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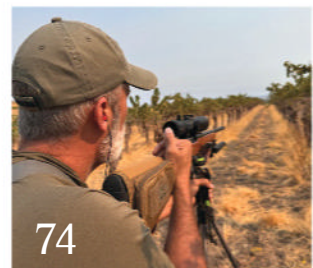
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FROM THE EDITOR

DAVID DRAPER



Guns For Everyone

Our annual Guns & Gear issue typically garners lots of rants and raves from readers. The rants are usually aimed at the price of the firearms we review, while the raves come from hunters who enjoy reading about all guns, even the ones they may not be able to afford. I get it, and can commiserate with the former while falling into the latter camp. While my job allows me to see, shoot and, sometimes, hunt with expensive guns, my salary puts a severe financial strain on what my gun safe can accommodate. Readers might be surprised to discover there are a lot more “budget” firearms in my collection than those deemed as “expensive,” though both those terms are subjective.

I understand not everyone can afford a rifle like the Nemo Arms featured on the cover. (I certainly can't.) However, the Electus might be the best example of what a modern bolt-action rifle can be. In my line of work, that's noteworthy and worth including in our annual gun review and roundup. At the other end of the spectrum is the new Glenfield, a reborn brand that comes out of the Ruger family with a price tag that's not much more than a few fill-ups of a half-ton pickup. The polymer-stocked rifle is not fancy, but it's serviceable

and a great choice for someone looking to buy a good deer gun for not a lot of money.

Speaking of inexpensive rifles, let's not forget the Mossberg Patriot, which celebrated a decade of production last year. The Patriot is one of my favorite budget rifles, and I've used mine in .25-06 to kill Coues deer at 450 yards and aoudad at little more than 150 yards. Though I own fancier rifles, prettier rifles and more expensive rifles, I don't have many that can outshoot that “budget” gun capable of printing same-hole groups. Does that mean a rifle like the one on our cover is not worth the cost? Not hardly. A Volkswagen and Ferrari will both get you to your destination. Deciding how you want to get there is up to you.

See you around the campfire,

David Draper | Editor in Chief
email: hunting@outdoorsg.com

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NEW GEAR

THE EDITORS

Shooter Ready

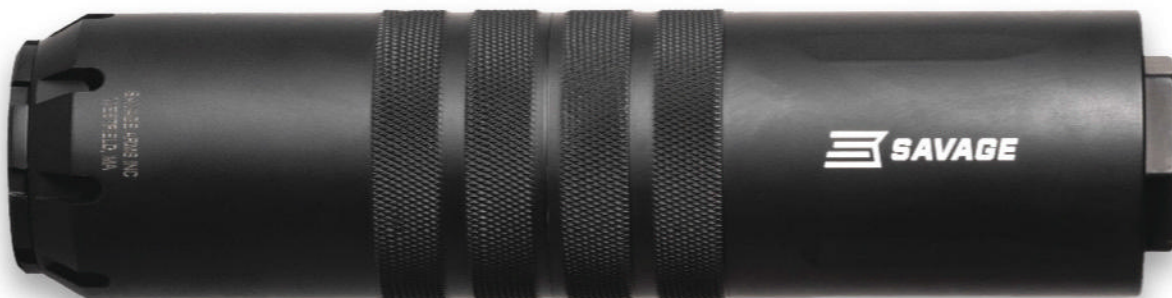


Tightening various screws to their appropriate torque limit is often overlooked and not meeting the standard can cause serious issues in the field. Fortunately, Wheeler gives sportsman a simple fix with their **F.A.T. Stix Preset Torque Wrench Set**. The set includes 15, 25, 35, 45 and 65 inch-pound torque limiters, a dozen popular bit sizes and a comfortable T-handle grip all stowed neatly in a convenient soft carry case.

\$110; wheelertools.com

The **AccuCan AC30 B.O.B.** (or Back-Over-Barrel) is Savage's newest addition to their impressive suppressor lineup. This design shifts attachment to inside the suppressor as opposed to the end of the barrel, cutting substantial overall length from your firearm. The result? A much more compact, easy to maneuver and effective noise-suppression solution. Attachment is simple with direct threads via its 5/8-24 pitch.

\$1,099; savagearms.com



Vortex Optics new **Viper Shotgun Enclosed Micro Green Dot** sight builds upon the proven line, providing turkey hunters a reliable, low-profile optic with a wide field of view and a new green reticle. Other features include multiple reticle options to choose from, an integrated universal mounting system for drilled and tapped receivers and motion activation with a 10-minute auto shutoff.

\$430; vortexoptics.com

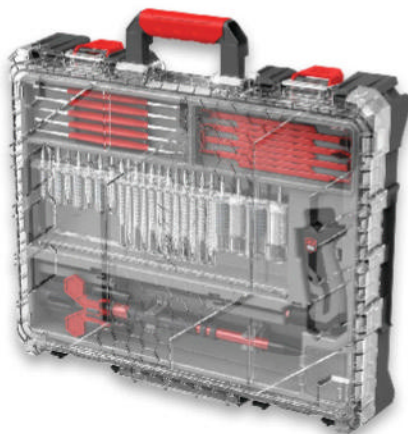


The days of bulky hearing protection are long gone with the introduction of Walker Game Ear's **Suppressor Bluetooth Earbuds**. These ear buds provide sound activated compression along with a 25db noise rating reduction. With its Bluetooth connectivity, users can also seamlessly pair them with their phone for hands-free calls and audio streaming on the go.

\$150; walkersgameear.com

Leupold Optic's new line of **VX-4HD** riflescopes deliver premium performance and high-end features at a cost-conscious price point. This new true 4x zoom riflescope utilizes a second-focal-plane design and Leupold's proven Elite Optical System glass. Other noteworthy features include its CDS-ZL2 dial turret, integrated throw lever, and illuminated reticle. Currently available in three models with four reticles to choose from.

\$800-\$1,200; leupold.com



Real Avid's **Bore-Max Master Cleaning Kit and Mobile Workstation** is a one-stop shop for all of your gun cleaning necessities whether you are on a multi-day waterfowl trip or simply returning home from a day in the deer stand. This kit features a wide array of tools and products designed to deliver a comprehensive cleaning for firearms from .22 rimfires all the way up to 12-gauge scatterguns.

\$220; realavid.com



Winchester's new **Supreme Long Range** ammunition combines extensive R&D with premium components to produce match-grade precision with impressive terminal performance at distances near and far. Headlining the new offering is Winchester's new BC Max bullet, featuring heavy-for-caliber projectiles and impressive ballistic coefficients. Available in seven popular calibers.

\$46-\$70; winchester.com



The American Whitetail line from Hornady received a facelift this year with the launch of their new **American Whitetail Tipped** ammunition. The new line features the same legendary SST and FTX bullets that whitetail hunters know and love, but they now sport a streamlined polymer tip for increased ballistic performance. Available in most of your favorite deer cartridges ranging from .350 Legend on up to .300 Win. Mag.

\$45-\$59; hornady.com

TESTED TOUGH

SCOTT ERGAS

TiON's Dragoon Mini Tames Alaska

If Alaska is wet, Southeast Alaska is soaked—there's no getting around it. This is a fact of life and careful consideration about the gear you pack is paramount.

Obvious choices like well-made, quality rain gear and waterproof footwear are prevalent threads of thought, as well as what rifle will accompany you on your adventure—down to the finite intricacies of cartridge choice.

I never considered bringing a suppressor along for the journey, but the more our bear hunting plan came together, the more I saw the merits of sound suppression for our purposes—which led me to the TiON Dragoon Mini.

I was already bringing a .308 Win. rifle with a 22-inch barrel that was threaded 5/8-24. The rifle was obnoxiously long, and I needed a small form factor if I was to top it with a can. At 5.5 inches long, with a 1.375-inch diameter and a weight of 7.8 ounces, the Dragoon Mini seamlessly paired with my Tikka. The titanium construction and Cerakote finish were added security against the corrosive seaspray we would surely encounter—with TiON's TBT design that allows the user to remove, clean and service all components if need arise.

Prince of Wales Island has an immense population of Jurassic-sized bears and the chance of us doubling up became a reality. Shooting suppressed in case things got western was added insurance if we needed follow-up shots to dispatch the bruins we were targeting.

When the “bear-thirty” evening hour was upon us, black bears rolled out of the dense old-growth forest like moths to flame for a chance at the tasty chartreuse-colored grass. Spotters on tripods, we referenced size and behaviors—finding a shooter.

The sneak to get in closer was slow going. Slipping on moss-coated shoreline rocks without tearing an ACL was of prime importance. With injury, we could easily have gone from hunter to hunted.

A bear was feeding voraciously in front of a downed tree on the beach across from our cove. After briefly eyeballing him through my riflescope (not something I commonly practice), I laid down prone and got into shooting position.

The muffled crack and heavy thwack of flesh briefly echoed, leaving the bear motionless on the shore.

Clarity is the best word to describe the aftermath. The moment forever cached in my mind and heart. It was cold, damp, lush, beautiful. And it was quiet. **P**

BULLET BOARD

JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT

Barnes 400-gr. .416 Banded Solid



BULLET BASICS

This non-expanding design features a blend of classic and modern characteristics. Designed for ultra-deep penetration on dangerous game such as Cape buffalo, elephant and hippo, the Barnes Banded Solid is made of a copper alloy and does not mushroom or expand at all. Although a flat nose is considered to transfer energy more effectively and to provide best-possible straight-line penetration even when heavy bone is impacted, this Banded Solid's round nose is classic in profile and optimizes smooth, reliable feeding. Driving bands around the bullet's shank minimize bearing surface, allowing the Banded Solid to be pushed at very impressive velocities.

TESTING GROUND

The bullet pictured was used to kill a free-range Cape buffalo bull in Namibia's legendary Caprivi Strip. Cape buffalo have massive bones and are known for being incredibly tenacious of life—a perfect test for a bullet designed for dangerous game.

FIELD PERFORMANCE

Austin Brown brought the bull down with a 400-grain Barnes TSX bullet from about 40 yards, but the buffalo refused to expire and turned toward us, struggling to rise. Brown drove this Banded Solid through the point of the facing-on bull's shoulder. It shattered the massive shoulder bone, perforated the vitals, and came to rest in the buffalo's far-side hip, effectively administering a *coup de grâce*.

STATS

Impact velocity from Brown's .416 Rem. Mag. Winchester Model 70 was estimated at 2,350 fps. Penetration drove at least five feet deep, devastating massive bone and vitals along its path. The recovered bullet weighs 399 grains, essentially 100 percent of original weight. Expanded diameter is .416 inch, indicating that no expansion occurred—exactly as designed.

NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

Barnes Banded Solids tend to be among the most accurate non-expanding hunting bullet designs available and often provide best-in-class velocity in handloads thanks to their minimal bearing surface. It's an excellent bullet, properly engineered for use by hunters who count their life on it.

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Cleaning Matters

A clean gun is often the difference between a filled freezer and missed opportunities.

We were on the X. The morning air was frosty, and flakes of white danced in the truck's headlights. I'll never forget that day. Two of the other hunters huddled in layout blinds would just as soon forget it. It was the kind of cold where loading shotgun shells into your chamber and working your action stung fingers through battery-heated gloves. However, the geese fell into the fakes magnificently, and after seven shots, I had reached my five-bird limit. While I shot, my buddies fought with their shotguns. Actions got smacked, foul language flew, and one friend pulled a can of WD-40 from his blind bag and lathered the internal working parts of his scattergun. My other buddy, after unloading his pump-action, slammed the butt of the stock into the icy mud in hopes of freeing the gun's action bars.

Cleaning your shotgun regularly matters. But what does regularly mean? Is there a rule? Do you clean it after every hunt, twice a season, etc.? My rule is this: I clean my shotgun top to bottom after every third hunt to prevent rust, remove dirt and grime and improve shot-to-shot pattern consistency. Waterfowl hunts are typically cold, wet and muddy. I use products from Real Avid and Hoppe's to keep my autoloading and pump-action shotguns performing perfectly. Here are a few other steps:

- Remove the choke when you clean the barrel. Clean the barrel and choke threads. Heat, pressure, moisture and grime can weld a choke to the inner barrel threads. Reinstall with choke tube lube to prevent seizing.
- If you notice your action working slowly and spent hulls landing closer to your body than usual after a volley, spraying WD-40, Gunk Blaster, etc. into your shotgun's internals is not the answer. It attracts dirt, causes misfires and makes cycling worse in cold weather. WD-40 and similar products

are water displacers—not lubricants—and they leave a sticky residue. Go with a dry lube or dedicated gun oil.

- Most shotgun manufacturers have disassembly instructional videos on their websites. If not, YouTube will. Learn to disassemble your shotgun and clean every working part.

While the process for rifles is slightly different, it is equally important to keep your favorite big-game gun in tip-top shape. I have an X-Bolt chambered in .22-250 that would have no room for notches had I made one for every coyote that fell to the rifle. Two years ago, my son, using a mouth call, put a double in my lap. I missed both. Something was wrong.

When we returned to the truck, my son, Hunter, asked me, "Dad, when's the last time you cleaned that rifle?"

I couldn't remember. As it turned out, it had been so long between barrel baths that fouling had built up to the point that carbon, copper, powder, dirt and mud was baked inside the rifling. It took two full days, letting the solvents soak and the brushes work, to run a patch through the barrel that showed zero black fouling.

If you clean your rifle regularly, you can avoid using abrasive bronze/brass brushes and stick with lighter fouling brushes and Hoppe's No. 9 solvent. I now keep my rifle barrels clean. After cleaning, I shoot three shots to foul the barrel and confirm zero. I'd put off this task with my pelt popper for too long, and it cost me.

- When cleaning your rifle's barrel, use a bore guide to center the cleaning rod and protect the chamber from damage.
- Inspect nylon, brass, and bronze brushes for bent wires. Bent wires can create nicks and gouges in your barrel's rifling.
- Follow a shoot-and-clean sequence when breaking in a new rifle barrel. **P**



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Those of us who are real rifle nuts can easily find ourselves with blinders on. In our search for the perfect rifle for some exotic purpose, we can forget we are not the norm. The fact is most hunters won't ever climb a sheep mountain or chase elk in the timber. The vast majority of folks simply want to punch a whitetail tag and put some meat in the freezer. A simple, functional and affordable rifle is the answer to the question. The Glenfield Model A fits that requirement.

Roughly 6 million whitetail deer are killed by American hunters each year. Nearly 90% of those animals are taken on private land and my assumption is that most of them are taken at relatively close ranges, likely from stands. Such hunting doesn't require super-duper high-BC bullets, sub-MOA accuracy or many of the other "must haves" of our times. Put an inexpensive cup-and-core bullet through the vitals and dinner is served.

One might blame slick marketers or social media for the demand for unnecessary features, but the reality is that this is far from a new phenomenon. 65 years ago, Marlin Firearms recognized the need for a no-frills rifle for putting meat on

the table. In response, they introduced the Glenfield series of firearms. These guns were inexpensive but serviceable and ideal for budget-minded hunters and shooters. When Ruger acquired the Marlin brand in 2020, the Glenfield name came along with it. In 2025, the brand was reborn when the Glenfield Model A was released to the public.

True to the brand's history, the Model A is a cost-conscious rifle designed with whitetail hunters in mind. The Model A comes with an MSRP of \$499 and a street price of around \$429. In a world of \$80,000 pick-up trucks and \$800 bipods, that's a real bargain. The Model A is currently chambered in seven deer-appropriate cartridges ranging from .243 Winchester to .30-06 Springfield. Those who hunt states that demand the use of straight-wall cartridges will be pleased to know that the .350 Legend and .450 Bushmaster are among its offerings. Our test sample came chambered in the versatile .308 Winchester.

Sharp-eyed readers will recognize the Model A as being incredibly similar to the first-generation Ruger American rifle. That design changed the budget-rifle game when it was released in 2012 and rapidly gained a reputation for

accuracy despite its modest price tag. Ruger has followed up on that success with the Generation II series, which expanded the feature set but also raised the price.

The Glenfield's Model A action uses a three-lug bolt resulting in a 70-degree bolt throw. The downside of a short throw is that it takes more effort to lift the bolt and cock the action. The full-diameter bolt body is a slip fit with the receiver raceway so there's minimal play between the parts—this results in a smooth-cycling action that shouldn't bind no matter how hard you run the bolt. It also features a sliding-plate-style extractor and a plunger-type ejector. The bolt stop sits on the left side of the receiver.

The Model A uses a handy tang-mounted two-position safety. There is a small tab at the back of the bolt's cocking piece that serves as a loaded chamber indicator. The Glenfield's trigger is a single-stage and uses a Glock-like trigger safety. Our test rifle's trigger broke at 4.25 pounds, but the trigger is user-adjustable between 3 and 5 pounds. The rifle feeds from a detachable box magazine that is molded from polymer and sits flush with the bottom of the stock. In our .308 chambering, the magazine capacity was 4 rounds, plus one in the chamber.

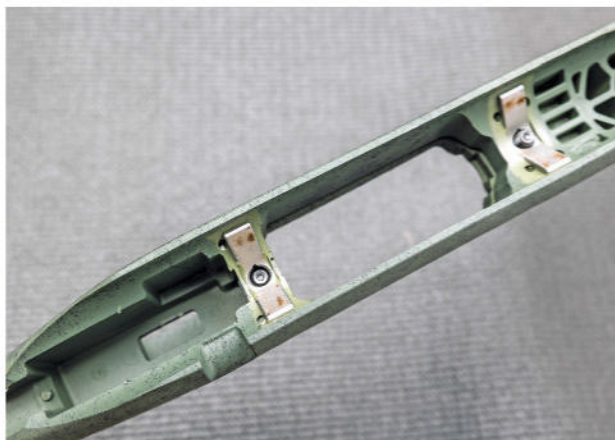
All current-production Model A rifles are fit with 20-inch sporter-weight chromoly barrels that are cold-hammer forged in Ruger's own barrel-making facility. Barrels are threaded 5/8-24 and covered with a steel thread protector. With the elimination of the \$200 NFA tax, even hunters on a budget might consider using a suppressor. I mounted a SilencerCo Omega 300 unit for our testing.

The Model A comes with a factory-installed one-piece Picatinny rail. This makes it very simple to mount an optic to the rifle. I mounted a Burris Veracity PH 2.5-12x42mm scope for our evaluation. This optic has a sophisticated internal heads-up display that works with a free ballistic app to provide shooting solutions inside the scope. These onboard electronics make the center housing of the scope a tad bulkier than it otherwise would be. Because of that dimension, I had to use a set of high rings to allow the bottom of the scope to clear the rail. I could have used my Bridgeport (or a hacksaw) to create a two-piece rail which would have cleared the scope, but this wasn't my rifle.



Like most budget-minded rifles on the market these days, the Model A uses a polymer stock. These designs are lightweight and inexpensive, but you get what you pay for. Instead of a traditional recoil lug on the action, two steel lugs are set into the stock and fit into seats milled into the underside of the action.

The stock is an attractive green color with a dark gray or black "crinkle" finish that adds some texture. Besides the lack of rigidity that is endemic with this type of stock, my only real gripe is the low comb height. With our scope installed, my cheek barely touched the stock when I shouldered the rifle. Given the size of many of today's scopes, the comb height could use some adjusting. A slip-on nylon cheek rest is a simple and cost-effective solution.



The Glenfield utilizes two steel lugs set into the stock as opposed to a traditional recoil lug on the action.



The author's test rifle trigger broke at a crisp 4.25 pounds.

I tested the Model A with three different hunting loads ranging from 150- to 168-grain bullets. Accuracy varied significantly, depending on the load, but the best groups came from Winchester's 150-grain Copper Impact ammunition. While the overall accuracy results from this rifle won't blow anyone away, let's keep the intended use in mind. It doesn't take ½ MOA to kill a deer at traditional hunting distances.

At 6.3 pounds stripped, this is a lightweight rifle. It was handy to carry and relatively compact—ideal for stand hunting. I carried the rifle while whitetail hunting back home and didn't feel undergunned. The one problem I encountered was a failure to extract a loaded round from the chamber in the field; I re-cycled the bolt, and it came right out.

By reviving the Glenfield name, Ruger has returned to market a product that provides a great deal of value and a low price. For those looking for a simple, serviceable rifle to take afield, the Glenfield Model A has a lot going for it. **P**



The Glenfield features a two-position, tang-mounted safety.



The 5/8-24 thread pitch easily accommodates a wide range of suppressors.

GLENFIELD MODEL A	CALIBER:	.308 WINCHESTER
	BARREL:	20-INCH, 1:10 TWIST, THREADED 5/8-24
	WEIGHT:	6.3 POUNDS
	CAPACITY:	4+1
	STOCK:	POLYMER
	FINISH:	MATTE BLUE
	SIGHTS:	NONE, PICATINNY RAIL
	SAFETY:	TANG-MOUNTED TWO-POSITION
	TRIGGER:	SINGLE-STAGE, 4.25 POUNDS (ADJUSTABLE)
	PRICE:	\$499
WEBSITE:	GLENFIELDFIREARMS.COM	

ACCURACY TEST

(Accuracy is the results of three 3-shot groups at 100 yards.)

Ammunition	Velocity (fps)	Accuracy (in.)
Nosler Whitetail Country 165 gr.	2,743	1.7
Speer Gold Dot 168 gr.	2,559	2.0
Winchester Copper Impact 150 gr.	2,664	0.9

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OPEN COUNTRY

JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT



A Most Useful Mid-Bore

The 9.3x62 has cleanly killed nearly every species that walks the earth.

Among all the clamor over cutting-edge new cartridges, there's a resurgence of interest in one that's 120 years old. It's called the 9.3x62, and it is arguably the most versatile, practical, one-for-everything cartridge in the world.

That title is usually given to the .375 H&H, but many experts believe the 9.3x62 deserves it more. This fine old cartridge is easy to shoot and inherently accurate. It's potent without being punishing, and its hunting prowess is proven on game around the world, ranging from roebuck to moose in Europe, springbok to elephant in Africa and whitetail deer to coastal brown bear in North America.

Although many American hunters have never heard of the 9.3x62, it's beloved in Africa and Europe and is recently experiencing a surge in popularity here in the U.S.A. More rifles are currently being chambered for the cartridge than ever before, mostly in bolt actions by companies ranging from Ruger and Tikka right up to Rigby.

Otto Bock—a German engineer—designed the 9.3x62 in 1905. Its purpose: fit in Mauser rifles and provide German and Dutch colonists in Africa with an affordable, easy-shoot-

ing rifle capable of handling anything that walked the Dark Continent. Over the next 35 years, it would become the most common and most popular cartridge in use amongst the Boer people that settled Africa.

Ballistics are impressive. The cartridge uses a case similar in size to the .30-06 and the 8mm Mauser, so Mauser rifle magazines hold five rounds—one or two more than .375 H&H rifles held. Bullet diameter is 0.366, just nine-thousandths shy of the .375 H&H that would prove to be the 9.3x62's dominant competitor. The most common bullet weight is 286 grains. Muzzle velocity from 24-inch barrels averages about 2,360 fps, which generates just north of 3,500 ft/lbs of kinetic energy.

Although that 3,500 ft/lbs of kinetic impact energy is less than the 4,000 often touted as the minimum for dangerous game, the 9.3x62 proved its ability to kill big, dangerous game cleanly. It's one of those cartridges that possesses an undefinable ability to punch above its weight class.

For a cartridge capable of cleanly killing Cape buffalo and elephant, recoil is quite mild, averaging around 37 ft/lbs in an 8-pound rifle. For the sake of reference, an 8-pound .30-06 loaded with 180-grain bullets generates nearly 25 ft/lbs. An

8-pound .375 H&H loaded with 300-grain bullets produces about 54 ft/lbs of recoil energy.

Lest you think 37 pounds of recoil is a lot, allow me to say this: at just 13 years old, my son William shot my lightweight 9.3x62 very comfortably. He used it to take several head of African plains game out to 220 yards, making well-placed one-shot kills.

If the 9.3x62 cartridge has a weakness, it is that it's not a long-range proposition. Projectiles are made for killing dangerous game with authority; not for flying far with minimum velocity loss and wind deflection. Muzzle velocity is slow by modern long-range standards, but is right in the sweet spot for dangerous game.

Not that the 9.3x62 can't reach out to practical hunting distances effectively. Bullets in the 235- to 250-grain range can be loaded to 2,600 fps or more, and have trajectory and wind deflection similar to traditional 165-grain hunting bullets in the .308. A good rifleman with an accurate 9.3x62 can make clean kills out to 400 yards or thereabouts.

Although not commonly found in your local hardware store, a wide assortment of factory ammo is available for the 9.3x62. It's loaded here in the U.S. by Federal, Hornady, Nosler, Swift, Winchester, Buffalo Bore and Barnes. Across the pond, it's loaded by Norma (which alone has eight different offerings), Lapua, Fiocchi, Sellier & Bellot, RWS, PPU and others.

Rifles, too, are readily available. You can find used Mausers on Gunbroker, and new rifles are offered by Tikka, Rigby, Mauser, Merkel, Blaser, CZ, Sauer, Steyr, Sako and other European makers. Here in the United States, Ruger chambers multiple models for the 9.3x62, including the classic No. 1 single-shot and the new M77 Alaskan Bush Rifle (see pg. 42).

You can also re-barrel any rifle chambered for a .30-06 (or similar) cartridge and chamber it for the 9.3x62. It's an easy and inexpensive way to get into a great-shooting rifle.

World War II came around and put a hurting on 9.3x62 ammo availability. British and German manufacturers stopped loading it. As supplies dried up, hunters were forced to contrive handloads out of repurposed .30-06 cases, which worked but were a tad undersized at the case head. Eventually, many 9.3x62 rifles were sold off or re-barreled to .30-06.



Could the 9.3x62 be the best cartridge you've never heard of?

For about six decades the fine old 9.3x62 cartridge hibernated in near obsolescence. Only a few staunch hunters and handloaders who knew and valued its capability continued to use it.

The year 2005 marked the 9.3x62's 100th birthday, and a group of South African shooters and hunters gathered to celebrate. They held shooting matches, shared personal stories, and swapped proverbial legends about the cartridge. I mark that event as the wind that fanned the 9.3x62 spark into life. Over the two decades since, the cartridge has roared like a wildfire and it's now on the lips of cartridge savants everywhere.

Aside from its intriguing history, the simple fact is that the 9.3x62 is an incredibly balanced, practical and capable hunting cartridge. It fits into all standard .30-06-length actions, making it suitable for common, readily available bolt-action rifles. It runs at modern pressure levels, so its ballistic performance is not crippled by weak vintage rifle actions. It's inherently accurate; in the hands of a good rifleman most rifles will shoot sub-inch groups at 100 yards.



On the right is a 286-grain 9.3x62 bullet that killed the author's biggest cape buffalo with a single shot. At left for contrast is a 400-grain bullet from a .416 Remington that also killed a buffalo.



Good accuracy is the norm with the 9.3x62. Most well-built rifles should shoot sub-MOA with most factory ammo.



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The 9.3x62 has been killing Cape buffalo and other dangerous game for 120 years with little fuss or fanfare. This excellent bull fell to a single front-on shot from the author's vintage Dumoulin square-bridge Mauser.

These characteristics can be attributed to many popular hunting cartridges. What makes the 9.3x62 stand out is its capability on dangerous game. Thanks to its heavy-for-caliber bullets, it provides plentiful authority for the biggest game in the northern hemisphere, from bison to Alaskan moose to coastal brown bears.

Load non-expanding "solid" bullets, and the 9.3x62 becomes suitable for use on the biggest game in the world, including elephants and rhino. In *The 9.3x62 Journal* you can read about many of the cartridge's more notable exploits, including Harry Flederman's taking of the third largest bull elephant ever shot in Mozambique and the 9.3x62's use in the hands of female explorer Osa Johnson, who used it to stop multiple charges by rhino, lion and other dangerous game.

Although it's not as common as the .375 H&H that overshadowed it after WWII, the 9.3x62 fits in lighter actions, holds 20 to 40 percent more cartridges in the magazine, has about 30 percent less recoil, and kills with near-equal effectiveness. There's a lot to like about the 9.3x62 cartridge. **P**



VISION QUEST

DAVID DRAPER

An Easy-Set 6x

Nightforce makes its case for the best new hunting riflescope in 2026.

Well-known in the military and long-range shooting world, Nightforce has long been an aspirational brand for anyone looking to stretch the distance between them and their target. Those targets were mostly inanimate (in civilian use, anyway), with a majority of hunters opting for other optical brands. Oh, there are more than a few predator and varmint hunters who have saved their money to spend on Nightforce optics, but speaking in general, it's just not a brand well-established in the hunting world. In recent years, the company has looked to increase their market share among hunters, with the introduction of both the NXS and NX8 riflescopes. For 2026, they're securing that position with the introduction of their NX6 riflescopes for mid- to long-range hunting.

Before the introduction of the NX6, the high-power NX8 line was Nightforce's flagship mass-market riflescope for good reason. It was built to the company's exacting standards for durability and repeatability, putting every shot where it mattered no matter the conditions. While aimed at hunters, the truth is most of us, with maybe the exception of prairie dog or rockchuck hunters, don't want or need 8X magnification in the field. A 4 or 6X scope is more in line with the majority of hunters who may want to extend their range past 500 yards, but aren't looking to snipe an elk at 1,000 yards.

To that end, Nightforce recently introduced their new NX6 line of riflescopes, with models ranging from a big-woods banger 1-6x42 to a canyon-crossing 3-36x56. In the middle is the sweet spot, where the 2-12x, 3-18x (tested here) and 4-24x models live. With the exception of the 1-6x, all NX6 scopes are available in both first and second focal-plane models with both MIL or MOA adjustments. Several different reticles, including illuminated options, also give hunters ready to step up to serious extended-ranged hunting and competitive shooting the configuration they are most comfortable with.

NO TOOLS NECESSARY

Dialing for dope has become the norm in most shooting situations, giving hunters the ability to simply turn their scope's

elevation knob to the desired yardage or drop and putting the reticle precisely where they want the bullet to impact. While holdover still has its place, both in the field and competition, ballistic drop dials are where it's at.

Some dials, however, do have drawbacks, namely the need to carry a tool, usually a tiny allen wrench, to make major adjustments like resetting a zero stop. In the last couple of years, manufacturers have come up with a few solutions to this pain point, and the Nightforce NX6 series exhibits the most recent innovation. Nightforce calls theirs the FieldSet turret system, which features an exposed dial topped with an inset locking cap. While not exactly toolless, the locking cap doesn't require a proprietary tool (though Nightforce does provide a TriTool device). Instead, the cap can be unlocked and removed with just about any small item that provides significant leverage. Once unlocked and fully unscrewed, the user can then lift the dial turret to set the zero stop or reset the dial in the case more down adjustment is necessary. This system also allows the shooter to remove the ballistic dial and replace it with a standard cap or, better yet, purchase a customized ballistic dial from Nightforce to use in place of the standard milliradian or MOA dial. (The windage dial is capped and can be adjusted without a tool, but resetting windage to zero does require a 5/64 Allen wrench.)

OPTIONS FOR ALL

As mentioned, Nightforce has always been well entrenched in the military and sport-shooting world, each of which have their idiosyncrasies. Think busy ballistic reticles with a myriad of aiming points options and the need for milliradian measurements over minute-of-angle that most of us non-tactical shooters are more comfortable with. All built on a front-focal plane system. I am somewhat speaking in generalizations, but with the NX6 line, Nightforce's goal is to help the everyman more easily transition into the higher-end brand that can otherwise be intimidating.

In addition to offering more MOA-based options in both first- and second-focal plane optical systems, Nightforce has also greatly expanded their reticle options, literally offering something for everyone. Want a detailed windage and ballistic drop aiming

The NX6 bridges the gap in Nightforce's line for shooters seeking a premium riflescope for both hunting and competitive pursuits.



Nightforce's new FieldSet turret system is a headlining feature of the new NX6 line.

solution that quite literally lights up like a Christmas tree? They've got that. Want a simple plex-style reticle that provides a complete field of view within the optic with no distractions? Nightforce provides. Instead of offering everything in every model, the reticle options vary with intended end use – think more “serious” long-range dedicated reticle options in the higher magnification scopes and the option to keep things simpler in the scopes that people might be more inclined to mount on their hunting rifle. (Yet, keeping BDC reticle options available in those mid-range models too for those of us who dabble in both worlds.)

RANGE TESTED

With all those options available, I found myself gravitating to the 3-18x50 F1 NX6 with the illuminated MOA-C reticle. In all my hunting experiences, I rarely find myself dialing much higher than 12-15X, but I wanted the option for a little more magnification as this scope will likely live atop my NRL Hunter rifle this coming season. The MOA-C reticle also delivers precise drop and windage points with visible numbering so I don't have to math things out in my head, all in a minute-of-angle package that I, as an old-school hunter, am much more comfortable with. The F1 designates this model as a first-focal plane system, so I can use the BDC reticle at any magnification.

As much as I would like to say I've bloodied the NX6, all my testing thus far has been on my home range. I mounted my scope to a Seekins PH3-NRL model chambered in 6 Creedmoor, using Nightforce rings. I expected the 50mm objective lens on the 3-18x50 F1 to require high rings, but was pleasantly surprised to find medium rings provided ample clearance between the barrel and bell.

After boresighting, getting the rifle on zero at the range took just a few shots. Both the windage and elevation dials on the NX6 are tactile, with positive clicks, so there's no wondering “was that one click or two?” or “did I just turn that too far?” To get the necessary downward adjustment, I did have to get past the hard zero stop. This required loosening the elevation turret and lifting it slightly up until the first (of three) revolution lines was exposed. After re-tightening the FieldSet dial and dropping the point of impact to zero at 100 yards, I repeated the process to reset the zero stop.

I, of course, did not have the provided tool with me on the range, so I put the FieldSet feature to the test, using the

back of the can opener tool on my Swiss Army Knife to loosen and tighten the locking dial. A coin or other small item would work just as well. In fact, I can just about unlock the cap with my fingers, and many users may be able to get enough grip to do so. But, I am comfortable the FieldSet system is tight enough to never accidentally loosen in the field. The windage dial is capped, but the interior dial is marked left and right in ¼ MOA adjustments and shifts POI accordingly. It does require a small Allen wrench to reset the dial to the zero position, which is a bit frustrating, but lends itself to Nightforce's robust reliability as you can always be assured the dial will not accidentally move off zero.

To give it a true field test, I probably should have thrown the rifle/optic combo into the back of my truck and bounced around some rugged two-tracks for a few weeks. Or slipped it into a scabbard hanging off the side of a wild-eyed mare and rode deep into the backcountry, half-hoping for a blow-up. As it were, the gun and optic didn't move off my bench much, with the exception of some NRL practice in the kneeling and prone positions. So, as for ruggedness, I can only assume the NX6 will perform, but for repeatability and accurate adjustments, I can attest the riflescope performs as advertised.

Box tests showed each adjustment moved the point of impact in accordance with the number of clicks the dial received. From 100 to 750 yards, both the dial and BDC reticle were on target when I provided the right dope from my ballistic calculations. One thing that gets lost among Nightforce's reputation for ruggedness is true optical performance (so much so the company doesn't even highlight its optics or coatings in marketing materials). I found the optics to be as clear as that in more established European brands, with low-light performance and edge-to-edge clarity more than adequate to my aging eyes.

Robust reliability is what Nightforce built its reputation on, as their tactical end-users demand no-fail performance with non-negotiable repeatability. The fact hunters can now access that kind of durability in a package designed more closely to their needs is a big bonus. The Nightforce NX6 will be my go-to riflescope for this year's NRL Hunter matches and will stay in my arsenal well into hunting season. **P**



FOUR OF US SLIPPED OVER THE RIDGE, PEEKING ACROSS THE NARROW VALLEY TO WHERE THE MULEY BUCK AND HIS DOES WERE STANDING.

Chad stayed as low on the horizon as possible as he set up the shooting sticks. I did my best to stay out of the way. My 11-year-old son, James, squirmed to find a stable position as the animals stirred. Even though Montana's youth deer season was prior to the opening of the general rifle season, these deer were spooky and wouldn't hold much longer. As Chad guided James into finding the shooter buck, the deer's survival instincts took over. We watched helplessly as the herd bounded over the next ridge and out of sight.

I first hunted with Chad Schearer back in 2016 and we've been in the field together several times since, both near his home in Montana and in other Western states. Part of our connection is our shared values; Chad and his wife Marsha are deeply committed to their faith and family. You can fake a lot of things in this world, but raising great kids is not one of them. When I first met Chad's sons, Walker and Wyatt, on their Montana ranch, I was deeply impressed. Being around two polite and intelligent teenagers who'd trained their own bird dogs and broken their own horses affected me deeply. Getting to know these young men made me think long and hard about how I would raise my own children.

My own son's passion for the outdoors runs deep. James is at his happiest when he has a gun or fishing rod in his hands. Sure, I've encouraged it, but I've never tried to force him or his sisters into chasing my dreams. I guess it's in his blood.

Thanks to growing up around a farm with a dad who makes part of his living hunting and shooting, he's had a childhood that I could have only dreamed of. The first time I took him hunting with me, he was only three. He's been filling our freezer with venison, turkeys, feral pigs and game birds since he was seven. It wasn't long before his mind danced with dreams of hunting western game.

I'd long hoped that James' first taste of hunting the West would come alongside the mentorship of Chad and his family and, last fall, that hope became a plan. James would hunt for mule deer as part of Montana's two-day youth deer season. As the hunt approached, James counted down the days. His excitement for this trip was genuine—the kind of childhood thrill that I wish I could recapture as an adult.

James has always been a bit of a natural when it comes to shooting. The last time we showed up at a youth hunt, he was helping some of the dads zero their sons' rifles. That said, we were in country that was unlike home with plenty of wide-open spaces, steep angles and howling winds. Fortunately, Chad and his sons run The Bergara Academy, a long-range shooting course whose range features an array of steel animal targets out beyond 1,000 yards. Chad got James behind the gun and made sure the zero was correct before directing him to engage various targets across a hillside. When he was

STOKING

KEITH WOOD

THE FIRE



Chad Schearer teaching the author's son, James, the ropes on deer hunting the West.

making consistent hits on a narrow target that sat 830 yards away, we knew he would be fine using this setup in the field where he'd be shooting a fraction of that distance.

We'd seen a buck that had captured our interest while scouting the previous evening and we decided to head in his direction. Chad was guiding and Walker was running the camera. I was just there for moral support. As we piled out of the truck and began making our way up the hillside, I couldn't help but look at the ridge where I'd killed a great buck just two years earlier. This is a special piece of ground, and I loved sharing it with James. He wasn't just hearing my hunting stories; he was making his own.





Sitting behind this buck was a proud moment for both the author and his son.



Chad edged his way around the slope and spotted the buck we were after. He was a solid 4x4—not crazy wide but impressively tall. The deer was within range, 200 or so yards across the valley. This was the buck we bumped and sent over the top of a high peak. James' first blown stalk—hopefully one of many throughout his lifetime. We couldn't have him thinking this would be as easy as walking up and taking a shot. Time to separate YouTube from reality.

We found a vantage point that allowed us to spot the buck and found it had joined a larger group of deer scattered across an entire mountainside. Now, he was 500 yards away and hundreds of feet above us. Not only was the canyon far too wide to shoot across, the 80 or so eyeballs would make a stalk impossible.

We backed off and made a plan. The answer was to take the long way around and make our way to the ridge from the opposite side. We made a giant loop, hoping that the buck would stay put long enough for us to make a play.

As we approached, we had to think about which avenue offered James the best shooting position. The valley floor would mean a steep uphill shot which is something that is difficult to practice back home in Alabama. Side-hilling would have gotten us in position faster, but we would have found ourselves in a similar situation to the one that resulted in the previous blown stalk. If we bumped him a second time, the hunt was likely to become exponentially more difficult.

The answer was to hike up high where we would get a panoramic view of the valley and take advantage of a rocky outcropping that would make a stable shooting platform. I smiled to myself when I heard James breathe hard in the thin air—he was earning this one. We stopped near the top of the ridge to let his heart rate and breathing slow down to a manageable level before peeking over.

Chad found a place in the rocks that provided a perfectly flat surface that was chest-high on James. It was as if God had created this terrain feature for him to shoot over. James set the rifle down and found the buck in the scope. The forend was steady thanks to the bipod's position on the stone surface, but his right elbow was unsupported due to



the angle. As Chad confirmed that he was on the correct buck, James did something that I'm extremely proud of.

"I'm not steady," he said. He didn't feel good about the shot and, instead of getting caught up in the excitement of the moment and making a bad shot, he did the right thing and held fire. I'd preached about this very scenario as we made our way westward that week and I was glad that my words had sunk in.

We could have worked on building him a more stable position, but there was no need—a group of four bucks were feeding on the same hillside and one of them was a shooter. Their location allowed James to achieve a steadier rest. Chad



James was all smiles as he helped his dad drag out his first mule deer.

calmly talked him through locating the correct deer and waiting for him to stand broadside. On cue, James sent the shot 258 yards across the valley, and we heard the bullet smack the broadside buck through the vitals.

"You hit him good, you hit him really good," Chad said. "He's going down, buddy." Just as Walker was telling James to rack the bolt and put another round in the chamber, the buck somersaulted forward and collapsed on the mountain-side. That's when the celebration began. James was shaking with excitement when I shook his hand and gave him a hug. Every one of us was smiling.

James' smile only broadened when we made our way to the deer, and he took those antlers in his hands. Walker talked him through the process of field-dressing. James and I dragged him down the hillside as a team. I watched my son spend the rest of the trip on that indescribable high that comes with a successful hunt.

I guess I've officially reached the stage as a hunter where I take greater satisfaction in seeing my kids take an animal than I do in notching my own tag. I'm hoping that James learned that a successful hunt has nothing to do with inches or record books, but the memories that are made and the people that the hunt was shared with.

I was 24 years old the first time I hunted mule deer and didn't kill one until I was in my 30s. Do I risk "spoiling" my son by taking him on a guided western hunt at age 11? Maybe, but I wouldn't trade the time that we spend afield together for anything. I'm hoping that this hunt lit a fire in him that will keep him chasing, climbing, and seeking that next adventure over the course of his lifetime. One day, when he's older, he can take his own child on a hunt somewhere special and talk about that time he chased mule deer in Montana with Daddy, Mr. Chad and Walker. **P**

BERGARA STOKE

Though he's gaining on me fast, I'm a foot taller than my son and weigh twice as much. It would be silly to think that my ideal rifle would be a good fit for him. That was what Bergara had in mind when it designed the Stoke. This rifle has the capability of a full-sized rifle but is built with smaller hunters in-mind.

The Stoke is built around Bergara's B-14 push-feed action. It is available in nine youth-appropriate chamberings ranging in horsepower from the .223 to the 6.5 PRC. We have one at home chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor and, for this hunt, we borrowed Chad's .308. The .223-class (.384-inch bolt face) rifles are fitted with 16.5-inch barrels and feature AICS detachable magazines. The remaining chamberings use 20-inch barrels with internal magazines and BDL-style hinged floorplates.

The Stoke's barrel is threaded, and we mounted a pre-production sample of Bergara's new BTi30 suppressor for the hunt. This titanium unit weighs 12.9 ounces and is only 6.5-inches long. A 6-pound .308 could be a handful for an 11-year-old but, with the BTi30 mounted, it was very comfortable to shoot and kept us from fumbling with hearing protection when it was time to make the shot. I'm pretty certain that James was the first individual to take a game animal with this new suppressor.

Plenty of makers shorten a stock's length-of-pull and declare it a youth rifle. There's more to fit than length alone. The stock on the Stoke is scaled down proportionally to fit hunters of smaller stature. The grip is smaller, and the comb is higher, putting the shooter's eye in line with the scope. The negative comb angle helps direct the forces of recoil away from the face. The forend is shorter as well. The compact 12.5-inch length of pull can be extended with a series of 0.25-inch spacers that are included with the rifle so the stock can be adjusted appropriately as the shooter grows.

I've never met a Bergara rifle that wasn't accurate and both Stokes we used have been no different. These rifles use the same button-rifled barrels that have helped build Bergara's worldwide reputation. We didn't bench test the .308 for groups but our 6.5 Creedmoor is sub-MOA accurate.

Overall, the Stoke is a well-balanced, accurate and reliable. This rifle and suppressor combination was a key component in James' confidence when it came to making the shot under pressure.

BLIND

AFTER A SERIES OF PAINFUL LOSSES, AN OLD DEER RIFLE HELPS KEEP FAMILY TRADITIONS ALIVE.

THE DEER MOUNTS COMPLEMENTED ONE ANOTHER. LARRY'S 10-POINTER HUNG ABOVE HIS FAVORITE CHAIR IN A LEFT-FACING POSE THAT LOOKED TOWARD MARY'S 8-POINTER.

The 8 was her one and only buck, and it hung above the couch, where she sat, facing slightly to the right. The bucks were taken from the same box blind with the same rifle during the same week.

Mary had always known how to shoot, but hadn't been deer hunting one time in her life. She was near 70, and had been married to Larry 50 years, before she declared that she wanted to go and shoot a buck of her own. Larry was happy to take her on the condition that she could shoot any buck she wanted, so long as it wasn't the particular 10-pointer that he'd been chasing himself since bow season.

In deer hunting, such plans rarely work out. Usually the neighbor shoots the 10-pointer, or it gets hit by a car, and everyone goes home disgusted. But for Mary and Larry Adams, it worked out perfectly. He killed the 10-pointer the second day of season, and then handed his rifle to her. She got her big 8 the next evening, and the happy couple put them on the wall for everyone to admire.

Cancer took Larry five years later, and for a little while, Mary was left behind. Michelle, my wife and their youngest daughter, would invite her to go out deer hunting but she had no interest in that anymore, not without Larry. Gradually, she had no inter-

est in leaving the house. She'd look over at his chair, which sat empty, and see the shadow of his 10-pointer.

Mary passed away last summer, died in the same bed at home where Larry had. Anse, our son, sat next to her, the second time in three years he'd had to watch one of his grandparents die. She went to sleep with a smile on her face, even if it seemed all of the smiles had been taken from ours. The doctor said that she had cancer, too, but anyone with sense could see that a broken heart also had a lot to do with it.

The deer mounts stayed above the favorite chairs for a while, still and silent, like the dishes in the cabinets and the guns in the safe. We walked inside the house that had bustled with smiles and love not long ago, and I expected to hear Mary offer up a cup of coffee, or for Larry to look at Anse and say, "That boy is growing like a weed."

But there was only the hum of the air conditioner kicking in on occasion, and reminders of moments frozen in time. There were hand-written figures on the back of an envelope, numbers crunched from the month's bills. In the safe were three green and yellow boxes of .270 Core-Lokts, marked \$8.96 a piece. That same box of ammo costs \$42 today. Larry's guns were all there, oiled and well-kept, just as he'd left him.

He named some of his guns. The Ted Williams .30-06 that he left to me was "Old Stomper." And his favorite 870 turkey gun, which Michelle still carries, is "Old Trusty." But the gun I always associated with him the most was his favorite deer rifle, a Remington Model 700 BDL in .270 Win. It's a gun reminiscent of another time, with a glossy walnut stock,



WILL BRANTLEY

polished blued steel, hinged floorplate and open sights. Larry's scope was a Bushnell Sportview 4-12x40 with see-through rings. It was his go-to rifle and a nice one at that; something befitting of a serious trophy whitetail hunter of his day. He'd splurged on it using factory worker's wages.

If the .270 had a name, I never heard it and neither did Michelle. Regardless, it was the gun that he used to shoot several genuinely huge bucks, including the 10-point on the wall above his favorite chair, the other 10-point that hung above the television, and the massive 8-point with the kicker off its G2—Michelle's favorite buck—that he killed down by the cane brake.

Larry shot a number of predators with that rifle as well. He had a bobcat mounted on the mantle that he'd killed with it, and who knows how many coyotes he'd taken with it over the years. In fact, if Larry had a flaw in his big buck hunting program, it was that he would fire down on any coyote he saw without hesitation. Opening morning of deer season be damned. Michelle is the same way now. She can't leave a predator alone.

Years ago, the two of them would jump at the chance to go predator calling together, and once the three of us even made a road trip to the Texas Hill Country, where Larry bagged his first gray fox. Big bucks and wild turkey gobblers were his favorite, but Larry loved hunting anything with sharp teeth and pretty fur, too.

The .270 had sat there in the safe, next to those worn boxes of Core-Lokts, for all those years. Perhaps the last shots fired out of it were at the two bucks, Larry's 10 and Mary's 8, up on the wall. I told Michelle there are only so many really



nice old rifles in the world, and we should bring that .270 out of retirement. She's a superstitious woman, same as her folks were and same as many people of Appalachian descent are. The rifle would benefit from a few modern upgrades, which I was happy to make (see sidebar), but for the most part we wanted it to remain just as it had always been. I assumed it would become Michelle's go-to deer rifle.

Of course, quite a few of those classic old guns kick like rented mules, and Larry's .270 is no exception. After sighting the rifle in myself, I gave it to Michelle, who settled down for a few practice shots on the range. She had a bad case of the flinch and trigger-yanks when we started dating, and she says that old



The author pulled Larry's old .270 Win. out of retirement this past fall. It never let him down.

hardwood-stocked deer rifles like her daddy's .270 were just the type of thing that caused it. She fired the rifle a few times, but bowed out of hunting with it. With deer season approaching, she wanted to stick with her suppressed 6.5 Creedmoor, something she's comfortable with.

So, I decided to carry the rifle myself. My first hunt with it was on a foggy morning in Tennessee, a few days before Thanksgiving. The rut was kicking, and I was slipping down a logging road just before daybreak, toward a cutover where I hoped to catch a big buck tending one of the many does that I knew were in the area. It was a good plan, except I walked up on a big doe that spotted me at the same time, and she commenced stamping and stomping.

Larry and I never saw exactly eye-to-eye on the subject of doe shooting. He'd grown up during a time when there were no white-tails to hunt at all, and believed that does should be mostly left alone. I grew up during the early days of QDMA, and have always had abundant deer to hunt—and have always enjoyed filling my doe tags. I dropped that one with a single bullet, and shot a second one on the other side of the farm a few days later for good measure. I could almost see Larry, shaking his head but smiling, and saying, "Boy, sometimes I don't know what to make of you."

My lucky streak continued with the .270 down in Texas. I shot a couple coyotes with it and a big sow hog, all dropped with single, well-placed shots. I have lots of good rifles in my safe, but this one was rapidly becoming a favorite.

Still, some part of the story was missing. Michelle and I have been dating since we were 16, and I've long considered myself part of the family. But I was married in. Call it superstition, but I believed the gun needed to be used by blood kin. Michelle had tried it but didn't like it. But Anse, the kid who many say is a dead ringer for Larry Adams himself, had not. And Anse, like his mama and granddaddy before him, loves calling predators.

He and I were cruising a ranch road after our morning sit in the deer stand, enroute to pick up Michelle and head in for breakfast. The .270 rode in the front seat next to me, like a middle-aged boxer in prime fighting shape and fresh out of retirement. Anse had mentioned several times that he wanted to get a

MAKE EVERY GOBBLER'S LAST DANCE A FINAL STRUT.

NEW FINAL STRUT HD



TURN A PROUD STRUT INTO A SILENT FINISH.

Let him strut. Let him commit. Then lay him down! Final Strut HD packs 12 g/cc tungsten-blended shot into a hard-hitting turkey load that patterns tight and hits with authority at distance. The all-black cap and hull keeps it low-profile but performs for serious knockdown. This load is for hunters who don't want excuses - only filled tags. The show ends here and there are no second acts.



Remington.com



The author's son, Anse, used his "Pawpaw's" gun to take his first Texas bobcat.

Texas bobcat one of these days, and then we looked out the window and saw one, standing next to a mesquite bush in the broad 10 a.m. daylight. The cat darted immediately out of sight, but there was a live oak ahead, just large enough to hide the truck, and a perfect wind in our face.

"I bet we can call that cat up," I said, grabbing the BOG rest and my predator call from the back seat. "But Pawpaw's gun is the only one I have." Anse had watched Michelle shoot the .270 back at home, and knew how it recoiled.

"I'll be way too excited to feel the kick if that bobcat comes in," he whispered. I nodded and smiled. We slipped through the Texas brush toward the mesquite, and I closed the bolt on a fresh Core-Lokt. I showed Anse where the safety was on the rifle, and he snugged the forend into the Death Grip and settled the stock against his shoulder. I knelt behind him and started pleading on the call, making the sounds of a dying rabbit that had always caused the boy's granddaddy to tense up, smile and get ready, because you just never knew what could appear from out of the brush, especially down in Texas.

I heard Anse whisper something, saw his left hand adjusting the scope's magnification dial, and the rifle barrel move slightly. The bobcat appeared, 60 yards away, and it dropped instantly at the shot. The kid, blood kin to Larry and Mary Adams, slung the .270 over his shoulder and admired his cat, a trophy fit for the wall.

I smiled and texted Michelle, feeling just a bit superstitious. **P**



UPDATING AN OLD RIFLE

Best I can tell, Larry's .270 was manufactured in 1976. It shot good just the way it was, but a few easy upgrades had it performing as well as anything in my gun safe. Although the old Bushnell scope had done its part, years of hard hunting had allowed some moisture to creep in. I removed the see-through rings and replaced them with a set of new Weaver bases and 30mm rings, into which I mounted a Leupold VX-3HD 4.5-14x40. That scope is ideal for whitetail hunting but, with a CDS turret, also provides long-range utility.

The old factory trigger, at just over 7 pounds, left much to be desired, but a new Timney fixed that. There are a number of options for a Model 700, and I installed an Elite Hunter with a 3-pound factory setting. The process took about 15 minutes, thanks to Timney's instructional YouTube video, and it made an incredible difference.

Some modern ammo was the next order of business, and since Larry shot Big Green almost exclusively, I couldn't in good conscience go with anything else. I ordered a few boxes of 130-grain Core-Lokt Tipped for the .270, and soon had it shooting slightly sub-MOA groups at 100 yards, living up to the Model 700's reputation for legendary accuracy. Perhaps experimentation with additional loads could do even better. But there was no arguing with the results in the field. This rifle is out of retirement, and my guess is it'll be a working gun for years to come.

The Amish "Secret" to Prostate Woes?



The Amish pride themselves on finding more "natural" solutions to a number of health challenges that affect the rest of us...

Prostate Relief Pill Combats All-Night Bathroom Urges and Embarrassment: Thousands have snapped up this safe & affordable way to get relief from prostate woes

And prostate woes rank near the top! Like the rest of us, Amish men struggle with prostate issues like:

-Too many bathroom trips, which disrupt a good night's sleep

-When it can seemingly take forever for our flow to start

-And when our flow does start, it's a weak stream, which causes us to have to stand seemingly forever to go

-When it feels our bladders are not emptying, which makes us very uncomfortable

Saw Palmetto has been kicked around for years as being helpful for prostate issues..

But the Amish have found that while taking some Saw Palmetto can be helpful—There are several other herbs that are just as helpful if not more so, and the Amish take a combination of all of them!

And over the past several years there is one product on the market many Amish men now swear by as being a key to improved prostate health—And that product is Prost-Fix.

30 INGREDIENTS IN ONE SMALL CAPSULE!

Scott Adams, the Product Manager behind Prost-Fix had this to say, "It took a great deal of research and time in order to create Prost-Fix. We wanted to create the perfect solution for those struggling with their prostate—I'm one of those myself and I take the Prost-Fix every day."

And that ingredient list starts with Saw Palmetto, which is considered the "granddaddy" of prostate ingredients. It's been used to help treat prostate

issues since the 1800's. And it has been extensively researched over the past four decades...

Many of those studies have showed that Saw Palmetto can help shrink the inner linings of the Prostate which when enlarged can put pressure on the tubes that control urine flow.

But Saw Palmetto is just a small part of what's in Prost-Fix. Here are several of the other ingredients included in each capsule of Prost-Fix:

Zinc: There's more zinc in one's prostate than in any other part of the body. One study supported the premise that zinc is needed for a healthy prostate.

Copper: Copper helps the body maintain healthy blood circulation, which is helpful for the prostate.

Selenium: In several studies Selenium has been shown to help protect the prostate.

Cernitin flower pollen extract: In one study helped improve prostate symptoms in a majority of men participating.

Quercetin: Helps fight prostate problems within cells.

Pumpkin Seed Extract: Helps maintain a healthy flow.

Nettle Root Extract: Very popular in Europe for prostate issues.

Vitamin B6: Helps boost your immune system.

And that's just a few of the ingredients found within each bottle of Prost-Fix. These ingredients have helped thousands get their prostate issues under control.

"I ordered this product for my father who is healthy and just turned 64. He had issues with frequent bathroom trips. Since taking this product for four weeks, he has noticed a fewer number of bathroom trips. We very much appreciated this product!"
-James Wilson

If you're looking for help for prostate issues then you need Prost-Fix!

- **REDUCE NIGHTLY BATHROOM TRIPS!** Get more sleep & stop waking up every night

- **INCREASE FLOW RATE** – Effective blend of 30 herbs, vitamins & minerals support urinary function

- **QUALITY YOU CAN COUNT ON** - MADE IN THE USA in a FDA and GMP Certified Facility and tested for purity by a third party

- **NO ALLERGENS-NO GMOs**, binders, fillers, preservatives, soy, gluten, dairy, shellfish, peanut and eggs

- **60 Veggie caps within each bottle.** Each bottle is a 30 day supply

GET A FREE BOTTLE!

One bottle of Prost-Fix is \$29.95 and if you order two bottles you'll get a third bottle absolutely FREE! You'll also receive free shipping & handling no matter how many bottles you order. For credit/debit card orders, you can call: **1-855-287-1800** Or go to: **TopValueSupplements.com**

Or you can send payment to: MWSB Inc., 834 South Union Street, Olean, NY 14760-3917

Prost-Fix comes with a 30-day money back guarantee.



LONESTAR WILDLIFE

FREE-RANGING AXIS DEER PROVIDE THE IDEAL REMEDY FOR CURING THE OFFSEASON BLUES.

THE LONESTAR STATE WILL ALWAYS BE BEST KNOWN FOR THEIR MASSIVE BRUSH-COUNTRY WHITETAILED, BUT THE HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS EXTEND FAR BEYOND THAT OF DEER, HOGS AND DOVES.

Love em' or hate em', the list of foreign exotic game that now thrive in sustainable populations across Texas is nearly unfathomable. Some of these exotics include Cape buffalo, bongo, kudu, eland and just about any other animal you can think of from the Dark Continent, as well as lesser-known exotics such as Pere David's deer, blackbuck, markhor, Himalayan tahr, addax and scimitar-horned oryx to name but a select few. While many reside "behind the wire" of massive, private ranches, fences fail and many of the once-contained exotics have escaped and now proliferate on the Texas landscape. Perhaps none more so than the striking chital deer, more commonly known as axis deer.

While a far cry from the dense jungles of India that axis deer originate from, the endless rolling mesquite-covered hills of the famed Texas Hill Country play host to a booming population of free-ranging axis deer to which I was fortunate enough to experience last year. Axis deer numbers still pale in comparison to Texas whitetails, but are now estimated to be north of 125,000 animals across the state and populations continue to grow with each passing year. Unlike the negative connotation that followed the introduction of axis deer in Hawaii, the residents and landowners of Texas have embraced the axis deer population. Not only is axis venison a prized table fare, but they also provide affordable year-round opportunities for hunters.

OFF-SEASON REMEDY

The 80-degree temps of the Hill Country in late March were a welcomed contrast to the clinging wintery weather I left behind in southern Idaho. Joining some good friends, both new and old, the plan for the week ahead consisted of chasing free-ranging axis deer and putting the new Harvest Collection from Barnes Bullets to the test. Neither disappointed and provided an ideal remedy for my severe case of the offseason blues.



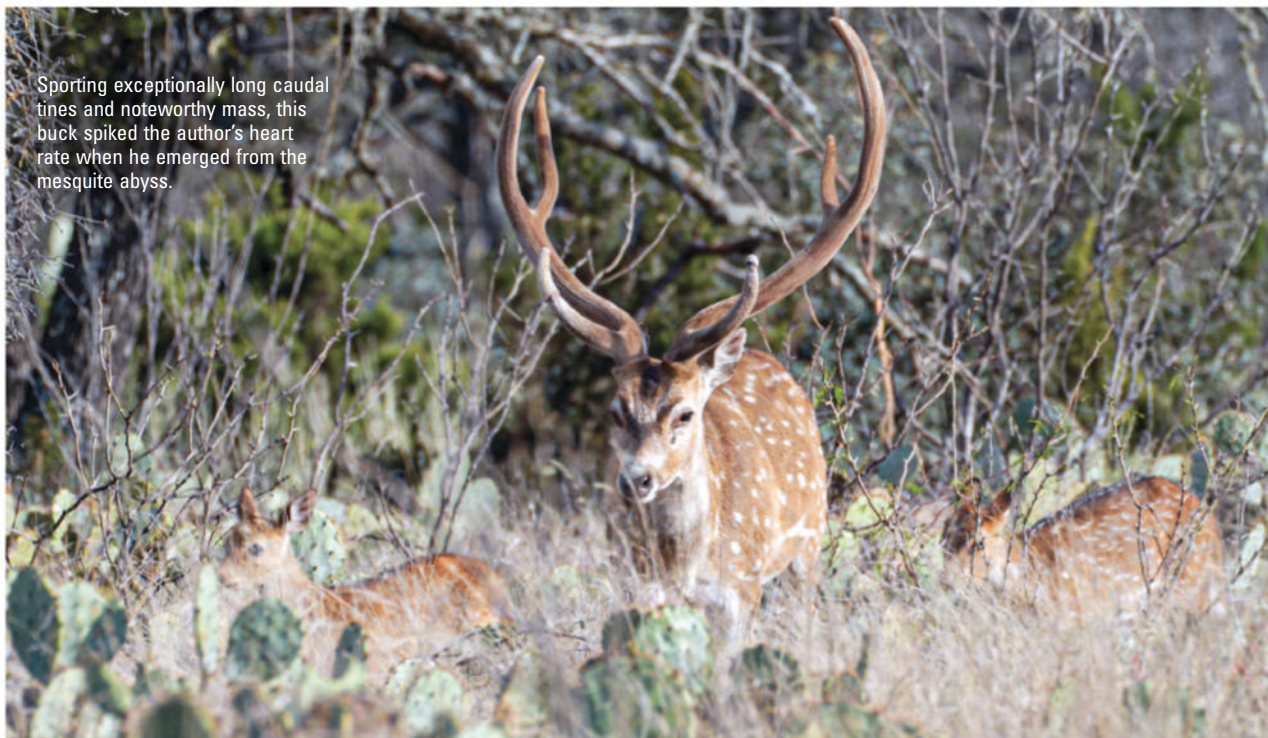
SPOTTED DEER

COLTON HEWARD



The famed Texas Hill Country hides a teeming population of free-ranging axis deer.

Sporting exceptionally long caudal tines and noteworthy mass, this buck spiked the author's heart rate when he emerged from the mesquite abyss.



The close, guttural roar of a pre-rut axis buck promptly interrupted our leisurely stroll down a mesquite-lined caliche two-track. A piercing glance from my guide, Jon Garcia, told me all I needed to know. Get ready. Senses on high alert, we eased forward. With the ever-so-slight shift in wind direction, the gig was up and the big buck vanished into the maze of mesquite. It was only night one and anticipation was high.

The next couple of days were incredibly enjoyable, looking over dozens of axis bucks and soaking up the time spent with my good friends Ky McNett and Jon Garcia of Texas Hunting Resources. Having had the opportunity to hunt with them on multiple occasions, I can vouch with the utmost confidence on the first-class operation they operate. Truthfully, I was not in a hurry to punch my tag and enjoyed sifting through bucks to find one that checked all of the boxes. What were those boxes? First and foremost, I was looking for a mature buck that had scratched out a living in these hills for many years. Second, I wanted the whole experience of hunting these wary deer at ground level and outsmarting a wise old buck on his home turf. The antlers crowned upon his head would simply be an added bonus, though I did mention to my guide, Jon, that I am a sucker for mass.

It is also worth noting that the peak of the axis rut is the summer months of May, June and July. Being late March, the majority of bucks still sported velvet-clad antlers and it was not uncommon to see bachelor groups of bucks running together, though we did see a handful of hard-horned bucks each day that were starting to hang around groups of does and displaying pre-rut behavior. It is also worth mentioning that axis deer are "switched on" at all times. Given that they are a primary food source for tigers in their native land, an acute attentiveness to their surroundings is built into their DNA. Seeing nothing more than a flicker of a tail or flash of spots disappearing into the mesquite was commonplace and closing the distance was never an easy task.





On the evening of day three, with a stiff wind in our face, we tiptoed through a mesquite-choked flat, eyes and ears on full alert. An hour prior, we had caught a brief glimpse of an impressive hard-horned buck before he dipped into the dense abyss of a massive mesquite flat. Within an hour we caught movement 80 yards to our left. The bits and pieces we caught through the tangled mesquite wall looked promising as a velvet-clad buck moseyed amongst a harem of does, fawns and a young buck. It wasn't the hard-horned buck we were looking for, but the abnormally long caudal tines and noteworthy mass of this buck had our full attention.

Tucked in the shade, we waited as the herd slowly fed towards the small clearing separating us and them. At 60 yards, the buck lumbered into the opening. The use of binoculars to see the grizzled-white face and massive, blocky body this buck sported was unnecessary. It was also crystal clear that this buck carried some serious weight above his head. For nearly 20 minutes, the herd milled around us at close quarters, the buck never presenting a clear shot. Truth be told, I didn't need to kill this buck to enjoy the entirety of this experience. The close-quarters interactions with this herd reminded me of my infinite love for bowhunting and I couldn't help but conjure up a wish that I could trade the Benelli in for my Mathews at this point.

Finally, at 54 yards, the buck stopped in a small clearing and the Benelli Lupo barked, sending a 145-grain Tipped GameKing directly through both shoulders of the unsuspecting buck. With a lunge forward, the buck snowplowed 10 yards into a bed of cactus, dying within seconds and penciling an exclamation point in all the boxes.



PREMIUM OPTIC ADVANTAGE

Prior to this hunt, my experience with Leica optics was limited but given their reputation for producing premium glass, my expectations were high. My optics of choice included Leica's Amplus 6 3-18x44i riflescope and their impressive new Geovid Pro AB+ rangefinding binocular, both of which lived up to the hype.

Pitched as their "entry-level" riflescope, Leica's Amplus 6 line brings the heat with a series of premium features that would tell a tale far beyond what most would consider "entry-level" optics. Features include the same high-quality optics with impressive color correction that are used in Leica's premium riflescope lines, a wide field of view, 90% light transmission, illuminated dot and a turret with 80 MOA of elevation adjustment. While longer shots were possible, the 54-yard shot negated the need to dial my turret but rest assured I had the utmost confidence in the Amplus 6 mounted atop my Lupo to get the job done no matter what situation arose.

The new Geovid Pro AB+ rangefinding binoculars are a technological masterpiece, combining the same premium optical clarity and detail that users have come to know and love from Leica decked out with a cutting-edge onboard ballistic calculator paired with a powerful rangefinding engine (capable of reach just over 3,000 yards). The Geovid Pro AB+ comes with Applied Ballistic's Elite program pre-installed on the unit, aiding in precise ballistical calculations. As impressive as the glass and ballistics calculator are, the most impressive feature of the binos, in my opinion, is the new Shot Probability Analysis feature. Shot Probability Analysis takes into account your ballistics, shot distance and ambient parameters to determine a hit probability percentage before you ever squeeze the trigger. Technology such as that incorporated into the Geovid Pro AB+ binoculars represent the next generation in hunting optic technology.

THE PERFECT PAIRING

The Harvest Collection represents a bold, first-of-its-kind move for Barnes Bullets, loading their ammunition with another manufacturer's lead-core bullet. Before we dive into the who, let's first understand the why. The Harvest Collection is tailor-made for hunting whitetail deer, but will excel across a wide genre of thin-skinned game including pronghorn and, in my field experience, axis deer. For thin-skinned game, a monolithic projectile is not a bad route. However, on the scale of good, better, best, an all-copper bullet is not always the best remedy when looking to maximize expansion and trauma, especially on small- to medium-sized game.

On a quest to manufacture the ultimate ammunition for hunting thin-skinned game, Barnes tapped Sierra Bullet's Tipped GameKing projectile to headline the Harvest Collection, drawing on their long-standing reputation of precision and terminal performance. The Tipped GameKing is a cup-and-core bullet with an optimally designed copper jacket for maximizing expansion while maintaining weight retention. The Tipped GameKing's signature translucent green polymer tip is seated above a hollow point that initiates immediate expansion of its lead-alloy core upon impact. The result is devastating terminal performance, especially on game shot from close- to mid-range distances (50-300 yards).



The author was all smiles sitting behind this mature axis buck.



The Harvest Collection is ideal for small- to medium-sized game at reasonable distances.

Beyond 300 yards, they will still kill with proper shot placement, but I would personally lean towards a monolithic or bonded projectile at extended distances to optimize penetration when the bullets velocity starts to fall off.

What about accuracy? Oh, it'll shoot. In fact, the Tipped GameKing, with its boat-tail design and high BCs, is a highly favored bullet of choice amongst a large crowd of avid reloaders. Its track record of terminal performance and precision, paired with Barnes Bullet's stringent loading standards, ensures the end users of the Harvest Collection will not be disappointed. I certainly was not.

On the bench, my Benelli Lupo 6.5 PRC, topped with a Leica Amplus 6 3-18x44i riflescope, consistently produced MOA 5-shot groupings with the 145-grain Harvest Collection offering. As is often the case, these MOA groupings turned into sub-MOA groups once I threaded my Silencer Central Banish 30 suppressor onto the end of the barrel.

Albeit a small sample size, the Harvest Collection performed flawlessly for myself and the other three hunters in camp on trophy-class bucks from 54 to 261 yards. As expected at 54 yards, the copper jacket of the Tipped GameKing fragmented heavily, inflicting a series of wound channels. Tucked neatly under the skin of the offside shoulder, we recovered the remnant of the lead core weighing 36 grains along with a shard of copper. Per its design, the Tipped GameKing delivered maximum expansion and devastation resulting in a quick and humane death of the buck I was humbled to be taking back to Idaho with me. **P**



BUILT FOR THE BUSH

JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT

RUGER'S NEW M77 IS ALASKAN TOUGH.

WHEN ASKED HOW TO CONFIGURE THE ULTIMATE RIFLE FOR USE IN THE ALASKAN BUSH, LEGENDARY BROWN BEAR GUIDE PHIL SHOEMAKER HAD GOOD ADVICE.

Start with a reliable controlled-feed action made of stainless steel. Give it a compact 20-inch stainless barrel mounted with durable express-type iron sights. Chamber that barrel in potent medium-bore cartridges such as the .35 Whelen and 9.3x62. Mate the action with a laminated wood stock resistant to moisture extremes.

These characteristics aligned perfectly with the vision held by Jason Cloessner, senior VP of product development at Lipsey's, a firearm distributor that's particularly good at commissioning special rifles, handguns and shotguns much in demand by discerning shooters and hunters. Working closely with rifle design gurus at Ruger, Cloessner sped out and ordered a rifle model that just may be the ultimate tool for hunting wild Alaska.

An Alaskan "bush rifle" is more than just a rifle to take to Alaska and knock over the occasional caribou, black bear or moose. It's more than a dedicated gun for grizzly hunting. It's more than a trapper's carbine, and it's more than a brown-bear charge-stopper. It's all these things and more. Those who inhabit and hunt the Alaskan bush need one rifle that capably does everything.

Ruger's new M77 Alaskan Bush Rifle fills the bill perfectly.

A CLOSER LOOK

For starters, the action is just what Shoemaker suggested: a controlled-feed affair based on Paul Mauser's excellent Model 98, with the Mauser's massive, non-rotating claw extractor, fixed mechanical ejector and renowned reliability. Of course, it's made of stainless steel. Ruger overbuilds nearly all its receivers, and the M77 Bush Rifle is no exception. Investment-cast, then precision machined to final dimensions, the action is strong as a bulldog.

Ruger cold-hammer forges its barrels, and if you have any doubts about their potential for accuracy, just look at reports on the precision of the company's American line of rifles chambered in cartridges known for accuracy such as the .22 ARC and 6.5 Creedmoor. The medium-bores recoil harder and are a bit more challenging for us humans to master but still shoot well; I've tested several and all shoot groups of less than an inch at 100 yards, as long as you feed them ammo they like.

Barrels on the Bush Rifle have a semi-heavy sporter profile. A beautiful barrel-band front sight is fit to the muzzle, giving the carbine a classic look. It's a sight that doesn't just look right, it's the most durable type of front sight ever designed and is nearly impossible to knock off kilter or break. A big, highly visible white bead is fit into the lengthwise dovetail slot. It's perfect for delivering a lethal blow on a big brown bear at close quarters. If you want a blade-type front, or a smaller bead or a brass bead, you can order replacement inserts from New England Custom Guns (NECG).

Rear sights are likewise robust and perfectly configured for fast shooting on potentially dangerous critters closing the distance quickly. A shallow, wide V-type express sight blade is dovetailed into a sleek island base. It's adjustable for windage.

CAPABLE CARTRIDGES

Bush Rifles are chambered for two incredibly cool medium-bore cartridges: the .35 Whelen and the 9.3x62. Both are classics, and both have achieved legendary status entirely on their own merits.

The .35 Whelen is a cartridge created by necking .30-06 cases up to hold 0.358-diameter bullets. First wildcatted around 1922, it was submitted to SAAMI and legitimized by Remington in 1988. The chambering is versatile across a wide spectrum of bullet weights. Light 180- and 200-grain bullets can easily be pushed north of 2,900 fps in 24-inch barrels. (The shorter 20-inch barrels on the Ruger M77 Bush Rifle will clock about 100 fps slower.)

Old as the .35 Whelen is, the 9.3x62 is older. Designed in 1905 for use on the full spectrum of African game, the 9.3x62 was a mainstay amongst German and Dutch settlers on the Dark Continent. Although roughly the same length as the .35 Whelen, the 9.3x62 holds more gunpowder and shoots slightly larger-diameter projectiles, so it's slightly more powerful than the Whelen cartridge.

STOCK OPTIONS

Barreled actions are fit to sleek stocks made of gray laminated wood. Lipsey's chose to commission the stocks cut to the same sleek profile as the M77 Hawkeye African, which has (in my opinion) the best contouring and feel of all the Ruger stocks. It's light and trim and athletic, all characteristics that benefit a good Bush Rifle.

There's a nice cap on the pistol grip, and a thin black recoil pad that's actually squishy enough to be useful. Subtle but attractive checkering is machined into the forend and pistol grip. Sling swivel studs are installed in the usual positions, meaning that there's no sexy barrel-band swivel stud on the barrel in front of the forend tip. Cloessner told me that with the short 20-inch barrel the barrel-mounted stud looked a bit funny. I'll take his word for it.

It is worth noting that the barreled action is well-fit into the stock, but it's not glass or pillar bedded, and the forend is not free-floated. For use on game inside 200 yards it probably doesn't matter a bit, but slightly OCD accuracy geeks like me will probably want to have their actions bedded and barrels free-floated.

BUSH READY

Ruger M77 Bush Rifles are fundamentally bush-ready right off the shelf. You don't even need a scope—just ammo. However, there are several things you can do to trick out the Bush Rifle that takes it to perfection.

First, mount a light, durable scope without too much magnification in quick-detach rings. Each Ruger M77 comes from the factory with steel scope rings, but the QD versions built by Alaska Arms are much better. At \$190 they're not cheap, but neither is your life—and that's not being melodramatic. When you need your Bush Rifle scope-free when following up a wounded grizzly or moose in thick alder brush, the QD feature

is invaluable. So is the perfect return-to-zero Alaska Arms rings provide when you lock the scope back onto your rifle.

Next, add an extended-capacity floorplate. These are also made by Alaska Arms and are patterned after an old Rigby design. The \$280 floorplate increases magazine capacity from four rounds to six rounds. Yep, that's 6+1 if you put a cartridge up the spout. If all you ever hunt is whitetails, then no, you don't need one. But if you occasionally mix it up with aggressive wild hogs or grizzly bears, there's nothing cooler than a .35 Whelen or 9.3x62 seven-shooter.

Finally, if you're a rifle tinkerer and just want to refine your Bush Rifle to the nines, add a Timney trigger. It's worth noting these aren't drop-in kits; you'll need to have a gunsmith tune yours unless you're particularly handy with needle files and trigger polishing stones.



Ruger builds the Alaskan Bush Rifle with ultra-strong barrel-band front sights fit with a large white bead. The white bead is extremely fast to acquire against a blur of charging black death or grizzly bear.



Simple and sturdy, the rear sight is a fixed shallow-V. It's the fastest type of iron sight made.



Ruger's Mauser-based M77 Hawkeye action features a controlled-round feed (CRF) action with a robust claw-type extractor and fixed ejector.



RANGE TESTING

I set an Alaskan Bush Rifle chambered in .35 Whelen up to accuracy test for this article. My scope of choice was a 2.5-8x36 Leupold VX-3HD, mounted in Alaska Arms' QD rings. The scope weighs less than 12 ounces, is the perfect magnification range for the cartridge, and has Leupold's legendary toughness—all characteristics crucial on a Bush Rifle.

Friends at Buffalo Bore, Barnes, Winchester, Remington, Nosler and Hornady helped me obtain factory ammo. I headed to the range ready to wring the compact new Ruger powerhouse out extensively.

After boresighting, I went to firing three-shot groups at 100 yards. Each type of ammo was tested via three consecutive three-shot groups that were averaged for size. To my amazement, the first three groups out of the Bush Rifle in .35 Whelen measured less than an inch. That was with Remington's 250-grain Core-Lokt ammunition, and it proved to be the most accurate load tested.

Unfortunately, two of the Remington cartridges failed to fire, introducing a fear that the Bush Rifle might have an ignition issue. However, I had a massive lineup of different ammo to test (10 factory loads in all) and I figured I'd know more by the time I was done.

Both Remington loads tested exhibited misfires. Not one of the other ammo types did. I'm convinced that the Remington ammo was to blame. Whether there were dud primers or the shoulder on some of the cases didn't headspace right, I don't know, but there was an issue. Thankfully, the rifle was 100 percent with all other brands of ammo.



Two loads averaged less than one MOA—darned impressive for a handy little bush rifle. Several more were around the 1.25-MOA mark. All ten loads produced averages of less than two inches at 100 yards. This little rifle is a real shooter—without a doubt glass bedding the action and free-floating the barrel would turn it into a proper tackdriver.

Feeding and function was stellar, too. The trigger is decent if not inspiring. Balance is super—the little rifle leaps to the shoulder and points like it’s a part of me. Recoil is stout, but not painful. It’s about like a 12-gauge pheasant load.

I wouldn’t choose a Ruger Alaskan Bush Rifle to hunt big mule deer on wide-open prairie or to shoot at elk across yawning Rocky Mountain canyons. Nor would I pick one for an elephant hunt. But by golly, there’s very little else that the Bush Rifle isn’t perfect for. It just might be the best-configured true hunting rifle introduced in 2025. **P**

Ruger’s new Alaskan Bush Rifle is a compact and practical powerhouse chambered in hard-hitting cartridges. A controlled-feed action, stainless construction, and iron sights make it perfect for use where your life may depend on it.



Type:	Bolt-action repeater w/Mauser-type action
Caliber:	.35 Whelen (tested), 9.3x62 Mauser
Barrel:	20 in., hammer forged, 1:12 twist
Capacity:	4+1
Overall Length:	40.5 in.
Weight:	7 lbs., 12 oz.
Stock:	Laminate, black & gray
Action:	Ruger Hawkeye M77
Bottom metal:	Hinged floorplate
Finish:	Brushed stainless steel
Length of pull:	13.5 in.
Sights:	Fixed shallow-V rear, white bead front, integral scope bases, rings included
Trigger:	Single-stage, 3 lbs., 15 oz. pull (as tested)
Safety:	Three-position on bolt shroud
Price:	\$1,659
Website:	Lipseys.com

ACCURACY TEST

(Accuracy is the results of three 3-shot groups at 100 yards.)

Ammunition	Velocity (fps)	Deviation	Accuracy (in.)
Barnes 200-gr. TTSX	2,750	10	1.17
Buffalo Bore 225-gr. SPBT	2,571	12	1.24
Buffalo Bore 225-gr. TSX	2,532	17	1.72
Buffalo Bore 250-gr. SPTZ	2,527	11	1.14
Hornady 200-gr. SP	2,805	17	1.18
Remington 200-gr. CL	2,763	14	1.31
Remington 250-gr. CL	2,240	21	0.78
Nosler Custom 225-gr. AB	2,623	16	1.73
Nosler Custom 250-gr. Part.	2,180	18	0.92
Winchester 200-gr. PP	2,734	14	1.58



THE "CHOSEN ONE"

COLTON HEWARD

NEMO ARM'S BREAK INTO THE BOLT-ACTION WORLD IS TURNING HEADS AND PUNCHING TAGS.

IF MONEY WASN'T A LIMITING FACTOR, WHAT WOULD YOUR ULTIMATE, DO-ALL MOUNTAIN HUNTING RIFLE BUILD ENTAIL?

The answer to that question will look slightly different to each shooter depending on their past experiences and personal preferences, but there would be a series of similarities across the board. Jeff Sipe, president of Nemo Arms, was posed this very question shortly after taking on his new role. With more than 25 years of extensive rifle-building and engineering expertise and a lifetime of hunting experiences around the globe to draw from, Sipe is, in my opinion, one of the most qualified individuals I have ever met to answer this question. And it was this very question that laid the groundwork for Nemo Arms brand new Electus bolt-action rifle.

BREAKING GROUND

Nemo Arms may be a newcomer to the hunting space, but their reputation for building premium AR-15s is well respected across the shooting industry. Shortly after Sipe started at Nemo he was tasked by Kelly Link, CEO of Nemo Arms, to create the ultimate bolt-action rifle to break into the hunting and competitive shooting market.

"What kind of budget and price point are we looking at?" asked Sipe.

His question was met with a puzzling stare and a response much in line with Nemo's pledge to excellency. "There is no budget," Link replied. "I want you to build the ultimate hunting rifle regardless of cost. Build your dream rifle."

With a "no-holds-barred" task, Sipe and his team started with a blank slate and went to work.

BUILDING THE "ULTIMATE" RIFLE

"I am a hunter at heart and every piece of this rifle has a story and a reason behind it," said Sipe. From the stock to the brake and everything in between, no corners were cut in the engineering of the Electus.

Starting with its action, the Electus features a titanium, controlled-round-feed action with a Remington 700 footprint. It comes as no secret that the titanium properties of the action optimize its strength while minimizing weight, a no brainer when creating the "ultimate" hunting rifle.

What will likely catch the attention of many hunters is the controlled-round-feed design implemented into the action as opposed to the more common push-feed actions. Is a controlled-round feed that much better than a push feed? Under normal circumstances, the advantages are nominal. However, under stress, which settling your cross-hairs on a hard-earned buck, bull or bruin certainly induces, the controlled-round-feed design shines, making it virtually impossible to inadvertently double feed your action when engaging a follow-up shot.



Other notable features surrounding the action include a crisp, TriggerTech Diamond trigger, black Cerakoted receiver, DLC-coated spiral-fluted bolt, two-position 700-style safety and a 20 MOA pinned Picatinny rail. It is also worth noting that the Electus utilizes M5 DBM bottom metal, allowing for detachable, flush-fit magazines.

A premium action fit for the “ultimate” hunting rifle needs an equally impressive barrel. Fortunately for the end user, Nemo is fully equipped to manufacture their own barrels using state-of-the-art equipment and a demand for excellency. The Electus features a cut-rifled barrel manufactured to select-match-grade quality. Manufacturing cut-rifled barrels is far from the fastest or most economical method of barrel creation but the advantages it offers, primarily in the extreme tolerances that can be held using this method, are undeniable. Once Nemo creates the barrel blank that meets its select-match-grade specs, it is sent to Preferred Barrels where it receives a true carbon wrap. The carbon weave completes the barrel, delivering a slight savings in weight but most importantly, providing faster barrel cooling and delivering a more consistent point of impact during follow-up shots.

The Electus comes standard with Nemo’s QC-1 quad-chamber self-timing titanium muzzle brake threaded with 5/8-24 pattern. However, it is designed for civilized, suppressed fire with all chamber offerings featuring an 18- to 22-inch barrel to easily accommodate a lightweight suppressor.

Nemo arms partnered with Manners Stocks to bed the mated barrel and action to a precision-inspired carbon-fiber stock. I have had the opportunity to shoot many rifles in a plethora of



stock configurations and I can say without a doubt this stock is the most complete and well thought out stock design that I have ever shot. Ergonomically, the stock features an adjustable cheek piece, perfectly sized palm swell and a convenient thumb detent initiating proper trigger-hand placement. Useful features include an integrated ARCA Swiss rail cut into the bottom of the stock, aluminum forearm Picatinny rail and five QD cup attachments (two right, two left and one bottom of forend). It also features a patented hinge design integrated directly behind the receiver, allowing users to fold the butt of the stock forward with a simple push of a discreet button. This cuts the overall length of the rifle from 42 inches to 32 inches, allowing it to easily slide inside your pack or scabbard for convenient backcountry travel.

With the final pieces of the puzzle complete and Sipe's ultimate rifle assembled, it was time to put it through the real test.

AT THE RANGE

Once in hand, the Electus was impressive from the time I pulled it out of the box. It didn't disappoint at the range either. It felt comfortable in hand, the trigger was set to a crisp 2.5 pounds, recoil was very manageable and it continually deliv-

ered sub-MOA 5-shot groups with multiple ammunition offerings. Current chamber offerings include 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, 7mm PRC, 7mm Backcountry and .300 PRC. While all are capable offerings, I was excited my test rifle was chambered in one of my favorite cartridges, the 7mm PRC.

My Electus was topped with Leupold's long-range masterpiece, the 6-24X52 Mark 4HD. Overflowing with bells and whistles, the Mark 4 is an ideal crossover scope for serious hunters and target shooters alike and was an optimal optic of choice to pair with the Electus. The final two accessories fastened to the rifle included my tried-and-true Banish 30 suppressor and Spartan Precision's Javelin Pro bipod.

Range testing included Hornady's 175-grain ELD-X loaded in their Precision Hunter line and their 162-grain CX loaded in their Outfitter line, as well as Federal Premium's 155-grain Terminal Ascents. As expected, all three shot sub-MOA 5-shot groups, but the clear winner in terms of precision was the 175-grain ELD-X, delivering 5-shot groups that consistently measured between .5 and .75 MOA. The results from the range were nothing short of confidence inspiring as I made final preparations to take the Electus on its maiden voyage into the heart of Idaho's elk country.



The hinged design of the Manners stock is a forward-thinking solution for convenient backcountry travel.



Leupold's Mark 4 riflescope and Spartan Precision's Javelin Pro bipod were the perfect pairing for the Electus rifle.



DETERMINATION OR DUMB LUCK? MAYBE BOTH

The faint whistle of a bugling bull broke the silence as I crept down an old logging road. Or was it? Surely I must be wishfully hearing a bugle in a figment of my delusional imagination. You see, I was on day six of getting my ass kicked. The previous five days had been spent hunting sunup to sundown with nothing more than a brief glimpse of a raghorn bull moving through the timber and a few cows to show for our efforts. I certainly hadn't heard a single bugle. After all, it was November 1, a solid 6-8 weeks post peak rut. If I am being honest, my optimism was at an all-time low but the unpleasant reality of an empty freezer at home kept my motivation high to stay after it. Given an opportunity, a spike was going to be in danger as I was on a pure meat gathering expedition. Then I heard it again. I wasn't hearing things. It was faint, but no doubt a bull bugled several hundred yards below me in the deep timber.

Cutting the distance a few hundred yards, I gave a soft cow "mew" to which the bull immediately responded. He was no more than 300 yards below me. As I belly crawled to the edge of the canyon he was in, I glassed up four cows 230 yards across from me bedded in one of the only small clearings of the timber-choked canyon. With virtually no shooting lanes other than the small clearing the cows were bedded in, it was now a waiting game, hoping and praying the bull was close by and would eventually come into the clearing himself.

Fortunately, I didn't have to wait long. The unmistakable whistle and chuckle of a bugling bull made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I couldn't see him, but I was able to pinpoint his bugle directly below the cows. Eventually stepping into the small clearing, the bull systematically checked each cow, desperately searching for one that had come into a second estrus cycle. I did my best to ignore his 6x7 rack as I watched him in my crosshairs hopelessly scanning for a shooting lane that offered a clear shot opportunity.

Finally, the bull slowly walked broadside through a small gap in the pine boughs. The Electus instinctively barked, delivering the 175-grain ELD-X bullet directly through the pumpstation of the unexpected bull. The elk broke for cover and then the woods fell silent. The cows stared at each other in confusion, not knowing what had happened. But the deed was already done. The bull was dead mere seconds after impact.



The Electus was perfectly suited for the rugged backcountry this bull called home.

After the adrenaline subsided the reality of what was still to come set in. Skinning, quartering, caping and packing out a bull while hunting solo was a task of monumental proportions, but that's a story for another day. Several months later my back is still sore, but my freezer is full and for that I am grateful.

THE CHOSEN ONE

Electus in latin translates to "The Chosen One", denoting Sipe's vision of his collective expertise and experiences to create the ultimate long-range precision hunting rifle. Nemo Arms might be new to the bolt-action world, but they left no stone unturned with the creation of the Electus. While my time at the range and in the field with the Electus is limited, I can confidently say it is one of the finest crafted and straight-shooting rifles I have ever been fortunate enough to get my hands on. As for my limited experience, that will change soon enough. I've got a strong hunch my Idaho timber bull is far from the last trophy to fall to the Electus. **P**



BROWNING X-BOLT 2 SPEED

CRAIG BODDINGTON

A RIFLE BUILT ON A LEGACY OF PERFORMANCE AND ACCURACY.

I OFTEN SAY THE SHOTS ARE EASY AT OUR TIMBER TRAILS WHITETAIL HUNTS IN KANSAS.

They are usually close, and all the stands provide a firm rest; even our treestands have padded rails. My friend John Sonne was on such a stand in December 2025 when he saw two bucks come down off a ridge, straight toward him. Both were shooters, a no-brainer ten-point, trailed by a big eight-point with a similar frame. John got the rifle up while they were in brush and let them come on. They stopped at 40 yards, sparring while he waited for a clear shot.

Then the smaller buck thought better, turned away and headed out, the bigger buck speeding him along. Nobody likes a going-away shot, but there are times and places to take one if you have enough gun and you're sure of your shot. Sonne was shooting a .308 Winchester with 180-grain bullet. Despite shooting offhand, at 50 yards, he was sure. He was shooting down, the buck headed uphill. His bullet smashed the spine above the base of the tail and exited the neck. The deer went down on the spot.

So much for our easy shots. Offhand in the woods at a moving deer in thick trees isn't easy. I was on a stand a mile away when I got John's text that he needed a hand. That day we were both carrying Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed rifles. Mine, a 6.8 Western, is a test gun that still belongs to Browning. His is my .308, received as a test gun. It shot and handled so well that I bought it—even though it's a right-hand bolt. There's always a spot for a good .308 on the Kansas farm.

John Sonne doesn't get excited, but when I got to him, he was animated. I looked to the right, up the ridge, and could see his deer down. Lots of antler showing. Big buck. He told me the story, then said, "When those deer turned and headed out I almost panicked." Then he added, "This Browning of yours handles well."

FROM A TO X TO 2

For years a Browning A-Bolt .270 was our much-used Kansas camp rifle. It accounted for a lot of whitetails. In numerous hunters' hands, I don't think it ever missed. Named for the A-Frame profile of the action and triangular bolt body, the A-Bolt was Browning's centerfire bolt-gun for 25 years, intro-



duced in 1984 and replaced by the X-Bolt in 2008. Both are mechanically similar using a three-lug bolt with short uplift, but the X-Bolt has a different bolt and receiver. It also added a detachable polymer rotary magazine, plus a bolt unlock button at the bolt handle root.

Cosmetically, the X-Bolt was a modernized upgrade. It takes its name from a small important feature: The X-Bolt is drilled and tapped for four scope-mount screws on each receiver ring. Depending on how you look at it, the four screw holes make an X, the total of eight screws offering a very secure scope-mounting system.

Introduced in 2024, the X-Bolt 2 is a second-generation X-Bolt that is upgraded with a different bolt and heavier receiver with increased bolt guidance surface. It also adds a new trigger, termed DLX, that is crisp, clean and wonderfully simple to adjust.

Browning is always generous in chamberings and variations. Both the A-Bolt and X-Bolt were offered in a wide variety of chamberings, stock styles and materials. Though just a year old, the X-Bolt 2 already comes in some three dozen variations and a wide array of chambering options. The X-Bolt 2 Speed family was new in 2025. My .308 is a basic X-Bolt 2 Speed. Slim, fluted



22-inch barrel, metal in attractive smoked bronze Cerakote, composite stock in Browning's versatile Oviz camo. Not just a composite stock; it's called Vari-Tech, enabling adjustable height of comb and inserts to change length of pull and grip angle.

The Speed in 6.8 Western is almost identical. Except: It's the X-Bolt 2 Speed SPR. It features a barrel four inches shorter by cartridge, for handier use with a suppressor. In



On the Vari-Tech stock, height of comb is adjusted by using a hex wrench through an upper hole in the recoil pad.



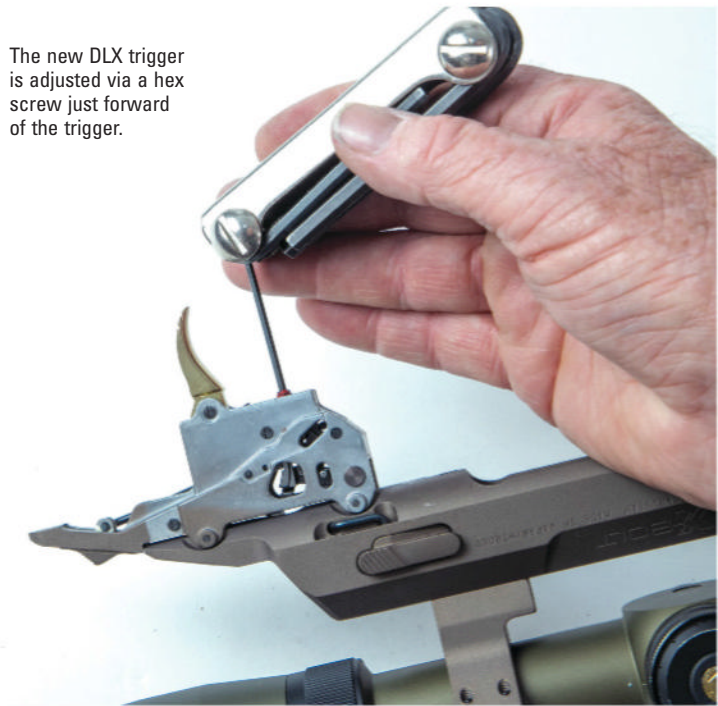
X-Bolt 2 Speed is supplied with grip inserts, allowing the grip angle to be changed to the shooter's preference.



In standard cartridges, the X-Bolt 2's rotary polymer magazine holds four cartridges. In magnum cartridges capacity is reduced to three.

6.8 Western, Browning's standard barrel length is 24 inches. The SPR version removes four inches, so the barrel length on that rifle is 20 inches. With the added length of a suppressor, I love the reduced length. But you must accept that some velocity will be lost. The Browning 175-grain Sierra Tipped GameKing load I used is rated at 2,835 feet per second (fps). In the shorter barrel with a Banish 30 suppressor, actual velocity was just under 2,700 fps. Price paid for shorter barrels, but much handier for suppressor use.

That's not a big deal as there is still plenty of speed and power. With the equipment we have today, velocity is just a number, but it's enough of a difference to throw ballistics charts into disarray. I put a Leupold VX-6 3-18x44 on it and did my homework. First use would be on an elk hunt in New Mexico. Using Ballistic Coefficient (BC), chronographed velocity, plus guesstimated altitude and temperature, I printed a ballistics chart and verified it on steel. Then I went elk hunting.



The new DLX trigger is adjusted via a hex screw just forward of the trigger.

In the event, I dialed the range on the turret and dropped a nice bull at 460 yards. From what I read (but don't necessarily believe), that's not considered a long shot today. It is my longest shot on a bull elk. He didn't seem to know I was missing 150 fps from advertised velocity.

SPEED SHOOTING

With its slim fluted barrel, the Speed is intended to be quick and light. The .308 with its 22-inch barrel weighs 6 pounds, 10 ounces without optic. Not a flyweight, but to my thinking about right for smooth handling in the field. I started it with an older VX-6 3-18x44 scope in Browning mounts. That brought complete weight up to just over eight pounds. No longer a lightweight, still a good weight to carry, and about right to steady quickly in field positions.

The Vari-Tech stock allows adjustment to get height of comb and length of pull exactly right. To some extent this is lost on me; I'm average Joe in size, and standard stock dimensions tend to fit me well. That VX-6 scope isn't huge, certainly not by today's standards, but the objective did require a higher mount. Using the supplied hex wrench, I went into the upper hole in the recoil pad and raised the comb a couple notches. Voila, now the cheek weld was perfect. This rifle felt good, quick and lively.

Out of the box, I felt the DLX trigger on the .308 was set a bit heavy. I did the unmanly thing and read the directions. Took the barreled action out of the stock, grabbed the proper size hex wrench, and took it down a couple of notches. This adjustment brought it down to a crisp and clean 2.5 pounds.

I received the .308 in the spring of '25, was short on factory ammo, so I whomped up some handloads with my favorite recipes with several different bullets. Common with slender barrels, asking for tight five-shot groups was a bit much; as the



John Sonne used the author's X-Bolt 2 Speed in .308 Winchester to take this excellent whitetail.



Considering the slim barrel, the X-Bolt 2 in .308 produced excellent groups with factory loads.

barrel heated, the last couple of shots started to wander, opening my groups toward the 1.75-inch range. Three-shot groups were much tighter. Of four handloads tested, the average for five, three-shot groups at 100 yards was .995-inch. Pretty impressive from that slender barrel.

Some barrels shoot homogenous-alloy bullets well, and some barrels shoot better with lead-core bullets. Best of my

four handloads was 41.5 grains of IMR 3031 behind a 165-grain Barnes TSX, averaging .825-inch for five, three-shot groups. That suited me just fine because I had the rifle in California, where we must hunt with unleaded projectiles. It was now late spring, the barley was up and pigs were in the fields. I took it out to friend Tony Lombardo's ranch, and in the late afternoon we caught a group of hogs laying waste to a barley field. Quick rest over sticks, nice hog down. There's not much better for hogs than an accurate .308.

Eventually I had some factory ammo, so I tried Hornady's Precision Hunter with 178-grain ELD-X. This .308 Speed liked

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This California feral hog was the first animal to fall to the X-Bolt 2 Speed in .308, taken with a 165-grain Barnes TSX.



The author used an X-Bolt 2 Speed SPR in 6.8 Western to take a good New Mexico bull.

that load. It also liked Federal Premium's Gold Medal Match loaded with a 168-grain Sierra. Embarrassingly, in this rifle, both loads beat the pants off my handloads, shrinking five-shot groups to just over one MOA.

Fast forward to Kansas deer season. I needed that Leupold on something else, so I switched it out for a new Redfield Reveal 3-18x44, which features impressive medium-priced glass. With the 44mm objective, the scope was similar in size, so no further comb adjustment necessary. I knew John Sonne would be joining me for our December rifle season. Although disgustingly slimmer, John and I are about the same size, so the rifle also fit

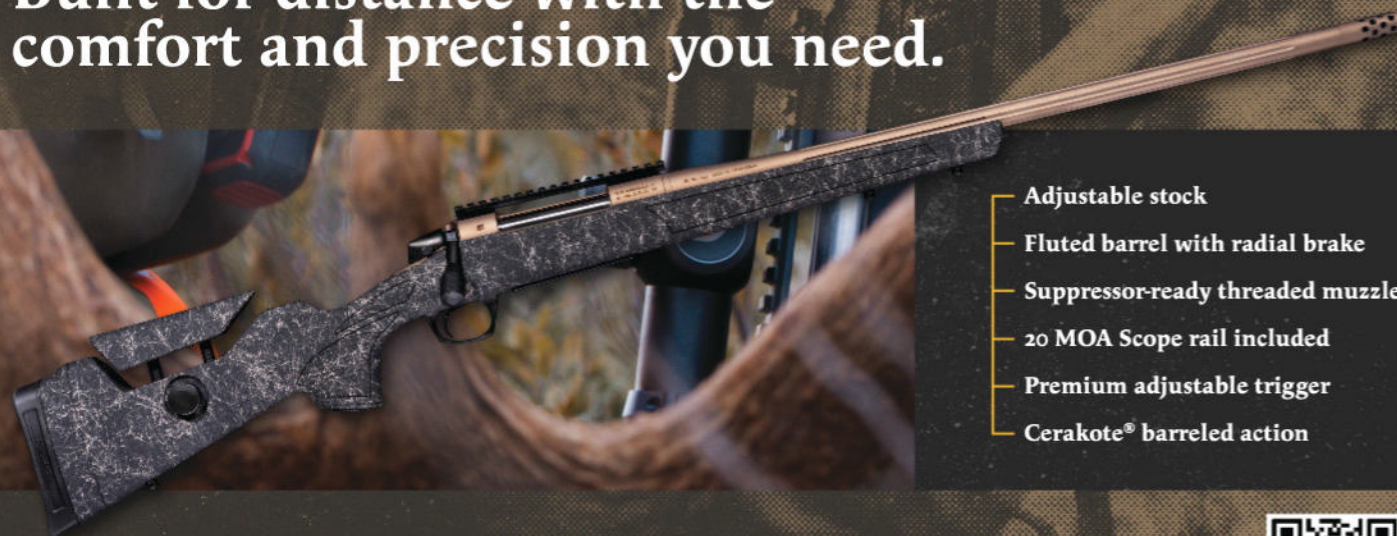
him perfectly. A few days before the season, I checked zero with the 178-grain ELD-X load. Perfect. When John arrived, we went to the range where he verified zero and took a couple shots to get used to the action and trigger.

A few days later we were standing over his heavy-antlered mature buck. Almost a perfect ten-pointer except for a split G2 point that made it an 11-point. Not quite the best buck of our 2025 season, but close. Taken thanks to straight shooting and a Speed rifle. **P**

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WILL BRANTLEY

MARKS THE SPOT

WE PUT WINCHESTER'S RIMFIRE AND CARTRIDGE COMBO TO THE TEST IN THE KENTUCKY SQUIRREL WOODS.

“SURPRISING” WOULD BE ONE WAY TO DESCRIBE THE SUPPRESSOR-READY WINCHESTER XPERT RIFLE.

It's a little bolt-action rimfire that doesn't cost much, weighs less than 5 pounds, and the ones I tested in the squirrel woods last fall were chambered in an unproven cartridge, the brand-new Winchester .21 Sharp. I'm fairly particular about my squirrel guns, largely because I don't view squirrel hunting as an afterthought, or as something to fill the time when seasons for “more important” game animals are closed. The gray squirrels I like to hunt are nothing like the chubby city park dwellers that snack on stale popcorn, either.

In the late summer and early fall, I enjoy slipping through the tall timber, which is still leafy and green, and working my way into range of hickory and oak trees where squirrels are feeding. Once I'm close enough, I maneuver myself into a decent shooting position, find a good rest, and pluck the critters right out of the canopy, ideally with a precise head shot. The average shot distance is around 50 yards in that game, sometimes farther, and a gray squirrel's noggin isn't very big. You simply *must* have a rifle that shoots better than the average rimfire plinker. My personal gun is a .17 HMR with a walnut stock and a heavy target barrel; scoped out, it weighs 10.5 pounds.

So, when the Xperts arrived last fall, I was a bit dubious. Not that there was a thing wrong with the gun; I just wasn't sure that such a lightweight budget rifle was up to the demands of my style of squirrel hunting. But I'd find out one way or the

other, as I was hosting a late-August squirrel hunting camp with a few other writers and some staffers from Winchester Ammunition for a few days of chasing bushytails and putting the Xpert rifle and .21 Sharp cartridge to the test.

I walked away impressed. So did my buddy Ryan, who guides with me and is just as squirrel crazy as I am. The suppressor-ready Xpert is a great little gun, inexpensive enough to purchase for a plinker or trapline rifle, but accurate and reliable enough to make a dedicated small game gun, too. And the .21 Sharp? Like it or not, it's a better squirrel round than the .22 Long Rifle. I'll let you get good and cranked up about that, and then we'll hash it out after discussing the Xpert rifle.

A FEATHERWEIGHT SETUP

Compared to my 10-pound .17, the Xpert feels like a toy, with a skeletonized molded polymer stock and stubby, 16.5-inch barrel. These rifles have a 1/2 x 28 TPI threaded muzzle, covered from the factory by a knurled thread protector. We paired each one (we set up four of them ahead of our squirrel camp) with a Silencer Central Banish-22, which are titanium cans that weigh about 4 ounces.

The Xperts' steel receivers are drilled and tapped, so we added Weaver-style bases and then topped each with a Leupold VX-Freedom 4-12x40 scope. This is a relatively inexpensive optic that still provides the light transmission of a 30mm tube, 12-power magnification and a side focusing knob, all of which are nice features for zooming in on a squirrel's head while maintaining a clear sight picture.



Once scoped, we zeroed each rifle from a bench, with sandbags, at 25 yards using the Super X 34-grain jacketed hollowpoint. The suppressed report was virtually indistinguishable from a .22 LR with a high-velocity hollowpoint. The rifles—all four of them—had no trouble clustering five rounds into a single, jagged little hole at that distance, either. Moving the targets out to 50 yards, it was still easy to keep a full magazine inside (or mostly inside) the edges of a 1-inch orange, stick-on target. The Xperts sported Winchester's Rimfire M.O.A. trigger, which broke crisp and clean. Really, the biggest challenge to good shooting was in the light weight of the guns, which were susceptible to moving depending on hand positioning and pressure. The can, adding just a bit of heft out front, helped alleviate some of that. Ryan and I walked away from the range confident that if we could find some squirrels and that our guests could shoot, the Xpert .21s were up to the task.

HITTING THE HARDWOODS

The hunting was good, as I expected it to be, and we were in squirrels out of the gate the first morning. I helped point the critters out while writer Alice Jones Webb and Winchester's Seth Brenton each worked into position to shoot. Both were excellent shots, with Webb tumbling one gray squirrel with a single bullet through the shoulders that may not have been quite 90 yards away, but then maybe it was, too. That's what I claimed, and she didn't protest much; whatever the exact distance, it was a hell of a shot.





Writer Alice Jones Webb takes aim at a squirrel high in a white oak.

The muted report with the Banish-22 is nothing but a good thing for small game hunting, especially early in the season, when the leaves are thick and a spooked squirrel can disappear by moving only a few inches. Shotgun shooters know that it doesn't take long to run feeding squirrels out of even the best hickory tree once the blasting begins. To be clear, they can still be spooked by the report of a suppressed rimfire, too—but if you sit still, the lull in the action rarely lasts for long.

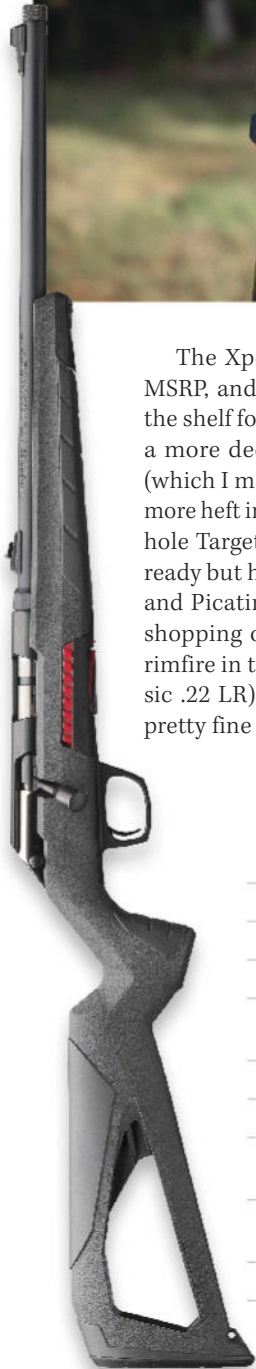
The .21 Sharp (see sidebar) is simply an excellent squirrel hunting cartridge, and this is coming from a lifelong squirrel hunter who's killed a bunch of them with a .22. Yes, the .22 is great, but it has shortcomings in the squirrel woods. The classic hunting load, a 36- or 37-grain hollowpoint at about 1,300 fps, has an arching trajectory that can make it easy to miss a squirrel's head on longer shots in tall timber. There are faster, hyper-velocity options, usually loaded with lighter, frangible bullets. Those are fine if your gun shoots them accurately, but many squirrel rifles do not. Moreover, those light, soft-lead bullets can be pretty destructive on meat after a body shot (and again, I say that as a guy who carries a .17 HMR more often than not, typically shooting FMJ bullets through it).

The .21 Sharp doesn't provide near the punch of the .17 HMR, of course, but it's much quieter, cheaper to shoot, and far less destructive on meat, bullet designs being comparable. This is a cartridge to compete with the .22 LR, which is a tall order. But the .21 Sharp is a little faster (1,500 fps for the 34-grain hollowpoint, vs. 1,300 fps for a 37-grain high-velocity .22), making it flatter shooting. And the copper-jacketed hollowpoint bullets that we hunted with seemed to provide a nice, controlled expansion on squirrels. Body-shot animals weren't ripped to pieces, but were killed decisively. The camp collectively shot around 50 squirrels during three days of hunting, and though plenty were missed, I can't recall any that were wounded and lost. That's just not something you can typically say after three days of hard squirrel hunting with .22s.



The .21 Sharp performed well on squirrels, resulting in quick kills without too much meat destruction.





The Xpert is inexpensive; less than \$400 MSRP, and chances are you can find one on the shelf for less than \$300. If I were setting up a more dedicated squirrel gun in .21 Sharp (which I may yet do), I'd probably opt for a bit more heft in the rifle, and get the Xpert Thumb-hole Target version, which is also suppressor ready but has a heavier barrel, laminate stock and Picatinny optic rail. Either way, if you're shopping on a budget for a new bolt-action rimfire in the slick new .21 Sharp (or the classic .22 LR), the Suppressor Ready Xpert is a pretty fine option. **P**

Type:	Bolt-action Rimfire
Caliber:	.21 Sharp
Barrel:	16.5 in.; 1:12
Receiver Finish:	Matte black
Capacity:	10 rounds/detachable magazine
Stock:	Molded polymer
Weight:	4 lbs., 8 oz.
Sights:	Dovetail, drilled and tapped receiver
Trigger/Safety:	Precision Rimfire MOA Trigger/manual safety
Price:	\$380
Website:	winchesterguns.com



WHY THE .21 SHARP?

Few things seem to cause veteran hunters (and gunwriters) more angst and handwringing than a new cartridge that competes with a proven classic. Since no cartridge is more proven, more classic, or more popular than the .22 Long Rifle, the .21 Sharp indeed has an uphill climb. But it's still an excellent round.

The .21 Sharp is loaded into the same case as the .22 LR; the difference is in the bullet diameter and design. The LR (which has been around for about 138 years now) is loaded with a .225 diameter bullet with a heel, which means the rear of the bullet has a slightly smaller diameter than the middle, allowing it to fit into the case. That design is the reason why most .22 LR ammunition uses basic, soft lead bullets.

The .21 Sharp has a diameter of .2105, allowing it to fit neatly within the case and also for the use of better constructed bullets, including the 34-grain Super-X JHP that so impressed me on squirrels. But the .21 is also available with various lead-free projectiles. As noted by editor-in-chief David Draper in his review of the cartridge last year, hunters can expect more areas, particularly public areas, to restrict lead ammunition in the future. Since some of the best squirrel hunting out there is on public land, that alone is reason enough to give the .21 Sharp a chance. That it's also capable of better performance on game than the .22 LR is another perk, too. I'm a fan of the cartridge, and while Winchester is making some nice little rifles for it, I hope other gunmakers follow suit with their own platforms as well.



THE VENATIC TACKLES THE HIGH PLAINS OF WYOMING.

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Being a person with 20/20 vision (or at least that's what they told me the last time my eyes were checked), I probably take it for granted.

But the high plains outside of Casper, Wyoming, said: "Jokes on you, ol' Eagle Eyes."

For one, it's extremely difficult to direct attention to a singular object in such a target-rich environment. There were pronghorns galore spread out rather evenly across a sprawling landscape. I was looking to kill my first antelope buck and wanted a solid representation of the species from the region. I certainly wasn't expecting to be able to observe and respectfully scrutinize so many specimens. "Mass, length and cutters," I was told. It kind of felt like being in the cereal aisle of a supermarket after the year 2000—I had come for classic Cheerios and was now inundated with too many flavor variations.

Secondly, the terrain was a far departure from the coniferous mountains near my home and played tricks on my depth perception. It amazed me how much an area can seem so still, yet bustle with movement. Gusts made the tall grass dance in swirls.

Prominent wind turbines spun constantly, scattered rock crags were strewn about, and stationary silos rusted with old memories. What was far felt close, and what was close felt far.

Thankfully, I was surrounded by a couple of experienced pronghorn slayers—Kelly Glause of Heart Spear Outfitters and Seth Swerczek of Hornady—that would steer me correctly. I was also wielding an exceptional rifle.

AT THE CORE

According to Horizon Firearms, "the Venatic was meticulously crafted with the lightweight hunter in mind." Even its namesake in the Merriam-Webster dictionary means "of, relating to, or used in hunting."

And that's exactly what the Venatic is—a supremely accurate rifle adorned with high-end components and assembled with strict attention to detail, allowing it to excel in a wide variety of hunting environments.

At first glance, probably the coolest visual feature that pops out is the barrel. The aggressive signature twist spiral fluting is done by Horizon in-house and is finished with a Horizon green Cerakote—a color much akin to Hulk's skin when he gets angry—but it makes me happy, and the fluting helps reduce the front-end weight and barrel cool faster.

Aesthetics aside, Horizon uses Benchmark 416R stainless-steel barrel blanks—which for a long time have been one of the top choices for competitive shooters on the PRS, NRL and benchrest circuits, as well as a common selection for gunsmiths advising

HORIZON



SCOTT ERGAS

clients on the start of custom builds. The barrels are threaded 5/8-24 and the rifle comes with an Iota SIM muzzle brake. I was enticed to run it suppressed, so I threaded my Kovix 6-inch Timberline series on it and don't regret it one bit. The 100% titanium construction of the .30 caliber can paired perfectly with the weight-saving design aspects of the 6 pound, 8 ounce Venatic.

The barrel itself is spun onto a Stiller Wombat action. Featuring a skeletonized stainless-steel design, and having a scant overall weight of 23 ounces, the Wombat maintains tight tolerances, isn't cumbersome and is slick to operate. The 2-lug bolt incorporates a 3-piece assembly that allows the handle and knob to be tailored to the shooter's preferences. Even though it's becoming more commonplace on rifles, the inclusion of a 20 MOA rail is a nice touch, and it matched nicely with a Leupold VX-6HD Gen 2 3-18x44 scope. This action has been one of my favorites in recent years. It's important to note that Kaspar Outdoors, Horizon's parent company, owns Stiller and Iota, which helps keep quality control up and sourcing scarcity down.

An inviting resting place for the barrel and action is the Iota EKO X stock. The EKO X comes with dual-thumb detents, which help mitigate rifle torque and encourage proper grip. I found the vertical palm swell to be very comfortable while shooting in many different positions—the mitts/pads of my hands are large, but my finger length is average—no problem. Every EKO X stock is hand-laid and hand-finished for optimum quality, which can not only be felt but also seen.

The stock features an integrated bipod rail—which is sleek, although I found it to barely have enough meat for my Gunwerks



The Venatic was extremely enjoyable to shoot at the bench. Largely in part to its accuracy and negative comb.



Hornady's Precision Hunter ammunition, loaded with a 128-grain ELD-X, was proper medicine for pronghorn.

Elevate 2.0 bipod to bite down on; it worked and was serviceable. Weighing in at only 24 ounces and having an overall length of 31 inches, the baseline stats of the stock were very desirable. I was also pleased with the custom-machined pillars that help maintain accuracy and dimensional mating of the action. The bottom metal (made by Horizon) is constructed from lightweight aircraft-grade aluminum and is compatible with AICS-type magazines. The negative angle on the cheek rest is an added benefit for shooters and, in concert with the Custom AirTech pad from LimbSaver, drastically reduces felt recoil (not that the .25 Creedmoor my rifle was chambered in is an untamable panther). And making things go “boom” with a slight press of the finger is a TriggerTech trigger, which broke crisply at just under 2 pounds, 3 ounces. I still prefer curved triggers over flat ones and was glad the Venatic came with a crescent moon shape.

HOME, HOME ON THE RANGE

When I first received the rifle, I did my normal OCD procedures—verified action screw was at the recommended torque, slid in the bolt and cycled it a hundred times or so, ran a dry patch through it in case of gunk, shouldered it feeling for quick acquisition, etc. I was excited to get my hands on a fantastic-looking, and highly touted rifle, chambered in a newly SAAMI-approved cartridge—the .25 Creedmoor—and was eager to get over to my local range to shoot it.

As a handloader, I would have loved to be able to source a gamut of .257-caliber projectiles and consistent brass to work up loads and listen to the barrel feedback on paper. But for this test, I shot a factory offering due to the infancy of the cartridge and my assumption that once market support catches up, many of you have already recognized the merits and consistency of modern factory ammunition—especially with match-grade chamber tolerances. Thus, I had no qualms relying on Hornady's 128-grain ELD-X Precision Hunter ammo, especially because I'd be hunting with them shortly thereafter.



The first three shots down the barrel at 100 yards yielded a sub-MOA group. Whenever you receive a test rifle, it's hard to assume how much it may have been shot previously. So, I thoroughly cleaned it and shot it again, assuming it needed three or four fouling shots. After letting it cool, I shot four more. (I couldn't help myself after stacking five holes close together; my zeal and hubris resulted in the final two shots being pushed right). The Venatic was pleasant to shoot and very consistent. I was confident in my chances of success in Wyoming.

WHERE THE DEER AND THE ANTELOPE PLAY

Returning full circle to the prologue of this article, the speed goat rut was dwindling down, but there were many of them on their feet—some still with large harems. We had looked over quite a few bucks, some that maybe “scored” better than the one I ended up taking, but I wanted mine to have a special swagger.

We came upon a hot doe getting harassed and chased by two bucks. One of the bucks was splayed out flat and kind of weird (a plus for me) and the other was younger and full of

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The skeltonized Stiller Wombat action is an ideal pairing for the Venatic's design.



The Venatic features a crisp TriggerTech "go-switch."



The author proudly poses with his first antelope buck.



miss and vinegar. But in our periphery, we could see a nice buck a couple hundred yards off converging slowly on the group with a stoic trot and without haste. When he got into intervening distance of their rut-fueled tryst, the other males bailed quickly out of there.

Maturity, dominance or both? I wasn't sure, but he was the one for me.

Ironically, in his tunnel vision, he kept bearing down on our location until about 90 yards, where Kelly whistled to stop him, slightly quartering to us. I pounded him with a heart shot. Regardless, I'm thoroughly convinced that the .25 Creedmoor might be the ultimate antelope/deer round in open terrain and that the Horizon Venatic rifle offers quality precision and dependability worth every penny. **P**

Type:	Bolt-action rifle
Caliber:	.25 Creedmoor (tested)
Barrel:	22 in., 1:7.5 twist
Capacity:	5 rounds, included AICS-type magazine
Stock:	iOTA EKO X
Sights:	None; factory-mounted optic rail on receiver
Trigger/Safety:	TriggerTech, two-position safety
Price:	\$3,799
Website:	horizonfirearms.com

ACCURACY TEST

(Accuracy is the results of three 3-shot groups at 100 yards.)

Ammunition	Velocity (fps)	Deviation	Accuracy
Hornady 128-gr. ELD-X	2,861	9	.46

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SPANDAU'S RL RIFLE IS A REMINGTON 700 CLONE THAT PERFORMS WELL AND IS PRICED RIGHT.

2020 WAS A TOUGH YEAR FOR A LOT OF REASONS, BUT GUN OWNERS MAY REMEMBER IT AS THE YEAR THAT WHAT REMAINED OF REMINGTON ARMS WAS SOLD.

America's oldest firearms manufacturer had suffered under years of mismanagement, and it seemed that the future of such popular firearms as the Model 870 pump shotgun and Model 700 bolt-action rifle was uncertain.

If you were one of the millions of hunters that was sad to see the Remington 700 disappear, then I have a bit of good news for you. Starting in 2026, SDS Imports in Knoxville, Tennessee is importing the Spandau RL, a Turkish clone of the Model 700. Initially chambered in .308 Winchester, this Remington revival is breathing new life into the classic Model 700 design.

Turkish guns have gotten a bum rap over the years, not all of which is undeserved. But, as with any other country, not all Turkish manufacturers are producing products of equal

quality. The Spandau RL is being manufactured by Huglu, one of Turkey's premier firearm manufacturers. The company consistently produces shotguns and rifles that rival guns from Europe, Japan, and the States in quality, and since CNC machines operate the same in Istanbul that they do in Illinois the "made in Turkey" label is nothing to fear.

The RL looks very much like a classic Remington 700 short action with a few noteworthy differences. The stock features a straight comb and is made from nicely finished Turkish walnut. It doesn't glisten like the classic Model 700 BDL stock, but I'm not sure that's a bad thing. The receiver and barrel metal of the RL feature a matte-black oxynitride finish. For those unfamiliar with the process, oxynitriding involves nitriding the steel and then oxidizing it to form a protective outer layer. The process gives the metal its distinctive matte black/gray finish, and the resulting surface treatment is resistant to wear and corrosion. Oxynitriding is a sensible finish option on hunting rifles because it stands up well to moisture, offers a low-glare finish and won't flake.

WEIRD



APPARENT

BRAD FITZPATRICK



RL rifles sport a 20-inch steel barrel with a medium sporter barrel profile. The barrel features 5R rifling which purportedly eases cleaning and improves accuracy, and the 1:10 twist rate stabilizes the vast majority of .308 Winchester hunting loads. The rifle's relatively short barrel makes it more practical for hunters because it reduces overall length, making the Spandau more maneuverable in a blind or treestand and reduces the overall length of the rifle when running a suppressor. Both a thread protector and muzzle brake are included with each rifle.

Many of the receiver and bolt features are true to the original Remington 700 design. The receiver is cylindrical (a feature on the original Model 700 that made it much more affordable and efficient to manufacture than the flat-bottom Winchester Model 70), and there's a recoil lug positioned at the front of the receiver. The push-feed bolt features dual locking lugs and a plunger-type ejector that extends through the recessed bolt face just like the original Model 700.



Hornady's Superformance ammo produced reliable sub-MOA precision.



The stock, made of Turkish walnut, features a classic straight-comb design.



The included zero-MOA rail simplifies the scope mounting process.

The extractor on the Spandau RL is better than the Remington 700 design, though. For years the M700's weak, small extractor was considered the Achilles' heel of an otherwise outstanding action. Several hunters I have spoken with over the years told me they broke Model 700 extractors at one time or another, and Namibian professional hunter, Jofie Lamprecht, nearly lost his life when the extractor on his .416 Model 700 snapped while a hippo was doing everything within its considerable powers to kill him. Many Model 700 owners sidestepped the issue by replacing the factory extractors in their rifles with Sako or M16-style extractors, both of which are far more robust. Spandau saves owners a step by installing a rugged M16 extractor on the RL at the factory.

The Spandau rifle ships with two detachable AICS box magazines, one five-round magazine and one three-rounder. I still feel a bit of a disconnect when I see a rifle with a wood stock and an extended box magazine, which to my mind is the outdoors equivalent of installing a rear spoiler on your Jeep CJ7. For me, the three-round flush-fit magazine looks more natural. If I eventually swap out the supplied walnut stock for a tactical/hybrid polymer stock, the five-round mag will likely return. Aesthetics matter very little when it comes to a rifle's capacity to make accurate shots, but having two included magazines is a nice feature.

Spandau ships their RL rifles with a zero MOA rail included, so mounting a scope on this rifle is straightforward. The rail is held in place with 6-48 screws, and since they are laid out in the traditional Remington 700 pattern, finding scope bases or other rails isn't an issue. In fact, the RL's 700 footprint makes it a new rifle with robust aftermarket support. Its compatibility with Model 700 components means swapping out the RL's stock, trigger, scope base, or just about any other major component is simple. If you're looking to build your own rifle, the \$799 Spandau RL is a great platform from which to start. But even in its factory form, the Spandau RL is a solid rifle that will feel familiar to any Remington 700 fan.

RANGE TESTING

With its 20-inch barrel, the RL rifle is short and snappy, and the weight of my test rifle was 6 pounds, 13 ounces (although wood density may cause weight to vary from gun to gun). The initial impression I got of the rifle was that it was handy. It works well in the dark confines of a blind and it's short enough to function as a



The RL features AICS-compatible bottom metal and comes standard with both 3- and 5-round magazines.

trunk or brush rifle. Length of pull is just a hair under 14 inches which may be a bit long for some shooters, but the thick recoil pad absorbs recoil effectively. The pad features a radiused heel that won't hang up on heavy clothing when you're mounting the rifle.

The trigger on the test rifle broke at 4.25 pounds on average and there was a bit of creep. It certainly isn't a bad trigger, but it's not as crisp as the many aftermarket Remington 700 triggers from companies like Timney and TriggerTech. The first order of business for me will be to order a new trigger for the gun, but many hunters will find the factory trigger suitable.

It certainly produced good accuracy results. I tested the RL with four different loads. Three of those loads (Hornady Superformance CX, Federal Fusion Tipped, and Nosler American Whitetail) were designed for hunting, and the last (Federal Gold Medal Center Strike OTM) was a match load. Both the Hornady and Federal Gold Medal three-shot groups averaged in the .9-inch range at 100 yards. The Hornady load proved to be the most accurate, but only by the slimmest of margins. Nosler's budget-friendly cup-and-core Whitetail Country load averaged 1.3-inches for three shots at 100 yards, and the Federal Fusion Tipped load averaged 1.4 inches.

So, is the RL a sub-MOA rifle out of the box? Yes, with a load it likes. I think that with a new trigger and some load development and testing you could certainly shrink groups even further.

I performed my range tests with a Silencer Central Banish Backcountry .30-caliber suppressor in place and attached a



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Both a thread protector and muzzle brake are included with each rifle.

Trijicon Credo HX 2.5-15x42 scope to the RL's rail. Fully equipped, this gun weighs around nine pounds, but it's still short enough to operate in heavy cover and the recoil and muzzle blast are so subdued that this gun is a real pleasure to shoot.

The control layout is pure Model 700, but the RL comes with an oversized bell-shaped bolt knob that's easier to operate than the stock bolt knob on a standard Model 700. There's a two-position safety that moves from the safe to fire positions with a distinct click. One of my peeves on two-position rifles are safeties that "float" and are easily switched between safe and fire positions every time the selector makes contact with a shooting bag or tree branch. There's none of that nonsense with the RL.

Reliable cycling is important on any hunting rifle and I'm happy to say that the RL cycles very smoothly. It operates well with the AICS magazines and there's no need to gently persuade the bolt to pick up another round on the return stroke. Run this gun at speed and it works every time. Ad-

ditionally, the open-top receiver design allows you to top load rounds directly into the chamber if you'd like.

When I'd finished testing, I removed the barreled action from the stock. It's worth noting the action screws were torqued to the correct setting at the factory, which is not always the case with factory rifles. The machining and finish on the barreled action are excellent, as good as you'll find in many rifles costing more money. The interior of the stock is roughly hewn, but it works fine.

Now that the remains of Remington Arms are under the control of RemArms, it remains to be seen what the Model 700's future holds, but if you wanted a 700 and didn't get in line in time, there's no need to despair. Spandau's RL rifle is a very good stand-in that is, in some respects, better than the rifle it replaces. The Remington 700 built its reputation by offering good accuracy and reliable performance at a modest price. If those features still appeal to you, then the RL is certainly worth a look. **P**



Shooters can top load rounds directly thanks to the rifle's open-top receiver.



Type:	Bolt-action centerfire
Chambering:	.308 Winchester
Capacity:	3+1, 5+1
Barrel Length:	20 inches
Barrel:	5R rifling, 1:10 twist, threaded 5/8-24, muzzle brake and thread protector included
Overall Length:	39.95 inches
Weight:	6 lbs., 13 oz. (unscoped)
Stock:	Turkish walnut
LOP:	13.97 inches
Sights:	0 MOA rail included
Trigger/Safety:	Single stage, 4.25-pounds
Safety:	Two-position
Finish:	Oxynitride
Price:	\$800
Website:	Spandauarms.com



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AGING LIKE FINE

MOSSBERG'S PATRIOT RIFLE TOASTS A DECADE OF PRODUCTION.

GUIDE LUCAS PAUGH AND I SPOTTED THE MATURE BLACKTAIL BUCK WHILE HE WAS CROSSING THROUGH CABERNET SAUVIGNON VINES AT STEINBECK WINERY.

Through the spotting scope he looked good, with a boxy frame still in velvet and four points on one side—a rare feature on coastal blacktails. When the buck turned his head, we saw that his main beams were a bit short and thin, but this was certainly the best buck we had seen all morning.

“What do you think?” Lucas asked.

“Depends on how you look at him,” I said. “Head-on he’s a great buck. In profile he looks like he could use another year.”

Lucas nodded, and I knew he felt the same. We left the deer, but later in the day we stumbled into him again in the same patch of grapevines. Perhaps the angle of the sun was slightly different or maybe the heat of midday blurred our vision, but the boxy four-point looked more impressive than he had a few hours earlier.

Stalking big bucks in vineyards is one of Lucas’s specialties. His favorite tactic is to slip into the open row beside the target buck and, keeping the wind in your face and utilizing vines as cover, creep within archery range. But that wouldn’t work on our hunt. There were does and young bucks on both sides of the boxy four, and they’d bolt the moment we started our stalk. The buck was too far away for an ethical shot from our current

position, so we’d have to move, and that meant maneuvering to the opposite side of the block of vines.

The plan worked perfectly. Because each row of grapes in Steinbeck Vineyard is numbered, we could pinpoint the buck’s location. Lucas and I knew he was last seen standing between rows 64 and 65, so we eased into that row hoping to find our buck.

We did, and he was within range, but he had bedded down. Lucas and I eased into position and saw the deer’s ears and antlers overtop a low rise. I settled the Mossberg Patriot, chambered in .270 Winchester, into position and waited. The shot was 115 yards, a simple task for that rifle/cartridge combination. I just needed the deer to stand.

A half-hour passed and the buck didn’t move. The heat of day sucked the last of the moisture from the August air and even the buzzing flies left us. I watched through the Leupold VX-5HD scope as the buck chewed his cud in the shade of a vine which was heavy with fat, purple grapes. The blacktail was in a state of repose, his dark eyes slowly blinking under the weight of his velvet rack. He seemed content to stay there all day.

Forty-fives minutes. I looked at that velvety rack again. The beams seemed to stop short and the front fork was weak. Maybe this deer needed another year to mature. Or perhaps he was past his prime: I hadn’t gotten a good look at his body from the other side and wasn’t sure I was capable of accurately judging the age of blacktail bucks on the hoof, anyway. I shifted behind the rifle, adjusted my grip, and slid my face back onto the Mossberg’s walnut stock.



WINE

BRAD FITZPATRICK



The rolling hills of Steinbeck Winery provide a safe haven for California's elusive coastal blacktails.

An hour into the standoff I was getting restless. I even heard Lucas move behind me, and he has the patience borne from years of bowhunting. The boxy four, for his part, seemed perfectly content to whittle away the warm midday hours in the shade of the vines. Twice I am certain the buck fell fully asleep.

After an hour and twenty minutes Lucas and I called it. We just weren't certain that the buck was old enough to harvest, and at the current pace of things we might be standing in the vineyard until sundown before the buck decided to move. We slipped out of the row and headed back to the winery's headquarters for lunch.

HISTORY AND TRADITION

The rifle I was carrying was Mossberg's push-feed Patriot bolt-action which turned 10 years old in 2025. Like their popular shotgun brands, the Patriot has earned a reputation for providing rock-solid performance at a reasonable price. The Patriot arrived at a time when budget rifles were all the rage. Ruger released the first American rifle in 2012, and in 2013 Remington came out with the 783. Mossberg was a bit late to the game, but their Patriot rifle proved to be a winner. The budget rifle revolution proved to the hunting public that even affordable guns could outshoot some higher-priced rifles designed just a decade prior. Building affordable, accurate rifles is a byproduct of modern machining technology.

For the Steinbeck hunt I selected a Mossberg Patriot Walnut rifle which comes with a detachable box magazine, fluted bar-



rel, spiral fluted bolt and LBA adjustable trigger for \$721. Though it's available in a variety of calibers including relative newcomers like both the 6.5 Creedmoor and PRC, I elected to hunt with a Patriot chambered in .270 Winchester.

The .270 turned 100 years old in 2025, and although modern cartridges with heavy-for-caliber bullets earn the lion's share of attention these days, the .270 is a classic big-game cartridge that's accounted for innumerable heads of game around the world. Cartridge historians love to debate whether it's based on a necked-down .30-03 or .30-06 case (which are virtually identical, but the '03 is the true parent). Paternity questions aside, the .270 has been among the most popular hunting rounds of the last hundred years. Sure, it had its champion in Mr. O'Connor, but the cartridge stands on its own merits and doesn't require propping up. It'll push a 130-grain bullet between 3,000 and 3,150 feet per second depending upon barrel length and other factors, which means the .270 shoots plenty flat for most hunting out to 500 yards or so. It's debatable as an elk cartridge (I think it gets the nod) and is a splendid sheep, goat, deer, caribou and antelope cartridge. And its mild recoil makes it a joy to shoot.

There are writers who have criticized the .270's accuracy. I discussed the notion of the .270's "inaccuracy" with Craig Boddington over a glass of wine following a day of hunting at Steinbeck and Craig has found that the .270 is capable of very good accuracy. Although my pool of experience is far more limited than Mr. Boddington's, I will say that I agree with his conclusion. I've owned three .270s and tested several more, and at least half (including the Mossberg) were capable of sub-MOA accuracy. That's good enough for hunting all big game at any responsible distance. It's also worth noting that Craig's wife Donna, who is also an experienced hunter and gifted writer, has carried her MG Arms .270 Winchester all over the world and has had great success with that rifle on a wide variety of game.

On paper the .270 doesn't look all that appealing. Hunting bullets are limited to about 150 grains, which don't offer the same aerodynamics as a 143-grain .264-inch bullet from a 6.5 Creedmoor or 6.5 PRC. The .270 is also a substantial step below



Mossberg's Patriot bolt-action rifle is impressively accurate, reliable and affordable.

the various 7mm magnums in terms of power, and it's also the least powerful of the now-growing .277 family of cartridges that includes the .270 Weatherby Magnum, .27 Nosler, .277 Fury and the 6.8 Western.

What the .270 has going for it, though, is a hundred years of load development and testing, a broad array of suitable hunting bullets, sufficient energy for most big game to moderate ranges and a flat trajectory. And, as previously mentioned, it doesn't beat the snot out of you.

We raised a glass to the Mossberg and the .270, but before we could celebrate too much, there was still work to do. The boxy four vanished to parts unknown and my deer tag was still unfilled.

SEARCHING FOR A FORK

There's nothing more classic in coastal California blacktail hunting than a big, mature fork horn. The average mature buck in the region carries two or three points per side (not counting brow tines), and although a big two-point doesn't impress everyone, it does impress me. We don't get a lot of big fork horn bucks in the Midwest.



I'd had my eye out for a fork even before we spotted the boxy four, but on the second day of the hunt I found exactly what I was searching for—a mature, heavy two-point buck as classically Californian as surfboards and fault lines. The buck was with a group of three others and when they saw us they disappeared into a row of syrah grapes.

Lucas and I pulled another flanking maneuver that led us back into the cabernet sauvignon section, and after carefully checking row-by-row, we found the fork-horn feeding in the shade of the vines. We stalked down the opposite row, using the tight latticework of vines as a shield, and popped out within 150 yards of the deer.



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The author with his classic California coastal blacktail.

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Lucas crawled into position and I followed, trying (and failing) to avoid the brutal spines of the stray yellow starthistle plant. As I lay prone, I felt the stab of a thistle spine in my hand and another in my knee. I cleared away the ones I could see and laid down only to feel three sharp stabs just above the belt.

When I had settled on the rifle, Lucas elbowed me.

“He’s bedded.”

Here we were again, watching a mature buck dozing in the midmorning heat while we waited for a shot. But things were different this time. I was certain this was the buck that I wanted, and, perhaps more importantly, I was laid out comfortably (save the thistle spines) in the prone position. I could hold my position for a long time if that was what the hunt required.

I watched the buck through the scope. He was bedded just in front of another younger buck that was still in velvet, and I noticed that the target buck had what appeared to be a large growth under his eye. I couldn’t tell if he was blind on that

side, but I did notice that he kept his eye partially closed and seemed inclined to turn his head farther in our direction than his velvet-antlered companion.

Ten minutes passed, then fifteen. The buck remained in his bedded position, but the angle of the sun was changing and, as a result, the shade evaporated. It was clear that the buck was uncomfortable, and after twenty minutes he stood up.

Lucas gave the sign to shoot and I fired, hitting the buck in the lungs. He went down almost where he stood, and with my guide patting me on the back I covered the buck until I was certain he wasn't going anywhere. Then I smiled, unloaded the rifle, and started plucking thistle spines from my belly.

The buck was very large and heavy, a classic, mature California forkhorn. He did have a hard mass growing under his eye, though we never determined what caused the growth. Lucas and I chalked it up to the hardscrabble life of a free-range buck living in dry, steep country.

The Mossberg worked, and so did the .270. That should come as no surprise, though, because both the rifle and cartridge have a long and successful track record. When the sun set, we sat under the rising full moon on the dining area at the rear of the main house, savoring the coolness of the evening and the crisp, complex taste of Steinbeck's The Crash wine. We lifted a toast to the day, to the deer, and to classic rifles and cartridges. **P**



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REAR VIEW

JIM ZUMBO

Close Calls And A Bad Attitude

I'M THOROUGHLY WHIPPED. All I want is to crawl in my small tent and slide into my sleeping bag. I'm about to turn off the lantern when I glance at my boots and see a black widow spider crawling into one. After quickly dispatching it, I wonder what else could go wrong. It's been a long, crazy day. I'm exhausted physically and mentally.

Another guide named Jack and I have the task of guiding three nonresident mule deer hunters in Utah's Desolation Canyon along the Green River corridor. The outfitter's hunting lodge is high above the canyon on a huge plateau where large groves of aspens support mind-boggling populations of big buck mule deer. It's 1965, which is considered one of the banner years for mules.

Unfortunately, the three hunters don't want to hunt the aspens out of the comfortable lodge. Instead, they want a serious adventure in Desolation Canyon with plenty of challenges. But there's a problem. The canyon is winter range. The outfitter frowns on the hunt because there are few deer there during hunting season, but he honors their wishes. He tells them their chances of scoring are slim to none.

I had taken a week of vacation from my regular job as a state forest ranger. I was just out of college and anxious to guide. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't happy with the \$15 daily salary too. I had extra bills to pay, including a shotgun which I bought on an installment plan.

To hunt the canyon, the hunters had to fly in a small plane flown by legendary Jim Hurst, who was well known as one of the finest pilots in the region and one of the few who dared attempt the precarious landing on the sandy shore along the river.

Jack and I would lead a pack train down the treacherous canyon slopes and establish a landing spot. We'd be clearing logs, brush and debris to make a crude runway. Then we'd repair an old corral, take care of the horses, dig a latrine, set up tents and arrange gear.

We worked at a feverish pace because the plane would arrive far too soon. I started a smokey fire off the side of the makeshift runway so the pilot could determine wind direction. Soon we saw Jim fly over to check the wind and dive into the canyon at a sharp angle. He maneuvered the plane where it appeared to miss the cliff walls by mere feet. Somehow, he eased it onto the rough runway. Three hunters stepped out of the plane. They were happy to be on the ground.

When I prepared the campfire coals for cooking, one of the hunters told me I was doing it all wrong. Then he complained about the steaks being too far from the coals and made demands that were unreasonable. He was belligerent all evening and I knew he'd be a problem for the rest of the hunt.



When I was preparing flapjacks for breakfast the guy sarcastically said the dough was too watery and the flapjacks were not perfectly cooked. He complained about the tent, the makeshift latrine and the camp in general. We saw zero deer that day. The two agreeable hunters took it in stride, but Mr. Nasty was irate. I reminded him that the outfitter warned them about the lack of deer, but they booked the hunt anyway.

The next day he took a shot at a modest buck while sitting in the saddle. Predictably he was bucked off and landed on his butt. Only his pride was hurt. I told all the hunters the first day before leaving camp that most all the people who shoot while mounted on a horse work in Hollywood.

Being bucked off the horse was enough for the whiner. He told us he wanted out of the canyon as soon as possible. He didn't care about his companions. We made a plan. Instead of all three hunters flying out, we'd break camp, leave the dude with supplies and a tent. The rest of us would ride up to the lodge where we'd radio the pilot to pick up Mr. Nasty. His buddies were happy to hunt the aspen forests above. They still had two days to hunt.

The only near mishap on the trip (other than the horse bucking incident) occurred when my horse almost lost his footing on the narrow trail along the cliff. Jack, who was in the lead, stopped momentarily to rest the horses. I was bringing up the rear. My horse began slipping out of control on a slick, slanted, smooth shelf. I yelled to Jack to move up. The train finally moved forward, just in time for my horse to regain his footing. At one point his hoof was inches from the edge.

We had just topped out into the aspen forests when we spotted two nice bucks. Minutes later our hunters scored. I wish I could have heard the conversation when they told the whiner. **P**

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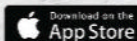
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