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FIRST LOOK

MARCH 2026

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SPRINGFIELD
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ECHELON
4.0FC 9MM

P. 34



- 17-RD./20-RD. MAGAZINE CAPACITY
- DIRECT-MOUNT OPTIC SYSTEM
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ELK HUNT FIELD TESTS

Jack Oller: Spandau RL
Bolt-Action .308
P. 40

Craig Boddington:
Winchester 6.8 Western
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SAVAGE 99

PART III: EMARY EXAMINES AN ICONIC
100-YEAR-OLD HUNTING RIFLE.

P. 58



P. 30
TARR
Dead Air + Ruger =
RDX910Ti Suppressor



P. 21
NANCE
Introducing Hornady's
.338 ARC: 175 to 307 gr.!

P. 46
BECKSTRAND
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Nightforce NX6



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The acquisition, ownership, possession and use of firearms are heavily regulated. Some models may not be legally available in your state or locale. Whatever your purpose for lawfully acquiring a firearm – know the law, get trained and shoot safely.

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BY JACK OLLER

THE SPANDAU RL MAY BE AN ENTRY-LEVEL RIFLE, BUT MINE IS ONE I'D SAVE BEFORE ANY OTHER.

IRREPLACEABLE

COVER PHOTOS: MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ AND MARK FINGAR; ABOVE PHOTO: KEVIN OLLER

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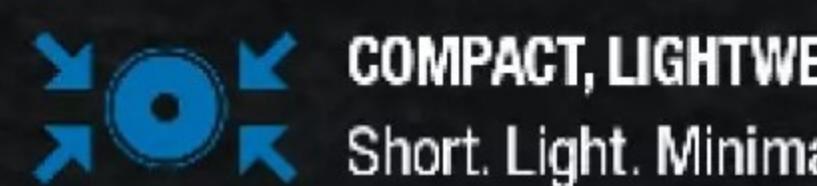
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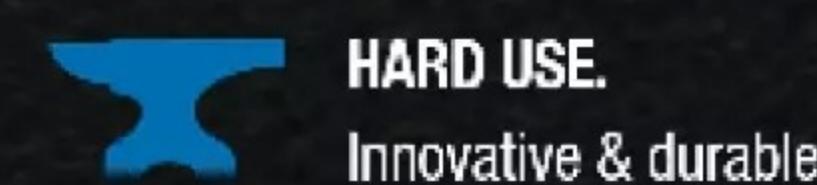
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READER BLOWBACK

FASTEAST RELOADS

I very much enjoyed James Tarr's column in the December 2025 issue. He stated, "If you are a revolver guy, I consider you an old-fashioned optimist." In my mind, truer words were never spoken. The fact is that revolvers do not carry enough rounds for adequate protection. Carrying a reload for a revolver is a possibility, however, I have never seen or heard of anyone who devised a method of reloading a revolver with one hand. Reloading a revolver requires both hands, which is sometimes not possible and not nearly as fast as replacing a magazine in a semiauto. I am not beating up on the revolver guys at all, just bringing up a few points to consider.

Mike Beals
Tomahawk, Wisconsin

SWEENEY'S CLASSIC

I picked up the November 2025 issue of *Guns & Ammo* and was flipping through it. I was surprised to see the article about the SIG Sauer P6, "Politzei" by Patrick Sweeney. I had discovered a P6 at my local gun store a couple days before. I had seen it on the shelf, and I had always wanted a SIG. This is my first. The young guy behind the counter told me all the lore as I fondled it: 14-pound trigger pull, oversized triggerguard for gloved hands, the police markings on the slide, and the curious loop on the hammer. I went home and looked it up in

WRITE US! "Letters," *Guns & Ammo*, 2 News Plaza, 3rd Floor, Peoria, IL 61614, or email us at gaditor@outdoorsg.com. Please include your city and state of residence. Letters may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Sweeney's article and he was right! I couldn't wait to get back there and buy it. It sealed the deal to read the great article in this publication. Now I need an original police holster, spare magazine carrier, and mags! The search begins.

Chuck Sherman
Vidor, Texas

.30-30 DOB

From Dave Emery's article, "Of Wood & Steel" (Jan. 2026), he wrote that the .30-30 Winchester was introduced in 1894. The .30-30 was not ready in 1894 but was released in 1895.

Rich Baird
Email

An oversight on my part. I think both the 1893 Marlin and 1894 Winchester were introduced in the .38-55 and .32-40 Winchester.

— D. Emery

FUTURE PROOF

In response to Bob Dillard's comments ("Reader Blowback," December 2025) concerning new cartridges — to which I basically agree — the .21 Sharp does fill a void. The .22 LR rimfire is popular worldwide, but it requires a soft lead projectile. State governments and foreign countries are making lead projectiles illegal, and there is no rimfire replacement cartridge besides the .21 Sharp. At my age, I'm not in the market for the Sharp since .22 ammo is still available and legal where I live, but future generations may need a replacement rimfire.

William M. Alexander III
North Carolina

NO NEED FOR 6.5

Just started reading my January 2026 issue. My hat's off to Glen Z. of Brooks, Maryland. My sentiments exactly! I'm an old man who has killed a pile of deer with my .308s, a Model 88 and a Model 70. I don't need anything more.

I'm looking forward to the rest of "Wood & Steel," and I really enjoy Garry James' stuff. Great magazine.

Casey Kosak
Terryville, Connecticut

EMARY'S FRIEND

Dave Emery's column "Faith & Honor" in the October 2025 issue, his tribute to Don Swearingen was a bright spot in the magazine. Thank you for sharing his life with us. It was a lift-you-up, positive, good-feeling read.

Tommy Rothrock
Paducah, Kentucky

PRINT LOVER

I was reading the September and October issues. While turning the pages and smelling the paper, I realized that there is nothing like a good paper magazine, even though I have access to the electronic version of *Guns & Ammo*. My eyes hurt after looking at a screen for long periods of time, so let's not lose this medium and support print editions as long as we can. Some old customs are better.

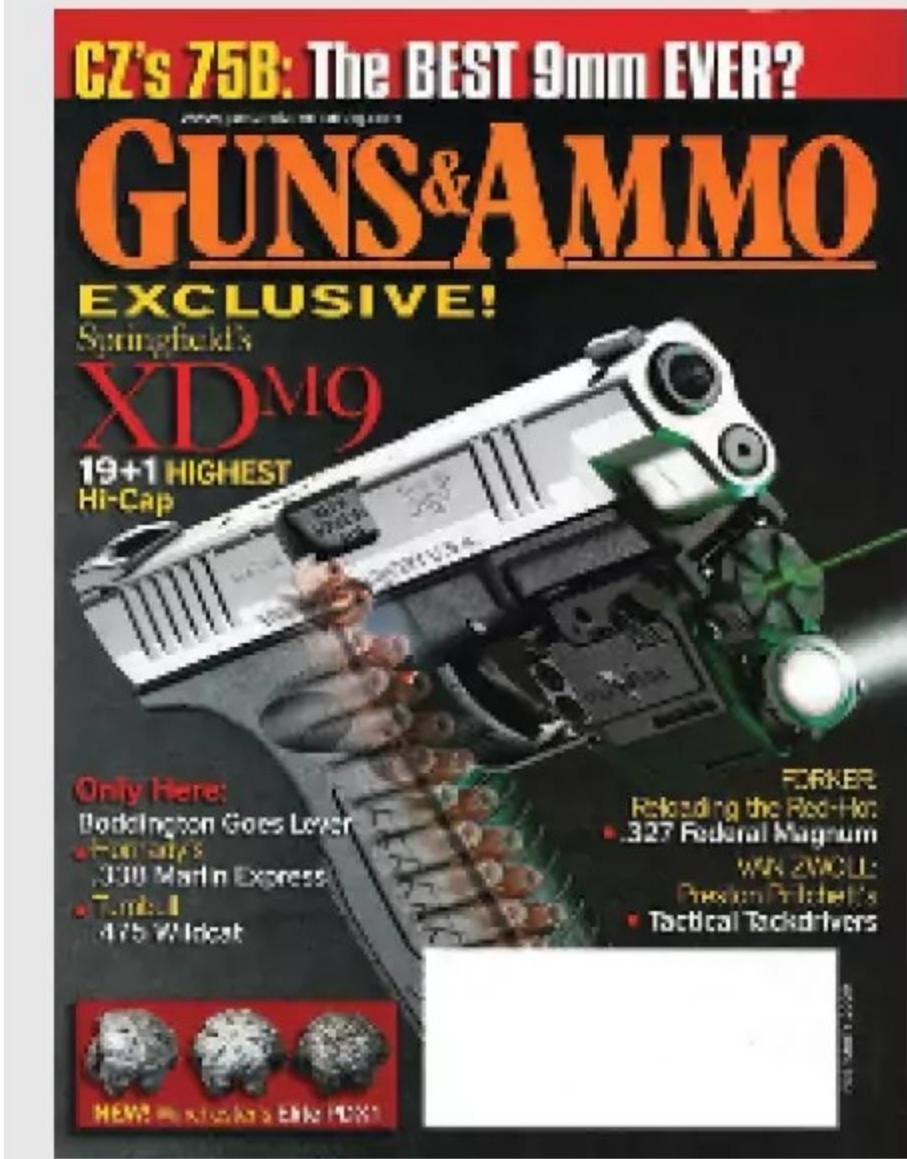
Santiago Pellegatta
Chicago, Illinois

S&W THUMB SAFETIES

I have an original Smith & Wesson M&P Shield

FEBRUARY '09

Author Patrick Sweeney reviewed the Springfield Armory XD-M 9mm, which was first introduced in .40 S&W. It redefined the term "high-capacity" for many handgunners with its 19-plus-one capacity, shifting attention away from the .40 and .45 ACP. The XD-M Elite series is still available in 10mm and as a lower-capacity, California-compliant 9mm.



Performance Center model with the thumb safety and a Shield Plus with a thumb safety, too. I believe both guns came with or without a safety at the buyer's preference. In both cases, I bought models with safeties, thinking that it's better to have one than not. I contacted S&W and asked if the guns without safeties were the same. Except for the presence of the safety, I was told they were. Since both have such small safety levers that it is nearly impossible to quickly disengage them, I wonder if there is a solution that would make them larger or easier to use? Having been born with a Model 1911 in my diaper, I do like the idea of a safety under my thumb.

Sgt. Jeff Weiss (Ret.)
Email gaditor@outdoorsg.com

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THE ARMORY

AFTER MY HONORABLE DISCHARGE from the U.S. Marines in November 2004, I missed servicing firearms and working the military's ranges. I left the National Rifle Association in January 2006 and was hired by Blackwater USA to be an armorer in Moyock, North Carolina. There, I found camaraderie among like-minded military types — many combat veterans — and a mission focus to support American interests during the Global War on Terror. I am humbled to have worked at a place filled with such competency and dedication.

Being that founder Erik Prince was a former U.S. Navy SEAL, most of the leadership were also former SEALs. Some colleagues had experience in U.S. Army Special Forces, Tier 1-type units, government agencies, and law enforcement. Blackwater was a magnet for talented professionals, inviting unique skill sets to staff areas such as administration, aviation, contracting, legal, medical, manufacturing, sales, security and logistics. A few were retired legends, such as Command Master Chief Hershel Davis, a frogman with experience that started in Vietnam.

"The armory needed a regime change when I arrived," my former boss and Armory Chief Bill Kirkland recalled. "The company tempo increased and there was a need to fill the armorer pool. We separated armorer training, which included factory HK armorer instructors, from the armorers who supported the company's range operations."

As military and law enforcement units came and went through training, we rotated through every armorer school available while supporting the maintenance needs of instructors and clients. The job required extensive knowledge of any firearm that could arrive at our ranges, to include peculiar machine guns, grenade launchers, foreign captures, optics, and vintage firearms. We serviced Soviet-era DShK machine guns, RPG and AGS-30 grenade launchers, sniper rifles, handguns, and even supported the testing of prototypes such as the KRISS Vector and mine-resistant armored vehicles.

In 2007, the armory was staffed by Lee Estes, a retired U.S. Navy SWCC, retired police officers Alan Alligood and Roger Luff, and led by retired U.S. Coast Guard CWO3 Bill

Kirkland. Kirkland finished his military ordnance career with the Department of Homeland Security, which included testing and selecting the SIG Sauer P-series for general issue.

We were tasked to search out a Gatling gun for Mr. Prince. Few were available, but a deal was made for a derelict Colt 1901 U.S. Navy model chambered in .30-40 Krag. It was a Naval landing gun, which was said to have toured with President Theodore Roosevelt to Panama in 1906 while he inspected the canal's construction. Estes and Luff went to California in a U-Haul to bring the Gatling gun to the armory. A mechanical restoration was in order, including the hand fitment of six bolt blanks.

"I never did anything like that before," Kirkland said. "It was real gunsmithing. Each bolt was different. The bolt blanks were cut and had to be filed, and if there was a part that we couldn't repair we had to make it. That project involved a lot of file work and Dykem, shaving the high spots a little bit at a time.

I was amazed that everything was handfitted, and that we turned something that didn't exist into a gun that works."

Before Hornady saved the .30-40 Krag with its 180-grain soft-point Custom load, the cartridge was difficult to source in any quantity. The Gatling gun carriage retained two storage boxes, one with tools and the other an ammunition box containing hundreds of rounds of original ammo. All but one of the cartridge boxes was unopened. Being that the ammo was a century old, we loaded our own for testing the project. Several months of downtime and after-hours work passed until we were ready to present Mr. Prince with the restored Gatling gun. We loaded the gravity-fed, dual-column magazine and fired it at the range. No malfunctions. Occasionally, our paths cross with Mr. Prince who told us that he keeps the Gatling gun in his home's foyer.

The experience at Blackwater provided exposure to more firearms than I ever knew existed. It was a place where armorers became gunsmiths. Failing to solve a problem was never an option. The key to our success was learning how to troubleshoot. It was an honor to work among such professionals, and the most fun I had while earning a paycheck. 



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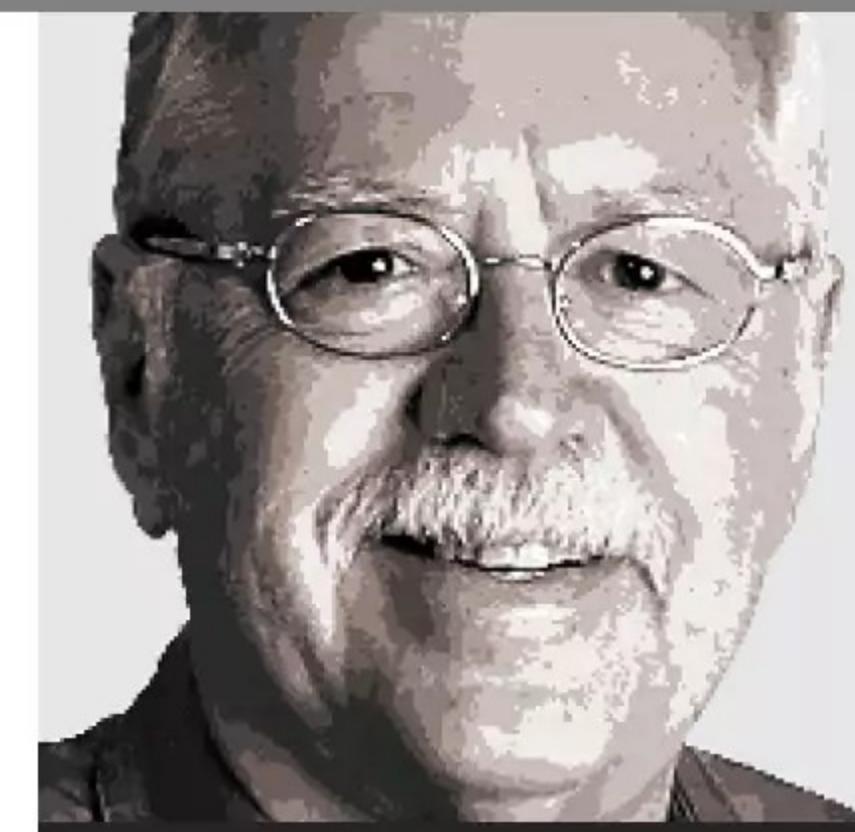
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“The facility was located in a mountainous area in the Shandong Province. Both military and export guns were produced there.”



GARRY JAMES

GARRY.JAMES@OUTDOORSG.COM

IDENTIFICATION & VALUES



CHINESE TYPE 56 SKS, 7.62X39MM, 98%: \$700



CHINESE SKS

Q: I purchased this Chinese Type 56 SKS several years ago from former “Firearms News” Publisher and Editor Robert W. Hunnicutt. He told me it was unfired. I recently saw a similar SKS offered online as a unique variant, making me wonder if mine is the same. Every part is original and matches for serial number. The sling is original, too. Interestingly, it has no importer mark anywhere. A rubber buttpad seems to have been added, but I’m not sure if it was by the importer or the factory. I’ll include an image of the markings, which I hope you can help identify. Do I have a unique SKS, or is it just a run-of-the-mill model in good condition? I appreciate any insights you can provide along with your value and condition rating.

J. O.

Columbia, Missouri

A: The markings on your Type 56 SKS indicate it was manufactured by the Chinese government-owned Factory 978, triangle containing an angular “416,” the entity’s code number. The facility was located in a mountainous area in the Shandong Province. Both military and export guns were produced there. My

guess is that it was manufactured in the 1970s. I have seen other Chinese SKSs with similar rubber buttpads, so I’m pretty sure yours is original to the gun. Condition on this piece appears excellent. Prices on SKS rifles have increased considerably in the past few years, some bringing decent sums depending on country of

manufacture and features. Value on your rifle is \$650 to \$750.

BERETTA O/U QUESTION

Q: Hello. I have a Beretta over/under 20-gauge BL-5. I bought it from the original distributor in the 1970s. It has 26-inch barrels bored

Skeet and Skeet. Its serial number is X04XXX. The gun has had light use, fired very few times. I’d say it should grade at 90 percent. It does have a few scratches on the wood. I would like to know the value in today’s market.

B. A.

North Carolina

A: The Beretta BL-5 was offered in several variants and available in 12, 20 and 28 gauges. They are all very nice and serviceable pieces. Your Skeet version in the condition you describe is

AUCTION BLOCK

A rare and desirable Webley-Fosbery automatic revolver in .38 ACP realized a hefty \$21,150, including premiums, at a May 4, 2025, Rock Island Auction Company sale. The eight-shot Model 1902 repeater was manufactured on September 29, 1903. Only a small number of these guns were produced, their quantity limited by Webley & Scott’s decision to emphasize the .455 Fosberys in order to garner possible military orders. The condition of this piece is excellent. It exhibits 95 percent of the original blued finish and is mechanically perfect. For more information about this and future sales, visit Rock Island Auction Company online at rockislandauction.com.





GEORG LECHNER DRILLING, 80%

in the \$550 to \$650 range. The 26-inch barrels are the least desirable length, unfortunately, which drags down the value a bit.

ELABORATE GERMAN DRILLING

Q: This drilling and a World War I submarine captain's Luger were given to me as a high school graduation gift by my grandfather in 1966. As he passed away a week later, I know nothing about it other than he traded a portable sawmill for both pieces before I was born. Engraved "Krupp-Laufstahl", the barrels are stamped "Georg Lechner Nurnberg". Serial number 20XXX231 is on forearm. Obviously, I'm

not planning to sell and I'm even nervous about giving it away to my grandson as a graduation gift! Any information would be appreciated.

D. P.
Email

A: Alas, I cannot find Georg Lechner in any of my books, but judging from your photos he was obviously a decent maker. You have a very nice example of a 1920s-vintage German drilling. The engraving is typical of the period and country of origin, and it was skillfully done. Value on the piece is greatly affected by its gauge and caliber. If this information is not located under the barrels when the gun is disassembled, it would be worth your

while to take it to a gunsmith and have a chamber casting done to determine caliber. The shotgun gauge should be easy to tell by simple observation. When you have this information, please send it to me and we'll come up with a value.

INTERARMS .30-'06

Q: I have a question about a rifle I own. I have not shot it and don't know much about it. A little research I did revealed that Interarms was more of an importer of former military weapons, which were sold to civilians. I was told by a friend that Interarms was a good weapon. I have included a few photos. I'm looking at wanting to sell it. I hope you can help me with more information and value. Thank you for your help and time.

A. S.
Email

A: You have an Interarms Mark X. This nice rifle featured a modified Mauser 98-style action manufactured by the Serbian firm Zastava. The action was then sent to England where it was stocked and otherwise kitted out. A number of calibers and styles were available from the 1970s into the 1990s. Your rifle appears to be in superb condition. I cannot determine what

scope has been mounted, so I'll offer a value of \$750 to \$850 on the rifle, sans the glass.

"MALTESE FALCON" WEBLEY-FOSBERY

Q: An interesting note on the Webley-Fosbery mentioned previously in your column. In Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon," one was used to shoot "Sam Spade's" partner "Miles Archer." Sam made the comment, "Webley-Fosbery automatic revolver. That's it. Thirty-eight, eight shot. They don't make them anymore." I think Bogart used almost the exact same line in the movie.

W. G. D.
Email

A: Yep, the quote in the 1941 film is taken verbatim from the 1930 book. It appears on page 17 of the first edition in chapter two, titled "Death in the Fog." If you look carefully at the quick shot of the Fosbery used in the Bogart film, you'll see its actually a .455, which is not surprising as .38 ACP Webley-Fosberys were very elusive — even in 1941. Only about 340 were made. My good friend Phil Schreier, director of the National Firearms Museum, was on a quest for a number of years to track down the

HOLLYWOOD HARDWARE

"PALE RIDER" (1985)

REMINGTON NEW MODEL ARMY REVOLVER

Carried by Clint Eastwood as his character "The Preacher," in the 1985 oater "Pale Rider, this Model 1858 Remington New Model .44-caliber revolver started out as a percussion gun but was converted to centerfire to enable it to handle the 5-in-1 blanks favored by studio armorers. The revolver was on the screen throughout a considerable portion of the movie as, like most early Remingtons, its easily removable cylinder allowed for a bit of clever on-screen business by Eastwood. (Courtesy National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, Virginia, and Hollywood Guns & Props, Santa Clarita, California.)



actual gun used in the movie — to no avail. If any readers have a line on this particular W-F, I'd love to hear about it. As a couple of more bits of "useless (but fun) information," the gun used to knock-off Miles Archer, portrayed by actor Walter Long, in the pre-Code 1931 Ricardo Cortez "The Maltese Falcon," is not identified at all. The nickel-plated bulldog revolver shown in the 1936 Falcon paraphrase, "Satan Met a Lady," is only referred to by Detective Dunhill (played by actor Olin Howland) as "an old Webley."

SAVAGE MODEL 24 COMBO GUN

Q: Hi Garry, I am writing to you to find out if you can help me with information about a gun I inherited from my father. It is a Savage Arms Stevens Model 24 over/under in .22 Long Rifle and .410. I am trying to find out an approximate time-frame that he acquired the gun, or when it was made, and also any information you may have about its plastic stock. My dad was a career Marine, and the first time I saw the gun was in 1960 when he was going through his footlocker trying to find something. This was in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Prior to that, he had been assigned training duty in San Diego, California. I do not think he acquired the gun there, so it may have been purchased before that duty, which started in 1956. The gun has no serial number. I have sent some pictures that show markings I found on the gun. The buttplate has a large plastic slotted plug. I have never tried to open that, not know-



SAVAGE STEVENS MODEL 24 (22-410), .22 LR/.410, >50%: \$450

ing what it would be for. The rear stock is hollow, not solid. As I said, I would like to pin down when he may have bought it and information on the stock. Was that stock a product of wartime necessity, a try at a new model to appeal to shooters, a cost savings ploy, or a survival model?

J. H.
Email

A: The Savage Model 24 O/U rifle/shotgun line was manufactured from 1938 to 2010. There were several variants with a wide range of rifle chamberings from .17 rimfire to .357 Maximum, and .410, 20 and 12 gauges. The black polymer stock option appeared circa 1965 and carried on until the early 2000s. Plastic replacement

stocks were also available from several suppliers.

The .22LR/.410, introduced by Stevens in 1938 as the Model 22-410, was the earliest variant and one of the most popular. Some 15,000 of these were used by the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II as survival guns. I believe they had wooden stocks. The fact yours is marked "Model 22-410" leads me to believe it may be an early gun that has had its original buttstock and forend changed from the original wood to synthetic some time in its history.

IVER JOHNSON "OWL HEAD"

Q: A friend passed away and his wife wants to know the value of a revolver. My research tells me it is an Iver

Johnson break-top in .32 Long, and was made around 1910. As you can see, it is in poor shape. Her brother tried to clean it up for resale, a bad mistake and job. The barrel has some minor pitting. I would like to know if this requires blackpowder or smokeless powder. It is a nice piece just to own.

O. B.
Wescosville, Pennsylvania

A: Your little .32 Iver Johnson "Owl Head" — so nicknamed because of the elaborate grip owl motif — is a variant of the popular Safety Automatic top-break revolver line, which began in 1893 and was continued until the 1950s. Calibers were .22RF and .32 and .38 CF. The mechanism was designed so the chances of accidental discharge were greatly reduced. Both visible-hammer and hammerless models were offered. This revolver is interesting in that it has the elaborate oversized grip feature offered by the firm in the early part of the 20th century. These guns were designed for smokeless powder loads, though I wouldn't shoot yours until a gunsmith gives it a look-see and pronounces the revolver sound. **G&A**



IVER JOHNSON SAFETY HAMMER AUTOMATIC, .32 S&W LONG, <50%: \$175

THE CARRY RIG

Crossbreed Holsters Chest Rig is offered for a variety of semiautomatic pistols and revolvers for hunters, landmen, outdoorsmen, and defensive-minded users. It is a three-point system that features adjustable retention, a comfortable suede backer, a quick-release buckle, and is available in a variety of leather treatments, hardware and Kydex colors. **\$105**



The leather features a padded and perforated suede backer for comfort. Backer sizes vary based on the firearm.

The Chest Rig positions the handgun near the center of the chest. It can be ordered for right- or left-hand draw.

The Chest Rig design borrows from Crossbreed's The Reckoning, offering a Kydex shell and custom retention.

It's not just for hunting!

CROSSBREED CHEST RIG

THREE YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT were invested into Crossbreed Holsters' Chest Rig before it was introduced in 2022. The concept evolved from the crossdraw holster in use since warfare on horseback. With the military's need to issue a handgun to armorers, crewmen, drivers, officers, pilots and tankers, sportsmen of the 1960s began crafting variations to accommodate revolvers and large pistols for hunting. The U.S. military pushed the concept away from its M7/M9 shoulder holster to a center-chest position once troops were issued plate carriers for body armor. The law enforcement community have adopted chest rigs, also.

Interest in handgun hunting has returned, and so did the need for a chest holster design that prioritizes comfort, flexibility, practical use and ergonomics. Along with the need for self-defense on the trail, the the Chest Rig is for those who work the land, ride ATVs and love trekking outdoors.

A sample of the Chest Rig was ordered in a standard all-black configuration for a Model 1911. It's a hybrid design featuring a Kydex pocket (available in various colors), and a leather-and-suede backer (in black or Founder's cowhide), with Cerakote-finished hardware and straps in multiple colors. Lights and rails are accommodated for certain models.



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CROSSBREED HOLSTERS CHEST RIG

MATERIALS	Kydex (shell), leather/suede (backer), steel (hardware)
CARRY TYPE	Chest
RETENTION TYPE	Level 1; friction fit
ADJUSTABILITY	Yes (shoulder straps, retention)
MSRP	\$105
HANDGUN FIT	Semiautomatics, with/without rail; revolvers
ACCESSORY RAIL ACCOMMODATIONS	None (tested); (optional, model dependent)
POSITIONS TO CARRY	Chest carry; right hand (tested) or left hand (optional)
AVERAGE TIME TO ATTACH	7 sec.
COMFORT RATING	5/5
CONCEALMENT CLOTHING	Jacket, zipped/buttoned
AVERAGE DRAW-TO-FIRE TIME	1.25 seconds (unconcealed)
MANUFACTURER	Crossbreed Holsters, 888-732-5011, crossbreedholsters.com

Draw-to-fire time is the average of five clean draws producing an A-zone hit on a stationary target positioned at 21 feet.

60-DAY CARRY

Comfort was the key takeaway from Guns & Ammo's evaluation of the Chest Rig. I wore the holster every day for two months for protection, while Managing Editor Jack Oller used a separate sample during a Wyoming elk hunt. Not only did the Chest Rig secure a heavy handgun for arduous activities, we also found it practical when simply driving a vehicle or wearing it in public while concealing it underneath a jacket. If you have a large belly, live in a jacket climate, or find waist carry uncomfortable, try the Chest Rig.

At the range, The Chest Rig was fast to draw from. With the straps adjusted, it doesn't move or slide around. Due to its quick-release buckle, it is also fast to strap on and detach at the end of each day. Plus, it's available for most popular handguns. **G&A** — *E. Poole*



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Hornady .338 ARC



RICHARD NANCE



The 6mm ARC was introduced by Hornady in June 2020, and .22 ARC followed in 2024. Both were developed to enhance the AR-15's long-range performance. Announced in late 2024, the .338 ARC was also designed to fit within the AR-15 platform and to be dual-purpose. A 285-grain full-metal-jacket load in the Frontier line and a 307-grain "Subsonic eXpanding" (Sub-X) bullet are suppressor friendly. Supersonic loads are available in Hornady's Black lineup featuring either a 170-grain MonoFlex, 175-grain Match hollowpoint, or 215-grain FTX projectile.



BIG LITTLE CARTRIDGE

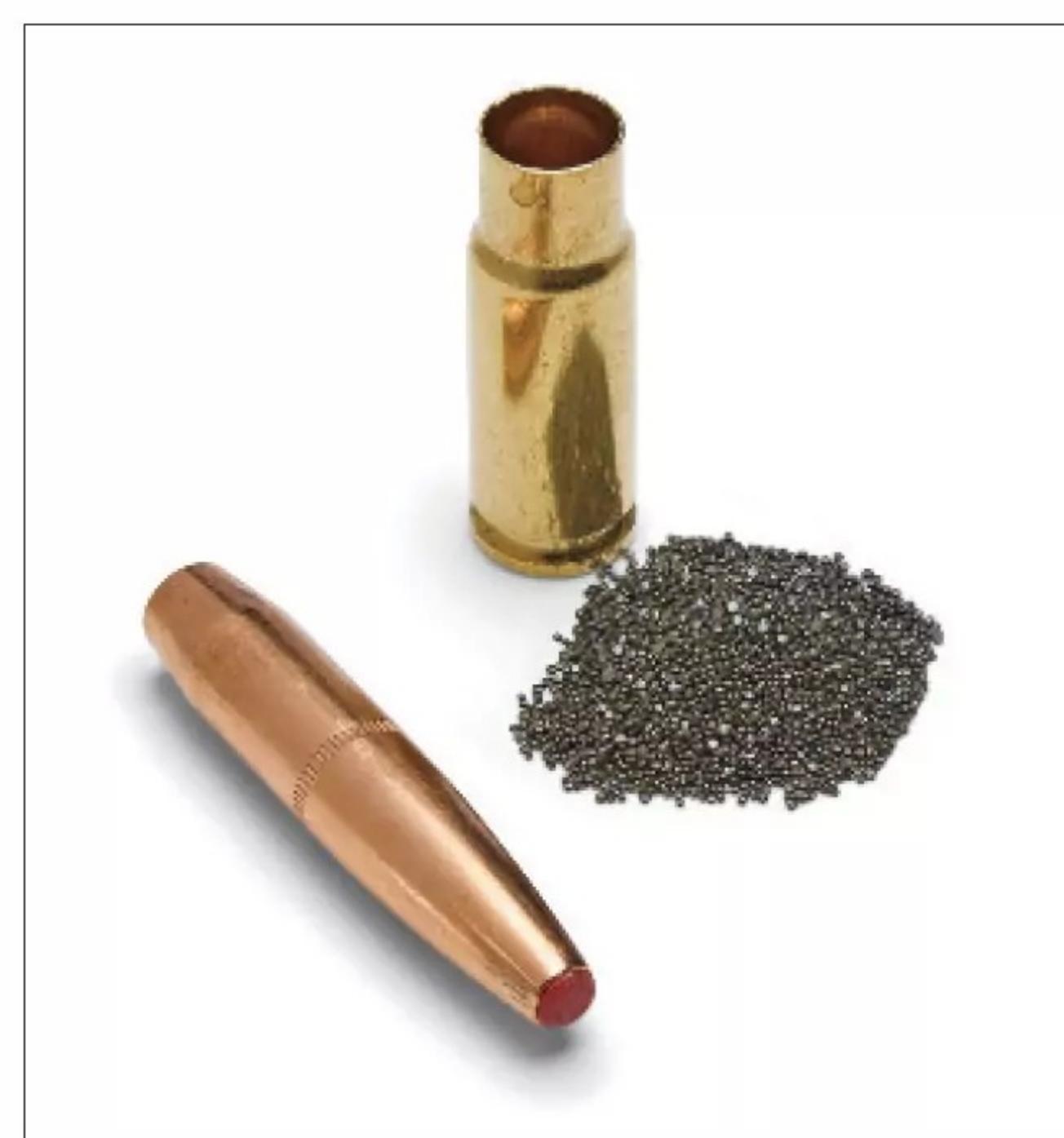
HORNADY BEGAN working on the .338 Advanced Rifle Cartridge (ARC) in 2017. The impetus for its development was a request from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), who was searching for a subsonic load with enhanced accuracy and terminal performance. Although the .338 ARC showed promise, its development was moved to the back burner when Hornady was called upon to focus on the 6mm ARC, introduced in 2020. Then, the .22 ARC arrived in 2024. The .22 ARC is another high-velocity round with a flat trajectory.

The success of the 6mm ARC and the .22 ARC rekindled enthusiasm for the .338 ARC. Hornady learned a lot about developing subsonic cartridges. Changes to the bullet weight and geometry for the Sub-X load resulted in vastly improved performance compared to early iterations of the cartridge.

While the typical range for a subsonic rifle round might be 100 to 150 yards, the 307-grain Sub-X is effective beyond 200 yards! It's a versatile option. Chamber a supersonic cartridge from Hornady's Black line and shooters will extend their practical engagement distance. The .338 ARC gives us the option of shooting subsonic or supersonic loads, too — with or without a suppressor — from an AR-15 on the same gas setting.

According to Hornady Marketing Communications Manager Seth Swerczek, "Running a cartridge below the speed of sound can produce some obstacles. The purpose-built .338 ARC takes the guesswork out of it, providing consistency, accuracy and terminal performance."

The .338 ARC is a strange looking cartridge using the 6.5 Grendel as its parent case. The bullet accounts for nearly half of the cartridge's overall



Utilizing a 6.5 Grendel parent case, the bullet's length measures nearly half of the .338 ARC cartridge's overall length.



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length. It's available in the subsonic 307-grain Sub-X load, a 285-grain subsonic full-metal-jacket in the Frontier line, and three Hornady Black supersonic loads: 170-grain MonoFlex, 175-grain HP Match, and a 215-grain FTX. While supersonic offerings are a better option at targets far away, subsonic performance is what the .338 ARC apart.

Designed for barrels with a 1-in-8-inch twist, the 307-grain Sub-X bullet expands reliably. It's an excellent cartridge for deer, hogs and similarly sized game inside about 200 yards.

"The .338 ARC really represents the pinnacle of subsonic performance," said Swerczek. "The cartridge case produces consistent velocity, which is paramount in downrange accuracy when shooting below the speed of sound."

The 307-grain Sub-X load produces roughly the same



Above, left to right: Hornady Black 165-gr. HP Match, Frontier 285-gr. FMJ, and 307-gr. Sub-X Subsonic. Die sets for the .338 ARC are available for reloading from multiple manufacturers.

velocity as the much lighter, 190-grain Sub-X load for the .300 Blackout. Since the .338 ARC is so much heavier than the .300 Blackout subsonic round, it delivers considerably more energy on target, too. According to data from hornady.com, at 200 yards, the 190-grain Sub-X bullet in the .300 Blackout produces 384 foot-pounds (ft.-lbs.) of energy. The 307-grain Sub-X bullet in the .338 ARC produces a whopping 605 ft.-lbs. of energy, by comparison. I guess that's why they're calling it, "The Big Little Cartridge."

When the 307-grain Sub-X bullet is fired from a suppressed rifle, it is quiet. Felt recoil is light, making it fun to shoot. Not only is it a viable cartridge for hunting and defense, but it's also a great cartridge for training new shooters. Pricing is expected to retail between \$33 (Frontier) and \$53 (Black) for 20 rounds. **GA**

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Aimpoint Duty RDS MR

TOM BECKSTRAND

**MULTI-RETICLE**

RED-DOT SIGHTS from Aimpoint are always in demand because they offer a simple and robust solution that everyone can appreciate. Put the red dot on target and ease back the trigger. Those are instructions we can all follow.

The situation can get complicated when the shooter wants the red dot to do more. Aimpoint came up with an excellent solution for those desiring a red-dot sight that offers more flexibility without complication. The Duty RDS MR is a multi-reticle sight designed for use by neophytes and professionals alike.

If you've ever served in uniform — either law enforcement or military — it comes as no surprise that most in the ranks are not, so-called, "gun guys." There are a handful of individuals who are supremely

talented and work hard to maintain their proficiency with firearms, but most just think of a firearm like another tool they will probably never use on the job. It's a challenge to create equipment that satisfies the needs of both.

The Duty RDS MR is just such an item. It was designed to be simple enough for the most casual shooter to use while still offering capabilities desired by advanced shooters. All of this is packed into a red-dot sight (RDS) that is as economical as Aimpoint can make it while still maintaining

its reputation for durability and optical performance. While it was developed for the needs of military and law enforcement, it's an excellent choice for gun owners for all the same reasons.

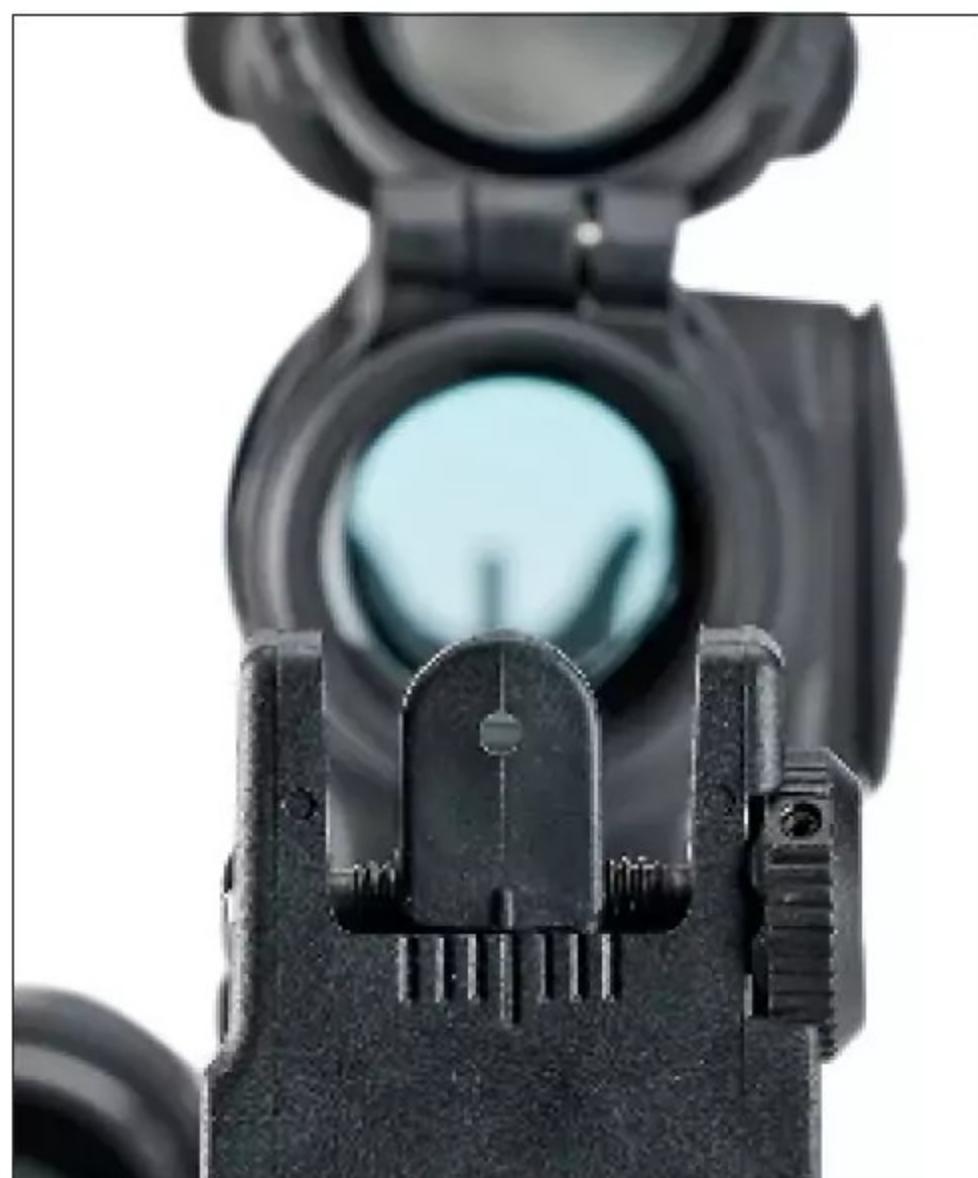
The "MR" in the name stands for "multi reticle."



The Aimpoint Duty RDS MR includes a one-piece torsion nut mount that allows the reticle to co-witness with most backup sights. It can be paired with a magnifier to increase engagement distance.



Using the provided tool, the process of zeroing windage and elevation are aided by intuitive "U" and "R" markings with arrows to indicate the direction to push bullets downrange. The reticle brightness adjustment is a tactile control pad on the left side.



The circle-dot multi-reticle system is a first for Aimpoint, and can be helpful for fast engagements. The bottom of the circle can be used as an offset aiming reference for close targets.

The sight features the standard 2-minute of angle (MOA) red dot, which is ubiquitous. However, the Duty RDS MR also includes the option of a 65-MOA segmented circle that surrounds the dot. Choose between the dot, circle, or activate both! We know that the 2-MOA dot is great for engaging targets fast, up close and those that demand more precision. Targets at 300 yards are reasonable for most carbines. In my experience, dimming the dot until it is just barely visible is the best way to coax as much precision as possible from a red-dot sight.

Why a 65-MOA circle? The circle-dot reticle originated in the late-1990s with the holographic sight. Some in the armed services have depended on it for last 20-plus years. The circle offers the eye a lot more reticle to see, so it can aid fast acquisition in certain circumstances.

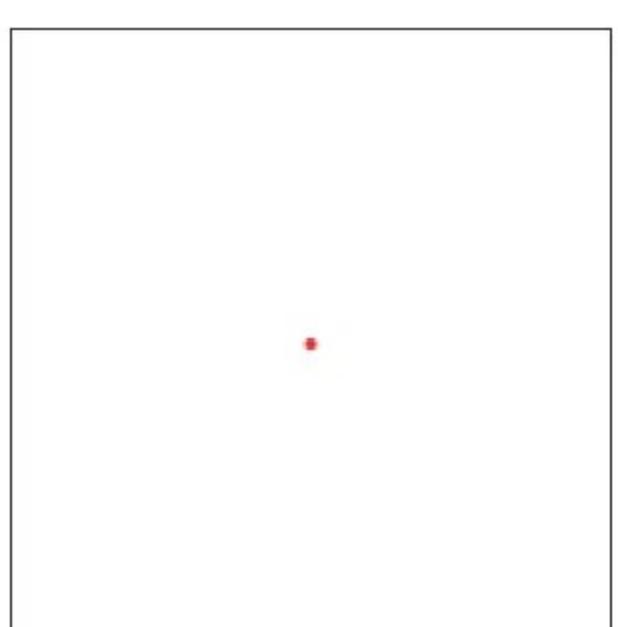
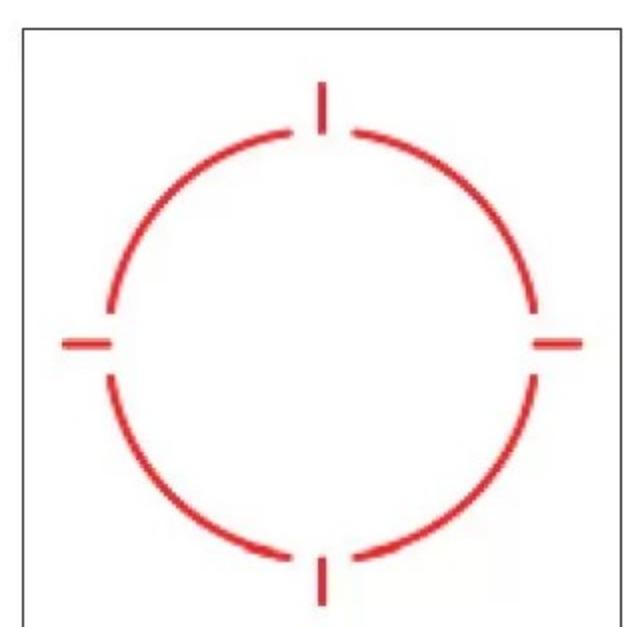
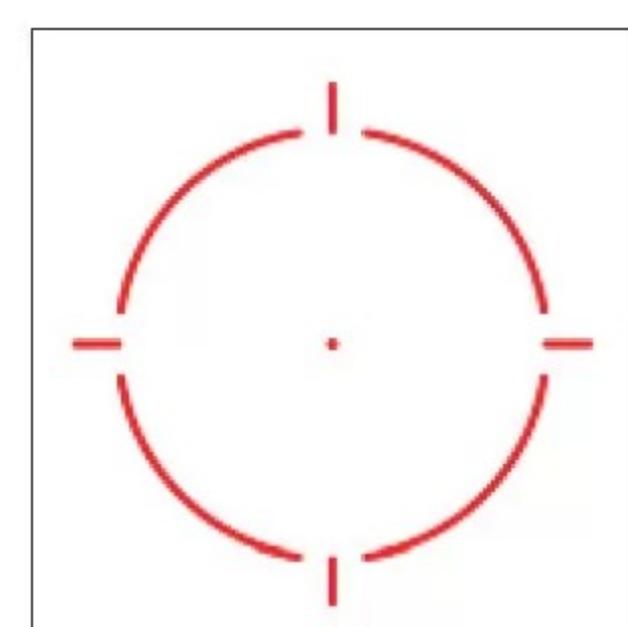
The 65-MOA circle also allows for multiple aiming points not available with a solo red dot. Sixty-five MOA is an angular unit of measure, so 65 MOA at 5 yards is the same as 65 MOA at 500 yards. What makes the reticle arrangement most useful is the relationship between the red dot in the center and the bottom of the 65-MOA circle. Half of 65 MOA is 32.5 MOA, so that's the distance between the center dot and the bottom of the circle. Thirty-two-and-a-half MOA is 3.25 inches at 10 yards. Since the sight height for most AR-15s is about 3.25 inches when using a standard 1.5-inch mount for

A CR2032 battery powers the Aimpoint Duty RDS MR for nearly 30,000 hours. Transparent flip-up caps protect the lenses.

most optics, the bottom of the circle is an ideal aiming point when shooting at short range (i.e., home-defense situation). Most new shooters will use the center dot at close-quarters battle (CQB) distances, and bullets will impact about 3 inches below where the shooter aims. The 65-MOA circle provides quick and easy visual reference that requires minimal training.

Aimpoint wanted to make the Duty RDS MR as inexpensive as possible, so a forged aluminum housing was selected rather than a machined housing used with other models in Aimpoint's portfolio. For comparison, the optic housings in the Micro line requires four times as long to machine, adding cost. While the Duty RDS MR sight may not be as aesthetically pleasing, it is every bit as durable. Each Aimpoint sight — regardless of what line it belongs to — must pass the same standards for impact resistance, water intrusion, vibration, and more. Aimpoint has one standard for performance, and the Duty RDS MR meets it. It only costs less because of the simplified controls and the forged housing. In the two years that the Duty RDS has been available, Aimpoint hasn't had one phone call or return about a failed housing. Some have

taken serious licks, but none have broken. John Enloe handles training and repairs at Aimpoint. He said, "I'm waiting on the unit to return that belongs to a motorcycle cop, where a bike lays down in an accident. I'm betting that's the only way to get



Multiple reticles for a red-dot sight are no small feat. The segmented circle measures 65 MOA. The center dot is 2 MOA.



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one to fail in a realistic scenario. Someone is going to have to grind away the housing before the sight breaks."

The riskiest part of the an optic equation is the enduser. Guns & Ammo readers are serious enough about their equipment to learn how to use it, but many who are issued firearms for a duty are not always committed understanding their equipment. A bored soldier will twist knobs and push buttons. Turrets on scopes were tactical fidget spinners long before millennials ever came along. The Duty RDS MR has recessed turrets to guard the optic's zero; A T-10 wrench is required to make adjustments. The idea was to require a

common and readily available tool, but not make it a control that can be easily compromised.

The circuitry and optics of the Duty RDS MR are the same as those found in every other Aimpoint sight. The lens geometry and material selection is the same, too, so the performance expectation is what we've enjoyed for the last decade. This is comforting to me, because I've learned to count on Aimpoint to provide a clear and sharp dot without distorting or discoloring the image. Since the circuitry is the same, the dot and segmented circle are created by a light-emitting diode (LED) and not holographic technology.

Holographics are great for visibility and brightness, but they present a pixelated image for the shooter. The pixelization is unlikely to yield any performance degradation, but it can be distracting — especially when used in conjunction with magnification. The Duty RDS MR excels when used with a magnifier. The clean lines of the LED offer concise points of aim and are less distracting than magnified holographic images, in my opinion.

Living with the Duty RDS MR is simple enough. Aimpoint delivers each sight with a mount that places the optic centerline at about 1½ inches above the rail, which is the standard and most useful distance. It is a bolt-on mount, in keeping with the durable but simple mantra. The footprint of the RDS Duty MR is the same as the Aimpoint Micro line (T-1, T-2, etc.), so any of those aftermarket mounts are compatible. One CR2032 battery yields about 30,000 hours of life at setting seven, so leaving the optic on all the time doesn't kill the battery quickly.

The Aimpoint Duty RDS MR represents an evolution in durability, capability and simplicity. It's a strong contender for any red-dot needs. **GA**

AIMPOINT DUTY RDS MR

POWER	1X
OBJECTIVE	18mm
DIMENSION	3.1 in. x 1.5 in. x 2.6 in.
WINDAGE/ ELEVATION	.5-in. per click at 100 yards
RETICLE	Illuminated 2 MOA red dot/illuminated 65 MOA segmented circle/both
WEIGHT	5.6 oz. (tested)
MSRP	\$649
MANUFACTURER	Aimpoint, 877-246-7646, aimpoint.us

XC3 SERIES



THE SUREFIRE XC3 SERIES

The XC3 Series delivers all the duty-grade durability and dependability of our full-size X-Series weaponlights in a form factor that fits subcompact and micro-compact handguns. The new XC3 Sub adds to the family's reputation of unmatched performance and switching ergonomics, incorporating a new mount, and 80% more candela and lumens when powered by its included SFRCR123 rechargeable battery.

XC3



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SUREFIRE[®]



QUIET TIME

Ruger & Dead Air Silencers RXD910Ti**DYNAMIC DUO**

I THINK the most interesting aspect about the RXD910Ti isn't what you might expect. It's not that it's a joint venture between Sturm, Ruger & Co. and Dead Air Silencers; They've been collaborating on suppressors since 2025. It's not that it's the first RXD suppressor specifically developed for use with centerfire pistol calibers. It's not even that it incorporates Dead Air's 3D-printed Triskelion baffle system. The most interesting aspect about the RXD910Ti is that this is not a dedicated 9mm suppressor!

You can learn a lot about these suppressors in deciphering the name. "RXD" represents the partnership between "Ruger" and "Dead Air Silencers." The first number in "910" indicates that this model was designed for the 9x19mm cartridge, but the following two digits, "10," indicate that it was also designed to suppress 10mm cartridges. In fact, the RXD910Ti is rated up to .400 Legend! That's why it is larger than some might expect for a 9mm can. Lastly, the "Ti" specifies its titanium construction.

While the .40 S&W has seemingly faded into obscurity, the 10mm Auto is more popular than ever! Nearly every ammo manufacturer offers a 10mm load, and it's rare that a firearm company not offer at least one 10mm model. However, if you want to suppress a 10mm Auto, shooters

typically have to thread on a suppressor designed for .45 ACP. Cans in .45 ACP work with 10mm, but they're usually larger than they need to be.

The RXD910Ti has a 3D-printed 6AL4V titanium body with nitride-finished 17-4PH stainless steel mounting hardware. A 1/2x28mm piston for mounting to a 9mm and smaller bore pistols is included, and in that configuration it measures 7.7 inches in length, 1.48 inches in diameter, and weighs 11.4 ounces. Even with steel mounting hardware and the piston, it is light for its size due to the titanium body. Installed at the front of the suppressor is a 9mm/10mm endcap, marked "9-10". The exit hole measured .466 inch. The endcap is machined 7075 aluminum, hardcoat anodized. The suppressor is available in black or FDE, both a high-temp Cerakote finish on the suppressor body. Retail pricing is \$999.

The RXD910Ti is rated for 5.7x28mm, 9mm, .38 Special and .357 Magnum, 10mm Auto, .300 Blackout, and .400 Legend. It is full-auto rated for 9mm, 10mm, 5.7x28mm, and subsonic .300 BLK.

The RXD910Ti uses Dead Air Silencers' P-Series compatible mounts and adapters. The thread pattern is smaller in diameter than the more popular Hybrid Universal Base (HUB) adapters. If you decide you want to mount the RXD910Ti

on a platform other than a traditional handgun with a tilt or rotating barrel, and you don't need the piston, Dead Air Silencers offers every mounting accessory necessary, including a spacer that replaces the piston. If you want to mount the RXD910Ti on a 10mm or .400 Legend, you'll need a different threaded piston from Dead Air Silencers as the provided $\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ mm piston won't fit a bore size larger than 9mm.

WHAT'S A SUPPRESSOR PISTON?

New to suppressors? Also called "boosters" or a "Nielsen Device," pistons are necessary when attaching a suppressor to most semiautomatic pistols. During recoil, a barrel typically moves backwards a short distance. If weight is added to the barrel (e.g., a suppressor), it slows or stops the movement and chokes the gun. A piston typically works with a spring that tensions the barrel against the suppressor. When fired, the barrel moves backward freely while inertia keeps the suppressor and its weight stationary, even for a moment. When the barrel reaches the end of its travel, the spring pushes the suppressor forward. It's simple, but it works and allows the pistol to cycle properly.

SUPPRESSOR TECH

RXD suppressors have integral vent holes near the front, which are exclusive to these models and not seen on other Dead Air Silencers' products. In part, these relieve back-pressure, keeping gas out of our faces. It's less of an issue with handguns than pistol-caliber carbines (PCC) because the handgun cartridges operate at lower pressures than rifle rounds, but less backpressure means less change to the action's cycling speed. The vents also reduce recoil similarly to a muzzlebrake, directing gas sideways instead of out the front.

The RXD910Ti not only has baffles, but has a "Triskelion gas management system." "Triskelion" is a symbol consisting of three interlocking spirals, and if you peer inside the suppressor at the first baffle you'll see



The first Triskelion is a 3D-printed blast baffle. It features three interlocking spirals, hence the name.

RXD910Ti	
CALIBER	9mm/10mm
THREAD PITCH	$\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ mm (9mm) (incl.)
LENGTH	7.7 in. (7.2 in. net.)
DIAMETER	1.48 in.
WEIGHT	11.4 oz. (w/ piston assy.)
MATERIALS	6AL4V titanium (body), 17-4PH stainless steel (piston), 7075 aluminum (cap)
FINISH	Cerakote (titanium), nitride (steel), anodized (aluminum)
FULL-AUTO RATED	Yes (9mm, 10mm, 5.7×28 mm, subsonic .300 BLK).
MOUNTS	$\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ mm direct-thread piston; P-Series (optional)
ACCESSORIES	$\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ mm piston, 9mm end cap, wrench, 10mm endcap (optional)
MSRP	\$999 (black or FDE)
MANUFACTURER	Dead Air Silencers, 801-857-4232, deadairsilencers.com



A piston assembly is usually necessary to accommodate the barrel movement with most recoil-operated semiauto pistols.

the engineering made possible by 3D printing. Suppressors work by slowing down the gases escaping the muzzle, which is primarily accomplished two ways: baffle design and volume. You can only make a suppressor so big (i.e., volume), so most improvements in suppressor technology are to the baffles for increased performance.

The surface of Triskelion baffles is shockingly complex when compared to conventional cone baffles. The first baffle looks like a stepped, multi-spoked wheel with a rough surface. The surface design disrupts gas flow. Past the Triskelion baffles are conical baffles. There are gaps in and around the baffles, allowing for gas to flow in different directions that also helps to slow escaping gases even more.

THE RUGER FACTOR

As Dead Air Silencers produces the RXD suppressors in collaboration with Ruger, it only seems right to mention just how many guns there are on the market — many from Ruger — for which these cans are ideal. Ruger has a number of rifles chambered in

.300 BLK, and dozens of 9mm firearms, pistols and carbines with threaded barrels. The newest is the RXM pistol, but don't forget the "10" in the model name. Ruger offers the LC Carbine in 10mm (\$1,049, ruger.com) and Marlin — owned by Ruger — introduced its Trapper lever-action in 10mm (\$1,599, marlinfirearms.com). The latter has a 10-round capacity and a threaded barrel. Suppressing them makes shooting them both even better.

LISTEN UP!

The RXD910Ti suppressor was specifically designed with a pleasant tone, too. Tone is something that discerning

suppressors look for in a new can. Combine this feature with the flexibility to use the RXD910Ti on a 10mm by changing a piston, and a full-auto rating with certain cartridges, plus the light weight of its titanium body, this one is likely to become a popular model. **GA** — J. Tarr



A $\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ direct-thread suppressor adapter and piston assembly attach to the threaded muzzle of 9mm firearms.



Endcaps are interchangeable for optimized use with either 9mm or 10mm/.40-caliber bores.

RANGE BAG

Security for those who demand quality.

SAFE & SECURE

WE LIVE IN AN AGE of overseas manufacturing designed to keep prices competitive while maximizing profits. The strategy is not inherently bad, but outspoken enthusiasts prefer U.S. production to support American interests.

Steelhead Outdoors is an American company founded by close friends who shared a passion for the outdoors: Charlie Pehrson and Corey Meyer. They saw a need for an American-made gunsafe, one that is heavy duty with protection against fire and theft. It also needed to be portable, one that didn't require a team of mules to move. With an engineering background, Meyer and Pehrson concluded that they could design and build such a gunsafe themselves. Hence, Steelhead Outdoors was founded in 2016.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

To build a gunsafe that fit their requirements, a modular design was the only solution. Modular safes have many advantages versus common one-piece safes, namely they can be moved and assembled with only one or two people. However, modular safe designs can be just as strong and secure as conventional gun safes. Plus, Steelhead Outdoors modular safes feature a superior fire protection rating.

The Nomad series was launched in 2020, before the company quickly grew. There are more finishes and designs for its modular safes than others in this category, and we could not find another U.S.-manufactured modular safe option. Steelhead Outdoors has also expanded into vault doors, cabinets, under-bed safes, and a line of lockboxes.



The Drifter 1 lockbox is the Steelhead Outdoors entry-level security device for firearms protection. It features 16-gauge U.S. steel and an integrated pin guard to protect the hinges. A 3-foot security cable is offered separately online at steelheadoutdoors.com. \$25

STEELHEAD OUTDOORS DRIFTER 1

TYPE	Lockbox, steel
DIMENSIONS	6.5 in. x 10 in. x 3 in.
WEIGHT	5 lbs.
MATERIALS	U.S. steel, 16 ga., TIG welded
FEATURES	TSA compliant, 3 keys, 4 anchor points
MSRP	\$99
MANUFACTURER	Steelhead Outdoors, 612-326-4244, steelheadoutdoors.com

DRIFTER 1

Steelhead Outdoors sent a sample of its Drifter 1 lockbox for evaluation. It is not the type of security box that can be pried open with a screwdriver. It's built using 16-gauge U.S. steel, each component secured with tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding. TIG welding is generally considered to be cleaner and more precise than metal inert gas (MIG) welding for finished, thin metals.

A lockbox is only as secure as its hinges. The Drifter 1 incorporates large, quarter-inch-thick hinges that are staked and welded, along with an integrated pin guard to prevent someone from punching the hinge

out. Additionally, there are four anchor points to secure the lockbox to a fixture such as a desk or cabinet.

The lock mechanism is a laser-cut key used to access the anti-pick lock. Other fast-access code models are also available. Three keys were included, and the lockbox is TSA compliant for travel. Weighing 5 pounds, it's convenient for mobile use, yet heavy enough to provide peace of mind.

Safe storage gun laws are taking effect throughout the U.S. If you're in need of a new gun safe or lockbox — and quality is important — look to Steelhead Outdoors. In addition to its ready-to-ship models, it also offers extensive customization options to fit any need. **G&A** — **G&A Staff**

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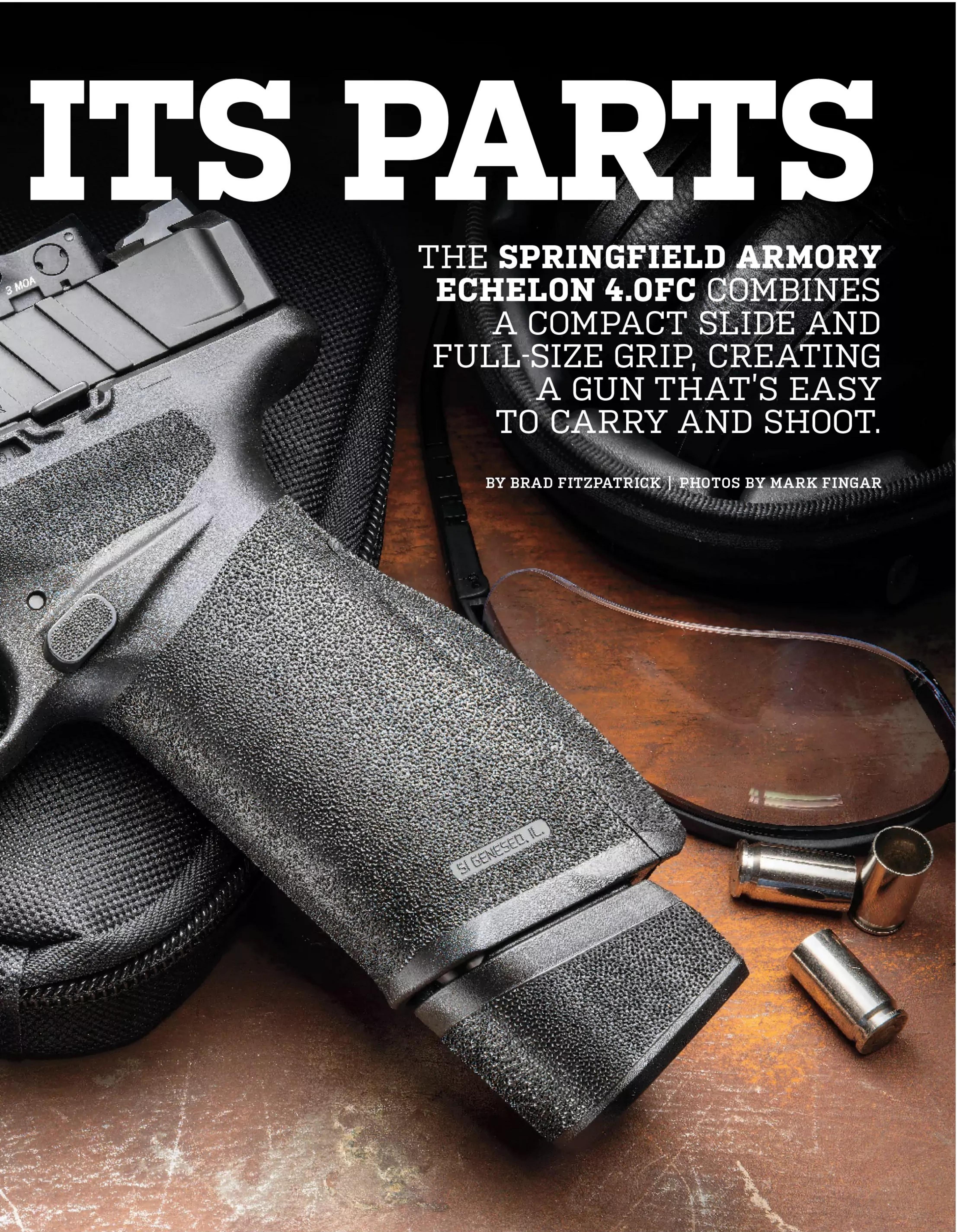
SUM OF



IT'S PARTS

THE SPRINGFIELD ARMORY
ECHELON 4.0FC COMBINES
A COMPACT SLIDE AND
FULL-SIZE GRIP, CREATING
A GUN THAT'S EASY
TO CARRY AND SHOOT.

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR





IN 2023, Springfield Armory introduced the Echelon 4.5, a game-changing striker-fired 9mm pistol that was honored as *Guns & Ammo's* Handgun of the Year. It was followed by the compact Echelon 4.0C in 2024. Just when it seemed that the brand was satisfied with its Echelon lineup, word came down in late 2025 that another variant was on the way. Meet the Echelon 4.0FC, launched on January 20, 2026.

If you're familiar with the nomenclature, you've already deduced that the new 4.0FC version combines the 4-inch barrel and slide with a full-size grip module. Indeed, the FC grip module is similar to the Echelon 4.5 grip, accommodating the same 17- and 20-round magazines. The dust cover of the FC was shortened so that it works with the 4-inch barrel and slide assembly.

The heart of the pistol is the serialized Central Operating Group (COG). The self-contained chassis is precision-machined from stainless steel. Critical component parts within the COG are machined from tool steel and polished, and because it is the serialized part the COG can be used with different grip modules. It allows Springfield Armory to offer different grips so that Echelon owners can change from a compact to full-size grip module, for example. The COG is well-designed and robust, and it is built to withstand hard use.

A CLEAN LOADOUT

The Echelon slide is similar in concept to those on other

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY ECHELON 4.0FC

TYPE	Recoil operated, striker fire, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	17+1 rds., 20+1 rds.
BARREL	4 in., 1:10-in. twist
LENGTH	7.25 in.
HEIGHT	5.5 in. (std.), 6.5 in. (ext.)
WIDTH	1.2 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 8.5 oz.
SLIDE	Billet steel, optic ready
FINISH	Melonite (steel)
GRIP	Polymer module, 3 interchangeable backstraps
SIGHTS	Tritium/fiber optic post (front), U-notch (rear)
trigger	5 lbs.
SAFETY	Striker block, trigger lever
MSRP	\$694
MANUFACTURER	HS Produkt, Croatia
IMPORTER	Springfield Armory, 800-680-6866, springfield-armory.com

9mm strikers, but here again Springfield Armory added several premium touches that help set Echelons apart in a crowded market segment.

The slide is machined from billet steel and finished in a matte black Melonite. Melonite is a nitride surface treatment that infuses nitrogen into the surface layers of the metal, resulting in improved hardness and corrosion resistance. The resulting metal is durable and won't scratch

or rust easily, regardless of the environment.

The metal on the front of the slide is relieved. Springfield Armory named them forward "trenches." Within the relieved portion are four deep, angled front serrations. The design offers more purchase than a standard slide with shallow serrations. The trenches makes press checks and slide racking easier and safer.

The rear portion of the slide also includes three serrations as well as "ears" at the back of the slide. Again, the point is to gain confidence in controlling the gun when performing basic operations. Most defensive pistol courses teach an overhand technique for cycling the action or dropping the slide on a fresh magazine because it's a gross motor movement, but there are millions of handgun owners who use the less favorable "pinch" technique. Regardless of hand position, the serrations and ears offer a solid landing point for the hand that



The Central Operating Group (COG) is a serialized chassis, the so-called “firearm.” As seen on other European-manufactured pistols, the serial number also appears on the slide and barrel.



The Echelon 4.0FC features the Springfield Armory Variable Interface System, which includes optic mounting plates and fasteners making the pistol compatible with more than 30 red-dot sights.



The sights are dovetailed to the slide. The front features a bright yellow ring with a tritium dot in the center. The rear is a U-notch rear sight with white outline. The sights co-witness with most red dots.



The barrel extends beyond the slide face and has a subtle 11-degree crown to protect the rifling. The guiderod features an aesthetically pleasing adaptive texture.

is more secure. The front and rear slide serrations are aggressive enough that it's easy for almost anyone with reasonable handstrength to operate the Echelon.

Springfield Armory changed the ethos of semiauto handgun design when it introduced its Variable Interface System. Optics on pistols have become more popular in recent years. Seemingly every semiauto striker-fired 9mm offers some method for attaching an optic to the pistol. The Variable Interface System is unique in that it eliminates the need for plates, allowing the optic to sit lower on the pistol. To accomplish this, multiple anchor holes were pre-drilled to accept an interchangeable locking pin system. The system allows the user to match the slide configuration to accept more than 30 different optics. As mounting screws are tightened, they exert lateral pressure on the interior mounting surface and create a stable, strong lockup between the slide and optic. It's a simple, versatile and robust system.

By eliminating the plate and allowing the optic to sit lower on the slide, the Echelon allows the gun's standard sights to co-witness with most optics. G&A's test pistol included a Vortex Defender-ST reflex sight. With the optic mounted, I could still use the Echelon's iron sights.



Grasping the Echelon 4.0FC, it smartly conforms to the palm. The Adaptive Grip Texture envelopes the grip with added touchpoints at the thumb rest, mag release, and on the magazine basepad.

I'm a fan of Springfield Armory's sight design. The Echelon 4.0FC uses the same U-notch rear and tritium/fiber-optic sight layout that resides on my XD-S. The configuration works just as well on the 4.0FC as it has for that pistol I have carried for many years. The white outline rear sight features a flat-front design that allows the shooter to perform one-handed cycling in an emergency, and the dot/U-notch configuration is easy



All Echelon backstraps incorporate a pin-punch tool that could be used to disassemble and remove the chassis, but the pin also engages the top of the module when the backstrap is installed.



The left and right side controls and contours are bilateral — except the disassembly lever. Adaptive Grip Texture is on the contoured lever, as well as on the shelf-like thumb rest ahead of it.



To test the pistol's ability to accept accessories, a new-for-2026 SureFire XC3 Sub pistol light was attached to the rail. It was compatible with the triggerguard and easily reachable to activate.



An extended baseplate with Adaptive Grip Texture is provided, including the baseplate guide necessary to convert a standard magazine and increase its capacity.

to see and align on target. Both the front and rear metal sights are dovetailed into the slide, and if you've ever tried to change the sights, you know they are secured tightly. I suspect three-dot tritium night sights and white-dot sight options will follow.

Like the 4.0C, the Echelon 4.0FC comes with a 4-inch cold-hammer-forged steel barrel. The barrel also receives a rugged Melonite finish and features a 1-in-10-inch twist rate. If Springfield follows the same pattern it has used with previous Echelon models, you can expect the addition of compensated and threaded 4.0FC versions to follow in the near future.

The FC grip module features a full-length grip and comes with wraparound Adaptive Grip Texture (AGT), Springfield's term for its micro-texture grip pattern. It secures the pistol in the shooter's hand but isn't overly aggressive. Springfield likes the design, too, because it added it to the thumb rest, rotating



Adaptive Grip Texture was also molded onto the front of the triggerguard and underneath.

disassembly lever and forward portion of the grip so that when you hold the pistol in a thumbs-forward grip, there's AGT at every contact point.

Three interchangeable backstraps are provided with each 4.0FC, and they are easy to change. The replacement backstraps come with sturdy posts that insert into the upper portion of the frame. Regardless of the size of grip insert you select, the grip angle and beavertail promote a proper high-handed hold on the pistol. The frontstrap lacks finger grooves, and a generous cutout on the underside of the triggerguard also encourages a high grip of the gun, helping to mitigate recoil and muzzle rise.

IMPARTING ACTION

Let's talk controls. The Echelon comes with a flat ambidextrous slide-stop that rests in a molded shelf within the frame. The pill-shaped mag release is also ambidextrous, and there's a rotating dis-



rotating disassembly lever that simplifies takedown and eliminates the need to press the trigger to complete its disassembly. It also serves as an indexing point for the support hand thumb for right-handed shooters. Though it lacks a manual safety — an option will likely be available on future models — the Echelon features a passive trigger lever, striker block and drop safeties.

The dust cover supports the mounting of accessories with a three-slot rail. The oversized, squared-off trigger-guard also has ample room for large or gloved fingers.

The trigger feel is excellent, which has a flat face and bladed trigger safety lever. It fires after just 5 pounds. The short reset and smooth pull make this one of the best striker-fire triggers available anywhere.

The 4.0FC has an unloaded weight of 24½ ounces, which is impressive for a gun with a capacity of 17 rounds. The extended magazine adds about a half-ounce to the gun's unloaded weight. Height is 5½ inches, which is the same as the full-size Echelon 4.5. Overall length is 7½ inches. With a grip width of 1.2 inches, the 4.0FC could work as a concealed carry gun, but the full-sized grip makes it equally effective for duty, target, self-defense or competition. The Echelon is made in Croatia and carries a retail of \$694.

RANGE TESTING

The Echelon is a smooth-shooting gun. The trigger is excellent, and that's one of the reasons why these guns

are so consistently accurate. At 25 yards, the 4.0FC managed five-shot groups as small as 1.64 inches, producing five groups less than 2 inches. That's excellent accuracy potential for a factory 9mm striker-fired gun with a 4-inch barrel.

Reliability was excellent. The internals are well-constructed and polished, and the metal magazines performed well. There were no feeding, extraction or ejection issues, but if you prefer to utilize a thumbs-forward grip, pressing down on the flat-top slide stop with the thumb of your shooting hand can cause the slide to drop forward after the last shot. That's not a malfunction but rather shooter error. In an effort to

keep reloads as fast as possible, be certain to avoid riding your thumb atop the slide stop.

Like other Echelons, the grip geometry of the 4.0FC is superb. The gun locked in my hand, and the grip design and indexing points promoted a consistent hold of the gun. It made the

4.0FC easy to shoot and helped improve its accuracy potential.

As said previously, the slide design smoothed out pistol operations. I also liked the takedown lever. It doesn't stand out like a fire alarm on a bare concrete wall the way some other levers do. To add, it effectively served double duty for indexing in my hand.

PARTING SHOTS

Is the 4.0FC the best Echelon? Perhaps. It's certainly as robust and reliable as its brand mates, and its build quality, ergonomics, capacity, and compact barrel layout will appeal to enthusiasts and professionals. I wouldn't be surprised to see more law enforcement agencies pick up the 4.0FC as its duty pistol.

Whether you're considering it as a duty gun, for defense, or simply want to take the Echelon to the range and keep your skills sharp, it'll suit you. All striker-fired pistols operate in much the same way, but the best ones do everything right. The Echelon 4.0FC is the sum of its parts, and that sum adds up to a nice 9mm handgun. **GA**

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Speer Gold Dot G2 147-gr. JHP	992	19	9	1.6	2.2
Hornady Critical Defense 115-gr. FTX	1,151	22	11	1.8	2.4
Federal Punch 124-gr. JHP	1,109	23	10	2.4	2.9
Federal Syntech 147-gr. TSJ	979	12	6	2.7	3
Fiocchi 147-gr. FMJ	968	51	19	2.9	3.5

Notes: Accuracy is the average of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a Caldwell Pistolero shooting rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured with a Caldwell Velociradar placed adjacent to the muzzle.



IRREPTA



ACEABLE

A close-up photograph of a rifle barrel and a camouflage strap. The barrel is dark and metallic, reflecting some light. The strap is made of a textured, olive-green fabric with visible stitching and metal hardware. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE SPANDAU RL MAY BE AN ENTRY-LEVEL RIFLE,
BUT MINE IS ONE I'D SAVE BEFORE ANY OTHER.

BY JACK OLLER | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

THE ANIMALS DIDN'T FLEE. I know suppressors are effective, but I couldn't believe how long the elk held their position after I'd taken the shot. For at least 10 minutes, several stood within feet of the cow that dropped where she stood. Without the *crack* of a .308, the herd didn't distinguish my threat as I laid prone some 270 yards atop a peak and across a ravine.

The day prior, Dad and I took a short helicopter ride to hunt the landlocked Bureau of Land Management (BLM) ground east of Sheridan, Wyoming. The land is "locked" in the sense that hunters cannot access it by vehicle or foot without crossing private property, which requires permission. A publicly licensed helicopter offers ingress to otherwise inaccessible ground, virtually untouched. Tony Chambers of Wind River Air (windriverair.com) was our pilot. The road — or airway — less traveled ensures opportunity on less-pressured game, as well as a greater chance to draw tags.

What makes a gun valuable? I don't think it's price alone. If I only had minutes to save a few guns in my safe, I'm going for the ones possessing memories. When I picked up the Spandau RL, I didn't expect that it could become such a gun. However, it brought me success during the most incredible hunt of my life: A trip with my dad that I may never experience again.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Known as a sporting shotgun brand within the U.S., SDS Arms (sdsarms.com) expanded the Spandau line in 2025 to include a bolt-action rifle. Though Spandau (spandauarms.com) is a separate factory in Türkiye that produces its own line of hunting shotguns, the brand name was borrowed and applied to the first sporting rifle imported to the U.S. through SDS Arms. The Spandau RL is actually manufactured by Huglu (huglu.com.tr). To learn more about these companies, read "Turkish Delight" by Eric Poole in the August 2025 issue.

The rifle is a Model 700 short action, a "clone" if you will. SDS Arms identified demand for such a rifle at a certain price point. After the unfortunate bankruptcy of Remington Arms Company, LLC, in 2020, we've seen many companies copy the iconic design. The M700 comes in many configurations — short action, long action, tactical, lightweight, and many calibers — and the action is supported by the most extensive aftermarket of any bolt rifle. The Spandau RL is blueprinted, just as the M700. Whereas Turkish manufacturing often defaults to using metric thread pitches and screws, the Spandau RL is made to American SAE specs. The rifle was designed to be ready as-is, but it is also a perfect candidate for the tinkerer who doesn't want to spend nearly \$2,000 on a clone.



Total weight including scope and suppressor measured 9.66 pounds. The rubber recoil pad effectively reduces what remains of the felt recoil from the .308 Winchester.



The Turkish walnut stock presents a warm appearance. The diamond checkering is laser-engraved, sharp, and keeps with the traditional aesthetic of a classic bolt-action.

The \$800 manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) is arguably the rifle's best feature, but I've already seen where these rifles are being sold at some locations for less. It is the most affordable price I've seen on a new-manufacture M700 clone. Even the Taurus Expedition has an MSRP starting at \$1,054 (taurususa.com). The Bergara B-14 Hunter starts at \$949 (bergara.online), and the Weatherby Model 307 starts at \$1,200 (weatherby.com).

The Spandau RL shot above its class in the field and at the range. My first experience with the rifle was at the Cameo Shooting Complex (cameosec.org) in Palisade, Colorado, during the 2025 OSG Roundtable. There, I shot a sample on steel scattered along the face of a mountain to 600 yards. It proved accurate from the bench on a flat range, as well as from supported positions while shooting high, near-vertical angles.

THE DETAILS

Regardless of how I shot the gun, the Spandau RL

SPANDAU RL	
TYPE	Bolt action
CARTRIDGE	.308 Win.
CAPACITY	3+1 rds., 5+1 rds.
BARREL	20 in., 1:10-in. twist
LENGTH	40 in.
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 2.24 oz. (tested)
STOCK	Turkish walnut
LENGTH OF PULL	14 in.
FINISH	Oxynitride (steel)
SIGHTS	None
TRIGGER	2 lbs., 15.5 oz. (tested)
MSRP	\$800
MANUFACTURER	Huğlu, Beysehir, Konya, Türkiye
IMPORTER	SDS Arms, 865-604-6894, spandauarms.com



A bilateral push-forward-to-release lever drops mags free from the action. The Spandau RL also utilizes a molded polymer triggerguard.



The trigger is patterned off of the M700, meaning that it can be replaced with an aftermarket unit. The factory trigger averaged at just less than 3 pounds.



The three- and five-round magazines feature a durable polymer housing, follower and baseplate. Mags are interchangeable with aftermarket AICS-pattern options.

was quite comfortable and mild in recoil. Attached to the end of the stock, a large rubber buttpad is more than effective. Even affordable-grade Turkish walnut is pleasing to the eye. I appreciate its warmth in this age of polymers and composites. The stock does have a spray-on finish, though, so don't be surprised if dings or signs of wear are noticeable after awhile. Mine had its fair share of scrapes after five days of hunting in Wyoming, but I only see them as well-earned badges from an memorable hunt.

The angle of the stock's curved grip was secure while shooting from the standing, prone or sitting positions. The laser checkering on both sides of the grip and forend was also tastefully done.

The length of pull (LOP) measured 14 inches. With my large frame, it's shorter than I prefer, but the Spandau RL is within industry standards. Finally, there are sling-swivel studs at the forend and under the stock.

We impart more variables in extracting accuracy potential than is inherent to the rifle. Our interaction



The Picatinny-style optic rail extends just beyond the receiver to accommodate long eye-relief configurations. It can be replaced with conventional M700 bases for rings.

with trigger is an example. The trigger on the Spaundau RL was nothing short of impressive. Another copy of the M700, the trigger is made in-house by Huğlu using standard M700 pins and springs. Should you desire to change it, the rifle is compatible with aftermarket M700 triggers. (I can't imagine why one would need to, though.)

My rifle took me by surprise with its clean trigger, its smooth operation and light pull. Sure, a \$200 aftermarket trigger will have improvements such as adjustability but there may be diminishing returns for subjective benefits.

In front of the triggerguard is the magazine release, a forward-push design that drops AICS-pattern magazines. Detachable AICS-pattern mags are the only upgrade of note to the traditional M700 platform. Three- and five-round magazines are included with the Spandau RL, an ideal combination. Three-round mags are necessary to comply with hunting regulations in certain states but are also great for shooting off bags or in a low-prone position. Five-round magazines offer more capacity afield (where legal) and convenience at the range. Worth noting, the Spandau RL will also feed from aftermarket 10-round AICS mags, too.

There weren't any surprises with the action and barrel. I am a fan of the Picatinny-style rail atop the receiver. It's a zero-MOA rail, so it does not affect



Set in a pair of Seekins low rings, the Leupold VX-6HD 3-18x44mm used for testing features CDS turrets. The scope was replaced by Gen 2 models in 2025.



The author sourced a Leupold BX-4 Pro Guide HD binocular (\$600), RX-5000 TBR/W (\$800) rangefinder, and Bog Inception Pack (\$572) for the elk hunt.

the baseline elevation in a scope. This is normal for a centerfire rifle intended for use at typical hunting distances. A Picatinny rail is also quicker and more convenient to mount or remove a scope from. The rail height is about right, too. With low rings, the scope's eyebox was in an optimal position for my head, and the 44mm objective had

plenty of clearance over the rail. The rail extends three-quarters of an inch beyond the receiver and above the rear of the barrel. Since the Spaundau RL's scope-base screws were drilled and tapped to mimic the standard M700. It's a cinch to remove the rail section and mount a scope in a set of rings directly to the receiver.

The bolt is standard M700, too, featuring a two-lug bolt head and large knob on the handle. Even with its 90-degree throw, I could quickly cycle the action without my hand hitting the scope. (I have large hands, so that's no small thing.) For this evaluation and the hunt, I used a discontinued Leupold VX-6HD 3-18x44mm with a fairly large eyebox. This model was replaced by the VX-6HD Gen II (\$2,400, leupold.com).

The Spaundau RL action is not bedded to the stock, likely done to save cost. The rifle shoots well, though, so it may be an acceptable trade-off. For those who enjoy DIY projects, it's also a great opportunity to learn how to glass-bed an action. Done successfully, it could enhance the accuracy of many rifles. (Plus, it's fun to



The Spandau RL is based on a standard M700-pattern short action and stock. It isn't bedded, but the action screws are sleeved and front lug stress relieved. The barrel does not contact the stock.



The Spandau RL includes a thread cap and radial muzzlebrake, the latter effective at reducing recoil. For hunting elk, the author attached a Banish 30 Gold (banishsuppressors.com). **\$1,300**



work on guns.)

Though not bedded, the barrel was free-floated. I ran a dollar bill along the length of the forend. There was no discernable slop where the recoil lug sits within the groove cut into the stock, either. Too much movement where the recoil lug interfaces with the stock can damage the wood and lead to accuracy concerns.

Though the Spandau RL is not bedded, the 20-inch barrel averaged 1 MOA with most hunting loads. Inside is a 1-in-10-inch twist rate with 5R rifling. Match ammo or handloads will produce the occasional sub-MOA group. Is sub-MOA necessary for hunting? Not really.

The action and barrel are protected by an oxynitride finish for corrosion resistance. I didn't observe corrosion on the barrel surface, but after my elk hunt I did find some rust forming on the laser-engraved identifiers on the barrel and receiver. It appears the markings were added after the finish was applied to the steel. It's

an entry-level rifle, so I was prepared for this. Some additional love and care were given for maintenance purposes to prevent corrosion. If you take the Spandau RL out on an adventure, just remember to give it a good wipe-down and a light coat of oil afterward.

THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

My dad, Kevin, lives to hunt. He was a wildlife biologist for 30 years. If anyone could be called a "Midwest game management expert," it's him. He's always wanted to go on a remote hunt, so I was thrilled to give him that chance. More than the hunt, it was an opportunity to spend time with him. Five days alone with only what we could pack into a small helicopter — including water rations — enabled me to get to know my dad as I never have before. There's something about a difficult hunt with another person that creates a special bond. The trip exceeded my expectations.

Thanks to the suppressed shot from my rifle, Dad had time to take an another elk from that herd. However, knowing that we'd have to pack out two of them

and we still had four days left to hunt, he chose not to shoot. Unfortunately, we didn't encounter elk for the rest of the trip. Ask him, though, and he wouldn't change a thing. Providing overwatch while I stalked my elk — and the enormous effort of packing it out together — made the trip he's wanted for a long time. He went home with half the meat, too.

For most, the Spandau RL is a simple-to-operate, good quality and affordable rifle. Mine will always represent that trip with my dad. It is now irreplaceable. Don't wait until you can afford a more expensive rifle. A hunt like this only gets harder as our dads gets older. Plan your adventure while you can. **G&A**

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Federal Premium Gold Medal 175-gr. OTM	2,564	21	9	.95	1.3
Hornady PH 178-gr. ELD-X	2,545	33	13	1	1.3
Fiocchi Range Dyn. 150-gr. FMJ	2,848	18	8	1.25	1.8

Notes: Accuracy is the average of four, five-shot groups at 100 yards from a rest. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Labradar chronograph adjacent to the barrel.



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ALL IN THE FAMILY

NIGHTFORCE LAUNCHES AN EXTENSIVE LINE OF NEW SCOPES WITH THE NX6.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

IF YOU LIKE IT when products get better and less expensive, it's time to pay attention. Nightforce introduced a high-performance family of scopes for 2026 and priced them reasonably for more rifle shooters. Making a premium-level product that's priced right requires a hint of witchcraft. I'm skeptical when anyone makes such a claim, but there are no secrets in optics. A close look at the NX6 line reveals that it is still possible to get a lot for a little.

WHAT'S NEW?

The NX6 family includes the following models: 1-6x24mm F1/F2, 2-12x42mm F1/F2, 3-18x50mm F1/F2, 4-20x50mm F2, 5-30x56mm F1 and 6-36x56mm F1/F2. The "F1" and "F2" nomenclature indicate "first" and "second-focal-plane" reticles.

There are many options across the NX6 line. Elevation turrets are available as capped or exposed, meaning the shooter can dial the turret for the desired elevation correction or set it and protect it. Every F2 scope — besides the 1-6x24mm — features a capped turret and a voucher for a free kit to convert it to an exposed turret, should you desire. F1 scopes — again, other than the 1-6X — features an exposed turret, but the user can order a custom ballistic drop compensating (BDC) turret from Nightforce. It doesn't cost much, and all that's required is to provide Nightforce with the muzzle velocity and ballistic coefficient (BC) of the projectile, as well as the approx-

imate elevation and temperature at which you'll be shooting. The BDC turret made for you will be marked in yards to the target. It makes dialing for distance so simple.

NX6 scopes have a new turret design that Nightforce worked on for a couple of years. One of the key features is an almost tool-less zero and zero-set system for the exposed turrets. Zeroing or removing an exposed turret is as simple as twisting the inner cap counterclockwise and then pulling the cap off the housing. A couple of metal tabs integral to the inner cap allow the use of anything ranging from a coin to the grip of a pocket-knife to tighten and loosen the cap. Nightforce intentionally designed the inner cap with the idea that something in your range bag will work to loosen it. Once loosened, the entire cap pulls off the housing and can be repositioned to zero the turret. Tightening the inner cap holds the entire cap in place and sets the zero mechanism. The single action resets the dial and the zero mechanism. Nightforce calls this "fieldset."

Nightforce engineers spent two years on the turret system to make it easy to live with, modular, and to knock a bunch of weight off. Scope weight is an important factor for some, and heavier is rarely better. I don't think scope weight is as big of a deal as many make out, but it matters when trying to make weight for certain classes of precision rifle competition. I'm of the opinion that the first priority is to make sure the scope is up to the task before




**NIGHTFORCE
6-36X56MM NX6**

POWER	6X-36X
OBJECTIVE	56mm
TUBE DIAMETER	34mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
WINDAGE	.1 mil per click
RETICLE	MIL-C, MIL-XT (tested), MOA-C, MOA-XT
LENGTH	15.3 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 15 oz.
PARALLAX	11 yds. to infinity
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in.
MSRP	\$2,200
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

**NIGHTFORCE
5-30X56MM NX6 (F1 ONLY)**

POWER	5X-30X
OBJECTIVE	56mm
TUBE DIAMETER	34mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
WINDAGE	.1 mil per click
RETICLE	MIL-C, MIL-XT, MOA-C, MOA-XT (tested)
LENGTH	14.9 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 15 oz.
PARALLAX	11 yds. to infinity
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in.
MSRP	\$2,100
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

**NIGHTFORCE
2-12X42MM NX6**

POWER	2X-12X
OBJECTIVE	42mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
WINDAGE	.1 mil per click
RETICLE	FC-MRX
LENGTH	12.5 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 5 oz.
PARALLAX	11 yds. to infinity
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in.
MSRP	\$1,800
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

worrying about weight. A scope is an aiming tool first and an observation tool second. It must be durable enough to survive travel and movement in the field if it is ever going to be a useful. Nightforce takes its scope durability tests to extreme levels to confirm they will hold in zero harsh environments. A historical downside has been the Nightforce turret system was heavy to ensure they could meet the necessary durability and repeatability requirements.

Pop the cap off any of the exposed turrets and take a look inside. There are visible lightening cuts in the system that help to shed weight. While the NX6 line is, in my opinion, impossible to distinguish optically from the pricier NX8 line, the NX6 scopes are shockingly light in weight.



The power adjustment ring no longer rotates the entire ocular assembly. A side-benefit is that scope caps will stay where positioned when used.

One of my favorites scopes, and a strong performer for me for many years is the NX8 4-32x50mm F1 (\$2,450, milehighshooting.com). I compared it to the NX6 6-36x56mm (\$2,200), i.e., “the new hotness.” The NX8 weighs 3 ounces less than the NX6, but the 6-36X comes with a 56mm objective lens. The

NX6 has a lighter-than-expected weight penalty, but it brings the advantages that come with a larger objective lens. The NX6 exit pupil is bigger at the same magnification, so it is easier to obtain and maintain a full field of view when the rifle fires.



Paired with 30- and 34mm maintubes, the larger objective lens yields a large exit pupil and enhances light transmission.

NON-NEGOTIABLES

NX6 scopes adhere to Nightforce’s well-established company standards. Perhaps the best known and most unique to Nightforce is the



Some NX6 models feature an exposed elevation turret for shooters who prefer to dial elevation adjustments in the field. Returning to zero is quick and aided by a zero stop. Windage turrets are capped.

emphasis placed on durability and repeatability. After walking through several optic factories and talking to many optical and mechanical engineers during my time as Guns & Ammo's Rifles & Optics editor, I think the biggest distinguishing feature between scopes that can take a beating and those that can't is whether or not the lenses have been bedded.

Bedding a lens is the process used by a few manufacturers to secure the lens housing inside the objective bell, ocular housing and maintube. Lenses can also be bedded inside the housing, providing some redundancy. Bedding compound is epoxy or glue used to secure the glass lens to the aluminum around it. The epoxy ensures the lens doesn't move, which also provides some relief from thermal expansion of the aluminum. The use of epoxy is a great way to ensure the scope can hold a zero no matter how much it vibrates or gets jostled and jarred. The number one cause of zero shift is a lens inside the scope that moves inside the scope body due to impact — usually the objective lens because it's so big and heavy. Nightforce beds the appropriate lenses in all of its scopes, including the NX6. I've never experienced a point-of-impact shift while using a Nightforce scope, so I expect the NX6 to live up to that reputation.

One reason the new turret took Nightforce so long to design was that its engineers wanted to ensure



A compliment to mil-based reticles, the NX6 is offered with turrets featuring .1 MRAD per click. These turrets also allow for 10 mils of adjustment per revolution, making the numbers easy to see.



The left turret is used to fine-tune parallax at different distances, and can activate reticle illumination at the press of the button. Illumination is powered by a single CR2032 battery.

the NX6 would track like other Nightforce scopes. Where there is normally a large center section of brass supporting the turret's internals, the NX6 line has a smaller brass component that received lightning cuts. It was paired with steel internal components, too. The use of steel makes manufacturing difficult, but the weight savings and durability of the steel is worth it.

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NIGHTFORCE 4-24X50MM NX6 (F2 ONLY)	
POWER	4X-24X
OBJECTIVE	50mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.25 MOA per click
WINDAGE	.25 MOA per click
RETICLE	MOAR (tested), 4A-i
LENGTH	13.9 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 11 oz.
PARALLAX	11 yds. to infinity
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in.
MSRP	\$2,000
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

NIGHTFORCE 3-18X50MM NX6	
POWER	3X-18X
OBJECTIVE	50mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
WINDAGE	.1 mil per click
RETICLE	MIL-C, MIL-XT, MOA-C, MOA-XT, 4A-i (tested)
LENGTH	13.9 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 11 oz.
PARALLAX	11 yds. to infinity
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in.
MSRP	\$1,900
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

NIGHTFORCE 1-6X24MM NX6	
POWER	1X-6X
OBJECTIVE	24mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.2 mil per click
WINDAGE	.2 mil per click
RETICLE	FC-DMX, FC-6C
LENGTH	10.2 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 3 oz.
EYE RELIEF	4 in.
MSRP	\$1,800
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

Nightforce is so obsessed with accurate tracking that each NX6 scope is tested across its entire range for accurate tracking before it ships to any retailer or enduser. The extra step takes more time but it is the only way for Nightforce to guarantee such a high level of performance.

MY FAVORITE?

The NX6 family is so large that I recommend visiting nightforceoptics.com to view all the options in detail. There are a couple of new hunting reticles, for example, and plenty milliradian (mil) and Minute of Angle (MOA) reticle options. The two scopes that are stand-outs for me are the 2-12x42mm F1 and the 6-36x56mm F1. The 2-12x42mm is an amazing hunting scope and the 6-36x56mm is ideal for steel and competitive use.

The 2-12x42mm impressed me because of its optical performance, light 23-ounce weight, and usable reticle across the entire magnifica-

tion range. Its reasonable 12½-inch length is why the 2-12X is a joy for me to use, and it's easy to maintain a full field of view. The reticle Nightforce puts in the 2-12X F1 is the FC-MRX. It has a segmented circle that surrounds a center crosshair. The segmented circle works as a bold aiming feature, making it visible at 2X. This must have been a tough combination to pull off,

but the 2-12x42mm is going to be popular on everything from hunting rifles to precision gas guns.

At 36 ounces, the 6-36x56mm is equally light for its magnification range. It features a wide field of view and superior optics. The NX6 family has better optical performance than many will expect in its \$2,200 price category because Nightforce built these scopes a little longer and without quite as wide a magnification range as the NX8. Scopes get easier to make and become a lot more economical — all with equal or better optical performance — with those two small concessions. The 6-36x56mm



A knurled knob is threaded into the power adjustment ring for leverage, which can be removed. The rear knurled ring locks the diopter once adjusted.



Uncapped, the right turret adjusts windage. Once zeroed, remove and replace the cap so that the number "0" lines up with the mark on the maintube, then secure the stainless set screws.

is a popular magnification range, and the NX6 brings outstanding glass, lightweight features and a great turret system to this segment.

The NX6 line is unique, though, in optical performance, especially when paired with its light weight and competitive pricing. It's also one of the easiest scope lines to use in the field. Eye relief is comfortable, even



A sign of premium quality, parallax marks on the left turret do not feature yards/meters for reference. Parallax should be tuned while looking through the scope to ensure the entire image is properly focused.



NX6 scopes featuring capped elevation turrets are easily zeroed, and can be used to dial corrections. However, these turrets are not locking, so cap the turret when adjustments are made to guard the setting.

when shooting in a hurry, and the turret design is as user-friendly as it gets. The shooter can swap turrets for the ideal setup on a particular rifle, and then easily change the configuration should the scope move to a different rifle. Zeroing is a snap, as well. The NX6 scopes mean life for rifle shooters just got simpler and a bit more affordable for a Nightforce. **GA**



Elevation and windage turrets are capped for the NX6 1-6X. The left turret controls the illuminated reticle with an off position between intensity settings.



Also referred to as a "throw lever," the knurled knob is positioned at the low power range for quick, intuitive reference in the field.

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SECOND

THE 6.8 WESTERN IS A FAST,
FLAT ".270" — WITH HEAVY BULLETS.



LOOK

BY CRAIG BODDINGTON
STUDIO PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ



THE BULL ELK stood broadside at the bottom of a cut, just beyond 400 yards, with no way to get closer. Sitting behind sticks, I got steady and held at the top of the shoulder. The bullet entered at the top of the heart, and the bull took one step forward before going over backward in a big cloud of snow, all four feet in the air.

Twenty-some years later, another big bull stood slightly quartering away at 460 yards, again with no way to get closer. I was standing to a sturdy tripod, shooting elbow anchored against a massive old water tank. Dead-steady, I dialed the Leupold's turret and held at the back of the on-shoulder. The bull attempted one forward step, then went over backward. All four feet were visible for a moment, then he lay still.

In 55 years of irregular but frequent elk hunting, those are my two longest shots — both bulls down as quickly and cleanly as any I've seen. They were taken with .270s, or, if you prefer, "6.8s." The first was brought down with a .270 Winchester, firing a hand-loaded 150-grain Nosler Partition at 2,900 feet per second (fps). The second was taken with a 6.8 Western firing Browning's factory load with a 175-grain Sierra Tipped GameKing.

TWISTED UP

I love the .270s — all of them. I've used the .270 Winchester all over the world. I've had flings with the super-fast .270 Weatherby Magnum, and in the early 2000s I had a protracted affair with the almost-as-fast .270 WSM. Elk, red stag, various Eurasian sheep and goats, all three are fast and flat-shooting, yet with moderate recoil.

On American game up to elk and larger African plains game, I never had a reason to question their efficacy. However, on large game, I always worried about the lack of bullet weight and was extra careful with shot placement. In 1925, Winchester introduced its .270 with a 1-in-10-inch twist. Twenty years later, Roy Weatherby used the same twist for his magnum .270. Nearly a half-century later, Winchester used the same ".270-traditional" 1-in-10 twist for the .270 WSM.

In .277 diameter, a 1-in-10 twist maxes out with a 150-grain bullet. Even then, the bullet cannot be exceptionally long and aerodynamic, or that rifling twist can't stabilize it. For years, the heaviest .277 bullet on the market was Nosler's 160-grain Partition, purposefully short, with poor aerodynamics to stabilize in 1-in-10 twist barrels.

When the 7mm Remington Magnum came out in 1962, the .270's greatest proponent, gunwriter Jack O'Connor famously said, "It can't do anything my .270 can't do." There's only .007-inch difference between the .270/6.8mm's .277-inch bullet and the .280/7mm's .284-inch bullet. I believe bullet diameter and frontal area makes a difference in hitting power, but seven thou-



sandths aren't enough for any game animal to know the difference. On the other hand, a 10-percent increase in bullet weight is significant! It's irrational to suggest that a .270 with maximum 150-grain bullets can deliver the same performance and penetration as a 7mm at similar velocity with bullets from 160 to 175 grains.

Bullet stabilization is more a matter of bullet length than weight. The 1-in-10 twist cannot stabilize today's long, low-drag bullets. Among the most aerodynamic bullets for traditional .270s are Federal's 136-grain Terminal Ascent, Hornady's 145-grain ELD-X and Sierra's 135-grain GameKing. All are about as long as can be stabilized by a 1-in-10-inch twist, and all have G1 BCs in the upper .400s. Downrange performance simply cannot compare with long, sleek, low-drag .284-inch bullets from 160 grains on up with G1 BCs in the mid .600s and beyond.

Across the board, rebarreling is an option. (Not my .270s, you won't!) In both 7mm and .30 caliber, new cartridges (i.e., Nosler, PRC, etc.) have been specified for faster twists, able to stabilize the longer, heavier bullets. The .277s were getting left behind. Introduced



The ".270" hunting cartridges include (above left to right): .270 Winchester, .270 WSM, .270 Wby. Mag., 6.8 Western and .27 Nosler. With a 1-in-10-inch twist, the first three are limited to 150-grain bullets, maximum. Specified for faster twists, the 6.8 Western and .27 Nosler allow use of longer, heavier low-drag bullets.

in 2020, the .27 Nosler was the first .270 cartridge with a faster twist for heavier bullets. The .27 Nosler is specified for 1-in-8.5-inch twist. This is a compromise twist, providing optimum stabilization for bullets from 130 to 165 grains. Thus, the .27 Nosler digests traditional .270 bullets from 130 to 150 grains, plus heavier bullets than traditional .270s could stabilize.

Introduced in January 2021, at the height of the pandemic, the 6.8 Western was not a compromise. As the name implies, it was intended for use in the open West on larger game such as elk or for long-range shooting with the heaviest, sleekest, low-drag bullets. Specified for minimum 1-in-8 twist, the 6.8 Western stabilizes bullets of 162 to 175 grains. Winchester's 6.8 Western rifles use 1-in-8 twist, while Browning's 6.8 Western rifles use an even faster 1-in-7.5-inch twist. At this writing, 175 grains is the heaviest .277 bullet, but a 1-in-7.5 twist will stabilize heavier bullets.

Winchester wanted a short-action cartridge. Its .270 WSM case offered a good starting point, but with longer, heavier bullets, there wasn't enough action space. So, it shortened the WSM case from 2.1 inches to 2.02



inches, with cartridge overall length (COAL) of 2.955 inches. This allows the 6.8 Western to be housed in short bolt-actions with bullets up to 175 grains.

6.8 WESTERN IN AFRICA

At normal hunting ranges, out to a quarter mile or so, all the .270s, old and new, shoot plenty flat. Heavier bullets start slower, and the low-drag bullets don't win the race until much farther out. I'm not a PRS guy, and I don't shoot game at extreme range. Still, I've always had that nagging concern about the .270's light bullets on larger game. I was curious about the 6.8 Western. During spring 2022, I managed to get my hands on one for a hunt in South Africa's Eastern Cape.

The rifle was an Ed Brown M704 action on a Woox Furiosa chassis put together by friends at Trop Gun Shop in Pennsylvania with a 24-inch 1-in-8 twist barrel. Although the 6.8 Western hasn't yet gone far beyond Browning and Winchester, as new cartridges go they have been generous with load selection under both brands.

Loads in 162, 165, 170 and 175 grains with several bullet options

are offered. Choice Ammunition (choiceammunition.com) also offers seven 6.8 Western loads with bullet weights of 150, 155, 165 and 170 grains. I haven't tried all the options, but for that hunt I had plenty of 162-grain Copper Impact in both Browning and Winchester loads, as well as Browning's Long Range Pro Hunter with 175-grain Sierra Tipped GameKing (TGK). Since bullet weight was my whole point, I wanted to use the 175-grain TGK. However, that particular rifle grouped the 162-grain load better and delivered a considerable velocity bonus. Rated at 2,875 fps, in that barrel I got 2,980 fps.

It wasn't a big-bag safari, just having fun with friends. We shot cull hartebeest and wildebeest, a good waterbuck and a fine nyala. So long as I did my job, the 6.8 Western did its part.

Honestly, no game were taken that a traditional .270 with 130- to 150-grain bullets couldn't have handled. Even so, I was impressed by the 6.8 Western. Like all copper bullets, the 162-grain Copper Impact

penetrated extremely well, most bullets exiting through. The largest animal was a big waterbuck, probably 600 pounds, quartering away at about 250 yards. He took the bullet hard and quickly piled up.

The problem with properly evaluating

performance on game is no animals react exactly the same upon receiving a bullet. With our short seasons and limited bags, we Americans have limited opportunity. My old friend and pioneer Australian outfitter Bob Penfold brought this to my attention. He said, "You Americans call shooting one deer 'testing' a cartridge. When we 'test' a cartridge or bullet, we shoot a couple hundred pigs or wild goats."

Point taken, never forgotten. On that hunt in the Eastern Cape, we shot a dozen animals with the 6.8 Western. Far short of a definitive test, and far short of many animals I've taken with traditional .270s and fast 7mmms with bullets of similar weights. Not enough to be certain that the 6.8 Western hits harder than a traditional .270 with its heavier bullet, nor enough animals to be certain of greater penetration. Although, intellectually, the increased

performance must be there.

My conclusion, albeit with a limited sampling,

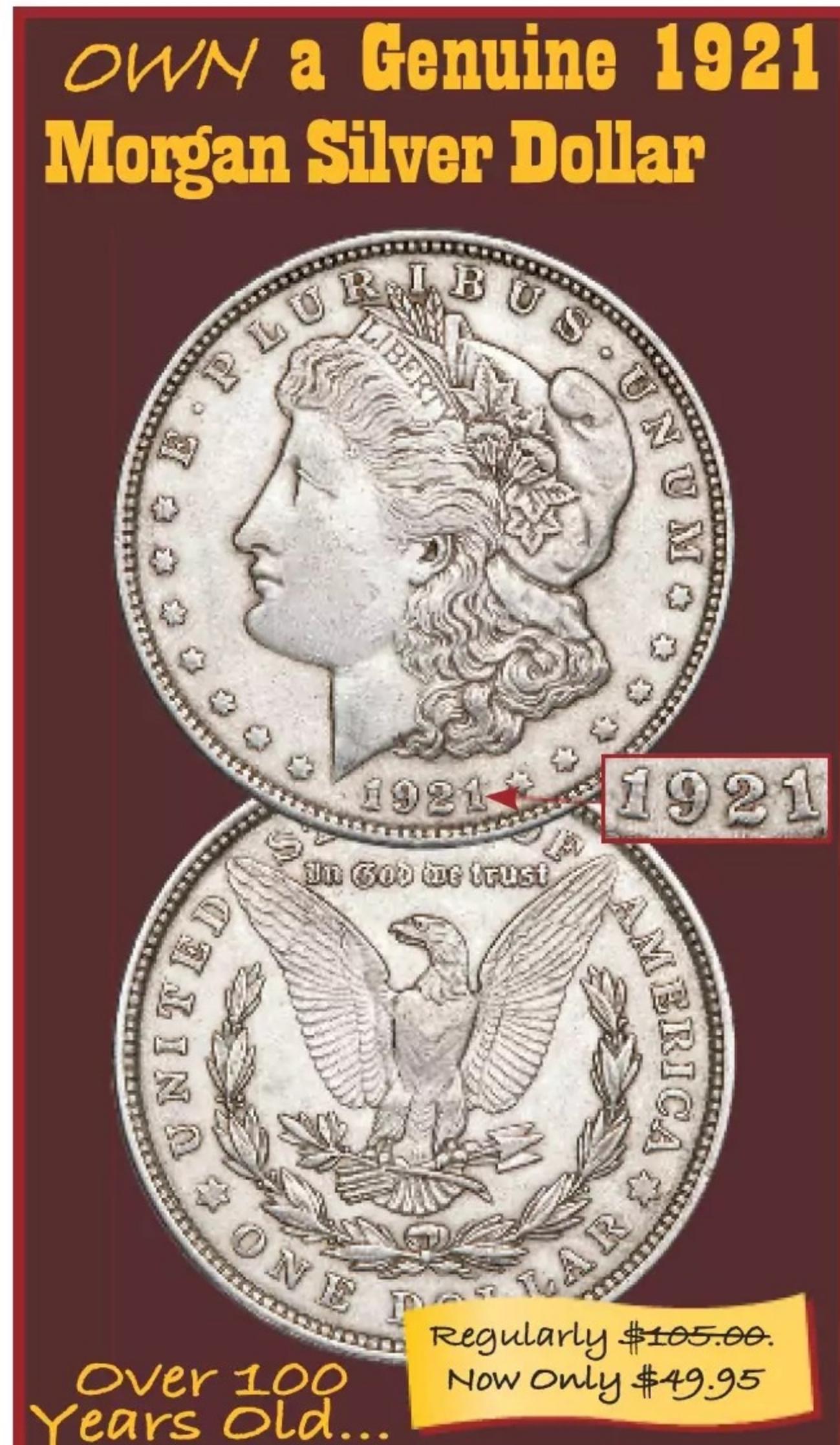
WINCHESTER 6.8 WESTERN

MODEL	SUBMODEL	WEIGHT (GR.)	BULLET TYPE	G1 BC	G7 BC	MUZZLE VELOCITY (FPS)	MUZZLE ENERGY (FT.-LBS.)
Ballistic Silvertip	—	170	TJHP	.55	.273	2,920	3,218
Copper Impact	—	162	TSHP	.56	.224	2,875	2,973
Expedition Big Game	Long Range	165	AccuBond LR	.62	.312	2,970	3,226
Power Point	—	170	JSP	.43	—	2,920	3,218
Supreme	Long Range	175	TJHP	—	—	—	—

6.8 WESTERN, WINCHESTER 175-GRAIN SUPREME LONG RANGE

DISTANCE (YDS.)	MUZZLE	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1,000
	VELOCITY (FPS)	2,825	2,690	2,559	2,432	2,308	2,188	2,072	1,959	1,850	1,745
ENERGY (FT.-LBS.)	3,101	2,811	2,545	2,298	2,070	1,861	1,668	1,491	1,330	1,184	1,052
100-YD. ZERO	—	0.0	-3.3	-11.9	-26.4	-47.5	-75.8	-112.1	-157.6	-213.2	-280.3
200-YD. ZERO	—	1.7	0.0	-7	-19.8	-39.2	-65.8	-100.6	-144.4	-198.4	-263.8

(G1 BC: .682) (G7 BC: .341)



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WINCHESTER 6.8 WESTERN 175-GRAIN BC MAX

BROWNING X-BOLT 2 SPEED, 20-IN. BARREL, BANISH 30 SUPPRESSOR

LOAD	G1 BC	G7 BC	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	ENERGY (FT-LBS)	ACCURACY (IN.)
Winchester Supreme LR 175-gr. BC Max	.682	.341	2,681	65.6	23.8	2,794	.52 1.24

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of five three-shot and five-shot groups fired from a sandbag rest at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of six rounds measured with an Athlon Rangecraft chronograph placed 10 feet from the muzzle. Stated factory velocity is 2,825 fps from a 24-inch barrel. Velocity shown is the average from a 20-inch barrel.

was exactly what I expected:

Slightly better performance than traditional .270s with lighter bullets, and identical performance to fast 7mmms with similar bullet weights at similar velocities.

175-GRAIN HEAVYWEIGHTS

A couple of years passed before I used the 6.8 Western again. Then came a chance for an elk hunt in New Mexico, and I decided to take a second look at the 6.8 Western. An elk's vital zone is huge. Minute of elk (MOE) is bigger than MOA at any distance, but that large target must be hit hard and well. This time, remembering MOE, I was determined to use the 175-grain

bullet. As happens too often in my world, time was short when the Browning X-Bolt, Leupold scope and Browning ammo with the 175-grain Sierra TGK came together. I had neither enough time or ammo for Guns & Ammo's five, five-shot group protocol; I just had to be sure of MOE. That was no problem.

The rifle came into zero quickly and liked the load; three-shot groups under one MOA, much better than needed for MOE. The X-Bolt 2 Speed had a 20-inch barrel (\$1,569, browning.com), much handier for use with my Banish 30 suppressor (\$999, banishsuppressors.com). With a 20-inch barrel, you're going to lose



At the bench on a cold day in Kansas with the Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed in 6.8 Western. Boddington's test rifle with 20-inch barrel was tested with a Banish 30 suppressor.



BROWNING X-BOLT 2 SPEED SPR

TYPE	Bolt action
CARTRIDGE	6.8 Western (tested)
CAPACITY	4+1 rds.
BARREL	20 in., steel alloy, fluted, 1-in-7.5-in. twist, threaded
OVERALL LENGTH	40 in.
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 12 oz.
STOCK	Composite; adjustable comb height, LOP, grip; OVIK pattern
LENGTH OF PULL	13.625 in.
FINISH	Cerakote, Smoked Bronze (steel)
TRIGGER	Gold plated, adjustable; 3 lbs., 15.3 oz. (tested)
SIGHTS	None
MSRP	\$1,640
IMPORTER	Browning, 800-333-3288, browning.com

velocity. Browning's Long Range Pro Hunter load with 175-grain TGK bullet is rated at 2,835 fps, but that's from a 24-inch barrel. In the 20-inch barrel, actual velocity measured 2,691. That bullet has a G1 BC of .617. With high BC bullets, we know the race isn't always to the swift. My Rangecraft Velocity Pro chronograph also gave me the energy: 2,794 foot-pounds (ft.-lbs.); plenty. The load had an extreme spread (ES) of 53 fps and standard deviation (SD) of a low 16.

I ran the numbers with actual velocity, then verified on steel. Then it was time to load the car and head for New Mexico. Two days later, the bull was down in his tracks. The long, heavy bullet entered at the rear of the on-shoulder and exited the center of the off-shoulder.

At that moment, the 175-grain TGK was the heaviest .277 bullet I knew of. Now there's another. Winchester's engineers developed their own high-BC bullet, the BC Max, designed for accuracy and long-range terminal performance.

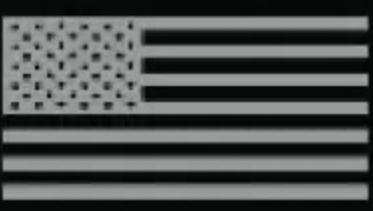
The Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed in 6.8 Western produced excellent groups, especially with the 175-grain BC Max bullet, new-for-2026. It was tested in the Winchester Supreme Long Range factory load. One group skewed the otherwise sub-MOA average.

BC Max is a lead-core bullet with a thick copper jacket to maintain weight retention and a large-diameter polymer tip to ensure expansion and rapid energy transfer, even at longer ranges as the bullet slows down. In .277 diameter, the BC Max bullet is 175 grains, with 7mm and .30-caliber options also in the pipeline. The 175-grain .277 has a shockingly high G1 BC of 0.682, G7 BC of 0.341. I haven't had the opportunity to use it on game. Hopefully soon. Unfortunately, the deadline for this article is now.

Initial results on paper are impressive. In the Winchester Supreme Long Range line, factory specs rate the 175-grain BC Max load at 2,825 fps, 10 fps slower than the Browning 175-grain TGK load. Interestingly, in my 20-inch barrel, average velocity for the BC Max was 2,681 fps, exactly 10 fps difference from the Browning 175-grain TGK load. The same X-Bolt 2 Speed liked it even better.

The average of five, five-shot 100-yard groups was a respectable 1.235 inches. Two groups were just fractions more than 1 inch, and one was less at .873. Browning's rifle has a slender, fluted barrel, so five-shot groups is a big ask, not helped by shooting on the first cold, blustery day of the fall. Worth noting, within those five-shot groups, the three-shot-group averaged .52 inch, with four groups less than .40 inch. Both averages were badly skewed by my last group, which spread to 1.78 inches. Likely, the latter was my fault because my hands were freezing.

It takes me a while to warm up to new cartridges, but I'm excited by the 6.8 Western and its heavy-bullet performance. As we hand-loaders do, I've been saving brass. Maybe it's time to order dies. **GA**

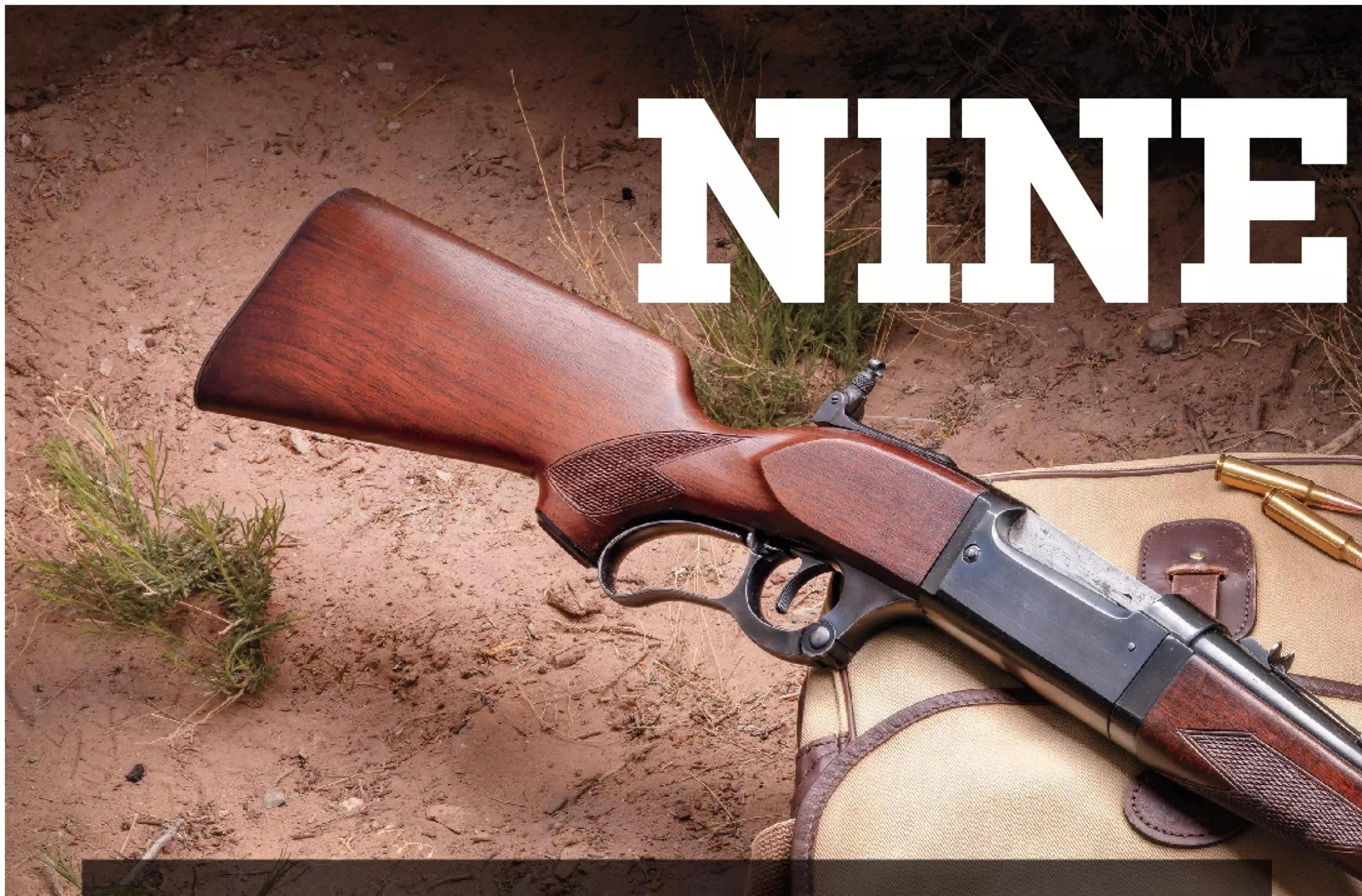
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NINE



WHEN ARTHUR SAVAGE started his Savage Repeating Arms Company in Utica, New York, in 1894 — later reorganizing and renaming it the Savage Arms Company in 1897 — lever-action rifles dominated the commercial centerfire rifle market. Savage had already designed a novel hammerless lever-action rifle for Colt, which was submitted for the 1892 U.S. Army rifle contract. That contract was ultimately won by the Norwegian-designed Krag-Jørgensen repeating bolt-action rifle that became the U.S. Model 1892 in .30-40. Manufactured by Springfield Armory in rifle and carbine configurations, there were three variants of each length through the Model 1899. The “Krag” was issued by the U.S. Army until the adoption of the Model 1903 Springfield.

Savage was convinced that his hammerless lever-action would sell, so he refined the Model 1892 rifle into the civilian 1895 Savage after his company was established. The rifle was produced by Marlin and the .303 Savage cartridge was loaded by Union Metallic

Cartridge Company (UMC). Savage’s rifle was unique at the time, having a five-round rotary magazine with a cartridge counter and a cocking indicator. The appearance of the rifle was unorthodox, but it proved to be a strong, accurate and attractive gun for a lot of shooters.

Savage missed out on submitting the Model 1895 to several military contracts, including one with Mexico. Why? Savage didn’t have a manufacturing plant. The exact number of Model 1895s produced is unknown but estimates range between 5,000 and 8,000 rifles.

Savage further refined the design and received a patent in 1899 for an improved cocking indicator. The rifle with his improved cocking indicator became the Model 1899. In 1899, Savage offered to retrofit existing Model 1895s with the cocking indicator modification for \$5. In 1908, Savage ceased offering this service and instead offered a discount toward a new Model 1899 rifle for Model 1895 owners. Savage’s Model 1899 was renamed “99” in 1921 as the .300 Savage cartridge was introduced.

TY-NTNE

**"OF WOOD & STEEL," PART III:
SAVAGE'S MODEL 1899 LEVER-ACTION.**

BY DAVE EMARY | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR





Markings on the receiver describe Guns & Ammo's test rifle as the "SAVAGE 1899 MODEL". The barrel displays the patent dates and advertises its "HI-PRESSURE STEEL".

THE MODEL 1899

Contemporary lever-actions of the era featured an external hammer and an under-barrel magazine tube, such as the most popular models from Marlin and Winchester. The 1899 Savage had none of these. The Model 1899 was a hammerless rifle with a clever five-round rotary magazine. The unique rotary magazine incorporated a brass carrier with a wound spring and a round counter that's visible through a small window in the front lower-left side of the receiver.

A major advantage of the rotary magazine in the Model 1899 was that it allowed the use of spitzer-profile pointed bullets, which became commercially available about 10 years after the rifle's introduction. Spitzer bullets featured an aerodynamic pointed nose. The spitzer bullet design was introduced in 1898 as the Balle D for the French army. Spitzers dramatically improved ballistics for cartridges fired in Savage's Model 1899, and originally had a flat base.

The Model 1899 was stocked like a conventional lever-action but with a buttstock that attaches to the

rear of the receiver with a long bolt through the stock. This proved to be a substantially stronger attachment method than screws through the tang of the receiver and stock as seen on earlier lever-action firearms.

The forearm of the Model 1899 attaches with a screw through a tenon in the forearm into a hanger on the barrel for a solid receiver connection.

On takedown models — beginning with the Model 1899H Featherweight — a spring-loaded tab on the forearm inserts into a notched tab attached to the barrel, just like the forearm on an over/under or side-by-side shotgun. On the takedown models, a steel cup on the rear of the forend inserts into the front of the receiver. The action is locked by the final movement of the lever raising the rear of the bolt — which has a locking shoulder at the top rear — into a locking shoulder at the top rear of the ejection port.

The safety is a sliding tab on the right side of the lever. When pushed forward, the safety locks the lever and blocks the trigger. The bolt is actuated by a large



Savage rifles were manufactured in 58 variations and grades. The Savage Model 1899 replaced the 1895. In 1921, the Model 1899 became the "Savage 99." An estimated 1 million were produced until manufacturing ended in 1998 due to worn tooling and declining sales.



One of the popular upgrades of the era was the addition of a tang sight. A Lyman combination folding sight with two-aperture system was mounted to G&A's Model 1899 test rifle.

curved arm, integral to the lever, that inserts into a slot in the bolt. The cocking indicator on the Model 1899 is a small post that protrudes from the top of the receiver as the lever is raised. The indicator can be seen and felt.

The initial chambering for the 1899 Savage was the .303 Savage. It was a cartridge in the same class as the .30-30 Winchester but was generally loaded with a heavy 190-grain bullet with a muzzle velocity of 2,000 feet per second (fps). It was advertised as being developed for taking heavier game such as elk, moose and caribou. In 1900, the .30-30 chambering was added to the lineup. In 1903, the .25-35 Winchester, .32-40 Winchester and .38-55 Winchester were also added. Currently, the latter three chamberings bring a substantial premium on the price of a Model 1899 when they appear for sale.

Savage also worked with Charles Newton. In 1912, their efforts resulted in the addition



One of four Savage cartridges, the .300 Savage was based on the .250 Savage case necked up to .30 caliber. It was developed in 1920.



Behind the trigger is a safety latch used to lock the lever in its closed position. A shotgun-style tang safety was introduced in 1960, but some later 99 models retained the sliding safety.

of the .22 Savage Hi-Power, the .250-3000 Savage (.250 Savage) in 1915, and the .300 Savage in 1921. While researching this content for this article, Guns & Ammo uncovered a vintage photo of the Prince of Wales posing with a tiger killed during a tour of India, and Reverend H. R. Caldwell with a tiger. In both cases, a Savage 1899 in .22 Savage Hi-Power. They had more faith and moxie in that rifle cartridge than I do!

The Model 1899 was offered in a variety of models and options. In addition to select walnut, several grades of engraving and checkering were available from Savage, as well as various barrel lengths and weights, steel shotgun-type or crescent buttplates, and takedown versions. For sighting, the receiver was pre-drilled at the rear to accept either a Lyman or Marbles peep sight.

SAVAGE MODEL 1899 AND 99 RIFLES OFFERED IN 1925

99-A: Standard weight, 26-inch barrel with crescent buttplate. Weight: 8 pounds.

99-B: Takedown of the Model A.

99-C: Standard weight, 22-inch barrel or 24-inch barrel in .300 Savage, shotgun buttplate. Weight: 7 pounds, 10 ounces.



Ahead of the diamond checkering under the forend is a two-position serrated switch. Thumbing it down unlocks the forend and allows it to be separated from the barrel assembly.

99-D: Takedown of Model C.

99-E: Lightweight barrel, 20-inch barrel in .22 Savage Hi-Power, .30-30 Win.; .303 Savage in 22-inch barrel in .250-3000 Savage; 24-inch barrel in .300 Savage; with shotgun buttplate. Weight: 6 pounds, 4 ounces.

99-F: Takedown of Model E.

99-G: Takedown, light barrel. Same as Model E with pistol grip, checkered stock and forearm, corrugated trigger and shotgun buttplate. Weight: 7 pounds.

99-Carbine: Special medium-weight 20-inch barrel, special carbine stock and forearm. Weight: 7 pounds.

CHAMBERINGS AVAILABLE:

.22 Savage Hi-Power (Models E, F, G)
.250-3000 Savage Hi-Power (Models E, F, G)
.30-30 Win. (Models A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
.303 Savage Hi-Power (Models A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
.300 Savage Hi-Power (Models A, B, C, D, E, F, G)

For the time, the .250-3000 and .300 Savage

were regarded as state-of-the-art cartridges. The .250-3000 Savage incorporated an 87-grain spitzer bullet with a muzzle velocity averaging 3,000 fps. It was considered to be a very good, flat-shooting cartridge for deer. The .300 Savage included a 150-grain bullet at 2,700 fps, which was a flat-shooting cartridge and capable for taking any mammal up to big bears for 300 yards. More than 1 million Savage Model 1899 and 99 rifles were made before production ceased in 1998.



The Savage Model 1899 incorporated an internal rotary magazine that organized up to five rounds, plus one in the chamber. The elevator guided and centered each round to the feed ramp.



For decades, the Model 1899 and 99 offered a distinctive brass cartridge counter that indicated the number of rounds available in the rifle's internal magazine.

THE TEST RIFLE

Guns & Ammo's Savage Model 1899 test rifle is a bit of a paradox. The serial number puts it as being produced in 1925, but the top of the receiver ring is clearly marked "1899 MODEL". It chambers the .300 Savage, which dates it to 1921 or later, meaning that it's a "99" model. Semantics? Sure, but it is nonetheless interesting.

After more research, I learned it was not uncommon, and others have encountered similar rifles made in this timeframe that were assembled a year or more after the receiver serial number date of manufacture would indicate. Perhaps G&A's test rifle receiver sat incomplete at the factory for years.

Our rifle is a Model G chambered in .300 Savage. It has a 24-inch lightweight barrel, pistol grip, checkered grip and forearm, Lyman receiver sight, and it's a take-down. The bore retains sharp rifling and is bright and



H.R.H. Prince of Wales used a Savage 1899 in .22 Savage HP during a tiger hunt in 1921. He toured India for four months and later became King Edward VIII. India banned tiger hunting in 1972.

shiny with no pitting. The rifle is as-new condition.

The Model 1899 exhibits a crisp trigger that was tested at 4 pounds, 15 ounces. The trigger remains decent, helping produce reasonable accuracy for comparison.

Period .300 Savage ammunition was advertised with a 150-grain spitzer soft-point (SP) bullet rated at 2,700 fps. The .300 Savage has a somewhat limited case capacity for a 30-caliber cartridge. The optimum propellant for it with a 150-grain bullet is IMR 4895. In the 1920s, this would correspond to Hercules Powder No. 308 propellant. Most extruded propellants slower than 4895 cannot get enough in the case to develop full pressure or velocity for the cartridge. After consulting the “Speer Handloading Manual Number 15” (\$45, speer.com), I used the maximum listed charge of 41.0 grains of 4895 in a Winchester case. It was a full case with a small amount of compression when the Speer 150-grain SP Hot Core bullet was seated.

AT THE RANGE

The table shows test results at 100 yards. Editor-in-Chief Eric Poole performed the accuracy test at the bench for the Savage Model 1899. For this series, we fired three five-shot groups at 100 yards and five-shot groups at 200 yards. We had a limited amount of production ammunition for three of the rifles in this series, which is why we limited the test to these number of groups. The velocity produced by the Model 1899 was close to that shown in the Speer reloading manual. Two of the three groups were at or below 3 inches in diameter, and one

SAVAGE MODEL 1899 .300 SAVAGE TEST RESULTS

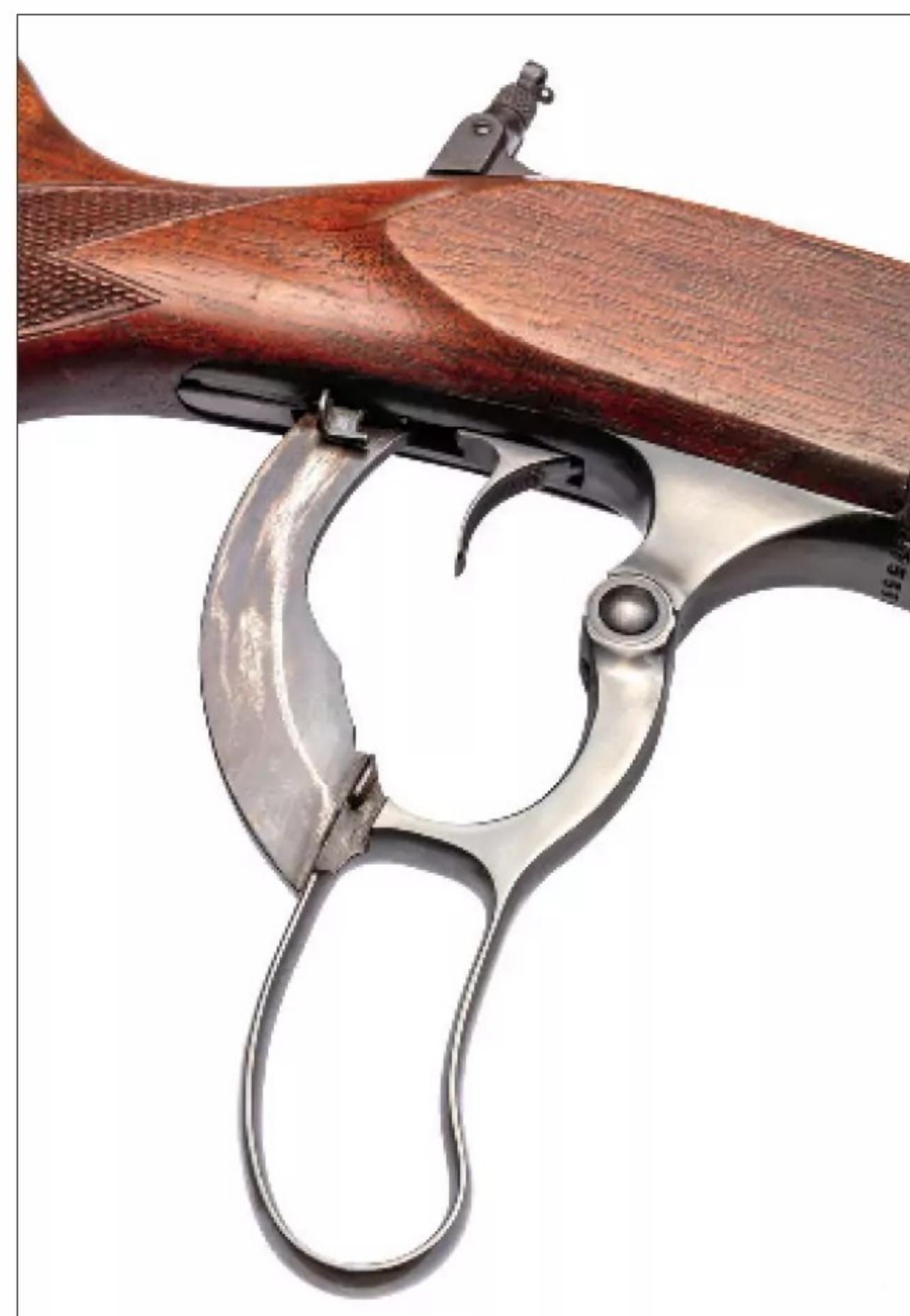
LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	EV (FPS)	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Speer 150 gr Hot Core, 41.0 gr IMR 4895	2,576	26	2.88	3.4

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups shot at 100 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of five, five-shot groups measured with chronographs.

larger group increased the average to 3.4 inches. grain spitzer bullet, the mid-1920s Savage 99 in .300 Savage demonstrated effective ballistics and trajectory to 400 yards. After verifying the rifle's accuracy potential on paper, we shot at a steel target with a 10-inch circle to represent the kill zone of a deer. The Model 99 easily held the 10-inch kill zone on our 200-yard target. We determined that the Savage Model 1899 in .300 Savage continues to be effective for hunting from 250 to 300 yards, depending on the eyesight and skill of the shooter.

In summary, the Model 1899 was a relatively light-weight rifle at 7 pounds. It balanced well in the hand

when carried at the receiver. With the steel buttplate, though, it produced noticeable recoil. The fixed front sight on our Model G was a bit of a pain to zero. To zero the rifle's windage using the Lyman receiver sight, we had to insert metal shims under one side.



Working the lever design unlocks the breech, ejects spent cases, feeds a round from the magazine, and cocks the internal striker before locking the breech closed.

PARTING SHOT

The 1899 Savage, for the time, would have been very handy. It remains a high-quality rifle chambered in several powerful cartridges that advanced smokeless powder cartridge development. With the .250 and .300 Savage, the Model 1899 and 99 would have been effective for hunting to the limit of most shooters' eyesight.

The Winchester Model 1907 semiautomatic chambered in .351 WSL will be evaluated next. **GA**

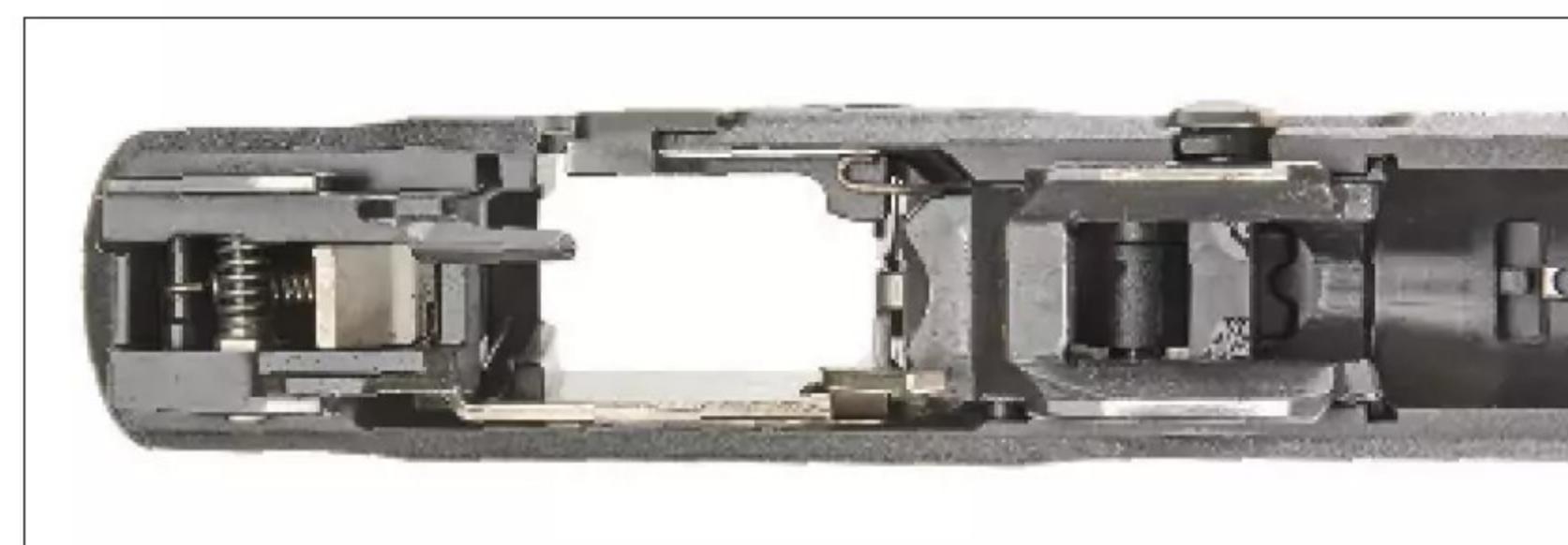
**SPRINGFIELD ARMORY
HELLCAT .380 ACP**

TYPE	Recoil operated, striker fire, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	.380 ACP
CAPACITY	11 rds., 13 rds.
BARREL	3 in., 1:10-in. twist
LENGTH	6 in.
HEIGHT	4 in. (no optic)
WIDTH	1 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 1 oz. (tested)
FINISH	Melonite (steel)
GRIP	Polymer, Adaptive Grip Texture
SIGHTS	Green tritium post (front), U-notch (rear)
TRIGGER	5 lbs., 5.6 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Trigger lever
MSRP	\$653
MANUFACTURER	HS Produkt, Croatia
IMPORTER	Springfield Armory, 800-680-6866, springfield-armory.com





With an 11-round standard-capacity magazine and 13-round extended magazine, the Springfield Armory Hellcat .380 offers the best-in-class capacity for a .380-chambered pistol.



The internal chassis is not readily removable from the polymer grip module for maintenance. The take-down lever secures the barrel, trapping the slide to the rails. The sear assembly is behind the magazine.

HELLKITEN

THE 9MM IS KING CALIBER for the concealed and everyday carry (EDC) market. The 9mm has received extensive advancements in the last 20 years. What Guns & Ammo's legendary Jeff Cooper once regarded as an "anemic" cartridge is now standard issue for the FBI.

Though not as popular, the .380 ACP has also received improvements, primarily with bullet design. An obvious host for the .380 ACP is a compact pistol such as the Springfield Armory Hellcat. Micro-compact 9mm's can be snappy to shoot, but the same gun chambered for .380 is milder. The Hellcat .380 sent to Guns & Ammo for testing is nearly identical to the 9mm Hellcat with only subtle tweaks to accommodate the smaller cartridge. Many of us expected a .380-chambered Hellcat sooner, but it has arrived and the performance did not disappoint.

9MM VS. .380 — IN A HELLCAT.

Let's compare the .380 Hellcat (\$653) to a standard 9mm (\$599). Only the most skilled eye can visually differentiate between the two, even when side by side. The slide width is an indicator, though. Otherwise, the 4-inch height, 6-inch length, and 1-inch grip are identical. The .380 pistol is also 1.8 ounces lighter than the 9mm version, but that figure is almost imperceptible in the hand.

Both incorporate a 3-inch, hammer-forged, Melonite-finished barrel and dual captive recoil springs with full-length guiderod. Though the slide is sized to optimally accommodate the .380 ACP, it looks aesthetically the same as the 9mm slide, including the same slide serrations, loaded chamber indicator and RMSc-pattern optic cut. We equipped our sample with a Shield OMSsc (\$430, shieldsights.com).



A baseplate with finger extension (above, middle) is available for the flush mag (above, top), but it does not add capacity. The extended mag improves grip and capacity (above, bottom).

The grip fills the hand identically to the original and maintains Springfield's Adaptive Grip Texture. For those desiring accessories, the single-notch rail on the dustcover did not change. We confirmed fitment of a Streamlight TLR-8 HL-X Sub (\$285, streamlight.com) and Crimson Trace Laserguard (\$220, crimsontrace.com). Hot-swap as necessary.

The sights are dovetailed to the slide. A chamber viewing port is at the barrel's rear.

The slide was narrowed for the .380, but the internal characteristics were unchanged.

Springfield Armory's Adaptive Grip Texture has always been a favorite among G&A's staff. Touchpoints, including the scalloped pad above the trigger, were carried over from the 9mm to the .380.

Despite a reduction in slide width for the cartridge, capacity did not change. The .380 Hellcat includes one 11-round standard magazine and one 13-round extended mag. It would be nice to see

this pistol accept more cartridges for the caliber size, but we may have to wait for extended basepads or the aftermarket. Interestingly, the standard and extended .380 mags offer the same amount of purchase in the hand as the 9mm mags. Still, the Hellcat offers the greatest capacity when compared to other micro-compact .380s.

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Disassembly of the Hellcat .380 is identical to the 9mm. To remove the slide assembly, rotate the takedown lever 90-degrees up with the slide locked to the rear.

RED-DOT READY

We could only find one other .380-chambered compact pistol — SIG Sauer P365-380 (\$500, sigsauer.com) — that includes an optic-cut slide.

Pocket-size .380s don't typically have the surface area to accept a red dot. We configured the Hellcat with Shield Sight's new-for-2025 Open Mini Sight Sub Compact, or "OMSsc." This micro red-dot introduced the first translucent roof.

Other red-dot sights enclose the objective completely, usually supporting the lens with a metal or polymer frame. The transparent roof increases a shooter's perceived field of view. Its worked best in daylight, where the dot almost appeared to float above the gun.

The translucent design also allows more accurate lighting conditions to the unit's photo sensor. The red dot is always on, but it self-adjusts to the user's ambient light. Along with the translucent roof, the Shield OMSsc is also the smallest micro red-dot available. It does not extend beyond the narrower slide of the .380 Hellcat. The sight is just .74-inch wide. Other micro red dots did extend past the width of

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Fiocchi Covert X 95-gr. JHP	972	18	6	1.8	2.3
Hornady Critical Defense 90-gr. FTX	927	26	9	2	2.5
Black Hills 60-gr. Honeybadger	1,154	66	24	2.3	3
Fiocchi Range Dynamics 95-gr. FMJ	852	33	12	3	3.8

Notes: Accuracy is the average of four five-shot groups from a rest at 25 yards using a 4 MOA red-dot sight. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle.



The Shield Open Mini Sight Sub (OMSsc) is the smallest pistol red dot. It also introduced a unique translucent roof design to enlarge the perceived field of view. **\$430**

the slide cut, including the Trijicon RMRcc at .95-inch wide (\$734, trijicon.com).

Throughout G&A's testing of the Hellcat .380, the OMSsc translucent roof proved to be more than just a novelty. In daylight, the perceived field of view appeared larger — as adver-

tised. The wider field of view supports fast target acquisition and transitions between multiple targets.

The objective lens is constructed of glass, but the translucent roof is made of an acrylic polymer. It is shatter resistant, though much less so than aluminum, of course. The primary dot emitter housing is made of 6082 T6 aluminum.

AT THE RANGE

The 9mm Hellcat is known as an easy-to-control compact pistol. Keeping the platform and reducing the cartridge did exactly what you'd think. It's a joy to shoot, and some staff

went so far as to compare it to shooting a semiauto in .22 LR.

The market is abundant with modern, quality defensive .380 ACP loads. The latest is Fiocchi's CovertX 95-grain JHP, reviewed in *Guns & Ammo*'s December 2025 issue. The bullet penetrated more than 10 inches into a Clear Ballistics 10-percent gel block, expanding to .57 inch with good weight retention. As well as the best group, this load turned in the tightest standard deviation (SD) and extreme spread (ES) of G&A's ammo test lot.

That said, all loads performed well in the Hellcat .380. There were no malfunctions with the gun. The only function to note is with the Black Hills 60-grain Honeybadger. While it performed without issue, the Hellcat slide did not lock to the rear after the final round was fired from either supplied magazine. This was not an issue with any other tested load. We did not consider this issue as a dealbreaker in deciding to carry the .380 Hellcat, we just decided to EDC a different load for defense. The Honeybadger is still a favorite due to its velocity and unique terminal ballistics. The slide not locking to the rear with the Honeybadger may stem from its relationship to the magazine. Also notable, the Hellcat .380



The Hellcat has a proprietary rail that may not accept some lights/lasers. Many brands offer Hellcat-specific products.

never failed to cycle or feed through the G&A typewriter test firing different random .380 rounds in the magazine.

The .380 Hellcat was accurate in G&A's 25-yard test protocol. At 50 yards, it was used to consistently center-punch an 8-inch steel plate. The minimal recoil impulse made it easy to keep the sights on target. Carrying forward the features of the 9mm model means that the manual of arms is the same, too. Experienced Hellcat users will be able to pick up and shoot the .380 without pause. Shooting the .380

is exactly like shooting a 9mm Hellcat — but with less recoil.

PARTING SHOT

The Hellcat is large when compared to many micros. However, this characteristic offers an advantage due to its controllability. Few .380s have as much aftermarket accessory support, and the Hellcat is one of the only options with an optic-cut slide. In addition to best-in-class magazine capacity, the weight and size make it even more comfortable to shoot while still being easily concealable. Since modern defensive .380 ACP loads are effective, the Hellcat .380 is a recommended option for recoil-sensitive shooters. **G&A**



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FOR AS LONG AS GUNS

have been extant, gun owners have modified them. After the Second World War, surplus military firearms were the subject of modification, often sporterized to serve as hunting rifles. An entire market evolved in the wake of the 2004 sunset of the 1994 Assault Weapon Ban, which included customization of Communist-bloc

firearms. AK-pattern and Soviet-types were of particular interest — especially among those who liked to clone historical variants — until President Obama banned the imports as part of sanctions against Russia for invading Crimea. Lever-action rifles are the current focus of modification trends.

The increased popularity of so-called “tactical” lever-actions may be due to legal simplicity. Lever-actions usually avoid restrictions in anti-gun jurisdictions. With the threat against owning semiautomatic “Black Rifles,” gun owners are merging interest in levers with the feature set of the AR platform. Common themes include synthetic and



A WOOD STOCK FOR AN AR-15?
WOOX has championed the desire of Black Rifle owners to give modern firearms a warmer look. The AR-15 (above) features WOOX's Vigilante stock, grip and handguard kit. \$619

aluminum stocks, M-Lok attachment points, sights and rails for optics and lights.

Some are motivated by a desire for contemporary, frequently used features on a rifle or carbine. From a utilitarian perspective, tactical lever-guns offer more functional flexibility than the blued-steel and wood-stocked counterparts. Leverguns also benefit from being easy to suppress, which is a boon when hunting or shooting at the range. Online writer Kenzie Fitzpatrick tweaked a Rossi R95 Triple Black in .30-30 (\$1,288, rossiusa.com), which received just about every upgrade offered by Midwest Industries (mid-

an AR-15 enjoys a selection of components from a long list of manufacturers for personalization. Even the most “retro” configurations of the AR platform are offered, with vintage polymer furniture and period-correct receivers and barrels that pay tribute to early configurations.

We are aware that such Black Rifles lack the charm of older, traditional firearms for many readers. This sentiment is highlighted by a few AR parts makers. Consider the wood furniture available for AR-15s from WOOX (wooxstore.com), for example. Pistol grips, stocks and handguards are made of American walnut for AR users wanting to give their rifles a warmer look. Contributor Alfredo Rico gave the WOOX parts a thorough review for an online exclusive. He was impressed.

With so many options available, we're interested in your thoughts. Are you restoring or modifying any firearms? Modifications are not just limited to rifles, of course. If there's a shotgun or handgun you'd be interested to see overhauled, let us know.

Email us at gaeditor@outdoorsg.com with the subject line “Sound Off.” We'd be happy to help. **GA**



ANTONIO ACITELLI

TRICKING OUT A LEVER-ACTION
A Rossi R95 in .30-30 received a full range of upgrades that brings the old-fashioned favorite closer to a modern fighting rifle.



COLD WAR REVIVAL
The AK platform is an enduring symbol of the Cold War, and the large surplus of guns means an equally large number of parts are compatible with the rifle.



SOUND OFF

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KEITH WOOD

A few misstatements from our elected officials.

DOOZIES

MAYBE IT'S A CONSEQUENCE of a citizen legislature, but I'm always fascinated by the fact that the elected officials most interested in regulating firearms seem to know the least about them. Apparently, education on the topics they aim to legislate isn't worth the effort. Better to rush to a microphone and embarrass themselves!

Through the years, we've seen some egregiously inaccurate statements from gun control advocates in government. The media does little to hold them accountable. Fortunately, the social media world is not so kind. One can spend hours online listening to elected officials butcher facts and firearm nomenclature. (I'll save you the time.)

One of my favorite all-time quotes came from the late Representative Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY). She was a fierce advocate for gun control laws. In 2007, she introduced a ban on so-called "assault weapons," which included barrel shrouds as one of the defining elements of such a firearm. When asked to define a "barrel shroud" by then-MSNBC host Tucker Carlson, she replied, "It's a shoulder thing that goes up."

Former President Joe Biden never seemed to let the truth get in the way of a good story, especially when it came to guns. (Sometimes I miss the laughs.) These two humdingers came from the same speech in 2022:

"Put a pistol on a brace, and it ... turns into a gun," Biden said. "Makes them where you can have a higher-caliber weapon — a higher-caliber bullet — coming out of that gun."

"And the fact that the NRA has such overwhelming power — you know, the NRA is the only outfit in the nation that we

cannot sue as an institution," he said. "They got — they — before this — I became president, they passed legislation saying you can't sue them. Imagine had that been the case with tobacco companies."

Earlier, in 2019, Biden covered the always tricky topic of "magazine clips." "I believe in the Second Amendment, but

nobody says you can have a round ... a ... a magazine with a hundred clips in it."

State politicians are no better, it seems.

"This is a ghost gun," California State Senator Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) said, brandishing an evil-looking black gun. "This right here has the ability, with a .30-caliber clip, to disperse with 30 bullets in half a second. Thirty magazine clip in half a second."

Wow, 3,600 rounds per minute. Where can I get one? Even ammunition isn't safe from factual butchery.

"Some of these bullets ... have an incendiary device on the tip, which is a heat-seeking device." New York Assemblywoman Patricia Eddington (D-Medford) told reporters as she advocated successfully to ban .50 BMG firearms in the Empire State.

Biden, the gaffe machine who kept on giving, had his own thoughts on ammunition, too. "A 9mm bullet blows the lungs out of the body," he told reporters in 2022. "So, the idea of these high-caliber weapons is of — there's simply no rational basis for it in terms of thinking about self-protection, hunting"

One final quote from America's Ballistician-in-Chief, Joe Biden, "Do you realize the bullet out of an AR-15 travels five times as rapidly as a bullet shot out of any other gun?" **GA**



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