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THE MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2025, VOLUME 42 • ISSUE 09

THE NEW QUARTER-BORE CREEDMOOR



**WALKING
AMONG
CRIMINALS**

The Concept of
Deselection

**GUN
GAMES**

How To Get
Started in Field
Competition

PLUS

PULL IT!
TODAY'S
HOT .22 LR
LEVER GUNS

A NEW BREED
HISTORY OF
THE RUGER
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Gun Digest the Magazine (ISSN 1938-5943) is published monthly by Caribou Media dba Gun Digest Media, LLC. Corporate Headquarters is 5583 W. Waterford Ln., Suite D, Appleton, WI 54913. Periodicals postage paid at Appleton, WI 54913 and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PO Box 182, Williamsport, PA 17703. Copyright © 2025 Gun Digest Media. GUN DIGEST THE MAGAZINE and its logo are registered trademarks. Other names and logos referred to or displayed in editorial or advertising content may be trademarked or copyrighted. The publisher and advertisers are not liable for typographical errors that may appear in prices or descriptions in advertisements.

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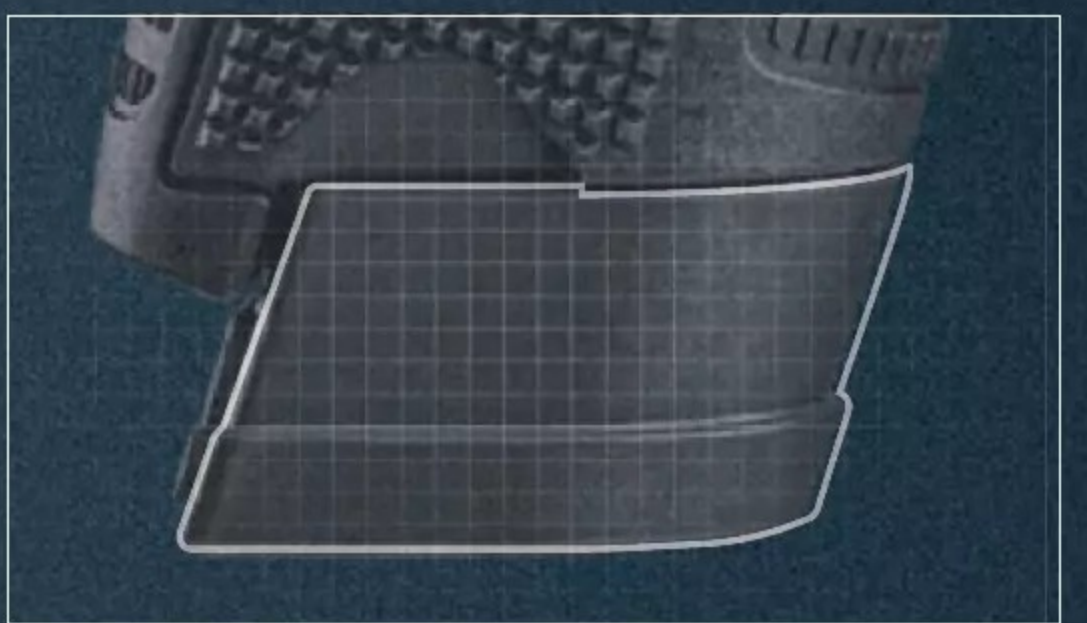
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PICK YOUR POISON

I've had a long-standing theory that anyone—yes, absolutely anyone—would love shooting if they could put away their fears or prejudices and give it an honest shot (pun intended). That might be shortsighted or overly hopeful, but I truly believe this.

Long-range shooting, pistol work, tactical games, plinking: Shooting is so diverse that there's something for everyone, and each discipline is such a wonderful challenge ... regardless of how far you take it.

With all that said, I also believe hunting isn't for everyone. Shooting is a very small piece of the hunt, and all the other pieces that go with it, such as taking a life, is a very personal experience. Some people don't want that experience, and I completely understand that perspective ... and I respect it.

But, for me, it's a passion that has truly shaped my life: Hunting is the reason and the catalyst that led me to the editorial chair from which I type this letter. Hunting is not a pastime for me; it's a sizable piece of my soul. When I'm hunting, I'm

thinking about life. And when I'm going through everyday life, I'm often thinking about hunting.

And a big part of hunting is the gear and shooting piece. I like trying new methods, hunting with different rifles and using various bullets to turn animals into meat.

This issue is *Gun Digest's* annual nod to hunting. While I do sprinkle it into various issues throughout the year, I make a conscious effort to respect the fact that, as mentioned above, not every shooter enjoys hunting. But, for this issue, we go hard and heavy.

So, sit back and enjoy. From a crash course on how to get started with NRL hunting competitions, to today's best sub-\$500 shotguns, it's in here.

Shoot straight, hunt hard and enjoy each trigger press ... regardless of what's in your sights. **GDTM**

GunDigest

5583 W. Waterford Ln., Suite D
Appleton, WI 54913
Phone: (920) 471-4522 • FAX: (920) 471-0031

GunDigest.com

E-mail us: info@gundigest.com

CARIBOU MEDIA GROUP PUBLISHER

JIM SCHLENDER

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LUKE HARTLE

MANAGING EDITOR

LAURA PELTAKIAN

ONLINE EDITOR

ELWOOD SHELTON

BOOKS EDITOR

COREY GRAFF

SR. ART DIRECTOR

GENE COO

ART DIRECTOR

KATIA SVERDLOVA

COLUMNISTS

RICHARD MANN, PHIL MASSARO,
ALEX OOLEY, PATRICK SWEENEY

ADVERTISING SALES

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

RYAN FARNER

(760) 809-8729

rfarner@recoilweb.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

ALEX OSTROWSKI

(920) 212-5677

alex@gundigest.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

DAVID FIGG

(813) 418-1060

dfigg@recoilweb.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

LORI MCDANIEL

(715) 498-3768

lori@gundigest.com

ADVERTISING ASSISTANT

CHING CORNFORTH

GUN DIGEST MEDIA, LLC

GM/PUBLISHER

GLEN CASTLE

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

JENNIFER SEXSTONE

NETWORK MANAGER

LUKE HARTLE

NEWSSTAND SALES

NPS MEDIA GROUP

lmasaoy@npsmediagroup.com

Subscription Services

U.S. and Canada: 1 (800) 829-9127

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.338-378 WEATHERBY

It's kinda like
a .338 Laupa.



HISTORICAL NOTES

In response to special requests from close friends, Roy Weatherby chambered a few rifles for a cartridge in which the case was formed by necking down his .378 Magnum case to .338 caliber. This took place as early as the 1970s, but it wasn't added to the Weatherby lineup of loaded cartridges and rifle chamberings until 1999.

The .338-378 Weatherby Magnum is sometimes confused with the earlier .338-378 Keith-Thompson wildcat, but because the K-T version is on the shortened .378 Magnum case, loading data are not interchangeable between the two.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The .338-378 Weatherby Magnum is

in the same performance league as the .338 Remington Ultra Mag and .338 Lapua, and, from a practical point of view, that's not saying a whole lot.

The smaller .340 Weatherby Magnum generates considerably less recoil,

yet Weatherby rates it only 100-fps slower than the .338-378 Magnum and at about the same speed as the .338 Remington Ultra Mag., when the three cartridges are loaded with 250-grain bullets. **GDTM**

.338-378 WEATHERBY LOAD DATA/FACTORY BALLISTICS

BULLET (GRAINS/TYPE)	POWDER	GRAINS	VELOCITY	ENERGY	SOURCE
180 Barnes TSX	RL-25	113.0	3,373	4,542	Barnes
210 Barnes TSX	RL-25	108.5	3,183	4,719	Barnes
225 Barnes TSX	RL-25	105.0	3,066	4,691	Barnes
250 Barnes TSX	RL-25	102.5	2,906	4,683	Barnes
225 Barnes TSX	FL	-	3,180	5,052	Weatherby B333225TTSX
250 Nosler Partition	FL	-	3,060	5,197	Weatherby N333250PT

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AP5-SD



9mm

AP53



5.56

AP51

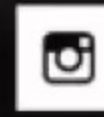


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GUN GRABBING

It's about time you get a grip. A good one.

There's a lot of discussion about using the "correct" grip when you shoot a pistol, but not so much about how to obtain that grip. It's possible to make a good shot without a good grip. It's also possible to make consecutive good shots without a good grip.

However, it's almost *impossible* to make a single or consecutive good shots efficiently and swiftly without a good grip.

The problem is, if you do not establish a good grip before you start shooting, everything that follows is what lawyers like to term "fruit of the poison tree."

Another way of looking at the importance of initially establishing a good grip is to use a baseball analogy. If you're a batter standing at home plate and you wait until the pitcher pitches the ball before you establish the proper grip on the bat, you're not going to hit a home run. At best you're going to bunt.

It's the same when it comes to getting a grip on your pistol. If you don't do it correctly when you draw from the holster, at best you'll probably just be slinging lead in the direction of the threat. The possibility even exists that, without the

proper grip, you might actually drop your pistol.

In a worst-case scenario, imagine that during the time it took you to draw, your attacker closed the distance and now you're engaged, hand to hand. If you do not have a solid, good, controlling grip, you could lose your pistol in a struggle.

CONSISTENCY IS KING

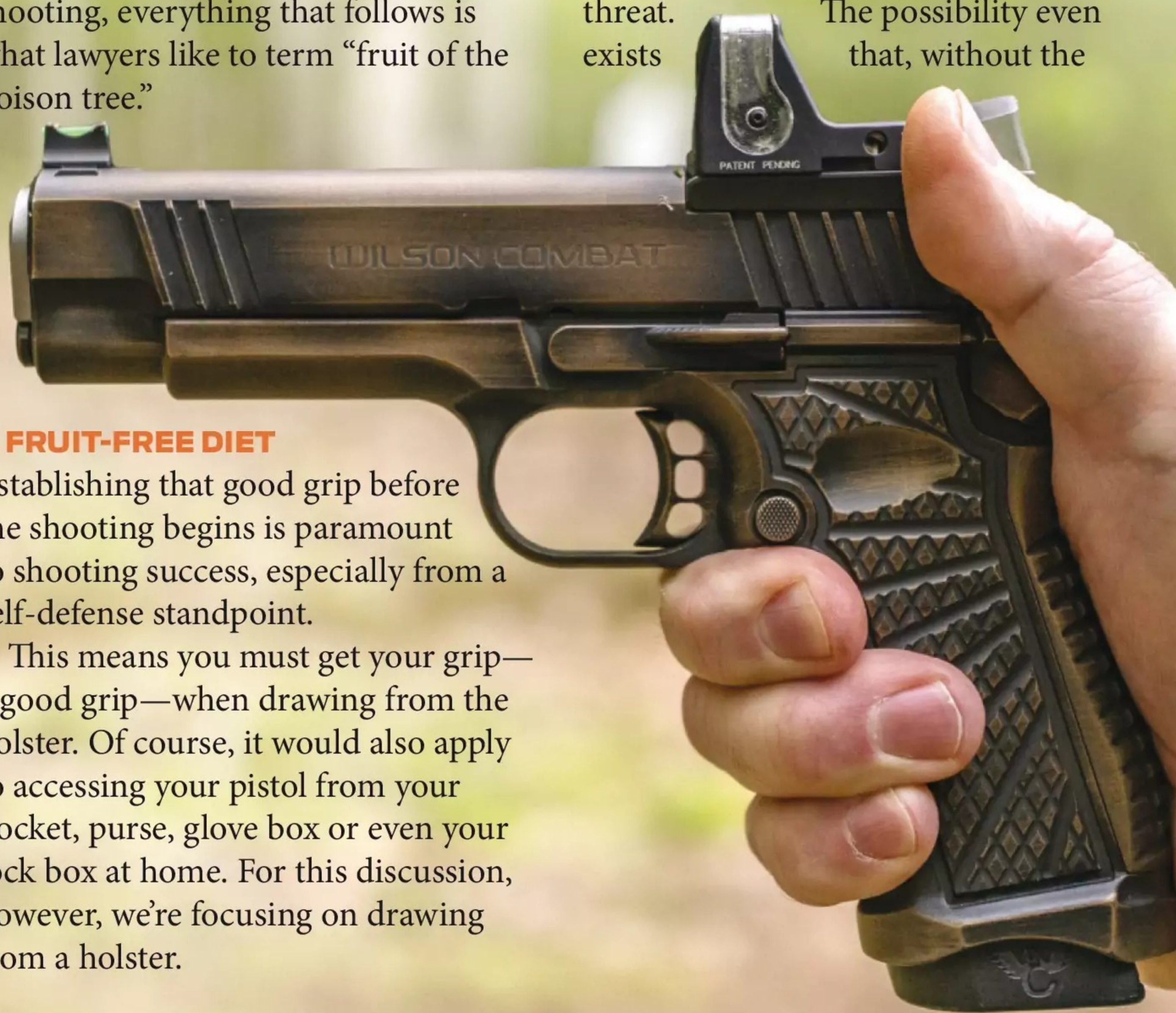
There are several things to consider concerning the establishment of a proper grip. Holster location and the cant of the holster are very important. This is something you will need to discover and tune based on the pistol and holster you use, as well as carry location and cover garments. However, the interaction of your hand with your pistol should not vary. Your hand's approach to the pistol and its establishment of a good grip should remain consistent.

When I'm moving my hand toward my holster,

A FRUIT-FREE DIET

Establishing that good grip before the shooting begins is paramount to shooting success, especially from a self-defense standpoint.

This means you must get your grip—a good grip—when drawing from the holster. Of course, it would also apply to accessing your pistol from your pocket, purse, glove box or even your lock box at home. For this discussion, however, we're focusing on drawing from a holster.





(left) Once your draw progresses to this point, you've seriously reduced the opportunity to reconfigure your grip.

(middle) If you do not initially position your hand on the pistol correctly, rectify this misalignment before you attempt to draw the pistol.

(right) Notice how the shooter has prepped his hand with the positioning of the fingers and thumb to best address the pistol in the holster.

(below) With a properly established grip on your pistol, the muzzle of the pistol should be in line with your forearm.

I like to have my hand arranged in a configuration that will best allow me to properly index it to the pistol. This helps me obtain my shooting grip before the pistol ever leaves my holster. What I've found that works best for me is to open my hand like I would prepare for a handshake, with a 90-degree angle between my thumb and my index finger. Then, I also like to hold my middle finger, ring finger and little finger grouped together but separate from my index finger. It's sort of like a modified version of the Vulcan "live long and prosper" hand gesture used by Mr. Spock on *Star Trek*.

Essentially, what I'm doing with this hand configuration is prepping the interaction of all my fingers and thumb for the job they must do when they contact the pistol. The first thing that should happen is the web of my hand should firmly slide into the arch of the grip, positioned as high as possible. As I feel this happen, it confirms I've obtained the proper initial position, and this tactical sensation drives the action of my fingers and thumb.

If, however, this interaction with the web of my hand and the grip does not feel right, this is the time—the only real opportunity—to correct any misalignment before I try to draw. Once my pistol comes out of the holster, I'm mostly stuck with the grip I have.

Next, my middle, ring and little fingers simultaneously wrap around

the grip of the pistol, while at the same time I make sure I fully extend my index—trigger—finger and slightly angle it away from the pistol/holster. While all of this is happening, my thumb is finding the manual safety—if the pistol has one—and it gently settles there in a preparatory attitude, waiting for further instruction.

At this point I have control of the pistol, and I can extract it from the holster.

The situation should drive any further action by the thumb on the safety and the index finger on the trigger. The finger should only find the trigger when your sights are on the target, or when you've orientated the pistol toward the target. Your thumb should only deactivate the safety when you've decided to shoot.

REPETITION RULES

As simple as this process sounds, it takes many, *many* repetitions to perfect it. That's the bad news. The good news is that this is something you can work on with dry practice, in the comfort of your own home, with a *for damned sure* unloaded pistol. The key is to conduct numerous repetitions from the holster to the point where you've fully extended the pistol toward the target and can make a trigger press. Ending each dry practice repetition with a trigger press allows you to evaluate if the grip you have established is



conductive to fast and accurate shooting.

When I was a cop, I would continually place my hand on my holstered gun, establishing that proper, pre-draw feel. I knew if I ingrained that into my very being, I could make a good draw and have a good grip. As someone who carries concealed, you can do the same thing. No, walking around town reaching for your gun all the time is *not* what I'm suggesting, nor what I did when I worked the street. But in addition to dry practice, when you're alone throughout the day, you can work to establish that proper first feel. **GDTM**



CONFRONTING THE UNTHINKABLE

Lessons from William Aprill on criminal violence and the mindset to survive.

In February 2018, I had the opportunity to take what would become one of the most impactful training classes of my life, Unthinkable: Tactics and Concepts for the Gravest Extreme taught by William Aprill and Greg Ellifritz. This wasn't your average pistol class or defensive tactics course. Instead, it challenged students to explore the psychology of violence, criminal victim selection and—most importantly—the internal mental shift required to survive the worst moments imaginable.

Today, I reflect not just on that class, but on the legacy of Aprill—a uniquely gifted trainer, mental health professional and former law enforcement officer—who we tragically lost too soon. The gun training world didn't just lose a teacher; we lost a scholar, a mentor and a man who dared to examine the darkest corners of human behavior not out of morbid curiosity, but to help others better defend themselves against it.

UNDERSTANDING THE CRIMINAL MIND

Aprill often said he didn't teach people

how to shoot better; he taught them how to *think* better. That was clear in Unthinkable, where we spent hours digging into how violent criminal actors actually think and operate. Unlike many of us whose lives are governed by laws, ethics and empathy, criminals often grow up in an entirely different moral ecosystem—where violence is normalized, manipulation is survival, and victim selection is a tradecraft.

Aprill's background as a mental health professional and former deputy sheriff gave him rare insight. He understood not just the behavior of criminals, but their developmental path. He pointed out that, for example, the average age of a first felony arrest for offenders who go on to kill police officers is just 11 years old. By the time they're in their 20s, many of these individuals have spent more than a decade refining their ability to identify soft, unaware, compliant targets.

As Aprill explained, criminals select victims using the same kind of fast, instinctive thinking that concealed carriers rely on in a defensive encounter. But

unlike us, their entire lifestyle is often geared toward sizing people up, probing boundaries and exploiting weaknesses. We might shoot 200 rounds at the range in a month. They've been living their "training" every day for years.

DESELECTION AS A WAY OF LIFE

One of the most transformative ideas I took from Aprill's class was the concept of deselection. Put simply, the goal isn't to win a fight—it's to avoid being selected for the fight in the first place. "Criminals don't want to fight," he said. "They want to win." If they sense that you're paying attention, carry yourself confidently or might present too much of a problem, they'll likely move on.

But this isn't something you can fake at the last second. You can't slap on a "tough guy" mask when you're walking to your car in a dark parking lot and expect it to work. As Aprill emphasized, deselection must be a lifestyle. Your posture, your awareness, your decisions all must consistently broadcast the message: "I'm not worth the trouble."

He illustrated this with a simple ex-

"One of the most transformative ideas I took from Aprill's class was the concept of deselection. Put simply, the goal isn't to win a fight—it's to avoid being selected for the fight in the first place. 'Criminals don't want to fight. They want to win.'"

“Unlike many of us whose lives are governed by laws, ethics and empathy, criminals often grow up in an entirely different moral ecosystem—where violence is normalized, manipulation is survival, and victim selection is a tradecraft.”

ample. Walk like a meerkat. Scan overtly. Look people in the eyes. Criminals, he explained, don't want to be seen. If they think you saw them, that alone can often break the attack cycle. Awareness, even more than armament, can be your most potent form of defense.

VIOLENCE WITHOUT HESITATION

While most training emphasizes the hardware—gear, guns, gadgets—Aprill focused on the software. Are you psychologically prepared to act with violence if you must? Not just draw and shoot, but strike, claw, gouge or even beat someone to death with a blunt object if it's the only option?

He didn't romanticize it. He didn't glorify violence, but he also didn't sugarcoat what survival sometimes demands. He made clear that in the gravest extreme, our polite, civilized sensibilities can become a liability. He encouraged us to rehearse not just techniques, but mental scripts to visualize the level of force we might need to use and to grow comfortable with it—not because we want to use violence, but because when it is necessary, hesitation can be fatal.

TRAINING FOR THE MIND AND BODY

The Unthinkable class offered practical skills—escaping restraints, disarming

attackers, tactical first aid—but its real value was the shift it created in mindset. Aprill and Ellifritz helped bridge the gap between theoretical preparedness and actionable readiness. Aprill's portion in particular was unique in that it wove together neuroscience, criminal psychology and tactical application in a way that few instructors even attempt, let alone master.

For those in the gun world who obsess over drills, groupings and gear, Aprill's message was both a challenge and a wake-up call: If you're not training your mind, you're only half-way prepared.

A LEGACY THAT ENDURES

With Aprill's passing, the firearms community lost one of its most brilliant and compassionate voices. But his impact lives on through the countless students he educated and inspired, and through the trainers who now incorporate his insights into their own curriculum.

David Yamane of *Gun Culture 2.0* called Aprill “so far ahead of so many in the gun training community he may well have been on Gun Culture Version 4.5.” That sounds about right. His work was a rare synthesis of empathy and hard realism, of aca-

demic rigor and tactical relevance. Even though you can no longer take the Unthinkable class with Aprill, a lot of his work is available on the internet, and Yamane has made a nice compilation available on this website at Gun Culture 2.0.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have trained under him, and as a tribute to his legacy, I encourage everyone reading this to dive into his recorded lectures, revisit his interviews and most importantly, apply what he taught.

If you're serious about self-defense, do yourself this favor: Take a course that challenges not your shooting ability but your thinking ability.

And carry Aprill's message with you. Train your mind to embrace awareness as a constant task, cultivate the ruthlessness needed for counterassault and embody the principles of deselection—projecting strength and vigilance to deter predators. By internalizing these lessons, you become hard to kill, hard to fool and the kind of person a violent criminal actor passes by, choosing an easier target instead. **GDTM**

About the Author

Alex Ooley is an affiliate attorney with the Armed Citizen's Legal Defense Network. The views and opinions expressed in this article are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Network. This article is for informational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal guidance regarding your situation, please consult with a qualified attorney.

COMP THAT BLASTER

Vantage Point Armory's aftermarket option.

Comps on pistols are the hot new thing. But what if you already have a pistol and want a comp?

For the most part, it means a new barrel, a comp and perhaps even some pistolsmithing work to get it all behaving properly. And, if you're doing this to a striker-fired pistol (anything not 1911, really), once the comped barrel is on, you can't get it off without removing the comp from the barrel.

Instead, look to Vantage Point Armory. Their comps slide onto the accessory rail of the frame, match up with the slide and barrel, and provide a setup that doesn't require comp-barrel surgery to remove.

The solution is simple, but it only works for some pistols. (They have a list with 10 very popular pistol models.) You use the lock bars and set screws that come in the kit. Slap the lock

bars into the accessory rail slots, slide the comp on and bolt the comp rails through to the lock bars. That's it. The comp now diverts some of the muzzle blast gases to tame recoil and reduce muzzle rise.

You can even, with some models, still mount a light onto the pistol once you've installed the compensator.

IT'S A SOFT FIX

This is not a perfect solution. (In reality, there is no such thing as perfection.) As a comp, it will not be as effective as one that is barrel-mounted. The needed extra clearance and gap from barrel to comp means you lose some

effectiveness. But, for the \$150 Vantage Point Armory charges for a comp, you cannot buy a barrel ready-threaded for a comp. Then, the comps will cost almost that much. And, with Vantage Point, you won't need a pistolsmith to install it; you can do that yourself.

You will still have to remove the Vantage Point comp to disassemble your pistol. However, removing four setscrews to slide the comp off the rail is a lot easier than wrestling a comp off an extended, threaded barrel. The comp has been given a Cerakote finish, so it will scrub up without too much hassle, depending on how long you go

Once in place, the comp follows the contours of the slide.





The Vantage Point Armory comp slides right on and bolts into place. No pistol-smith need be involved.

between cleanings.

And, depending on the pistol you have, you can still fit the comped pistol into a holster.

This is one of those “wish I’d thought of it” ideas that, on second thought, has a lot of downsides for a comp

maker. Downsides? The dimensions of the various pistols means Vantage Point has to account for the distance from rail to bore center, rail length,

slide profile, slide contour and barrel movement on each and every pistol as an individual option (which they have done). Some pistols are easier than others. Glock dimensions are so alike that one of the Glock comps works on no less than five different 9mm models. But I don’t see them ever coming out with a “one size fits all” comp. It’s just not possible.

What is possible is getting a comp onto one of the listed pistols and even getting a light on there as well—without enlisting the services of a pistol-smith.

That’s a win in my book. **GDTM**



The comp is not attached to the barrel, so the gap means there’s some efficiency loss. That’s physics for ya.

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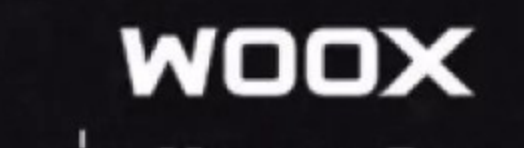

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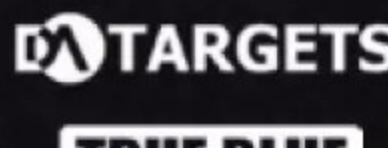
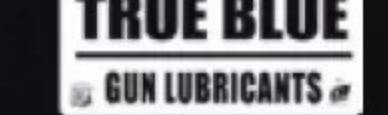

MANTIS


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WOOX

**MISSION FIRST
TACTICAL**


TARGETS

TRUE BLUE
GUN LUBRICANTS


**GUN OWNERS
OF AMERICA**


SMKW


AMERICAN LEGION
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YOUR SUPPRESSOR PRESCRIPTION IS READY

Silencer Central proves efficient for the arduous endeavor of hushing up a firearm.

When Brandon Maddox passed me his card, one part of the text jumped out at me immediately—*pharmacist*. At this point, it's been a cup of coffee since the founder and chief muckety-muck of Silencer Central plied this trade. But forgive him: He's been too busy reinventing the retail suppressor market, building one of the premier purveyors of the ever-so-popular muzzle device. Yet, it struck

me that he continues to keep this moniker from a past life alive—along with his license in a handful of states.

Sure enough, he invested blood, sweat and likely caffeinated nights to earn the professional degree at University of North Carolina and Duke. In turn, hard work, pride and a little family honor are wrapped up in the title. But scratch the surface of Silencer Central and the company's success is wrapped up—in part—in pharmacy.

Well, that, and bad consumer experiences, the great state of South Dakota and prairie dog hunting.

Confused yet? Here, I'll explain ...

THE NEED TO HUSH UP

The easiest place to start is South Dakota—Sioux Falls, to be exact. Prompted by his wife, Maddox left the East Coast for his hometown in the southeast corner of The Rushmore State. As it does so many folks, the ample sportsman

opportunities of the more tropical of the Dakotas enraptured Maddox. In particular, the state's ample prairie dog population.

As anyone who's dusted off the plains varmints knows, the draw of the sport is high-volume shooting. Few other styles of hunting outside of doves and snow geese offer the opportunity of as many trigger pulls. But unlike the wing-shooting disciplines, Maddox was quick to observe one of the paradoxes of the endeavor: Send your first varmint to Valhalla, and the rest of the town tends to keep their heads low for a long time.

Sigh. A half a day's drive to a shoot for a fraction of expected trigger pulls is not exactly the recipe for excitement. Maddox, however, had a plan to improve his chances in the field. All it would take was a modest investment in what was then a somewhat rare device—a suppressor.

Problem solved, right?

BLASTED BY THE SUPPRESSOR MARKET

We'll get into buying a suppressor in a bit and how Silencer Central has streamlined the process. Suffice to say, this was not the environment Maddox operated in during the early 2000s when he set out to buy his first device. Sure, the NFA paperwork, the \$200 tax

stamp and waiting (and waiting and waiting) were all the same. Where you did business was different.

Then, the nation had yet to embrace the wonders and conveniences of the internet, so your one choice to buy a suppressor was through your local gun store. Maddox came to find out it was subprime.

First off, you were dealing with a retailer not exactly enthralled with the prospect of exercising their Class 3 license. Why would they be? Brick-and-mortar operations are set up for a sell-and-shake transaction: You pick a gun, they collect the cash and both of you are on your merry way. Suppressors are a longer-term commitment in the sales process, with money up front and hand wringing on both ends.

Additionally, back then, most mom-and-pop operations had a passing knowledge of the rarely sold devices. They knew suppressors suppressed the report of the gun; if they were experienced, they might be cognizant a can would reduce recoil. Gaining in-depth insight into the nuances of suppressors, which make up a slew of the reasons why one is preferable to another, was lost on most of this era's retailers. Hence the reason why Maddox's first can was akin to threading a car muffler on his rifle. Worse yet, when he attempted to

rectify his mistake with a new model, he was back to square one in the process and came out with one equally unsatisfying, albeit for other reasons.

It seemed if Maddox was going to rectify the issue of hit-and-miss—mostly miss at this point—suppressor purchases, he was going to have to take matters into his own hands. Luckily, he had a few things going for him.

PRESCRIPTION FOR THE SUPPRESSOR MARKET

The first ace Maddox played was his father-in-law, who was an FFL. Through his tutelage, the then pharmacist in charge of a mail-delivery national pharmacy gained his licensure to sell firearms and, more importantly, suppressors. This kicked off his basement business, South Dakota Silencers, which sold at state-wide gun shows.

Maddox's next ace was his pharmacy background, particularly the business end of the industry. With his keen eye, he was quickly aware of how many folks from neighboring states were beating a path to his business at the shows. This was money left on the table—given he



(Above) Brandon Maddox puts a premium on direct selling of suppressors, ensuring customers get exactly the option they require.

Once the hub of a by-mail pharmacy, Silencer Central's Sioux Falls, South Dakota, HQ is the next best thing to over-the-counter suppressors.



Maddox (front) has used a load of personal experience—from his career in the pharmaceuticals industry to bad experiences buying suppressors—to build Silencer Central into a success.

Not only has Silencer Central innovated the suppressor-buying process, but it's done its part to evolve the devices themselves. The company's Salvo 12-gauge shotgun suppressor is a good example

couldn't sell out of state—which led him to look to expand. From his company, he evolved into Dakota Suppressors, first to North Dakota, then Nebraska and continuing growing from there.

And for the next aspect pharmaceuticals play in building a suppressor empire: Maddox was also uniquely qualified to navigate the highly regulated world of national NFA device sales. Let's just say that he knew his way around the block.

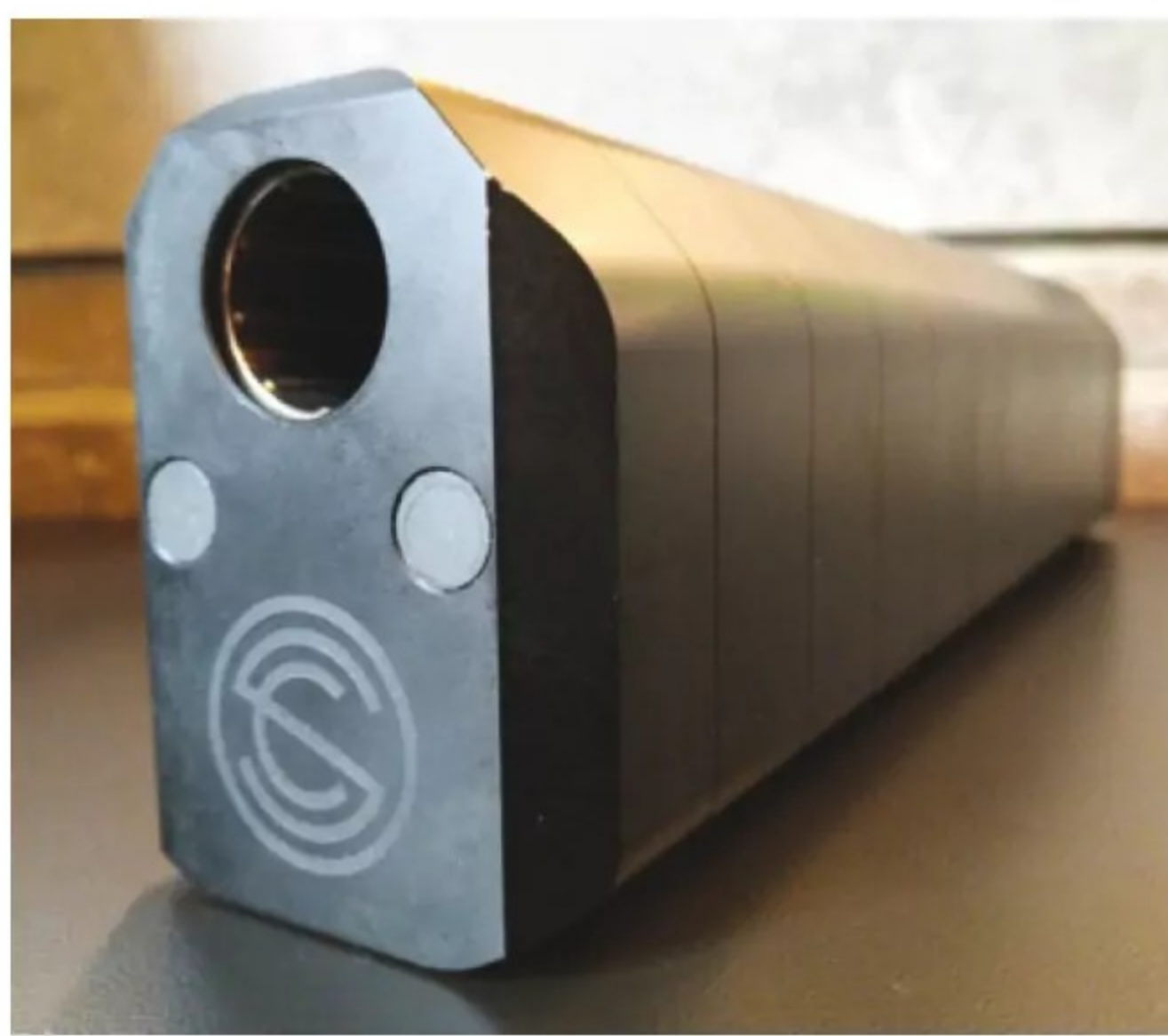
"At GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), I worked on the first pharmaceutical product to do direct-to-consumer advertising in the industry," Maddox said. "All direct-to-consumer advertising had to be pre-approved by the FDA before we could use it commercially with consumers. Watching our team at GSK work directly with the federal regulatory branch, the FDA was instrumental in navigating the federal regulations in firearms with the ATF."

Finally, Maddox knew the biggest barrier for the consumer was the process itself. Much like the nationwide mail pharmacy he worked for when he started what would become Silencer Central, Maddox knew the red tape had to be cut—or at least alleviated—to build a successful business in the niche.

This all leads us to ...

THE RISE OF SILENCER CENTRAL

Modestly tidy and residing at the edge of an industrial park in northwest Sioux Falls, Silencer Central's HQ represents the axis mundi of American suppressor



The company continues to innovate suppressors, such as its shorty and tactically minded Banish Speed K.

Don't have a gun with a threaded muzzle? No sweat, Silencer Central's shop will thread your barrel for you.



sales. At present, nearly 200 employees buzz around this hive, marketing, taking orders, filling orders and helping potential customers route a course to suppressor ownership. This doesn't count its off-site employees, with FFLs on the payroll in the 42 states where suppressors sales are legal ... and their partners who manufacture Silencer Central's Banish line of cans. And this success all comes from demystifying and defanging one of the most unnecessarily arduous processes in all consumerism.

Overall, this was Maddox's main aim: simplification. And he's achieved it in spades.

Silencer Central experts assist customers in selecting a suppressor and take care of paperwork submission after a brief phone consultation. Customers only need to answer questions and provide necessary information. Silencer Central offers a free trust service, allowing the easy addition of members post-purchase.

The paperwork end of things takes a mere 15- to 20-minute chat, and the hands-on aspects—passport-style photos and fingerprints—are flawlessly facilitated with clear instructions and tutorial videos. Heck, Silencer Central even provides flexible payment options, including a four-installment plan and personalized schedules.



The company's HQ is also its warehouse, with all suppressors passing through it before being shipped around the nation.

Silencer Central sells suppressors in all 42 states where the device is legal.



Suffer a baffle strike? No worries. Silencer Central's shop has the parts to get your suppressor back up in running order.

Approval typically takes 8 to 10 months, during which Silencer Central maintains communication with monthly check-ins. Once approved, customers digitally complete Form 4473, and the suppressor is shipped to their door after passing through the company's South Dakota facility. Ongoing customer support is available 6 days a week during business hours.

Not that these completely within-the-bounds innovations still didn't turn heads, but when Silencer Central officially lifted off the ground in 2019 as a national company, Maddox was politely invited to meet with the ATF in

Washington, D.C. Far from a one-on-one inquiry of his business, he walked into a room brimming with more than 4 dozen federal agents and officials.

Honestly, it sounds more ominous than it turned out. The officials were mainly interested in his business model—given nothing like it existed previously. Bureaucrats are going to bureaucrat, so in return for the info, they offered guidelines for running his business. These have been implemented to keep the powers that be at bay, and they haven't made Silencer Central miss a step in delivering what they promise—a painless process from picking a can to picking it up.



Honestly, Silencer Central offers a can for every occasion.

PROOF IN THE PUDDING

So, have Maddox's efforts been worth it? On my trip to Sioux Falls, I went through the process of filing the paperwork for a suppressor and creating a trust. Honestly, I would have put it at a 10-minute ordeal. Then, we took the time to sample the company's wares at the range, including Silencer Central's brand-spanking-new Buckmaster 30 and Banish Speed K, along with its classics. Top to bottom—from .22 LR to .338 Lapua—the suppressors performed.

Maddox is fond of saying, "If you shoot suppressed, you'll never want to shoot unsuppressed again." He's right. And with the streamlined process he's concocted at Silencer Central, he's given you every reason to put the assertion to the test. **GDTM**

01 Magpul MOE QD M-Lok Bipod

Magpul just made life easier for M-Lok users with the new MOE QD Bipod. It's got the same rugged reliability and clean design of their original bipod but now attaches directly to M-Lok slots—no adapter needed. Built from high-strength polymer with stainless steel hardware, it offers smooth pan and tilt, rapid leg deployment and quick one-handed adjustments. Best part? It's lightweight, stable and priced right for everyday use. Whether you're ringing steel or stretching your rifle's legs in the field, this bipod is ready to work.

MSRP: \$80**02 Henry HUSH Rifles**

Henry's new HUSH Series isn't just suppressor-ready—it's suppressor-optimized. Built by the company's Special Products Division (SPD), this is a clean-sheet design engineered specifically for running quiet. Each rifle features a carbon-fiber tension-wrapped match-grade barrel from BSF, a skeletonized aluminum M-Lok fore-arm by TAPCO, and a forged-carbon Pic rail for optics. The matte-finished laminate stock keeps it rugged but lightweight and a threaded muzzle comes standard. Available in five calibers from .45 Colt to .45-70 Gov't, the HUSH balances like a classic lever gun—even with a can on board.

MSRP: \$1,999**03 HEVI-Hitter Waterfowl Loads**

HEVI-Shot's new HEVI-Hitter line blends 20 percent tungsten over 80 percent steel to deliver a one-two punch that ducks and geese won't walk away from. The denser tungsten layer adds serious impact—reportedly 54 percent more kinetic energy than steel alone—while the steel keeps patterns wide and affordable. Available in 12-, 16-, 20- and 28-gauge options, HEVI-Hitter offers 11 loads tuned for everything from close shots to long-range boomers.

MSRP: Starting at \$49 per box of 20

GEAR TO GET

01 **02** **03** 

04 Escort WS Youth

Escort's WS Youth is built from the ground up for young or small-statured shooters—but without feeling like a cut-down compromise. This 20-gauge pump-action sports classic Turkish walnut furniture, a soft recoil pad and a 13¾-inch length of pull that leaves room to grow. The aircraft-grade alloy receiver keeps weight down, while the 22-inch chrome-plated barrel is threaded for Escort's multi-choke system, making it just as suited to bird hunting as it is to casual clays. With a fiber-optic front sight, sling studs and a manual cross-bolt safety, the WS Youth delivers tradition, fit and function in one package.

MSRP: \$300

05 Mendoza RM-22 Rifles

Mendoza Firearms, a century-old Mexican gunmaker, is now bringing its RM-22 semi-auto rimfire carbine stateside. Based on the classic Hammerli SA22, the RM-22 runs a reliable blowback action and feeds from a 17-round tubular mag. It's offered in three trims—the RM-22 1000, 3000, and 6000—each sharing the same core action but differing in stock style and optics readiness. Think German beechwood or camo synthetic stocks, with options like thumbholes and Picatinny rails on the higher-end models. Lightweight, affordable and made for plinking or small-game duty, the RM-22 is an old-school .22 with fresh availability.

MSRP: Starting at \$225

06 Leupold Spotting Scopes

Leupold is doubling down on glass this season with two fresh entries: the SX-2 Alpine HD and the SX-4 Pro Guide HD. Both are purpose-built for hunters and long-range shooters who demand sharp optics without babysitting their gear. The Alpine HD comes in 60mm or 80mm objective versions, offering excellent clarity and rugged, lightweight construction at an approachable price. Step up to the SX-4 Pro Guide HD and you get enhanced resolution, edge-to-edge sharpness and a diamond-coat lens treatment designed for hard-core use in tough light. Either way, you're getting top-tier Leupold performance.

MSRP: SX-2 Alpine HD starting at \$399, SX-4 Pro Guide starting at \$799

07 X Vision Optics Shadow 100 Digital Night Vision Viewer

Don't let the size fool you—X Vision's new Shadow 100 Mini packs serious punch in a pocket-sized night vision viewer. With an extended 435-yard nighttime range, 8X digital zoom, and a crisp IPS display, this upgraded model delivers clear visuals in low light without the bulk. It's photo and video capable, stores up to 32 GB internally, and offers seven IR brightness levels to adapt to changing conditions. At just over 7 ounces, it's an easy grab for hunters, campers or anyone who wants to see in the dark without weighing down their pack.

MSRP: \$149







GUN GAMES

When it comes to hunting preparation, zeroing your rifle from a bench is not practice. But you do have some fun options.

We are in the golden age of competition shooting, with different forms and flavors for every marksman. One of the underappreciated but rapidly growing organizations is NRL Hunter. Fusing traditional hunting scenarios with modern competition standards, NRL Hunter elevates the skill cap and educates people nationwide that marksmanship in the field isn't shooting fish in a barrel.

In essence, it tests your skills to find, range and shoot targets from between 100 and 1,000 yards while layering the difficult conditions you might face while on a hunt. Even for seasoned competition shooters or hunters, this game isn't easy.

But—it is satisfying, illuminating and oh so much fun.

THE SOUL OF A HUNTER

As the name suggests, NRL Hunter was started to benefit hunters. While many

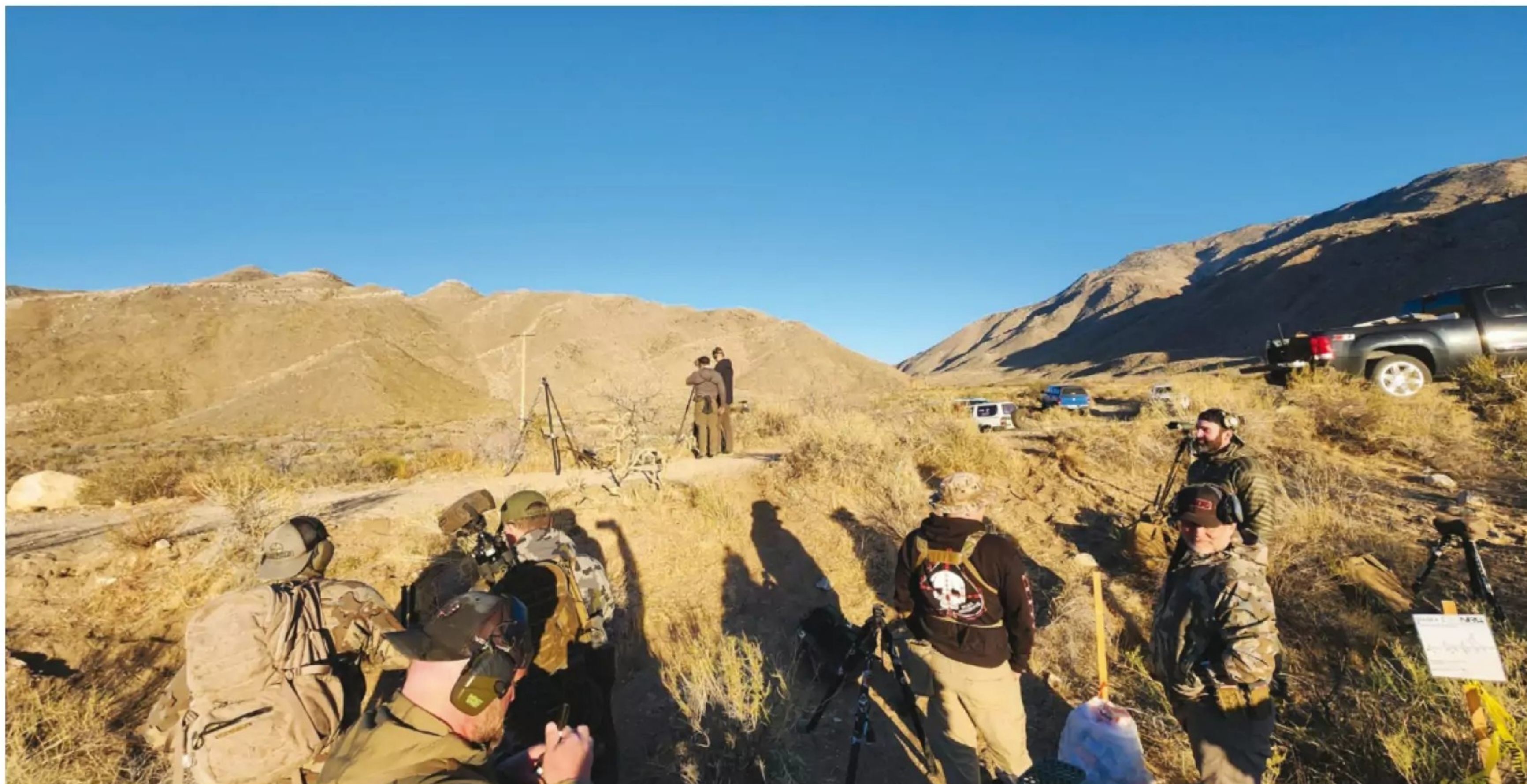
skills are necessary for a successful harvest, one of the most difficult to learn or practice is field marksmanship. Shooting off a bench at a paper target doesn't address the critical skills needed for a real shot taken at an animal in the wild.

Stress, wind reading, knowing your rifle, your ammo and your limits are aspects that can make or break a hunt. Being able to put those skills to the test and improve yourself makes not only for more successful hunting but also more ethical hunting.

For many who shoot NRL Hunter, this is the whole allure of the game. And if you have a once-in-a-lifetime hunt coming up or just want to improve your shooting skills, NRL Hunter is a great place to push yourself.

GAMERS PLAY THE GAME

Not everyone you meet at an NRL Hunter match is there prepping for elk season. Shooters focusing on hunting are probably the minority. While NRL Hunter is a great



way of practicing for the big-game season, it is still a game. Steel elk don't hear you stalking, AR500 bobcats don't smell you, and no timers are counting down in the woods.

For a lot of the shooters, NRL Hunter is simply a fresh new format for precision matches, forcing different and interesting skills and giving people a good excuse to build a new rifle. Count me in that category. Matches that push my skillset or force me to learn something new are always attractions, and NRL Hunter does it in spades. It has quickly become my second favorite format to shoot.

BASIC RULES

The exact rules should be consulted before your first match, but to give you a taste we can boil them down to Cliffs-Notes.

Every stage is shot "blind," meaning you don't know what you're getting into. You don't get to watch other competitors shoot the stage before you, and learning anything about the stage before you shoot is strictly forbidden.

Every stage is 4 minutes and allows a maximum of eight shots. Scoring is "2-1 dead target." Hitting the target with your first shot earns 2 points, if you miss your first shot you're allowed a second. Impacting with the second shot earns 1 point. If you miss both shots, the target can no longer be engaged. If you hit the target, it's considered neutralized, and you move on

to the next target at the stage.

Each stage consists of some combination of up to four targets and up to four positions. If you have four targets, you will only have one position. If you have four positions, you'll have one target. There are also combinations in between, like two targets/two positions. The positions are not fixed and can be selected by the hunter while on the clock. A "new" position must be at least one arm's length away from the old one.

Each stage is given left and right limits, so you know what area you're looking in to find the targets. On the start buzzer, the shooter needs to find the targets, range the targets, get into position and shoot.

Trust me, the 4 minutes to accomplish all this go fast.

EQUIPMENT

Gear won't win matches or put meat in the freezer, but it can help. If you're an established long-range shooter or hunter



and you want to test your gear and your skills, you probably won't need to buy anything new. But if you want to get all the juice for the squeeze, a few tools are game changers.

My loadout included:

- Eberlestock UpRanger
- Armageddon Gear Game Changer Shmedium with Git-Lite fill
- Fix It Sticks Long Range Competition Toolkit
- Sig Sauer Kilo 10k Gen II
- Kestrel Ballistics 5700X Elite
- Longtucky Supply Bino Pouch
- Leofoto Tripod with Really Right Stuff Anvil-30 ballhead
- L3i Design Solutions Tac Table

The general strategy for a stage is to use a tripod to glass and find your targets, then get into position using any combination of tripod, bipod or shooting bag to take the shot.

Range-finding binoculars help speed and smooth out the process since finding a target and then switching tools to range the target eats valuable time. Add in a ballistic solver, such as my Sig Sauer Kilo 10k Gen II, and the process becomes even easier. It gives range and dope with the press of a button.

One thing to keep in mind is that gear is only useful if it's easy to access. Most shooters use a chest rig of some kind to make life easier. Longtucky Supply just released its Bino Pouch not long before my California-based Mason Valley match, and it's a winner. Magnets seal the hood, and Velcro makes the entire pouch adjustable to any size or shape of binos.

A solid bag to carry all your stuff in is a requirement, since stages are spread out and often over broken landscapes. The Eberlestock UpRanger has served me well for several years and is easy to recommend.

One piece of gear that didn't arrive in time for the match was the new MDT Champion Backpack. While I didn't get to use the new bag in Mason Valley, I have used it at PRS matches since then, and I highly recommend it. Giving yourself a portable workstation comes in handy when you're in the bush.





CUSTOM LIGHTWEIGHT
PRECISION RIFLE

Most of the gamers shoot in Open Heavy, giving them a maximum of 16 pounds of rifle to play with. Since the hunting aspect is what appeals to me in NRL Hunter, I shoot the Open Light class. This has a 12-pound limit, forcing competitors to use a rifle they more likely would in the field.

To make that goal but still pack on as many luxuries as possible isn't easy—but it is doable. Here is how my Hunter rifle shakes out:

RIFLE ACTION
FAXON FX7

- BARREL: Faxon "Gunner" Profile, 20 inches, 6.5 Creedmoor
- SCOPE: Vortex Razor LHT 4.5-22x50 FFP
- SCOPE RINGS: MDT Lightweight
- CHASSIS: MDT HNT26
- MUZZLE BRAKE: Area 419 Hellfire Match
- SUPPRESSOR: Silencer Central Banish MeatEater
- TRIGGER: TriggerTech Special
- GRIP: Kung Fu Grip
- TIMER: MDT Crush It timer
- AMMO: Black Sheep Ammo 143-grain ELD

This rifle has performed far better than my wildest hopes. Everything about it has been perfect from the first day ... almost.

Faxon Firearm's FX7 is a sleeper of a rifle. The action is a six-lug, 70-degree bolt lift Remington 700 footprint coated in ArmorLube DLC and made from 416 stain-

less-steel. Its assets include an integrated recoil lug, integrated 20-MOA Picatinny rail, interchangeable bolt handle, M16 style extractor and uses a standard R700 trigger.

The action is smooth and well-made, and it handles dust and grime better than any bolt rifle I've used previously. But my favorite part of this build is the barrel. Faxon Firearms offered the "Gunner" profile in AR-15 and AR-10 barrels for years but applying that idea to a bolt-rifle barrel has been magical.

Barrels are what pack on pounds to a rifle, and it's hard to cut that weight without running into problems like

overheating, drifting POI or groups that explode open. The Gunner profile is built to mitigate all of those. Starting thick, it quickly tapers down to an almost pencil profile before opening up at the very end to host a threaded muzzle. The result is a 20-inch 6.5 Creedmoor barrel that only weighs 2.45 pounds. With my handloads, this is a comfortably .75 MOA rifle shooting 10-round groups with no downtime for heat.

Cutting all this weight left room in the budget for a suppressor, but only if it was light enough. Silencer Central's new MeatEater by Banish comes in at only 10.3 ounces but offers a full 32dB sound reduction and helps cut recoil with the inclusion of a muzzle brake at the end of the suppressor. If you haven't added a suppressor to your match or hunting rifle, I cannot recommend it enough. Making life quieter and easier to stay on target is a must-have for any rifle system.

The MeatEater is not the least expensive suppressor you can find, but the full titanium build and added muzzle brake are entirely worth it.

For glass, Vortex provided the Razor LHT 4.5-22x50 FFP. This is an interesting scope that ticks a lot of boxes and is almost perfect for NRL Hunter. While mostly a hunting scope at heart, it has



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SAFETY TIP

Store firearms securely, inaccessible to children and unauthorized users.

Consult and comply with any and all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, requirements, and/or restrictions, including but not limited to those regarding the purchase, ownership, use, transport, and carrying of a firearm. Not all products are available in all states or jurisdictions.



enough features to make it effective in a match environment. A rock-solid zero stop, perfect tracking, great Christmas tree reticle and impressive glass worthy of the Razor name, it has all the hallmarks of a last-generation top-tier competition scope. But at only 21.7 ounces, this was built to not weigh you down.

Part of where the LHT saves weight is the 50mm objective lens and 30mm main tube. While enough to get the job done, this does limit the light-gathering ability of the scope. But even on my last stage of day one at Mason Valley, where we went way past legal hunting light, I could still find the gray steel of my last stage against the gray rocks. For what this scope is designed for, it's impeccable.

MDT's HNT26 was the chassis of choice for this project. My feelings on the HNT26 have gone back and forth between love and hate, but after a week-end shooting NRL Hunter, it's settled on love. The HNT26 feels lightweight. It should, since it's 26 ounces. But in your hand, out of the box, it feels *too light*. Don't let that fool you, because this chassis can take some insane abuse.

Two long days of competition lead to progressively caring less about being gentle on your equipment, none more so than the chassis. But even being banged on boulders, dropped on cacti or dumped in the sand, the HNT26 ate it all.

The only failure point on the chassis was the grip and that happened a couple

of months before the match. The carbon-fiber grip of the HNT26 is a shell epoxied to a plastic piece that connects to the rifle via a standard AR-15 grip interface. That epoxy on my grip just failed and disintegrated—slipped right off in my hand. Reaching out to MDT, it turns out my grip was one of the unlucky few in a specific batch of grips where something went sideways with no way for QC to catch the problem until they were in the hands of users. Oh, well. These things happen.

While MDT offered to replace the grip, I didn't love it, so I was fine with using something else. I like near-vertical grips on my precision rifles, and this NRL Hunter rifle was no different.

The Bubba in me reached for one of my spare Die Free Co. Kung Fu grips because it was the perfect shape and texture. A little Dremel work to remove the beaver tail, and it was perfect.

To finish it all off and actually put lead on target, Black Sheep Ammo provided a pile of their 143-grain ELD match-grade ammo. Made in Union, Missouri, Black Sheep is a newer brand of ammo manufacturer focused on quality over quantity. I've used almost everything they make, from 115-grain 9mm to this 143-grain 6.5 Creedmoor, and all of it has been impressive. Accurate, low SD/ES, and dead-nuts reliable. Plus, the brass is great for reloading as well.

MASON VALLEY MATCH

Just a hair outside of San Diego County

in Southern California, you can find Mason Valley Ranch, a piece of land that hosts one of the best NRL Hunter matches in the nation. This was my second time shooting this match (once in 2023 and once in 2025), and both have been outstanding, though not without challenges.

Boasting 20 stages, it makes for a packed course of fire across just 2 days, with 12 stages shot on Saturday and the last eight shot on Sunday.

The madman in charge of Mason Valley is Serge Ducourneau; assisting the madness was Ben Gallimore. The Mason Valley match has become infamous for how the stages are designed to push shooters in every aspect. The targets weren't easy to find, and like real animals, they were often where you wouldn't expect them. Mason Valley is also infested with Sasquatch of a few types. These tall, skinny targets require wind calls with no margin for error.

The targets and the machinations of the match directors are only half the battle. The environment is the other. There was a 50/50 chance of precipitation and a 100-percent chance of wind. Though, it turned out mild by Mason Valley standards with temps in the mid 60s and wind gusting to only 35 mph.

The course of fire is spread out across a wide area, and shooters walked 2-3 miles over both days. Most shooters have a love-hate relationship with Mason Valley. On the one hand, it's an unforgiving match. On the other hand, it's the challenge that keeps us coming.

As for the match, while Serge and Ben designed some truly diabolical stages, they weren't all dialed to 11. Most of them were approachable, but some of those ate my lunch (curse you, Sasquatch!). All of it was educational.

And that's the rub of NRL Hunter: If you're willing to step up, the matches offer more education, excitement and fun than you can shake a rifle muzzle at.

If you're not willing to accept the challenge—possibly a fat goose egg on your score—maybe try something less stressful ... like watercolors or stamp collecting. **GDTM**



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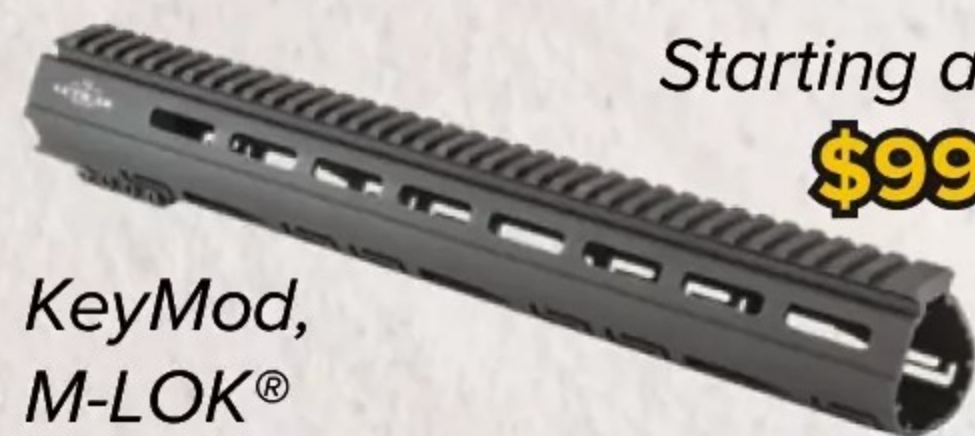


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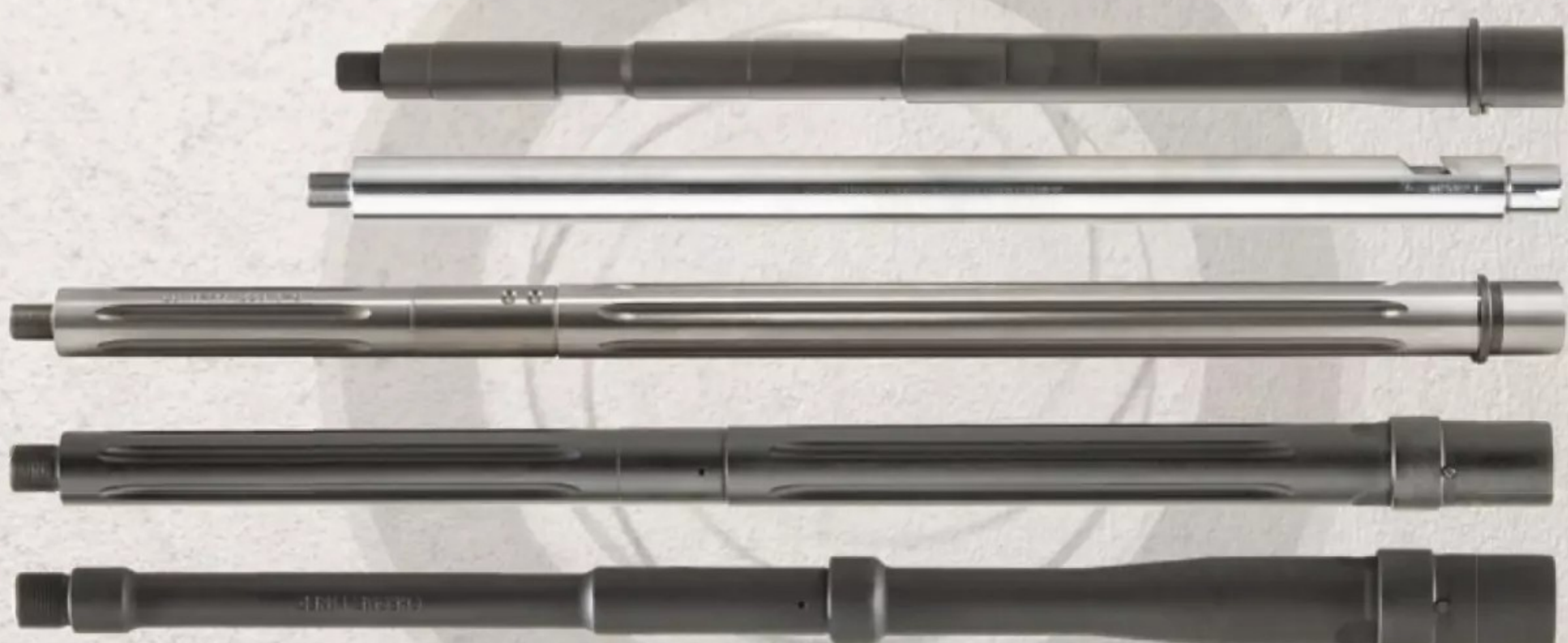
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Over the past centuries, we have seen a constant focus on the types of pistols and calibers that are suitable for use in the field. In *The Prairie Traveler*, a contemporary piece on Manifest Destiny, there is a good discussion on what Colt you should carry—the percussion .36 being the surprising recommendation for the era, even over the .44.

These older sources are invaluable as we look at the general nature of what we are putting in our belts and chest harnesses today. I've been carrying pistols for various uses in the field my entire adult life as a hiker, fisherman, hunter and general outdoorsman. My choices have sometimes been motivated by nostalgia as much as practicality, but what is true is that there's no one right answer for you.

There is, however, a fascinating backstory to all this that is worthy of note.

THE OUTDOORSMAN'S SIDEARM

Pistols have a long history—that much is absolutely certain. We don't have the space here to explore every culture and their relationship to handguns, but it's true that there has always been a practical need for a firearm that is compact and can be carried on the person ready to use. While there are some words I will use interchangeably here, I will be referring to these guns as pistols. (Sorry to those who like to make a distinction for revolvers.)

Historically, what we call handguns were referred to as pistols, typically distinguished by mode of carry, be it

saddle holster, belt or pocket. In 1835, Sam Colt had a patent for a “revolving firearm,” which is a bit too vague for use here. In the American lexicon, there wasn't much specialization in this class of arm until 1847.

Colt's early Paterson designs weren't very successful. The Texas Rangers had an early success in battle against Native Americans on the frontier using the Paterson. A modern, much more powerful firearm was requested by Ranger Sam Walker, leading to the famous 1847 Walker Colt. This revolver

was arguably the first truly modern Colt, and by default, the first of what we would call a field pistol. The revolver after this point would become (and could be argued still is) the dominant field pistol.

The idea that an individual would not just be able to have a gun on them, but one that would not require immediate reloading after its one use, was revolutionary. Not only that, but each shot would also have enough power to immediately



THE FIELD PISTOL

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Field guns, like this custom piece from RW Grip Frames, are powerful revolvers large enough to hunt with outright and also suitable for carry and defense.



Vintage Remington .44 Mag still packs a relevant punch. Bullet technology has strayed from exposed full lead tips like this, favoring JHP designs.

.44 Mag has been a longtime favorite, a Keith design. Modern monometal bullets are very reliable for penetrating animals from any angle. That is not to say that the old Keith-style bullets or vintage soft points will not work; in fact, they have lots of merit for the outdoorsman.



kill, or at least severely injure, an attacker at close to medium range. Most “repeating” arms of this time were small and woefully underpowered, unreliable and even dangerous to the user. The Walker was no joke and could bring some hurt where it was due.

With reload time and reliability at a distinct advantage over competing designs of the era, the Colt was the one to beat. Over time, we have seen that translate into the Colt, then Smith & Wesson and eventually modern guns like Glock, taking the preferred spot in the field. The base notion of all of this has been that these field guns are reliable and powerful first, high capacity second. These traits are critical because in the mind of modern outdoorsmen, revolvers are only recently challenged by rounds like 10mm Auto, itself the beneficiary of lots of very positive press.

The basis of the field gun is that it needs to be able to deliver power and accuracy, not just as a self-defense option for bears (a somewhat rare situ-



Bullets have evolved in the last few centuries, but the base concept are still relevant. The Walker can fire round balls with lethal results even today, but there are other choices.

9mm, .38 Special, .44 Special and .45 Colt are all old cartridges, and each is still relevant for field guns with good bullets.



ation overall), but serve as a stopgap for signaling, hunting and general-purpose survival. In short, it needs to be a functional backup to a rifle or shotgun, but not a true replacement. On its own, the field pistol statistics are up to the end user.

The ammunition in question has its own flavor—such as the retro hardcast, even in semi-automatic pistols. Buffalo Bore has earned a reputable name producing loaded cartridges on the high end of the power scale. Having shot many of their most potent loads, I can honestly say that many are downright painful in packable revolvers, but overall pleasant in semi-auto calibers like 9mm and .45 ACP. I have killed large white-tails with the Buffalo Bore 255-grain Hardcast Outdoorsman in .45 ACP at about 40 to 50 yards out of a 5-inch 1911.

Raw killing power is more a function of the bullet than the gun, but the features of the gun do matter quite a bit. There is a bit of a dichotomy in that to get a certain level of handling you need a gun that is, by nature, easier to handle. Adjustable sights, excellent accuracy, smooth recoil and reliable functioning are musts in general, if you want to get the most out of placing your bullet with any certainty.

Going hard in one direction is what ends up happening quite often, with many guys opting for absolute maximum power over anything else. You won't replace a rifle with a pistol; it just isn't going to ever be feasible. If you're a hiker or kayaker who camps with pre-packed food, a rifle may be prohibitive for weight and fatigue when a handgun would serve emergency use better.

An optically equipped pistol of good power level can be very, very accurate. There is nothing wrong with having a .45 on your chest and a lightweight .22 LR rifle with 500 rounds stowed under board in a canoe. You don't have to take just one in some cases, especially if your main goals are fishing or other recreational activities.

THE BEAR ESSENTIALS

Westerners reading this will probably disagree with me, but we're talking apples and oranges here. What's good for Michigan might not fly in Montana, but what is needed in the Crazies is just extra weight in the waters south of Traverse City. In all of the Midwest, a .45 ACP+P is pretty much guaranteed to be capable of handling any threat.

It's still a heavily debated topic just how much gun you need when up against apex predators in close proximity. A debate centered on such a niche topic as bear attacks is what has inspired a market of guns and ammo on its own. Putting things bluntly, people are exponentially more likely to be killed by other people even in the woods as opposed to bears. Bear attacks are rare enough that they always make the news, sometimes even nationally.

Yet, in urban environments, we have murders daily, often multiples. I won't get into a discussion about environmental pressures making bears attack when allegedly socioeconomic factors force people to kill unarmed clerks after a robbery and we must accept this as normal. Likewise, more people have been killed by other people in national parks and wilderness areas than wildlife. Most bullets meant for men will work on bears.

That said, this bear situation is very interesting, as it seems to be universal for discussion on field guns. It is absolutely true that there are many Americans who live around brown bears and their variants. Yet, the rate per million of attacks is extremely low annually, and in those attacks, there is no one caliber that seems to have set itself apart for being able to resolve the



situation instantly. Bear attacks have made people extremely conscious of a problem that, while not impossible, is very rare. Yet, the remedy for this rare occasion is often a revolver of such power that it is impossible to master and will not yield better results than something “smaller.”

I’ve spent a good amount of time talking to everyone from cops to coroners to contractors on shootings, warfare, murders and all things in between, and the general consensus is that people kill with what they have on hand and make do with it. Very little out there, aside from premeditated murder is planned out; the vast majority of killing is done with little notice. I have some very cool stuff, a lot of which has appeared on these pages, but I’m not carrying a suppressed Fulton Armory M14 when I type at the coffee house. I’d get some looks. Most days, if I found myself attacked by a grizzly in my beach town, I’d have a .38 Special. I might make it.

Since the bear situation has dominated the field pistol discussion for some time, I’ll take a more practical look at what is really going on for this type of gun. Colt has quietly been releasing new versions of their classic lineup, and I hear there are some good things coming from S&W soon that appeal to the Elmer Keith fan in me. Many companies are starting to make 10mm Auto

versions of 1911 and other pistols as standard models in their catalogs.

The debate on this chambering is hot even today, and I’m not a huge proponent of the 10mm as I have used it alongside .45 ACP in the field on large game regularly and really don’t see the effectiveness people talk about online. Given a choice between the two, I’d take .45 ACP all day. I have seen absolutely no difference in its killing effects opposed to 10mm, but I have seen a much greater degree of recoil and difficulty of mastery side-by-side.

As a suppressor hunter, .45 ACP is also far more advantageous inside the effective range of both cartridges, being that it’s quieter with a wet suppressor than any bow out there at 40 yards—I know, to each their own. The debate is far, far from over but I remain deeply skeptical on the degree of need associated with the increase in power lacking a real mandate for it in practical terms.

THE OLD GUARD

Since I mentioned Keith, a name any serious outdoorsman should know, we’ve

got to look at what he really thought of as the ideal field gun. As a lifelong student of his work, I will say the man was a legend and has a deep-running influence on the handgun world as a result, but he was honestly presumptive in that he decided he was the authority when he published his famous 1929 article in *American Rifleman*, “The Last Word,” at age 30. (Keith was born in 1899.)

The thing was, Keith, in fact, did figure it out. His work with his “The Last Word” Colt SAA in .44 Special set the stage for all field guns in our modern era going back just a hair under a century. Yes, that 30-year-old kid did more to influence handguns with that one article than maybe any article ever. His time with pushing the .44 Special was truly *special*, and he perfected the field gun with his eventual legacy, the 44 Magnum. The initial .44 Magnum loads weren’t nuts by today’s standards, and a 240-grain Keith bullet at 1,200 fps from a 4-inch barrel is still, and likely always will be, one of the best field loads ever.

So, going back to a century ago, what did we know that we don’t seem to

remember? For starters, the rampant consumerism of the industry wasn't as prevalent before the advent of the internet and modular guns, the two feeding off each other to the point that we have a hard time introducing new things because the parts can't be readily changed out.

The old days saw most guns being hand-fitted and finished, truly investments for the workingman and rich man alike. Smith's pre-lock guns are highly sought-after, and I've had the pleasure of working with many guns from the era over time. The .44 Magnum was always very powerful, but people today don't realize that this was by comparison to what was considered already powerful rounds. The guns that many of these rounds were housed in were often the weak spot.

For instance, the .45 Colt can be loaded far above .44 Magnum, but it requires a modern frame. The .45 Colt

can be loaded up to some truly impressive numbers and deliver some serious lead down range, enough to make the .44 Mag. blush. However, most people are only familiar with the "safe" loads in .45 Colt, which are quite anemic and meant for cowboy replicas and original Colts SAA revolvers for safety.

IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE ... TAKE THIS!

Where you see the true utility of rounds like .44 Magnum is in their flexibility in terms of power, something that people today only look at the upper end. The beauty of these revolvers is that they can easily use lower-powered ammo. I really like shooting weak .38s in my .357 revolvers. Likewise, I like to load some light 180-grain lead bullets in .45 Colt with what remaining stock of IMR Trail-Boss I have. It can be like shooting a .22 LR if you play it right.

Field guns, outside of the bear situation, are blessed with flexibility. This is something widely overlooked today due to the fact that to vary power in a semi-auto, you need an entirely different gun; you're pretty much fixed at that cartridge power level. If you want sauce, go 10mm Auto. If you want power and easy handling, go .45 ACP. General use, well 9mm. In a .44 Mag. or .45 Colt, you can span the entire spectrum in one cylinder from popgun to piss-your-pants.

The old timers knew this, and this is what made field pistols great in practice. Ammunition was available everywhere; you could travel this country and find something that would work in your revolver in any hayseed town by the streams you'd pull over for. **GDTM**



Hornady is offering two factory loads for the .25 Creedmoor: this 134-grain ELD-Match load and a 128-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter load.

Currently, with only two factory loads available, the .25 Creedmoor is mostly a handloading option.





A HUGE NICHE

Logistics and legitimacy of the new quarter-bore Creedmoor.

Neophobia is the fear of new things, and though it's most often thought of in relation to kids who fear trying new food, it also applies to shooters.

A lot of shooters scoff at the introduction of any new cartridge, not because they cannot fathom its usefulness and application, but because it challenges the status quo or the ballistic norm they exist in.

These folks often say things like, "What does it do that another cartridge cannot?" Or maybe they claim a new cartridge is an answer to a question no one was asking. I expect that, when it comes to the .25 Creedmoor, many afflicted with neophobia—maybe even you—will utter a similar phrase.

This neophobic response to new cartridges has always rubbed me wrong. That's partly because every new cartridge does fill a need, even though that need might be very niche. But it's also partly because it is through the development of new cartridges that we ended up with things like the .308

Winchester, .223 Remington and 6.5 Creedmoor.

New cartridges are just examples of evolution, driven by advancements in ballistic understanding or need, and both these things were instrumental in the creation of the .25 Creedmoor.

QUARTER-BORE HISTORY

Cartridges with a 0.257-inch bullet—a quarter bore—have traditionally been very popular with hunters. The first such cartridge was the .250 Savage, or .250-3000, which loaded to 45,000 psi, was the first American-made cartridge to break the 3,000-fps mark. The .250 Savage would push a 100-grain bullet to around 2,800 fps. It became immensely popular with hunters, because with its 1:14 twist rate, it provided them with a single cartridge that would work very well for varmints with lightweight bullets and for big game with heavier bullets.

Currently, there are four Creedmoor cartridges, and the .25 Creedmoor (second from left) is the most versatile. Left to right: 6.5 Creedmoor, .25 Creedmoor, 6mm Creedmoor and .22 Creedmoor.

The author has three .25 Creedmoor rifles, and this is typical of the precision they can deliver.

Not long after Savage introduced the .250-3000 in 1915, Remington legitimized a wildcat cartridge gun writer Ned Roberts created. In 1934, Remington called this cartridge .257 Roberts and wisely gave it a 1:10 twist rate to handle longer and heavier bullets than the .250 Savage could.

However, for some ridiculous rea-

son, most of Remington's .257 Roberts factory ammunition was loaded with a round-nosed 117-grain bullet. Furthermore, they requested that SAAMI (Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturer's Institute) approve the cartridge at a pressure of only 45,000 psi. The .257 Roberts would outperform the .250 Savage, but not by much.

Fortunately, other ammunition manufacturers began loading +P .257 Roberts ammo at 50,000 psi that would push a 100-grain bullet to about 3,100 fps. However, the cartridge is at its best in a long-action rifle.

The best ballistically performing quarter-bore cartridge was introduced in 1944: It's .257 Weatherby Magnum, and it can launch a 100-grain bullet to about 3,600 fps. Like the .257 Roberts, it also had a 1:10 twist, and the cartridge was very popular for a while, but there were two problems with it. First, it came with an intense muzzle blast, and while the recoil was not terrible, it seemed a bit stiff for a rifle that



a hunter wanted to use for rock chucks and mule deer.

Too much of a good thing is possible.

In 1969, Remington tried to fill the gap between the .257 Roberts and the .257 Weatherby with a new cartridge called the .25-06 with a 1:10 twist. It was a .30-06 necked down to fire a quarter-inch bullet, and it would squirt a 100-grain bullet out of a 24-inch barrel at about 3,200 fps.

For about 2 decades, the .25-06 was very popular, but by the '90s, many American hunters were beginning to transition to specialized rifles. No longer was the dual purpose—varmint and deer—rifle enough. With modern manufacturing techniques, rifles were becoming more affordable, and hunters wanted a specific rifle for every different thing they wanted to hunt.

The industry's last real attempt at a quarter-bore dual-purpose cartridge was in 2004 when Winchester introduced the .25 WSSM. This short and fat cartridge offered performance similar to Remington's .25-06, but it was about as popular as a toothache. Also, with the lawsuit against Winchester from former gun writer Rick Jamison, Winchester discontinued all their WSSM cartridges to avoid paying him royalties.

ENTER THE CREED

Given the fact that the dual-purpose rifle cartridge had lost a lot of its appeal—clearly proven with the failure of the 2008, AR-15 compatible, .25-45 Sharps cartridge—the concept was mostly abandoned. This was also the year Hornady introduced the 6.5 Creedmoor, which, though it was a hit with competition shooters, didn't really catch on until the notion of shooting at stupid long distances was buoyed by the *American Sniper* movie in 2014.

What made the 6.5 Creedmoor appealing was that the cartridge case was short enough to work with very long and high ballistic coefficient bullets, but it still fit inside a short-action rifle, like a standard Remington 700 or even an AR-10. It also did not kick hard.

By 2015, the 6.5 Creedmoor was on its way to rock star status, and Hornady tried to capitalize on it with the 6mm Creedmoor, which was a 6.5 Creedmoor case necked down to work with a 6mm bullet. Like the 6.5 Creedmoor, the 6mm Creedmoor came with a fast twist rate that allowed for the use of high coefficient (BC) bullets.

Compared to the 6.5 Creedmoor, the 6mm Creedmoor has been only

marginally successful—I think partly because it cannot handle the heavier bullets hunters like to use for game larger than deer.

EARLY .25 CREEDMOOR DEVELOPMENT

While Hornady was screaming the praises of the 6mm Creedmoor, I saw the practicality in creating a better quarter bore by necking the 6.5



The author took this Nebraska buck with a .25 Creedmoor about five years ago. The rifle is a custom Remington Model Seven with a Douglas barrel built by Dove's Custom Guns in Princeton, West Virginia.



The .25 Creedmoor will carry on the great deer-killing tradition of quarter-bore cartridges.



According to Hornady, 17 different rifle manufacturers will be offering rifles chambered for the 6.5 Creedmoor. Proof Research is one of those.

THE TRIPLE THREAT



It can be hard to predict the commercial success of a rifle cartridge. Throughout history there have been some that offered practical and great ballistics, but they simply never appealed to the masses. Will anyone care about the .25 Creedmoor?

Competition shooters have been all over it for the past few years, which is the main reason Hornady decided to legitimize it. I expect it will see some success in that venue if factory rifles built for competition materialize. I, however, believe the hunting field is where the .25 Creedmoor has the most to offer. After all, that has always been the appeal of quarter-bore.

The .25 Creedmoor offers great varmint and predator application with lightweight bullets. With bullets in the 85- to 100-grain weight range, it's superb for antelope and deer, and with heavier bullets, it will also work for larger game. And finally, with the new, long and skinny, high BC 0.257-caliber bullets, the .25 Creedmoor is an excellent, flat shooting, low-recoil cartridge for recreational or competitive long-range shooting. The .25 Creedmoor has taken the dual-threat—varmint and big game—suitability of the quarter bore and expanded it into extreme long range, making it a true triple threat.

Arguably, the .25 Creedmoor is the best triple-threat cartridge ever created and ultimately approved by SAAMI. None of this is a surprise to me. It's exactly what I envisioned back in 2015 when I made it.

Creedmoor down to 0.25-caliber. The cartridge would essentially duplicate, if not outperform, the .257 Roberts, but it would also work in a short-action rifle. With the help of two other West Virginia gunsmiths—Jerry Dove and Mike Cyrus—I created that cartridge in 2015 and, sort of tongue-in-cheek, called it the 2Fity-Hillbilly.

I began hunting with it immediately,

.25 CREEDMOOR BALLISTIC PERFORMANCE (20-INCH BARREL)

LOAD	TYPE	VELOCITY (FPS)	ENERGY (FT-LB)
Hornady 134-grain ELD-Match	Factory Load	2,760	2,266
75-grain Hornady V-Max	Handload	3,519	2,062
85-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip	Handload	3,440	2,233
102-grain Lehigh Defense Controlled Chaos	Handload	3,100	2,176
110-grain Nosler AccuBond	Handload	3,037	2,253
133-grain Berger Elite Hunter	Handload	2,686	2,130

and with lightweight 70-grain bullets pushed to around 3,600 fps, it was instant death on groundhogs and coyotes. But with heavier bullets like the 100-grain Partition at about 3,200 fps, and 110-grain AccuBond and ELD-X bullets pushed nearly as fast, it was a serious deer killer.

I tried to get Hornady to legitimize the cartridge through SAAMI, but they were not interested. In fact, instead of going with the 2Fity-Hillbilly—which is the .25 Creedmoor as a wildcat—a decade ago, their next Creedmoor was in 2023 when they legitimized the .22 Creedmoor. The .22 Creedmoor is sort of a modernized—fast twist—version of the .22-250 Remington. As with most modern rifle cartridges introduced in this new century, specialization has been the guiding force.

Then, somewhat surprisingly, in 2025, Hornady announced they had gained SAAMI approval for the .25 Creedmoor. For now, they're

offering only two loads that include a 128-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter load at 2,850 fps and a 134-grain ELD-Match load at about the same speed. According to Hornady, “The .25 Creedmoor is the end result of our constant pursuit of maximizing ballistic potential. This cartridge fills that competitive niche between 6mm and 6.5mm—providing shooters the absolute best blend of moderate recoil, flat trajectory and superior wind resistance.”

A BIG NICHE

It's great that Hornady has answered the call of others who were competing with the .25 Creedmoor in a wildcat form like mine. With its 1:7.5 twist, it will handle very aerodynamic bullets and shoot right with the 6.5 Creedmoor at distance. However, the real appeal of this cartridge calls back to the true forte of the quarter-bore cartridge, which is dual-purpose use on varmints and big game. It will shoot light bullets that the 6.5 Creedmoor cannot, and it will shoot heavier bullets that are too much for the 6mm Creedmoor.

The question is: Are shooters and hunters ready for another dual-purpose cartridge, or are they committed to different rifles for everything they do? The

The advantage the .25 Creedmoor has over all other Creedmoor cartridges is that it can handle bullets weighing from 70 grains all the way up to 138 grains.



long-range precision ability of the 6.5 Creedmoor has driven many shooters to purchase expensive rifles so they can extract all the cartridge has to offer. The problem with a different rifle for every pursuit is that if you want maximum performance in every area, you must buy an expensive rifle for every cartridge you use.

The .25 Creedmoor allows for the purchase of a single, nice and expensive rifle that you can use to do most anything you want. It fills the traditional 0.25-caliber niche and does it better than any previous cartridge in any caliber. **GDTM**

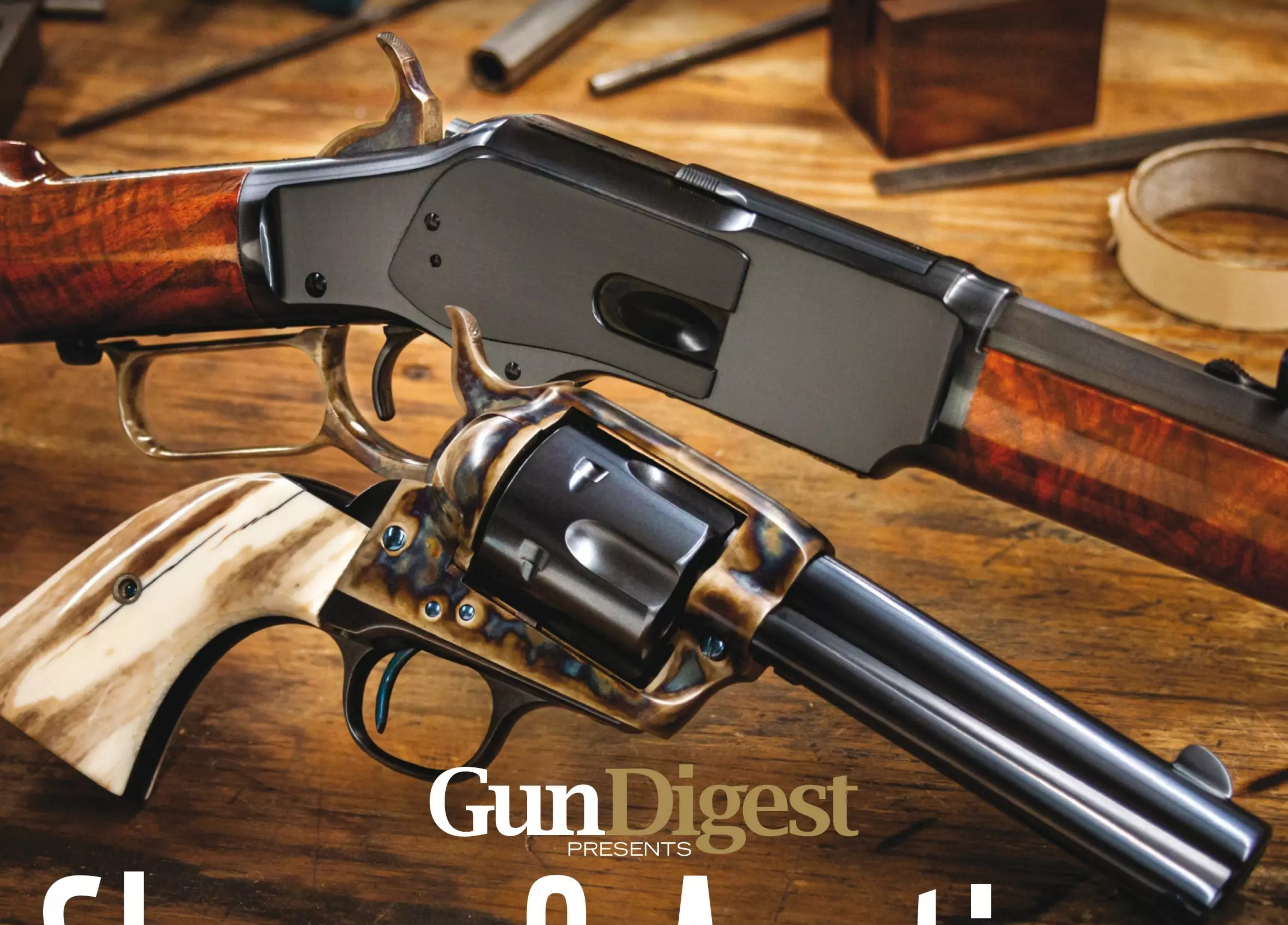
This is a five-shot group fired from a Proof Research Glacier Ti rifle in .25 Creedmoor with a 20-inch barrel, using Lehigh Defense 102-grain Controlled Chaos bullets.

The author has been hunting with a wildcat .25 Creedmoor for a decade. It has proven to be a deadly coyote cartridge with 70-grain Hornady V-Max bullets.



The .25 Creedmoor is nothing more than a 6.5 Creedmoor necked down to fire a 0.257-caliber bullet. It is the newest quarter-bore in almost two decades.





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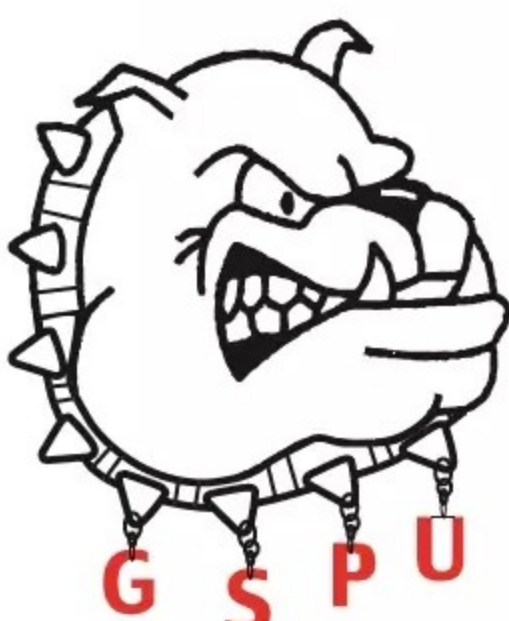
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ALERT!! ALERT!! ALERT!!
Please Read! Important!
National Gun Promotions LLC
has a new plan, The National Gun Day Shows
are being consolidated into TWO MEGA
Special Grand Extravaganza Collector Shows,
including modern guns and accessories, per Year.
Bigger and Better shows will bring in more
Collectors and the General Public.
Our next MEGA Show will be September 27, 28, 2025.
If you would like to part of this New Exciting Plan,
please send in your reservation NOW!
It is a WIN, WIN, for everybody!!
Everyone wants to see the BIG ONE!
I can't wait to say "It's Gun Show Time"

TRADE TABLE: \$140 E-mail: Ron-Dickson@nationalgunday.com

Send to: Ron Dickson, P.O. Box 741, Oxford, Ohio 45056 (Info (513)523-3574) No refund if cancelation is 7 days before show. www.nationalgunday.com



Exhibitors and Attendees,

I am proud to announce that the **THEME** of the September 27, 28, 2025, National Gun Day Show, in South Wing "A", of the Kentucky Expo center, in Louisville, Kentucky, will be **"LEVER ACTIONS"**. This will include **ALL** manufacture's of Volcanic, Henry, Winchester (all models antique & modern), Marlin, Savage, Whitney, Colt-Burgess, Stevens, Sharps, Spencer, and any other manufacturer of **LEVER ACTIONS**. If your gun has a **LEVER**, bring it to **THE LEVER ACTION CAPITAL OF THE WORLD**, Louisville, Ky. This will be an **EVENT** you will not want to miss. If you are a **LEVER ACTION LOVER**, this is the show for you. Bring out your **BEST!!** **NO SHOW** in the Country can match this **WEEKEND!**

I have also invited John Gangel (Little John), who is bringing his fabulous "Cabinet of Royal Arms" including King Henry the Great's 1602 Wheelock Pistol, insured for \$1.2 Million dollars, plus many other, **GOLD STANDARD**, Royal European Arms from the 17th and 18th century for Exhibit and sale at the National Gun Day Show.

Wow, this is going to be an **"EVENT"**, not just a **Show!!!** That is why they call it the **MONEY SHOW!**

I suggest very strongly, that you make your reservations as soon as possible and send in your application with payment. If you do not have a application, go to my website www.Nationalgunday.com and print one off. We are using the Crowne Plaza Hotel, \$129 flat rate. Please call 1(866)888-0620 and ask for the **"GUN SHOW, Block Code LMW"** for the special rate, **call now!**

You will like this show!

I can't wait to say, **"It's Gun Show Time"!!**

Ron Dickson





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Garland County Fairgrounds
October 18-19
 130 Tables: 1-4 \$55 ea., 5+ \$50 ea., 10+ \$45 ea.

Conway

Conway Expo Center
October 25-26
December 13-14
 440 Tables: 1-4 \$65 ea., 5+ \$60 ea., 10+ \$55 ea.

TEXAS

Canton

Canton Civic Center
August 8-10
 250 Tables: 1-4 \$60 ea., 5+ \$55 ea., 10+ \$50 ea.

Henderson

Rusk County Expo Center
September 6-7
 160 Tables: 1-4 \$60 ea., 5+ \$55 ea., 10+ \$50 ea.

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Nacogdoches County Expo Center
September 26-28
November 28-30
 193 Tables: 1-4 \$65 ea., 5+ \$60 ea., 10+ \$55 ea.

OKLAHOMA

Elk City

Elk City Civic Center
December 6-7
 150 Tables: 1-4 \$45 ea., 5+ \$40 ea., 10+ \$35 ea.

Shawnee

Expo Center
 1700 West Independence
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December 20-21, 2025

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SHOW LISTINGS BY DATE

AUGUST

Aug 16 PA, -Greencastle . Izaak Walton Gun Show & Outdoor Extravaganza. Greencastle Sportsman's Association, 3260 Sportsmans Road. SH: Sat. 8am-3pm. A: \$7.00 adults (13+ years). T: 110. F: \$20-\$25 depending on inside or outside. Izaak Walton League of Franklin Co. PA Chapter. 106 Greenleaf Rd, Chambersburg, PA 17202-3134. PH: 717-977-9240.

SEPTEMBER

Sep 5-6 ND, West Fargo. Red River Range Gun Show. Red River Regional Marksmanship Center, 640 16th St NE. SH: Fri. 4pm-8pm, Sat. 8am-4pm. A: \$5.00 per day; 12 years and older. 11 and under free with adult. T: 160. F: \$40. Red River Regional Marksmanship Center. 640 16th St NE, West Fargo, ND 58078. PH: 701-356-0677. rrrmc.com.

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Sep 20-21 SD, Rapid City. Rapid City Rifle Club Association. The Monument Event Center, 444 N W Blvd., Rapid City, SD 57701. SH: Sat. 9am-5pm, Sun. 9am-2pm. A: \$5.00 Daily. T: 205. F: \$50. Rapid City Rifle Club. PO Box 1945, Rapid City, SD 57709. PH: 605-209-1166. www.rapidcityrifleclub.com.

OCTOBER

Oct 4-5 IN, Valparaiso. Gun & Knife Show. Porter County Exp-Center, 215 East Division Road. SH: Sat. 8am-5pm, Sun. 9am-3pm. A: \$8.00 children 12 & under free with Adult. T: 350. F: \$70.00 8ft.@ run of show. Dunes Rifle & Pistol Club L.L.C.. P.O. Box 345, 812 West Old Ridge Road, Hobart, IN 46342. PH: 219-942-4514. <https://valpogunshow.com>.

DECEMBER

Dec 6-7 SD, Rapid City. Rapid City Rifle Club Association. The Monument Event Center, 444 N W Blvd., Rapid City, SD 57701. SH: Sat. 9am-5pm, Sun. 9am-2pm. A: \$5.00 Daily. T: 205. F: \$50. Rapid City Rifle Club. PO Box 1945, Rapid City, SD 57709. PH: 605-209-1166. www.rapidcityrifleclub.com.

GUN SHOW

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October 18-19 • ABILENE Convention Center

October 25-26 • FREDERICKSBURG Fair Grounds

November 8-9 • KERRVILLE Expo Hall

December 13-14 • AMARILLO Civic Center

December 20-21 • KERRVILLE Expo Hall

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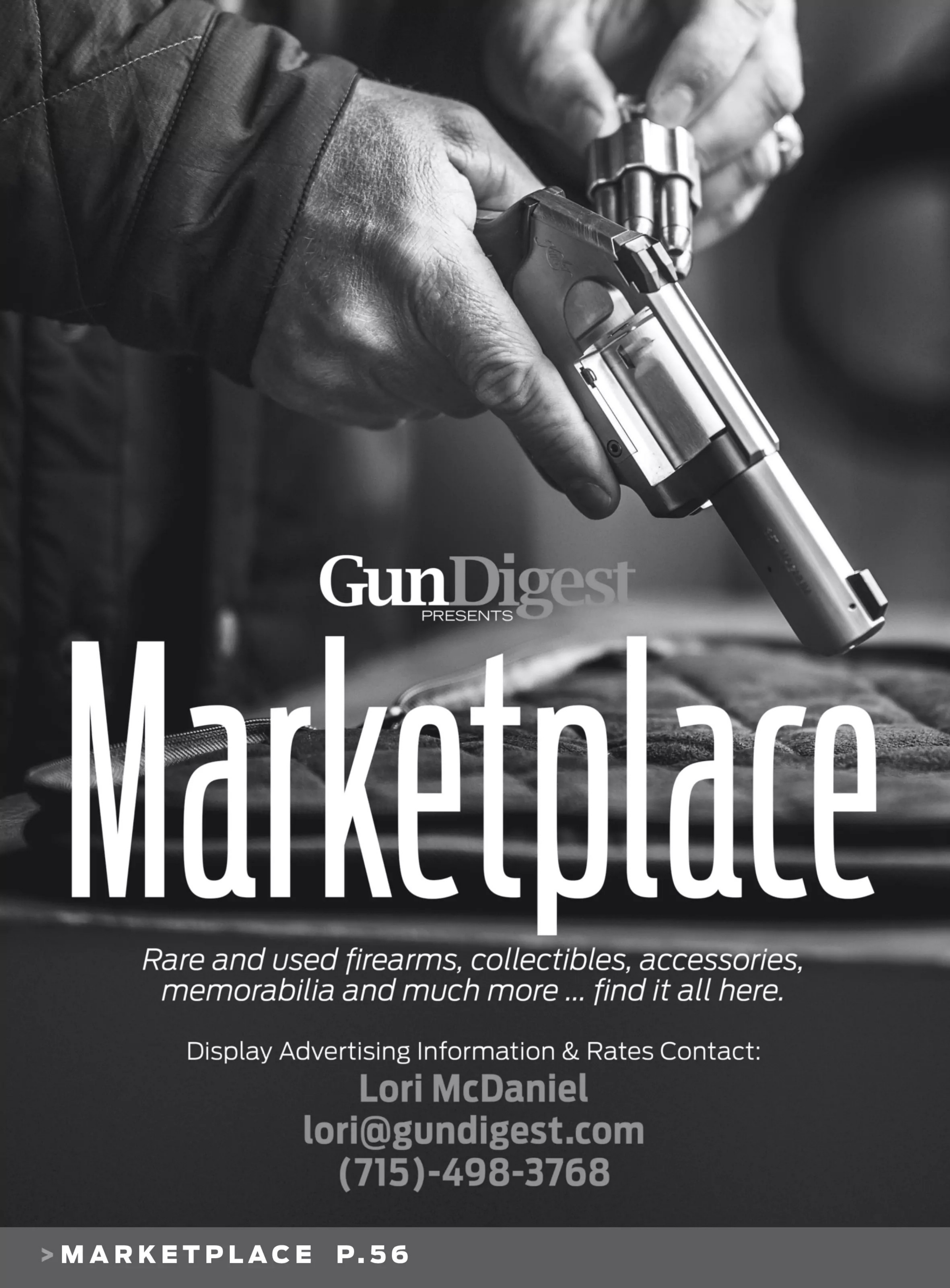
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- 3-Z Browning .22 LR "Challenger" Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with mint bore, 99% original bright blue, target style adjustable rear and blade front sights, minty original checkered Walnut wrap around grips with flared bottom, Browning marked original magazine, made in 1968 and shows little or no actual use, collector quality (C&R)\$695
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- 5-Z Browning .22 LR "Nomad" F.N. Belgian Made Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with mint bore, 99% original blue, target style sights, mint checkered black plastic logo grips with flared bottoms, made in 1967 but looks near new, collector quality (C&R)\$595
- 6-Z Browning .32 ACP "Model 1922" Nazi Occupation Era Auto Pistol** 4 1/2" barrel with excellent bright bore, 90% original fading blue with spotty graying on nose cap, front strap and sharp edges, all matching numbers, Nazi "WaA 140" proofing on most parts, very good "FN" logo checkered black hard rubber grips, comes with (2) Waffen proofed "FN 7.65" marked magazine with Nazi proofs well worn from sliding in and out of gun, comes in an odd correct style holster with an original German marked inner top flap and fastening strap but a very nice reproduction lower, excellent function (C&R)\$695
- 7-Z Charter Arms .32 S&W Long "Undercover 32 Model" Revolver** 2" barrel with mint bore, 97% original blue, fixed sights, very good smooth Walnut round butt grips with silver medallions, excellent function, shows some holster carry wear on front sight, these are nice low recoil / low noise revolvers\$285
- 8-Z Colt .22 LR "Woodsman 1st Series" Target Auto Pistol** 6 5/8" barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue, elevation adjustable front sight, screw adjustable windage rear sight, mint full checkered Walnut grips, very good original full blue magazine marked "Colt Woodman" over "Cal. 22 LR", made in 1940 and shows little or no actual use (C&R)\$1295
- 9-Z Colt .22 LR "The Woodsman Sport Model Series 1" Auto Pistol** 4 1/2" barrel with mint bore, elevation adjustable front and screw adjustable windage adjustable rear factory sights, 98% original bright blue with a couple tiny specks of pitting at left rear of slide, mint full checkered Walnut grips, excellent full blue bottom release magazine showing bluing loss but works fine, made in 1941 just prior to WW-II, excellent function and super looker, collector quality (C&R)\$1625
- 10-Z Colt .22 LR "3rd Series Woodsman Sport Model" Auto Pistol** 4 1/2" barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue just getting a bit thin at muzzle, ramp blade front and Colt "Accro" fully adjustable rear sights, excellent checkered Walnut thumb rest grips, (1) bottom release Colt magazine, excellent function, made in 1973 and looks lightly used (C&R)\$765
- 11-Z Colt .32 ACP "Model 1903 Hammerless" Pocket Auto Pistol** 3 3/4" barrel with very good bright but lightly pitted bore, fixed sights, 85% original bright blue with sharp edge silvering and graying at muzzle, near excellent checkered black hard rubber grips with Colt banner and rampant horse logos, excellent full blue magazine marked "Cal. 32" over "Colt", made in 1914 and comes in an original well worn and tattered box with an original instruction sheet and correct blue end label which is showing a little loss at lower edge (C&R)\$825
- 12-Z Colt .32 ACP "Model 1903 Hammerless" Pocket Auto Pistol** 3 3/4" barrel with excellent bright bore, fixed sights, 95%+ original bright blue, 90% fire blue on safety and trigger, mint "Colt banner" checkered hard rubber grips with "rampant horse" with a stylized "C" imposed over horse, correct full blue magazine, 1913 manufactured, looks super in original tattered and repaired box with manual box has some missing edges but complete end label present along with serial number on bottom (C&R)\$945
- 13-Z Colt .38 Special +P "Cobra" Current Model Double/Single Action Stainless Revolver** 2" barrel with mint bore, red fiber optic front sight and top strap groove rear sights, 99 1/2% original matte stainless finish, mint Colt logo wrap around finger groove round butt rubber grips, as new in original blue plastic case with end label, cable lock, manual, hang tag, 6 shot cylinder\$635
- 14-Z Colt .38 Special +P "Cobra Classic" Double/Single Action Stainless Revolver** 2" barrel with mint bore, 99 1/2% bright polished stainless finish, fixed open sights, mint checkered Walnut wrap around round butt grips with silver Colt medallions, appears unfired and comes in its original blue plastic case with end label, cable lock, owners manual and hang tag, super looker\$675
- 15-Z Colt .38 Special "Official Police Model" War Time Production Double/Single Action Revolver** 5" barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue, fixed sights, excellent service style checkered Walnut grips with Colt silver medallions, excellent smooth function and tight lockup, made in 1944 and shows the lightest of use (C&R)\$885

- 16-Z Colt .38 Colt New Police (.38 S&W) Police Positive Model Single/Double Action Revolver** 5" barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 98% original bright blue with fire blue on screws and back of bright sided hammer, mint escutcheon "C" early style checkered black hard rubber grips, made in 1930 and looks and functions near new, collector quality (C&R)\$785
- 17-Z Forehand Arms Co. .38 S&W Hammerless Top Break Revolver** 3 1/4" ribbed barrel with very good bore, 98% original nickel, blue and case color, excellent double action only, odd opening feature looks like an external hammer, manually operated, safety behind opening latch, very good "F&W" logo checkered hard rubber grips with a small chipout of left panel at locating pin, many advanced features indicate later 1901-1902 manufactured date, excellent function (C&R)\$265
- 18-Z French Pyrenees Hendaye Unique .22 LR "Model D4" High End Target Cased Auto Pistol** 9" barrel with mint bore, and factory integral muzzle brake, 98% original blue, "Unique" marked magazine, checkered brown plastic grips with minor cracks on right panel and a large un-repaired broken upper section on left side, comes in a black French fitted black carry case with manual and original warranty card, nickel plated latches and carry handle, excellent function (C&R)\$895
- 19-Z Harrington & Richardson .22 LR "Model 195 / USRA" Single Shot Target Pistol** 10" ribbed barrel with mint bore, pinned on blade front sight and screw adjustable target rear sight, 99% original bright blue round rod auto ejector, mint checkered fancy Walnut one piece factory grips, excellent function with fabulous trigger pull, collector quality, very limited production in the 1920's and 1930's (C&R)\$1650
- 20-Z Harrington & Richardson .22 LR "Model 195 / USRA" Single Shot Target Pistol** 10" ovoid barrel with mint bore, 99% original bright blue, elevation adjustable front and fully screw adjustable rear, "fat" grooved trigger, lever style auto ejector, mint fancy Walnut checkered target one piece grips, excellent function, super looker, sixth variation, last of the USA series made around 1940 (C&R)\$1975
- 21-Z Harrington & Richardson .22 LR "Model 195 / USRA" Single Shot Target Pistol** 7" new profile ribbed barrel with mint bore, pinned on target front and fully screw adjustable target rear sights, 4th variation with round plunger type auto ejector, 99% original bright blue, grooved slender curved trigger, mint checkered Walnut target one piece grips, excellent function and rare in 7" barrel, collector quality (C&R)\$1785
- 22-Z Harrington & Richardson .22 LR/.22 Winchester Magnum "Model 686" Dual Cylinder SA/DA Western Style Revolver** 7 1/2" barrel with mint bore, 98%+ original blue and brilliant case colored frame, factory target style fully adjustable rear and ramp blade front sights, mint one piece smooth wood grips, excellent function and very nice quality\$395
- 23-Z Harrington & Richardson .32 S&W Long "Model 733" Swing Out Cylinder Double/Single Action Pocket Revolver** 2 1/2" round barrel with mint bore, 99% original bright nickel finish, mint H&R logo checkered black plastic grips, looks and functions as new overall, 6 shot cylinder, nice low recoil / low noise revolver\$295
- 24-Z Harrington & Richardson .38 S&W "Model The American" Double Action Revolver** 2 1/2" octagon barrel with fair pitted bore, 90% nickel finish with flaking and scattered peppery pin prick pitting, triggerguard and trigger are blued, black hard rubber grips, pull pin cylinder release, manufactured 1905-1942 (C&R)\$125
- 25-Z Hartford Arms Equipment Co. .22 LR "Model 1925 Target" Clip Feed Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with excellent bright bore, 92% original fading blue with noticeable graying on straps, fixed blade front and drift adjustable rear sights, excellent checkered black hard rubber grips, excellent correct original "Colt" marked (2) tone magazines, only a few early examples made with Colt purchased magazines, excellent checkered black hard rubber grips, "I-A" type takedown, excellent function and rarely found in this good condition, a must for High Standard collectors as this is their earliest product Hi Standard called the model "B", first year production, collector quality (C&R)\$765
- 26-Z High Standard .22 LR "Model B / Post War" Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue, mint checkered hard rubber "HS" logo grips, 10 shot original magazine shows blue loss but functions well, lettering on left side of frame and slide shows very nice white grease pencil highlighting, made in 1946, collector quality (C&R)\$495
- 27-Z High Standard .22 LR "Model B" First Year Production Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with mint bore, first year production using some 1925 Hartford Arms parts, type "I-B" takedown, 96% original bright blue with a little fading to gray on straps, 1925 style parts including dovetail open sights and smooth narrow trigger plus "Colt" marked magazine the Hartford Arms used in their pistols, mint checkered black hard rubber grips of the Hartford style, the 24th gun made in High Standards introduction year of 1932, collector quality and rare in any condition, this one looks and functions great (C&R)\$795
- 28-Z High Standard .22 Short "Model LW-100 Flite King" Auto Pistol** 6 3/4" barrel with mint bore, 99% original bright and matte blue finish, factory open sights, mint checkered brown plastic thumb rest grips, cadmium plated "Hi Standard" marked magazine, push button takedown, made in 1957 but looks and functions as new (C&R)\$495
- 29-Z High Standard .22 LR "The Sharpshooter Model 103" Auto Pistol** 5 1/2" bull barrel with mint bore, 98%+ original blue with just a little thinning on backstrap, ramp blade front and target style fully adjustable rear sights, mint checkered brown plastic grips with gold medallions, mint original full blue "Hi Standard" marked magazine, lettering has been nicely high lighted with white grease pencil, excellent function, push button takedown, made in 1971, collector quality, first year production (C&R)\$595

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50-Z Ruger .357 Magnum / 9mm Para “Blackhawk” Convertible Single Action (3) Screw Revolver 6 ½” barrel with mint bore, 98% original blue, factory adjustable sights, matching serial number cylinders, mint dark Walnut, smooth (2) piece grips with silver medallions grips, excellent function, made in 1971 with un-modified frame, as new in original yellow and black box serial numbered to gun (box is a bit tattered) with spare cylinder and instruction sheet, collector quality (C&R)\$925

51-Z Ruger .357 Magnum “Old Model Blackhawk” Single Action Revolver 6 ½” barrel with mint bore, 99%+ original blue, made in 1969 with unmodified frame, factory adjustable open sights, mint dark smooth Walnut (2) piece grips with a clear added finish, “XR3-red” frame, comes in its original yellow and black box, collector quality, exterior shipping box is also included with 1969 shipping date from Southport Conn. \$1.15 USPS charge shipping to Silver Springs, MD., looks and functions as new (C&R)\$685

52-Z Ruger .357 Magnum “Model GP 100” Stainless Double/Single Action Revolver 4 ¼” barrel with mint bore, factory target style sights, mint finger groove wrap around Ruger logo rubber grips, as new in original gray plastic case with serial numbered end label, all paper and cable lock plus outer shipping box, shipped 2017\$695

53-Z Ruger .44 Magnum “Super Blackhawk 50th Anniversary” Boxed Single Action Revolver 7 ½” barrel with mint bore and marked “50th anniversary of the Super Blackhawk -2009” on top, 100% original high polish blue finish, un-fluted cylinder has factory gold rings front and back, mint smooth Cocobolo (2) piece grips with black eagle medallions, comes in correct white 50th anniversary box with matching end label, instruction manual and Ruger logo soft zipper pouch, made in 2009 with total production of 1660, collector quality\$1300

54-Z Savage Arms .32 ACP “Model 1917” Auto Pistol 3 ½” barrel with excellent bore, 99% original blue, fixed sights, mint Savage logo checkered black hard rubber grips, excellent function, looks near new, collector quality, comes with “Roe Clark” verification letter, manufactured 1920 with notes from Savage pistol’s author (C&R)\$595

55-Z Smith & Wesson .22 LR “1953 .22/32 Kit Gun” (Pre Model 34) Double Action Revolver 4” pinned barrel with mint bore, blade 1/8” front and fully adjustable target style rear sights, 99% original bright blue, flat latch, 99% case color, checkered Walnut “magna” style grips with diamond center, silver S&W medallions, round butt and matching number, made around 1953 and is in correct (2) piece reinforced corner box with end label in early style and matching numbered bottom, box shows lots of storage wear, collector quality (C&R)\$1025

56-Z Smith & Wesson .32 S&W Long “Post War .32 Hand Ejector Model (Pre Model 30) Revolver 2” pinned barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, (5) screw frame, all matching numbers including mint checkered Walnut, diamond center, round butt grips with silver S&W medallions, 99% original blue and case colors, excellent function, one of the first hand ejectors, made after WW-II and in minty condition, collector quality (C&R)\$795

57-Z Smith & Wesson .32 S&W Long “Model 1903 Hammer Hand Ejector 5th Change” DA/SA Revolver 3 ¼” pinned barrel with very good+ bright bore, fixed sights, 98% poorly done re-nickel finish, fixed sights, all matching numbers including mint checkered black hard rubber, S&W logo round butt grips, works fine, 5 screw frame, made around 1912 (C&R)\$295

58-Z Smith & Wesson .32 S&W Long “Model 31-1” DA/SA Revolver 3” pinned barrel with excellent bright bore, 97% original bright blue with a little light pitting on backstrap and one small spot on left side of frame, 98% original case colors, flat opening latch, excellent magna style checkered dark Walnut diamond center square butt grips with silver S&W medallions and matching number, excellent function, made around 1967 (C&R)\$595

59-Z Smith & Wesson .32 S&W Short “Safety Hammerless 2nd Model” Top Break Revolver 3 ½” ribbed barrel with very good+ bright bore, 98% original bright nickel and case color, fixed sights, all matching numbers including scratch number, checkered black hard rubber logo round butt grips, excellent looking but hand spring is broken manufactured 1903 (C&R)\$295

60-Z Smith & Wesson 32/20 “Model 1905 4th Change Hand Ejector” DA/SA Revolver 6” pinned barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 95% original period bright blue with a couple of patches of flaked off blue on left side of frame and some pin prick flaking on sideplate, (5) screw frame, all matching numbers including excellent checkered Walnut diamond center, non-medallion square butt grips, 98% original bright case colors, excellent function, made around 1940 and is one of the last 32/20 1905 hand ejectors, collector quality in near new condition overall (C&R) ...\$1325

61-Z Smith & Wesson .38 Special “M&P Pre-Model 10” DA/SA Revolver 2” pinned barrel with mint bore, (5) screw frame, 99% blue and case color, fixed sights, all matching including mint “Magna” style checkered Walnut, diamond center grips, as new in original box with warranty card, collector quality, manufactured 1949 (C&R)\$1050

62-Z Smith & Wesson .38 Special “Model K-38 Combat Masterpiece” Double Action Revolver 4” pinned barrel with mint bore, (5) screw frame, 98% original period blue, 98% case color on factory target hammer and standard grooved trigger, all matching numbers including excellent “Magna” style checkered Walnut, diamond center, square butt grips, silver S&W medallion, shows very light use and excellent function, made in 1951 (C&R)\$795

63-Z Smith & Wesson .38 Special “Model 36” (Chiefs Special) Flat Latch Boxed Revolver 3” pinned barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 99% original bright blue and case colors, mint matching numbered, “Magna” style checkered Walnut diamond center, square butt grips with silver S&W medallions, comes in matching numbered (2) piece early style “Bangor Punta” box with instruction sheet and warranty card, collector quality (C&R)\$795

64-Z Smith & Wesson .22 Winchester Magnum “Model 48-3” Double/Single Action Revolver 4” pinned barrel with mint bore, 98%+ original bright blue and case color, ramp blade 1/8” front sight and fully adjustable target style rear sights, minty checkered dark Walnut grips with matching number and silver S&W medallions, discontinued in 1986, this one made in 1977, comes in original (2) piece reinforced corner box with washed out end label that has been numbered over, in “Bangor Punta” box of the era, excellent function and collector quality\$1295

65-Z Stevens .22 Rimfire “Model No. 35 Offhand” Single Shot Tip Up Pistol 10” barrel with fair pitted bore, 75% original nickel and 70% well faded blue, factory open sights, very good+ smooth Walnut grips, excellent function (C&R)\$235

66-Z Taurus .44 Special “Model 441” Stainless Double Action Revolver 4” full underlug barrel with excellent bore, white outline fully adjustable rear and red ramp front sights, all polished stainless finish looks new, target trigger 5 shot cylinder, minty Pachmayr finger groove wrap around rubber grips, nice quality, excellent function\$465

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116-Z Winchester .22 S, L, & LR "Model 69 (Early Target Model) Clip Fed Bolt Rifle 25" barrel with excellent bright bore, 97% original blue with triggerguard/floorplate going a gray brown, factory hooded ramp bead front and "Dockendorfer" style target style peep rear sights, (no barrel dovetail) cock on closing bolt, original 5 shot Winchester marked magazine, very good Walnut pistol grip stock checkered black hard rubber early style buttplate, whole gun shows mostly storage wear, excellent function (C&R)\$365

117-Z Winchester .22 LR "Model 75 Sporter" Clip Feed Bolt Rifle 24" tapered barrel with mint bore, hooded ramp bead front sight, rear barrel sight has been removed and replaced with a dovetail blank, receiver mounted scope blocks for mounting grooved receiver rings have been installed, Winchester proof marks are offset on barrel and receiver and was probably intended for scope blocks as the rear of the barrel has 2 dilled tapped and plugged holes meant to be used with now occupied holes in receiver, receiver mounted Lyman 57E aperture rear target sight using factory holes, 98% original blue with "Sporting" marked triggerguard and factory serrated steel buttplate showing mostly gray, select checkered figured Walnut pistol grip stock with factory hard rubber logo grip cap and sling swivels, comes with one 10 round original Winchester marked detachable magazine, stock shows some light scattered dings and dents, manufactured 1947 (C&R)\$1195

118-Z Winchester .22 S, L & LR "Model 67" Single Shot Bolt Rifle 27" barrel with excellent bore, 90% original blue with light graying and pitting about 10" back from muzzle, "King" adjustable open rear and factory bead front sights, excellent dark Walnut pistol grip stock with finger groove forend and mint hard rubber logo buttplate (C&R)\$175

119-Z Winchester .22 S, L, & XL "Model 99" Thumb Trigger Single Shot Bolt Rifle 18" barrel with fair bore, 90% original blue with areas fading to brown, original dovetail sights, professionally refinished gumwood straight stock with Winchester black hard rubber buttplate, manufactured 1904-1923 (C&R)\$650

120-Z Browning 12 Gauge "Model A-5 Light Twelve" Auto Shotgun 28" vent rib barrel with 2 3/4" chamber, fixed modified choke and excellent bore, 96% original bright blue with most loss at carry point on belly of receiver, nice factory engraving, excellent dark Walnut pistol grip stock with cut checkering and logo buttplate, excellent function, Belgian made in 1973 (C&R) ...\$975

121-Z Ithaca 16 Gauge "Grade No.1 NID" Side by Side Shotgun 28" barrel with 2 3/4" chambers, raised solid rib, full and modified chokes and mirror bright bores, 98% original blue on barrels, 80% case color on engraved receiver with most loss on belly due to hand carry, double triggers, extractors, excellent dark Walnut pistol grip stock with cut checkering, grip cap and expertly installed solid red rubber butt pad, excellent functioning cocking indicators, raised rib has a single blued screw added about 2" from chamber end, super looker showing only light field use, made in 1926 (C&R)\$1295

122-Z J.C. Higgins (High Standard) 12 Gauge "Model 20" Pump Shotgun 27" vent rib barrel with mint bore, 2 3/4" chamber and factory installed "Power Pac" mid range compensator replaceable tube choke device, 97% original blue, very good Walnut pistol grip stock with grip cap, factory vent rubber recoil pad, silver inlaid shield at toe line and serrated pump handle, cut-off switch on receiver, finish on stock is poor, excellent function (C&R)\$225

123-Z L.C. Smith 12 Gauge "Model 2E" Side Lock Side by Side Shotgun 30" raised rib barrels, with 2 3/4" chambers, improved modified and full fixed chokes and excellent bright bores, rear of rib is marked "Hunter Arms Co. Fulton, NY" and there is a tiny plug screw about 6" down from breech end, 98% original blue, excellent bright steel with traces of case color on game scene fine scroll engraved sidelocks with "L.C. Smith" on both sides, double triggers, auto ejectors, excellent figured Walnut straight grip stock with fine cut checkering, splinter style forend, stock has 15" L.O.P. with professionally added old "white line" vent recoil pad, shows a couple cracks behind sidelocks that aren't going any where, excellent function, made in 1905, super looker (C&R)\$1295

124-Z Marlin 12 Gauge "Model 55" Clip Feed Bolt Shotgun 28" plain barrel with excellent bright bore, 2 3/4" chamber and fixed improved cylinder choke, 97% original blue, bead front and added peep sight at rear, excellent Walnut pistol grip stock with added swivel "eyes", factory vent rubber recoil pad and (2) shot original magazine, excellent function undoubtedly some ones favorite deer slug gun\$150

125-Z Parker Brothers 12 Gauge "Trojan Grade" Side by Side Shotgun 26" raised concave rib barrels with excellent bright bores, 2 3/4" chambers and fixed cylinder and improved cylinder chokes (barrels probably cut from 28"), 96% original barrel blue with a little spotty graying on undersides, receiver is a smooth un-pitted mottled blue/gray with touch of case color, double triggers, extractors, excellent Walnut pistol grip stock with cut checkering, splinter style forend and a very professional refinish buttplate is a plain serrated black hard rubber, excellent function, made in 1927 (C&R)\$650

126-Z Remington 12 Gauge "Sportsman (Model 11)" Auto Shotgun 28" plain barrel with mint bore, 2 3/4" chamber and fixed modified choke, 98% original blue, nicely roll engraved game scene receiver, minty dark figured Walnut pistol grip stock with logo serrated hard rubber buttplate, excellent function showing little or no actual use, made in 1937 (C&R)\$595

127-Z Remington 12 Gauge "Model 870 Super Mag" Slide Action Shotgun 28" vent rib barrel with mint bore, 3 1/2" chamber, stainless steel knurled "Carlsons" modified choke screw in tube for steel, copper or lead shot, 99% original matte black finish, minty checkered Walnut pistol grip stock with solid black rubber logo recoil pad, excellent function, has a slip on shell carrier on buttstock, shows little or no actual use\$485

128-Z Smith & Wesson 12 Gauge "Elite Gold Grade I" Side by Side Shotgun 26" raised rib (2) bead barrels with mint bores, 3" chambers and fixed cylinder and improved cylinder chokes, 99 1/2% original high gloss blue and bright case colors on lightly engraved scalloped boxlock receiver, single non-selective trigger, auto ejectors and straight grip checkered Turkish Walnut stock with nicely figured fiddle back grain and checkered butt, splinter style lever release forend with same fine cut checkering as wrist, looks and functions as new weighs 6 lbs 3oz with 14 3/4" L.O.P., as new in original box with all paper, made in 2007\$1975

129-Z Winchester 12 Gauge "Model 12 Heavy Duck" Pump Shotgun 30" plain barrel with 3" chamber, fixed full choke and minty bright bore, 99% original bright blue, minty Walnut pistol grip stock with a stylized "A" branded in right butt cheek, correct solid red rubber butt pad giving the correct 13 5/8" L.O.P., butt pad shows a bit of deformation from standing for the last 68 years, excellent function and looks near new, the equal of or better than most high end hunting shotguns of today, made in 1956 (C&R)\$1295

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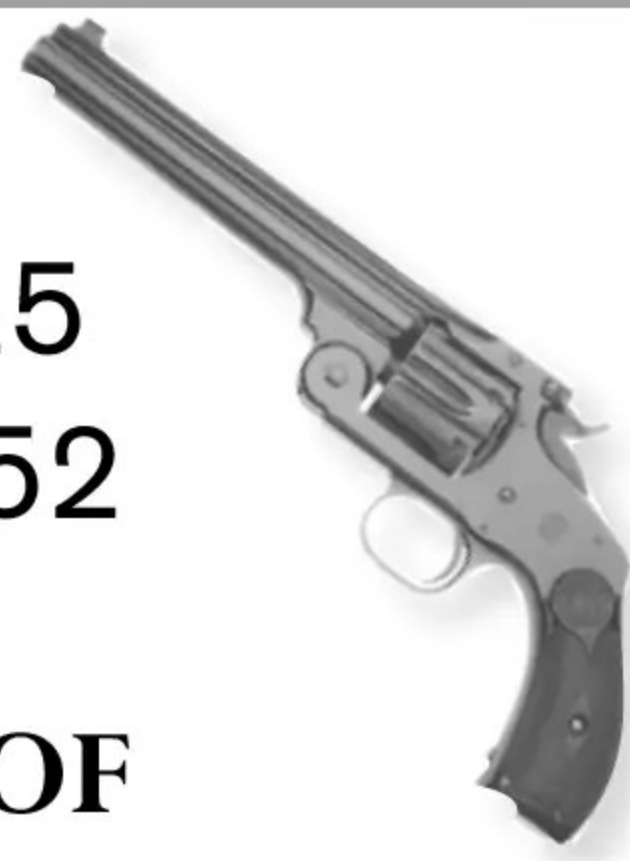
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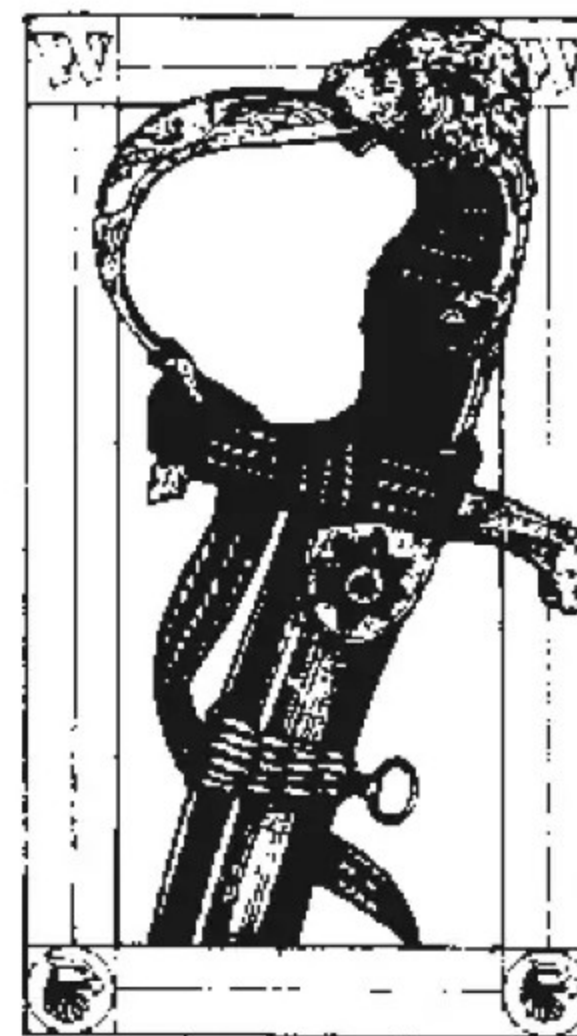
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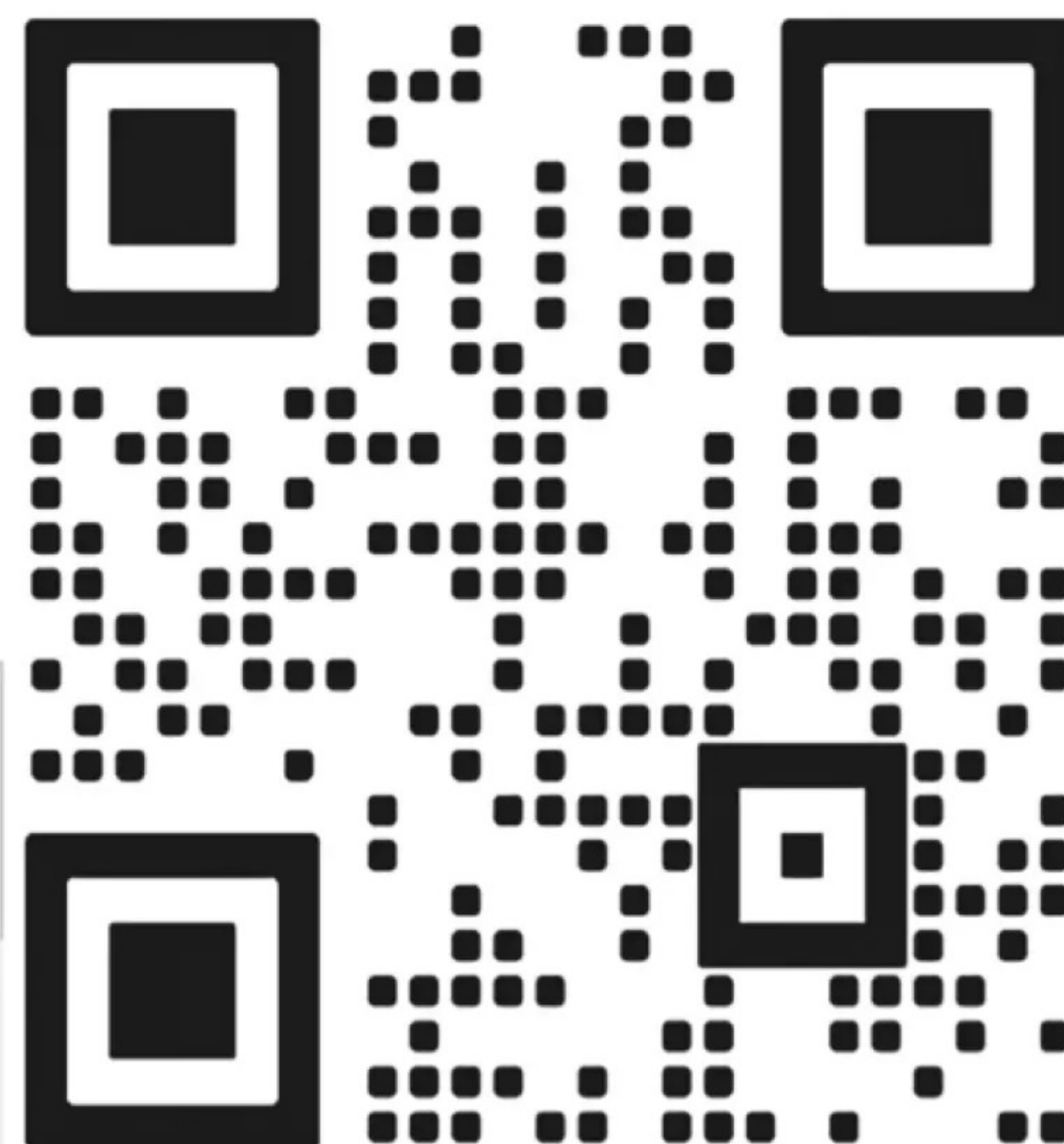
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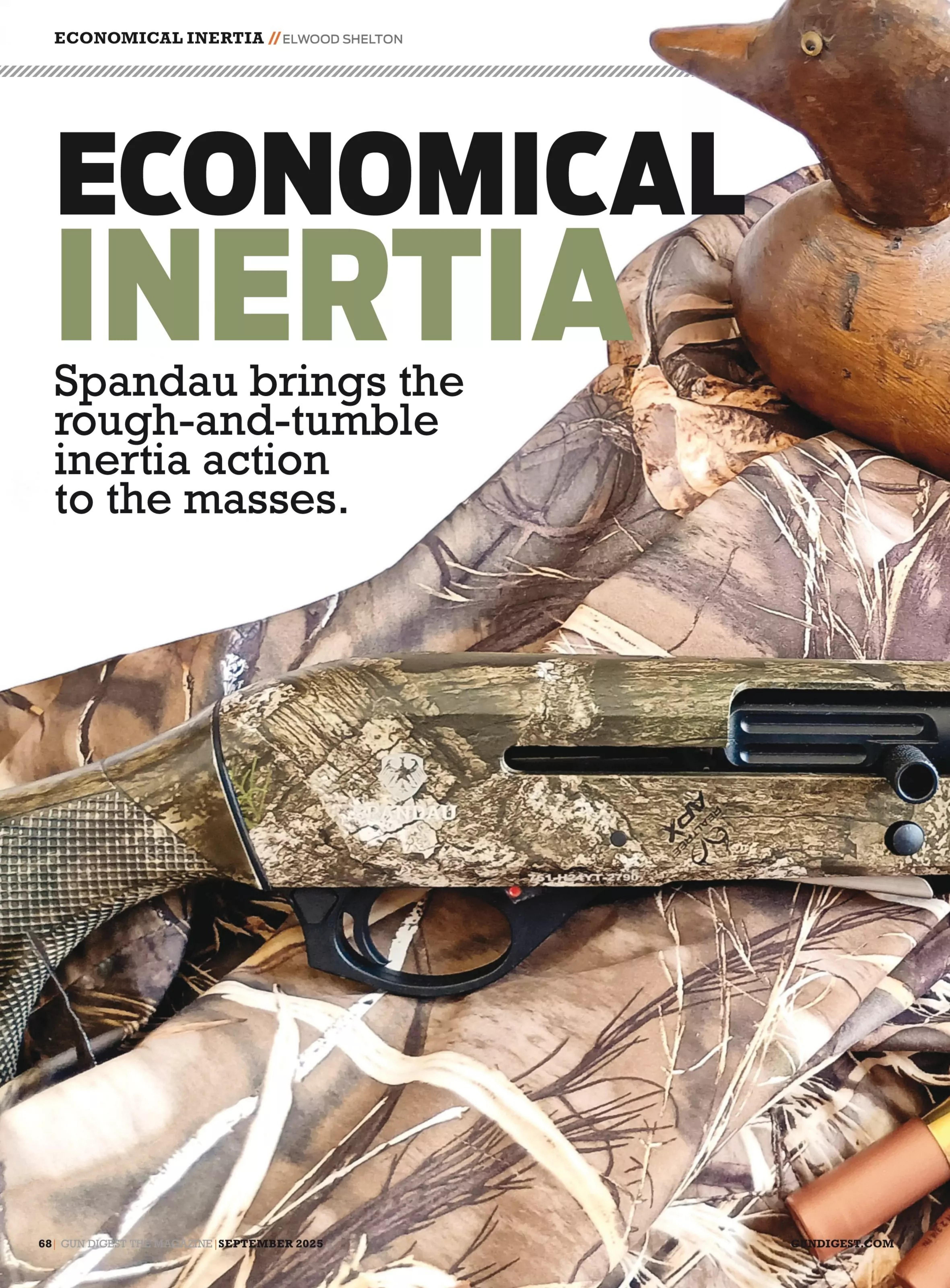
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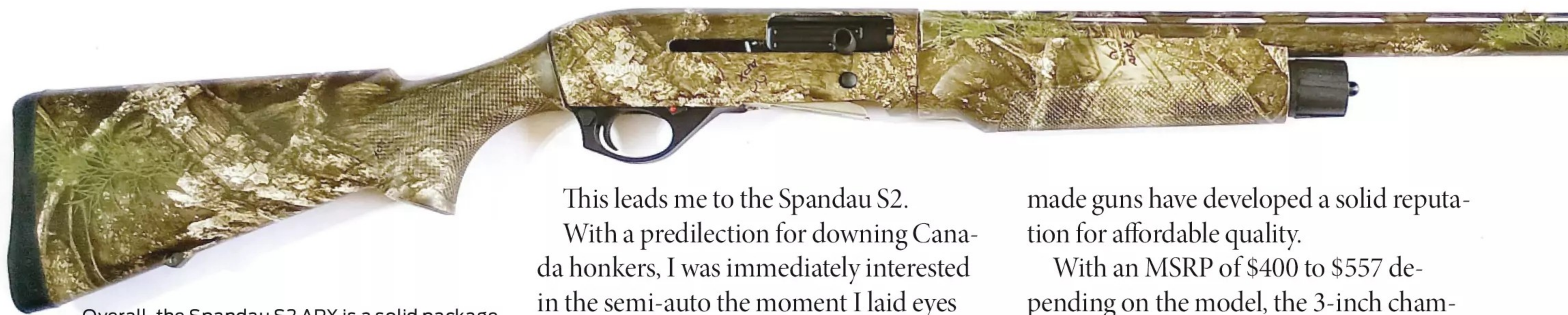
Spandau brings the rough-and-tumble inertia action to the masses.





Chances are, no matter your geographic point, you live hours—if not minutes—from a spit of land where you can call in or flush out one of the nation's multitudes of avian game. Even better news: As far as hunting goes, wingshooting is one of the more affordable options on the table.

Certainly, you can pay a mint and take the Cadillac route to knock pintails out of the sky. But you needn't. Over the past couple of decades, the price of decent shotguns has dropped to where they're only slightly more than a good pair of boots or waders. Buyer beware: There are lemons in this class of gun. But with a little research, there are also gems.



Overall, the Spandau S2 APX is a solid package for the price point, offering up a 3-inch chambered 12-gauge with a reliable inertia operation.

SPECIFICATIONS SPANDAU S2

GAUGE: 12-gauge

CHAMBER: 3 inches

BARREL LENGTH: 28 inches

STOCK: Polymer

FRAME/RECEIVER FINISH: Hydro-dip Realtree APX (also available in Realtree MAX-7, Mossy Oak Obsession, Mossy Oak Bottomland, Realtree MAX-7); Black

CAPACITY: 3+1

SIGHTS: Fiber-optic front

OPTICS READY/CUT: Drilled and tapped

OVERALL WEIGHT: 6 pounds, 14 ounces

CHOKE TUBE: Benelli/Mobil (cylinder, modified, ext. ported modified, full)

MSRP: \$557



This leads me to the Spandau S2.

With a predilection for downing Canada honkers, I was immediately interested in the semi-auto the moment I laid eyes on it at the 2025 SHOT Show. A semi-auto for less than many pumps? Has the floor fallen out of the market? Or, was this potentially a pretty face ... without much to back it up?

Well north of 500 shells and a mountain of broken blue rock later, I'm pleased to say the budget blaster left a lasting impression.

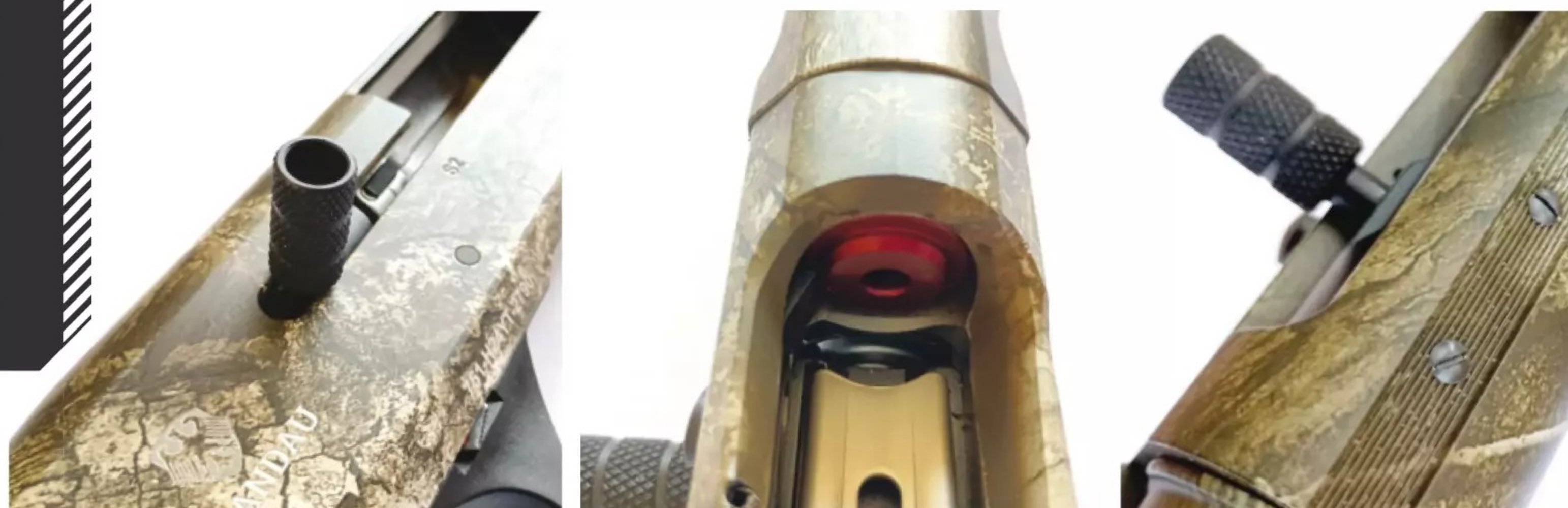
INERTIA IMPETUS

The S2 is the first semi-auto from the new-ish brand Spandau Arms—imported by SDS Arms out of Knoxville, Tennessee. Mainly focusing on budget- to mid-tier over/unders before the S2, the Turkish-

made guns have developed a solid reputation for affordable quality.

With an MSRP of \$400 to \$557 depending on the model, the 3-inch chambered 12-gauge semi has the honor of being the most affordable shotgun in the brand's catalog. The asking price—likely \$100 or so less at your local outdoor retail warehouse—also gives it the distinction of being among the most affordable shotguns, period.

The S2—like much of the recent hunting-focused semi-auto market—is inertia driven. I, like many hunters, prefer chasing game—not cleaning guns or mollycoddling their idiosyncrasies. Since the system isn't as finicky as gas-driven semis—and has earned a reputation for running in any condition with any load—inertia actions have become a hunting-



A large cylindrical charging handle to get the scatter is just the ticket in the field, getting the gun into action without any second thoughts.

A metallic red follower lets you confirm if the magazine is empty without any doubts.



The S2's controls are oversized—such as the safety—making them easy to find and operate, even with gloves.

season favorite. Early muggy-season doves to late snowbound Canada geese, low brass to high, these guns just chug along.

IN FULL CONTROL

Bird guns are a mature concept. In turn, improving the design is a marginal process. Yet for what qualifies as a budget shotgun, Spandau paid attention to the S2's minutiae to produce a gun punching well above its monetary weight.

Given the gun seems tilted to waterfowlers and turkey hunters, the attention to the controls is especially appreciated. Everything here is enlarged and easy to find, from the large triangular cross-bolt safety to the prominent bolt release at the

front of the receiver. The latter is also in line with the fore, making it quick to get the offhand in shooting position.

Spandau even tweaks the loading gate, enlarging the port and shortening the lifter. This was one of my favorite aspects of the gun. It loads fast, instinctively and sans a thumb bite.

Finally, the oversized, knurled charging handle is a nice touch. Cylindrical and easy to find, I was able to run the S2 as quickly as a tactical gun, charging over or under the receiver at an elevated pace.

STOCK STOCK

I'm a sucker for walnut on a shotgun, but the S2's stock is the norm for today's rough-and-tumble field guns. In short, it's polymer. While the hollow knock of injection-molded plastic doesn't exactly set my heart soaring, it's well-formed, adjustable and adds to the gun's light construction.

Spandau uses a shim system in the buttstock to allow the shooter to adjust the drop and cant with the shims, if so desired. I didn't, but the option is there for you.

The forend is reminiscent of a certain Italian manufacturer's semi-auto smooth-bores, with a full belly tapering to slightly more than the barrel's width up top. I like this design. It forms to the off-hand better and—to my mind—gives more control on a swing.

As for the fore and grip texture, it's not aggressive, which worried me. I like checkering with some bite—even if it's uncomfortable by day's end—because the pain is worth a guaranteed purchase. Thankfully, the gun didn't have to sink its teeth into me, as the texture proved adequate, even with moisture on the stock.

IN SIGHT

Like many, I was raised on a brass bead on shotguns, and it feels like coming home with one on the rib. But as age and presbyopia have caught up with me, the S2's fiber-optic front bead—backed up with a brass mid-rib bead—was a godsend. Bright in daylight and bright enough in flat light, it was simple to find quickly

upon shouldering the gun.

ACCOUTREMENTS

As light on the pocketbook as the S2 is, Spandau added a couple of extras generally not expected at this price point.

The stock and magazine nut have sling attachment points. The shell follower is a vivid red, evident when the magazine is cleared. The receiver is drilled and tapped, making the addition of optics mounts a simple matter of tightening screws. And

Spandau offers the Realtree camo patterns MAX-7 Camo or APX, in addition to its base-model black. For the record, mine was in APX.

Rounding out the package is a set of removable chokes, four in all ... including a ported modified. Given some of its other Italian design features, it's no surprise the S2 is compatible with Benelli chokes.

LET THE CLAY PIGEONS FLY

After several range sessions with the S2,



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I came away impressed. What Spandau offers here would cost a small fortune in tonier neighborhoods.

Out of the box, the gun fit me excellently—I could close my eyes, bring the gun to my shoulder and the bead was right in line. It functioned flawlessly from the get-go, and it was a blast to shoot. My general take after dusting many clays: It's an out-and-out shooter, and a pleasant one at that.

What surprised me most shouldering the S2 was how light the gun was, even for the typically wispy inertia class. From the specs, the gun weighs 6.7

pounds—and I won't dispute it. Its slight mass makes it thump a bit more—certainly more recoil than a gas gun—but not enough to make me hesitant.

The S2's balance is slightly rear-biased—a trait that's likely common among inertia-driven semi-autos, though I've never studied it formally. Despite that, the gun didn't feel whippy and was easily controlled. In fact, I'd argue it made the S2 feel a bit nimbler when swinging on doubles.

PARTING SHOT

Looking to flex on your gear-snob bud-

dies at the duck shack? The Spandau S2 isn't for you. Looking to run a gun hard and put birds in the bag without draining your bank account? This gun is worth a look.

For under \$557, you get a semi-auto that digests a wide range of loads, shrugs off rough weather and runs clean. It's light on the shoulder, fast on the follow-up and—most importantly—reliable out of the box.

It's a no-nonsense field gun built for work, not wall-hanging. In short, it's a budget wing shooter engineered to get anyone into the field. **GDTM**

Cheap Shots: Sub-\$500 Shotguns

Perhaps no other firearm runs the range of pricing like the shotgun. At the top end, the best guns can and do cost as much as a common American starter home. At the other end, they're a step above free. What we're concerned about here are the inexpensive smoothbores—but not just any blue-light special that hits your local gun store's rack. These guns are proven shooters and game-getters, as versatile as they are affordable, and each and every one boasting an MSRP of less than \$500. Some of these scatterguns might not win beauty contests and could draw barbs from snobbish hunting buddies. Guess what? Neither of those factors will matter once you fill your bag, which each of these shotguns is more than capable of accomplishing.



01 Pointer Acrius

Of all over/unders, the Acrius has one of the most approachable price points. And for a field-ready option, the Turkish-made Pointer delivers while adding a touch of refinement. The gun's fit and finish punch well above its price tag, and the fact that it's available with a smattering of laser-etched engraving makes the scattergun quite appealing. So do the chambering options the brand offers, including 12, 20, 28 and .410. However, you'll have to settle for a 28-inch barrel—which isn't a bad thing, since it's an optimal length for 12-gauges. Pointer adds some nice touches to the gun beyond aesthetics, including a fiber-optic bead and a relatively good trigger. That said, the drop at the comb doesn't get your eye on the bead as cleanly as I'd like—though that could be personal. Also, the checkering is there but not very aggressive. I prefer something that bites into the palm, though that's not everyone's preference. All that said, the Acrius has the stuff to last. Unlike many O/Us at this price point, the receiver is steel, which gives it better footing in the long run.

MSRP: \$429

02 Mossberg Maverick 88 All Purpose

Never a looker and always a doer, the Maverick 88 is among the least expensive guns in Mossberg's catalog—not an easy task for the already affordable gunmaker. Despite this, the black polymer gem has built a mythos over the years, particularly among the home defense and tactical communities. The pump-action is equally adept in the field. I personally like to think of the 12-gauge as a Mossberg 500 that didn't go to finishing school. It has the same rugged heart of the legendary pump—twin action bars, milled receiver and reliability—in a rather rough package. It's very plasticky, even down to the cross-bolt safety and trigger guard. And there's a nit I have to pick: It's with noticeable machining and sharp edges on the loading port. Watch your fingers if you're feeding a shell through it at an expedited pace. Still, this might be one of the best beginner's shotguns out there and won't leave a newbie hanging in the field.

MSRP: \$275

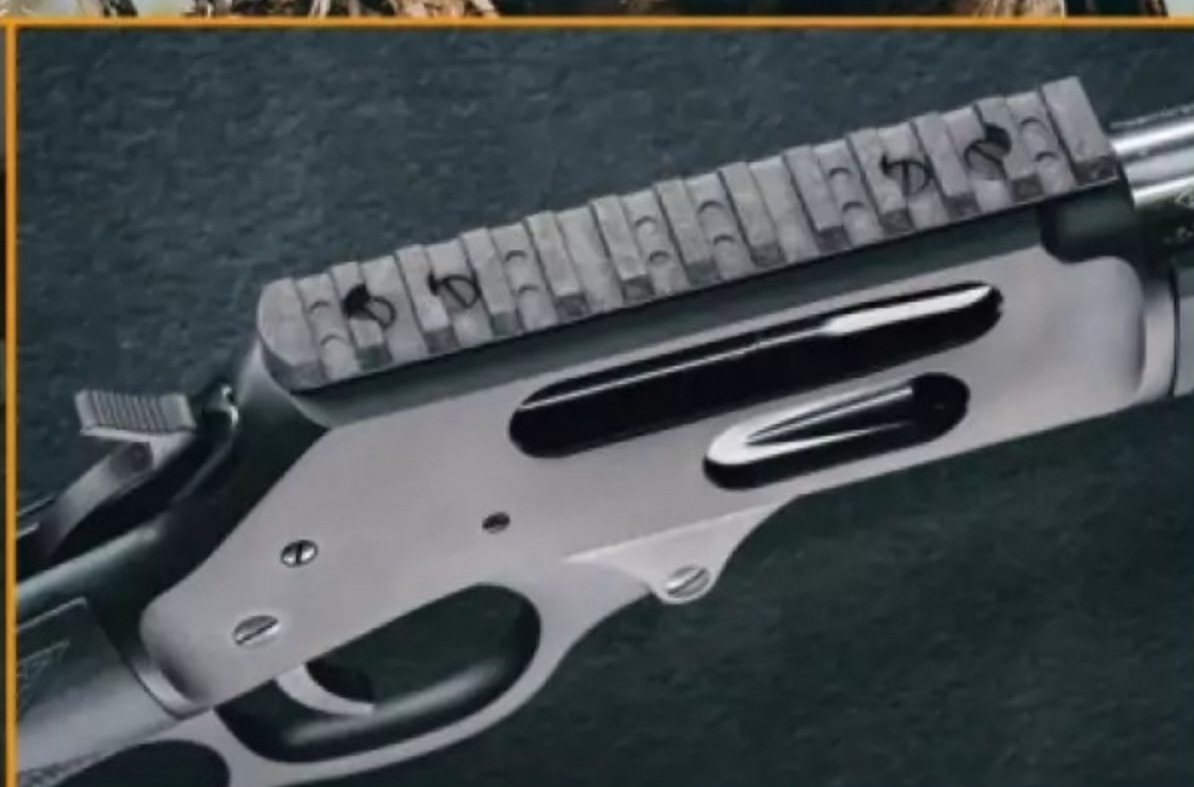


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03



04



05



06



03 Savage Stevens 560 Field

Savage has long been known for producing economical hunting rifles, but the Massachusetts manufacturer knows its way around shotguns, too. Released a couple of years ago, the 560 is more than proof of that. The gas-operated gun comes in at a great price and more than has the chops to rule the corn stubble or duck blind. Among the most appealing aspects of the 560 is the 12-gauge's lightweight design, coming in under 6 pounds. Much of this is thanks to an aluminum-alloy receiver that cuts down on the gun's mass. Even so, it's relatively polite in the recoil department thanks to the gas system and a thick 1-inch recoil pad. Reliability-wise, the gun is impressive, kicking everything from heavy 3-inch turkey loads to demure low-brass dove shells. Best of all, Savage Stevens has taken the time to dress the 560 up in a nice stick of Turkish walnut. Finishing it off is pebble texturing on the grip and forend, giving this traditional material a sleek, modern look.

MSRP: \$499

04 CZ 612 Field

Strangely enough, there's never been a ton of noise made about the 612. That's a pity, because the CZ 12-gauge is a true gem and a classy way to get into wingshooting. More than anything, CZ got the ergonomics right with the Field version of the pump action. Close your eyes, shoulder the gun, open them—and your eye is right on the bead. A good trigger with a break around 5 pounds helps pick up the pace of the shot ... as does a relatively thin front of the forend, giving the off hand a chunk of material behind it to operate the slide. The gun is available only in a 28-inch-barreled, 3-inch-chambered model for the field. However, if you need a bit more oomph for pass shots on geese, CZ offers the 612 Magnum Waterfowl that eats up 3½-inch magnum shells.

MSRP: \$499

05 Winchester SXP Black Shadow

With more than a decade on the market, the SXP Black Shadow has earned a reputation as a class option no matter the price point. Why not? It's over-engineered, light as a feather and runs all day long. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the pump-action is its four-lug rotating bolt, making the system extremely strong. At the same tick, they unlock quickly, allowing what Winchester claims is the "fastest" pump action to cycle its loads. Is it the fastest? It's hard to say, but it's pretty dang quick. Winchester also offers a load of barrel and chamber size options in the Black Shadow, with 24-, 26- and 28-inch barrels, each available with 3- or 3½-inch chambers. The only knocks I have: It's no beauty queen, available only in polymer black stock, and the trigger is not on par with modern standards—it's nearly 10 pounds. Overlook those issues and you have one heck of a hunter.

MSRP: \$440

06 Stoeger Uplander Field

If you want to know why side-by-sides typically cost a king's ransom, it's because getting horizontally parallel barrels to hit the same spot takes some doing. Stoeger has accomplished this—and done it at Stoeger prices—with the Uplander. The gun is dressed in a walnut stock and has a nicely blued receiver and barrels, giving it a classy look. The forend and grip have good checkering, offering a solid purchase and adding to the gun's overall aesthetics. And, most importantly, the gun hits what it's aimed at—not always the case, even with more expensive side-by-sides. I appreciate Stoeger offering the gun with the option of English double triggers in addition to the more common single. While not as popular today, double triggers add to the enjoyment of a side-by-side—once you get used to them. As for downsides: You'll have to invest in a butt pad. The Uplander comes with a plastic plate, which with heavier 3-inch loads can dig into your shoulder.

MSRP: \$499

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Every so often a rifle comes along that is so utilitarian—and affordable—that it becomes nearly ubiquitous. Everyone, it seems, either has one or wants one. The Ruger American is one such rifle. Following its introduction in 2011, it rapidly became one of America's most popular affordable bolt-actions, and sales quickly exceeded Ruger's expectations. To date, Ruger has delivered well over a million of them in 28 different chamberings and more than 250 distinct models.

What most people don't know is that the American was intended to be some-

thing entirely different. Ruger engineers initially tried to create a more affordable version of the company's venerable M77 Hawkeye flagship bolt-action rifle, but they could only go so far working with the legacy design.

A CLEAN-SHEET DESIGN

That prompted a decision to go with a clean-sheet design, and three experienced Ruger engineers were assigned to the project. Step one was gathering input from a "Voice of the Customer" campaign to find out what customers really wanted. Ruger's polling produced some interesting results.

"With enough folks polled, many features or choices canceled out," says Mark Gurney, Ruger's innovation director. For example, about one-third wanted push feed, one-third wanted controlled-round feed, and one-third didn't care. Much the same applied to decisions over whether the safety should be a tang or wing design, and whether the ejector should be a plunger or fixed type.

In the end, several factors emerged as constants. The rifle needed to be accurate and have a good trigger. It needed to be rugged. And reliable. In other words, it needed to be a Ruger.



THE EVOLUTION OF THE RUGER AMERICAN RIFLE

Ruger's American rifle is more than just another affordable bolt-action. It's an American success story.

From the time Ruger committed to the American, it took a little over a year to bring the design to life. A team of manufacturing engineers were added to the effort during the development cycle and Ruger stood up the first dedicated American rifle production line in Newport, New Hampshire. In 2016, in response to demand, Ruger added additional production capacity in its Mayodan, North Carolina, facility.

THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN

When first introduced, the American was a no-frills rifle designed to hit a certain price

point. It did that handily. Original MSRP was just \$449 (it retailed for less), but from the beginning, the rifle delivered performance on par with guns costing far more.

The rifle was, unsurprisingly, originally chambered for some of America's favorite cartridges, including .243 Win. and .308 Win. in short actions, and .270 Win. and .30-06 in long actions. It was equipped with a 22-inch free-floated hammer-forged barrel (with a recessed crown) attached to the action with a barrel nut for precise headspacing and enhanced accuracy.

The bedded action was mated to the

stock using Ruger's innovative Power Bedding System, which also contributed to the gun's accuracy. That system used two aluminum V-blocks embedded into the synthetic stock that mated up with a pair of cuts in the action. It was a simple but clever design that worked quite well.

Use of a full-diameter bolt with three locking lugs and dual-cocking cams allowed for a short, 70-degree bolt throw and ample scope clearance. Smoothness of cycling varied a bit on these early guns. I handled some that were quite smooth and one or two others that felt a little stiff, but loosened up with lubrication and use.



The rifle employed the Savage-like bladed-style Ruger Marksman Trigger, but it differed from similar designs in one important respect. The blade locked the trigger, versus the sear, so the sear couldn't trip no matter how low the pull weight was set. The pull weight was user-adjustable within a range of 3 to 5 pounds. The action used a two-position, tang-mounted safety that did not lock the bolt down.

In a departure for Ruger, the top of the action did not have the milled slots used on Hawkeye rifles for directly attaching Ruger scope rings. Instead, each rifle shipped with two single-slot Weaver-style bases to attach to the receiver.

The rifle had a matte black, glass-filled polypropylene stock. It wasn't the stiffest stock in the world, but that shortcoming was negated by the stiffness of the action and the free-floated barrel. Stocks were equipped with a recoil pad that did a decent job of mitigating recoil. Stippled panels were impressed into the forend and grip to improve purchase in inclement weather. The rifle fed from a well-designed detachable, four-round rotary magazine that slid rounds smoothly into the chamber.

Visually, the original rifle didn't look like anything special. At the time, it didn't exactly stand out on rifle racks overflowing with other guns with black polymer stocks, but once people found out how

well it shot, sales took off. In buyers' eyes, beauty was in the rifle's performance.

UNFAILING ACCURACY

I've had a fair amount of experience with Ruger American rifles, both in the field and on the range, starting with an American Predator model chambered in 6mm PRC. That rifle had a green synthetic stock and a fairly stiff-cycling bolt that made a bit of a *zip-zip* sound, which was somewhat common on early models and has since been corrected.

That rifle, which weighed just 6.6 pounds, had a 22-inch medium-contour barrel. Like all American rifles of that time, it had Ruger's Power Bedding System, a tang-mounted safety, the Marksman adjustable trigger and a four-round flush-fitting rotary magazine. The push-feed action's bolt had three large lugs, a generously sized extractor, a plunger ejector and a short, 70-degree throw. I wasn't overly impressed with the rifle's appearance, but my attitude toward the gun quickly changed when I put rounds downrange. On a day with the wind blowing full value at 12 mph, a Hornady load produced five-shot groups averaging 0.78 inch and a best group of just over half an inch.

I was even more impressed when I discussed the rifle with my friend and fellow outdoor scribe John Barsness. He shared a

photo of a group he shot with the Predator in 6.5 Creedmoor with his handloaded ammo. All five shots went into a single ragged hole. That's impressive performance for any rifle, let alone an inexpensive one. At the time, that American had an MSRP of \$529, and you could find it at a real-world price a bit south of \$400.

Every Ruger American rifle I've tested since then, regardless of chambering, has proven to be unfailingly accurate. Each has turned in sub-MOA groups with ammo it liked, which is more than I can say for some rifles costing far more. That inherent accuracy, combined with its affordable price tag, accounts for much of the Ruger American's continued popularity in the years since its introduction.

VERSATILITY IN SPADES

With that sort of performance and price, it's no surprise that the rifle quickly gained a following and found itself at home in deer blinds and pickup trucks across America.

When first introduced, the American was offered with only a black synthetic stock. Initial chamberings were limited to a handful of popular cartridges. The lineup would quickly expand. In the rifle's second year, Ruger added .22-250 Rem and 7mm-08 Rem. Ruger American Rimfire models appeared by 2015. Magnum chamberings,

including 7mm Rem Mag and .300 Win. Mag., arrived in 2016.

Magnum calibers were prototyped very early in the American rifle's life, but it wasn't until 2016 that Ruger built them in any quantity. Today, only .300 Win. Mag. stands as the legacy magnum cartridge in the lineup, though some models have been chambered in 7mm Rem. Mag. and .338 Win. Mag. in the past. Such rounds have been mostly replaced by 6.5 PRC and 7mm PRC, which work with the magnum-sized American receiver and bolt, and feed well from Ruger's three-round magnum box magazine. These magnums have quickly grown in popularity, especially with long-range shooters and Western hunters.

In 2016, the .450 Bushmaster made it into the lineup without a great deal of notice or fanfare, but it climbed into the number-three spot about a year later. It remains a staple of the line, and is a good choice for black bears, whitetails or hogs.

Over time, a few chamberings have been subtracted from the American lineup, but overall, the list has grown. As of this writing, some models are chambered for an astonishing 18 different cartridges, and I wouldn't be surprised to see others added. Ruger has never been shy about embracing innovative cartridges—or partnering at times with ammo manufacturers to make them—so you can expect continued flexibility in its choice of chamberings for the American.

NOTABLE EARLY MODELS

2014 was a banner year for the Ruger American. That's when a slew of new models were added to the lineup. They included the All Weather and All Weather Compact models (Ruger introduced the Compact the year before). The All Weathers had 22-inch matte-stainless barrels, while the Compact variants had shorter lengths of pull and shorter barrels, and were designed for shooters of smaller stature.

One of the most important introductions that year was the Ruger American Ranch, which was, as its name suggests, designed to be a handy companion for dealing with situations that call for a

The Ruger American Gen II improves considerably on the original American, but is still affordably priced.

At 6.5 pounds, the Ruger American Gen II rifle is rugged and light enough for back-country hunts.

The author used the new Ruger American Gen II in 6.5 Creedmoor to down this aoudad on a challenging West Texas hunt.



quick-handling, maneuverable rifle. The Ranch differed from the standard American in several important ways.

First, it was chambered in 5.56 NATO, which is useful for dealing with predators, and in .300 Blackout, which is potent medicine for feral hogs. Barrels measured 16 inches, which was even shorter than the 18-inch barrels on Compact models, making the rifle easier to whip out the window of a pickup truck when needed. Notably, the barrels were threaded for use with suppressors. The American Ranch also came with a Picatinny rail in place of the more traditional optics mounting system, making it easier to change optics. The gun even looked like a ranch rifle with a flat dark earth finish on the stock. It weighed only about 6 pounds. MSRP at the time was \$489.

Another important addition to the line that year was the Ruger American Predator, which sported a moss green composite stock. It featured a heavier-tapered, threaded 22-inch barrel, and came with a one-piece rail for mounting optics. As

its name implies, the Predator was quite useful in the hands of predator hunters thanks to the fact that it was chambered for such varmint-dispatching rounds as the .204 Ruger, .22-250 Rem and .223 Rem. Despite its name, the Predator was capable of much more because it was also chambered for .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor and .308 Win. Rifle weight in most chamberings was 6.62 pounds. Its MSRP was also \$489.

The year 2014 was also when Ruger made southpaws happy with the introduction of a Ruger American Left-Handed variant. When first introduced, the lefty model was a standard American model. Initial chamberings included .22-250 Rem, .223 Rem, .243 Win, .270 Win., 7mm-08 Rem, .30-06, and .308 Win. The MSRP was just \$449. The Left-Handed rifle is still available in several chamberings in the American Predator rifle.

If you were willing to spend a couple of hundred dollars more that year, you could get an American packaged with a Redfield Revolution 3-9x40 scope. Later, packages



Among other improvements, the Ruger American Gen II now has a three-position safety that locks the bolt down.



New on the Ruger American Gen II is a modular stock with a removable black comb. It also sports an effective recoil pad and a removable spacer to adjust the length of pull.



were added with different scopes.

Over time, Ruger introduced new magazine styles to the American lineup, including AI-, AR- and Mini-Thirty-style magazines in addition to the existing flush-fitting rotary mag. 7.62x39 was the first new chambering added to the line with this capability, but AR-sized cartridges have benefitted the most from the addition of new types of magazines. Today, Ruger supports .350 Legend, .400 Legend, 6mm ARC, .22 ARC and 6.5 Grendel with AR mags from the factory in select rifle versions.

GOING WILD

One of my favorite additions to the American line came in 2018 with the Go Wild. It featured an upgraded Go Wild camo synthetic stock, Cerakote finish, AI-type magazine, muzzle brake, and a Picatinny rail for optics. The Go Wild had an MSRP of just \$629. I initially tested the model in 6.5 Creedmoor chambering, and was more than a little pleased with the results. The action cycled more smoothly than earlier models I had tried. Four of five tested factory loads turned in sub-MOA groups (the fifth load held 1-inch average groups). I used that rifle on a challenging West Texas desert mule deer hunt to cleanly drop a 3X3 management buck.

That rifle stood up to harsh conditions, including a terrific dust storm, and performed like a champ. I was so enamored with the rifle that I bought it, and it would still be in my inventory save for the fact that my son kept hinting that he thought it would make a fine birthday present. I later used another American Go Wild rifle chambered in 7mm PRC to swat a management Axis buck into the freezer. I only had one load to test in that rifle, but it also proved to be quite accurate, with average groups measuring 0.67 inch and a half-inch best group.

Current first-generation American rifle versions include the Standard, Predator, Ranch, Go Wild, Hunter, Compact, and a package option equipped with a Vortex Crossfire II riflescope. The Standard model, with a 22-inch barrel, is offered in seven popular chamberings. MSRP is \$599.

The original Predator rifle has options

that include 10 different chamberings, black or moss-green stocks, and varying barrel lengths. Depending on the model, magazines included flush-fit, AR-, or AI-style. MSRPs range from \$610 to \$699. Real-world prices are considerably less.

The Hunter model is notably equipped with a specialized Magpul Hunter American stock, featuring fully adjustable length of pull and comb height, and enhanced ergonomics. Hunter rifles are chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor or .308 Win. Some versions have shorter, heavy contour barrels. MSRP is \$1,019, making this the most expensive rifle in the American lineup.

THE BEST RUGER AMERICAN YET

Fans of the Ruger American got a present with the Christmas Eve 2023 introduction of the Ruger American Gen II rifle, which improves considerably upon the original. The Gen II looks quite different than first-generation Americans, but improvements are more than skin-deep. The action still employs a one-piece, CNC-machined stainless bolt, but it cycles more smoothly and no longer has the characteristic “zip-zip” cycling sound of the early bolts. The bolt still has a short 70-degree throw to provide ample clearance for scopes. An oversized bolt knob is a definite plus.

Ruger upgraded the Gen II's safety from a two-position type that did not lock the bolt down to a three-position, tang-mounted design that allows you to cycle rounds through the action with the safety in the middle, engaged position. It also locks the bolt down in the rearmost position. These features mark a big improvement over the safety in first-generation rifles.

The Gen II still uses Ruger's Power Bedding integral block system, but the free-floated barrel is now deeply fluted to shed weight. The rifle I tested, chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor with a 20-inch barrel, weighed just 6.5 pounds, making it light enough for backcountry hunts. The muzzle is threaded for adding a suppressor or different muzzle brake, and Cerakote protects all the metal.

I have always found Ruger American rifles to be well-balanced in the hands, and that holds true for the Gen II.

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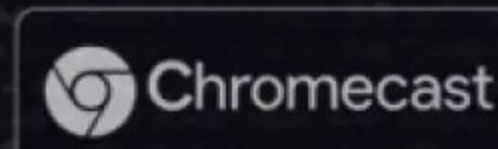
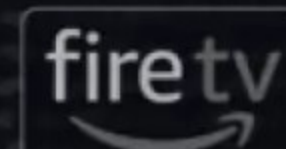
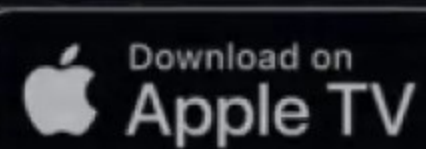
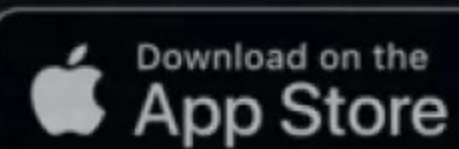
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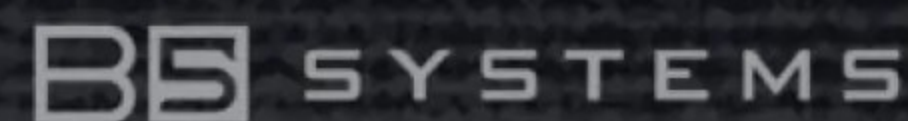
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A NEW MODULAR STOCK

Also new with the Gen II is a modular stock design with a removable black comb, an effective recoil pad, and a removable spacer to adjust the length of pull. The standard Gen II's stock has a textured black-and-gray splatter finish that nicely complements the dark gray Cerakote on the barrel and action. The splatter finish improves grip on the rifle, and the Gen II stock is noticeably stiffer than first-gen stocks.

Happily, the Gen II addresses one design element that has always annoyed me. The trigger could always be adjusted, but it was a pain to do so because you had to remove a spring-loaded magazine release latch to access an action screw to remove the barreled action from the stock. I always found that lever to be difficult to get back into place. More often than not, I left trigger pull weights at their factory settings. The latest version of the magazine well has a notch that allows you to access the rear action screw with a 3/16-inch ball end hex wrench, greatly simplifying the trigger adjustment process.

I have always found Ruger American rifles to be consistently accurate, and the Gen II was no exception. In testing, a Gen II chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor produced sub-MOA groups with four of five tested factory loads. That accuracy came in handy at the conclusion of a mile-long stalk on an aoudad ram on a remote West Texas ranch. That's rough country, where shots can be long, and aoudad can be tough to put down. The Gen II was up to the task.

The standard Gen II rifle is currently offered in 18 chamberings, ranging from common cartridges such as the .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor, .270 Win, 7mm-08 Rem, .30-06 and .300 Win. Mag., to straight-walled rounds (.350 Legend and .400 Legend) and newer options such as 6.5 PRC and 7mm PRC. Barrel lengths, magazine styles, and capacities for American Gen II rifles vary by chambering.

There's also a quick-handling Gen II Ranch rifle, offered in nearly a dozen chamberings, with a flat dark earth/black splatter-finished stock and shorter barrels measuring a bit more than 16 inches.

Gen II Predator rifles, available in 18 chamberings, have a Burnt Bronze Cerakote finish and a green stock with black and bronze splatter texture. They feature 22-inch barrels to achieve greater velocities.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As the Gen II rifles amply demonstrate, Ruger has continuously improved the American rifle over the years. In 2017, for example, Ruger changed American barrels from six-groove rifling to five-groove, claiming it reduces bullet deformation, makes barrels easier to clean and ultimately results in greater accuracy potential.

"It's the hidden details that help us win with continuous improvement," says Matthew Willson, Ruger product manager. "Engineers spent a lot of time working to improve bolt feel and made improvements in the bolt, receiver, and bolt stop that all played a part in making Gen II feel better than American rifles had in the past."

An important part of that process is what Ruger engineers call "tolerance stack-up" analysis. This involves, for example, looking at the magazine, magazine well, mag latch, stock, receiver and barrel to ensure all the components align to put the magazine at the correct height to feed a cartridge into the chamber smoothly.

Ruger's Voice of the Customer Campaign was a key factor in designing the Gen II American. Ruger collected information from a broad group of customers, including consumers, industry insiders, buyers at independent and chain retailers, and wholesale and law enforcement distributors.

Information was gathered via mechanisms ranging from formal surveys, questionnaires and focus groups to informal feedback and even social media. Says Willson, "We had quite a list going into American Gen II development from years of feedback compiled at shows, shoots, retail events, customer service interactions, and even through the 'Tell the CEO' function of the Ruger website." Ruger listened, and the results are reflected in Ruger's best American rifle to date, the Gen II.

LOOKING AHEAD

By the time you read this, Ruger will likely offer the Gen II American in additional versions and chamberings. As noted, Ruger currently offers seven traditional American rifle models and three American Gen II models, but that will change.

"The original adaptation of American Rifle will remain for now, but will see a reduction in models so we can focus production on the highest-demand models of Gen II. The American Gen II will continue to grow with new configurations and calibers," says Willson.

The MSRP for all Gen II rifles is just \$729, and you can often find them for a little more than \$500. All indications point to the Gen II being on the same trajectory to success as the first-generation Americans. It's a refined rifle, and has more of the features today's shooters want, but it still reflects the core Ruger American attributes: accurate, reliable and affordable.

Ruger has a long and rich legacy of creating American-made firearms that deliver solid performance at an affordable price. The Ruger American does that in spades, and that will likely ensure its ongoing popularity into the foreseeable future.

The Ruger American is an aptly-named rifle. It's a great success story, and few things are more American than that.

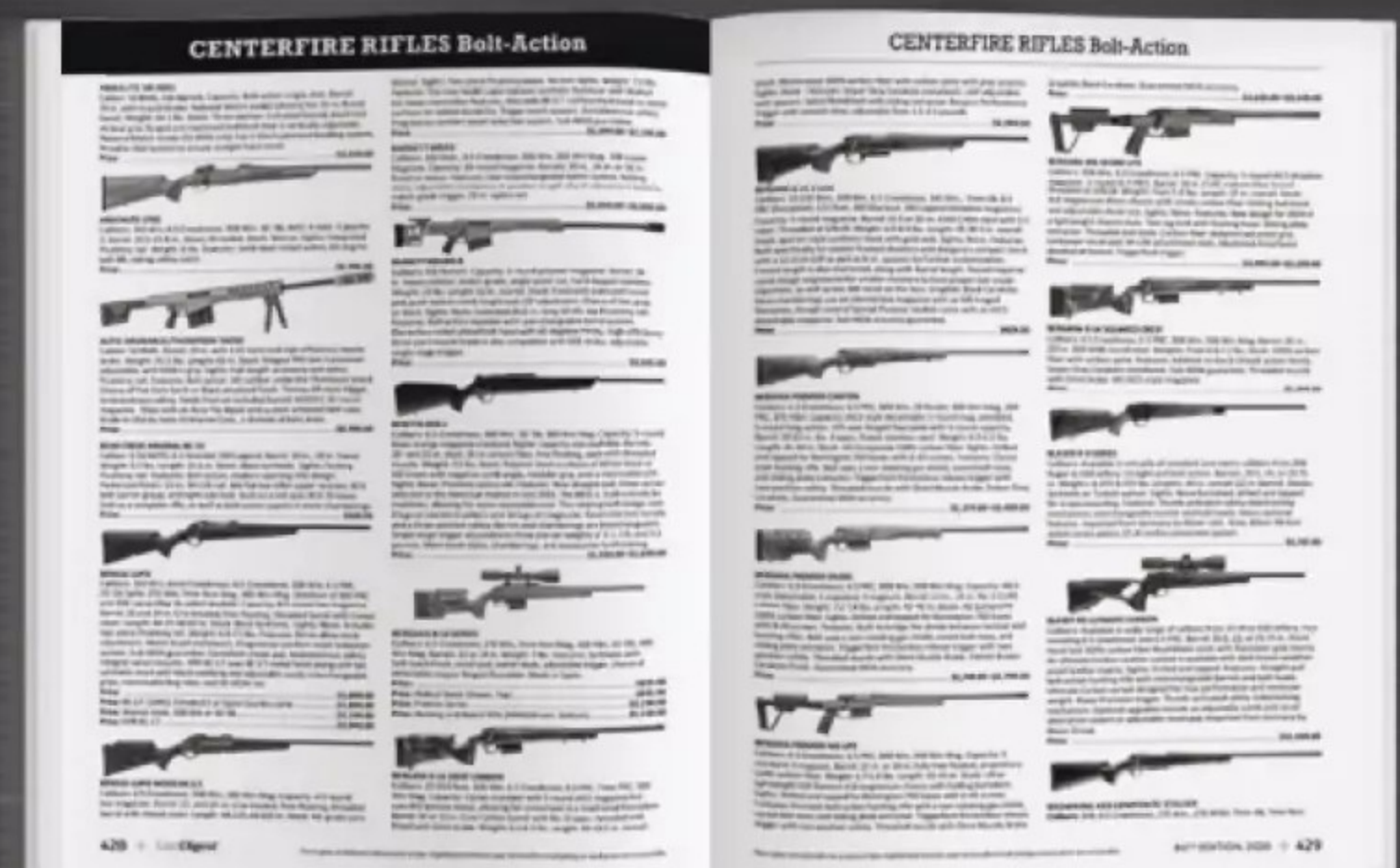
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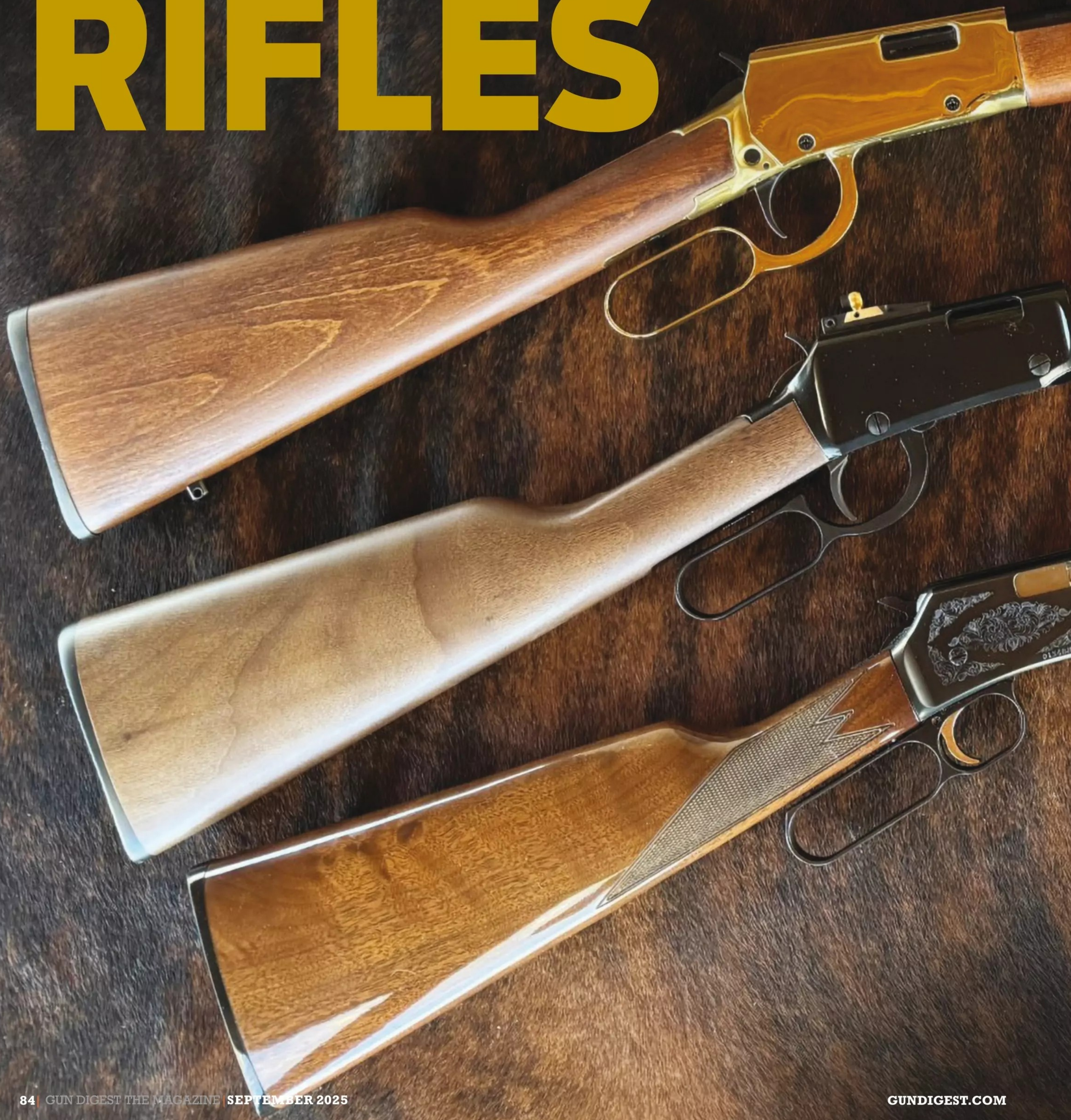
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TODAY'S .22 LR LEVER-ACTION RIFLES





Designed in 1887, the .22 Long Rifle (LR) is arguably one of the most popular cartridges ever invented, and for good reasons. Of course, other rimfire cartridges were produced, including the .22 Short, .22 Long, .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire (WMR) and the tiny .17 Hornady Magnum Rimfire (HMR), but I'll focus on the .22 LR here in lever-action rimfire applications.

This rimfire cartridge has many things going for it from the get-go. First of all, it's relatively inexpensive and pleasant to shoot. No harsh recoil nor

ear-splitting muzzle blast are associated with the .22 LR, although we need hearing protection whenever possible, even with small cartridges. It's a master at collecting small game, and while it may not be optimal, you can press it into service as a defensive weapon. Federal even offers its Personal Defense Punch Rimfire .22 LR 29-grain load specifically designed for such purposes. Another of the .22 LR's merits is that it's chambered in guns similar to those we hunt big game with or carry for personal protection. That adds another excellent option for less expensive live-fire practice to hone our shooting skills.

One of the most popular rifle actions ever devised is the classic lever-action. It provides the shooter with lightning-fast follow-up shots. For those still



This article is but a small taste of Gun Digest's recent book, "Lever Actions: A Tribute to the All-American Rifle." From the first Winchester to the latest from Mad Pig, this book has it all. Go to GunDigest-Store.com and search "lever gun book" to

Henry is making gorgeous lever guns, including this rimfire TX Ranger with eye-catching engraving and a large loop lever.



Browning's high-end lever-action .22s remain fan favorites. From top to bottom: the BL-22 Grade II, BL-22 Field Grade II and Browning BL-22 Micro Midas.



needing convincing, we can easily watch videos of accomplished shooters running their lever-action rimfire rifles with unbelievable speed and accuracy.

Uniquely American, the lever gun has been a part of the shooting scene for over 160 years. The longevity of manufacturing rifles with this type of action and the fact that gun companies still produce them and continue to add them to their lines means one thing: Shooters want them. If companies couldn't build, sell and make money by providing lever-action rifles, they wouldn't do it.

Several companies are currently offering multiple versions of .22 LR lever-actions. From historic designs like the Henry 1866 Yellowboy to modern renditions of lever guns that have gained brand recognition from makers like Browning, Chiappa, Rossi and others, the lever-action .22 is as popular as ever. Let's look at the current models available for today's shooter.

Cimarron Firearms offers its 1866 Yellowboy carbine with a 19-inch round barrel or 24-inch octagon-

barreled Sporting Rifle chambered in .22 LR. Staying within traditional lines, Taylor's & Company catalogs the 1866 Carbine with a 19-inch barrel and the rifle version with a 24.25-incher. Taylor's also sells the Uberti Scout with a 19-inch barrel.

Browning's BL-22 comes in numerous configurations, Field Grades I and II, Micro Midas, Grade I and Grade II. What does all of this mean? You can have the top-shelf, fast-cycling, accurate lever-action in a couple of different sizes with optional barrel lengths of

16.25 to 20 inches and even a 24-inch octagonal barrel. The receiver finish options are satin nickel or blue.

At last count, Henry Repeating Arms offers more than 30 different lever-action rimfires. From its Classic Lever Action .22 Model H001 to carbines, Octagon Frontiers, Small Game Rifles and Carbine, Limited Edition, and Tribute guns, Henry has a vast variety from which to choose.

Heritage Manufacturing Company's Settler Series of lever-actions are new to the shooting game, with three different models available from the 20-inch Settler to the 16-inch Compact and down to the 12.5-inch Mares Leg.



The 1866 Yellowboy in .22 LR from Cimarron Firearms.



The Henry Golden Boy .22. Every shooter should treat themselves to a Henry, and a Golden Boy chambered for a rimfire round provides the perfect excuse to get one.

These guns feature polished black oxide barrels, wood stocks and attractive simulated case-hardened receivers.

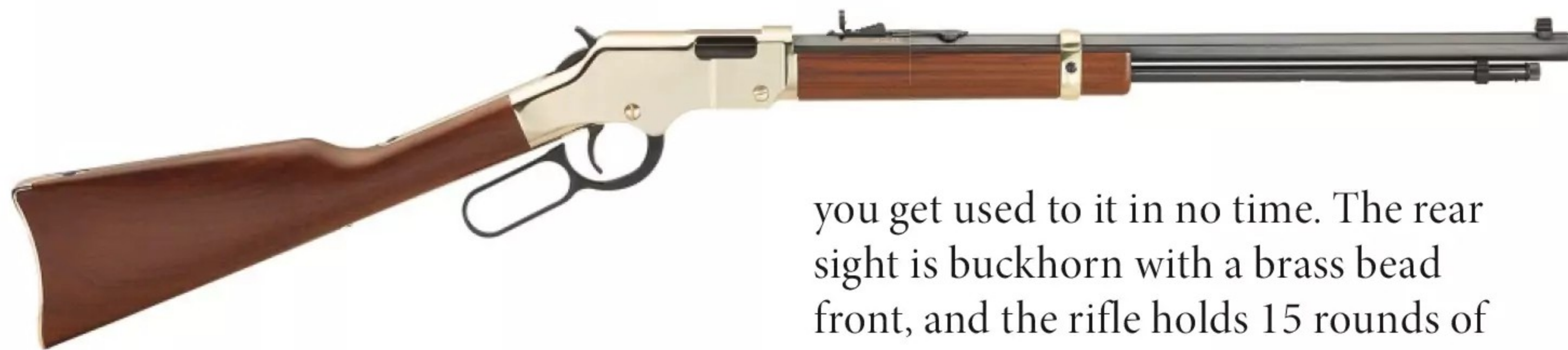
Rossi's Rio Bravo line of .22s are good-shooting, affordable lever guns. These 18-inch carbines come in matte black and wood, PVD gold and wood, Cerakote gold and wood or the tactical-looking polymer and black.

Chiappa Firearms has several versions of its takedown LA322 lever-action .22—a straight grip blued and wood model with an 18.5-inch barrel, the matte-chrome Kodiak Cub, and the Take Down Deluxe with a curved lever and hand-oiled walnut stock and forearm.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Henry provided the H001T with a hefty 20-inch octagonal barrel that balances nicely. Of course, the action was smooth, as all Henrys are, and the trigger broke at 3 pounds. The semi-buckhorn rear sight with a white diamond in the bottom contrasted nicely with the brass bead front sight.

The wood-to-metal fit and finish on the Henry rifle are excellent, with a bit



of grain in the darkly stained walnut stock and forearm. The Henry holds 16 rounds of .22 LR, and the barrel is marked .22 S/L/LR. It holds 21 rounds of .22 Shorts.

Rossi sent its brass-framed Rio Bravo Gold. The action is smooth on the Rossi, but this particular rifle has just a bit of catch as the nose of the bullet goes into the chamber. This did not cause any issues; you feel a slight increase in action tension as the cartridge begins to seat into the chamber of the 18-inch round barrel. The fit and finish are good, and the wood stock has some grain, which I like. The trigger broke at a crisp 4 pounds with about a quarter inch of take-up or slack before you hit the trigger's tension. By design, a quarter-inch gap between the lever and grip of the stock takes some getting used to; it feels slightly different from other lever guns I'm familiar with. However,

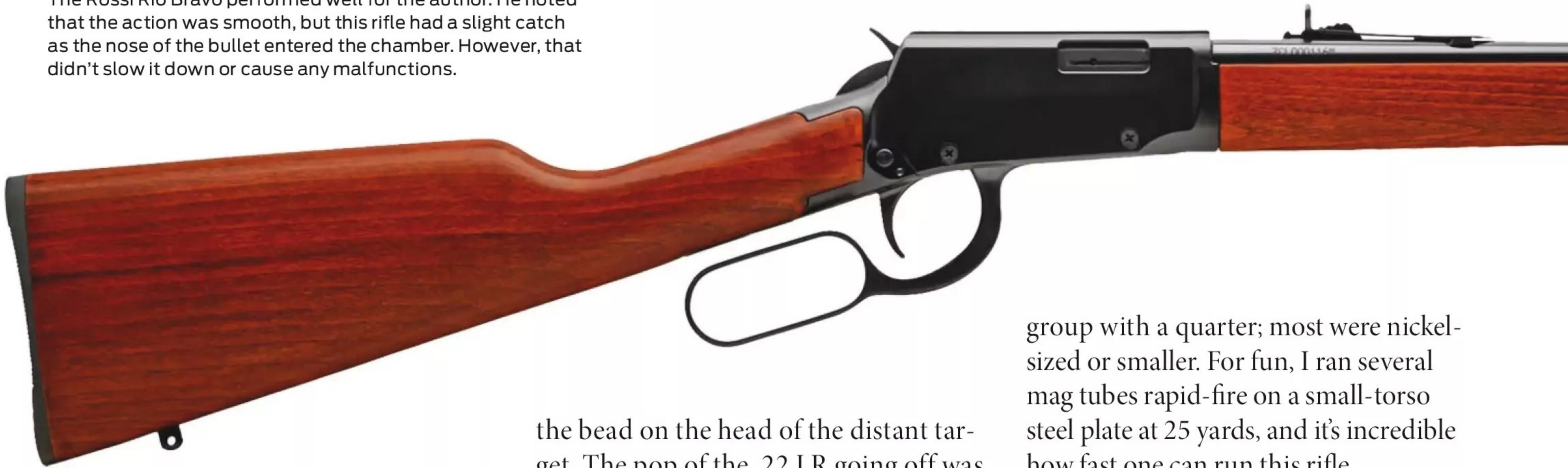
you get used to it in no time. The rear sight is buckhorn with a brass bead front, and the rifle holds 15 rounds of .22 LR.

I carried this little rifle while working livestock on the Harkins Ranch in hopes of shooting it during an afternoon break, which is precisely what we did. For starters, 12-year-old Sutton ran the Rossi through several rounds of steel Go Fast targets he had set up for a speed competition at 30 feet with two square targets on each side of a round "time-stopping" target. He competes with a slick semi-auto .22 LR rifle, but you wouldn't know it by the way he ran the Rossi lever-action like a pro. Sutton, his dad Jase, and I alternated running this course for time and naturally gravitated to shooting at long-range steel on the remote range. A steel ram, turkey, pig, and chicken soon took a beating at 50 yards, so we moved to an old scuba tank at 100. Next came the 200-yard steel, small-man-silhouette that we hit repeatedly by holding the front bead on top of the rear sight notch and focusing

The three .22 LR lever guns the author tested all performed well with each brand of ammunition. (Top) Browning BL-22 Grade II (middle) Henry Octagon Frontier, (bottom) Rossi Rio Bravo Gold.



The Rossi Rio Bravo performed well for the author. He noted that the action was smooth, but this rifle had a slight catch as the nose of the bullet entered the chamber. However, that didn't slow it down or cause any malfunctions.



the bead on the head of the distant target. The pop of the .22 LR going off was answered after a slight pause by a “ding” of the tiny bullet making contact with the metal.

My friend Jim Crouch at Dodson Guns in Alpine graciously allowed me to include his previously unfired Browning BL-22 Grade II in this article. It is high-end and has a beautiful black walnut stock and gloss-finished forearm, with an engraved receiver and a 20-inch barrel. The 33-degree lever throw design of the BL-22 enables you to run the lever with a simple flip of the hand. It's fast, and it's accurate. The trigger breaks at a crisp 6 pounds after a slight take-up. We could cover each

group with a quarter; most were nickel-sized or smaller. For fun, I ran several mag tubes rapid-fire on a small-torso steel plate at 25 yards, and it's incredible how fast one can run this rifle.

Taking all three rifles to the range for accuracy testing, I set up my target stand at 15 yards and used 1-inch orange Rangemaxx target stickers on a white poster board as my aiming point. I fired five shots each from a sitting, sandbag rest with Remington's 40-grain Thunderbolt and 36-grain Golden Bullet, CCI 40-grain Target Mini Mags, Eley 40-grain Club, Browning's 40-grain Pro 22 and Winchester's 40-grain Power-Point.

Each of these rifles performed well with all brands of ammunition, with some groups a ragged hole. The largest groups were made by one-round-self-induced flyers by the shooter.

A trio of Chiappas! From left to right: The Chiappa Kodiak Cub, Chiappa LA322 and Chiappa LA322 Take Down Deluxe.



FIREARM	LOAD	ACCURACY (IN.)
Browning BL-22	Remington Bucket O' Bullets	.42
Browning BL-22	Remington Thunderbolt	.57
Browning BL-22	CCI Mini Mag	.41
Browning BL-22	Eley	.42
Browning BL-22	Winchester Power-Point	.39
Browning BL-22	Browning Pro22	.39
Henry Octagon Frontier	Remington Bucket O' Bullets	.88
Henry Octagon Frontier	Remington Thunderbolt	.68
Henry Octagon Frontier	CCI Mini Mag	.34
Henry Octagon Frontier	Eley	.47
Henry Octagon Frontier	Winchester Power Point	1.06
Henry Octagon Frontier	Browning Pro22	.43
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	Remington Bucket O' Bullets	.76
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	Remington Thunderbolt	.33
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	CCI Mini Mag	.37
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	Eley	.43
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	Winchester Power-Point	.43
Rossi Rio Bravo Gold	Browning Pro22	.22



Each of the three lever-actions reviewed produced tight five-shot groups (the setup was 15 yards from a sandbag rest). Each gun will provide excellent accuracy after seeing which rounds it likes.

Each lever-action could likely shoot better than I can shoot them, and each provided good-to-excellent accuracy with the six loads tested. The Browning BL-22's best two groups measured 0.39 of an inch with Winchester Power-Point and Browning Pro22 ammunition. Out of all rounds tested, this rifle averaged a group size of .43 inch. That's six different cartridges from four different manufacturers. Browning's BL22 is the top-shelf lever gun in the trio. This quality lever-action fit, finish, and engraving will set you back around \$740.

The Henry stacked the CCI Mini Mags into 0.34 inch, and the Browning Pro22 load was close behind at 0.43-inch groups with one round just slightly out of the cluster, likely pulled by yours truly. The average for all loads fired was 0.64 inch. The Henry Octagon Frontier Model retails in the neighborhood of \$400 and sits comfortably as a mid-price, quality lever-action .22 LR.

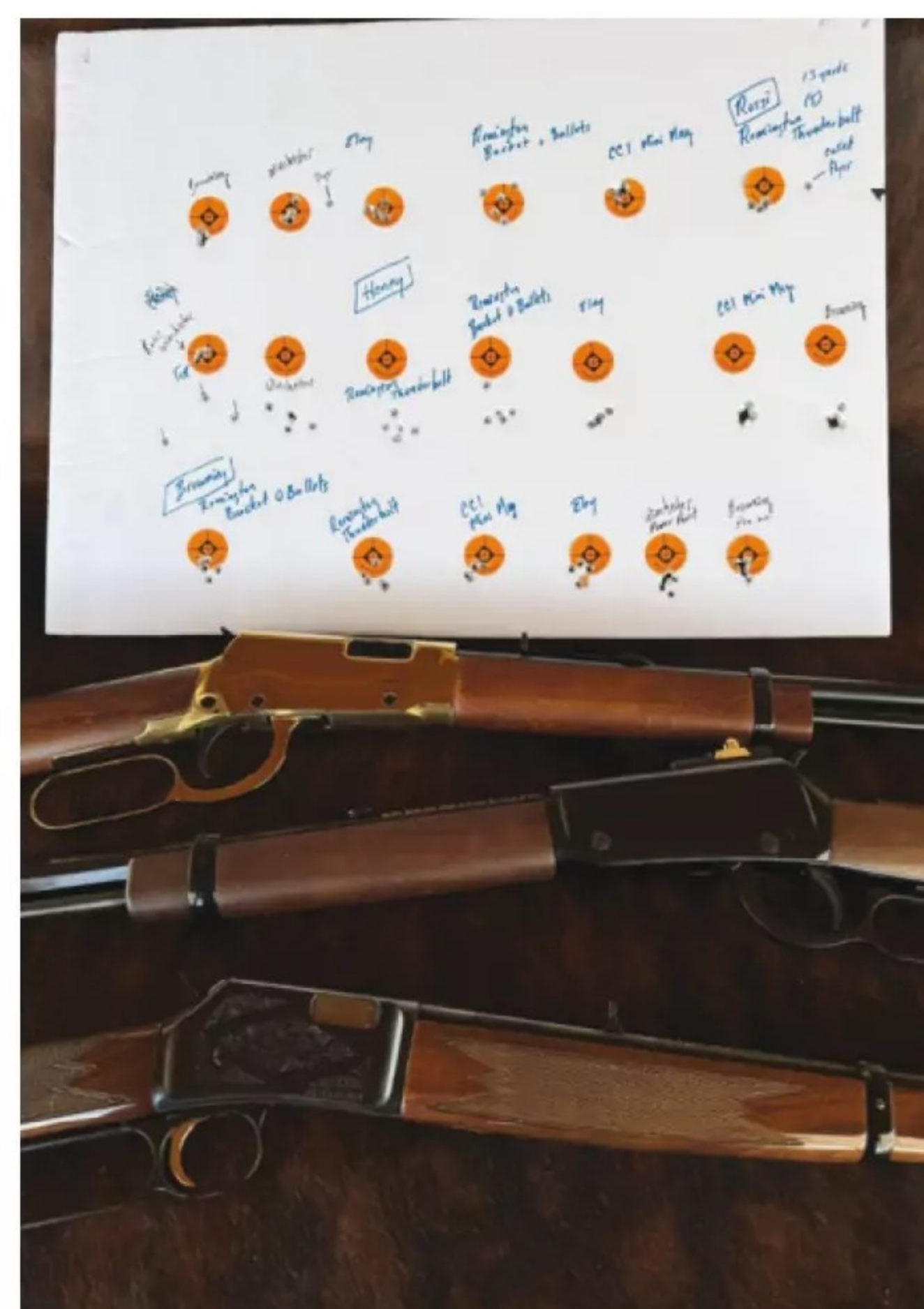
The most economical of the lot is the Rossi Rio Bravo Gold. This rifle retails around \$350, but don't let the lower price tag dissuade you from considering it a worthy addition to your armory. The Rio Bravo produced impressive groups, with the smallest measuring 0.22 inch with the Browning Pro22 ammunition—the smallest group of the three rifles tested—and the average of six groups was just 0.42 of an inch. So, the most cost-effective .22 LR in the mix shot on par with the high-end lever gun; how's that for a bargain?

All of this boils down to one thing. No matter what your gun budget allows, we have excellent options to own a good, accurate lever gun in .22 LR. Understandably, fit and finish vary slightly between the manufacturers and each gun is priced accordingly. Some low-cost guns might have cast or even synthetic parts here and there, and the wood quality goes up with price. The

fact remains that no matter the cost, each of these lever-action rimfires shot and functioned well.

Finishing up with the business at the shooting bench, I loaded up the rifles for some fun, rapid-fire shooting on steel from 50 to 100 yards. I never experienced a glitch with any of the guns or ammunition, and it took little effort to keep them ringing plates, even at football field distance.

Today's production .22 LR lever-actions range in price from under \$300 to over a grand. You can choose from various brands and models and select the appropriate rifle to fit your needs, wants and budget. Even the most economical guns offer good accuracy, function and reliability, ensuring shooters have opportunities to own



and shoot quality lever-action .22 rifles at any cost. There are also options for those who admire the finer things in life like high-end, figured walnut and engraving. Now grab a pocketful of ammo, your favorite .22 lever-action and head to the range! **GDTM**



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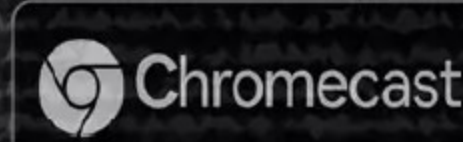
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