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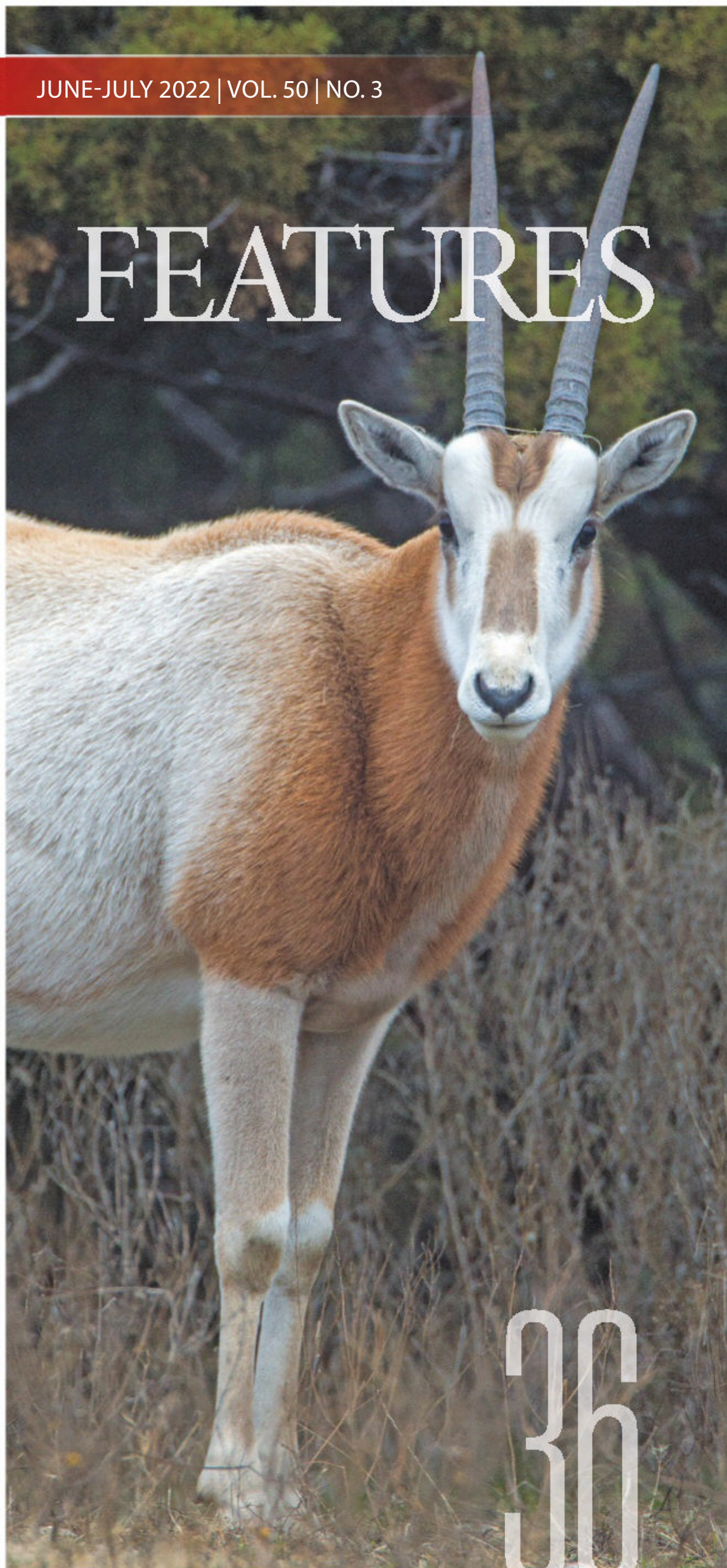
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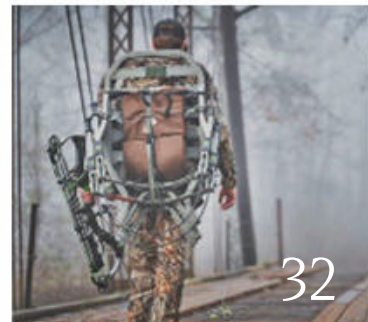
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“WHERE’S ALL THE AMMO?”

If I had a single round for every time I’ve been asked that in the last year and a half, I’d have at least a few boxes of my own ammo to send downrange this summer. It’s the question everyone’s been asking, and no matter how many times I give the standard answer, “They’re making it as fast as they can,” no one seems to believe me.

But, believe me, manufacturers *are* making ammunition as fast as they can. It’s in their best interest to do so. They’re in business to make money, and right now ammo is practically currency. But consumers are buying up all that ammunition as fast as the major manufacturers can deliver it. There does seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. I’m starting to see shelves filling up. While it might not be the exact calibers I need (Can I get just one box of .30-30, please?), at least there’s something to take up all that empty space.

A few weeks ago, I saw a lot of 9mm, some .223, and even a few boxes of .22 LR at my local gun store. Sure, the stuff

ain’t cheap, but it gives me hope that demand is easing up and soon we’ll be able to find a few boxes of our favorite cartridges. If we’re lucky, they’ll show up before hunting season opens. To that end, I’ve tasked my old friend and former reporter Joe Arterburn to sniff out a quick news update on what we can expect to see on store shelves in the coming months. You can find that exclusive on page 10.

That’s not the only ammo-related story you’ll find in this month’s issue, which we have dedicated to all things related to gunpowder and lead. On page 54, Executive Field Editor Craig Boddington answers a pair of pressing questions: “Are all these new cartridges really so hot?” and “Is my old favorite deer rifle still relevant?” While the short answer to both is in the affirmative, Boddington’s insight is worth considering, especially if you plan to purchase a new rifle anytime soon. One of our favorite new voices, Colton Heward provides a primer (pun intended) on bullet con-

struction (page 16), and our resident “Rear View” writer Jim Zumbo expounds on that age-old excuse for missing—a deflected bullet—to close out the issue.

Before signing off, I’d be remiss not to wish the happiest of 100th birthdays to Federal Ammunition. Since the first few issues of *Petersen’s Hunting*, Federal Ammunition has been a valued partner, but for many of our older staff members and readers, the relationship has lasted even longer. It’s impressive that any company makes it to the century mark, and Federal’s 100th anniversary proves the company is committed to providing hunters with the best ammunition possible.

Hopefully, you’ll find some of that fast, accurate, reliable Federal Premium—or whatever your preferred brand may be—on the shelf this coming season.

See you around the campfire,

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Will There Be Hunting Ammo This Season?

It's not an Ammunition Shortage, it's a Buying Surplus.

IF YOU'RE WONDERING if you'll be able to find hunting ammo for the coming fall seasons, the answer is yes...maybe. Probably. Well, it depends.

Let's put it this way. You're likely to find some ammo in standard popular calibers, but it might not be the exact brand or the specific bullet you want.

That's the confusing news. The good news is your odds of finding hunting ammo will improve if you're looking for what Hornady Communications Manager Seth Swerczek calls "staples": popular calibers like 7mm-08, .243 Win., .270, 6.5 Creedmoor, .308, and .30-06.

On the other hand, if you're looking for smaller calibers—like .204, .22 Hornet, even .22-250 or larger big-game cartridges lower on the popularity chart—you may find the pickings slim.

Whatever the case, manufacturers and retailers agree the best advice is to not wait until hunting season to shop. Start looking now and adjust your expectations about finding the exact brand and cartridge.

"We're telling people if you see a box of ammo in a caliber you need or like to hunt with, then you'd better grab it now," said J. Nesbitt of NexGen Outfitters. "It likely won't be there in October."

Matt Highby of Highby Outdoors agreed. "If you wait until September to start worrying about your rifle ammo for deer season, you're probably too late," he said.

And don't be afraid to put in a backorder at several places,

Swerczek said. Hornady, Federal Ammunition, and other manufacturers are running their factories 24/7 and are still unable to keep up with the demand for some calibers.

"When the market and ammo demand turned really fast in March of 2020, it caused two problems for us," said Jason Vanderbrink, president of Vista Outdoor's sporting division, which oversees Federal, Remington, CCI, Speer, and Hevi-Shot. "First, there was not labor available to make more ammunition and then it takes time to train people. You can't just go hire hundreds of people overnight, train them, and boom, you have more ammo. Second, commodity prices are up and availability down. Acquiring brass, lead, and plastics to build ammunition is a challenge.

"Consumers are buying ammo of any and all types, so this demand in the marketplace impacts hunting ammo as well."

It's not so much an ammo shortage but a "buying surplus," said Swerczek. "I say that because we have never produced more ammunition than we do today. We are head and shoulders above where we were two years ago from a volume, quality, and shipped quantity standpoint."

And what applies to center-fire (and rimfire) ammo also applies to shotshells. "We, and I'm sure all other manufacturers, are working as hard as ever to meet demand by investing in machines and manpower," said Jeff Barry of Kent Cartridge.



Global supply chain disruptions remain the primary factor. "Raw materials for loaded ammunition, such as steel, resin, lead, bismuth, nickel, and copper, are all in short supply with ammunition components being a sliver of the overall market for those materials," said Barry. Even so, Barry assured me Kent Cartridge was producing more ammunition than they ever have, with upland and waterfowl loads as the main focus.

Where hunting loads were 70 percent of production in a "normal" year, they now represent 90 percent, said Barry. Production is keying on 12 and 20 gauges. Sizes like 16, 28, and .410 will be produced in lesser amounts, so sub-gauge aficionados may have a more difficult time finding ammo.

On the positive side, popular personal-defense calibers—like .223 and .308 for common AR platforms and the ubiquitous 9mm—seem to be more readily available than so-called standard hunting calibers.

Disruptions on the global stage is prompting the latest surge in demand. "I think we were seeing some early signs of things lightening up before the Russia-Ukraine conflict," said Swerczek.

"It's the uncertainty if Russia is coming some day or if we are headed for World War III," added Highby. "We get guys that call and ask, 'What's your best price on 4,000 rounds? I don't care what they are, I just want my .223. I can tell it's not the mainstream guy. It feels like a different customer; not your everyday-in-the-store kind of guys. It's more like guys saying, 'I probably have a few boxes of bullets, but I can't defend myself, so I'm a little bit worried.'"

There is a consensus that interest in shooting has increased, for whatever reasons, and that is a positive for the industry. "It has been encouraging to see the increase in participation for hunting and shooting sports brought on by new and returning hunters and shooters," said Barry of the silver lining in the ammo-supply cloud. 📺

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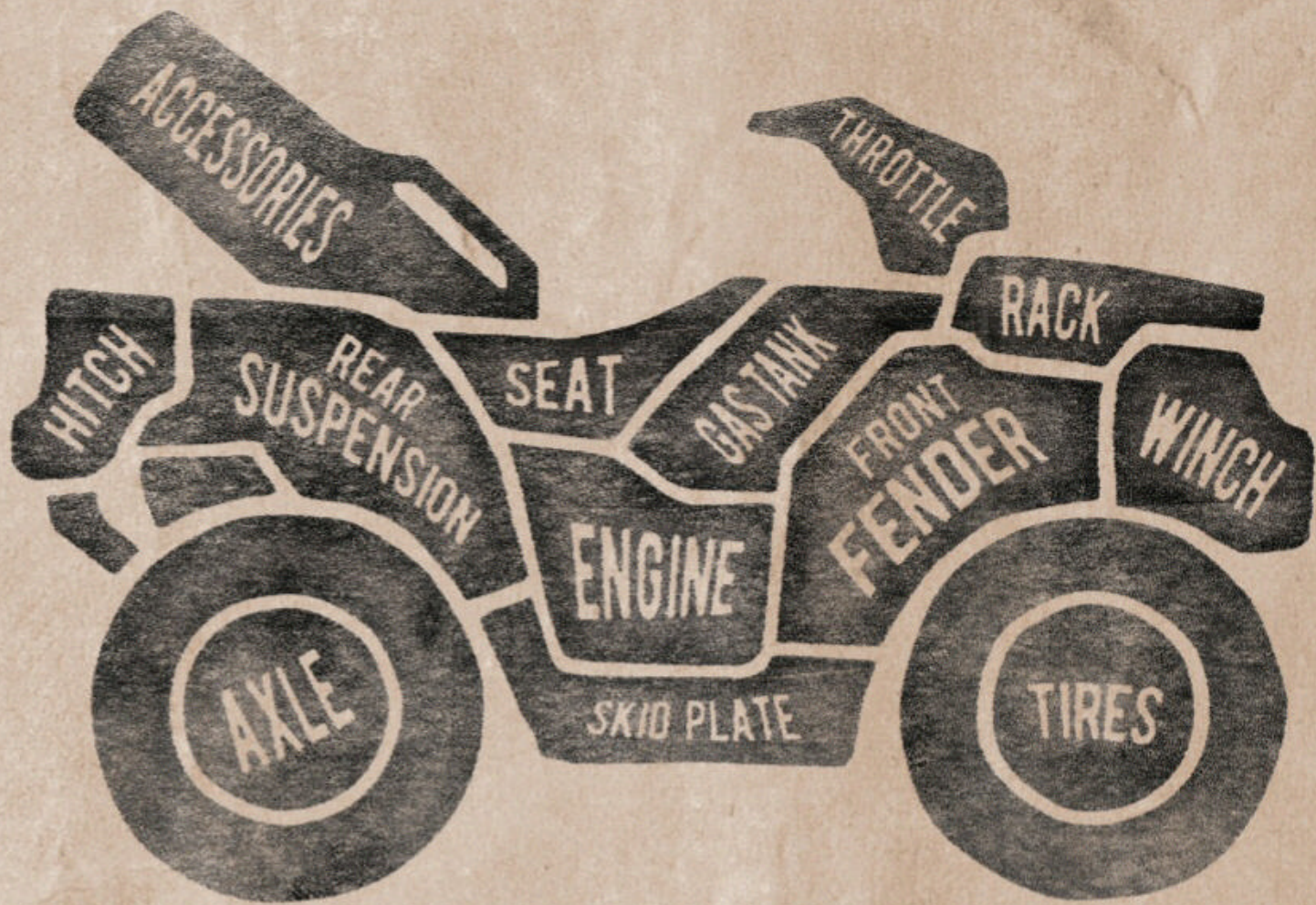
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Is there a more satisfying sound than lead impacting steel and echoing back across the landscape? Made even more rewarding when it's followed by the confirmation of a spotter watching over the shooter's shoulder.

"Impact."

Sure, it may seem like a small thing, but a hit on target is a big reward for shooters, whether they're participating in a long-range shooting competition or just ringing steel at a local range. Even when there isn't a championship on the line, that sound gives the person behind the trigger confirmation they did everything right. It's the culmination of countless hours practicing every little step of the process—the bal-

listic calculation, the wind call, the breath work, the trigger pull—all coming together to achieve maximum accuracy at extended range.

With the rise of the Precision Rifle Series, National Rifle League Hunter matches, and countless local shooting events around the country, there is no off-season for hunters looking to hone their skills. Each event is unique and each is designed to get shooters off the bench and into realistic hunting situations, employing a variety of rests in real-world conditions that hunters may encounter in the field. All this leads up to the real reward every hunter strives for: the perfect shot on a deer, elk, or other big-game animal this fall. —David Draper



A-1 MURRAY QUICK SET RIFLE SLING

There are very few pieces of kit more important to the rifle hunter than a good sling. The sling keeps your hands free and your rifle secure. This humble strip of leather, nylon, or canvas is often the only thing preventing your rifle and optics from smashing themselves into uselessness. I've used several brands over the years, and my go-to is the A-1 Quick Set Rifle Sling from Murray Custom Leather, which is handmade in Aledo, Texas.

Murray's A-1 slings are made from a single piece of vegetable-tanned saddle leather and use a steel friction slide to adjust the length. It's fast, secure, and idiot-proof. The A-1 is long enough to be used as a shooting aid but cinches up tight.

American-made GrovTec steel sling swivels are included with the sling, and they are equally durable. A single harness knot made from six strands of 1/4-inch latigo holds everything into place. The rough side of the sling provides grip that helps prevent it from sliding off your shoulder at an inopportune moment.

As good as the A-1 is, I've learned the hard way that even with a sling gravity still applies. Exhausted from several days of riding and hiking in search of elk, I tripped and fell face-first onto a rock slide in western Wyoming. My rifle—Murray sling and all—came flying off my shoulder with the scope making a direct impact on a rock. My rifle, scope, and sling survived.

CONSERVATION CORNER



MAINTAINING PUBLIC ACCESS

SCI JOINED 40 other conservation and hunting organizations—representing millions of sportsmen and women across the United States—in a letter to Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams demanding that hunting opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges be maintained. This letter responds to recent settlement discussions between plaintiff Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Service after CBD challenged the 2020 expansion of hunting and fishing opportunities on 2.3 million acres of federal public land.

Fighting for hunters, SCI and the other organizations have requested the

Service reject any settlement of pending litigation that would undermine or reduce the expansion of hunting and fishing opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges.

CBD erroneously claims that additional hunting and fishing on these public lands poses a threat to endangered species through potential lead poisoning from ammunition and tackle. But SCI and its partners, who have intervened in the pending litigation, have pointed out the weaknesses in CBD's complaint. For these reasons, the organizations strongly object to any settlement that would close hunting or fishing or ban the use of traditional ammunition or fishing tackle.

The letter reinforces the importance of hunting opportunities opened to assist in the management of overly abundant or invasive species. Additionally, the letter explains that hunting and fishing are essential

to protecting habitat and funding and maintaining the National Wildlife Refuge System. The crucial role of these activities is demonstrated by the Service's announcement earlier this month of a record \$1.5 billion in funding for wildlife and habitat conservation generated from excise taxes on hunting, shooting, and fishing equipment. In announcing this historic revenue, the Service confirmed that hunting and fishing are consistent with the President's "America the Beautiful" initiative.

This letter to Director Williams is part of SCI's larger efforts to secure a No-Net-Loss commitment from the Biden administration to protect hunting access around the world. A No-Net-Loss (or better) policy maintains or expands hunting and fishing access on public lands and is critical to protecting the freedom to hunt and the North American Model of Conservation. —*SCI Staff*



I'm not sure how many of these slings I own, but I have yet to wear one out. My oldest example has probably been with me for a dozen seasons, and it looks virtually new. It's been to Africa, Alaska, and a pile of spots in-between. Even my son, whose formidable destructive power rivals that of a Category 5 hurricane, can't seem to hurt it. —*Keith Wood*

BULLET BOARD

BULLET BASICS

Although the TSX's ancestral X-Bullet founded the monometal projectile movement, the Triple-Shock X (TSX) spotlighted here is the bullet that gave it momentum. It's made entirely of copper. It features a deep, skived hollow nose to optimize expansion and a mushroom shape. A boattail modestly boosts aerodynamics. Grooves around the bearing surface minimize friction and pressure. A benefit is reduced copper fouling. Even better, the TSX is spectacularly accurate. It is arguably the toughest expanding bullet design on the market, and this 160-grain 7mm version is splendid for elk, moose, and big black bears.

TESTING GROUND

Brent Neidig used the bullet shown to shoot a big Sitka blacktail buck on Kodiak Island. It's a land known for harsh weather, gnarly terrain, and huge bears—a good place to load your rifle with a deep-penetrating bullet. Shot presentation was a classic Texas heart shot—also calling for a penetrator.

Barnes 7mm 160-Grain TSX



FIELD PERFORMANCE

Shot distance was about 170 yards. The bullet impacted the left hindquarter, just left of the tail, and penetrated the buck fully, coming to rest in the right-side shoulder. It shattered the pelvis, perforated abdominal vitals, and destroyed both lungs. The buck lurched on impact and turned sideways, scrabbling at the frozen ground in an attempt to get away. A follow-up shoulder shot dropped him on the spot.

STATS

The recovered weight was 159.8 grains, or 99.9 percent of original. Expanded diameter averaged 0.61 inch, which is 2.14 times the original diameter. Penetration was estimated at more than 48 inches.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

Although it doesn't have the high BC modern shooters covet, the non-tipped Barnes TSX is one of the most consistently accurate bullets on the market. It's superb for heavy-bodied game inside 400 yards. In a good rifle, Federal Premium's factory load using it often shoots half-MOA groups. —*Joseph von Benedikt*



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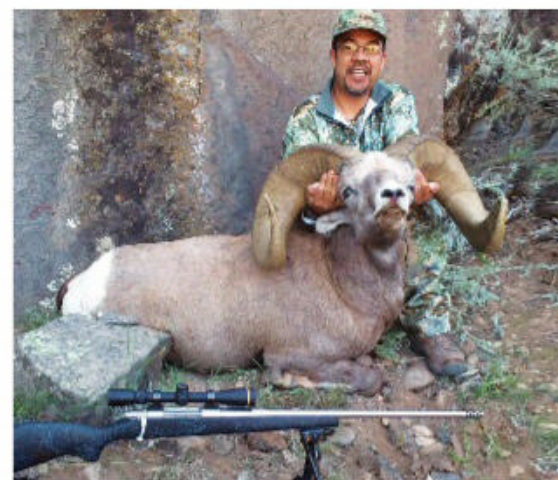
RACK ROOM

HUNTER: Joseph Santistevan

SPECIES: Bighorn Sheep

WHERE: New Mexico

RIFLE: Weatherby Vanguard/.300 Weatherby Magnum



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HUNTING BULLETS 101

Slowly but surely, we are starting to see an increase in the quantity of ammo readily available at our local sporting goods stores. But we aren't out of the deep water just yet. The ammo shortage has forced hunters to purchase what is available, instead of being able to take their favorite load afield. This unfortunate reality necessitates a simple understanding of the various bullet types and their capabilities. This was made crystal clear last fall when a deer hunter showed up to camp shooting an FMJ bullet. The unfortunate ending to this story is that this error was not figured out until after he shot a deer. As would be expected, the bullet penciled straight through and the buck was not recovered.

What follows is a simple breakdown of the different types of bullets you might encounter at the ammo counter and the applications and limitations of each.—*Colton Heward*

1 FULL METAL JACKET

Full metal jacket (FMJ) bullets are a cheap option for plinking at the range but rarely, if ever, should be used for hunting purposes. FMJ projectiles are not designed to expand and so subsequently punch straight through the intended target. You could get away with shooting squirrels and other small vermin, but leave the FMJs home for anything bigger than a coon.



2 CUP & CORE

A cup-and-core bullet is an encompassing family of projectiles with a wide range of applications. The basics of this versatile bullet include a copper jacket encasing a core of lead. Since its introduction in the late 1800s, bullet manufacturers have tinkered with the thickness of the jacket and shape of the bullet to produce cup-and-core bullets that perform in a variety of hunting scenarios. These include everything from fragmenting, ballistic-type varmint bullets, such as Hornady's V-Max, to elk- and moose-capable meat missiles, such as the Nosler Partition and the Remington Core-Lokt.



3 BONDED

Bonded bullets, often referred to as controlled-expansion bullets, were designed to deliver the terminal performance of the traditional cup-and-core design while delivering the deep-penetrating ability that they often lacked. Bonded bullets appear similar in design but differentiate themselves by bonding the lead core to the copper jacket. The result is a slower, controlled bullet expansion and subsequent deeper penetration. Popular bonded bullets include the Federal Terminal Ascent, the Nosler AccuBond, and the Swift A-Frame. With the appropriate cartridge and bullet size, these projectiles are built to take on everything from dainty antelope on up to the giant Yukon moose.



4 MONOLITHIC

The idea behind a solid copper or monolithic bullet was to create a projectile purposely built to break bone and punch through dense muscle while still creating a sizeable wound channel. Since their introduction, monolithic projectiles have gained a lot of popularity for delivering devastating terminal performance on the biggest mammals around the world. Besides their proven terminal-performance track record, a solid copper bullet also offers hunters a non-toxic bullet alternative. Some of the best monolithic projectiles include the new Hornady CX, the Barnes TSX, the Winchester Extreme Point, and the Nosler E-Tip.





BUILT FOR: THE HUNT

Built. It's a simple word, but it implies that you've personalized your rifle for a specific need. Aero Precision M5 Receivers and ATLAS Handguards create a lightweight, dependable platform that's ready to handle anything your hunt can throw at it.

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OUT
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Here Comes The Boom

— THE EDITORS

Bushnell is entering the world of fast-handling riflescopes with the new **Trophy Quick Acquisition** 1-6x24 scope. It's an excellent choice for close-quarters work or for dangerous-game hunters. With a true one-power magnification, users can easily and quickly find their target in the optic, while the higher power zooms allow for accurate shots at longer distances. The reticle features a half-MOA, illuminated-dot for even faster target acquisition in low-light situations. \$200; bushnell.com



An update of the original and popular Primos Trigger Stick, the **Apex Tripod** features carbon-fiber-wrapped aluminum legs for lightweight durability—the tripod can hold up to 50 pounds while weighing a manageable seven pounds. The Apex Clamp head allows any rifle to be locked into position. The tripod legs extend with the squeeze of the trigger, and each leg adjusts independently. It provides a stable platform for making uncomfortable angles or difficult shots more accurate. **\$500; primos.com**



Everyone needs a good .22 in their arsenal, whether it's for teaching kids, hunting small game, or just practicing your trigger pull with ammo that won't break the bank. The Winchester **Xpert-22** weighs in at 4.5 pounds, so it's light in your hands. The precision steel receiver is drilled and tapped to add optics and is attached to a precision button-rifled barrel. The 10-round magazine features an ambidextrous release, and the rifle also accepts aftermarket 10/22 magazines. **\$320; winchesterguns.com**



Sub-gauge is still all the rage, and Benelli has gotten on board with a 28-bore version of the ever-popular **Super Black Eagle 3**. The proven inertia action is built to accommodate both 2¾- and 3-inch shells, making the SBE3 an ideal shotgun for small-water duck hunting and fast-swinging upland hunts. Crio-treated barrels are available in both 26- and 28-inch lengths. Offered in black and camo stocks. **\$1,799–\$1,899; benelliusa.com**



If you're looking to reach out and touch some fast-flying doves on public land this season, Hevi-Shot has the perfect shell for your day afield. Their new **Hevi-Hammer Dove** shotshells are designed specifically for hunters looking to target small game and speeding birds. The shells are non-toxic and made with a 15-percent-higher-density bismuth layered over steel. The 3-inch 12- and 20-gauge models are available loaded with No. 7 shot. **\$24–\$32; hevishot.com**

Howa Carbon Stalker

A lightweight hunting rifle that delivers superior accuracy.



Howa's Carbon Stalker at the range on sight-in day. This lightweight hunting rifle delivers surprising accuracy.

For hunters, a good rifle is worth its weight in gold. In the case of Howa's Carbon Stalker, this rifle's weight should be measured in platinum. Starting at a weight of four pounds, ten ounces, for mini-action models, this rifle is a backcountry hunter's dream. It's a feather on your pack and will put your shot in the sweet spot at the moment of truth.

I recently tested the Carbon Stalker chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, one of three short-action offerings for the platform. It may be considered cheating to test the rifle in such a soft-shooting, inherently accurate chambering, but I was impressed nonetheless by its performance.

First impressions of the rifle were good. It's pleasing to the eye due to its sleek design, but I would prefer a solid color over the Kryptek Altitude camo. The rifle is so light that picking it up makes you think it's made of a lightweight polymer you'd find on a kid's airsoft gun rather than a tack-driving hunting rifle.

The textured finish on the stock is grippy and offered secure handling, which is something I appreciate in a hunting rifle.

With the standard swivel sling studs, this rifle would carry comfortably on a hunt, and it will accommodate a wide variety of bipods.

The model I tested came with a Picatinny rail for scope mounting, but you can also mount your scope directly to the tried-and-true Howa 1500 action, which is drilled and tapped to receive scope mounts. A bonus of the 1500 action: Unlike other push-feed, dual-lug actions, it features a three-position safety that allows you to cycle the bolt while keeping the gun on safe. As tested, this rifle weighed six pounds, two ounces, without an optic. Once I mounted the Vortex Razor LHT 3-15x50 scope, the weight jumped to eight pounds.

BUILT FOR ACCURACY

There are a few factors that affect the accuracy of a rifle. First is a quality trigger. The Carbon Stalker comes standard with

the Howa Actuator Controlled Trigger (H.A.C.T.) two-stage trigger that is as reliable as they come. Many people, especially those in the world of precision shooting, don't like a two-stage trigger pull. In that setting, I tend to agree, but on a hunting rifle, having to pull up slack first doesn't bug me at all.

The H.A.C.T. allows the user to get a comfortable position on the trigger without fear of it going off. The slack at the beginning of the pull is substantial, but it settles in nicely. Once you have the trigger set, a solid 2.5-pound pull sets the gun off. It's crisp and precise. Personally, I like using a single-stage trigger more, but after spending time on the range with the Carbon Stalker, it grew on me.

Another great effect on accuracy is recoil. Hard-recoiling guns can create a flinch in the shooter, causing rounds to go haywire and group inconsistently. Because the Carbon Stalker was a lightweight hunting rifle, I expected the recoil to be significant, even though it was chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor. My expectation was correct.

At the shot, this lightweight rifle wants to jump off the bench if you don't have a solid hold, but with the Limb-Saver butt pad, the recoil on the shoulder was comfortable. Furthermore, the Carbon Stalker is threaded to accommodate a muzzle brake or a suppressor—either of which will mitigate recoil, making this gun more than pleasant to shoot.

The stock of your rifle needs to fit appropriately and comfortably for you to execute an accurate shot. Lightweight hunting rifles most always lack adjustable combs or adjustable length of pull, so it's important to find one that allows you a comfortable cheek weld and shoulder position—if you can't get comfortable on the range, it won't get better in the backcountry. This rifle doesn't feature an adjustable comb or length of pull, but the stock design is comfortable and should fit a wide range of shooters. It's sleek and has a low comb, so mount your scope low to the barrel to ensure you don't have to lift your head to take a shot.

The last, but most important, component for accuracy is the barrel. Howa's 1500 action is mated to a cold-hammer-forged barrel, and over the years those barrels have proven their ability for accurate and consistent shots. The Carbon

Bad to the Bone

Full tang stainless steel blade with natural bone handle —now **ONLY \$79!**

If you're on the hunt for a knife that combines impeccable craftsmanship with a sense of wonder, the **\$79 Huntsman Blade** is the trophy you're looking for.

The blade is full tang, meaning it doesn't stop at the handle but extends to the length of the grip for the ultimate in strength. The blade is made from 420 surgical steel, famed for its sharpness and its resistance to corrosion.

The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features **decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.**

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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"The feel of this knife is unbelievable... this is an incredibly fine instrument."

— H., Arvada, CO



Rating of A+



The Carbon Stalker's forend settles securely into sandbags, and would also do so when shooting from a pack or other field-expedient rest.

HOWA CARBON STALKER

Type: Bolt-action repeating rifle
Caliber: 6.5 Creedmoor (tested)
Magazine Capacity: 4+1
Barrel: 21.25-in., cold hammer forged
Overall length: 41.875 in.
Weight: 6 lbs., 2 oz.
Stock: Stocky's Custom Carbon Fiber
Sights: None; drilled and tapped for scope
Trigger: H.A.C.T. two stage
Price: \$1,119
Website: howausa.com



The author tested the rifle with Hornady's 140-grain ELD Match loads, a similar round to the 143-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter.

Stalker, as tested, had a 21.25-inch barrel that holds true to the legacy. The barrel on this rifle is shorter than others, but weight had to be sacrificed someplace to the hit lightweight category.

ON THE RANGE


I consider myself a solid minute-of-deer shooter, as compared to my colleagues who are proficient shooters and can make any rifle shoot quarter-sized groups. The advertised sub-MOA accuracy that many rifles carry is usually right at my shooting ability.

After a quick bore sight to ensure my impacts would be on paper, a few shots at 50 yards gave me great confidence in the accuracy of the gun. Once pushed out to 100 yards—my desired sight-in range—both the Howa and the Vortex functioned flawlessly. Tight groups and solid adjustments made for a quick zero.

While testing, I used Hornady's 140-grain ELD Match ammunition. It's a great round to test accuracy and flies like the 143-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter, which is my go-to round for

hunting with a 6.5. The ELD Match claims a muzzle velocity of 2,710 fps, as measured with a MagnetoSpeed chronograph from a 24-inch barrel. Firing eight shots through the shorter, 21.25-inch barrel, the average was 2,614 fps—a difference that was expected from a barrel that was three inches shorter. This speed difference will not be an issue for most hunters, but it will influence the bullet's efficacy at longer ranges.

The Carbon Stalker carries that sub-MOA guarantee for accuracy, and it sure did meet that requirement. Every shot that rang out landed near the shot before it, though I never saw any same-hole shots. With my last three-shot group, after adjusting my zero when the wind died, I landed three shots 0.75 inch apart in the bullseye.

For the price, Howa's Carbon Stalker delivers a quality that any hunter should be proud to carry in the hills. With caliber options ranging from the mini-action 6mm ARC all the way up to .300 Win. Mag., this rifle will perform in the most rugged country and land your bullet on its mark. 

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Pros & Cons Of Hunting With A Suppressor

Are the benefits of hunting with a silencer worth the added length and weight, let alone navigating the red tape to get one?

When opportunities occur in brief seconds, with no time to apply hearing protection, a suppressor protects the hunter's ears from damage.



As those that have them say, “Hunting without a suppressor is uncivilized.” Suppressors are perhaps the trendiest item on the current “cool gear” roster. Good ones have undeniable advantages. But there are some downsides, too. Whether the pros outweigh the cons depends on your situation and the type of hunting you do.

Let’s go against popular opinion and first examine the disadvantages of suppressors as a hunting tool. We’ll then come full circle and look at the advantages of suppressors as hunting tools. Finally, we’ll discuss various scenarios in which suppressors are either a plus or a minus.

Unfortunately, the first thing a potential suppressor owner encounters is cost. *A lot* of cost. Decent suppressors rated for centerfire hunting cartridges run from about \$600 up to \$1,700.

That's not including the \$200 tax stamp Uncle Sam charges for processing your application.

Yep, you can buy a quite-nice, new hunting rifle for the same price as a suppressor.

Next, new purchasers are figuratively clobbered with a mountain of red tape. Hoops that must be jumped through include filling out a Form 4 application for the ATF, creating a suppressor trust so your spouse and kids can possess the silencer, having fingerprints taken, and supplying passport-type photos.

Candidly, it's a proverbial pain in the hindquarters.

Several companies have services that walk you through the process and make it much easier than trying to navigate the process on your own. My favorite of these is Silencer Central, which creates a free suppressor trust for you if you purchase through them. Plus, they will mail you fingerprint cards and walk you through using an app to take and submit your own passport-type photos. They'll also submit your paperwork for you, and when it's approved, they ship your suppressor directly to your home.

Sound extraordinary? It is. Silencer Central is the only company in the country that possesses the legal variances necessary to perform this service.

Finally, one hurdle remains. It takes time for the ATF to process your application. Plan on six months to a year before you get your suppressor. Ouch.

It's worth noting that the ATF recently implemented a new E-Filing option. It eliminates a lot of delay-causing mistakes in paperwork and streamlines the process considerably. Once the current vast load of paper applications is processed, turnaround time should be much faster.

And there you have it. Many of the cons to suppressor ownership are front loaded. With that in mind, there's no time like the present. If you covet a suppressor, get your E-Form application started.

REASONS TO NOT USE A SUPPRESSOR IN THE FIELD

The three main knocks against suppressors are length, weight and awkwardness. *Ugh.*

Those characteristics are exactly the opposite of what a great hunting rifle should be: manageable, responsive, light in the hand, and beautifully balanced.



TOP:

Suppressors are right at home in wild country, as shown here on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

BOTTOM:

Even for high-altitude mountain hunts, a suppressor can be an asset. This Gunwerks ClymR is fitted with the company's 6IX suppressor - excellent medicine for high-alpine bighorns.

Suppressors add length to your rifle barrel. That's the primary reason they can be a pain to pack afield. If you hunt on foot through brushy country, hanging an extra six to nine inches on the end of your shootin' iron makes it unwieldy. That length makes it likely to snag on oak brush or alders. It unbalances it on your shoulder, so your slung rifle is prone to tipping backward and sliding around under your armpit.

Weight, too, is a consideration. The best suppressors for hunting are compact (minimizing that length issue just



Management hunters trimming populations and collecting meat shoot a lot and so benefit greatly from a good suppressor.

addressed) and weigh less than 12 ounces. Still, that's three-quarters of a pound hung on the far end of the fulcrum that is your rifle barrel. And if you have one of the big "super-effective" suppressors? It might be nine inches long and weigh more than a pound.

If you're a mountain hunter who regularly hunts near-technical terrain—or a big-game guide that must occasionally dig a wounded grizzly out of a thicket—the added length and weight of a suppressor may be intolerable.

For everyone else? Read on. I suspect you'll find that packing a little extra length and weight is a worthwhile cost for the advantages of hunting with a suppressor.

REASONS TO USE A SUPPRESSOR IN THE FIELD

Now we come to the fun part. Hearing protection. Increased accuracy. Less recoil. No muzzle blast. Better communication. Less spooked game. Let's unpack these characteristics of a suppressor.

First and foremost is the fact that a suppressor reduces the sound of a shot to hearing-safe levels. No, it is not entirely quiet. Nor does a suppressed shot make an electronic sound like the ones you hear in the movies. When the bullet exits the muzzle, it's traveling faster than the speed of sound, so it makes a sonic crack. It sounds about like a mild .22 cartridge being fired.

It's hearing safe. That's the pertinent point. It's awesome for you, and even better for those around you. Hunting partners' ears don't get blasted. Kids can shoot at game without earplugs or muffs. (I do screw in foam plugs when practicing because that sonic crack is still sharp on my scarred eardrums.)

Without plugged ears, it's much easier to communicate clearly, in whispers. If your child needs a little coaching or encouragement, have at it. If your hunting partner spots your impact, he can tell you without whisper-shouting.

Also cool: Since that sonic crack more or less accompanies the bullet downrange to and past your game, from where they're

standing it seems to come from all around. Often, animals don't pinpoint the source of the danger and so don't take off. It often makes follow-up shots much easier and more ethical.

How about accuracy? Does hanging a suppressor on the end of your barrel affect its ability to shoot well? The answer is yes. In about eight out of 10 rifles, I see an increase in accuracy when a suppressor is attached. Experts attribute this to several potential influences.

Simplest explanation: The weight on the end of the barrel reduces vibration and barrel oscillation, so groups tighten.

Less intuitive: As a bullet exits the muzzle, the suppressor contains most of the "ejecta," which are burning particulates jetting out and around the bullet at between 5,000 and 8,000 fps.

With fewer particulates pelting the bullet's base at launch time, it's more accurate.

Shooter accuracy benefits, too, thanks to reduced recoil. Depending on the specific suppressor and the cartridge your rifle is chambered for, kick is reduced 25 to 50 percent.

There are muzzle brakes that reduce recoil even more than that. However, they are accompanied by horrendous amounts of blast. I was once told by a company representative that "adequate hearing protection doesn't exist" for a product they had just introduced. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

On the flip side, suppressors reduce recoil and blast. That, my friends, is a beautiful thing. I once interviewed a top-ranked PRS competitor that prefers using a suppressor on his competition rifle, even though it's not quite as effective at reducing recoil as a brake would be. "Why do you prefer it?" I inquired.

"In PRS, you often shoot next to barricades: walls or 55-gallon steel drums," he said. "I don't like the reflected blast I get when using a brake. With a suppressor? There's no reflected blast. None."

On a related note, the single most challenging, distracting rifle I've ever tested was a lightweight .300 PRC fit with a very effective muzzle brake. Recoil wasn't bad. Blast shook me to my toenails every time I fired it. There is a crossover point where extreme blast becomes as bad or worse than stout recoil.

Suppressors eliminate blast. Gone.

A hunting rifle fit with a suppressor is safe on your ears. Communication with hunting partners is easy. Game is less spooked by shots. Accuracy increases, recoil decreases. And there's no muzzle blast. Compelling reasons to hunt with a suppressor, right?

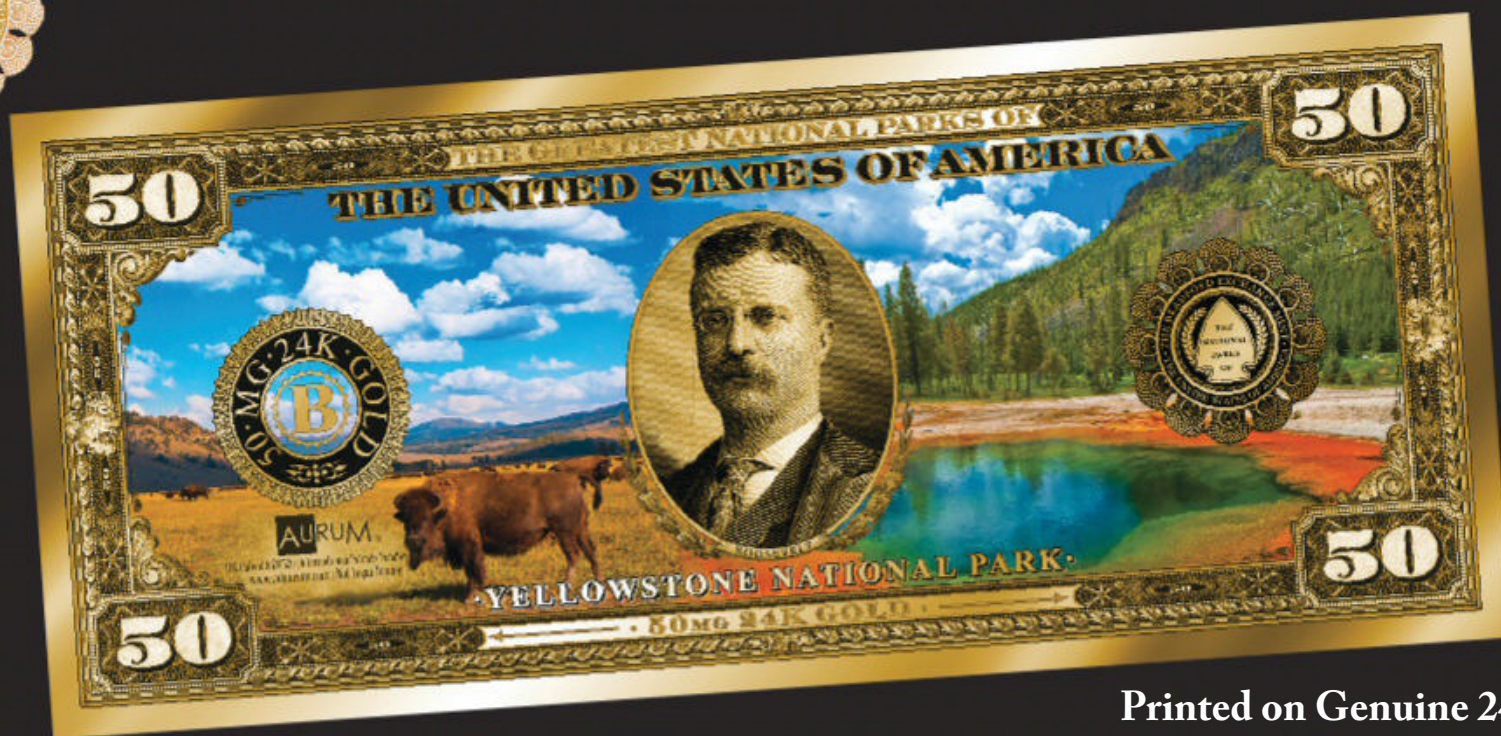
When you finally draw that mountain goat tag, you may want to remove your suppressor from your favorite lightweight hunting rifle. Until then, there's no good reason that every serious hunter should not have one and use it.

Jump through the hoops. Complete the application, fork over the funds, and wait the processing time. Once your suppressor is in hand, you'll wonder why the heck you didn't make the move long ago.

In short, get civilized. 🇺🇸

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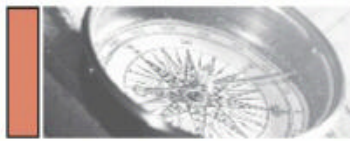
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Have Gun. Will Travel.

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Boddington typically travels with duffel and gun case, using a backpack as carry-on. The gun case must be sturdy, and all hasps must be fitted with locks to pass TSA requirements.

make sure all the carriers on your itinerary accept firearms as checked baggage and have baggage transfer agreements with each other. Many carriers require advance notice, especially when your travel is international.

Next, it all starts with a good, solid hard case. We used to argue polymer versus metal, but I don't think it really matters. They all get beat up, so I've gone through many over the years. These days, I use mostly polymer cases from Pelican and Plano, with lots of foam padding to cushion the firearms. Make sure all the hasps and hinges work and the case closes securely. Both the airlines and TSA can—and will—reject a case that doesn't close tightly. New rule: All lock holes must be filled with locks. My cases use four, so I use four identical locks with like key or combination. "TSA approved" locks are recommended.

Within the United States, and most commonly everywhere, firearms are checked separately inside the case, unloaded, with no ammunition in the gun

Many of us don't travel outside our home state to hunt, but when it comes time for that hunt of a lifetime, we may have to check our guns with an airline that's not always firearm-friendly. Honestly, traveling with a gun is not a big deal, but if you haven't done it, it is a bit daunting. Also, it's easier if you know the rules because a lot of ticket agents don't.

First, always check with the airline or airlines before you book a ticket. Most carriers accept sporting firearms as checked baggage, but a few domestic and some international carriers do not. The only time I've had serious problems was in transferring from one carrier to another. You need to

case (more on ammo later). Ideally, the firearm is disassembled. Bolt actions are the easiest; just remove the bolt and put it to the side in the case. I wrap my bolt in a bandanna or put it in a sock. With ARs, the bolt assembly can be similarly removed. Break-open firearms are also easy; with doubles (shotguns and rifles) I pack barrels and actions separately in the case, wrapping and padding as needed.

Disassembled inside the case is not exactly a rule within the United States. However, it's a good idea and is comforting to the ticket agent, who will make a visual inspection but may not know what he or she is looking at.

Other action types—such as many single shots, lever actions, and some semiautos—are more difficult. On lever



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actions, I thread cable gun locks down through the action, with the lever open. Recently, I've added cable locks on bolt actions. I want my firearms to be visually safe, and I want the ticket agent and the TSA folks to be happy. Some actions, such as falling-block single shots, are hard to visually secure. Here, a trigger lock is probably the best answer, but I always keep a few zip ties under the foam padding in my gun case. *Petersen's Hunting* Editor David Draper related using a zip tie on a Browning BLR to clear Canadian security, and I use zip ties on Ruger No. 1s, secured so that the lever cannot be closed. Remember, when it comes to airline security, it's not always about logic; it's about the appearance of safety.



Zip ties offer a "field expedient" option for securing firearms that defy disassembly. On a Ruger No. 1, a zip tie precludes the lever from closing, expediting a visual safety inspection.

case can be one of them, but if you're allowed zero or one bag, you will pay extra for the gun case, cost varying with the airline. Common in Europe and now instituted by South African Airlines, you will pay extra for a gun case. I don't like it, but special handling is required, so I don't think the charge is unfair.

PAPERWORK

Assuming your firearms are legal at points of origin and destination, there isn't much else within the United States except that local laws must be adhered to. For instance, it's unwise to transit any New York City airport with handguns or even with long guns, and the Port Authority will inspect firearms in checked baggage. Hawaii also has special rules.

International travel is a different deal. When you check in with firearms, the airline ticket agent is obligated to ensure that you can legally complete your route and enter your country of destination. Popular destinations such as Argentina, Canada, and South Africa are simple. Their own customs websites clearly state that temporary permits can be issued upon arrival (or you can secure them in advance).

Most countries, however, require some type of temporary permit or police clearance in advance. Typically, it starts with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Form 4457, a small piece of paper used to record valuable items you are taking abroad—jewelry, cameras, firearms—and is obtainable free at any CBP office. The agency keeps no record of this document, but it serves two important purposes. First, it allows you to bring these items back into the United States without paying duty. Second, since we do not have firearms "registration," the 4457 serves as a "U.S. gun permit" literally throughout the world for obtaining temporary permits.

Historically, Form 4457 was valid as long as you owned the firearm. More recently, unfortunately, most have an expiration date, so you must be sure yours is current. South Africa requires the 4457 to be dated within the year, so you may need a new one. In some countries the process is simple; in others it's more complex. For foreign travel with firearms, especially if you're new to the game, I strongly recommend using a travel agent that is "gun savvy." In any case, your outfitter should assist you. If a temporary permit is required in advance, have it with you when you check in.



Eleven pounds is the international limit, so if in doubt, weigh your ammo. Three boxes each of .375 Ruger and .300 Winchester Magnum weigh just a bit over 10 pounds and is plenty of ammo for any hunt.

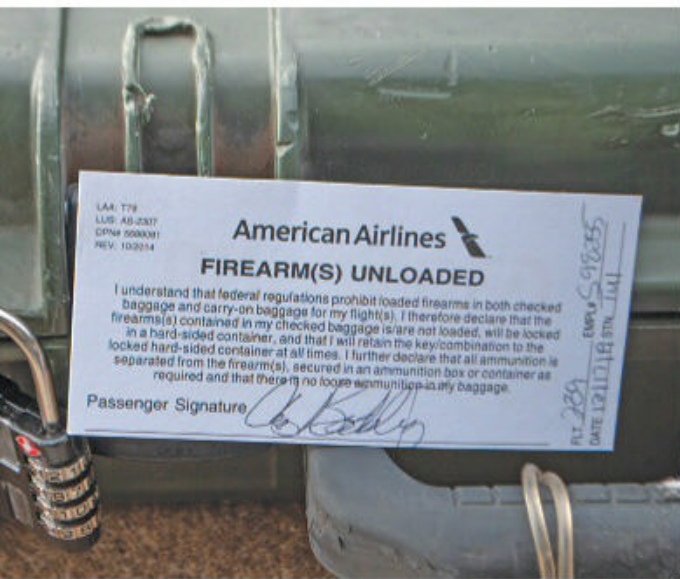
AMMO

The rules and limits are simple, and pretty much worldwide: up to five kilograms (11 pounds) in the original factory containers. This may not be enough ammo for competitive events (the option there is to ship ahead), but it's plenty for any hunt. Three boxes of .375 ammo and three boxes of .300 magnum ammo weigh just over 10 pounds. In the United States, ammo goes in a checked bag that is separate from the firearm.

Elsewhere in the world, ammo is more commonly checked separately in its own locked hard case. For years I used a small plastic tackle box, but recently I've used a Plano "marine box" shaped like a military ammo can with a lockable hasp. Mine is blaze orange because I think it's less likely to go unnoticed and be left behind. In the United States, I start with my ammo inside the box, inside my duffel unlocked, but with locks in the box. This way, if somebody insists ammo be checked separately, I can whisk it out of the duffel and lock it.

COSTS

Baggage allowances have shrunk and are now zero with some airlines. Within the United States your gun case is regular checked baggage, although you may need to check it through the "oversize" counter. If you're allowed two bags, your gun



The passenger must certify the firearms are unloaded. Every airline has a slightly different form, and once completed, the form goes inside the case. The case is then locked—with a lock in each lock hole.

CHECK-IN PROCEDURE

Be nice, smile a lot, and pretend you know what you're doing. You are required to declare firearms. When I walk up to the counter, I say, "I have two unloaded sporting firearms in this hard case. I also have ammunition in this checked bag, less than five kilograms, in the original factory containers."

Sign the airline-provided form certifying the guns are unloaded and pop it in the case. In many situations that's it! In some airports a ticket agent will accompany you to TSA. In other airports they will put the bags on the belt, and you wait nearby for 15 minutes or so. They will call you if TSA needs your help in opening the case for inspection.

Two last thoughts. Allow extra time for check-in and do not schedule close connections: at least one hour domestic; no less than two hours international. Murphy's Law applies even more so when traveling with guns.

At your final destination, delivery of gun cases is schizophrenically inconsistent. Most common: They come through "oversize baggage." Sometimes they are delivered to the baggage office or direct to the airport police. And sometimes they come banging down the carousel. Keep your paperwork handy and put copies of your ID, itinerary, and any needed permits inside your gun case. Honest, it's not such a big deal—especially after you've done it a few dozen times! ®



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From On High

A climbing stand remains the best mobile setup for most bowhunters



We had already hung a perfectly good ladder stand in the pasture corner, and hunting it would've been a hell of a lot easier than fiddling with a climbing stand in the dark. But it probably would've been a waste of time, too. It was early December. The leaves were gone. And the deer had been shot at for three months. I figured my chances of getting drawn were better if I hunted from the nosebleed section of the canopy, so I scaled 30 feet up a nearby poplar.

I'd gotten pictures of a tight, heavy 8-pointer with a palmated beam the previous morning. He ambled into view an hour after daybreak as if he'd reviewed the script the evening before. I drew as he closed the distance. At 15 yards he stopped to stare at the ladder stand. He was facing me almost head-on, so I held at the crease of his neck and shoulder and let fly. The arrow buried to the fletching, and the buck crashed 20 yards away.

A climbing stand allows hunters to be mobile, change spots with ease, and hunt new stands in minutes.

If I had hunted the ladder stand, I don't think I'd have killed that buck. Being mobile is a hot topic in deer hunting right now—and for good reason. Public-land hunting—where permanent stands frequently aren't allowed—is also a hot topic. Besides that, the ability to act on recent scouting intel and set up quickly is one of the best ways to shoot a deer on public or private land, particularly when hunting feeding patterns early or late in the season.

So what's the best way to be mobile? Tree saddles and ultralight hang-on stands are certainly trendy and work well if you're comfortable using them. But for most bowhunters, I still say a climbing stand is the more practical choice. I've been using the same Summit Open Shot for more than a decade. I replaced the cables on it once, but otherwise, it's just as it arrived in the box. When I need to set up somewhere new in a hurry, it works.



Climbing stands require a particular type of tree. A straight trunk and few limbs are a necessity to be able to climb and place the stand safely.

Some say climbers are too heavy and noisy, but that's just not true. People are noisy. Metal clanks and pings are as easy to make against a climbing stick as a climbing stand. Scaling a tree with a climbing stand does indeed make sound—but one that's not unlike a buck rubbing its antlers. I've "rattled in" enough deer with a climbing stand to suspect that it's actually a pretty natural noise. I'm not saying it's any sort of advantage, but it's not something that causes me to lose sleep.

As for weight, my Open Shot—or a similar model like the Lone Wolf Assault climber—weighs about 15 pounds. The Lone Wolf Custom Gear D'Acquisto 2.0, a premium, ultralight hang-on with a comparably sized platform, plus four climbing sticks and straps, weighs a little over 21 pounds.

Speed counts, too. I hang 20 or more lock-ons with portable sticks each year and can do it quickly, sometimes in a single trip up the tree. But I can scale 20 feet in a climber in about half the time. Most hunters using a saddle or hang-on are also limited in hunting height by the number of climbing sticks they're willing to carry. (And, yes, I have seen the single-stick method used by some saddle hunters; it's cool, but also looks a little slow—and do not drop the stick.) With a climber, you can scurry up and hunt among the hoot owls if you so wish.

Time on the stand kills deer, and you can't discount the importance of comfort. Tiny stands are handy, but bigger platforms and cushioned seats are more comfortable. That's the facts. I haven't hunted out of a saddle enough to say definitively that a climber is more comfortable, but I know what my own two eyes seem to tell me.

With all that in mind, climbers are also comparatively cheap. For a Tethrd tree saddle, plus a platform and set of four Millennium M250 aluminum sticks, you're looking at an out-the-door price of \$734. For the Lone Wolf Custom Gear stand I mentioned and a matching set of four sticks, you're looking at \$1,049. Meanwhile, the Summit Open Shot is going for \$340, and the Lone Wolf Assault is \$400.

Hell, that alone is enough to convince the crowd of cheapskates I pal around with.



Safety must be a priority. Before you start climbing, make sure to have your safety harness attached properly to the tree.

PICKING TREES

Really, a climbing stand's only drawback is that you need a fairly straight and clean tree trunk to climb, and in some areas of the country—Texas, Oklahoma, and the Western Plains come to mind—such trees are tough to find. But in most of the Midwest and, especially, throughout the East, there's no shortage of climbable timber. In Kentucky and Tennessee, where I hunt the most, I don't remember ever abandoning a hunting spot for lack of a suitable tree.

Ideal trees are about 16 inches in diameter, but anything from 13 to 25 inches, give or take, will work. Oaks, pines, poplars, and pignut hickories are good ones, since they grow tall and straight, and their rough bark provides a secure bite for the stand. I've scaled and killed deer from sycamore and

beech trees, too, but their slick bark (especially that of the sycamore) makes it difficult for the stand to bite and hold the tree. Hunt from them cautiously. Obviously, you need a trunk that's unencumbered by large limbs, but you can take care of small ones with a handsaw as you climb.

Look for the tree that's unnoticed; for example, the most inconspicuous trunk in a group of four. Concealing foliage nearby also helps. Early in the season, I love to sit just above a leafy sapling that obscures a deer's upward view. With a climber, you can move the platform up, down, or around the tree to find the best shooting lanes.

Most climbing stands have two parts: the hand climber/seat and the standing platform. They should be tethered together at all times. When I put my stand on a tree, I like to put the platform on a little tight, so that it's pointed upwards at a 15- to 20-degree angle. Tree trunks get narrower as you




The author shot this Tennessee 8-pointer in early December after scaling 30 feet up a barren poplar tree.

ascend, and the idea is for the platform to level out when you settle in to hunt (some newer stands have built-in leveling systems). It goes without saying to wear a safety harness. I put my tether belt around the tree and slide it up as I climb and never allow it to get lower than eye level.

Bring two pull-up ropes—one for your bow or rifle and one for your pack—and stick two gear hangers in your pockets. Climb slowly, stay quiet, and get settled before pulling your gear into the tree. Be sure the seat is secured against the tree—most

climbers come with a buckle strap to cinch it down—so that you don't bump it and cause it to fall when standing for a shot. Then sit there all day, if you have the patience.

It's no doubt quieter and more convenient just to sneak into a permanent stand. But a climbing stand has other perks, too. I particularly enjoy the ritual of climbing back down to take up a blood trail. 



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THE OTHER ORX

KEVIN E. STEELE

HUNTING FREE-RANGE
SCIMITARS IN BIG
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DUST DEVILS

danced on the horizon, their vortices rising like spirits toward the cornflower-blue Texas sky. Pulling my binoculars down from my gritty eyes, I scanned the in-between distance, hoping to spot the tell-tale white dots that would confirm the presence of our prey: the scimitar oryx. I was two days into a hunt for a species that I had never hunted before, on an invitation from an old friend and colleague, Paul Pluff from Ruger.

I knew that transplanted, free-range gemsbok inhabited the White Sands missile base and bordering state lands in New Mexico. Heck, I was even recently advised that another herd lived on an island off the coast of Florida. But what I didn't know was there were free-range scimitar oryx in Texas. Sure, there are thousands of them on high-fenced game ranches, but I was unaware there was a sustainable, free-ranging herd in the desert south of the town of Alpine and north of the Big Bend.

Native to the deserts and arid grasslands of North Africa, the scimitar-horned oryx, like their East and Southern African cousins, are perfectly adapted to life with little to no water. Most of the moisture they require comes from the plants they consume. Their white coats help reflect the heat of the sun, and they possess special physiological mechanisms that permit them to thrive in high temperatures that would soon kill animals less well adapted. After decades of internecine war, drought, and poaching, scimitar are now listed as extinct within their native range. Hopefully, recent

efforts to reintroduce them into the wild in areas of Chad and Niger will in time prove successful. But until then, a hunter's only option is Texas.

A STALK SCOOPED

My hunt took place on 77,000 bone-dry acres of a ranch whose total breadth was only slightly smaller than Rhode Island—or so it seemed when its boundaries were explained to me by another compadre, Steve Jones of Backcountry Hunts. Jones and his guides Robert Curry and Dave Galloway estimated no fewer than 250 scimitars lived on the spread, but it would prove to be a real challenge finding them on those 77,000 acres.

Our method of hunting was simple. We would drive for hours searching for groups of scimitars. They like to travel in large groups of up to 70 animals. Occasionally, smaller groups were sighted and far less frequently a lone bull, but none proved easy to stalk.

The first day of the hunt saw the wind gusting to 40 miles per hour, roiling the dust in great clouds and spirals reminiscent of a Saharan haboob. Mirage, that undulating, blurry image of the distance created by the extreme heat combined with the blowing dust, was going to make accurate long-range shot placement a 50/50 proposition. That is, if we were even able to locate the animals.

With an expansive 77,000 acres of ground to cover, good optics are a necessity. The author spent hours behind the glass trying to locate a small group of scimitar oryx.



The guide's "War Wagon" was an old but reliable truck outfitted with safari-style seats for the hunters to sit and glass from.



Then, toward midmorning, we spotted a lone bull feeding his way slowly halfway down a long ridge. The bull was more than a mile distant, but we figured if we could get ahead of it we may have an opportunity for a shot. We took a circuitous route in Jones's legendary "War Wagon" and maneuvered into position for a stalk on foot.

Luckily, the plan came together. Curry and I slowly and carefully made our way toward the scimitar by taking advantage of the sparse cover provided by dips in the desert terrain and the sporadic ocotillo and Spanish dagger plants. We pulled up behind a giant yucca and there, no more than 250 yards away, was the lone bull moving slowly toward us. He was totally unaware of our presence.

Curry planted the shooting sticks in the sand, and I rested the forend of my Ruger American rifle within their deep "V." As I lined up my scope's crosshairs on the point of the bull's right shoulder, a muted voice suddenly came over the walkie-talkie.

"Don't shoot. Kelly's already in position. We are within 80 yards of the bull."

It was the other guide, Dave Callaway, who, along with his hunter, had also spotted the bull and approached the scimitar from the opposite direction. They had gotten into position before Curry and I had. Knowing that Kelly was shooting a shorter-range .45-70, I immediately agreed he should take the shot.

Moments later, I heard the hollow report of the short-barreled M1895 Marlin as the scimitar bull lurched into a run. Several additional shots followed, and then we heard Callaway holler, "He's down."

The scenario could not have played out more perfectly. Both Kelly and I had been able to get into a shooting position on the lone bull without having to cope with all the watchful eyes of



Paul Pluff of Ruger with a great scimitar oryx that he took while on the hunt. These animals offer an exciting hunt in open, yet rough, country.

a herd. Indeed, keeping the eyes of a herd of scimitar oryx off of us would prove to be crucial in the stalks to come.

By the end of day one, my score was oryx five or six to my zero. We had spotted small groups and larger herds several times, but each time we attempted to get close, they easily eluded us. Arriving back in camp that evening looking like one of the “Rat Patrol,” I was more than eager to wash the dust down my throat with an icy-cold Shiner Bock.



Four beautiful scimitar oryx taken in West Texas. The author hopes these animals will once again roam on their native ranges in North Africa.

AT LAST LIGHT

Day two proved to be pretty much a repeat of the first day. Curry and I made numerous attempts to sneak close enough to groups of scimitars, but each time they saw us first, betrayed by our movement, the wind, or a combination of both.

Late afternoon found us at the far end of the property. This barren area looked more akin to a lunar landscape than Chihuahuan desert. We stopped atop every hill and glassed for miles and couldn't find a single oryx. Finally, as the sun began to set, we made our way back to an area we had hunted earlier. We hoped that the fading light might finally give us an advantage over the unnerving eyesight of our prey.

In our last 15 minutes of shooting light, Curry made the decision to play a different hand. Dismounting from the War Wagon, we slowly began to stalk down the two-track that snaked its way through an area of thick brush.

We had not gone far when upon rounding a curve we were surprised to see an oryx bull staring at us from 50 yards away. Without a word between us, we each took a knee, fully expecting the bull to turn and run, but for some reason, it didn't.

I have observed, over decades of Africa plains-game hunts, that many animals, particularly antelope, become less spooky as the sun sets. My guess is the coming darkness must give them some sense of impending invisibility. Such was the case with this





G GEARING UP FOR SCIMITAR

A hunt for scimitar oryx in West Texas calls for straight-shooting, long-range cartridges that will possess enough terminal energy and penetration to drop a 350-pound animal reliably at distances out to 500 yards. On this hunt, we were well equipped with Ruger American rifles chambering the still relatively new 6.5 PRC cartridge.

We used Hornady Precision Hunter loads featuring a 143-grain ELD-X bullet that features exceptional aerodynamics due to a design that incorporates flat-trajectory attributes like Heat Shield tip, secant ogive, and boattail. In 6.5 PRC, that pill leaves the muzzle at 2,960 fps, resulting in minimal drop out to 500 yards.

The Hornady 6.5 PRC Precision Hunter load was teamed with Leupold's excellent VX-5HD 3-15x44 riflescope fitted with a custom CDS-ZL2 turret matched to the Hornady ammo. On the range we checked our zero and then confirmed the accuracy of our turret adjustments (my scope featured MOA adjustments, but MILs are also available). We were ready to dial for ranges out to 500 yards.

The final piece of the puzzle was my Ruger American rifle. Reasonably priced, the Ruger Americans I have used over the years have all proven themselves to be reliable and accurate. The rifle used on this hunt was no exception. The 6.5 PRC is a relatively new chambering for the Ruger American, and the pair make a great choice for the big-game hunter interested in a rifle capable of handling long-range shots. Our rifles had lightweight synthetic stocks in Go Wild camo and a burnt bronze Cerakote finish on the 24-inch barrel. Additional features included a three-round detachable box magazine, user-adjustable Marksman trigger, 70-degree bolt lift, and a factory-installed Picatinny rail for scope mounting.

bull. But when Curry planted the sticks and I made the move to rest my rifle, the bull finally dove into the brush to our right.

Again, the bull didn't do what we expected. Rather than retreating deeper into the brush, it ran parallel to the road. We followed slowly and carefully.

Twice we bumped the bull. Despite that, he continued his cat-and-mouse game just inside the brush line and parallel to the road. Finally, the bull stood long enough for me to quickly make an offhand shot. A combination of my Leupold VX-5HD scope's light-gathering capabilities and the black crosshairs on the oryx's white hide enabled me to place my bullet accurately. The bull dropped.

Laying my hands on this beautiful animal so far from its home in North Africa made me both happy and sad. Happy that these animals have been successfully transplanted to Texas and now range freely in the Big Bend country, yet sad they have mostly disappeared from their native Sahara.

Hunting these beautiful, unique, free-range antelope in West Texas is as close as you will come in the United States to an African plains game safari. It's a real hunt that will challenge both your stalking and shooting abilities in that magical land west of the Pecos. 🇺🇸

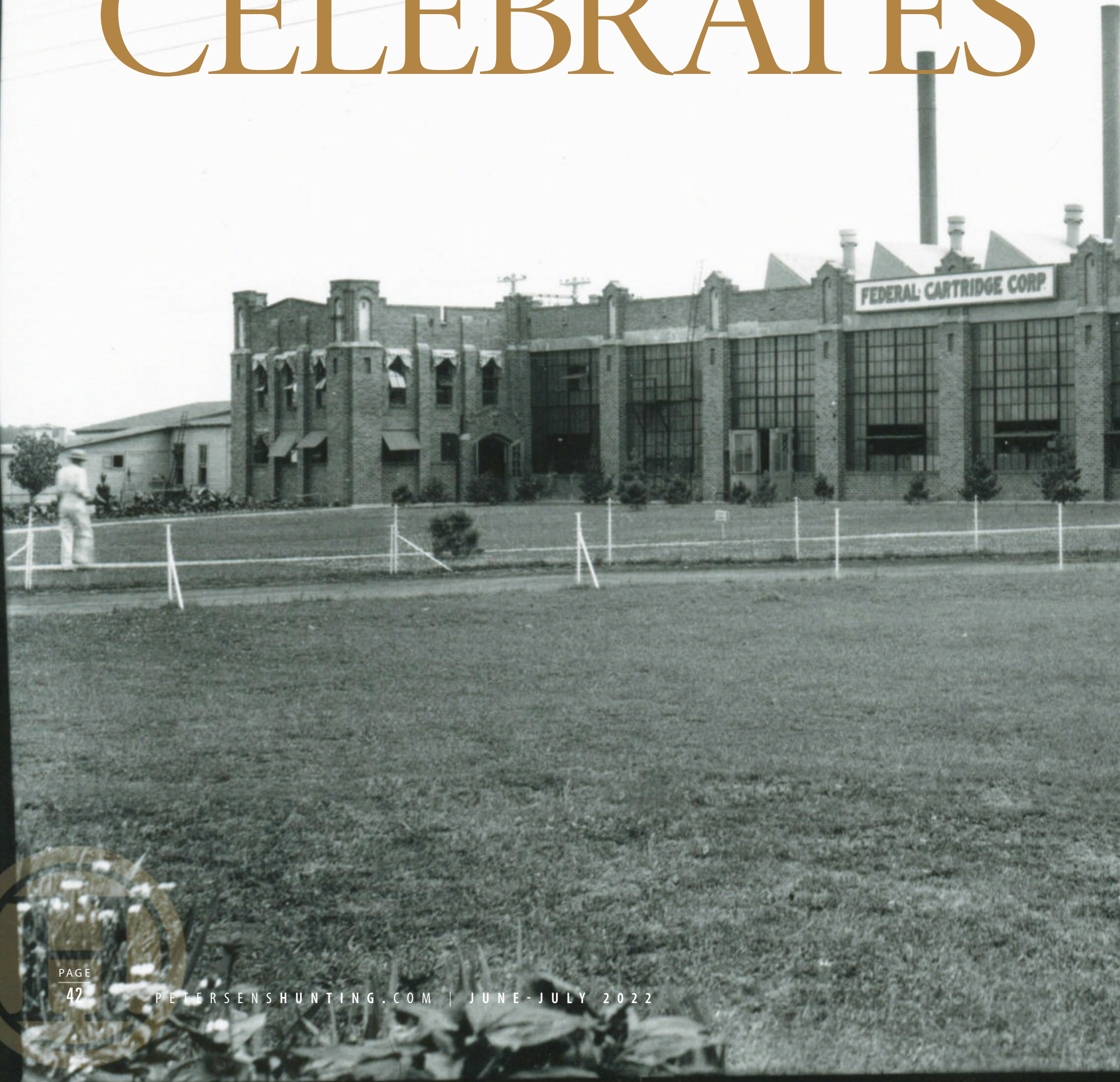


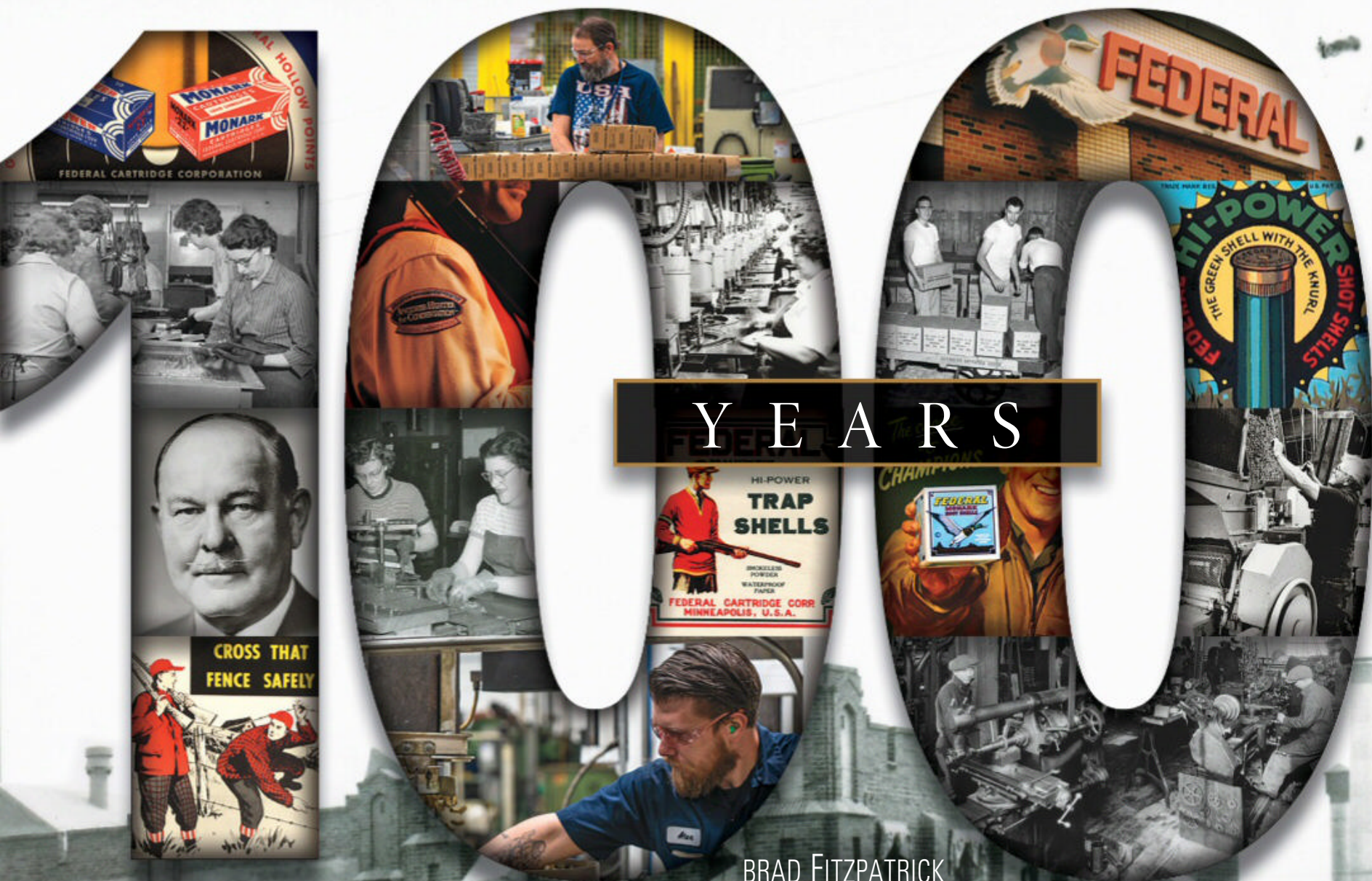
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YEARS

BRAD FITZPATRICK

A LOOK BACK AT A CENTURY OF AMMO INNOVATION.

2020 WAS a banner year for Federal Ammunition. At that year's SHOT Show in Las Vegas, the company released a record 130 new ammunition products, including Terminal Ascent and Hammer Down centerfire hunting ammunition and FireStick, a revolutionary premeasured, color-coded propellant charge for muzzleloader hunters. It wasn't surprising to see this type of new product rollout from Federal. The company has become one of the world's largest ammunition manufacturers, and generations of hunters have relied on Federal ammo for hunting everything from small game and waterfowl to the world's largest and most dangerous game.

But Federal hasn't always been such a large and influential ammo brand. By the time the current company produced its first round in 1922, Federal had already failed once. And if it weren't for the vision of a single Minnesota businessman, the ammunition brand we know today would never have existed.

T

THE EARLY DAYS

Charles Horn was the president of the American Ball Company in Minneapolis. It was a manufacturer of specialized ball bearings for machine parts. When the 34-year-old Horn heard reports that neighborhood children were breaking into the company's scrapyard to steal cast-off bearings to use as ammunition for their air rifles, he concluded the company had accidentally discovered a new revenue stream. American Ball entered the air-rifle ammo business.

Horn had the ability to produce plenty of BBs. What he lacked was an effective packaging system for the sale of his ammunition. He developed and patented a paper tube design, but American Ball didn't have the production capabilities to produce these tubes. He began the search for a shot-shell manufacturer since, at that time, shotshells used paper hulls and the manufacturing process to make them would be like what Horn required for his BB tubes.

Horn called upon the Federal Cartridge and Machine Company in nearby Anoka, Minnesota, but the plant was closed and the building shuttered. Federal Cartridge and Machine had opened in September 1916, but by 1917, when Louis and Harry Sherman, brothers who had founded the company, left, the plant had never produced anything close to the 175,000 shotshells a week it was projected to manufacture. Only a handful of 12-gauge shells were ever verified to have come from the original company (and, not surprisingly, those boxes of ammo are highly coveted by Federal collectors). Only the plant manager, a man named John Haller, remained in the building, roaming the vast factory where hulking steel machines sat silent.

T.W. Lewis was the last stockholder in the failed Federal Cartridge and Machine Company. Horn struck a deal with him, and instead of purchasing BB tubes as he'd planned when he visited Anoka, he purchased an entire ammunition company. Horn's first order of business was to hire Haller as the new plant manager. Horn knew nothing about manufacturing ammo and, according to early employees, broke most every machine he touched. The name was changed to Federal Cartridge Company when the purchase was complete in April of 1922.

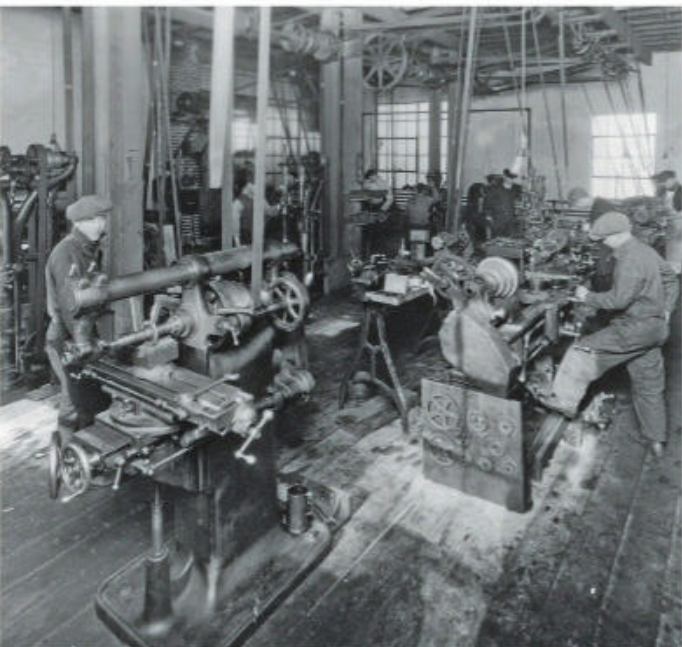
EARLY CHALLENGES

Horn proved very effective at overseeing plant operations. He developed a workforce, and when the sleeping machines roared back to life, Federal was once again manufacturing ammo in short order. Initially, Federal offered three different Hi-Power shotshells: "short brass" Dixie blackpowder loads, "medium brass" Standard ammunition, and Ranger "Long Brass" ammo. Horn also struck deals with large companies like Montgomery Ward and Sears & Roebuck to create their "house" brand shells, which would produce a solid revenue stream for the brand.

A strong revenue flow was important in the company's early days because larger ammunition brands, like Western Cartridge Company, which was owned by Franklin W. Olin, effectively shut off sales channels for Federal. This meant Federal ammunition would never make it to the shelves of sporting goods stores, which might have killed the brand.

Horn wasn't going to give up, so he developed an alternative sales plan. Horn had his secretaries type hundreds of letters addressed to dentists, doctors, and barber shop owners across the Midwest. As a boy who grew up in Iowa, Horn felt that these establishments, which were in most every major town, were a gathering spot where local peo-





By 1930, Federal was employing more than 500 workers, from a core of seven less than 10 years earlier. The Depression had relatively little effect at this point.

Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia, where they learned to manufacture centerfire ammunition. That provided Federal with the capabilities to produce military ammunition (the initial GOCO contract called for Federal to produce 100 million rounds, but by the end of the war the company had produced over 5 billion rounds). It also laid the foundation for Federal to release its own line of commercial centerfire ammunition.

POST-WAR ADVANCEMENTS

In 1963, Federal began offering centerfire hunting rifle ammunition in the Monark line. Fourteen calibers ranging from .222 Remington to .35 Remington were initially offered, including 8mm Mauser, .303 British, .300 Savage, and .32 Winchester Special. Except for the .222 Remington and one .243 Winchester load, all Monark ammo was offered initially with Federal's Hi-Shok copper jacketed lead core bullet.

During that same period, Federal revolutionized shotgun-shell design. In 1961, Federal began color-coding shotgun shells, beginning with yellow 20-gauge shells. Color-coding helped to quickly identify the gauge of a shotshell and reduced accidents, and by 1966, Federal was the first company to color-code all of their shotshells (red for 12 gauge, purple for 16 gauge, yellow for 20 gauge). In 1965, Federal was the first major ammunition manufacturer to utilize plastic shotshell hulls. This wouldn't be the last time Federal would be at the forefront of ammo innovation.

Less than a decade later, in 1973, Federal released its first steel shotshell load. This was revolutionary because the nationwide ban on lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting was still almost two decades away, and it illustrated Horn's insight into the changing hunting market. In 1978, a year after Horn left his position as company president, Federal launched the Premium line of hunting ammunition, which included centerfire rifle ammo loaded with premium hunting bullets from Nosler and other brands.

ple chatted about various topics, including hunting. Anyone receiving a letter could order ammunition (\$17 for 500 12-gauge shells, \$14 for 500 16-gauge shells, or \$13 for 500 20-gauge shells) to sell in their shop. Horn personally made deliveries in his red Buick.

In 1924, Federal hired Maurice "Daddy" Swope. Swope had previously worked at Western Cartridge, so it must have been satisfying for Horn to hire an employee away from a company that in effect was trying to derail his business. Swope was an expert in the production of rimfire ammo, and that same year Federal purchased the American Cartridge Company, a brand for which they produced house brand ammunition and which had fallen into debt. American Cartridge became American Eagle, a brand that's still under the Federal umbrella.

In 1925, a familiar name turned up on Federal's stockholder list: Franklin W. Olin. Apparently impressed by Horn's efforts to avoid being bankrupted by Olin's own guerilla sales tactics, Franklin Olin's foundation purchased majority stock in Federal, effectively making him the brand's owner. Horn, the other primary stockholder, remained president, a position he would hold until 1977.

THE WAR EFFORT

Federal continued to grow throughout the 1920s and 1930s, which is particularly impressive considering the financial state of the nation during that period. By 1941, Federal's success had captured the attention of the United States government. At the time the conflict in Europe was growing more intense, and it seemed unavoidable that the United States would become involved. In the fall of that year, the government joined with Federal to open the Twin Cities Ordnance Plant (TCOP). TCOP was classified as a government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) plant, which meant the government would pay for the facility, which cost \$30 million to build and operate. As a GOCO, Federal would manage the facility and supply the workforce to produce ammunition needed by the government should war erupt, and it wouldn't take long until the United States was embroiled in battle. In December 1941, just a few months after TCOP began ammunition production, Pearl Harbor was bombed and America entered World War II.

At the time Federal produced only shotshells and rimfire ammunition. The war effort required the manufacture of .30-, .45-, and .50-caliber munitions, and so several Federal employees traveled to



Shotshell production increased through the 1920s and by the end of the decade Federal had staked a claim as one of the top shotshell brands in the country. Federal originally produced shotshells for hunters, but by the 1970s Federal shotshells were a dominant brand in competitive circles.

The Tax Reform Law of 1969 stated that all foundations that owned majority shares of stock of companies had to sell those companies within 20 years, and that impacted Federal Ammunition, which had been owned by the Olin Foundation since 1925. In 1985, Federal was sold to the Federal-Hoffman company, and in 1988, the company was resold to Pentair Inc. Changing ownership didn't slow new product development. That



same year, Federal released the first-ever 3½-inch 12-gauge magnum load in conjunction with Mossberg. At the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, American Launi Kay Meili won the gold medal in the women's 50-meter three-position rifle event using Federal's Gold Medal Ultra-Match. Meili's win marked the first time a medalist had used American ammunition since the 1960 Rome Olympics.

In 1993, Federal purchased the rights to a hunting bullet designed by Jack Carter. After seeing several premium hunting bullets fail when used on large, dangerous game, Carter designed a bullet with a bonded core that would penetrate deeply and expand reliably. He called his design the Trophy Bonded Bear Claw (TBBC). Federal kept the name but

changed the bullet's composition slightly. Rather than the full copper jacket Carter used, Federal opted for a 95 percent copper/five percent zinc jacket, which facilitated production without impacting bullet performance. Carter's Trophy Bonded Bear Claw and Trophy Bonded Sledgehammer designs became part of Federal Premium's line of ammunition. In 2000, Federal began offering TBBC muzzleloading bullets as well.

Over the years, the Bear Claw design has evolved and improved. Though it has always been one of the toughest bullets on the market, the original Bear Claw wasn't a particularly aerodynamic design, so in 2008 Federal released the Trophy Bonded Tip (TBT) bullet, which incorporated a polymer tip and slightly deeper nose cavity to improve ballistic coefficients and help initiate expansion. In 2020, Federal introduced the Terminal Ascent hunting bullet, which utilizes the same bonded design that originated with the Bear Claw bullet and improved performance further by adding a Slipstream polymer tip that initiates expansion at velocities that are 200 feet per second lower than competing bullets. The tip also helped increase ballistic coefficients even further. Both features make this bullet perfect for those who hunt at long range. In fact, Terminal Ascent is one of the few premium hunting bullets to offer exceptional long-range performance with the reliability of a bonded bullet.

As good as the Terminal Ascent is, it's not the only bonded bullet in Federal's line. In 2005, Federal released Fusion bonded bullets and ammunition. Like Terminal Ascent, Fusion ammunition uses a bonding process (although the process differs significantly from the bonding method used for Terminal Ascent) but is a very affordable option. This makes it a superb option for rifle and handgun hunters, especially while hunting tough game like bears and hogs. Fusion bullets continue to be an important part of the Federal line. In 2019, the company offered 10 new Fusion component bullets for reloaders, and Federal recently added 6.5 PRC and 10mm Auto Fusion loads. In 2005, Federal also launched their first branded centerfire hunting cartridge, the .338 Federal, which was based on a necked-up .308 Winchester cartridge.

There's been no shortage of shotshell additions to the Federal ammuni-



TOP:
While technologies have changed,
Federal's core remains its employees.

BOTTOM:
The company has developed popular rounds
like the .224 Valkyrie and .338 Federal.

tion line over the last few decades. In 1996, just a few years after the nationwide ban of lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting, Federal released their first tungsten shotshell load. Ten years later, Federal released Heavyweight shotgun ammunition, which was denser than lead yet non-toxic. Today, Federal also offers the Black Cloud line, which features TSS pellets. TSS (for Tungsten Super Shot) has a density of 18.3 grams per cubic centimeter, which is 56 percent denser than lead.

A HISTORY OF CONSERVATION


Federal's many successful ammunition lines are well known, but what may not be as widely known is Federal's long commitment to conservation. Starting in 1933, Charles Horn began serving on the Minnesota Conservation Committee, and a year later Federal initiated 4-H conservation programs nationwide. In the 1930s, Federal commissioned artists to create conservation cartoons that promoted observing bag limits and passing on hunting traditions to the next generation. And in the 1940s, the company published a booklet titled *Upland Game Propagation*.

Federal's commitment to wildlife conservation continued after Horn's death. By the early 2000s, Federal was supporting dozens of conservation organizations, including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and others. Bill Stevens, Federal's conservation manager, received the Lynn Boykin Hunting Heritage Award in 2003 from the National Wild Turkey Federation, and in 2007, Stevens earned a lifetime achievement award from *Field & Stream*. That same year Stevens retired, but his legacy remains. Federal is still a major supporter of several conservation efforts and has played an active role in the R3 movement to preserve hunting rights while simultaneously conserving wildlife and protecting valuable habitat.

FEDERAL TODAY

Today, Federal Ammunition is owned by Vista Outdoor, and Jason Vanderbrink serves as president. And while Federal has become one of the leading ammunition manufacturers in the world, the company president says it's not the time to slow the pace of new product development.

"We need to be more focused on the end user of our products and be the leader in innovation, in all of our brands," said Vanderbrink. "I think complacency has ruined many great companies, and I can assure you we are not and will not be complacent. We will expand research and development activity and consumer insights, so we have a solution for any need that consumers need."

It's hard to imagine that the brand that so nearly failed in 1922 is now celebrating a century in business. It has taken a great deal of effort by many people to propel Federal into its current position, and it will take more dedicated individuals to help maintain the brand's dominance in years to come. There's little doubt that Federal has earned its spot as one of the top ammunition manufacturers in the world, and it's safe to say that future generations of hunters and shooters will also rely on Federal ammunition. 

MOZAMBIQUE MOMENTS

MARK KAYSER

ABOQUE

A MODERN SAFARI PROVIDES GLIMPSES INTO THE GOLDEN AGE OF AFRICA.

WITH THE SLIGHT wave of his hand behind his back, my professional hunter Clayton Wallis instantly paused our stalk. A moment later the reason was obvious. The giant form of a bull elephant ghosted through the brush less than 80 yards away. Although it wasn't startled, the bull sensed prowlers and reasoned a silent exit was the best course of action against the unknown. After a methodical review of the course ahead, Wallis waved me on in our stalk to catch up with the wayward Cape buffalo.

It cannot be overstated that we were in a desolate corner of the world. The nearest large city was a two-hour bush flight away. The only semblance of society was a small village 30 minutes from camp accessible via a two-track road. Despite the friendly nature of its inhabitants, there were no medical facilities nor retail outlets to purchase even a box of Band-Aids. Few roads, no fences,

and no nearby assistance defined the location's desolation. The distinguishing characteristic of the land was a swath of open road that delineated the nearby Zimbabwe border. Not surprisingly, the fence that was associated with the border had been pilfered by locals for metal and by poachers for snare construction. Any missteps would mean a long wait for help.

Our earlier outing for buffalo the day before was a bust, as we failed even to find fresh spoor. Luckily, a giant eland crossed our path, and we tracked it until daylight gave out. I had never shot an eland despite three previous trips to Africa, but it was on my list as a bonus trophy if fortune allowed. After an incredible dining experience, I drifted off to sleep with the sounds of the bush through the canvas buffering of our hut.

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S

Sunrise greeted **us with fresh sign** of buffalo. A herd of bulls had visited a nearby waterhole, known as a “pan,” and departed before dawn. Even so, our trackers, Timothy and Rafael, felt confident the bulls were not too far ahead. More than three hours later, with a slow tracking speed that covered just three kilometers, Timothy and Rafael dropped to their knees. Pointing ahead, Timothy whispered, “Buffalo.”

Expecting to see a herd in the intermittent openings, I took several seconds to locate the black bulls in the shadows of the nearby bush. A zap of my rangefinder confirmed the distance

of a mere 54 yards. Wallis field-judged the bulls, and a minute later he summed up the state of play.

“The oldest bull is the one staring directly at us,” he said. “That younger bull is blocking the shot, but if the younger one steps aside, shoot that bull square in the chest.”

I slowly eased the Bergara Premier Canyon into shooting position as Wallis motioned to use his shoulder as a rest, thus minimizing any additional movement trying to deploy the shooting sticks. As I settled into a solid position, it was obvious the bulls were in no hurry to exit the shade, even with their suspicions aroused. Minutes ticked by as the five bulls barely blinked as they stood in their cool digs. Would the shot happen or would the mass retreat in a blur with no opportunity whatsoever?

It was a tense wait. Suddenly, the younger bull tired of the stare down and took several steps away, exposing the forward-facing chest of the target bull. Steadying my aim, I took a breath and at the bottom of the exhale, depressed the trigger smoothly. The bark of the potent .375 H&H Magnum was ear-piercing. Rocking from the recoil, I lost sight of the older bull as the herd raced for safety.

Wallis turned to me with a confident smile and said the shot looked solid, but it would be best to wait a few minutes to allow the bull to die before taking up the trail. After re-checking my chamber for a fresh cartridge, we cautiously followed the trail of the running buffalo and within 100 yards were greeted to the sight of a mound of black piled up in the brush. The Hornady 300-grain DGX bullet had performed **as advertised. I knelt to inspect the broad bosses of the elder bull. His body was enormous, and it would later take a team of camp helpers to load the giant Cape buffalo.**

Professional Hunter Clayton Wallis discusses hunting strategy with trackers Timothy and Rafael.



NEXT UP: NYALA

Safari experiences unfold as opportunities arise. A spotted hyena was on my bucket list, so with fresh meat, we started a bait site in the hopes of luring in a nocturnal visitor. After choosing a pan with a set of fresh hyena tracks crossing through it, we used predominant winds to place the bait within easy rifle range of an ancient termite mound that would serve as a hide. If and when tracks appeared with regularity, we would craft a blind from the surrounding bush. Until then, we set off with eland, greater kudu, impala, and nyala as focal points for daylight pursuits.

Water is an essential survival element for species of the Mozambique bush. At every opportunity we scoured pans for fresh sign and locations to start our stalks. One particular pan



Kayser was looking forward to hunting the gorgeous nyala and collected this fine bull early in the hunt with his Bergara Premier Canyon rifle.

held a mass of spoor, including an abundance of nyala activity. Wallis decided a few hours wait on the edge of the pan was warranted, and not long after setting up, the bush came alive.

A baboon troop announced their arrival, and sporadic members slowly emerged to test the safety. A sounder of warthogs slipped in from the opposite side, along with a herd of greater kudu cows and calves. Following the arrival of the kudu, a pair of young nyala put Wallis on alert, noting more may follow. With kudu and nyala visiting the pan, my anxiety for a good encounter ran high. That's when two mature bulls emerged from the brush. Their charcoal coats with vertical white stripes blended well with the surrounding bush, but the openness of the pan negated their natural camouflage as they approached for a drink.

"The one on the right is a good, mature bull," Wallis whispered, giving me the go-ahead for a shot.

When the bull finally settled in the pan for a drink, I placed the reticle on its shoulder and once again felt the recoil of the .375 H&H. What happened next was unexpected at best. The mortally hit nyala bull charged into the mudhole and vaulted out the opposite side before crumbling

in a plastered heap of sludge and muck. Back at camp the staff gave the nyala bull a good scrub down to help bring back its beauty for photos, and once again we had fresh entrails for rebaiting our hyena hideout the next day.

A HUNT FOR A HYENA

My safari included at least one additional plains game species, so eland, kudu, and impala were now the target species. Nevertheless, my goal of killing a hyena was still in play as we checked several bait sites for fresh spoor.

My interest in hunting predators was spurred even more when I learned the native culture revered the spotted hyena. Some credit the hyena with a power to influence human spirit, magic with a witchcraft effect, while others simply brand the species with a mystical quality. Whether that played into management plans was not explained to me, but I discovered I was the only person in a large expanse of this corner of Mozambique allowed to hunt a hyena. It was obvious this venture was highly sacred, as compared to any coyote hunt back in my home of Wyoming.

Bouncing down a barely discernible trail, we made our way to the Zimbabwe border to visit the site of a recently poached elephant. The anti-poaching patrol had tracked the wounded bull and euthanized it two weeks earlier. After removing the ivory, they invited the local villagers to scavenge the meat from the enormous carcass. We were hoping the leftovers would lure in a hyena. We were wrong, but a bull elephant stood as a sentinel guard over the carcass, reinforcing the idea that elephants do mourn their dead. After surveying the gruesome scene, we moved on in the search of a worthy eland, kudu, or impala.



Elephants were everywhere in the concession area because of the nonstop efforts to eliminate poaching.



You can use one rifle while hunting Africa, as Kayser did with the new Bergara Premier Canyon, but bring several loads along. Re-zeroing takes just minutes and is worth the time.

After several more days of scant hyena spoor and thwarted stalks on kudu, a fresh hyena track appeared at our initial bait site. It was time to build a leafy blind and spend an evening in the hide. Wallis scanned with thermal assistance, then he whispered, “Elephants!” There was no need for night vision as the partial moon illuminated the stately pachyderms passing by at 25 yards. Well after the elephants left, a quiet herd of Cape buffalo approached to water. They milled about as I watched them in the infrared equipment attached to my riflescope.

Several jackals slunk to water, and a civet cat slowly eased in late in the evening to eat. That activity sent a strong signal that hyenas were probably not nearby. After midnight we slipped out of the hide for a few hours of rest before restarting another safari day.

Several exciting days of hunting passed without success on plains game, but others in camp were adding to the tally, thus keeping us in fresh bait. The reports of a fire on the seventh day of the hunt meant all hands on deck. Shots had been heard and an antipoaching team was dispatched to discover that the likely poachers had lit a brush fire as a diversion to conceal their escape. The fire exploded in the dry, overgrown environment. It took everyone in camp, including the hunters, until dusk to stamp out the wildfire.



The last species Kayser was able to collect in Mozambique was this grand impala ram he shot at sunset on the last afternoon of the safari. Kayser used a 250-grain Hornady CX Outfitter series bullet to down the ram.



It took nearly an hour for the adult male hyena to approach the Cape buffalo to feed. Kayser did not hesitate and took the shot at the first opportunity with his Bergara Premier Canyon rifle.

NIGHT MOVES

It was midway through the hunt when our trackers yelled from their elevated perch in the Land Cruiser truck bed.


“Lion!”

A male lion sprang from the carcass of a freshly killed buffalo. Wallis quickly hatched a plan. We would borrow the carcass, drag it to our best bait site, and use it to lure in a hyena fond of a fresh kill. Of course, there was that small detail that the original owner could scent trail the carcass to our hide, but why worry about maybes?

After darkness swallowed the landscape, it didn’t take long for the putrid smell of the buffalo to attract attention. “Hyena,” Wallis hissed as he spied through his thermal optic. A large hyena circled the carcass in a wide swath, peeking from the surrounding brush. My rifle, equipped with an infrared viewing screen, was pointed at the carcass, so I could not see the action, but Wallis gave me play-by-play action as the hyena eventually made it to the pan and cooled off in the shallows while drinking. This lollygagging ate up nearly an hour, and then an excited tone in Wallis’s voice indicated a change of hyena attitude.

“Turn on your screen,” he whispered “I think he’s going to the carcass now.”

The Cape buffalo remains materialized in the infrared viewfinder. A moment later, the cautious hyena pulled up to the carcass. “Ready?” Wallis asked. I whispered back a barely audible “Affirmative,” and Wallis lit the scene with another infrared boost. Stabilizing my hold on the Bergara, I settled the reticle on the spotted form and added even more light to the night with the muzzle flash from the .375.

Wallis’s exclamation was a welcome confirmation as the darkness once again descended. A follow-up sweep using the thermal confirmed the kill, and the celebration continued on the jostling ride back to camp under a celestial show of starry lights. 



BERGARA PREMIER CANYON RIFLE

Traveling to Africa for a safari is not a small endeavor. With airline regulations and limitations increasing the challenge by the minute, matching a single rifle to your safari is critical. Bergara’s new Premier Canyon rifle meets the test for hunts at home and abroad. The Premier Canyon is a lightweight, ergonomically complementing rifle with a nimble configuration for snappy deployment.

The Premier Canyon is fitted with a No. 4 fluted barrel with a 5/8-24-inch threaded Omni brake, all fitted in an AG Composites carbon-fiber stock. Protection for this workhorse is complemented by a Sniper Grey Cerakote finish on the barrel. Bergara utilizes its proven Premier action, featuring a non-rotating gas shield, coned bolt nose, and sliding plate extractor. Like the Cerakote barrel, this construction is coated to resist damage from any environment on earth. Finally, projectile launch is facilitated with a TriggerTech Frictionless Release Technology trigger. MOA is guaranteed at one inch, and my .375 H&H overperformed with three-quarter-inch groups from the factory Hornady DGX loads.

The Premier Canyon is available in popular calibers like the 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .308 Winchester, .300 Winchester Magnum, .300 PRC, 28 Nosler, and the .375 H&H Magnum I tested in Africa. Although the rifle weighs from 6.2 to 6.5 pounds, it may appear too light to handle large-caliber recoil. You would be wrong to think that. The stock design, combined with a muzzle brake, tames even the top-end magnum calibers. Rifle length varies from 41 to 44 inches depending on the configuration.

\$2,379–\$2,429; bergara.online/us

SOMETHING OLD

SOMETHING NEW

CRAIG BODDINGTON

MODERN CARTRIDGES ARE ALL THE RAGE,
BUT DON'T DISCOUNT THE CLASSICS.

I CAME INTO this business when the previous generation of scribes—Askins, Keith, O'Connor, Page—was still active. It seemed that older gunwriters were required to be irascible and opinionated. The calendar doesn't lie, and I now have to consider myself an older gunwriter. Therefore, I'm required to be an irascible and opinionated curmudgeon that's resistant to anything new.

As proof of this, my personal favorite hunting cartridges include .270 Winchester, 7x57 Mauser, .30-06, .375 H&H, and .416 Rigby. Collectively, they exhibit more than 550 years of fine performance. However, I accept that cartridge development didn't stop before World War II, nor just after, when Roy Weatherby burst upon the scene.

L LOOSEN THE BELT

In Roy's day, fast cartridges were belted. Besides the exceptions he created, almost all cartridges we called (and considered) magnums were based on the belted .375 H&H case, necked this way and that, and often shortened. Funny thing: The belt was never essential, and Mauser's rimless case worked just fine. Only in the 1990s did we accept that an unbelted case could be fast and powerful and, if also short and fat, amazingly efficient.

There were earlier unbelted wildcats and proprietaries—including those from Dakota, Imperial, and Lazzeroni—but 1998's .300 Remington Ultra Magnum (RUM) was the first unbelted magnum from a major manufacturer. It got Winchester's competitive juices going and started a flood of short, medium, and long unbelted cartridges, with development continuing to this day from multiple sources. Man, do we have choices!

Thanks to the widespread use of chronographs, manufacturers must be honest. All the brave new cartridges do pretty much everything they're supposed to do. I'm prepared to say that most are, in some ways, better than older cartridges they seek to replace.

I'll go through the caliber progression as appropriate, but I want to issue one caution. Performance is critical above all, but it's wise to take a look at another "P" factor: popularity. None of us can predict how long current ammo shortages will go on. Not being a conspiracy theorist, I believe manufacturers are trying, but before adding another cartridge to your battery, whether old or new, it's wise to consider just how you're gonna feed the beast.

CASES, ACTIONS, BULLETS, BARRELS

I've already mentioned unbelted cases, but much of modern case design relies on the more efficient burning of shorter and relatively wider cases. Shoulder angles, long ago explored by Parker Ackley, also increase burning efficiency. The end result, at least with a number of our newer cartridges, is more energy produced per grain of powder burned. This was (and is) part of the charm of the RUMs and WSMs 20 years ago and today offered by newer cartridges such as the Nosler family (now numbering six members) and Hornady's 6.5 and .300 PRC. They cannot increase velocity, per se; burning nitrocellulose expands at about 5,000 fps, establishing a theoretical limit, which cannot be practically reached because of friction, resistance, and barrel wear.

So there have been no significant velocity gains since Roy Weatherby. Often there are reasons to keep speed down: reducing recoil and barrel wear and maximizing efficiency, as in the Creedmoors. Also, much of modern case design is based on rifle platform limitations. This is not new. Peter Paul Mauser created a large family of cartridges for his bolt-action rifle, and over decades, Winchester created numerous cartridges sized to their 1894 lever action.

Today, much cartridge development is based on maximizing performance in the AR-15 action. It's a great and immensely popular action, but it's sharply limited in cartridge space. Newer cartridge developments that maximize, enhance, and add to the AR-15's performance include the .224 Valkyrie, 6mm ARC, 6.5mm Grendel, .350 Legend, and .450 Bushmaster. If you're looking for a great AR cartridge—perhaps for a specific purpose—these new cartridges are amazing. However, any cartridge designed for a specific action—whether 1898 Mauser, 1894 Winchester, or AR-15—inherits the size and strength limitations of that action.





This big Wyoming mule deer was taken with a .264 Winchester Magnum. Especially with the new 6.5mm bullets, the nearly obsolete .264 is still a fine hunting cartridge, but newer cartridges like the 6.5mm PRC make more sense.

Largely driven by the current rage for long-range performance, projectile development has advanced considerably, placing emphasis on bullet aerodynamics rather than raw velocity. This leads to longer and heavier-for-caliber bullets that cannot be pushed as fast but do get downrange with more retained velocity and energy. We used to think of .500 as a high Ballistic Coefficient (BC). Today many “low drag” rifle bullets exceed .600, and a few exceed .700. Several newer cartridges are designed around these long, heavy bullets, with shorter (and more efficient) cases so they can be housed in existing bolt actions.

Depending on caliber, this can create barrel challenges. Cartridge standardization specifications include recommended rifling twists to best stabilize existing projectiles. Rifling twists can change—and have changed—over time. The .223 Remington (5.56x45) is a great example. The original spec was a 1:14 twist for a 55-grain bullet, but that quickly shifted to 1:12, okay for bullets up to 60 grains. We now have 0.223-inch bullets up to 90 grains that require faster twists: 1:10, 1:9, 1:8, even 1:7. Downrange performance is awesome, but neither my bolt action nor my semiauto .223s will handle the heaviest bullets. I could rebarrel, but for my purposes (casual target shooting, varmints, occasional deer), I’m fine with lighter bullets, and my rifles shoot fine with the 62-grain TSX, a great little whitetail bullet.

Other historic examples include .250 Savage, introduced with a 1:14 twist for the original fast 87-grain bullet. Eventually, the standard twist changed to 1:10, but my 1920 .250 Savage, which is too nice to rebarrel, can barely shoot 100-grainers. In 1955, Remington made a classic blunder with the .244 Rem., barreling it with a 1:12 twist, which is unable to stabilize bullets heavier than 90 grains. In 1963 they renamed it 6mm Rem. with a 1:9 twist. That was a good fix, but the damage was done; the .243 Win. came out of the starting gate (also in 1955) with a 1:10 twist and was able to stabilize bullets up to 100 grains. The 6mm Rem. is probably a “better” cartridge, but it never caught up. Similarly, some of our favor-



Boddington has recently shifted to this Jarrett in .300 Win. Mag. as his “go-to” mountain rifle. Modern .300s with unbelted cases are said to be more accurate, but not all rifles agree.

ite rifle cartridges, because of traditional and existing twist rates, cannot handle the new projectiles. Rebarreling is a relatively inexpensive option, but, like my .250 Savage, some rifles shouldn’t be rebarreled.

SIZE MATTERS

I don’t think the old versus new question applies to all bullet diameters. New .22s like the Valkyrie and 22 Nosler are awesome, but they aren’t going to unseat the .223 as the world’s most popular centerfire, and I think the .22-250 will remain in the saddle as the dominant fast varmint cartridge. Almost no new cartridge development has focused on the .25s. Likewise, 8mm and .35 caliber. The .350 Legend is an obvious exception, but it’s purpose-driven. The Legend takes advantage of the straight-wall cartridge deer hunting opportunity with the added benefit of fitting the AR-15 action.

Here are some of the popular rifle calibers where I think sound choices must be made between old and new cartridges.

6MM

I’m impressed by the stubby 6mm ARC, but I think the 6mm Creedmoor is the best 6mm cartridge. With a slightly shorter case (and a faster rifling twist of 1:7.7), it is able to handle the new low-drag 6mm projectiles up to 112 grains. Honestly, with its long-standard 1:10 twist, the .243 maxes out at 100-grain bullets, and most .243s are more accurate with lighter bullets. So if you want a maximum-performance .24 caliber, the 6mm Creedmoor is hard to beat. However, the .243 Winchester is almost unassailable. Since 1955, it’s held the title of the classic crossover varmint/deer cartridge and is easily the most common “first hunting rifle” for beginners. For long-range target use, the 6mm Creedmoor wins, but rifles and ammo are limited, so I don’t see it displacing the .243.



At the bench with a Springfield Waypoint in 6.5 PRC. The PRC propels a 140-grain bullet at about 3,000 fps, performance that Boddington believes is ideal for 6.5mm projectiles.

6.5MM

You must be tired of my diatribe: “The 6.5mm Creedmoor doesn’t do anything the 6.5x55 Mauser couldn’t do in 1894.” True enough, and the underrated .260 Remington is ballistically identical. However, the 6.5mm Creedmoor offers something no other 6.5mm cartridge has brought to America: wild popularity. This popularity has also brought something American shooters have never had in 6.5mm: a wonderful selection of loads and bullets.

If you are looking for a mild-kicking, accurate, and effective cartridge for long-range target shooting and moderate-range deer hunting, get a 6.5mm Creedmoor. I did. However, don’t buy into the hype and consider it a long-range hunting cartridge. It’s marginal for elk, and modest initial velocity makes its trajectory curve steep past 300 yards.

Fortunately, thanks largely to the Creedmoor’s popularity, it isn’t our only 6.5mm choice. It never was; I have an accurate .264 Win. Mag., which, with a 140-grain bullet at 3,000 fps (against the Creedmoor’s 2,700 fps), will do pretty much everything the Creedmoor shouldn’t be asked to do. However, the belted .264 Win. Mag. has been on life support for decades, with limited loads and few new-rifle options. Also, depending on the manufacturer, barrel twists were variously 1:8, 1:9, and 1:10. The first two barrel twists are fine for most new 6.5mm bullets, but a 1:10 barrel twist is unlikely to stabilize the new “low drag” bullets. The 6.5mm Creedmoor and most of our new “fast” 6.5mms are barreled with a 1:8 twist and will stabilize the longest 6.5mm bullets currently available.

For me, the 6.5mm “sweet spot” is a 140-grain bullet moving about 3,000 fps. Choices include the old .264, 6.5-284 Norma, 6.5 PRC, and Weatherby’s 6.5 RPM (Rebated Precision Magnum). At least in factory cartridges, extra-fast 6.5mms include the 26 Nosler and 6.5-300 Wby. Mag. Performance of both is fantastic, but both are overbore capacity. Propellant selection is limited, and barrel life is reduced.

The 6.5mm RPM is sound, but so far it hasn’t gone beyond Weatherby for rifles and ammo. The 6.5 PRC seems to be winning the popularity race. With apologies to my old .264, I just bought a Springfield Waypoint in 6.5 PRC.

.270

The .270 story is truly a twist of fate. For decades, we have had just three primary choices in 0.277-inch bullet diameter: .270 Winchester (1925), .270 Weatherby Magnum (1945), and .270 WSM (2001). All have traditionally been barreled with a 1:10 twist. This is because although all three are fast and versatile hunting cartridges none has been considered a target cartridge. Primary bullet weight ranges from 130 to 150 grains, and no heavy, low-drag bullets have been developed. Until now. Enter Winchester’s new 6.8 Western. The rifles are barreled with a 1:8 twist, and the initial loads bring heavy-for-caliber aerodynamic bullets from 162 to 175 grains, weights which have never before existed in 0.277-inch diameter. The short-action cartridge is based on the .270 WSM case. Because of greater bullet weight, the 6.8 Western is not as fast as the .270 WSM or Weatherby Magnum, but bullet weight and aerodynamics give it wonderful downrange performance. The 27 Nosler is faster, but requires a standard-length action.

The catch: Not a single existing factory .270 rifle barrel will stabilize these new bullets. So you can rebarrel or start over. Not being an extreme-range shooter, I’m unlikely to abandon the .270 Winchester. It’s still an awesome hunting cartridge, and both the .270 WSM and .270 Wby. Mag. shoot flatter over normal ranges and deliver more energy.

Even so, I’m fascinated by the 6.8 Western concept: more bullet weight and frontal area than the 6.5mms can deliver and less recoil than the 7mms and .30s. And I’ve seen 6.8 Western at dealers. I may have to explore this one.

7MM

American rifle and ammo manufacturers offer more choices in 7mm, 0.284-inch bullet diameter, than anything else except .30 caliber. For many years, the 7mm Rem. Mag. was the world’s most popular magnum. It’s still a fine and versatile cartridge, but diluted by 7mm WSM, RUM, RSAUM, STW, Wby. Mag., and more. Traditional 7mm bullets run up to 175 grains, which is heavy-for-caliber. Depending on the cartridge

A man with a beard, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a long-sleeved shirt, sits on a log stump in a forest. He is looking off to the side. In the background, there are logs and a stone fire pit with a kettle on it.

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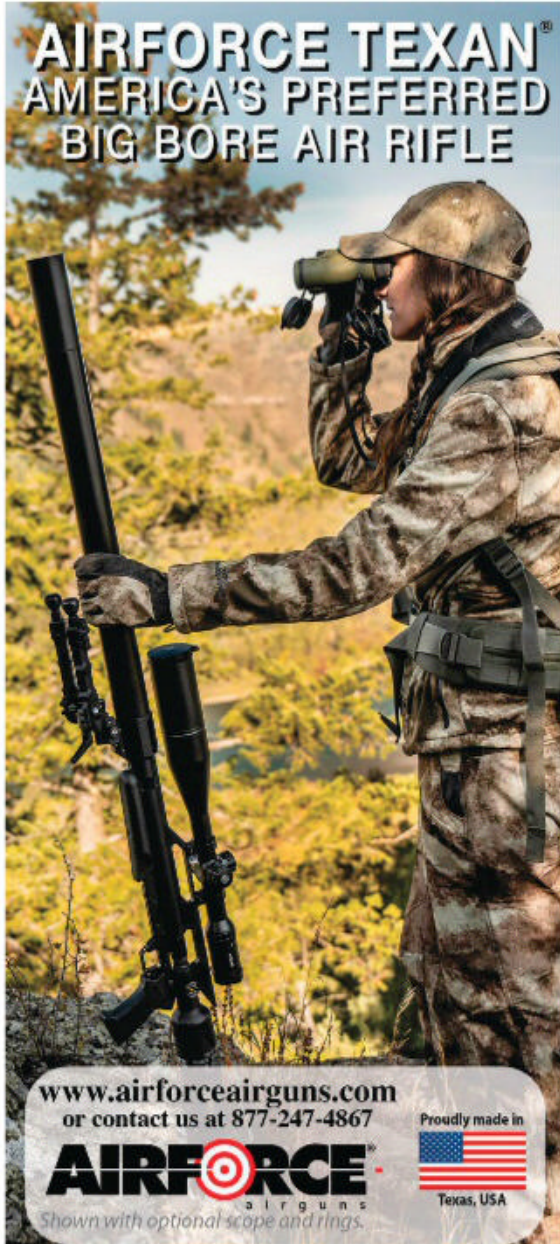
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For the past decade, Boddington has done most of his mountain hunting with a .300 Wby. Mag. barrel on the Blaser R8. Modern, unbelted, fast .30s are probably "better," but familiarity and confidence count. This is a good Punjab urial sheep from Pakistan.



Boddington used the then-new 26 Nosler to take this big Bezoar ibex. Although fast and effective, the 26 Nosler has not been as popular as its first offspring: the 28 (7mm) Nosler.

Nosler: RUM case shortened, alleviating overbore capacity, and fitting in a standard-length action.

.30

Boy, oh, boy, do we have lots of good choices. Although I love the .30-06, I've done most of my mountain hunting with the .300 Weatherby Magnum, and I've used almost all the too-numerous fast .30s. For long-range competition, there is much to be said for purpose-

and the manufacturer, factory 7mm barrels run from 1:9 to 1:10, which will stabilize bullets up to 175 grains. However, with the current trend toward longer, heavier, low-drag bullets, these twists may not be fast enough. Today, some bullet packaging shows recommended twist rates. Berger's Extreme Outer Limits 195-grain 7mm box states: Minimum 1:9; Optimal 1:8.3, with a G1 BC of a whopping .754.

You may not need such bullets but, if you do, you may be back to the choice of rebarreling or restarting. There's nothing wrong with traditional 7mm cartridges, but if I were in the mood for a "new" 7mm, I'd go with the 28



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designed unbelted cartridges, such as the .300 PRC, 30 Nosler, and .300 Norma Magnum. Most .30 calibers are barreled with 1:10, a versatile twist that will stabilize bullets up to about 230 grains. Match .30-caliber bullets currently run up to 250 grains. If you intend to use these extra-heavies and want optimum accuracy, you're probably in for a non-standard barrel with a faster twist.


If you're into maximum velocity, then the long-cased, unbelted .300 RUM is probably for you, *if* you're okay with the punishing recoil. Otherwise, in .30-caliber I go with the "P" factor. The most popular fast .30, and currently the world's most popular "magnum," is the .300 Winchester Magnum. It has an archaic belted case and has long been criticized for its too-short neck. However, case design is just one factor in rifle accuracy and is not as important as a great barrel and rigid action, assembled and bedded correctly and fed good ammo. I haven't ended my long affair with the .300 Wby. Mag., and I still have a .300 H&H, but the rifle I'm carrying up the mountains now is a .300 Win. Mag.

THE BIG BOYS

Above .30 caliber, need and practical purpose diminish, as do the number of shooters who can handle the punishment. Still, we have too many choices, both old and new. In .338 it depends on what

you want to do. The .338 RCM, .338 Norma Mag, 33 Nosler, and .338 RUM are all excellent. However, for hunting, I'll stick with the .338 Win. Mag.—hardly the fastest, but a good blend of performance at acceptable recoil. For serious long-range work, go for greatness because that's what the .338 Lapua was designed for.

In .375, the two obvious choices are 1912's .375 H&H and the brash new upstart .375 Ruger. In all ways I can think of, the .375 Ruger is the better cartridge: slightly faster, modern case design, able to be housed in a standard-length action. Except for the "P" factor. Just now, on the way to Mozambique, all my ammunition was confiscated in Qatar. In camp near Lake Caborra Bassa, there was, as almost always, plenty of .375 H&H ammo. Need I say more?

I'll stop with .416. Even in this rarified air we have several choices. The most likely are: oldest, .416 Rigby (1912); .416 Rem. Mag. (1989); and newest, .416 Ruger (2008). As with the .375s, the .416 Ruger is probably the "best" cartridge: a modern case, housed in a standard-length action. However, it has not been as popular as its parent: the .375 Ruger. I love the tradition of the .416 Rigby. But, with identical ballistics, the .416 Remington wins "P" for popularity, and it gets another P+ for practicality: cheaper and more compact ammo, along with the ability to be housed in a lighter and less expensive .375 H&H-length action. My preference will always be the .416 Rigby, but if you feel the need for a .416, get a .416 Rem. Mag. and be done. 

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Deflections And Dejections



Sean Delonas


THE SHOT was a no-brainer. The black bear stood in the snow 75 yards away. I was positive it would soon be wearing my tag. When I touched off the .300 RUM, the bear never flinched. It was as if nothing had happened. I was so stunned it took me a few seconds longer than usual to chamber another round, and by then it was too late. The bear turned and waddled off, out of sight below a small ridge. I tried to process what had just transpired. My rifle was dead-on, nestled in a solid rest. I've missed before, but this miss was inexplicable.

My Canadian guide turned to leave, but I needed to solve this puzzle. I asked him to stand exactly where I had shot from. I walked over to where the bear had stood. I drew an imaginary straight line to the guide and didn't see anything amiss. Then I spotted it: the top of a Douglas fir sapling lying in the snow. I picked it up. There was part of a round hole where it had been separated from the tree. A bullet hole, an obvious deflection. The discovery offered some solace, but the miss meant no bear on this hunt. It was the last hour of the last day, and the odds were poor we'd see another bear on the way back to camp.

I knew the gang back at camp would have fun with this news. I was with a group of outdoor writers, including legendary humor writer Pat McManus. He and I wrote columns for the same magazine. The boss editor had asked us to go on a hunt and then write, in our own words, what actually happened in two separate side-by-side features. Pat's version of my bear

miss was brilliant. He wrote that I was actually after the trophy sapling, and when the bear walked behind it, I was offered a clear silhouette and took the shot. Vintage McManus.

On a whitetail hunt in Saskatchewan, I sat in a cold elevated stand and watched as a big buck walked within range. I slowly eased my rifle away from the wall and concentrated intently on him. The butt of my rifle touched an empty orange juice can, which clattered noisily on the floor. The buck raised his head and stared at me with that look every whitetail hunter knows. To my surprise, I was able to shoulder the rifle and take aim. The buck was standing behind some fairly thin brush, and I knew he would bolt any second. I figured the big .300 RUM bullet would easily drill through the vegetation. When I touched off the round I could tell the buck was hit by the way he reacted to the shot. He disappeared in an instant. My guide and I followed the blood trail on fresh snow and came upon the buck. I'd hit him far from a vital organ, but the snow allowed me to spot him and take a finishing shot. We investigated the spot where the buck had stood and I saw where the bullet had punched through brush and obviously been deflected. It's the biggest whitetail I've ever taken, which explains why I didn't hesitate to shoot through the vegetation.

There's only one good thing about a deflection: It's an ironclad alibi for a miss. It shouldn't occur in the first place, but every hunting scenario is different. Stuff happens. 



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