograph at the muzzle at an ambient temperature of 95 degrees F at 1,030 feet above Sea Level.

## SOURCES

**Bear Creek Arsenal,**
BearCreekArsenal.com

**Federal Ammunition,**
(800) 831-8300, FederalPremium.com

**Hornady Ammunition,**
Hornady.com

**Remington Ammunition,**
Remington.com

**Winchester Ammunition,**
Winchester.com

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By Patrick Sweeney | Suppressors

# SAVAGE AC30 B.O.B.

## Lightweight Hunting Suppressor

**The Savage AC30 B.O.B. is a lightweight hunting suppressor that only adds four inches to the overall length of your rifle. (Patrick Sweeney)**

Not everyone wants a suppressor that is full-auto rated. Any shooting pace that even comes close is hard on barrels and wallets. Not everyone is happy with a foot-long suppressor that is that long to be quiet. Some want a well-behaved, not-heavy suppressor for hunting, one that won't break the wallet nor feel like an anvil on the last leg of a hike up to the hunting area. So, Savage makes one. The AC30 B.O.B.

This is a .30 suppressor that ticks all those boxes. First off, the B.O.B. part? That's back-over—barrel, what we called a reflex suppressor in the old days. The mount threads are part-way up the suppressor tube, and the extra volume that the design provides (part of the two-inch diameter of the AC30) means more quiet. It also means that the B.O.B. is lighter for its volume because the extra volume permits the use of aluminum for the major parts of the suppressor.

The threads are a titanium (6AL-4V alloy) insert secured to the 7075-T6 aluminum mount assembly. This way you don't have aluminum threads being abraded by the steel threads of the barrel. Titanium is tougher than that. The AC30 B.O.B. is made of three parts, the mount, the reflex/expansion chamber, and the monocore baffle stack that is removable. All are made of aluminum, given a Type III hard-coat anodized finish and topped off with DLC.

Mounting is easy. The reflex design has a limited clearance diameter (0.94 of an inch max, since you asked) and that means you have to be aware of barrel diameter. Any barrel small enough and threaded to 5/8x24 pitch will work. Remove any thread protector, and screw the AC30 B.O.B. on. That's it. For cleaning, you unscrew the forward half of the AC30 B.O.B. to remove the monocore, which Savage calls the MonoKore technology. Then you can scrub it to your heart's content, since you have full access to all the surfaces.

**The monocore has a built-in flash-dampening set of prongs, inside of a protective collar. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**The rear cap looks too large to be threaded onto your barrel. That's because the threads are four inches inside of the tube, and it overlaps your barrel when installed. (Patrick Sweeney)**

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**When you go to disassemble the AC30 B.O.B., it will seem like you are unscrewing the front tube forever. There's almost an inch of threaded section there. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**The now exposed monocore is easy to clean. That's a good thing because an aluminum suppressor can't be cleaned by "shooting it hot." (Patrick Sweeney)**

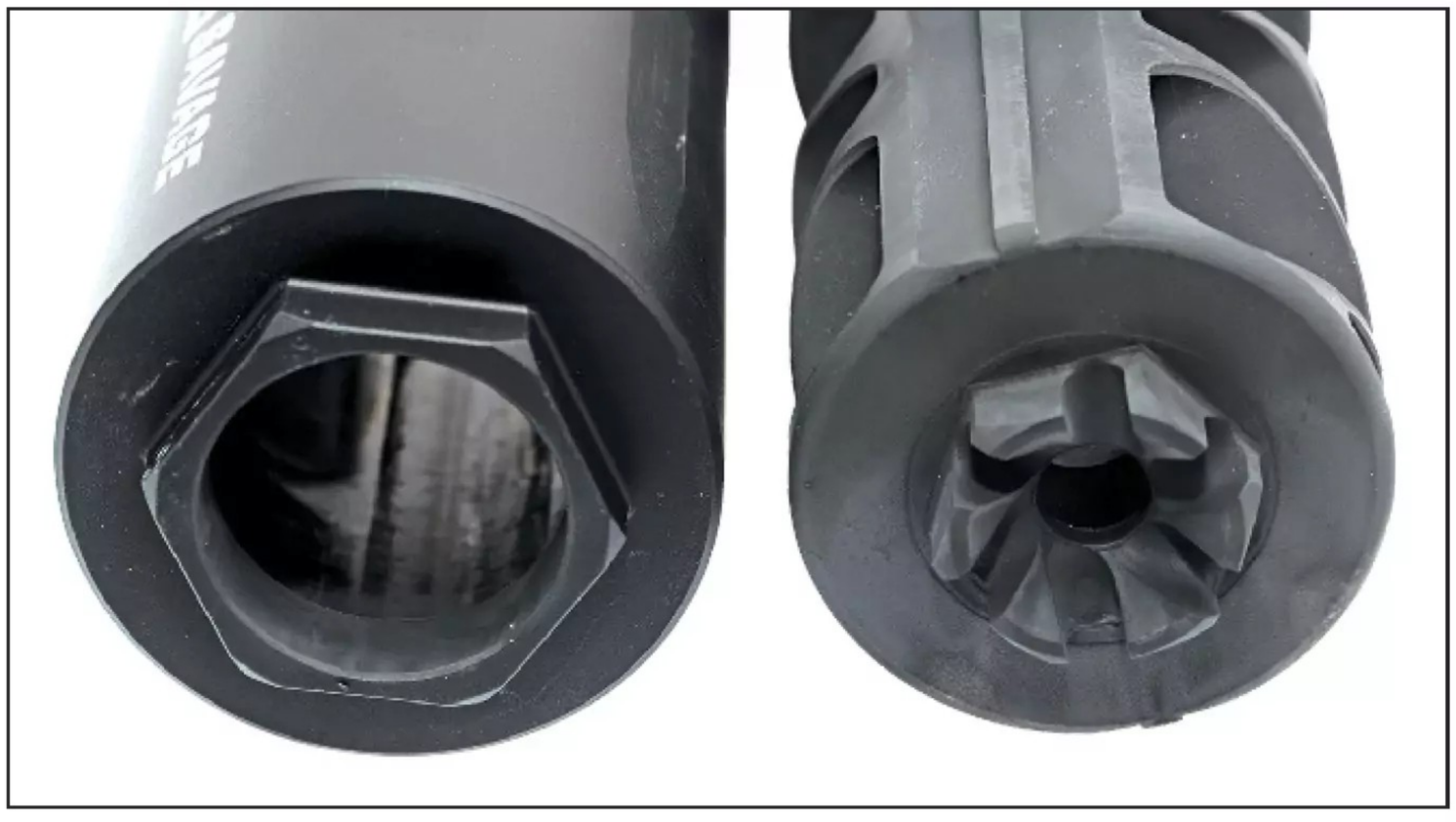
Once you have the monocore out, you might notice that the outer surface has a machined ridge in it. That is the tube cleaning edges on the baffle monocore. Suppressors get gunky. The usual "cleaning" method is to shoot it enough to heat the suppressor up and burn out the residues.

The AC30 B.O.B. is made out of aluminum, so that approach really isn't an option, and if you do not control the buildup, you can carbon-weld your disassemblable suppressor into a singular unit. So, each time you take the AC30 apart, the built-in scrapers start the cleaning process.

The front tube simply covers the monocore, it doesn't even create the exit face of the assembly, but its made-with-wrench-flats collar protects the flash-hider built into the monocore. That, along with the flash hiding projections on the end of the monocore, is screwed into the rear cover. The cover is the serialized part, the actual suppressor of record. So, let's say you do something you should not have, and have put a bullet sideways through the monocore. Heck, let's make it particularly gruesome, and you blasted out through the monocore cover. No problem. All of that is forward of the tube that is serialized. You simply have to disassemble the AC30 B.O.B. and send the busted parts to Savage for replacement. You keep the serialized part in your safe. Once the new parts arrive, reassemble and you're back in business. (With a rueful tale, and a lesson learned, we hope.)

The advantage of the B.O.B. and any reflex suppressor is that you do not add a long suppressor to your overall length. While the AC30 is eight inches long, the net added length is four inches. Plus, you are adding the extra ounces right at the muzzle, and not a point four inches forward of the muzzle. So the balance of your rifle changes to a lesser extent than with a non-reflex suppressor.

Now, all these advantages come at a cost (everything does, not that Savage



**The outer tube has the protective collar that rings the flash-hider prongs on the monocore. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**You can clearly see the scraping ridge machined into the monocore. This is the first step in cleaning the AC30 B.O.B. when you do clean it. And you should. (Patrick Sweeney)**

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**The Savage AC30 B.O.B. suppressor mounted on a Savage 110 Ultralight Elite rifle. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**Here is how much the Savage AC30 B.O.B. overlaps your barrel. (Patrick Sweeney)**

can avoid it), and those are easy to grasp. First of all, a reflex suppressor has to be larger. You can't fit a suppressor over that barrel, keep it an inch and a half in diameter, and have any extra volume in the over-barrel part. So, it is two inches in diameter. If you want it light, and taking advantage of the extra volume, you have to make it out of either aluminum or fully out of titanium. Titanium, costs, a lot, so that means aluminum to keep from busting your wallet. An aluminum centerfire rifle suppressor has strict firing limits. So, the AC30 B.O.B. is meant for use on rifles up to .300 WinMag, but not SBRs. I'd be happy using it on a .308 or a 6.5 Creedmoor with a sixteen-inch barrel but were I putting it on a .300 WinMag, I'd stick with a twenty-inch barrel. The firing rate is twenty rounds at one per second (a zippy PRS rate, a lot faster than anyone will do hunting) and then wait for it to cool off.

**The advantage of the B.O.B. and any reflex suppressor is that you do not add a long suppressor to your overall length.**

Clearly, this is not the suppressor for working over a prairie dog town, but then who uses a 6.5 CM or .308 for that anyway? I never got at all close to that when testing, but it still heated up enough that I could not touch it and had to keep it away from any nylon gear lest it melt the cases and such. Once back to the shop, it was easy to hand-loosen and remove the outer tube to inspect and clean the monocore. One thing you might take note of, and that is the threaded portion of the outer tube. The thread extends to just shy of one inch from the bearing shoulder to release. The first time you go to take it apart it will seem like you will be spending all day spinning the tube.

The tested reduction by Savage, using a .300 WM rifle with a twenty-inch barrel was to drop it down to 133 dB. That's impressive, and while it is plenty good enough to take as a hunting-rifle suppressor, I think I'd still be using some kind of protection were I to put this onto a PRS rifle for a match. What I did use it on was the Savage 110 Ultralight Elite, a PRS-like rifle built to be a lightweight hunting rifle. Instead of nearly twenty pounds full-up, (a top-end PRS rifle can be that) the 110 Ultralight Elite was six and a half pounds bare, seven with the AC30 B.O.B. on it. It was a nice, handy package, with a beautiful trigger and the AC30 B.O.B. didn't change the balance of it enough to notice.

With a list price right at one grand (well, a dollar less than that) and a retail price at your local gun shop of something less than that, you can be hunting in quiet style (where allowed) soon enough. FN

| SAVAGE AC30 B.O.B. SUPPRESSOR | |
|---|---|
| Overall Length: | 8 in. |
| Net Added Length: | 4.1 in. (reflex design) |
| Diameter: | 2 in. |
| Material: | Aluminum, titanium |
| Weight: | 13.6 oz. |
| Finish: | Type III hard coat anodized, DLC |
| Calibers Available: | .30 up to 300 WM |
| Full-Auto Rated: | No |
| Mount System Available: | Direct thread |
| MSRP: | $999 |
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By Will Dabbs, MD

# THE MP43

## Collecting the Original Assault Rifle

**The German MP43 was a transformational design. It fundamentally changed the world of infantry weapons. (Will Dabbs)**

I once read an anecdote about an American paratrooper who made the D-Day jump into Normandy. In the face of withering antiaircraft fire, many of these sky soldiers jumped lower and faster than they had in training. Much of their equipment was subsequently lost in the violent slipstream. This particular paratrooper hit the ground armed solely with his pistol and a knife.

This young man soon liberated a German MP44 assault rifle. He referred to it as, "*That new Buck Rogers gun.*" He packed that thing in combat for a couple of days until he ran out of ammo and then discarded it in a handy bush. By then, he had scored a proper American weapon that the logistics system could keep supplied.

"That new Buck Rogers gun" was indeed a radically advanced combat implement. At a time when the state of the art was a bolt-action rifle that was nearly four feet long, held only five cartridges, and fired a round the size of your little finger, the MP44 was something altogether different. Firing a lightweight intermediate cartridge from a thirty-shot magazine and offering controllable selective fire operation, the MP44 spawned an entirely new species of infantry weapon. The MP44 was the world's first true assault rifle.

**When introduced during the latter parts of World War II, the MP43 offered the individual soldier unprecedented firepower. (Will Dabbs)**

**The success of the MP43 was really driven by its revolutionary cartridge. All modern assault rifle cartridges stemmed from it. From left to right we have the 7.92x33mm kurz, the 7.62x39mm, the 5.56x45mm, and the 5.45x39mm. (Will Dabbs)**

### The Cartridge

This all began as an idea during World War I. In 1918, a Hauptmann Piderit of the *Gewehrprüfungskommission* ("Small Arms Examination Committee") made the observation that almost all infantry combat took place at less than 800 meters. Most of those scraps were actually within 300 meters. Much of the power of those full-sized cartridges was therefore wasted in the countryside beyond the target. This eventually led to the development of the revolutionary 7.92x33mm kurz round in 1938.

The 7.92x33mm kurz was 24mm shorter than the standard 7.92x57mm cartridge and used exactly half as much powder. It pushed a 124-grain full metal jacket bullet to around 2,250 fps. All that remained was to find a gun that would shoot it.

### The Weapon

Hugo Schmeisser designed the weapon. The selective fire MP43 was formed predominantly from steel stampings. At 11 pounds and five ounces loaded, the MP43 was nonetheless still fairly heavy.

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**Though portly and cumbersome by modern standards, the MP43 nonetheless changed the very nature of infantry combat. (Will Dabbs)**

**The MP43, the MP44, and the StG44 are all essentially the same gun. (Will Dabbs)**

There were technically three different versions of the weapon. Aside from the markings, there were very few practical differences among the three. The MP43 morphed into the MP44 that eventually became the StG44 or Sturmgewehr ("Storm Gun.") Adolf Hitler purportedly came up with that term himself. Allied intelligence translated Storm Gun into Assault Rifle, and here we are.

## Collectability

For ease of discussion, we will use MP43 to describe all of these rifles. There were 425,977 copies that rolled off the lines during the war. As this was such a weird, unique, historically-significant firearm, it became a popular war trophy. As a result, they are better represented in the NFA registry might otherwise be the case.

Most all of the MP43 variant guns I have encountered were original curio and relic vet-bringback weapons. I have seen a couple post-sample machineguns built up on rewelded receivers, but they really don't count. Prior to the 1986 ban, there was not enough demand for these guns to justify anyone tooling up to make virgin receivers. While stamped components like MP43 receivers are cheap to build once you have the dies tweaked, the initial startup investment is prodigious.

Back when I was a kid, you could land a demilled MP43 in the pages of *Shotgun News*, the predecessor to the superlative magazine you appear to be clutching, for around $450. These kits included a torch-cut receiver and intact barrels. Nowadays, that same kit would set you back five or six grand on the rare occasion they can be found.

## Details

The quality of these rifles deteriorated somewhat during the course of the war. Around-the-clock bombing took a toll on raw materials availability, and skilled workers were drawn off to serve on the front lines. Early MP43's are generally the nicest. The subsequent MP43/I was the same gun with a threaded barrel and an extended muzzle nut to accommodate a grenade launcher attachment. It also featured a scope rail to accept the superb Zf4 optical sight. Guns thusly configured are unusual and therefore slightly more valuable than the standard unadorned sort.

Late-war StG44's often can be found with mismatched finishes and fairly crude furniture. However, paradoxically, sometimes these last-ditch features will actually enhance the value of a specific specimen. That is all driven by the proclivities of the buyer.

Specialty kit designed for the StG44 like the Vampyr IR night vision system or the Krummlauf curved barrel assemblies that allow you to shoot around corners are incredibly rare. Possession of some of that stuff along with a proper host rifle could be traded for a decent retirement fund. I've personally never seen either actually for sale.

**The MP43 (top) and the MP40 were popular war trophies during World War II. Both guns would break down small enough to fit into a duffle bag. (Will Dabbs)**

**Most all MP43-variant rifles are vet-bringback guns. (Will Dabbs)**

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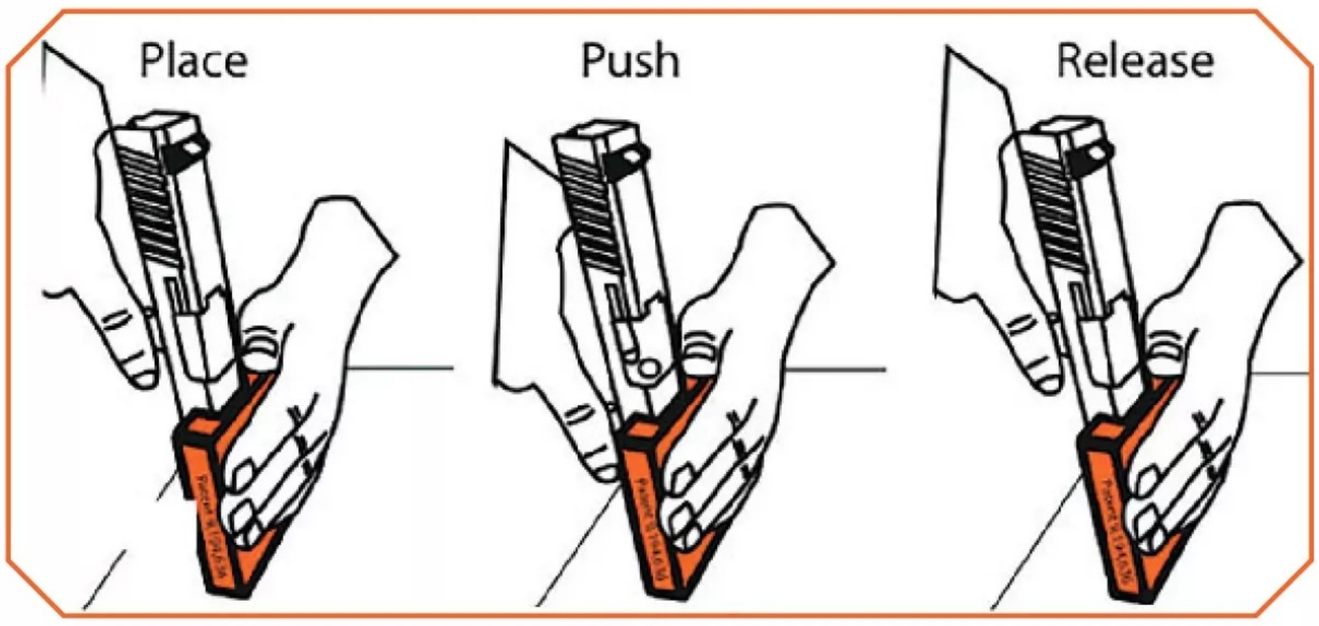


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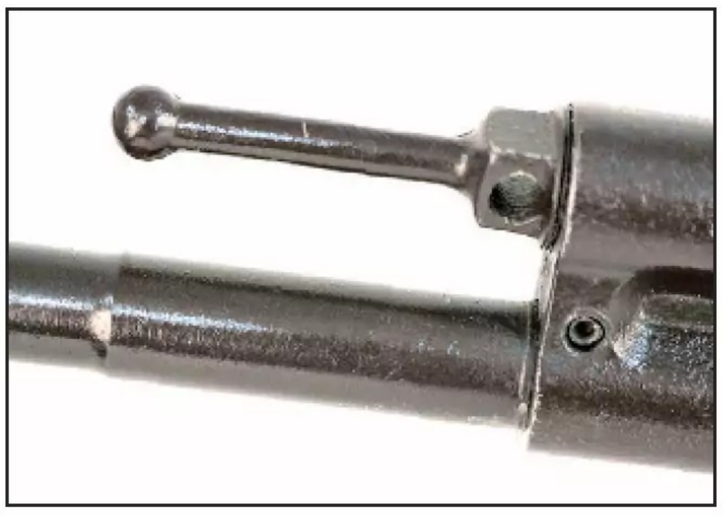
**The lever is the safety. The crossbolt pushbutton is the fire selector. (Will Dabbs)**



**This weird appendage was included to allow multiple rifles to be stacked when not in use. (Will Dabbs)**

**The MP43-family of guns was designed from the outset to be cheap and easy to manufacture in quantity. (Will Dabbs)**

**The Russians claim that Mikhail Kalashnikov was not inspired by the MP43. I find that hard to believe. (Will Dabbs)**

**Even when compared to state-of-the-art modern fare, the MP43 is an exceptionally efficient combat weapon. (Will Dabbs)**

According to MachinegunPrice Guide.com, MP43-variant rifles were running around $11,000 apiece back in 2004, and *Firearms News* Editor-in-Chief, Vincent L. DeNiro, sold an amnesty-registered MP44 for $9,500 around 2001. Nowadays, a decent specimen will set you back closer to $42,000. A super nice unusual example might fetch nearly $60,000. A beater would be closer to $36,000.

## Practicalities

The MP43 is unique in the marketplace simply because nothing else shoots that weird 7.92x33mm kurz ammunition. The enterprising reloader can build his own using .308 brass, but that is a fairly advanced undertaking. In years past, ammo availability was a significant aspect of collecting these old vintage guns. Unlike those who accumulate decorative figurines, autographed baseballs, or oil paintings, most folks who collect exotic firearms want to exercise them, at least a little bit. However, nowadays the novelty and subsequent astronomical prices of these old guns has overcome the natural desire to really wring them out.

Once you do press that trigger, however, it becomes apparent what all the fuss was about. The MP43 cycles at a comatose 550 rpm and is simply great fun to shoot. The design holds its own with much more modern fare.

For decades, Prvi Partizan was the primary source for new-made 7.92x33mm ammunition. Made in Serbia, Prvi Partizan ammo was of good quality and available. However, as of the summer of 2025, the President of Serbia has halted ammunition exports. That has driven the price up on Prvi Partizan 7.92x33mm ammo to above a dollar a round.

The one bright spot is the new-made MP44 from DK Production Group based in Kentucky. These modern semi-auto MP44 replicas are indeed things of beauty. Chambered in the original 7.92x33mm kurz, the MSRP on these guns is a whopping $6,200. However,

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**By definition, all of these guns are at least 80 years old. Most of them have astronomical round counts. It is actually amazing they have held up as well as they have. (Will Dabbs)**

**With each passing year, spare parts get tougher and tougher to find. (Will Dabbs)**

as of this writing they are sold out. There is a waiting list. As more of these guns enter the marketplace, however, the demand for 7.92x33mm ammo will obviously increase. It'll no doubt cost a fortune, but I suspect somebody will tool up to make that stuff eventually.

## Ruminations

The MP43 is heavy, and the forearm gets hot fast on rapid fire. Original spare parts are almost impossible to source, and the gun fires an obscure round that, for the time being at least, nobody really mass produces. However, these old vintage Sturmgewehrs still command an insane premium. That's because this really was the world's first assault rifle. Clutching one of these antique machineguns is like touching a little history. FN

| MP43 ASSAULT RIFLE | |
|---|---|
| **Caliber:** | 7.92 Kurtz (7.92x33mm) |
| **Weight:** | 11 lbs. |
| **Operation:** | Select-fire |
| **Cyclic Rate:** | 550 rpm |
| **Barrel Length:** | 16 in. |
| **Overall Length:** | 37 in. |
| **Sights:** | Front: hooded barley corn, Rear: tangent notch |
| **Value (U.S. Transferable):** | $36,000 – $60,000+ |

**Few martial weapons pack the sort of historical gravitas of the MP43 assault rifle. (Will Dabbs)**

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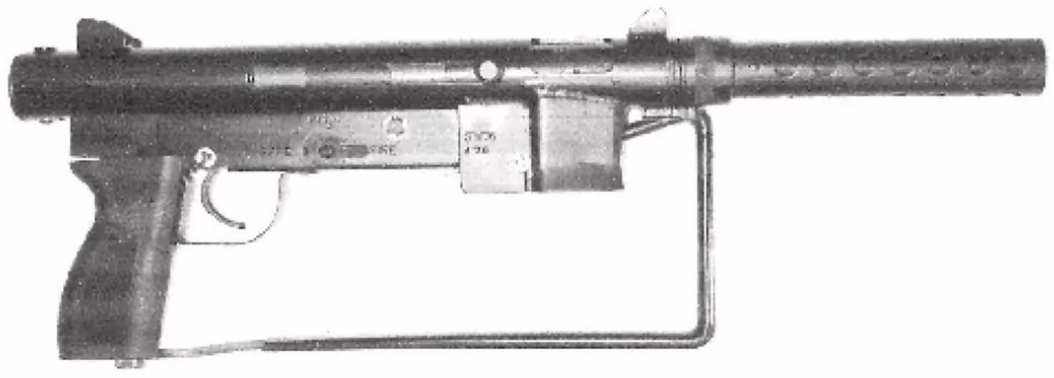

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The Österreichische-Repetier-Gewehr M.88-90 served the Austro-Hungarian army from 1890 through the end of the Great War.

# M.88-90 MANNLICHER RIFLE

## DAS ÖSTERREICHISCHE-REPETIER-GEWEHR M.88-90

### The First Smokeless Powder Military Repeating Rifle!

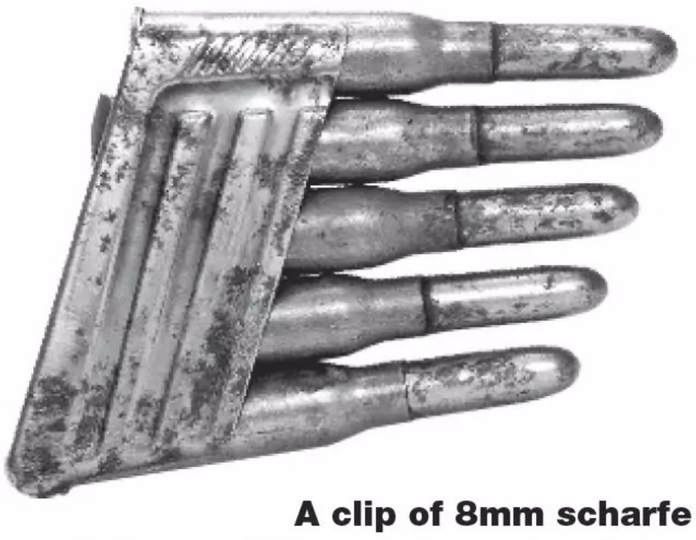
Photos by James Walters unless otherwise indicated

The most successful series of straight pull bolt action military rifles in history were invented by Ferdinand von Mannlicher (1848–1904), one of the world's truly great weapons designers. Mannlicher was an engineer who had become fascinated with firearms while visiting the 1876 World Exposition in Philadelphia. Upon returning to Austria, he devoted his talents to firearms development and his work soon eventually attracted the attention of the Hapsburg empire's premier arms manufacturer, the Österreichische Waffenfabrik Gesellschaft of Steyr. It was his designs that were responsible for their becoming one of the world's foremost producers of military small arms.

Mannlicher began work on a bolt action repeating rifle around 1880. Early on he decided to concentrate on the straight pull design as he felt this system provided the soldier the greatest firepower potential with the least amount of physical effort.

However, his lasting fame was to come from the magazine system that even today carries his name—the Mannlicher en bloc magazine. This revolutionary system consisted of a magazine located below the action of the rifle which was charged with prefilled metal clips holding five cartridges that, in effect, became part of the magazine until the cartridges were all fired. When empty, the clip fell out of a hole in the bottom of the magazine housing allowing a loaded clip to be inserted.

In 1885, the Austro-Hungarian army announced trials to find a repeating rifle and Mannlicher's



A clip of 8mm scharfe Patronen M.88-90. Note the finger grooves that enabled a soldier to feel the top of the clip in the dark.

A close up of the M.88-90's receiver shows the short, straight bolt handle, large magazine housing. The catch on the rear of the housing was for releasing a loaded clip from the magazine.

The M.88-90 with the bolt open and a clip of cartridges in position to be loaded into the magazine.

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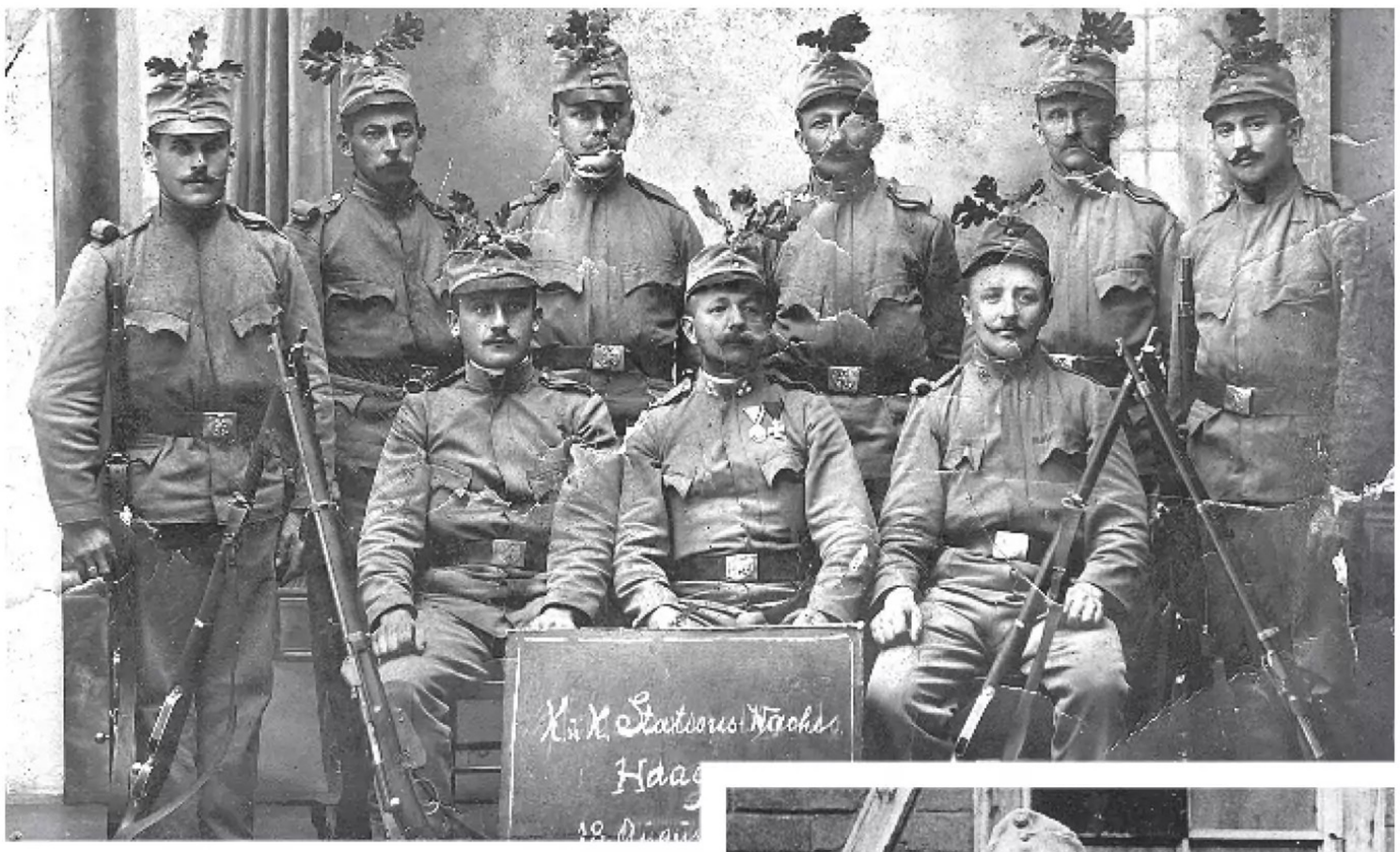
**The bolt used on the M.86, M.88 and M.88-90 Mannlichers was a rather long, non-rotating design. Note the short bolt handle, hinged locking wedge on the bottom of the bolt body and the long extractor.**



**1914. WWI Austro-Hungarian soldiers armed with Gewehre M.88-90.**

entry, the Repetier-Gewehr-Österreichische Vorlage M.85 proved promising enough that is was approved for extended troop trials. The next year, a slightly modified version was adopted as the Österreichische Infanterie-Repetier-Gewehr M.86, a straight-pull bolt-action rifle using the Mannlicher en bloc five-round clip loaded magazine and chambered for the black powder 11mm scharfe Patrone M.86.

The Gewehr M.86 utilized a long, two-piece bolt in which the rear section, containing the bolt handle and firing mechanism, moves in and out of the rear of the bolt body. As it is pushed forward, the bolt picks up and chambered a round and cocked the firing mechanism while inclined ribs on its sides hinged a wedge on the rear of the cylindrical bolt body down to lock securely against a shoulder in the receiver. When the bolt handle is pulled to the rear the ribs pull the locking wedge up, permitting the entire bolt to move backwards, extracting and ejecting the empty cartridge. A long spring extractor provided tension to keep an unlocked bolt in place and a pivoting safety lever at the rear of the bolt could be applied whether the firing mechanism was cocked or

**The quadrant rear sight. Range markings on the left were for the regular sights while those on the right were for use with the long-range volley sight.**

**Gewehre M88.90 armed Czech soldiers in Austrian service.**

## SPECIFICATION
## ÖSTERREICHISCHE-REPETIER-GEWEHR M.88-90

| | |
|---|---|
| **Caliber:** | 8mm scharfe Patrone M.88-90 |
| **Overall Length:** | 50.4 in. |
| **Barrel Length:** | 30 in. |
| **Weight:** | 9.7 lbs. |
| **Magazine:** | 5 shot, Mannlicher style clip |
| **Sights:** | Front: blade<br>Rear: V notch adj. by quadrant from 400 to 1800 schritt |
| **Bayonet:** | 9.84 in. single edged knife-style |

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**1915. An Austrian soldier shares his rations with a Serbian girl. Note the laced-up handguard on his rifle.**

**Turn of the century Manchu troops armed with Gewehre M.88-90.**

**1922. A Greek military policeman armed with a Mannlicher M.88-90 and plenty of ammo.**

not. While it provided less locking strength and initial extraction than some turn bolt designs, it was more than sufficient for the black powder cartridges then in use.

Combined with his clip loaded magazine, Mannlicher's straight-pull bolt action system provided the individual infantryman with an unparalleled rate of firepower. The army commission was quite pleased with Mannlicher's M.86 and Steyr received a contract to manufacture 5,500 rifles for field trials.

While Mannlicher's rifle easily outclassed tubular magazine rifles then in use, such as the German Gewehr 71/84 Mauser and the French Modéle 1878 Kropatschek, it was made obsolete the very year it was adopted by the French introduction of the smokeless powder, small bore 8mm Balle M cartridge and the Modéle 1886 "Lebel" rifle. But the combination of Mannlicher 's magazine system and smokeless propellant were to start an arms race that saw all the major powers rushing to develop a small bore, smokeless powder repeating rifle for their armies. Herr Mannlicher entered into this competition with great enthusiasm.

Within two years, he had adapted the Gewehr M.86 rifle to the small-bore 8mm scharfe Patrone M.88 cartridge. This was based upon a rimmed, bottlenecked case 50mm long loaded with a round nosed, full metal jacketed (FMJ) bullet weighing 244 grains, a charge of 62 grains of compressed black powder propelled it to a velocity of 1,750 feet per second (fps). The only changes that were required to update the rifles were a new barrel, magazine housing and sights.

The resulting rifle, known as the Österreichische-Repetier-Gewehr M.88, was in service for less than two years before the Austrians developed a semi-smokeless propellant. The resulting 8mm scharfe Patrone M.88-90 used a case 2mm longer with the same bullet at a muzzle velocity of approximately 1,950 fps.[1]

Gewehr M.88 rifles were modified for the new cartridge by the simple expedient of attaching a plate with new sight graduations to the sight base and renaming them the Österreichische-Repetier-Gewehr M.88-90. [NOTE: rifles produced after 1890 had their rear sights calibrated for the M.88-90 cartridge and were sometimes referred to as Repetier-Gewehr M.90.]

Sights consisted of a blade front and a V-notch rear adjustable by quadrant from 400 to 1,800 schritt[2] As was common on military rifles of that era, M.88 and M.88-80 rifles had an extension on the rear sight that was slid out and used with an auxiliary front sight on the right side of the middle barrel band that was meant for long range volley fire. A task that was preempted soon afterwards by the machine gun.

Besides being adopted by the Austro Hungarians, before WWI, M.88 and M.88 90 rifles were bought

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**Pre-WWI Bulgarian troops training with Gewehre M.88-90.**

**Salonika 1917. Bulgarian troops firing at Allied aircraft.**

**1945. An elderly member of the Volkssturm examines an equally elderly Gewehr M.88-90 he has been issued.**

in large numbers by Bulgaria, Greece, China, Siam and Chile.

These early Mannlichers were the first small bore military rifles to see actual combat service when they played a pivotal role in the Chilean Civil War of 1891. In 1889, the Chilean government (a perennial customer of Steyr's), then under the control of the dictator Balmaceda, purchased 12,000 M.88 rifles and ammunition from the Belgian arms dealer Auguste Schriever. In a twist of fate, soon after their arrival in Chile the entire consignment was captured by the rebel (Congressional) forces. Reportedly their rapid fire and long-range effectiveness struck terror into the dictator's troops at the Battle of Concon, causing them to flee the field in panic. A short time later, Mannlicher-armed Congressional forces routed Balmaceda's at the Battle of Placilla, resulting in his downfall.[3]

Unfortunately for the Austro-Hungarians, developments in other countries quickly made the Gewehr M.88-90 obsolete. Desiring a rifle with a stronger action, improved extraction, and firing a more ballistically impressive cartridge they once again called upon Herr Ferdinand. By 1894, he had produced a new, and much stronger, straight pull design— but that is story for another issue.

Gewehre M.88 and M.88-90 saw wide use during the First Italo-Abyssinian

**Test firing was performed from an impromptu bench rest at 100 yards.**

# RUBEN MENDIOLA

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War (1895–1896), First and Second Balkan Wars (1912–1913), WWI, the Russian Civil War, Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the various conflicts that plagued the Balkans and eastern Europe throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Numbers were still in service during WWII with Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, China, Romania, Ethiopia, Greece and the German Volkssturm.[4]

## Test Firing the M.88-90 Mannlicher

My good friend, and owner of innumerable, bolt action military rifles, John Wall kindly provided me with a M.88-90 rifle to photograph and test fire. It bore the OEWG markings of the Steyr factory, an 1892 manufacture date and was in such nice condition that I doubt it had ever been issued. A supply of custom made 8mm scharfe Patrone M.90 cartridges were provided by the late Bob Shell. Shell was a contributor to this magazine under its original name, *Shotgun News*, for many years.

My brother Vincent and I test fired the M.88-90 on my gun club's 100-yard range. While the bolt required a hefty pull to open and shove to close, loading with Mannlicher s charger was fast and fumble free. IMHO, much superior to the highly vaunted Mauser charger loaded magazine.

With its lowest sight setting of 400 schritt, it took several rounds to figure out the necessary Kentucky elevation but once we had the measure of that, we were able to produce nicely centered groups running from 3.25 to 4.0 inches. Considering the rather coarse sighting arrangement, I found this more than acceptable. Running five rounds of Bob's reloads across my Chrony chronograph gave an average velocity of 1,916 fps.

All in all, I was suitable impressed with Herr Ferdinand's M.88-90 rifle. It was vastly superior to any of the military repeating rifles that came before it—and soldiered on in parts of the world until 1945. Not too shabby a reputation, no matter how you look at it.

It has been said that many of Mannlicher's ideas were ahead of his time and that military conservatism, and inability of the technology of the time to keep up with him, prevented him from becoming as well-known as his contemporaries such as John Moses Browning and Paul Mauser. FN

**All in all, I was suitable impressed with Herr Ferdinand's M.88-90 rifle.**

1 Because of their generous chamber tolerances M.88-90 rifles could fire the later 8mm scharfe Patrone M.93.
2 Schritt was an early Germanic measurement equaling 0.75 meters
3 www.gunboards.com/threads/mannlicher-m1886-chile.1180686/
4 Copies of the M.88 were produced at the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai from 1891 to 1895.

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# MOUNTAIN MARITIME

Fair days or foul…the Weatherby 307 Alpine CT is built for "getting out there!" (Rikk Rambo)

## Rambo Draws "First Blood" With Major Injury During Hunt – A Lesson in Survival

**By Rikk Rambo**

### Prologue: 'Bergs, Bear, Blood, and a Tier-1 Weatherby Rifle

There is nothing safe, easy, or certain when hunting solo in Alaska…and while this truism has never been lost on me in over two decades of backcountry adventures in the 49th state, it especially rang true as I sat, alone, on a remote, lonely beach on Prince William Sound losing an obscene amount of blood through a gaping leg wound and blocked from returning to my boat by a mile-long ice flow choked with icebergs as large as pickup trucks.

The .300 Winchester Magnum Weatherby 307 Alpine CT leaning against my Eberlestock pack had accomplished *its* mission, as readily evidenced by the large black bear boar dead at my feet. Now it was time to complete *mine*… and it was multifaceted: Don't bleed out, lug that bruin back to an inflatable raft, and safely navigate through formidable tide-driven ice flows back to my boat.

The Weatherby 307 Alpine CT and its Trijicon TR22-2G AccuPoint scope had survived two weeks of challenging subarctic coastal climatic conditions…now I had to follow their lead.

### Good Things Comes to Those That Wait: The Weatherby 307 Alpine CT!

My first memory of a Weatherby rifle was generated from…of all things…a bank advertisement. It was the late 1970's and I was stumbling through adolescence and spending an inordinate amount of time dreaming about

# PURPOSED, TESTED:

## THE WEATHERBY 307 ALPINE CT CRUSHES AN ALASKA OFFSHORE BLACK BEAR HUNT

rifles that were way outside of my paygrade… like the legendary Weatherby Mark V.

It was undeniable… I was suffering from what my good 'ol dad called "champagne taste on a beer income." While I had never actually sampled either of those adult beverages at that tender age, I had a good idea of what he was trying to impart by comparing the MSRP of a new, top-shelf Weatherby Mark V to that of my primary adolescent long-arm…a well-used Crossman Model 766 "American Classic" .177 caliber air rifle.

The ad that gave me temporary (but fleeting) hope was placed by a Colorado-based bank in *Guns & Ammo* magazine that promised a brand-spanking new Weatherby bolt-action masterpiece to anyone who opened a savings account with their establishment, how much cash deposited would determine if accessories came with the rifle – I wanted the "Hunters Special Package."

**Trouble…Right around the corner: an Iceberg/Ice-flow spawning glacier in Prince William Sound. (Rikk Rambo)**

**◄ *"Hey Dad... can I open up a $2,815-large savings account in Colorado? Dad? Hello?"***

**► Executive Editor of *Firearms News*, David Fortier, shooting a new rifle in the Weatherby line while Hunting Field Editor, Rikk Rambo, gets familiar with the Alpine aided by CEO Adam Weatherby. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

However, my grass-cutting/pool-cleaning allowance fell pathetically short of passing muster…tragically dashing any dreams of getting my mitts on a fine Weatherby rifle… AT LEAST UNTIL THE SPRING OF 2025!

It took a minute, but finally, over four decades later, the opportunity to carry a Weatherby rifle into the field became a reality. While attending a meeting and range session at the Outdoor Sportsman Group Editorial Roundtable with Weatherby's traditionally grounded, but forward-thinking team in late-summer 2024, I was introduced to their new magnum-caliber, surprisingly lightweight Model 307 Alpine CT. Its accuracy, ergonomics, and alpine-light engineering made my decision to carry it into the challenging maritime environment of Prince William Sound for the 2025 spring black bear hunt an easy one. Not every rifle is an exact fit for the rigors of hunting Alaska's coastal waters, rocky shorelines, and mountainous terrain, but I had high hopes for the Alpine CT.

Coastal black bear hunting involves several mobility challenges that make a lightweight rifle invaluable. These include clamoring through steep, treacherous terrain sometimes blanketed in belly-button deep snow, climbing a saltwater vessel's bow ladder onto/off of extremely tricky coastline, or lowering yourself from your boat's gunwales onto an inflatable raft in ornery seas. The cherry on this sometimes difficult to eat cake is finding a rifle that satisfies not only the requirement of being lightweight, but also capable of chambering an adequately powered cartridge, achieving consistent accuracy, and having a stock, action,

**Coastal bear hunting is no joke...and neither is climbing through some of the roughest bush-country in North America. Boatmate Katherine (AKA: K-Bar) rocking it! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Getting there (i.e. off the boat and onto the beach) is half the fun...especially with a light weight rifle like the Alpine CT! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The stock, manufactured by Peak 44, features an effective 3D Hex recoil pad, negative comb, and vertical grip. (Weatherby)**

▲ **This bipod adapter is down with affixing any Spartan Precision Equipment bipod or tripod in their arsenal to your rifle (JavelinBipod.com). (Rikk Rambo)**

◄ **Everyone wants to get their "paws" on it: The Alpine CT's Peak 44 "Bastion" carbon fiber stock. (Rikk Rambo)**

**The Alpine CT features a Trigger Tech Field model which can be adjusted from 2.5 to five pounds. It is incredibly smooth. (Weatherby)**

and finish that can stand up to the saltwater environment and physical beatdown associated with maritime hunting.

### The Alpine 307 Was My Huckleberry for This Year's Hunt…and Here's Why

The rifle's stock is representative of the Alpine CT's overall build… light, highly ergonomic, and engineered for serious, real-world business. Designed and fabricated by Peak 44, the stock sports a recoil-murdering 3D Hex recoil pad, a negative comb, vertical grip, carbon-bedding block, and three swivel studs (two of which are in the front for lovers of all things bipod-ish). Its carbon fiber construction gifts shooters with a pleasing heft of only 24 ounces and its nine-lug anchoring system (magnum action model) insures it isn't going anywhere…even with the stoutest of loads or criminally abusive handling. While Peak 44 "Bastion" stocks are available in a variety of camouflage pallets (and Carbide Black), the 307 Alpine CT's pattern is titled "WYO Brown and Backpack Brushed Sponge Pattern Accents." First off, I'd like to thank whoever the culprit was at Peak 44 that secretly wanted to throw a monkey-wrench into my word count for this article. Having said that, I'd also like to praise them for a camo pattern that will fit into almost any environment short of a "rave" or gender-reveal party. I've fielded an inordinate number of bolt action rifles during my lifespan, but the Peak-44 stock makes the Alpine CT one of the fastest pointing, ergonomic, and most pleasing magnum-action longarms I've ever shouldered. Now let's talk about the action, starting with its heart and soul…the Trigger Tech trigger.

The Trigger Tech model native to the Alpine CT is their "Field" model and capable of adjustments from 2.5 to five pounds. The Weatherby I tested averaged a 3.25-pound press…strike that…make that a 3.25-pound press with no burrs, trigger-creep, or any other distractions…just a crisp, laser-precise breakover with no surprises. Now, let's travel over to the bolt, which you are going to adore for several reasons…the first of these being ease of disassembly.

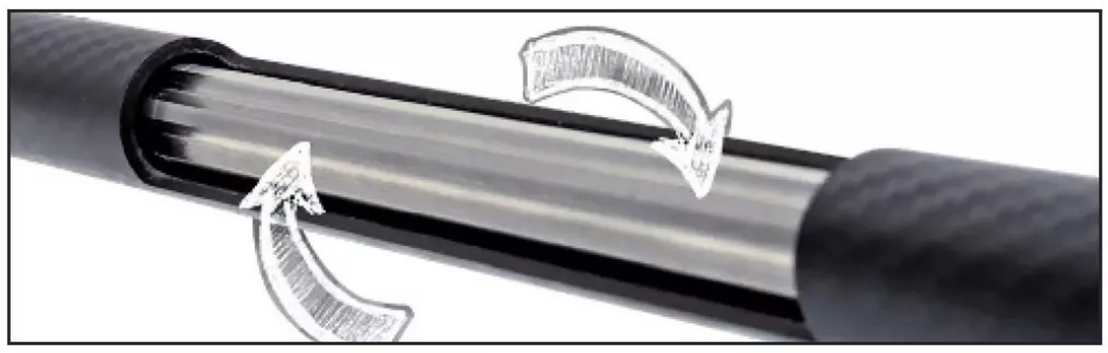
If you've ever had to utilize the "Remington 700 Piggy-Bank Robbery" method to disassemble a rifle bolt through the field expedient use of a dime or a penny (Google or YouTube it and trust me…it works, but there's no fun in it), you're going to love the 307 Alpine CT's action! The bolt not only features the utilitarian wonderment that is its ability to be taken apart without a single tool (or form of U.S. currency) in play, but also rocks an M16 style extractor. This tried-and-true style of extractor maintains a reputation for avoiding malfunctions and is a must for rifles that must perform to the highest standards when

**Strategic weight-saving: The Alpine CT's fluted, toolless take-down bolt and semi-skeletonized bolt-handle. (Rikk Rambo)**

hunting (or defending against) bear or other potentially dangerous big game. The Alpine CT's bolt also exhibits weight-saving features in the form of its fluted bolt and skeletonized (but not overly-so) bolt handle.

The Alpine CT's lightweight heft (6.3 pounds for our .300 WinMag test model) is thanks to the use of carbon fiber technology infused in both its stock and barrel. The weight reduction force multiplier to the rifle's Peak 44 stock is its BSF Barrels carbon fiber jacketed barrel. BSF's manufacturing process begins with a precision-turned, match-grade 416R stainless steel barrel. This barrel is then encased in a roll-wrapped carbon fiber sleeve loaded under tension to create a significant air gap between the match grade stainless steel barrel and the surrounding carbon fitting. What this means to non-metallurgists and Physics 101 dropouts like you, and I, is that the 307 Alpine CT rocks a barrel that cools at a much faster rate than similar barrels thanks to increased air circulation. The Alpine CT's BSF barrel also incorporates design features that absorb shock, mitigate adverse barrel harmonics, and allow its carbon fiber sleeve to expand and contract, precluding delamination or other potentially catastrophic structural anomalies.

If you've ever been excited about placing a muzzle brake onto a rifle only to be thwarted (at least temporarily) by the need to install crush-washers or shims to ensure fit and proper alignment, the Accubrake DST will reignite your faith in humanity…and also forward-thinking engineering. This side-ported brake features a timing nut that will allow you to align and cinch the muzzle brake down with minimal effort and the utterance of words that probably wouldn't go over well at all with fellow parishioners in the aftermath of your kindergartener's "What did daddy teach you this week"—themed Sunday school story-telling time assignment.



**▲ A precision-turned, match-grade 416R stainless steel barrel. This barrel is then encased in a roll-wrapped carbon fiber sleeve, which creates a significant air gap that cools at a much faster rate than similar barrels due to increased air circulation. (Weatherby)**

**► The "Wouldn't Want to Be You" end of the Alpine CT with thread protecting muzzle-cap installed, and lightweight Spartan "Pro Hunt" bipod. (Rikk Rambo)**

The final stop on our tour of the 307 Alpine CT is the factory-installed Peak 44 Picatinny optic rail. Another Alpine 307 perc and one less accessory a shooter has to purchase and install, making it nearly field-ready from the box.

### The Perfect Alaska Rifle Scope: Trijicon's 2.5-10x TR22-2G AccuPoint

I've written about the TR22-2G's "last frontier" exploits in previous articles, and while I won't regale you with a story

**Take a brake (or not)! The Accubrake DST is easy to install or remove! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The Peak 44 Picatinny optic rail is factory installed. (Weatherby)**

**The Trijicon AccuPoint TR22-2G after doing what it does best: SMITING! (Rikk Rambo)**

you may have already heard, I will tell newcomers that this phenomenal rifle scope saved my bacon in the dark of night during a danger-close encounter with a predatory black bear that stalked me during a solo Alaska-range moose hunt several years ago. The tritium reticle allowed me to accurately engage the bear with my Kimber .375 H&H Magnum Talkeetna at approximately 15 to 20 feet, in pitch-black conditions illuminated only by a Petzl headlamp, and lived to tell the story. AccuPoint rifle scopes give a shooter the ability to simply snap the front objective scope cap down (while leaving the rear eyepiece cap open), keep both eyes open, and turn a variable power rifle scope into a DANGER CLOSE 'reflex' sight with a beautifully glowing red, green, or amber reticle.

The TR22-2G AccuPoint rocks clear glass and a dual-illumination reticle (tritium and fiber-optics) that functions nearly perfectly in both bright daylight or murky twilight conditions. The light-gathering characteristics of its 56mm front objective lens is phenomenal and the scope's weatherproof, ruggedized body is built to take a smackdown from both adverse climatic conditions and blunt-force trauma.

These attributes made my TR22-2G a perfect optic choice for hunting the dreary, rainy, and foggy mountains and beaches of coastal Alaska.

### Handling Characteristics, Range Performance, and Deadly Sin #'s 4 & 5!

If one day you found that the deadly sin of envy (and maybe a tinge of lust) was as prevalent at your local shooting range as they were at your local Cadillac dealership or a big-city "gentleman's club," you could place the blame squarely on the stage presence of the Weatherby 307 Alpine CT. Hungry eyes abounded after the Alpine CT was unleashed from its carrycase and range-testing was severely delayed due to the instant fan-base it developed with the rifle shooters occupying the other benches up and down the line!

Once the adoring fans and paparazzi returned to their business, the Alpine CT was finally able to stretch its legs to the 100- and 300-yard lines. When the .300 Winchester Magnum thunderstorm commenced, one thing was blazingly clear: the folks at Trigger Tech know what they're doing. The Alpine CT's trigger, at factory settings, was perfect for back-country work and exhibited absolutely no "creep" or burrs when pressed. Simply put, once my finger started the press, there were no distracting scrapes or "nano-grinds" … just a clean, short, and unerringly consistent breakover.

Range-day was a far cry from the majority of weather a hunting rifle will experience in the 49th, with 70-degree temperatures, a bright glowing ball in the sky that someone reminded me was "the sun," and wind speeds were nil. All five-shot groups were shot from a solid bench rest.

The rounds sent downrange were the following:

- Hornady 180-grain SST Superformance
- Hornady 200 grain ELD-X Precision Hunter
- Federal Power-Shok 180-grain soft points

The load I chose for the black bear hunt was the Hornady 180-grain SST Superformance due to its 3,130-fps muzzle velocity and projectile-weight retention characteristics. The Superformance cartridge's best performance at 100 yards was a .864-inch group and its average was .95 of an inch. At the 300-yard mark, it scored a bestie of 2.67 inches accompanied by a 2.90-inch average group.

The 200-grain Precision Hunter ELD-X and Federal Power-Shok 180-grain soft-point cartridges followed, with the Precision Hunter punching .81 of an inch and impressive 2.34-inch "besties" at the 100- and 300-yard lines, respectively. The average for this Hornady powerhouse at 100 and 300 yards, respectively, was .90 of an inch and 2.766 inches. The tried-and-true Federal Power-Shok knocked out 1.21-inch and 2.71-inch best groupings 100 and 300 yards.

◀ **Hornady's Superformance SST's were the chosen ones for the 2025 'bar hunt' with their 100-yard .864 top-group! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Hornady's hyper-accurate Precision Hunter ELD-X bestie-group at 300 yards. (Rikk Rambo)**

**Tried and true...all the way to the 300-yard marker...courtesy of Federal Power-Shoks! (Rikk Rambo)**

Its group average at those ranges were 1.31 inches and 3.17 inches, respectively.

### The Spot, the Stalk, the Shot, the Track…and a Good 'Ol Fashion Prison Shanking!

Black bear hunting from a saltwater boat can be exciting when challenged with big seas, monstrous tides, horrific weather, hazardous iceberg packs, and methed-up rogue commercial fishermen illegally setting nets in the dark of night…but that's a story for another time!

Conversely, it can also be tedious and demand hour upon hour of glassing beaches and mountainsides for elusive bruins. When you consider the amount of money hunters spend on camouflage clothing, it seems silly, bordering on absurd, to think that a beefy, 400-plus-pound bear sporting an ink-black coat could blend into its surroundings better than commercially available, state-of-the-art, digitally blended and color-coded outerwear. Ursus Americanus (the North American Black Bear), without fail, will prove you wrong on that theory…unless they are supping luxuriously, in the open, on newly sprouted spring greens and shellfish on a remote beach in northern Prince William Sound.

I spotted my bear, engaged in those very pursuits, while dodging intermittent icebergs and ice-flows generated by the calving of a massive glacier several miles from my vessels travels in the protected waters of a glacial fiord. I cut the power on my boat, a 25-foot New Zealand-built Stabicraft affectionately named the "Red Menace," and kept a weather-eye on the bear for a generous portion of time to confirm it wasn't a sow with cubs.

After I identified features that are common to an adult boar (blocky head, small ears, and bulked up musculature reminiscent of an oiled-up body-building bro at the gym on "bi's and tri's day"), mission planning began. I evaluated the beach and surrounding terrain I would have to navigate and ultimately chose a landing site for my inflatable raft blocked from the bruin's view by a small peninsula densely covered with spruce trees. I would have to cross a

**WEATHERBY 307 ALPINE CT RIFLE: .300 WINCHESTER MAGNUM**

| Manufacturer | Weight (grains) | Bullet Type | Velocity (fps) | Energy (ft-lbs.) | Average / Best (in.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **100 YARDS — THREE FIVE-SHOT GROUPS** | | | | | |
| Hornady Superformance | 180 | SST | 2,926 | 3,422 | 0.95 / 0.86 |
| Hornady Precision Hunter | 200 | ELD-X | 2,707 | 2,587 | 0.90 / 0.81 |
| Federal Power-Shok | 180 | JSP | 2,746 | 3,013 | 1.31 / 1.21 |
| **300 YARDS — THREE FIVE-SHOT GROUPS** | | | | | |
| Hornady Superformance | 180 | SST | 2,546 | 2,591 | 2.90 / 2.67 |
| Hornady Precision Hunter | 200 | ELD-X | 2,414 | 2,587 | 2.77 / 2.34 |
| Federal Power-Shok | 180 | JSP | 2,346 | 2,200 | 3.17 / 2.71 |

All groups shot from a solid bench-rest position utilizing a Trijicon 2.5-10x30 TR22-2G rifle scope with no adverse wind conditions.

**Maritime bear hunting requires multi-tasking…and you have to be able to transition from Boat Captain to Hunter-Gatherer muy rapido! (Rikk Rambo)**

**"Forget Waldo…where's Rambo?" Big country begins 20 yards from the beach! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The "Red Menace" ready to get underway! (Rikk Rambo)**

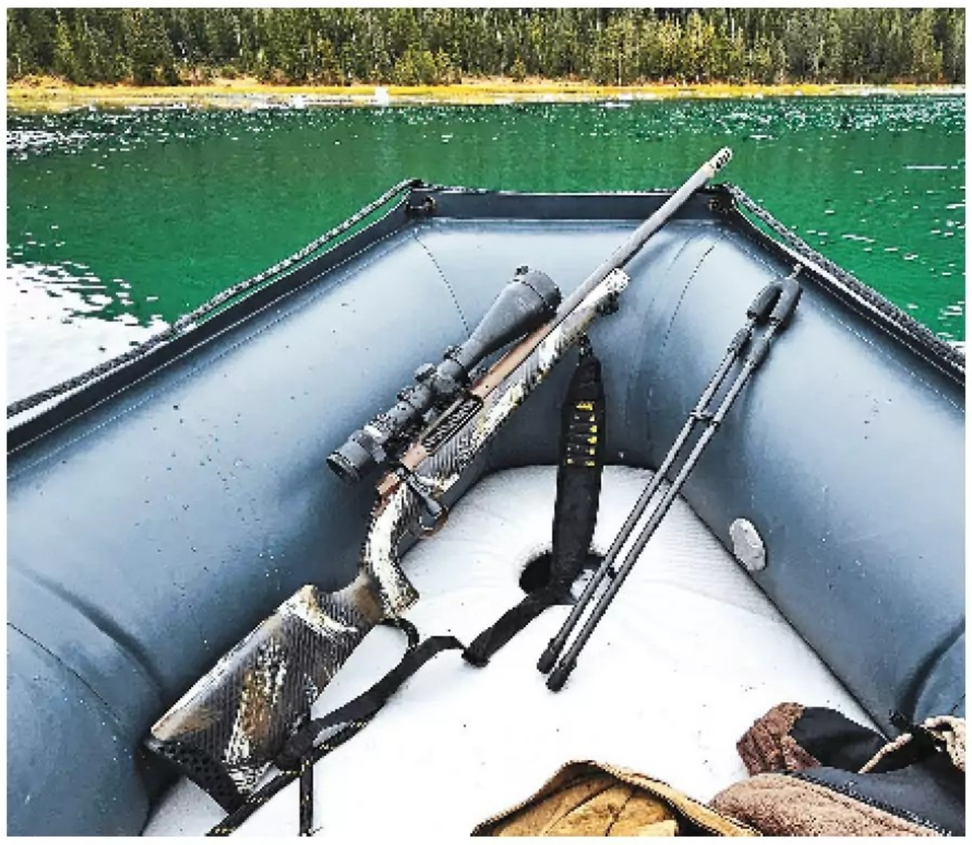
small but rapidly moving creek that spilled into the fiord on foot, but there was no getting around my intended route due to an incoming super-tide, terrain limitations, and considerations related to securing my inflatable well above the tideline. Once the river was behind me, it would be a quiet and straight-forward stalk through the edge of the previously mentioned stand of spruce and then a slow, methodical stalk through coastal grass and ancient, bone-white dead-stand trees.

When mission planning was complete, Mike, my boat-mate and hunting partner, assisted me in launching the Red Menace's Triton inflatable. Mike (call sign: Avalanche) made a previous appearance in a *Firearms News* article (October 2023; Issue #19) and served as the primary "bear go-getter" during that year's black bear hunt. Mike's unchecked aggression would have to be dialed down a notch today, however, as he would be remaining on the boat due to the navigational hazards presented by the previously mentioned ice-flows and pickup truck sized rogue icebergs.

The several hundred-yard row to shore was silent and uneventful, and securing my Triton inflatable well above tide-line was a breeze. Nature abhors a vacuum, however, and I faced my first challenge: crossing a swiftly moving river with deep holes and eddies custom-made for drowning a short-legged solo hunter attempting to schlep his rifle and pack quickly but quietly to its opposite shore. As soon as I stepped into the creek, smooth, algae-covered rocks made every attempt to send me sprawling towards disaster as I navigated its rapids-strewn, swift moving waters. It is exactly at moments like this that outfitting yourself with the best gear you can get your hands on pays off. Thanks to the tread pattern and design of my recently acquired Sitka Gear Gore-Tex laminate VentLite boots, my fording went…I was going to say "swimmingly" … but will instead go with "effortlessly." I managed to maintain steady footing for the duration of the crossing, and my unsuspecting bear was now a mere 200 yards away.

Remember when I said that nature abhors a vacuum? In this case, my successful river crossing demanded a blood sacrifice to even things out, and that sacrifice was heartbreaking. My trusty carbon-fiber/silicone composite Spartan Precision Equipment "Springbok" bipod that was a deal-breaker for a massive Yukon bull moose in September of 2024 had taken a tumble out of my pack. While demoralizing, after surveying the foliage and terrain that separated me from the boar, I observed my solid shooting platform savior…a flat-topped stump located near the location I planned to ambush the bear from. My decision was made…and I moved out as smoothly and quietly as could be managed through the thick, knee-deep coastal grass and sporadic dead-stand trees.

I crossed the tidal flats stealthily and the bear, now approximately 150 yards downrange, was unaware of my presence. I kneeled, mashed some foamies into my ears (safety first!), cautiously positioned the forend of the Alpine CT on the moss-covered stump, and settled my shoulder into its Peak 44 Bastion stock. I placed the bright-green reticle of the AccuPoint center-mass and just



**The Saturn "Triton," Alpine CT, and Spartan Precision "Springbok" bipod...geared up for a beach landing! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Landfall...time to secure the Triton, ready the Weatherby, and shoulder the Eberlestock "Just One!" (Rikk Rambo)**

behind the boar's shoulder and luck was on my side… the bruin was providing me with a near-perfect broadside shot and there was no rain, wind, or meddling downrange foliage to complicate the Hornady SST's ballistics.

I pressed the trigger, the 180-grain Hornady SST slammed into its mark, and the big bear's back legs gave out…but not for long. He immediately regained his footing and made a mad dash for the tree line and cover of its rainforest-thick foliage. Both black and brown bear can temporarily soak up a double lung shot and, in some instances, a heart strike, and still make you work to recover them. To preclude this, I worked the bolt and attempted to get back on scope. Much to my dismay, tall weeds that were previously inches away from both sides of the rifle's forearm were now completely tangled up in front of the AccuPoint's front objective, completing blocking the scope's field of view. Planning can only take you so far, and this was something I hadn't factored into my endgame. The powerful vertices kicked up by the violent gases exiting the muzzle brake had somehow blasted sideways and back, causing the foliage to swirl up and over the rifle's barrel. I quickly cleared them with a knife-edged sweep of my hand, but it was a futile gesture. The last I saw of my bear was it's big black keister disappearing into the trees…toute de suite.

Now, I had to go in after him solo…with no hope of emergency assistance from Mike. During the river-crossing and stalk, a massive flow of ice had blocked off my beach from the Red Menace and forced Mike to move the boat to a safe location nearly two miles away. But wait…there's more! They say that "bad things come in threes," and right on cue, problem child #2 reared its ugly head immediately after the ice flow moved in. The channel we previously tested on my handheld VHF marine-band handheld, before rafting away from my boat, had since been hijacked by a never-ending National Weather Service marine conditions broadcast. Communications with Mike and the Red Menace were officially off the table…but no bigs…because it's all part of the "Alaska Experience!" ™

Any bowhunter will tell you to give big game a bit of time to settle down after said game gets arrowed… especially those of the predatory variety, armed with buck knife-sized claws and Velociraptor-reminiscent teeth. The same rule goes for bear receiving a devastating hit with a modern firearm that don't die immediately in place. I slowly and quietly withdrew to the inflatable (found my Springbok bipod on the far side of the river…bonus!), then paddled along the shore to a beaching spot close to where I'd shot the bear. Now it was time to nut up, break some brush, and find that boar.

Bear often leave little or no discernible blood trail…no matter how hard they've been hit…and my boar was no exception to the rule. With the exception of blood spatter caused by that single Hornady SST to the chest, multiple grid-pattern searches were unsuccessful in identifying a blood trail or other tell-tale spoor. I was going

**A young bear that "got a pass" on last year's hunt! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Locked in! The Red Menace departing under the threat of heavy ice flows! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The FN510 Tactical: Effective defense against predators of the two-legged AND four-legged variety! (Rikk Rambo)**

**"In the thick of it..." (Rikk Rambo)**

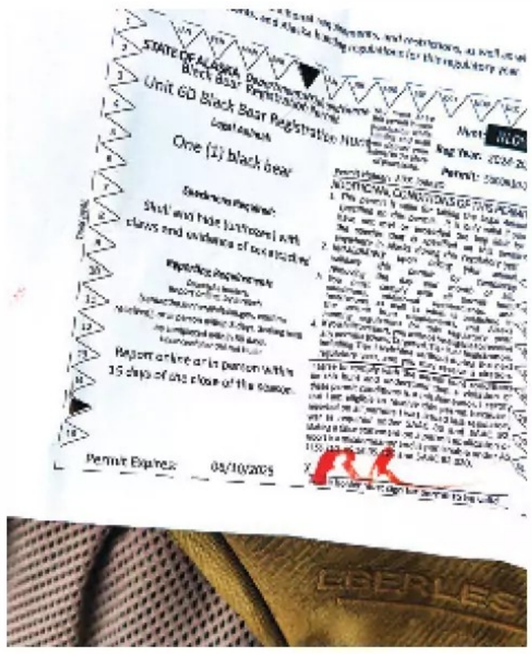
**Just the way we like 'em...big, blocky, mature, and "boar-ish!" (Rikk Rambo)**

to have to do this the old fashion way: take my time, slowly claw my way into the thick subarctic foliage, channel my inner Jim Bridger/Hugh Glass, and find him. The Weatherby was no good to me in the thick alder, so I shouldered it and transitioned to my 'go-to' Alaska EDC (everyday carry) handgun…an FN510 Tactical 10mm topped with a Leupold DeltaPoint Pro and stoked with a combination of 200-grain solid core Federal Premium dangerous-game rounds and Hornady "Handgun Hunter" 135-grain Mono-Flex cartridges...fifteen and one to be exact!

It didn't take long to find the bear…thanks to, of all things…a little HUMMINGBIRD buddy! I was smashing through brush, fighting skeeters, and trying to maintain my enthusiasm when a deeply pitched pulsing sound began

**The Razor APX...expertly wielded "Westside Story/Bernardo-Riff-Tony" style by my bruin! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Field expedient pressure dressing: The Pristine Ventures “Tag Bag” gamebag! (Rikk Rambo)**




**Normally, I sign my harvest ticket in the game’s blood… well-played, black bear (and Razor APX)…well played! (Rikk Rambo)**

**No one got away clean from my stabbiness…not even my business cards stowed in a front-pocket “Ridge” wallet! (Rikk Rambo)**

reverberating mere feet to my left. I turned with my FN510 at low ready and was surprised to find a little hummingbird giving me a good onceover from only a few feet off the tip of my nose! She flitted around my head for a bit, then disappeared…but the direction in which she caused me to face showcased a sizeable mound, approximately 25 feet away, that would provide me with a great vantage point to survey the surrounding terrain. I climbed to the top of the promontory, looked down on the opposite side, and there was the bear, prone and facing away in the fetal position. I immediately went guns-on and placed the DeltaPoint Pro’s reticle on the back of its skull…but there was no movement. I shouted, “*Hey Bear!*” and there was no reaction. I observed it carefully for several minutes and it appeared to be stone cold dead. While pointing in with my strong-hand, I launched a rock at the boar with my other and still nothing. Pistol at the ready, I made a cautious approach and gave it a boot in the caboose while yelling, “*Hey bear!*” but it was over…my bear was as dead as Julius Caesar…and also Bruce Springsteen’s career.

With the help of my longtime game-hauling companion, the Alaska Gear Company “Siglin Pulk” sled (proudly made in the 49th), I horsed the bear from the depression in which it died to a semi-dry, tundra-carpeted area where I could field dress it with little fear of meat contamination from dirt or muddy water.

**Keep it clean, people: All patched up thanks to the Red Menace’s Adventure Medical Kits “Trauma Kit 1.0!” (Rikk Rambo)**

## Not Out of the Woods Yet

THIS…is when the third “problem child” from our “Bad things come in threes” rule struck…and it was the Queen-Mother, “Winner-Winner, Chicken Dinner” doozy of suckiness. It was also potentially deadly.

**The Weatherby 307 Alpine CT is much easier to shoulder than other rifles of the same caliber due to its weight reduces features. (Rikk Rambo)**

In my defense, I have carved, cut, and sawed through thousands of pounds of moose, bear, caribou, Dall sheep, mountain goats, deer, elk, wild boar, muskox, and bison without ever inflicting even a single stitch-worthy cut upon my soft, supple, and tender hide. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end…and what better location to end my four-decade game processing winning streak than on a remote beach located over 65 ocean miles from even a small coastal village with no way to safely get back to my boat or communicate with my hunting brother?!?

Yup. I stabbed myself in the leg while skinning the bear's front paw under the rear-pad/ankle area. The irony of the situation was not lost on me as I sat there with an Outdoor Edge "Razor APX" buried dead center mass, all the way to my femur, approximately three inches above my knee. I was testing the Razor APX for the first time, and it had indeed proven to be ruthlessly efficient at making one of the most difficult cuts on a bear. The ease at which it rocketed through sinew, ligaments, and muscle was akin to the proverbial hot knife slicing through butter. Unfortunately, my follow-up was a bit slow, and the knife continued on its journey from the bear's paw deep into my thigh.

Let it be known henceforth that even the most skilled outdoorsmen sometimes screw the pooch...and after

**The 307 Alpine CT's other "one-shot bruin" ...but that's another story! (Rikk Rambo)**

# ALASKA-TOUGH GEAR FOR SPRING BEAR 2025

**The Benchmade "Raghorn," Outdoor Edge "Razor APX," and Sitka Gear "Ventlite GTX" boots (Gore-Tex uppers soaked in Rikk Rambo's blood not included). (Rikk Rambo)**

"Sweeney Todd-ing" myself in the leg, I was immediately aware of two things: My cat-like reflexes were apparently on vacation, and I was finally going to have the opportunity to capitalize on all of that military and law enforcement first-aid training I'd received over the years!

I didn't panic…although I did say a word that probably made my good 'ol mom's ears ring over 4,000 miles away back in the Midwest. I followed the tactical first-aid playbook and held the knife in place with one hand while reaching for the trauma kit in my Eberlestock pack with the other. It wasn't there. Unbeknownst to me, but beknownst to one of my hunting buddies, he had removed it for his use during a previous hunt and then forgotten to return it to my pack. I'm not naming names, but let's just say someone is going to be spending a significant amount of income on Kentucky and/or Tennessee's finest to restore their Red Menace privileges!

Anyhoo…no matter. I snatched an extra Pristine Ventures "Tag-Bag" gamebag and a large handkerchief, fashioned them into a fairly skookum pressure dressing, carefully pulled the Razor APX from the wound channel, and immediately and tightly applied the impromptu pressure dressing to my future totally cool scar. All joking aside, I did take a gander at the wound before dressing it and it resembled a raw chicken breast prison-shanked by a methed-up outlaw motorcycle gang enforcer. Lastly, I drank a bunch of water, and since that bear wasn't going to field-dress itself, got to work.

While I bled significantly, even through the pressure dressing, I never felt faint or experienced any other telltale signs of shock. The poorly timed ice flows cleared just as I was moving the bear from the treeline to the inflatable and like a well-oiled machine, Mike moved in to pick me up. I rowed my way back to the boat with nary a bump or scuff from a wayward iceberg, hefted

Alaska is the state that breaks things. This is the standout gear that fought back against the 49th's challenges and won the day during the 2025 coastal black bear hunt.

**Sitka Gear "Ventlite GTX" Boots:** These aren't your pappy's old rubber hunting boots. I wore these Gore-Tex knee-high waterproof boots for two weeks on the hunts this spring and they kept my feet dryer than any other similar boot I've worn…both from the beaches, streams, and tidal flights I slogged through, but also from perspiration, which can be as much as an enemy as the outside elements. They are light, comfortable to hike in over difficult terrain, and QUIET. (SitkaGear.com)

**Benchmade "Raghorn" Carbon Fiber Knife:** I carried the Benchmade "Nimravus" tactical knife and later, their "Infidel," into some harrowing situations for over two decades during my career as a DEA Special Agent. Now I carry an EXTREMELY lightweight hunting knife that can be trusted to retain an edge and perform…even after field dressing an entire black bear: The "Raghorn." It's carbon fiber handle and hunter's orange "I double-dog-dare you to try and lose me" CPM Cru-Wear Tool Steel Cerakoted blade make it one tough Mama-Jama! (Benchmade.com)

**Outdoor Edge "Razor APX":** My hunting buddies and I have been carrying Outdoor Edge replaceable-blade knives on expeditionary hunts for years in the 49th. They're lightweight, don't require schlepping along a sharpening device, and are perfect for skinning and caping. This year, the 3-inch bladed "Razor APX" proved itself…not only on a big, blocky bear, but also my thigh! This Titanium-framed straight-blade features a safe, dependable locking mechanism for its replaceable blades (of which there are several styles, including saw-tooth, gut-hook, and standard). (OutdoorEdge.com) FN

**On land, sea, or in the mountains, the 307 Alpine CT and Trijicon AccuPoint are ready to keep you safe...and your freezer filled! (Rikk Rambo)**

the game bags, rifle, and gear on the Red Menace, and high-fived Mike…not because of the successful black bear harvest, but because I didn't croak.

Notwithstanding the fact that I left a bigger blood trail (both on shore and on the floor of my Triton inflatable) than the bear during this debacle, it was a happy ending. We motored to the end of our glacial fiord, hoisted up some bountifully filled shrimp pots waiting for us, and found a cove to overnight in. I snagged one of two gunshot wound/trauma kits on the Red Menace, irrigated, cleaned, and medicated my wound, then redressed it. With the bleeding managed, we lit up a couple of cee-gars, downed a few adult beverages, and hit the sack. The rest of the trip was uneventful, and we all made it back to home port the next afternoon none the worse for wear…unless we're talking about the bear or that inch-deep hole in my leg!

## A Hunter's Hunting Rifle…From Unboxing to Alaska's Pacific Coastal Mountains!

The 307 Alpine CT is a testament to Weatherby's eight decades of rifle and shotgun craftsmanship, innovation and manufacturing experience. The simple act of shouldering this rifle and working the action for the first time imparts that it was engineered by experienced rifle-builders who know what it takes to craft a comfortable, yet rugged backcountry-ready longarm. The force-multiplier to its excellent handling traits is its minimalist weight of 6.3 pounds (in .300 WinMag chambering).

## MOUNTAIN PURPOSED, MARITIME TESTED

The Trigger Tech trigger is predictable and smooth, the Peak 44 "Bastion" stock is supremely ergonomic and light, the corrosion-fighting "Chocolate-brown" Cerakote finish gives the rifle a rugged yet handsome appearance, and the tool-less takedown bolt makes maintenance a breeze.

Unequivocally, from the stock to the muzzle, identifying something to criticize in this rifle's build, accuracy, and performance (as well as the Trijicon AccuPoint TR22-2G optic we partnered it with) is a Herculean task and one that I failed. But…since we all know someone out there will gripe if I don't engage in at least a modicum of naysaying about the Alpine CT, let's do this! It only holds three rounds in the magazine and one in the chamber. That's it. That's all I can conjure up for the "Negative Nancie's!"

During its time in Alaska, Weatherby's recent offering was responsible, with only two rounds sent downrange in the field, for humanely harvesting two black bears. We didn't have the page-space to detail the bear taken during an earlier trip on the Red Menace by two of my hunting partners, Dale (Call-Sign: Kingfisher) and Katherine (Call-Sign: K-Bar), but it was also a "one and done" single shot success story, courtesy of the 307 Alpine CT/ AccuPoint TR22-2G duo.

The Alpine CT marks a waypoint in the evolution of Weatherby's hunting rifle lineup. It represents lessons learned from previous generations of their Mark V and Vanguard bolt-guns and combines them with modernized design, superior ergonomics, and field-traits serious hunters seek in a rifle that can be trusted under the most trying conditions. From stock to muzzle, the Alpine CT does nothing but satisfy these prerequisites…both at the range and more importantly where it counts the most… OUT THERE! FN

### TRIJICON ACCUPOINT TR22-2G SCOPE

| | |
|---|---|
| **Dimensions:** | 13.8 in. x 2.6 in. x 2.6 in. |
| **Magnification/Objective:** | 2.5-10x30 |
| **Reticle:** | Second focal plane, dual illumination (Tritium and fiber optics), mil-dot |
| **Adjustment Range:** | 50 MOA total travel |
| **Housing Material:** | 6061-T6 Aluminum (black hard-coat anodized) |
| **Submersion Depth:** | 10 ft. |
| **Weight:** | 20.7 oz. |
| **Finish:** | Matte black |
| **Country of Manufacture:** | Assembled in USA with components engineered in Japan |
| **MSRP:** | $1,108.00 |
| **Contact:** | (800) 338-0563, Trijicon.com |

### WEATHERBY 307 ALPINE CT RIFLE

| | |
|---|---|
| **Caliber:** | .300 Winchester Magnum (tested); Also available in additional short and long/magnum action chamberings including 7mm PRC, 300 Weatherby Magnum, and 6.5 Creedmoor |
| **Action:** | Bolt-action, tool-less takedown feature, M16-style extractor |
| **Trigger:** | Trigger Tech "Field," curved, 2.5–5 lbs. adjustable |
| **Barrel:** | 22 in. BSF Carbon Fiber Barrel, 1:10 twist, 5/8-24 thread |
| **Muzzle Device:** | Accubrake DST, side-ported |
| **Weight:** | 6.3 lbs. (unloaded) |
| **Magazine and Capacity:** | Hinged floor plate, 3+1 |
| **Stock:** | Peak 44 "Bastion" carbon fiber stock with "3D Hex" recoil pad |
| **Sights:** | Peak 44 Picatinny Rail for user-preferred rifle optic |
| **Origin of Manufacture:** | Sheridan, Wyoming |
| **MSRP:** | Starting at $2,249.00 |
| **Contact:** | (307) 675-7840, Weatherby.com |

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**Wilson Combat's Tactical Hunter and Rikk R. spending some quality time in the rain on Prince William Sound! (Rikk Rambo)**

# WILSON COMBAT'S TACTICAL HUNTER RIFLE MOOSE HUNT

## Rikk Rambo on Another Alaska Adventure for *Firearms News*!

**By Rikk Rambo, Hunting Field Editor**

**Prologue: Free-Falling…but not the kind Tom Petty sang about!**

If someone asked me what three things I disliked most about Alaska, the answers would be simple:

- The state bird (Culiseta Alaskaensis, the last frontier's "home-team" mosquito)
- The amount of time it takes to get back to the Midwest during a family emergency (or fall deer season on my buddy's farm)
- …And lastly, that lying, insidious, no good upper level of crust on super-deep spring snow that gives false hope you can walk across it, only to break bad underfoot and send you plummeting downward to your doom (or at least up to your ears) in its crystal-line depths…which surprisingly is where the story of the Wilson Combat "Tactical Hunter" begins.

There was no doubt about it…I was on my way to China. "*We're on an express elevator to hell…going down!* —Private 1st Class William "It's over man!" Hudson; *Aliens* (1986)

One minute, I was showcasing my cat-moves and master-stalker credentials in silent pursuit of a wounded black bear boar through the thick coastal bush-country of coastal Alaska, and the next minute, I was plunging downwards through nearly ten feet of granular snow towards a small, invisible creek below. Unbeknownst to me previously, but definitely beknownst to me now, a hidden stream had melted nearly five feet of snow above it as it ran its course silently underneath. Now, it appeared that Mother Nature's little booby-trap was about to test the tensile strength of

**Wilson Combat and the SilencerCo Hybrid-46 puts the "Tactical" in "Tactical Hunter!" (Rikk Rambo)**

my tibs, fibs, and femurs. I wasn't alone, however…my trusty Wilson Combat Tactical Hunter was taking the trip with me. Before we get to the outcome, however, let's talk about my companion from Berryville, Arkansas who accompanied me on this backcountry extravaganza!

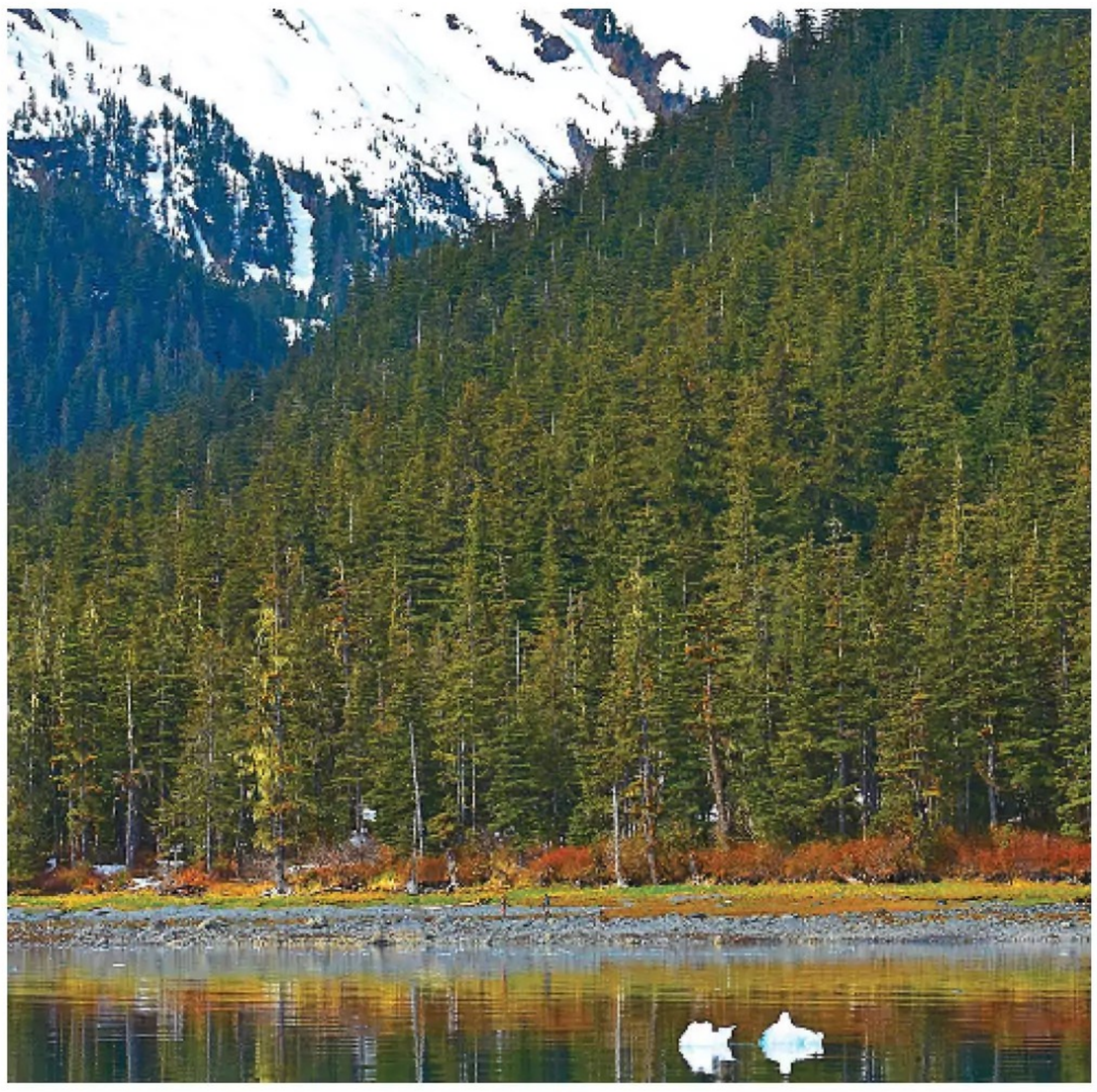
### Blood Trails, Bear Dens, Big Yukon Bulls, and the Wilson Combat Tactical Hunter!

The Tactical Hunter is one of several Wilson Combat AR-10 platforms designed for heart-attack serious hunting, self-defense applications, and just about any other garden-variety worst-case scenario you may find yourself embroiled in. There's no better place in North America to test a rifle's capabilities (and conversely, learn its shortcomings) than Alaska, and that's just what went down during a month of coastal black bear hunting and a two-week long Yukon River moose expedition with a test model in .308 Winchester.

Our goal was to ascertain whether this premier Wilson Combat rifle, along with its Trijicon AccuPoint TR26-C optic and Spartan Industries "Springbok" bipod (JavelinBipod.com) would sink or swim when faced with the 49th State's challenges…the first of which would be tracking a wounded bear through chin deep snow in a densely foliated Prince William Sound coastal forest. So, make sure your affairs (and wills) are in order, put on your huntin' duds, grab your trauma kits, and steel your resolve…because we're about to get into the thick of it with Wilson Combat and Trijicon's finest!

Okay…back to the tale of that Prince William Sound "death plunge" (or at least "career ending injury plunge"). It was early-spring black bear season on board my boat (the

**The Tactical Hunter was the master of its environment…from Prince William Sound to the Lower Yukon River! (Rikk Rambo)**



**Big Country: Hunters Robert and Jonathan make their way along a remote beach during their bear hunt. (Rikk Rambo)**

"Red Menace") and I was accompanied by friends I trusted implicitly. Onboard to partake in a wee bit of maritime black bear hunting were Robert, my lifelong high school friend (and 30-year military veteran), his son Jonathan (about to leave for military service), and a Kaleo, my combat veteran "brother from another mother." We were 60 ocean-miles from the closest bag of potato chips (or for that matter, a dock) on a remote glacial fiord in Prince William Sound's vast expanse, and I had a wounded bear to track down.

A short time earlier, Jonathan made a solid hit on a big, blocky boar with a Shaw Excursion bolt-action rifle in .400 Legend—he was using a Winchester 215-grain Power Point JHP. However, the bear responded with a burst of speed towards the treeline and successfully entered the thick

**Sorry (or congrats), you didn't make the cut! A small black bear that was given a pass! (Rikk Rambo)**

**Lube 'em if you got 'em! This bottle of slippery goodness shipped with the Tactical Hunter! (Rikk Rambo)**

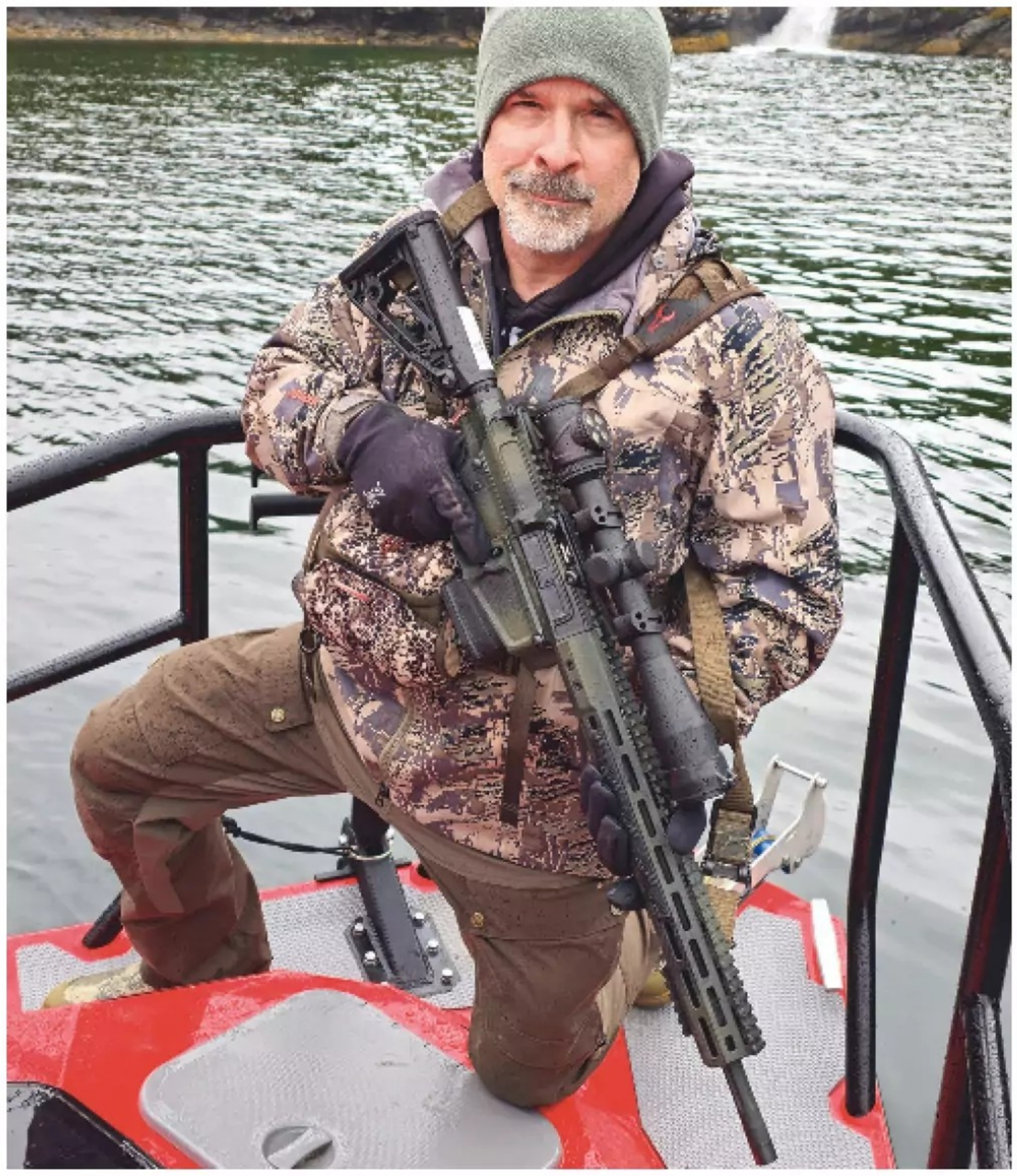
alder and willow thickets just above the high tide line. In that young man's defense, mature black bear boars are some tough hombres. They can take earth-shattering hits while retaining the gumption, orneriness, and physiological capabilities to turn the unprepared hunter pursuing it into a steaming pile of Gore-Tex goulash well after common sense dictates they should have been pushing up daisies. If there was a North American big game animal (with the exception of the Brown/Grizzly bear) engineered to take accurate, organ-pulping ballistic punishment, not expire in place, and retain the ability to remain ornery, it would be the North American black bear.

I wasn't on shore with Robert and Jonathan when the shot was fired, but given the situation, thought it best to join them. Kaleo took the helm and maneuvered the Red Menace onto a gravel beach, where I climbed the bow-ladder to terra-firma, engaged in some quick mission planning, and began tracking the bear.

The situation was not ideal (which shouldn't come as a "shocker" to those who have experience hunting Alaska's wilds.) With the exception of the original impact's spatter, there was only an abbreviated blood trail…and then nothing. To make matters worse, the entire area was crisscrossed with such a significant number of bear tracks, it would have been surprising to learn there had been a D-Day/Omaha Beach reenactment on that stretch of shoreline the previous day (but with bears instead of WWII enthusiasts/role players).

I followed the only set of tracks that looked promising and found myself in the deep, dark coastal forest post-holing through snow up to my ears. Seriously…every three steps or so, that crusty snow, I mentioned earlier, tested my resolve (and civilized vocabulary) by giving way and causing us to plummet to ankle-breaking depths.

When the snow gave way over that stream, I lucked out… but my no-no parts did not! Immediately after plummeting through nearly four feet of granular slush into an additional five-foot deep cavity of nothingness created by the stream's warmth melting the snow above it, my crotch smashed onto a sturdy alder sapling that was bent over by the weight of the winter's accumulation. Luckily, this stopped me from falling through that last five feet of open space to the rocks and water below. Events like this are par for the course on the last frontier, and after extricating myself (now with a much better singing voice) from that debacle, cracked on. After fifteen minutes of floundering about, and saying words that would make my mom wish she'd had a princess-like



**The Tactical Hunter and Trijicon AccuPoint getting 49th State soggy! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The Tactical Hunter's predecessor: Rikk and the Ultra-Lite Ranger avenging the Titanic near Harvard Glacier! (Rikk Rambo)**

daughter instead of a potty-mouth son, my travels took me to what I would classify as that "worst case scenario" I mentioned earlier: A bear-den.

It came in the form of a cave dug under a massive blown-down spruce tree root ball. Its recesses were cavernous and very dark, I would have to crawl through slushy muck to get in there…but hey…it's all part of the Alaska experience and I had to ensure the bear wouldn't go to waste.

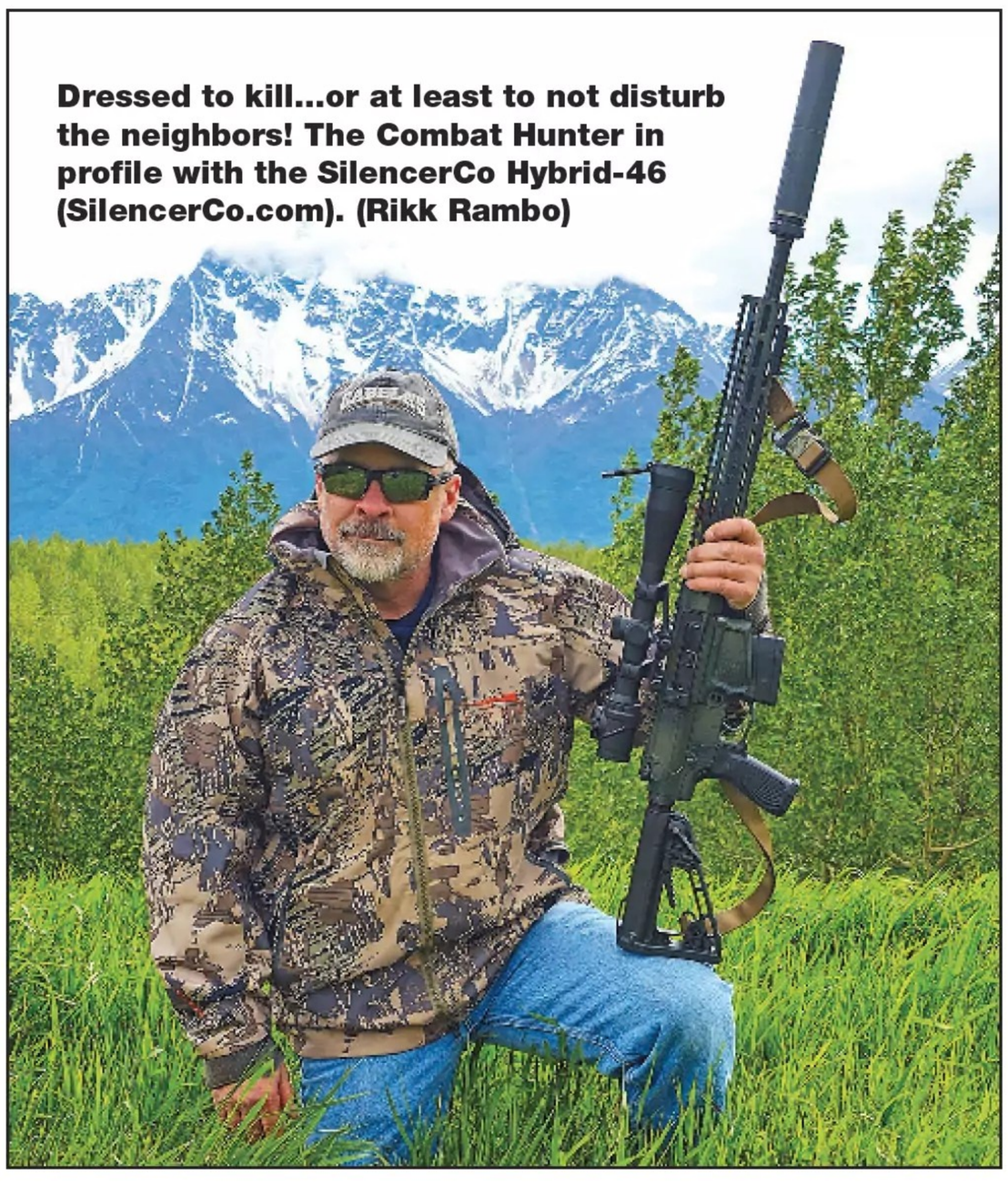
To enter the cave, and remain "combat capable," I had to switch to my handgun…a 10mm Springfield Armory Ronin 1911. This meant leaving the Tactical Hunter in the capable hands of Robert. Thankfully, I brought a secret weapon with me from the boat…my INOVA TFR "Long Throw" flashlight. With 1,220 lumens of bright white light leading the way and backed up by nine rounds of Hornady 135-grain MonoFlex Handgun Hunter goodness, plus a can-do attitude, I inched my way into the dank, musky darkness.

Sadly, the bear hadn't barricaded itself in the den, which was completely empty…and while it pains me to say it, we were unable to locate or recover that big mature boar.

The purpose of telling this story is two-fold. The first centers on the credo of ethical sportsmen. Just around the corner for every hunter, no matter how skilled or practiced, there will come a day when despite following every rule of our collective ethos and having employed every ounce of our marksmanship skills and fieldcraft, a quarry's demise will not be immediate and the intended prey, despite being gravely wounded, will flee. Quite often, their path will take them into the deep dark woods or difficult terrain. When this occurs, it is our duty to take every measure within our power to locate the wounded animal, provide closure to the final chapter of its life, and honor its passing by salvaging the sustenance it can provide.

The second lesson, while not as profound, will kick off our evaluation of the Wilson Combat Tactical Hunter's efficacy and capabilities from a "boots on the ground" standpoint. To accomplish this, we have to head back to that dank subterranean cavern on Prince William Sound for a moment.

I made the decision to enter that den using a calculated risk matrix. While the 10mm Ronin was a formidable consolation prize as a primary weapon while tunnel-ratting into a confined space in pursuit of a grievously wounded bear, my backup plan was equally capable. This "Plan B" was my lifelong high school buddy with 30-years of military service poised to intervene just outside of the den with the Trijicon-topped Tactical Hunter in his capable paws. I've had nothing but spectacular successes with Wilson Combat rifles and if it had proven necessary to fight my way out that damp, dark hole, both Robert and the Tactical Hunter were up to the task of saving my bacon…and since you're already familiar with my friend Robert, let's talk WILSON COMBAT.



**Dressed to kill…or at least to not disturb the neighbors! The Combat Hunter in profile with the SilencerCo Hybrid-46 (SilencerCo.com). (Rikk Rambo)**

## Wilson Combat's History of Alaskan Game-Getting Continues: The Tactical Hunter Enters the Fray!

My faith in Wilson Combat's AR-10 lineup was built over the course of a nearly two-year period carrying their .358 Winchester Ultra-Lite Ranger rifle on hikes and hunts in Western Alaska, our Southeast coastal mountains near Ketchikan, and the mountains and maritime regions of Prince William Sound (*Firearms News* Issue #3, February 2023).

The Ultra-Lite Ranger served hard duty in abysmal conditions and demonstrated ruthless reliability and accuracy throughout its tour of duty on the last frontier. Mirroring these attributes were its accompanying Trijicon AccuPoint 3-18x50 TR34-C and 1-6x24 TR25-C optics. The Ultra-Lite

**From "Super-Stoc" to muzzle. (Rikk Rambo)**

Ranger finished its Alaska campaign with a humane victory over a Yukon bull moose that completely filled an entire chest freezer (and then some) with steaks, burger, brats, and sausage.

The Tactical Hunter is the latest AR-10 offering from Wilson Combat and, like the Ultra-Light Ranger, is designed to be a "Jack of All Trades" when it comes to hunting, self-defense, or tactical work. It weighs in at seven pounds,

**The Rogers Super-Stoc in flat dark earth finish. (Wilson Combat)**

**The Tactical Hunter styling with its "Sniper Veil Green" Armor-Tuff finish. (Rikk Rambo)**

12.8 ounces with a chambering repertoire which includes 6mm ARC, .260 Remington, 6.5 Creedmoor, 7mm-08 Remington, 300 HAM'R, .338 Federal, and .308 Winchester. The Tactical Hunter going into the field in the 49th was chambered in tried-and-true .308 Winchester.

While I'm chomping at the bit to get to the Tactical Hunter's fall moose hunting efficacy, we'll first have to get past an anatomy lesson…and not one focused on the JB Pritzker-esque proportioned physique of an over-fed Lower Yukon bull moose, but the rifle with which I intended to smite one!

We'll start our tour at the buttstock. The Tactical Hunter features a Rogers "Super-Stoc" that is designed to be

**From its full-length rail system to its bountiful M-LOK stations, the Tactical Hunter isn't just a daylight rifle; here it is pictured with Armasight "Contractor" thermal sight (Armasight.com). (Rikk Rambo)**

**The Wilson Combat-Bravo Company Starburst Gunfighter Grip has storage in addition to an ergonomic design. (Wilson Combat)**

**Wilson Combat's 4- to 4.5-pound TTU (Tactical Trigger Unit) is Crisco-smooth and consistently predictable. (Wilson Combat)**

**Wilson Combat provides a premium bolt carrier assembly and offers many different configurations in multiple calibers such as this lightweight .308 model in nickel-boron. (Wilson Combat)**

lightweight yet retain the ability to take physical punishment both from the environment *and* the shooter. It's designer, Bill Rogers, is no stranger to having a penchant for holsters and firearms accessories that work as intended. Bill spent his time in the trenches and earned his stripes as a former FBI Special Agent in the 1970's, survived his career with the same number of holes he started with, and began developing Kydex holsters and life-saving weapon retention-focused holsters shortly thereafter. The "Super-Stoc" utilizes Bill and his team of like-minded engineers' cam-lock system to significantly reduce the sometimes wobbly, loose, or shaky characteristics of other collapsible AR-specific buttstocks. In a world where "tactical" is sometimes an overused descriptor, the Super-Stoc stands fast with its large and easy to manipulate actuator latch, 7.3-ounce heft, and ability to consistently survive a three-foot drop-test (fully loaded). One more attaboy for the Super-Stoc is its ability to be installed on both Mil-Spec or Commercial Sized buffer tubes…so if you are looking for an a la carte, upgraded buttstock for one of your AR rifles, the Super-Stoc may be purchased separately from Wilson Combat.

Next on our syllabus is the lightweight billet upper and lower receiver. If you possess an appetite for accessories, you'll especially love the flat-top upper, because it has a full-length rail system traveling from the rear of the upper receiver, cross-country, to the end of the handguard.

While we're on the topic of accessories, tacti-cool rifle shooters will like the M-LOK cutouts that completely satellite the Tactical Hunter's handguard. My love affair with the Tactical Hunter's latticework of M-LOK gear stations began with the installation of a Spartan Precision bipod adapter that I would use **spoiler-alert warning** to great effect for the attachment of my lightweight "SpringBok" bipod during a critical moment of our moose hunt. The array of attachment points is also great for any other attachments such as night-vision devices, IR lasers, angled or vertical foregrips, etc.

If you aren't a strict adherent to matte black, Wilson Combat also features some practical alternatives…some of which are…not to sound dramatic…stunning…and include multiple colors, camouflage patterns, and compositions. Their "Armor-Tuff" coating scheme comes at no added cost, while their "Combat-Tuff" custom camo/texture coatings are also available at an additional price-point.

On the subject of grips, the rifle's BCM Starburst Gunfighter pistol grip is classic Wilson Combat and of an ergonomic design focused on comfort and weapon retention Its moderately knurled grip surface is comprised of high-impact polymers and allows for secure handling in wet conditions (hopefully not the "red kind"). It also features water

**Wilson's "Armor Tuff" finish totally dissing Alaska's gear-destroying weather somewhere on the Yukon! (Rikk Rambo)**

**The 2.5-12.5x42 Trijicon TR-26C…mission capable…near OR far…bright or abysmal! (Rikk Rambo)**

resistant storage for extra batteries or for ultra-hardcore survivalists, as well as M&Ms and/or Skittle survival rations.

The heart of the Tactical Hunter is its action. Wilson Combat's 4- to 4.5-pound TTU (Tactical Trigger Unit) is Crisco-smooth and consistently predictable. If a rapid succession of shots on target is required to solve a problem, the TTU's reduced reset feature will assist in that endeavor. It's CNC precision machined H13 steel, made "factory slippery" with a dry film lubrication finish lends even more credence to its "tactical" nomenclature.

The rifle's low-profile rifle-length gas block and premium bolt carrier assembly rounds out the rifle's infrastructure and are complimented by the Tactical Hunter's match-grade barrel. The Tactical Hunter's 18-inch fluted barrel (straight fluting) on our test-rifle is engineered to specifically accommodate the .308 Winchester cartridge. It is constructed of 416R rifle-rated steel, features a 1:11.25-inch twist, and was designed for the .308 Winchester's barrel harmonics. The rifle's twist-rate is also optimal for heavier hunting bullets. For muzzle brake or suppressor enthusiasts, the rifle hosts a 5/8x24 threaded muzzle (with thread protector factory installed) and is protected by a proprietary "Armor Tuff" finish available in multiple colors (black, gray, dark green, and four "flat dark earth" shades).

**Range Day: Brass in the air on a fifty-yard double-tap! (Rikk Rambo)**

## "*Home, Home on the Range…*": Accuracy Testing

While mountain sheep and other big-country long distance hunters can benefit from higher magnification optics, I've found that most game in Alaska can typically be taken within 200 yards (with the vast majority being harvested at 75 yards and in). With that in mind, I chose the Trijicon 2.5-12.5x42 TR26-C AccuPoint as the Tactical Hunter's partner in crime optic.

The scope's dual illumination system (fiber optics and Tritium), its mission-appropriate magnification settings for coastal black bear and riverine moose, and its ability to function as a close-quarter "reflex" style sight are the TR26-C's qualities that gave it dibs on riding shotgun aboard the Tactical Hunter.

We have a riverine moose hunt to discuss, so I'm going to cut straight to the chase on the Tactical Hunter's range day and its takeaways. First off, I have nothing but undying affection for the rifle's TTU trigger. It was smooth, predictable, and crisp…with just enough press-resistance to make it field-worthy from a safety standpoint.

The accuracy of the rifle isn't just "close enough for government work." It's close enough for anything most rifle shooters will task it to…including ending a groundhog's aspirations to win the regional "Who Can Dig the Most Horse-Ankle Breaking Holes Competition" from 300 yards distance.

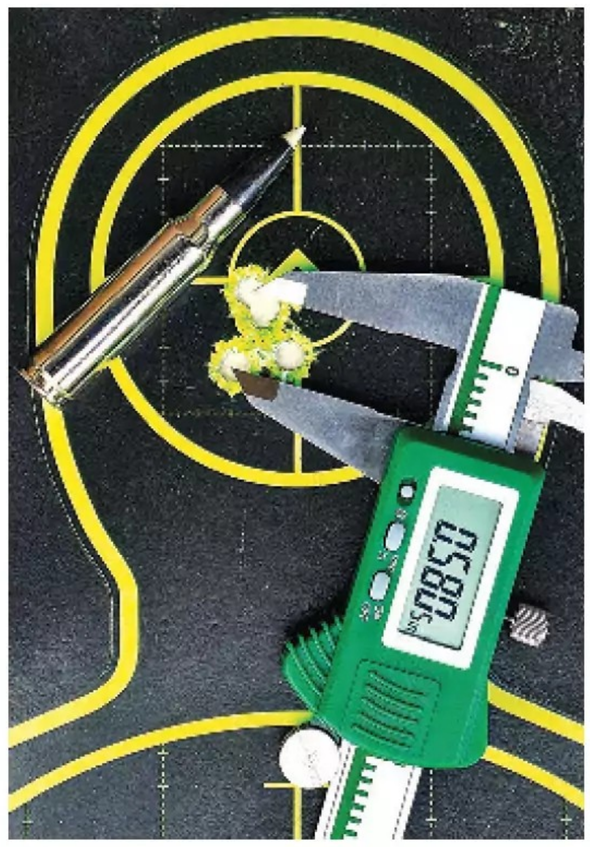
The cartridges sent down range were:

- Hornady 150-grain Superformance CX
- Federal 165-grain Fusion Bonded Soft point
- Winchester 168-grain Ballistic Silvertip

During range testing, all three cartridges performed well, but in the end, it came down to bullet weight and mission purpose. The Ballistic Silvertip, with its 168-grain heft, was the pick of the litter for the Tactical Hunter's moose harvesting aspirations. At the conclusions of shooting three five-round groups from a solid bench-rest with each cartridge at 100 and 300 yards, here's the damage.

The Winchester Ballistic Silvertip proved one thing: Even a blind squirrel can sometimes find a nut…and I'm talking about me…not the cartridge. The top group at 100 yards scored an impressive group of .580 of an inch at 100 yards…one I wasn't able to replicate again. Its group average from the 100 yard-line round out to .99 of an inch. At 300

◄ Effective medicine...Winchester, Federal, Hornady, and a Hults-Bruk Spika Forest axe! (Rikk Rambo)



► Winchester Ballistic Silvertip Bear-basher in action at 100 yards: .580-inch "best in show" group. (Rikk Rambo)

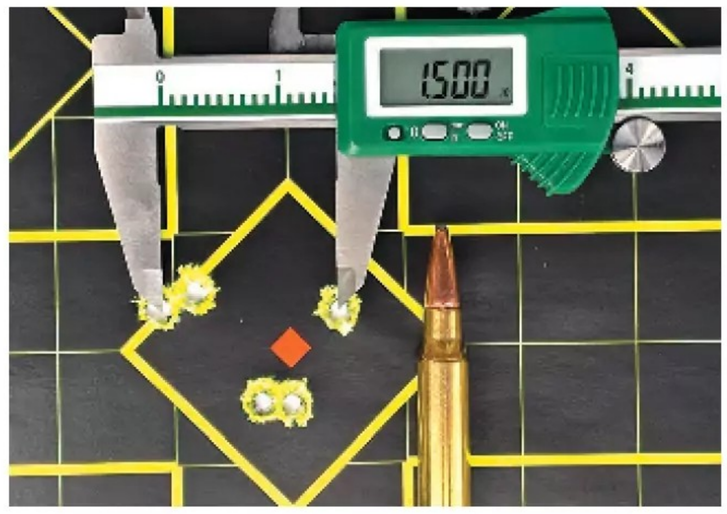
◄ Hornady Superformance CX...the cartridge for "minimalists" as shown in this .80 of an inch five-round group at 100 yds. (Rikk Rambo)

► A five-round group or a five-round burst? Superformance straight-line bestie at 300 yards measured in at just 1.743 inches. (Rikk Rambo)

yards, the Ballistic Silvertips scored a bestie of 1.743 and a group average of 2.499 inches.

Next up, the whiz-bang speedy 150-grain Hornady Superformance CX. It knocked out a best in show group equaling .80 of an inch, an average of .943 of an inch at 100 yards, and a 1.786-inch bestie with 2.528-inch average at 300 yards.

The 165-grain Federal Fusion Bonded soft points were last on the chopping block and started their range day with a 1.50-inch bestie group at 100 and a 1.566-inch




► Federal Fusion punched a 1.5-inch bestie at 100 yards... not the Tactical Hunter's pet-load, but accurate enough for bear work. (Rikk Rambo)

**WILSON COMBAT TACTICAL HUNTER: .308 WINCHESTER**

| Manufacturer | Weight (gr.) | Type | Velocity (fps) | Energy (ft-lbs.) | Average / Best (in.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **100 YARDS—THREE FIVE-SHOT GROUPS** | | | | | |
| Winchester Ballistic Silvertip | 168 | FPT | 2,484 | 2,301 | 0.99 / 0.58 |
| Hornady Superformance | 150 | CX | 2,772 | 2,559 | 0.94 / 0.80 |
| Federal Fusion | 165 | Bonded SP | 2,501 | 2,291 | 1.57 / 1.50 |
| **300 YARDS—THREE FIVE-SHOT GROUPS** | | | | | |
| Winchester Ballistic Silvertip | 168 | FPT | 2,143 | 1,699 | 2.50 / 1.74 |
| Hornady Superformance | 150 | CX | 2,350 | 1,839 | 2.53 / 1.79 |
| Federal Fusion | 165 | Bonded SP | 2,128 | 1,660 | 3.33 / 3.01 |

All groups shot from a solid bench-rest position utilizing a 2.5-12x-30mm Trijicon AccuPoint TR26-C-200104 rifle scope set at 12x with no adverse wind conditions.

**Deadly-Duo: The Tactical Hunter and the Spartan Industries "Springbok" bipod. (Rikk Rambo)**

group average. The Fusion's best group at 300 yards was 3.01-inches and they rounded the day's shooting out with a 3.33-inch group.

In addition to the accuracy testing, I also sent approximately 200 rounds of ancient, Smithsonian-worthy Israeli military surplus ammunition down range in an effort to induce a sneeze (or at least a hiccup) in the Tactical Hunter's functionality without cleaning the action. I did not succeed in that endeavor…which meant one thing: It was time to go HUNTING!

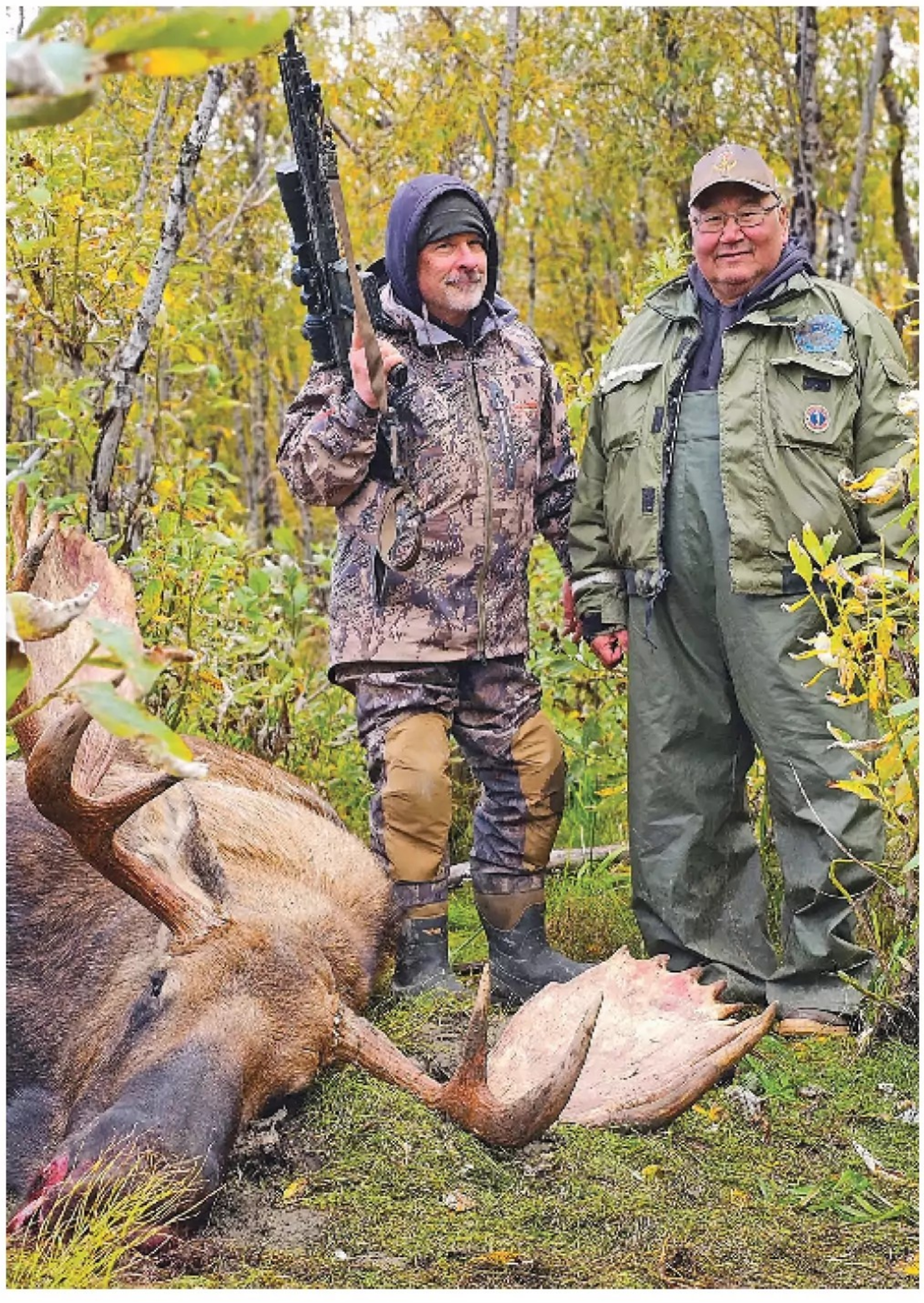
### Grocery Shopping…Yukon-Style!

One bull moose lasts my family for nearly a year (and change), fall had officially edged out summer on the last frontier, and the time for the Tactical Hunter rifle to fill the freezer had arrived.

The lower Yukon has the capability of turning into one of the absolute ugliest stretches of riverine deadliness on the planet…and in short order. It makes the Ohio River look like an intermittent stream, is over 100-feet in depth in places, and can conjure up 6–8+ foot seas when the wind decides to have an up-current battle of wills with the river's swift-moving waters. Luckily, we only faced a few episodes of that brand of crazy on our moose hunt…and the Tactical Hunter had two opportunities to strut its stuff.

Before we get to the swamp-donkey smiting part of the story, we'll get the boring (but important) logistics out of the way. My longtime hunting buddy, Kenai Jay, his stalwart bow-hunting pal Mike, and a former Alaska bush-country cop who hails by the call-sign of "River Ninja" rounded out our moose hunting posse. River Ninja, a Yup'ik elder, was born and raised on the Yukon. His mastery of all things riverine has elevated him to a position of sensei in our crew and he serves as our voice of reason in all matters tactical and otherwise while on the river. Upon arrival at a village upriver from Ninja River's hometown, we would break Kenai Jay's sturdy Yukon Raider

**Nothing says "happiness" like accurate shot placement and 675 pounds of quality burger, steaks, sausage, and brats! (Rikk Rambo)**



**Rikk Rambo and "River Ninja" reveling in the Tactical Hunter/AccuPoint/Ballistic Silvertip trio's efficacy! (Rikk Rambo)**

**A full boat is a happy boat! There's 2½ years of protein under that brown tarp! (Rikk Rambo)**

aluminum boat out of storage, fuel up, pick up River Ninja, head WAY downriver, and get busy whackin' and stackin' our moose.

River Ninja scored first, on the second day of the hunt, with a one-shot instant "down-n-out" hit on a bull with his Browning X-Bolt in .280 Remington. His moose had the good grace to immediately collapse within 30 yards of the river and the pack-out was a cinch. Then came Kenai Jay's moose…and he was a bit of a troublemaker (and back-breaker)!

We were cleaning blood off of our hands from River Ninja's moose when Kenai Jay observed a small lake a mere fifty yards from the river's bank through a sparse grove of alder and willow. His instincts to check it out were spot-on. Jay, who was toting a .300 Winchester Short Magnum bolt-gun, sighted a respectable bull approximately 150 yards distant as soon as we neared the cut-bank of the lake…but there was a problem…it was on the opposite end and nonchalantly sipping water from the lake like it was made of Chardonnay. On the plus side, it had no idea we were scheming and thinking murderous thoughts about it, but on the downside, it was standing a scan foot away from a body of water that would create a s#itload of problems if Jay shot it in its current position. Moose have incurred the nickname "swamp-donkey" for a reason. The massive ungulates have a penchant for doing their best to ruin a hunter's day by dying in rivers, streams, ponds, marshes, swamps, or any other body of water their

700–1,200-pound bodies can make a mad dash for prior to biting the big one…so we waited.

This was fortuitous, because we were in medium to high grass, there were no stumps or trees to provide support for a well-aimed shot, and a good prone position was definitely a no-go. What I did have, however, proved to be the hero of the day: A Spartan Industries "SpringBok" bipod. It uses a super-magnet to attach to its adapter, which I had sturdily fastened to the Tactical Hunter's M-LOC system.

**Two "wouldn't want to be you" 100-yard groups shot at night with the assistance of an Armasight Contractor thermal optic using HotHands disposable handwarmers for targets! (Rikk Rambo)**

I positioned myself with a clear field of fire, Jay whispered for me to back his play as soon as he shot the moose, and we waited. That was ONE THIRSTY MOOSE…but after nearly five minutes, he turned, climbed to the top of the bank, gave Jay a broadside, and it was game on. "*Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."–Dylan Thomas.*

Jay smashed him through the lungs with his .300 WSM, but the moose had other plans besides doing the right thing and going "gentle into that good night." Instead, the moose, who obviously never had to endure Chief Engineer Scotty losing his s#it over Dilithium crystals, immediately engaged "Warp Factor 8" and began galloping at breakneck speed along the far bank of lake, diagonally, in our direction. The Tactical Hunter was about to earn its keep…because nothing burns down the disco…or a rapidly accelerating bull moose with the rapidity of an AR-10. With my accuracy force multiplier SpringBok bipod, I swiveled and lead the moose, settled in, and placed three rapid, back-to-back shots on the big guy's heart-lung area. River Ninja, who remained with the boat, later told me he could hear the smack-slaps of the Ballistic Tips pummeling the bull as loud or with even more verve than the reports of the rifle—he also politely asked if the Tactical Hunter was selective fire due to the tempo of the follow-up shots.

The Tactical Hunter/AccuPoint/SpringBok/Ballistic Tip quartet performed as a well-honed system. The big bull died in full sprint, slid several yards through the grass, and piled up near a log. I've always been a bolt-gun aficionado, but there's no arguing that an adequately chambered AR-10 is a game-changer for knocking down an Indy-Car reminiscent big game animal moving with gusto.

We paid the price for how easy River Ninja's moose was to parse out and lug to the boat earlier in the day with Jay's bull. It took a polymer sled, inflatable pack-raft, and quite a bit of Sherpa grunt-work to get it back to our riverboat.

## BACK-COUNTRY-TOUGH GEAR FOR 2025

Alaska is the state that breaks things. Introducing gear that earns its keep in the 49th:

### Sitka Gear "Delta Pro Zip GTX" Waders

These waders are built for rough service and will keep you dry, warm, and quiet. I wore them every day for nearly two weeks of moose hunting and a month of maritime bear hunting. They survived multiple mile-long hikes through tundra, forest, saltwater marshes, and mountain terrain with nary a scratch or scuff.

**If you're hypothermic, trigger-presses can be tough… Sitka Gear Delta Zip Waders kept Rambo warm, dry, and mission capable! (Rikk Rambo)**

Padded knees, a sturdy waste-belt, and built-in boots earned them the "play of the day" award for our 2024 Yukon moose hunt. (SitkaGear.com) ►►►

### ◂◂◂ Hults-Bruk "Spika" Forest Axe

We've used Hults-Bruk axes on Alaska expedition hunts for the last two decades. They've allowed us to build camp-kitchens, game-poles, and emergency shelters with ease. They are other-worldly sharp and stay that way even when used and abused…to the point that it is baffling! How much trust do I place in these fine axes? It rides shotgun on my tactical life-vest when venturing out onto Alaska's coastal waters in the event a "worst case scenario" occurs and we have to camp out on a beach for a spell waiting for our good friends from the U.S. Coast Guard to save our bacon! (HultsBruk.us) FN

**Rambo has used Hults-Bruk axes for decades. (Hults-Bruk)**

No matter…while "grocery shopping" in Alaska may not be easy, it definitely gives you a free, top-tier workout!

My moose came into the picture at a very unlikely time. Two days after Kenai Jay and River Ninja hit their "Red-Meat for a year" jackpots, it was Mike the Bowhunter's turn to put a stalk on a bull. Mike, a lifelong archer, did not disappoint in his fieldcraft and snuck in under the moose's radar (and sniffer) in an attempt to put an arrow on target at 35 yards. He slowly went to full-draw…took a moment to get steady, then unleashed hell…just like Russell Crowe did on those hirsute Germanic barbarians in Gladiator…but with just one arrow…that wasn't on fire…or in the least bit hurtful to the bull.

A single, low-hanging cottonwood tree branch had other plans for Mike's arrow besides the skewering of a Yukon ungulate's ticker and lungs. There are few things in life more heartbreaking than when an arrow flies true, our follow-thru is picture-perfect, but the intended game bounds away unscathed. Oh yes,we may have enough time to be momentarily puzzled, but before we have time to scratch our melons and wonder what in the name of sweet googa-mooga went wrong, a single branch we could have sworn wasn't there when we set up for our shot suddenly falls into the slipstream of our dearly departed arrow. Next comes the moment when, in addition to failing to harvest an animal, we must also suffer a ration of "insult to injury," because the offending tree-branch doesn't just drop immediately to the forest floor. It remains semi-attached to the remainder of its parent-limb, dangling back and forth and taunting you like those irritating French mopes did to King Arthur and his silly fellow English knig-gets in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

We returned to the boat a bit forlorn, but it was lunch time, so we all took a break, chowed down, and discussed the remainder of the day's battle-plan. I wasn't two bites into a stale bagel stuffed with salami when I looked past River Ninja and observed what looked like two big-screen television cardboard boxes slowly swaying back and forth in complete synchronization from nearly 500 yards away on the opposite shore. I stuffed my field-expedient sammich back into its Zip-Loc, snagged my Meopta binos, and confirmed what I already knew…it was a bull moose, a BIG ONE.

### Gametime on the Yukon!

Lunch would have to wait…and no one complained! I moved to the front of the boat while River Ninja backed

**The Tactical Hunter doing what it does best…performing to Wilson Combat standards! (Rikk Rambo)**

us slowly and quietly from our current position on a sand bank, turned the boat, and stealthily crossed the river just below the bull. The bull must have had other things on his mind, like the scent of a cow moose upriver (it was the beginning of rut), because he never busted us maneuvering to the cut-bank behind him. This would be his Waterloo, because after a short stalk, I put three Ballistic Silvertip showstoppers into his aortic arch and both lungs…dropping him immediately a mere 25 feet from the river.

Every once in a while, the planets and stars align on an Alaskan expedition and all is right with the world…and on this hunt, it came in the form of a big, beefy 59-inch spread bull moose politely expiring only yards away from our means of transporting his delicious quarters and cuts back to civilization.

### The Wilson Combat Tactical Hunter: An AR-10 With a Call-Sign That Says It all!

Predictability can be both good and bad…from your grandmother's timeless, heavenly buckwheat-vanilla pancakes to that crazy-eyed hobo you encounter…every…single…day…at the same stoplight laying in wait to smear your windshield with whatever skeevy and highly suspect effluent passes for glass-cleaner in his world.

I'm happy to report that the Tactical Hunter falls into the buttery, syrupy hotcakes category. This .308 Winchester game-getter performed flawlessly, reliably, and exhibited the same high-level of accuracy as its Ultra-Light Ranger cousin.

My only criticism is one that can be corrected by the operator with a single purchase: backup iron sights (BUIS). I hate cliches, but Murphy's Law typically rears its ugly head in abundance when the shiitake hits the proverbial fan, and BUIS's are NEVER a bad idea for shooters who take their rifles into remote areas or hazardous situations. In Wilson Combat's defense, only a sparse number of AR's I've tested or utilized as duty rifles/carbines over the years have come with them. If you want to get ahead of the game, Magpul has made economical but well-built backup sights in its MBUS series (Magpul.com).

From the Tactical Hunter's perfectly crisp and predictable trigger, accuracy, an action capable of running dirty and functioning reliably, and a quiet, up-engineered stock that will take the old-school military phrase "battle rattle" out of your vocabulary, this Wilson AR-10 (or W-10 to be accurate) is purpose-built for dependability in the toughest of situations.

The world can be a dangerous and unforgiving place…but the latest generation of Wilson Combat rifles makes it less so. The Tactical Hunter was equally at home in the mind-bendingly harsh saltwater climate of coastal Alaska and its punishing rainforests as it was getting knocked around on the back floor of my pickup truck and leaning against a tree near the campfire where it served as bear-protection while camping throughout 2025's spring and summer months. It also exceled in real-world self defense capabilities…from daylight practical shooting to "dark of night" thermal sight accuracy during rapid "time-on-target" drills.

If you're on the prowl for an effective big game getting machine or reliable self-defense rifle with the oomph to take on all-comers, the Tactical Hunter will get you to your destination with the efficacy that defines Bill Wilson and his team's 48 years of innovative design and real-world capable engineering…now if I could just get them to make me some snowshoes! FN

| WILSON COMBAT TACTICAL HUNTER RIFLE | |
|---|---|
| **Caliber:** | .308 Winchester (tested); Also available in 6mm ARC, .260 Remington, 6.5 Creedmoor, 7mm-08 Remington, 300 HAM'R, .338 Federal |
| **Action:** | Semiautomatic |
| **Trigger:** | Wilson Combat TTU 4–4.5 lbs. |
| **Barrel:** | Wilson Combat Match Grade Barrel; 1:11.25 in. twist; 18 in. barrel; 5/8-24-inch thread pitch |
| **Muzzle Device:** | Not included |
| **Weight:** | 7 lbs., 12.8 oz. (unloaded) |
| **Magazine and Capacity:** | AR-10 compatible magazines (Tested with MAGPUL 10LR/SR Gen M3 10-round magazines) |
| **Stock:** | Rogers "Super-Stoc" |
| **Sights:** | Full-Length Rail System |
| **MSRP:** | Starting at $3,436 |
| **Origin of Manufacture:** | Berryville, Arkansas |
| **Contact:** | (800) 955-4856, WilsonCombat.com |

| TRIJICON ACCUPOINT TR26-C-200104 | |
|---|---|
| **Dimensions:** | 13.8 in x 2.4 in x 2.3 in |
| **Magnification/ Objective:** | 2.5-12.5 x 30mm |
| **Reticle:** | Second Focal Plane; Dual Illumination (Tritium and Fiber Optics); Mil-Dot |
| **Adjustment Range:** | 90 MOA Total Travel |
| **Housing Material:** | 6061-T6 Aluminum (black hard-coat anodized) |
| **Submersion Depth:** | 10 ft. |
| **Weight:** | 22.4 oz. |
| **Finish:** | Matte Black |
| **MSRP:** | $1,441 |
| **Country of Manufacture:** | Assembled in USA with components engineered in Japan |
| **Contact:** | (800) 338-0563, Trijicon.com |

**The S&W SW22 Victory Target pistol is a great choice for small game handgun hunting, especially when equipped with a suppressor like this Banish 223 from Silencer Central. DeNiro took this squirrel on his rural property. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

# SMITH & WESSON'S SW22 VICTORY TARGET MODEL PISTOL

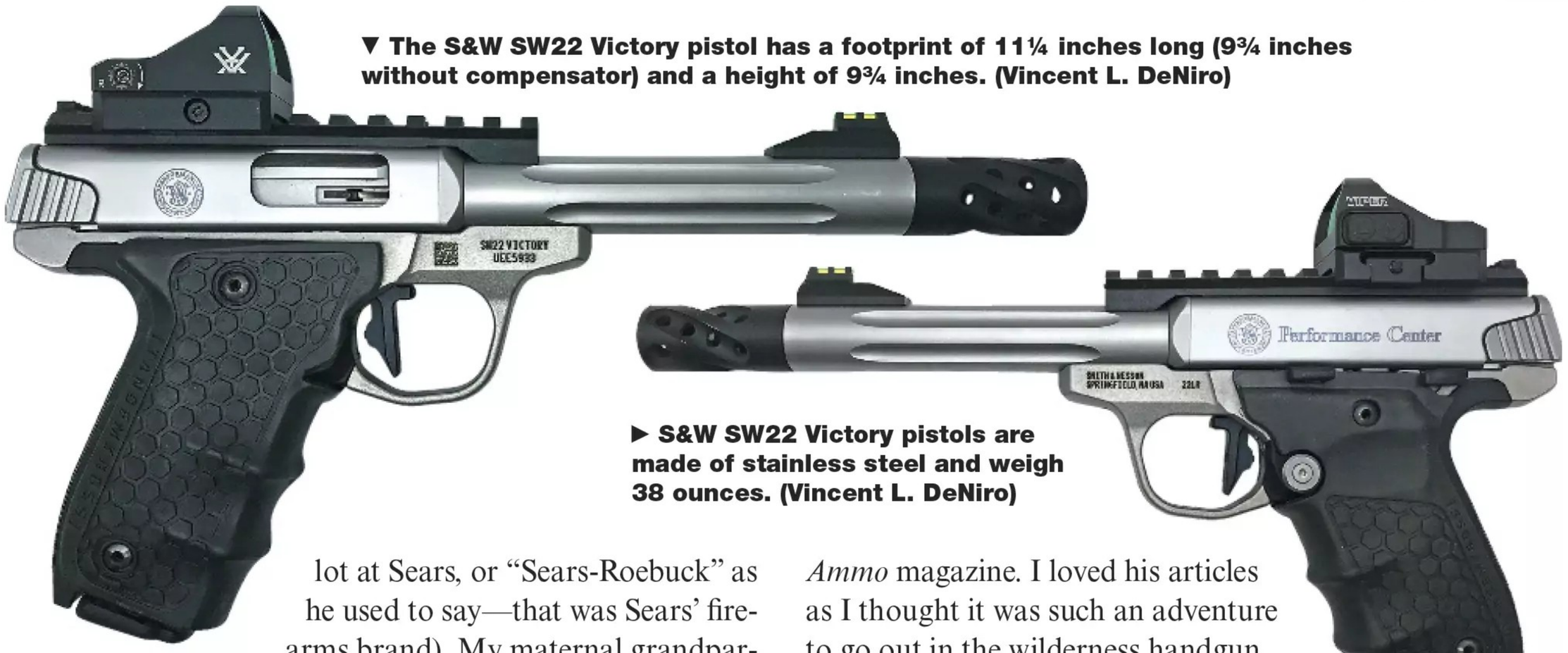
## A Performance Center-Enhanced .22 LR Handgun; for the Squirrel Killer in All of Us!

**By Vincent L. DeNiro, Editor-in-Chief**

The fall, I love this time of year. If it were up to me, I would have six months of fall, four months of spring, one month of winter, and one month of summer. The leaves changing color is one of the most beautiful sites in nature, the bugs start going way, and the cooler temperatures allow one to put on those awesome "woodsy"-type clothes that just make you want to go explore outside.

Although I became a deer hunter later in life, I have been a small-game hunter since the mid-1970s. The first animal I ever saw shot was a black bird my maternal grandfather killed in his backyard, sometime around 1972. He used a J.C. Higgins single-shot .22 LR rifle (he used to shop a

**DeNiro's High Standard Model GD .22 LR pistol (and some vintage ammo boxes) he inherited from his maternal grandfather. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**




**▼ The S&W SW22 Victory pistol has a footprint of 11¼ inches long (9¾ inches without compensator) and a height of 9¾ inches. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**► S&W SW22 Victory pistols are made of stainless steel and weigh 38 ounces. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

lot at Sears, or "Sears-Roebuck" as he used to say—that was Sears' firearms brand). My maternal grandparents were Ukrainian (known as some of the best farmers in the world), and they had a micro farm on five lots in the city, right across the street from the huge industrial area owned by U.S. Steel Corporation in Youngstown, Ohio.

They had about 30 fruit trees (four types of apples, two types of pears, three types of cherries, two types of plums, peach, etc.), dozens of different fruits (Niagara grapes, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, etc.), and dozens of vegetables (tomatoes, peppers, beans, potatoes, carrots, lettuce, etc. Have you ever heard of kohlrabi? They grew that too!), even wheat and rye! They grew so much rhubarb that a local grocery store would buy it every year from them, and there was always a fruit and vegetable stand in the front yard selling mostly to the steel workers.

The property was unique for its small size with hills, a sunk-in backyard, a flat field, and a deep ditch or sinkhole (about 35 by 20 yards wide), which was probably from the coal mining days in the 1800s. When I stood in their backyard and looked around, it felt like I was in the rural countryside. There were actually safe places to shoot a .22 LR there, despite it not being lawful. I was given a special duty in 1974: shoot everything that is eating the fruit and vegetables! However, unlike my grandfather on that day in 1972, I used BB and pellet guns from Daisy and Crossman.

As a youth, I got most of my small-game hunting practice in the woods of Ohio using pellet guns, namely a Sheridan Blue Streak rifle in .20 caliber. That rifle packed a punch and was extremely accurate—I have no idea how many squirrels and other small animals I shot with it. When I wanted to challenge myself a little more, I also used a Crossman model 150 .22 caliber single-shot $C0_2$ pellet handgun that my maternal grandfather let me use. In 1978, I got my first AR-15, which was a Colt SP1, so I got sidetracked a bit, but I still loved air-gun hunting.

Later, I had the same rifle-to-pistol transition when I started using .22 LR in the country. I was influenced from reading articles by Bob Milek who wrote about handgun hunting for *Guns & Ammo* magazine. I loved his articles as I thought it was such an adventure to go out in the wilderness handgun hunting and stretching the limit of how far one could shoot with a pistol—even at a distance that many would only shoot a rifle. He was a huge influence on me. When shooting squirrels with a rifle became a little boring, I switched to a handgun, and that .22 LR handgun was a Hi-Standard Model GD, another one of my grandfather's guns which I inherited in 1982. Hi-Standard pistols were used in Olympic shooting in the mid-20th century and are known for being incredibly accurate; they are a great choice for handgun hunting.

Small game hunting (and nuisance animal eradication) is the most fun for me: rabbits, groundhogs, raccoons, opossums, chipmunks, crows, but my favorite to hunt are squirrels, especially with a .22 LR handgun. So, when I had a chance to review one of Smith & Wesson's Victory-series .22 LR pistols, I was excited.

## The Pistol

The S&W SW22 Victory Target .22 LR pistol is constructed of a stainless-steel frame, barrel, and receiver, which is great for outdoor use especially during rain and high humidity. Its overall length is 9¾ inches and 11¼ inches with compensator attached. It has a height just over 5½ inches and a width of 1.1 inches—a typical footprint for this type of pistol. Being all steel, this isn't a lightweight pistol at 38 ounces (2.38 pounds), but the

**The front sight is fiber optic (as is the rear adjustable sight) and works really well. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**The rear sight assembly, which is fully adjustable, shown in place of the Picatinny rail option. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**The six-inch barrel is fluted for weight and heat reduction. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

advantages are lower muzzle flip for follow-up shots, lower perceived recoil, and rock-solid construction.

The front and rear sights are a light green fiber-optic type. The rear sight is fully adjustable for windage and elevation and is incorporated into a 4¼-inch assembly, which stretches across the entire top portion of the pistol, stopping at the barrel. So, when you want to add an optic, just remove one hex bolt and replace the rear sight assembly with the provided five-inch Picatinny rail assembly. The P-rail assembly also incorporates a fixed rear sight as a backup—very nice. This model also comes with a Vortex Viper dot optic.

The six-inch target barrel is fluted; fluted barrels aid in cooling and are inherently lighter than full-bull barrels due to the removed material, but they still retain the strength and advantages of a bull barrel. The barrel is threaded at 1/2x28 and comes with a rubber washer around its base below the threading. The barrel is attached to a rectangular tube-like receiver by a hex-head bolt, which is only accessible when the barrel-receiver assembly is removed from the frame—also held in place by a hex-head bolt (all Allen wrenches are provided). The barrel can be changed out for other variations such as a six-inch threaded carbon fiber target barrel, a six-inch threaded bull barrel, or a 5.5-inch non-threaded bull barrel (also available in camo finish). A compensator is attached to the barrel and its design consists of five milled channels in a spiral design with 20 ports. A stainless steel

► **DeNiro found the effectiveness of the compensator to be noticeable. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**A well-designed ramp helped ensure zero feeding problems during the review. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

thread protector is also included. In the rear, the feed ramp extends across the bottom of the chamber from the 7 to 5 o'clock position with the center being polished.

Did you notice I wrote "receiver" and no mention of a slide? The Victory has a rectangular tube-like receiver that houses a rectangular bolt assembly. This is unlike a traditional pistol, like my Hi-Standard Model GD (and all Hi-Standard variants), which has a slide that incorporates a bolt face and all related parts. However, this is nothing new, as one only need to look at the Ruger Mark I and II pistols to see basically the same thing, with the exception that the receiver and bolt design are round instead of square. To me, it doesn't make much difference, but this design of the Victory does have an advantage of exposing fewer of the internal parts to dust, dirt, rain, etc. The bolt contains the recoil spring and guide rod, firing pin assembly, as well as the extractor. Charging the pistol is comfortable and non-slip, due to the four raised "bars" (or serrations) on both sides of the bolt. Each bar increases in height from front to back.

The frame contains the trigger assembly, which is adjustable and what I would call a match trigger. My trigger broke at just under 2½ pounds. Nice! The trigger can be adjusted (hex head bolts) for take-up and overtravel via two locations on the trigger face. I was happy, so I left it as was. The target trigger has a comfortable shape: straight and with a flat surface 5/16 of an inch wide. The trigger guard is spacious so wearing gloves when the snow is falling will not be an issue.

The bolt stop/release lever protrudes out far enough that it is comfortable to activate. Same with the 1911-like thumb safety. The magazine release button is 8/16 of an inch wide and very easy to find and actuate with the thumb. Its spring is also very light. The wraparound grip is a hard rubber with finger grooves and has a beehive pattern on both sides. Right-handed shooters will appreciate a shallow, but present, thumb rest just behind the magazine

## VORTEX VIPER RED DOT (VORTEXOPTICS.COM)

**(Vortex Optics photo)**

The Vortex Viper is a high-quality handgun optic, which can also be used on a rifle (I also tested it on an AR-15). The optic is 1.81 inches in length, is 1.06 inches wide, and weighs a little over an ounce. It features scratch-resistant lenses, a 6 MOA red dot, is adjustable for brightness and has a battery life of 150 hours on the highest setting, and up to 30,000 hours on the lower settings. Adjusts are made in 1 MOA increments. MSRP: $369.99. **FN**

release. The backstrap is checkered. The magazine holds 10 rounds and is stainless steel with a pull-down assist attached to the follower for easier loading.

In a world of ever-increasing number of striker-fired handguns, I am so happy that this is a hammer-fired pistol. Why? Well, it's the trigger. If this were a striker-fired .22 LR pistol (like the short-lived Beretta NEOS), the trigger would be very creepy and difficult to adjust (via gunsmithing). A creepy trigger is something you don't want when you are aiming at a small animal 75 to 100 feet away, as creep can easily cause a miss.

**◄ The Victory has a large ejection port. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**► The bolt contains the recoil spring and guide rod, firing pin assembly, and extractor. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

**▼ The bolt locked back showing a clear view of the four serrations, which aid in charging the pistol. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

## Range Time

Shortly after the gun arrived, I decided to install the adjustable rear-sight assembly. This was done in part due to my astigmatism, which causes the dots on electronic optics to distort with many looking like blurry Tic-Tacs tilted at an angle. So, the Vortex Optics Viper Red Dot optic (included) stayed in the box initially.

Loading the 10-round magazine is easy and like many other .22 LR handguns of this type—pull down the follower with my left thumb while feeding ammo with my right. I ran a few hundred Winchester Wildcat 40-grain hollow points through the Victory without any issues—just plinking on a variety of steel targets and sticks within 40 yards or so in my front yard (living in the country definitely has its benefits). The fiber optic sights were right on if my memory serves me correctly.

The Victory has a magazine disconnect just like all of my first-, second-, and third generation 9mm S&W pistols I had, and have had, since the 1980s. There are many opinions, both pro and con, regarding magazine disconnects disabling the trigger when a magazine is not locked in. If this were a self-defense gun, I would address those, but for a .22 target pistol, I will just say that it's in there.

Regarding the safety, it's thumb-activated 1911-style, as indicated earlier. It positively locks in place for safe and fire, and I like the amount of pressure it takes to go from one to another. The issue is that I unintentionally activated the safety quite a bit while shooting in two ways. First, when I would adjust my grip, my knuckle at the base of my thumb would push the safety up and on. Then, when I would pull the trigger, the trigger moves completely to the rear with the safety on, but the fire control group is disengaged. This gave me the feeling that the hammer fell with the bolt after the previous shot. It happened often, and a few times I ejected the live round and rechambered until I figured out what was going on. The second way the safety would unintentionally activate was during reloading. When I would reach up to the bolt release with my thumb to drop the bolt on a fresh magazine, I would almost always activate the safety. The safety's "shelf" doesn't really protrude that far out, and I feel it's the correct width.

Possibly, it's a matter of the safety's location in relation to the shape/design of the frame, or maybe my large hands. Also note that the safety will not engage if the hammer is down—I like this, as it tells me that the hammer is not cocked.

Many months later, I took a good look at the Viper Red Dot and had a pleasant surprise. My astigmatism didn't distort the red dot very much when I used the top portion (distance lens) of my tri-focal glasses. Should I use the

**The SW22 Victory compared to DeNiro's Hi-Standard Model GD, which has a slide instead of a bolt like Victory has. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

◄ The trigger can be adjusted for take-up and overtravel via two locations on the trigger face. (Vincent L. DeNiro)

► The safety and bolt-release lever are easily accessible. (Vincent L. DeNiro)

**Allen wrenches, an adjustable rear-sight assembly, thread protector, extra magazine, chamber flag, lock, and padded soft case are the additional accessories. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

dot optic to do my accuracy test? Decisions, decisions… I checked the dot size at 75 feet, which was my desired test distance. My estimate, using the paper target, was that the dot covered approximately 1.25 inches—not scientific, and the astigmatism didn't help with the estimate. Well, this would affect precision shots, but I decided to go with the Viper mounted, instead of the traditional sights, as that is how this S&W Performance Center package is sold.

I set up my shooting bench and used a sandbag. It was a great day with winds from zero to four mph, but sunny and hot at 88 degrees. The ammo I chose was my initial test ammo, Winchester Wildcat 40-grain hollow point (HP), plus Remington Thunderbolt 40-grain lead round nose (LRN), Federal BYOB 36-grain HP, and ELEY Subsonic 38-grain HP. Most of these are bulk .22 LR ammunition loads, but it's characteristic of what most people shoot. All testing included three five-shot groups per ammo type.

I shot a handful of test groups with the compensator on, which I was happy with, but decided to remove it, as compensators (as well as muzzle brakes) can affect accuracy a bit—sometimes for good, and sometimes for bad. I was taking my time for accuracy, so no need for rapid-fire follow-up shots. The thread protector went on.

I then noticed shooting a couple more test groups from a relaxed position on the bench, that when the compensator was on, it really reduced muzzle flip and perceived recoil even though we are talking about a heavier handgun in mild-shooting 22 LR. Yes, it was noticeable.

First up, Winchester Wildcat, and I scored a 1.09-inch group, 0.91 of an inch without the flier/outside shot with a 0.44 of an inch clover leaf. My second and best group came in at 1.04 inches and 0.56 of an inch group without the flier—great! After the third group, which opened up a bit, the average was 1.3 inches. Next in line was Remington Thunderbolt, which always shoots well for a bulk .22 LR ammo. My first group came in at 1.6 inches with the second opening up to two inches. The best and last group was 1.48 and that took the average to 1.7 inches. The best group (first one) without the flier was .65 of an inch—a really great group for four shots. Federal's BYOB (Bring Your Own Bullets—that's what I tell people coming to my property for shooting!) was third in line. The first and last groups were over two inches with the second, and best, group coming in at 1.02 inches for an average of 1.91 inches.

The last test would be ELEY Subsonic, so I removed the thread protector and attached the Silencer Central Banish 223 suppressor (SilencerCentral.com). Sure, it was made for 5.56, but this suppressor is so light (just over 11 ounces) that it works extremely well on .22 handguns. For those who don't know, ELEY is probably the highest-quality, and most accurate, ammunition one can get for .22 LR. It has been used by world champion .22 rimfire competitors for many decades. I have used it since the 1990s for squirrel hunts when I need the most accurate ammo for those 100-plus-feet pistol shots. I ended up with an average of 1.31 inches

**DeNiro fired hundreds of rounds during his initial test and was pleased with the compensator's effectiveness. (LAD)**

◀ For the 25-yard test, DeNiro chose Winchester Wildcat 40-grain HP, Remington Thunderbolt 40-grain LRN, Federal BYOB 36-grain HP, and ELEY Subsonic 38-grain HP .22 LR ammunition. (Vincent L. DeNiro)

At 25 yards, Winchester Wildcat scored this 1.09-inch group right out of the gate, 0.91 of an inch without the flier/outside shot, and this clover leaf measured 0.44 of an inch. (Vincent L. DeNiro)

with best, and first, group of .84 of an inch, which also gave me a .53 of an inch four-shot group—the best group overall. I'm not sure why the second and third groups opened up. Possibly, it had something to do with the suppressor (but most likely not), or it was the red dot covering an area larger than the bullseye (most likely), or it was just me being so excited (I almost did a happy dance) about the first group that I threw the last two off, or a combination of the above.

► Federal's bulk pack BYOB .22 LR scored this 1.02-inch group. (Vincent L. DeNiro)

## A Few Post-Range Thoughts

Now, I had a lot of experience with the Victory's trigger, although I didn't adjust it because it was to my liking right out of the box at under three pounds. The trigger has almost 2/16 of an inch take-up followed by 1/16 of an inch of travel, without creep, until the hammer drops. It's great, but I may do some adjustments just for fun next time I target shoot with it.

The issue with me unintentionally activating the safety that I described earlier was annoying and happened often during bench shooting. I will have to train myself to avoid this from happening.

I'm not sure how I would have done accuracy-wise if I had used the "iron sights" for my bench testing, but I am going to say that I would have shot even tighter groups. However, I was happy with the groups I shot. Out of curiosity, I plan on going on my next squirrel hunt and using the Viper red dot, something I never expected to do before testing it. However, I am very excited to mount a handgun scope on the Victory and see what it can do at 100 feet using magnification. (I mean, I'm VERY excited to do this soon—it's my inner Bob Milek calling.)

| SMITH & WESSON SW22 VICTORY TARGET MODEL PISTOL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Manufacturer | Weight (gr.) | Type | Velocity (fps) | Average/ Best (in.) |
| 25 YARDS (75 FEET) - THREE FIVE-SHOT GROUPS | | | | |
| Winchester Wildcat | 40 | HP | 1,255 | 1.30 / 1.04 |
| Remington Thunderbolt | 40 | RN | 1,255 | 1.70 / 1.48 |
| Federal BYOB | 36 | HP | 1,260 | 1.91 / 1.02 |
| ELEY Subsonic | 38 | HP | 1,040 | 1.31 / 0.84 |
| ABOVE 25-YARD GROUPS WITHOUT OUTSIDE SHOT/FLIER | | | | |
| Winchester Wildcat | 40 | HP | 1,255 | 1.03 / 0.56 |
| Remington Thunderbolt | 40 | RN | 1,255 | 1.07 / 0.65 |
| Federal BYOB | 36 | HP | 1,260 | 1.55 / 0.96 |
| ELEY Subsonic | 38 | HP | 1,040 | 0.88 / 0.53 |
| Vortex Viper red dot for all shots fired from bench on sandbag. Conditions: 0-4 mph wind, 88 degrees F. | | | | |

## A Hunting We Will Go!

On my property I have brown (aka fox squirrels), gray, black, and red squirrels (collect 'em all!). Sometimes a

◀ With Silencer Central's Banish 223 suppressor attached to the Victory, ELEY Subsonic did not disappoint with this .84 of an inch group. Without the flier, it measured only .53 of an inch for four shots! (Vincent L. DeNiro)

**DeNiro loves the relaxing time spent in the woods squirrel hunting in early fall. This also gives him a chance to look for deer scrapings and other signs of where the deer may be when that season starts. Note the plunger-activated squirrel call in his left hand. (LAD)**

**DeNiro's first squirrel kill with the Banish 223-equipped Victory pistol. Small-game hunting and handgun hunting really need more coverage these days. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

mix of two different ones. We even have flying squirrels in Ohio, but these are nocturnal—I have never seen one and not sure if it's even legal to hunt them. When I moved to this property 17 years ago, we only had big brown fox squirrels (which can get HUGE if they are nested near your deer feeder), just like when I was growing up in Ohio 50 years ago. Somehow, these other variants moved in over time. Our season bag limit is six per day.

Have I eaten squirrel? Sure. "*Tastes like chicken*" is what you always hear, but as someone who enjoys gourmet cooking, I will say that if you cook non-red meat like chicken, it will almost always come out tasting like chicken. I like the meat, but it's better used in a gourmet recipe if you want to savor it rather than just throwing it into a stew or casserole. Although, that isn't a bad idea since you just don't get that much meat off of a few squirrels. Seasoned with rosemary, salt, and pepper and put on a small electric rotisserie is a simple way to cook and experience its unique flavor. When I was a deputy sheriff, one of the deputies I worked with, who was a hunter, would bring in spaghetti sauce with cooked squirrel meat for us to try. It was pretty good!

In between my initial testing of Victory and my bench testing was when I went squirrel hunting during the fall. So, I didn't have the Viper optic mounted, just the adjustable rear fiber optic assembly. I didn't shoot the Victory on paper with the iron sights, but I plinked with it so much onto small targets that I saw that it was on. After mounting the Banish 223, I loaded up two magazines with Winchester Wildcat, 20 rounds would be plenty for the hunt.

I chose a great fall weather day one Saturday afternoon and headed into my woods. I always look for oak trees and check the acorns on the ground near them. If the acorns look like they have been chewed up, or if there are a bunch of cups/hats of the acorn laying around and missing the nuts, that is the sign that squirrels are living right there and possibly are right above my head. I found a tree with "all of the above" clues, so I stood patiently under the tree scanning it for squirrels right after I gave my squirrel call (see sidebar).

Within a few minutes, I heard a squirrel respond. He was above, on a branch. Before I go any further, a safety warning. If you are hunting squirrels with a .22 LR, the safest way to shoot them is on the ground or from a high-up position like a tree stand or from on top of hill firing downward with the ground as a backstop. Shooting up into a tree with a rifle can be dangerous unless it is a large tree that you are shooting under as a backstop behind the squirrel. I have been shooting for over 50 years and I shot my first pistol competition in 1984 so I can, and do, take these kinds of shots safely.

The squirrel scurried off of the branch and started down the tree once it saw me. I took aim with the squirrel about 25 feet above, which was spread eagle moving its way downward clutching tree bark for stability. One very quiet pellet-gun-like "pop," and the squirrel nosed-dived onto the ground. After examining my fox squirrel, I moved him and decided to take a walk into my back field. Within 10 minutes, there was another squirrel about 15 feet into the woods, about 30 yards from me. The squirrel ran behind a tree, so I gave out a few calls. It then ran up the tree and around to my side about four feet up from the ground. Standing, I took a shot and must have grazed it, as it had trouble running about 20 yards away to the left at the base of another tree. As soon as it stopped, I took another shot and won my second prize for the day. Two squirrels within 10 to 15 minutes is probably a speed record for me. The second squirrel was living within 40 yards of one of my deer feeders and that can cause big issues. Not only do

## YOUR BUILT-IN SQUIRREL CALL

I've used squirrel calls, as they can replicate a few squirrel sounds: the bark, a squeal, or the higher-pitch squeal of a young squirrel in distress. In recent years, I have just used the bark sound, which is used by squirrels to communicate their position to other squirrels or to signal danger. You can buy a call, and the one I have was made by Cedar Hill Game Calls. However, I pretty much use the one God made me with. Here is how you can do it.

Open your mouth about halfway. Then, bring your bottom lip into your mouth by stretching your lower jaw forward. Then take the tip of your tongue and push it in front of your bottom front teeth all the way down past the gun line until it stops—this is exactly where you (or your best buddy) put a "dip" of finely-ground chewing tobacco. When you are ready to make a "barking" sound, quickly curl the tip of your tongue up and backwards. There, that's one "bark." Be careful if you have false teeth and do this with them out of your mouth as you may call in a bunch of hillbillies from a nearby trailer park. (LOL! Just kidding!)

Once I get into the woods, I stop and either stand, kneel, or sit, scanning upwards into the trees most of the time, but also looking at the ground in front of me. You want to remain still. Then I will make two barks and wait for about a minute. If there is no movement or return bark, I will try again and usual make two barks, one after the other, wait about five seconds and then follow up with four to five more barks. Then wait a few minutes while scanning trees and ground floor waiting for a squirrel to respond. I will repeat this for about 10 to 15 minutes before walking another 30 to 50 yards in order to try another position. Any time of day is good to squirrel hunt, but early morning and late afternoon seem to be best. FN

they eat a lot of the corn I put out, but they activate my trail cameras and instead of getting deer photos, I end up having to scroll through many hundreds, sometimes thousands, of squirrel photos when they "attack" my feeders. A successful hunt with the S&W Victory!

### Final Thoughts

Right out of the gate, I will say that overall, the SW22 Victory Target pistol lives up to the Smith & Wesson Performance Center category. It is every bit of a modern, match-grade .22 LR target pistol. As someone who has written and corrected gun manuals for firearms companies, I will also say that S&W provided an excellent instruction manual. As far as concerns, wants, and wishes, I have some.

There is no way to co-witness the fixed sights with an optic, as the mount is not see-through. Not a big deal, but that would be nice. I already mentioned my issue unintentionally activating the safety, so no need to beat a dead horse—I will work to train myself not to do it.

The magazine release button is 8/16 of an inch wide and very easy to find and actuate with the thumb, and its spring is very light. It sticks out quite a bit and that is good because it's easy to reach and activate, but possibly not so good as it may drop the magazine accidently if a lefty is wearing a holster and bumps it into something. A right-handed person could also unintentionally activate the magazine release if he/she leans hard on their right side with a holster on. This didn't happen to me as I didn't carry it holstered, so it's just an observation.

As far as things I would love to see accessory-wise, a 16-inch barrel with stock would be nice, or a 10- or 12-inch barrel with an arm brace—either of these would make a great camping or back-packing gun. Although a 10-round magazine is fine for hunting and target shooting, I would definitely buy a 15- or 20-round magazine if one was available from S&W.

I had zero malfunctions with this pistol. Overall, a Victory pistol (any model) really is the "one and done" target and hunting .22 LR handgun for your gun collection. If you buy one and have never small-game hunted, do a lot of practice and get out into the woods—it's very relaxing and enjoyable. FN

| SMITH & WESSON SW22 VICTORY TARGET MODEL PISTOL | |
|---|---|
| **Caliber:** | .22 LR |
| **Action:** | Semi-auto, internal hammer-fired |
| **Weight:** | 38 oz. |
| **Length:** | 11¼ in. (9¾ in. w/o compensator) |
| **Height:** | 9¾ in. |
| **Capacity:** | 10 |
| **Barrel:** | 6 in. fluted stainless steel and threaded 1/2x28 |
| **Optic:** | Vortex Viper red dot |
| **Sights:** | Fiber optic front and adjustable rear, and Picatinny rail with fixed rear |
| **Frame:** | Stainless steel |
| **Trigger:** | Adjustable for take-up and overtravel, 2.5 lbs. as tested |
| **Grips:** | Hard rubber GripHive |
| **Accessories:** | Allen wrenches, an adjustable rear-sight assembly, thread protector, extra magazine, chamber flag, lock, padded soft case, manual |
| **MSRP:** | $989.00 (sku 12079) |
| **Contact:** | (800) 331-0852, Smith-Wesson.com |

In deep woods hunting, or picking a shot through the brush, a lever action is the tool of choice by many. (Patrick Sweeney)

# HENRY REPEATING ARMS' STEEL LEVER ACTION .360 BUCKHAMMER RIFLE

Ever since the first lever-action rifle hit the market back in 1866, there has always been a lever-action rifle in production (except for wartime production demands) by one or more manufacturers. Why? The lever-action rifle is a grand combination of sleek, handy, compact, and ergonomic. It is light enough to be easy to pack, yet heavy enough to dampen recoil. It can be (and is) chambered in a wide range of cartridges that are eminently suitable for hunting on the North American continent. The mechanism is simple, easy to keep clean and oiled, and the parts are robust, which sounds like an advertising campaign for the Henry line of rifles, and perhaps it ought to be. The one sent here for testing is the Steel Lever Action .360 Buckhammer. (Actually, they sent me a steamer trunk sized shipment of rifles, but the boss said I could only write up one of them.)

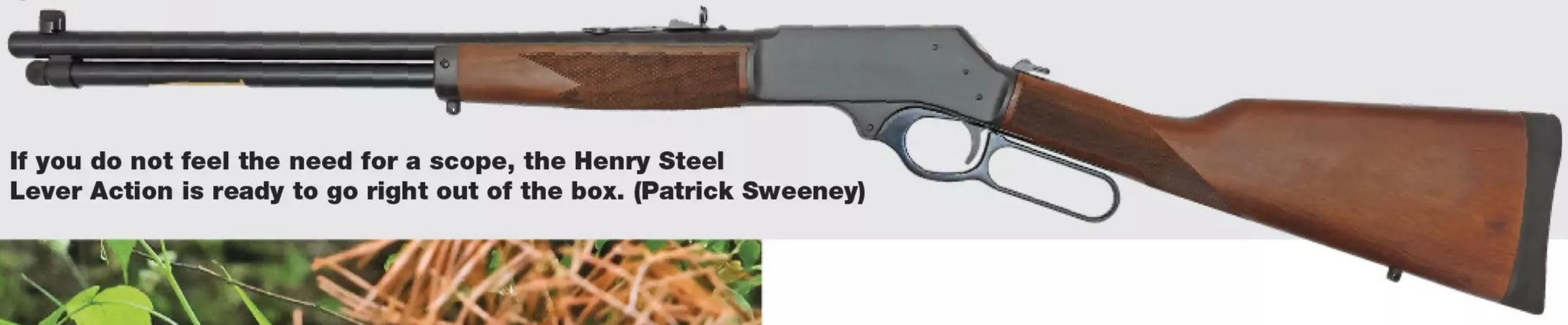
Let's start in the middle, since that's the heart of the lever action. A moment's glance and thought will tell you that this is a close copy of the Marlin 336, which is a very good thing. As a gunsmith, I worked over a slew of 336s, and I can tell you this: they are almost indestructible. You will have to work to break one. You have to be really diligent to make one not work properly, including the 336 brought to me for accuracy problems, problems caused by the owner feeding it entirely the wrong cartridge. The Henry is just as robust, and just as easy to operate and simple to take down for cleaning.

The right side has the ejection port and the loading gate. You'll see four screws there. Three of these you never need to touch. The one on the receiver extension is for taking it apart for cleaning. (We'll get to that.) On the left side the receiver is a blank slate. Oh, there are three ends of screws,

# Welcome to 21st Century Lever-Gun Deer Hunting!

By Patrick Sweeney

The Henry Steel Lever Action is classic and classy, understated, and elegant. (Patrick Sweeney)



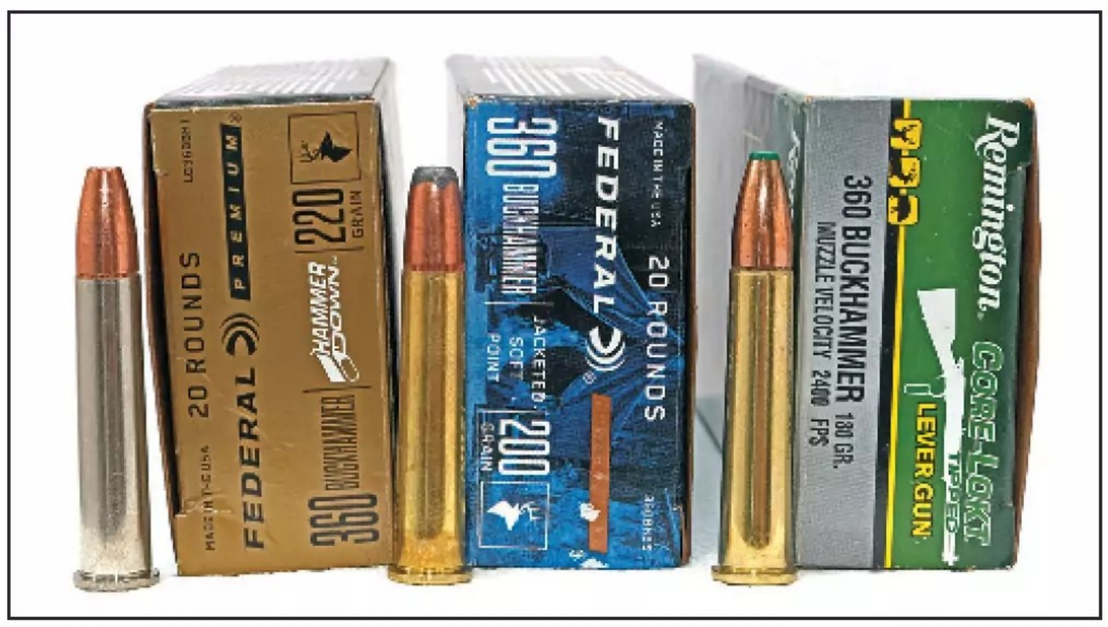
If you do not feel the need for a scope, the Henry Steel Lever Action is ready to go right out of the box. (Patrick Sweeney)

and the uppermost end you see is the base of the ejector, which is held in place by the bolt.

On top of the receiver, there are four drilled and tapped holes for mounting a scope base. Henry makes it easy for you (or your gunsmith) because they tell you right up front that the base you need is the Weaver 63B or its equivalent. No measure and test-fit, as we had to do in the old days. No proprietary bases, no, not from Henry. That is, if you want to mount a scope. The kinds of hunting that call for a lever-action happen in thick woods or across short distances out from a blind. With good eyesight, and some practice, iron sights are plenty good enough out to 100 yards. To be truthful, a lot of hunters will not notice a whitetail wandering through the woods, even inside of 100 yards from their blind. It's in their DNA to go un-noticed.

One big advantage of the lever action is that you can keep the sights on your target all the way through ejection and rechambering. (Patrick Sweeney)

**For those who prefer more bullet weight, with expansion, weight retention and penetration, then the Federal Hammer-Down will fit the bill. (Patrick Sweeney)**




**The .360 Buckhammer may be a new cartridge, but you do not lack for choices for your hunting needs. And as a straight-walled cartridge, it passes Division of Natural Resources muster in many states for deer season. (Patrick Sweeney)**

So, Henry puts a front blade with a brass bead on it, and on the back of the barrel, ahead of the receiver, they install a semi-buckhorn with diamond inset. To adjust is easy. Lift the spring-loaded rear sight and slide the stepped baseplate to raise or lower the point of impact. To adjust windage, there are two small screws on the plate set into the rear sight. Loosen, nudge, tighten and re-shoot. No, it isn't a click-adjustable target sighting system, but once it is set you will know it stays set.

The handguard and stock are walnut, and they have each been given a very sharp-looking and sharp checkering area. The handguard checkering extends all the way around the handguard, not just in a couple of panels, one on each side. The handguard is held on by means of a nosecap, which is a machined steel cup that slides over the magazine tube. There's a cross-screw that holds it in place, and the nosecap also has a front sling swivel stud on it as well. There's a matching sling swivel stud on the bottom of the stock, which sports a rubber recoil pad. Some of you might be thinking, "*Rubber recoil pad? Recoil isn't that bad.*" Maybe, maybe not, but it does make shooting more pleasant, and if practice is more fun then you're more likely to do it. I've never understood the affectation for hard rubber buttplates, or brass, or steel ones. I like shooting, but they make it less fun.

For the longest time, lever-action rifles came with the hammer machined for a half-cock notch. This was so you could lower the hammer halfway down. (Carefully, and

▲ **The rear sight is adjustable for windage and elevation. Not target-range click-adjustable, but certainly hunting-rifle durable. (Patrick Sweeney)**

◄ **The front sight had a brass bead for aiming. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**The receiver of a lever action rifle is flat. The Henry is simple, sturdy and ready to go. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**You can see the transfer bar, on the front face of the hammer. If the trigger isn't pulled and held back, the transfer bar won't transfer. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**The Federal JSP in the .360 Buckhammer is very accurate. No whitetail that walks the earth will shrug this off, when properly placed. (Patrick Sweeney)**

with a good grip on it.) This allowed you to sit in your blind, or stalk through the woods, not having the hammer at full cock. And also not have the other choice being the hammer resting on the firing pin. Henry has brought the design into the 21st century, and so the hammer on the Steel Lever Action (and other Henry rifles as well) uses a transfer bar. The transfer bar is activated by a lever built into the trigger. When you press the trigger back to fire the Henry, the trigger lever cams the hammer-mounted transfer bar up. The transfer bar then rides on the hammer such that it fills the gap between the hammer and the rear of the firing pin when the hammers hits home.

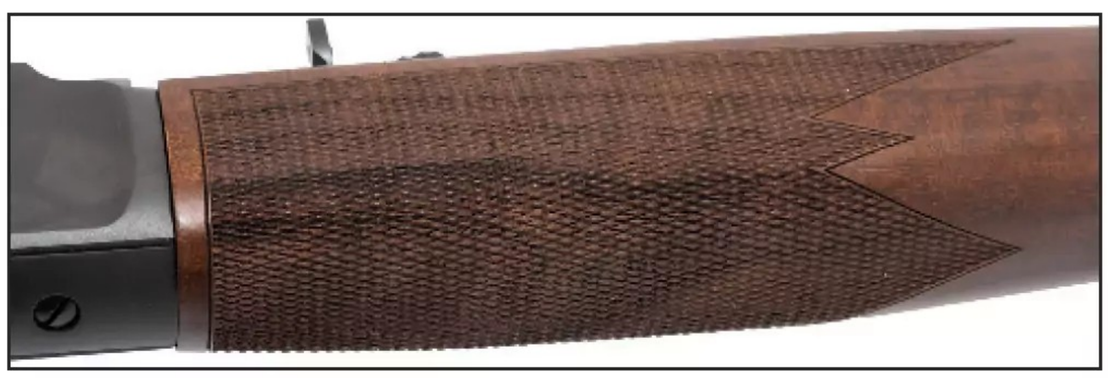
**The left side of the Henry receiver is also flat, and that makes the Henry very handy to carry. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**The top of the receiver is drilled and tapped for a scope mount base, should you feel the need for optics. (Patrick Sweeney)**

If you have the hammer fully cocked and something jars it out of engagement, the trigger spring will push the trigger forward. This prevents the trigger from camming the transfer bar. The gap remains unfilled, and the rifle won't fire. The explanation sounds complicated, but the mechanism is really pretty simple and straightforward. It also means the Steel Lever Action does not need a crossbolt safety in the receiver.

Operating the Steel Lever Action is simple. A quick point: you do this at the range or at hunting camp while outside of the cabin. Pointing the muzzle in a safe direction, use the nose of a cartridge to press the loading gate in. (The gate is a single piece of spring steel, it will flex out of the way.) Push the cartridge fully into the loading gate. Once the magazine is full, you can't fit any more in. You can at this point, if you are hunting, simply leave it as-is. You can, when you need a round in the chamber, work the action and have a chambered cartridge and a cocked hammer in a second. Or, you can do the lever-action two-step: point the muzzle in a safe direction. Work the lever and chamber a round. Grasp the hammer with a finger and thumb, and then press the trigger while preventing the hammer from moving. Let go of the trigger. Now ease the hammer down. It will not stop at half-cock, there is none. If you wish, you can load another round into the magazine through the loading gate. You are fully topped-off. Another way to do this is when you start empty. Open the action. Drop a cartridge into the ejection port and close the bolt. Now do the two-step. Then, load through the loading gate. When you need to fire, you have

**The wrist of the stock is sharply checkered with an elegant and effective pattern. (Patrick Sweeney)**



**The forearm has its checkering wrapped all the way around. (Patrick Sweeney)**

◄ The stock is capped with a rubber recoil pad, a good thing even on not-hard-recoiling rifles. (Patrick Sweeney)

◄ The Henry .360 is equipped with sling swivel studs, this one in the stock. (Patrick Sweeney)

► The front sling swivel stud is attached to the forearm nosecap. (Patrick Sweeney)

Cor-Lokt bullets have been getting the job done since 1939. They still do, and accurately as well. (Patrick Sweeney)

to thumb-cock the hammer, which is a lot less noisy and takes less motion than working the lever.

To unload, you stand the Steel Lever Action muzzle-up. Rotate the magazine tube spring assembly and lift it out of the tube. You can now point the muzzle down and pour the cartridges out. Once they are out, work the lever to eject the chambered round (if there is one) and leave it open. You are not unloaded. The clever among you will think, "*A-ha, I can load it the same way.*" I thought of that, but there is some peculiarity of the rim diameter and geometry of the .360 Buckhammer, in the magazine tube, that makes it, well, clumsy. I had to jiggle the rifle as I pressed the tube down, to keep it from catching on the rim of each cartridge as it passed over them. So, no, it isn't the quick and easy way to load that it looks like it was going to be.

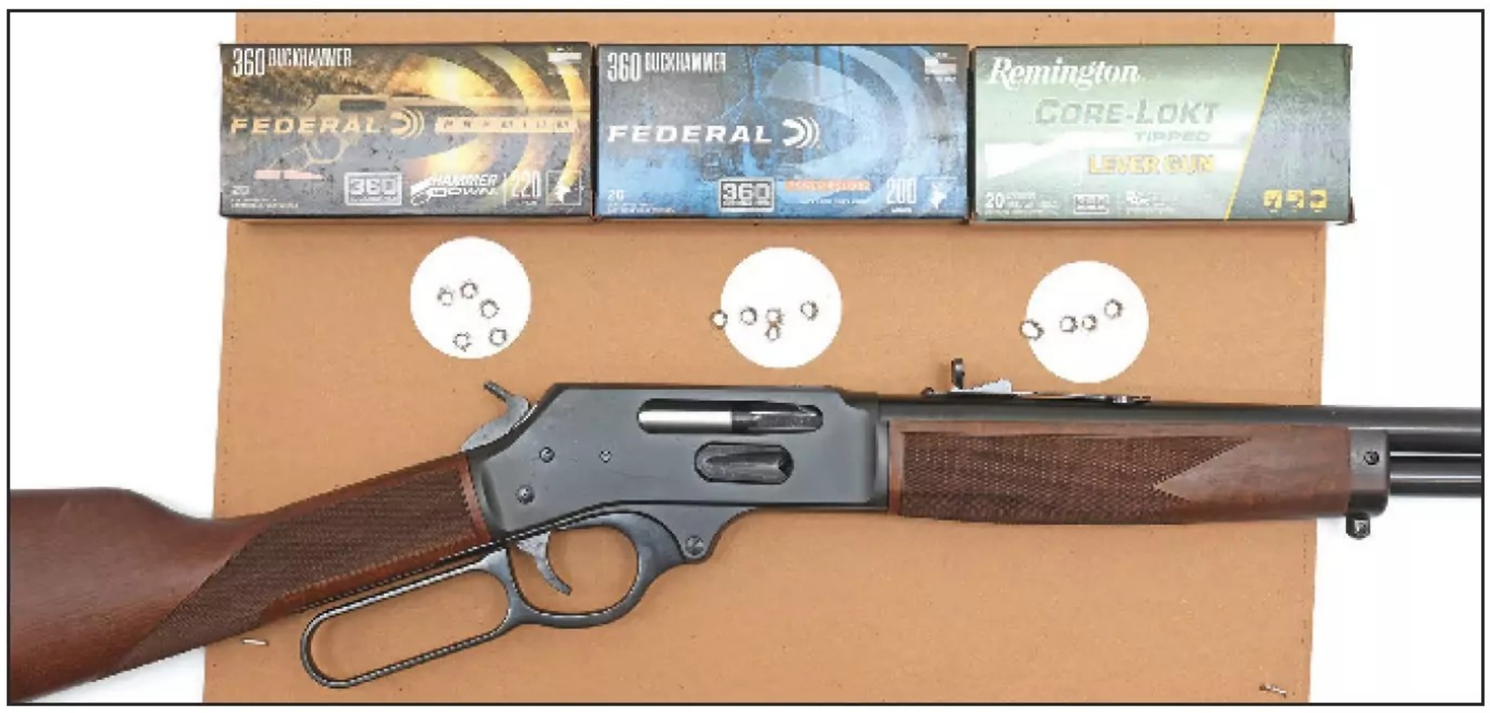
The .360 Buckhammer is an interesting cartridge. It is, basically, a .30-30 case that has been necked-out to accept and hold a .359-inch-diameter bullet. In talking to shooters about it, I've had it compared to both the .35 Remington and the .35 Whelen. Well, not really. The .35 Remington is a good little cartridge but with a max pressure of 33,000 PSI, it can't generate the velocities of the .360. It falls some 200 fps behind the .360. And the Whelen, while it can exceed the velocities of the .360 by 400+ fps, is a longer cartridge, and requires a bolt-action rifle to handle it. Plus, both of those cartridges are not allowed in certain hunting areas because they have a case neck. The .360, being a straight-wall cartridge, is permitted by the DNR in handgun-only areas as well as the many straight-wall-rifle-cartridge-only deer-hunting states such as Ohio.

In testing, I found the Steel Lever Action to be brilliantly accurate. In the chrono work, I found myself

**HENRY STEEL LEVER ACTION .360 BUCKHAMMER RIFLE**
CHRONOGRAPH AND ACCURACY DATA

| Ammunition | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Velocity (fps) | ES | SD | Accuracy (Ave & Best) (in.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remington Cor-Lokt | 180 | 2,329 | 8 | 3.4 | 1.5 / 1.3 |
| Federal JSP | 200 | 2,208 | 49 | 19.3 | 1.4 / 1.2 |
| Federal HammerDown | 220 | 1,947 | 41 | 16.9 | 1.4 / 1.2 |

Accuracy results were to be averages of three, five-shot groups at 50 yards off a Champion shooting rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured on a Labradar chronograph set to read 15 feet from the muzzle.




This is the kind of accuracy you can expect from a Henry rifle. (Patrick Sweeney)

**The way to unload the Henry is with the port on the magazine tube, once you turn the brass tube and remove it. (Patrick Sweeney)**

having to use the club's 100-yard range, so I used one of the rifle gongs as an aiming point. Shooting standing offhand, I hit the gong on the first ten shots in a row doing chrono work. This despite a heavy trigger, a trigger that I'd be certain to send back to Henry were I to be keeping this rifle. Henry is proud of their warranty, and wants customers to be satisfied, so I'm sure it would come back better. For accuracy work, I used the factory iron sights at 50 yards, and the results were excellent, even brag-worthy.

Disassembly is easy. Unload. Leave the action open. Use a properly-fitting screwdriver to remove the lever pivot screw. Pull the lever out. Now, pull the bolt out of the receiver. The ejector is loose, so make sure you don't lose it. On reassembly, place the ejector in its slot, with the small stud on it inserted in the locating hole in the receiver. Slide the bolt in, then catch the lever into the bolt, line up the screw and replace it.

So, there it is. A light, handy, powerful rifle that has a wider accepted area of use for hunting than other rifles. Accurate, soft-enough in recoil and with a rubber recoil pad that practicing wouldn't be an onerous chore. The Federal Premium (FederalPremium.com) and Remington ammunition (Remington.com) tested are built for hunting, so you can count on performance in the field. The listed price is something you can pretty much count on being not the price, your local gun shop will have it at a lower price, and even at that it is a great deal. I won't bore you with the inflation adjustment, but when I bought a used 336 lever action back during the Reagan Administration, the price then equates to more than the price of a new Henry today.

**Disassembly for cleaning starts with removing the lever hinge screw. (Patrick Sweeney)**

**This is as far as you need to go to clean the bolt, receiver and bore. (Patrick Sweeney)**

Even if where you hunt you aren't restricted to a straight-wall cartridge, the Steel Lever Action in .360 Buckhammer is a great rifle at a great price. FN

## SPECIFICATIONS
### HENRY REPEATING ARMS STEEL LEVER ACTION RIFLE

| | |
|---|---|
| **Type:** | Hammer-fired lever-action |
| **Caliber:** | .360 Buckhammer |
| **Capacity:** | 5+1 rounds |
| **Barrel:** | 20 in. |
| **Overall Length:** | 39 in. |
| **Weight:** | 7 lbs., 1 oz. |
| **Finish:** | Blued steel |
| **Furniture:** | Walnut |
| **Sights:** | Fixed front, adjustable rear |
| **Trigger:** | 6 lbs., 6 oz. |
| **MSRP:** | $1,088 |
| **Contact:** | HenryUSA.com, (866) 200-2354 |

**◄ The .360 Buckhammer is meant to be a hunting cartridge that won't let you down, and is approved in straight-wall cartridge states. (Patrick Sweeney)**

[Cont. from page 11]

*Inc. v.] Bruen*," wherein the Supreme Court had established a "text, history, and tradition" standard for determining the constitutionality of "gun laws," the DOJ brief then referenced the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision and argued "Illinois violated the Supreme Court's clear directive that States cannot prohibit arms that are "in common use" by law-abiding citizens for lawful purposes.

The brief represents a 180° turn in DOJ practices in gun cases, where previously, the government had defended infringements against challenges, just as Attorney General Pam Bondi had done in Florida, when, as State AG, she had supported "red flag" laws, gun bans for 18–20-year-old adults, and more. It arises because of President Donald Trump's Executive Order, *Protecting Second Amendment Rights*, in which he "instructed his Administration to 'protect the Second Amendment rights of all Americans'." Doing her own turnaround, Bondi issued an "all hands" memo in early April pledging Justice would "use its full might to protect the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens."

## Enforcing 2A from State Infringements

That changes were coming was indicated before that in late March, when DOJ announced a "pattern or practice" investigation looking into "lengthy eighteen-month delays" in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's processing of concealed handgun license applications delays, said to be "unduly burdening, or effectively denying, the Second Amendment rights of the people of Los Angeles."

"This Department of Justice will not stand idly by while States and localities infringe on the Second Amendment rights of ordinary, law-abiding Americans," Bondi proclaimed. "The Second Amendment is not a second-class right, and under my watch, the Department will actively enforce the Second Amendment just like it actively enforces other fundamental constitutional rights."

That raised great hope, particularly for this correspondent, who had been calling for DOJ to do exactly that against California's in-your-face infringements since the turn of the century with a totally grassroots "Petition for Enforcement of the Second Amendment." In it, we challenged Attorney General John Ashcroft to back his—unprecedented for the DOJ—admission that the Second Amendment was an individual right with meaningful action to protect it. After submitting over 40,000 mailed in signatures, printed out and returned by spontaneous volunteers from around the country (we had presumed boxes of actual hard copy pages should make more of an impression than email petitions), it turned out Ashcroft's declaration was just words to garner political support. Ultimately, we, and by extension every gun owner who took the time to support the effort and gather signatures, were met with deliberate indifference and ignored.

With Bondi's announcement about looking into Los Angeles concealed carry license application delays, hope was renewed and Second Amendment advocates looked for ways to call attention to infringements in other states. Two attempts that I have been involved in reporting on were made about denial of rights in Illinois, the same state AAG Dhillon is weighing in on with the amicus brief.

The first complaint to the Civil Rights Division was against blatant conflict of interest.

"On 8/11/23, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled to uphold the state Assault Weapon ban. It was 4–3, with Justice Rochford authoring the opinion," the complaint stated. "She violated current SCOTUS precedent (*Caperton V Massey*) by refusing to recuse herself regarding blatant conflicts of both political interests (campaigned with/was bankrolled by the main defendant(s) and was endorsed/took money from a lobbying group that lobbied for the law)."

"After careful review of what you submitted, we have decided not to take any further action on your complaint," the Justice Department inexplicably responded.

**"This Department of Justice will not stand idly by while States and localities infringe on the Second Amendment rights of ordinary, law-abiding Americans," Bondi proclaimed.**

The second complaint detailed racial discrimination with the Illinois' Firearms Owner Identification card requirement and process.

"DOJ forwarded your inquiry to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) for response," the plaintiff was told. "ATF implements policy and regulations to enforce laws created by Congress. As such, we encourage you to reach out to your State congressional delegation with your recommendations regarding firearm laws. We hope this information proves helpful to you."

So, why forward it to ATF? And what will complaining to politically invulnerable Illinois Democrats about infringements they enthusiastically impose do, aside from give them a good laugh?

## Making Their Case

With these two failed attempts as backdrop, DOJ's Civil Rights

# Just Released: First-Ever American Silver "Double" Eagle

## *and It's The Lowest Mintage Bullion Silver Eagle to Boot!*

For almost 40 years, the American Silver Eagle has dominated the coin market with over 640,000,000 minted to date. These hefty silver dollars are made from one ounce of 99.9% fine silver and have become THE standard for silver coins worldwide!

And now, the US Mint has released a special Silver Eagle that might just become THE greatest of all time…the "Double" Eagle Privy Silver Eagle!

### A Silver "Double Eagle"?

Most people know Double Eagles to be $20 gold coins struck prior to 1933. An "Eagle" was a $10 gold coin, so a $20 coin was a "Double Eagle".

Now, the U.S. Mint just released a bullion American Silver Eagle with a special eagle privy mark on the obverse. That means there's an eagle on the reverse AND the obverse, making it the first-ever silver "Double Eagle"!

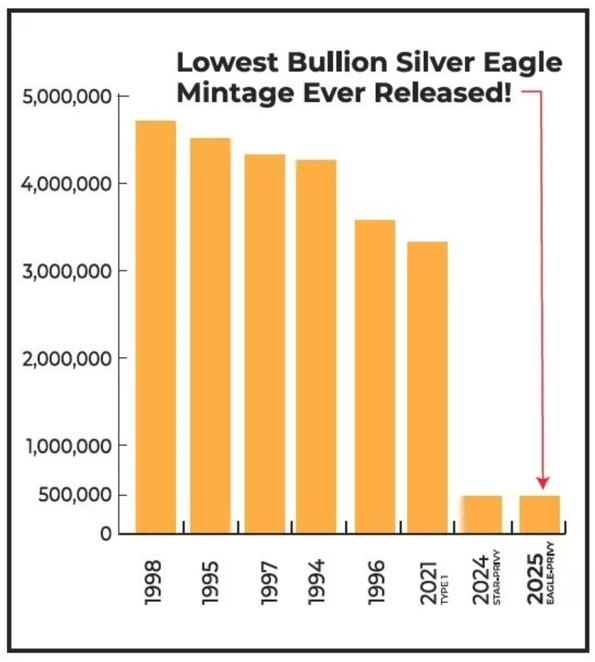
### Special One-Time-Only Privy Mark

The US Mint added an "eagle privy" to the Silver Eagle to support the new mobile gaming app, 8th Era, that marries gaming with coin collecting to inspire the next generation of collectors. It's an instant "must-have" for Silver Eagle collectors.

### Lowest Mintage Bullion Silver Eagle

Not only is the Eagle Privy the first-ever silver "Double Eagle" it's also the lowest mintage bullion Silver Eagle, tied with last year's Star Privy Eagle.

Take a look at the graph for perspective. Prior to 2024, the 1996 Silver Eagle was the lowest mintage with 3,603,386 coins made. The Eagle Privy Silver Eagle has a mintage of only 500,000 coins. That's **SEVEN TIMES LOWER!**

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**5-9 coins - $75 each + FREE SHIPPING**
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Division involving itself proactively in arguing against the Illinois semi-auto/magazine ban is a remarkably welcome change and adds credence to the thought that it's going to tactically pick and choose the right cases where the most progress can be made. So, now we can look at what is actually being argued and see if the right tactical arguments are being advanced.

"The Act violates the Second Amendment by banning AR15s and other firearms that are in common use by law abiding citizens for lawful reasons," the brief asserts. "Many of the banned firearms are 'Arms' under the Second Amendment."

That's why another key point made in the brief, that "the Second Amendment's text does not exclude 'militaristic' arms," is of paramount importance. "After all, 'a militia would be useless unless the citizens were enabled to exercise themselves in the use of warlike weapons,'" the brief explains.

The right to keep and bear arms also includes "the right to purchase them, to keep them in a state of efficiency for use, and to purchase and provide ammunition suitable for such arms, and to keep them in repair…. The right to keep and bear arms also involves the 'right to maintain proficiency in firearm use'," the brief elaborates. "The Second Amendment protects firearm attachments that are useful to the exercise of the right, including magazines, suppressors, and other firearm attachments that are in common use by law-abiding citizens for lawful reasons."

That leaves a concern, a big one articulated in these pages before: Currently banned arms, along with arms technology that will be developed in the future, are not "in common use." Since no innovation ever begins "in common use," a government with the power to do so can ban all new weapon developments, retaining them exclusively for itself.

That's a point the Second Amendment community needs to be making before we find we've been caught in a web of our spinning.

### But Wait. There's More.

In addition to the DOJ brief, one signed by 35 state's attorneys has been filed challenging the Illinois bans on behalf of the counties they represent, making two main arguments: "The act, as a ban on a class of arms "in common use" for self-defense today, is categorically unconstitutional under *Heller*; [and] The act is inconsistent with the historical tradition of firearms regulation and is therefore unconstitutional under *Bruen*."

With that comes an ominous footnote about a legal dilemma: "The State's Attorney is conscious of their dual responsibilities both to support the Constitution of the United States and to prosecute offenses committed in violation of the laws of the State of Illinois.

**The right to keep and bear arms also includes "the right to purchase them, to keep them in a state of efficiency for use, and to purchase and provide ammunition suitable for such arms, and to keep them in repair…."**

"Many" is a curious word to use. What firearms are NOT arms? That's why a concession in a footnote should raise concerns: "For purposes of this amicus brief, however, the United States does not challenge the district court's findings that certain firearms banned by the Act, such as .50 caliber rifles and pistols, do not fall within that category."

Perhaps the tactic will be to get a ruling that will help in later challenging those? Or what? Turning the conversation to tanks, grenades, artillery and submarines doesn't seem like they're arguing on favor of what Tench Coxe of the Continental Congress called "every terrible implement of the soldier."

Still, the brief adds some important points that an ultimate Supreme Court decision will need to consider: Among recognized "uses by law-abiding citizens for lawful purposes" are "self-defense, target shooting, and public defense," that last category touching on the core purpose the Framers had in mind as articulated in the first 13 words of the Second Amendment.

Until the courts clarify that such restrictions are unconstitutional, the duty to enforce the law remains, while each State's Attorney makes prosecutorial decisions based on their understanding of the appropriate legal principles at play and the facts and circumstances of each case."

Think about that. And ask yourself how many signatories would resign before conducting a prosecution they knew was wrong.

### So Now What?

Now we wait and see what the Seventh Circuit will do. Then we'll see appeals based on how they rule. Then we'll see what the Supreme Court will do, if anything. If they do nothing, the infringements will continue in Illinois and other "blue" states. If they hear the case, and if Illinois loses, we'll see if those states will keep playing games with laws in defiance of SCOTUS, and if anything will be done to discourage that.

But the real interesting dynamics will happen if gun owners lose. Then we'll see if the Second Amendment is worth the parchment it's written on. FN

# WHY Should YOU Become a Rifleman?

The best response might be "Why not?" Why have a car, but you can't drive it? Why have a rifle, if you can't hit the target? Out to the standard "Rifleman's Quarter-Mile" – 500 yards - something they could do starting back in the 1890s...and you can't, today??? Does it come down to self-respect: Do you respect yourself enough to become competent with your rifle? Learning to shoot like a Rifleman is fun, and once you learn how, it's a lifetime skill. But your main reason should be to carry on a great American tradition. And teach that tradition to others...

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