

OUR BALLISTICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON **HANDGUN ACCURACY**

SHOOTING TIMES

APRIL 2026



BODDINGTON ON
BENELLI'S LUPO

SIMPSON ON
**HOW TO
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HANDGUNS**

VON BENEDIKT ON
**FAVORITE BOER
CARTRIDGES**

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By Layne Simpson



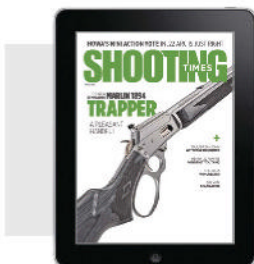
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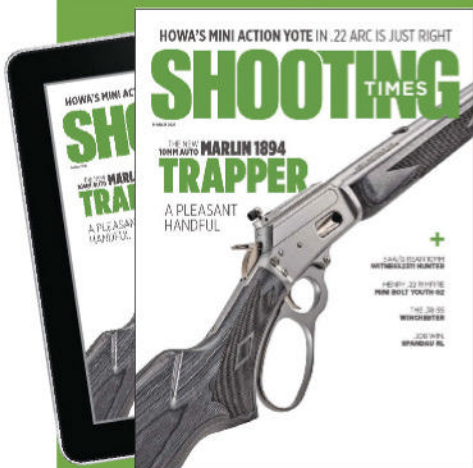
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Favorite .30-40 Krag Load

THANKS FOR "THE SHOOTIST" COLUMN IN THE DECEMBER 2025/JANUARY

2026 issue on the .30-40 Krag U.S. Model 1899 Krag-Jorgensen carbine by Joseph von Benedikt. I have a carbine version that I got from a fellow shooter for a decent price. It came with some ammo. I obtained some new brass and a 200-grain Redding/Saeco bullet mold #301. My favorite handload is 25.5 grains of VihtaVuori 135 with the 200-grain cast bullet. The lowest sight setting of the ladder's aperture works well for 200-yard steel plate targets.

Carl Thomas Zmuda

Via email

Thanks for Using the Correct Nomenclature

I'm writing to thank Joseph von Benedikt for using the correct names for the .32 S&W and the .45 Colt in the recent article on Federal's Hydra-Shok Deep ammunition in the December 2025/January 2026 issue. It drives me nuts when I hear people refer to them as the .32 Short and .45 Long Colt. The .32 S&W was named 18 years before the .32 S&W Long was developed, and the name was never changed. As to the .45 Colt, Colt's developed several different cartridges with both Short and Long names, but not the .45 Colt. There never was a .45 Short Colt, so Colt's would have no reason to name it the .45 Long Colt. Unfortunately, that incorrect nickname has been used for so long that even gunmakers and ammomakers use it. They know better, but they have given up fighting a very large group of ignorant people. I just had to get that off my chest.

Rich Baird

Fayetteville, OH

Would've Liked Some 7mm-08 Handloads

I read Layne Simpson's article on the Howa Model 1500 Super Deluxe rifle in the February issue with great interest. I have one of those rifles, and mine shoots as well as the one Layne reviewed. I haven't shot all the factory ammo Layne fired, but I get my best factory-load accuracy with the Hornady 139-grain InterLock ammo, averaging around 0.75 inch at 100 yards from a benchrest for three-shot groups. The description of the gun

was very thorough, but I would have liked to see some shooting results using handloads. I know Layne has written about handloading the 7mm-08 for *Shooting Times* in the past, so I was hoping he'd show some of those loads in this article. Other than that, it was a very good article.

Mark Jordan

Via email

It Had to be a Winchester

Returning home from Vietnam in 1969, I knew I needed a deer rifle. I didn't know push feed from controlled feed. All I knew is it had to be a Winchester. Of course, since I trained at Parris Island with the M-14, my hunting rifle had to be in .308 Winchester. The PX had Model 70s, 770s, and 670s. I settled in the middle because the 770 had a walnut stock, and the 670 did not. The 770 cost \$117. Three of us Grunts boarded the plane in California to come home carrying cased rifles. How life has changed! The 770 never failed to feed, and it accounted for my first two bucks in Bradford County, Pennsylvania.

Semper Fi.

Adam W. Mackow

Milford, NJ

My .30-40 Krag Experiences

Having been a fan of the cartridge, I enjoyed Joseph von Benedikt's recent column on the .30 U.S. Krag (aka .30-40 Krag). Years ago, I bought a Centennial Ruger No. 3 single shot in the .30-40 Krag offering.

I found that the No. 3's strong action allowed a more robust loading when preparing my own handloads. Using Ken

Waters's method of case expansion and looking for pressure signs, I developed loads with velocities in the range of the .307 WCF with a variety of 150-grain to 180-grain bullets. The .30-40 with modern brass is an easy case to reload. There are a wide number of medium-range powders that make for accurate and excellent deer and elk loads in my No. 3.

This rifle is very accurate loaded with either a 150-grain or 180-grain Spitzer, producing sub-MOA groups. It has a real preference for the Hornady 150-grain Inter-Lock. With the Burris 4X scope I installed on it, it's a good game collector.

Though most writing on the Krag rifle is focused on the U.S. version, the Krag also was a military battle gun for countries in Scandinavia. I'd be interested in what chamberings were used there, their effectiveness, and if they suffered from the same concerns of strength.

Kenneth Willis
Via email

7mm-08 Rules

I sure enjoyed the article on the 7mm-08 Howa Model 1500 Super Deluxe rifle in the February issue by Layne Simpson. It looks like a nice rifle, and the 7mm-08 is one of my all-time favorite deer-hunting cartridges. I've used it to successfully hunt whitetails out East and down South. In fact, my best trophy buck so far scored 152, and I took it during a Texas hunt almost 12 years ago. I made a poor shot (totally my own fault), but the good old 7mm-08 did the job anyway. The buck went maybe 20 yards after the shot and crumpled within sight of my shooting position. I was using a Remington Model Seven with a Weaver scope and Federal Fusion 140-grain ammo.

Joe Meyers
Via email

The Bigger the Adventure, the Bigger the Blade

The perfect knife for your next adventure

No offense to those nifty little Swiss knives, but sometimes you need a big blade to get the job done. That was the case three years ago in the jungles of Argentina.

I was hunting for clues to lost Inca gold. The Inca were known for their 25,000-mile road system along South America's eastern side, and the clue I sought was down a long-abandoned jungle-covered road.

That's when my Pathfinder Blade came to the rescue. Made from high-quality 420 surgical stainless steel and measuring 16 inches, this full-tang knife tore through the brush. Its rugged handle—crafted from natural white bone, hand-carved and torched with an iconic design—offered a steady grip. With brass spacers, handguards, a brown pakkawood handle, and hand-engraved spine, this knife was all I needed.

Upon reaching a stone wall hidden by the jungle, I snapped my knife back into its tooled genuine leather sheath and read the markings the Incas had left long ago. It was time to travel north for the next part of my adventure.

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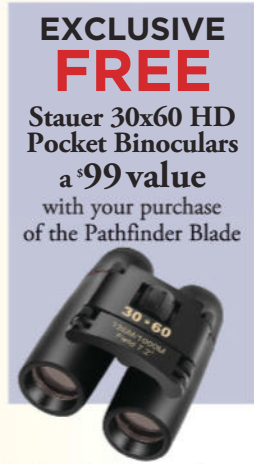
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Readers Speak Out // Continued From Page 9



Bread and Butter for Hunters

So glad to see you did a 7mm-08 test rifle in the Howa 1500 Super Deluxe article in the February issue. Really awesome. It almost made me fall out of my chair. It's usually .308 or 6.5 Creedmoor. So glad you did this. I love the traditional calibers. I love that you have picked this one especially. The older calibers are bread and butter for most of the hunters, I would say. I hope someday the 7mm Rem. Mag. gets to come to light again as well. My dream is the .35 Remington or .35 Whelen comes back in a bolt rifle. Any maker would be awesome, but maybe a Savage 110 Trail Hunter. But the most appropriate would be in a Remington 700 or Model Seven, and it resurrects these great classic calibers. They are deer hunters' delights here in Northern Michigan. Keep all the classic traditional calibers coming. I will put on a pot of coffee and breeze through these articles or take them to the deer blind.

Ray Stomerski
Via email

Proper Way to Deactivate a Type 38 Safety

Joe Starmetal's recent letter published in the "Readers Speak Out" column reminds me that I meant to write about the "proper" way to take the safety off for a Type 38 Arisaka (and a Type 97).

In the August 2025 "The Shootist" column, co-authored by Joseph and William von Benedikt, they write, "To deactivate, push forward and roll the safety counterclockwise." The implication here is that it is just the reverse of activating the safety: "...push your palm firmly forward and clockwise..."

This is not the way to deactivate the safety.

In a few words, what you do is push up on the right side of the "large disk-shaped safety" with the tip of your right thumb, which is presumably on the hand that is wrapped around the stock wrist.

It is very fast.

In *Testing the War Weapons*, Timothy J. Mullin writes on page 215, "I discovered that I could remove the safety on a Type 38 or Type 97 faster than I ever could with a Mauser or even Enfield..."

On that page, he has a much more detailed description of disengaging the safety than what I just wrote. I've done it—it works!

I do hope you'll spread the word on this matter.

Edward Sutorik
Via email

An Excuse for Getting a New Rifle

I now have an excuse for a new rifle thanks to the *Shooting Times* article on the .25 Creedmoor. My .257 Roberts on a custom Mauser action is my

favorite rifle, and it's easy to reload the cartridge. Comparing the ballistics for a Sierra 117-grain GameKing (my favorite load), the .25 Creedmoor's velocity can exceed my "Bob" by more than a bit. Cartridges like this will keep the .257 caliber bullet selection alive. My supply of .257 Roberts brass is running low, so it looks like I need to go shopping.

Dave Lange
Belmont, NC

The Best Decapper/Deprimer

I read with interest the request from William Rogers in the "Ask the Experts" department about a decapper/deprimer. I have gone down the same road, starting 50 years ago. I think I have tried all the major deprimers since, starting with the Lee Loader kit, in which you had a punch and drove the primer out by hitting the punch with a hammer!

At some point I progressed to depriming on my press, but there was so much power in the stroke that it was so easy to bend a pin if it was not in the flash hole or you had a Berdan case.

I had the same luck with individual bench-mounted deprimers—so easy to bend a pin! There was so much force in that lever, you would bend a pin before you knew it. I have many times been put out of reloading for the day because I had no depriming pins left!

One of the two I have used the most is the Frankford Arsenal tool that looks like a caulking gun. It works but tires out my arm. Pins would break when I was using it, and getting replacement pins was hard. I have heard that has changed now.

The deprimer I found best is the Harvey deprimer. It's easy to use, is very compact, and has good ergonomics. I did have the same problem William did because I had a large inventory of World War II .30-06 brass that had some type of sealer around the primer. It was black, and the only deprimer that would remove

the primer and not break the pin was the Harvey.

Another advantage is you can deprime crimped primers with the Harvey. You know when you have one because you have to squeeze harder. This makes it easy to keep these cases separate so you can remove the crimp. No more having to do a visual inspection!

Over the years I have never broken a pin with the Harvey. If I tried to deprime a Berdan, it was too hard to squeeze, and I knew something was wrong.

I did give it a test one time to see how strong it is. I put a dime in it and was able to punch a hole through it! I had to use both hands to do it though. I tried that with the Frankford deprimer, and it was not possible. I could not squeeze it hard enough to punch a hole in the dime. There is not enough leverage with that tool, even when I used both hands.

I think the Harvey tool would solve William's problem with the Korean ammo. I have no affiliation with the Harvey company.

Roger Harvey
Via email

No Issues with Post-1964 Winchester Model 70

I just received my first subscription copy of *Shooting Times* (the Dec. 2025/Jan. 2026 issue). I read with great interest the response of a reader regarding a report by Joseph von Benedikt about a post-1964 Winchester Model 70. Joseph's column was published in the September 2025 issue.

I have owned a .30-06 post-1964 Model 70 since 1969, and I hunted, sometimes successfully, for 40 years with this rifle. I have never understood the negative comments regarding the push-feed action. I have found my rifle to be accurate, and I have never had any issues with feeding or extraction of cartridges.

Jeff Slosser
Lubbock, TX

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SHOOTER'S UPDATE

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THE BENELLI M4 EXT IS THE NEWEST VERSION OF THE FAMOUS GAS-OPERATED 12-GAUGE semiautomatic M4 shotgun, and it features enhancements requested by Benelli customers. Those enhancements include a seven-round magazine capacity, a five-position collapsible stock with integrated pistol grip, and an oversize bolt release. Other features include an 18.5-inch barrel, a ghost-ring rear sight, and a Picatinny rail. It's offered in three finishes: H2O, FDE, and Multicam black.

MSRP: \$2,599

benelliusa.com



SDS Arms Tisas 1911 A1 Stakeout

SDS Arms has announced the return of the Tisas 1911 A1 Stakeout chambered for .45 ACP. Set apart by its traditional GI profile, the 1911 A1 Stakeout features a forged steel frame and slide, a 5.0-inch barrel, Series-70-compatible parts, subtle military-style markings, checkered walnut grips, QPQ Tenifer finish, an extended beavertail grip safety, a rounded hammer, a brass bead front sight, and a seven-round magazine capacity. The company calls it a modern take on a trusted classic.

MSRP: \$565.33

sdsarms.com



EAA Balikli Blue Label Over-Unders

The new Balikli Blue Label over-under shotguns from EAA are chambered for 12, 20, and 28 gauges and .410 Bore. Made in Turkey, these guns feature 28-inch (12 gauge) or 26-inch barrels (20 gauge, 28 gauge, and .410 Bore), and they come with five Mobil choke tubes (Beretta/Benelli pattern) in Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified, Improved Modified, and Full. Nice touches on the Blue Label guns include pheasant motif engraving on the receivers, checkered select Turkish walnut stocks, fiber-optic front sights, vent ribs, rubber recoil pads, and golden triggers.

MSRP: \$479 (12 gauge and 20 gauge), \$499 (28 gauge), and \$519 (.410 Bore)

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Ruger Red Label III

Ruger has brought back its classic over-under shotgun. The new-for-2026 Red Label III is offered in 20 gauge, and it comes with 28-inch or 30-inch barrels; a polished blued receiver; a hand-rubbed, oil-finished walnut pistol-grip buttstock; a checkered walnut forearm; a custom premium case; and five Tru-Choke-style choke tubes in Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified, Improved Modified, and Full. Other features include a single trigger and an automatic tang safety. The gun is built by the craftsmen at Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing Co., and it weighs 6.5 pounds.

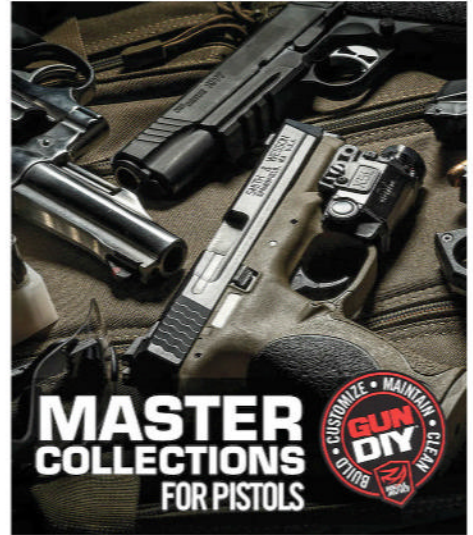
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Kimber 2K11 Comp Series

Kimber has added compensated models to its 9mm optics-ready 2K11 1911 lineup. The new additions are offered in black and stainless finishes with 5.0-inch and 4.25-inch barrels. All models feature an integrated compensator forward of the front sight and Kimber's new carbon-fiber grip module. Select variants are available with a Stan Chen magwell and TAG Precision steel optic adapter plates. The 2K11 Comp models retain the hallmark features of the original 2K11 line, including a tool-less guide rod system, an external extractor, and a crowned and fluted barrel.



MSRP: \$2,345 to \$2,499 depending on configuration
kimberamerica.com



Real Avid Master Pistol Collections

Real Avid has introduced its Master Pistol Collection handgun cleaning kits in two comprehensive packages. One is the Master Pistol Cleaning Collection, and the other is the Master Pistol Maintenance Collection.

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How to Make a Shellholder Thinner?

Q. I REMEMBER READING A LETTER IN ONE OF THE 2025 ISSUES OF *Shooting Times* from a guy who referred to using the thinnest shellholders for resizing his .30-06, .308 Winchester, and .243 Winchester handloads. It was in the context of another reader's letter that referred to fired cases not being resized enough to fit his rifle's chamber. I've had this problem myself but don't have multiple shellholders, so can one of the experts explain how I can make my existing shellholder thinner?

Frank Peabody

Via email

A. That letter was in response to an earlier letter that described a reader's problem of his .300 Savage fired case not being sized enough to fit the chamber of his rifle. The response letter writer's solution was to measure several of the shellholders that he had on hand to find the "thinnest" one. It was a mere 0.002 inch thinner, but it worked for him.

I have experienced this problem several times with various cartridges and rifle chambers, including 6.8 Western, 6mm ARC, .350 Rem. Mag., and others. This problem has nothing to do with the construction of the sizing die or the shellholder. They are no doubt made to SAAMI specs. Most shellholders are about 0.500 inch thick, give or take a couple thousandths. But rifle chambers can vary, and sometimes by a lot. I solve this mismatch by thinning the shellholder.

When the shellholder is made, it is heated red hot and then quenched in oil, which the hot shellholder actually ignites. I have seen this in a die factory, and it's quite spectacular. Shellholders so treated are so hard that it is almost impossible to alter them with tools, without modification. The trick is to "de-temper" it.

Hang the shellholder in question on a suitable piece of wire (good old bailing wire works fine) away from anything flammable. Fire up your propane

torch, heat the shellholder until it's red hot all the way through, and hold it there for a couple minutes. Doing this in a poorly lit area helps you see that the metal is red all the way through. Then turn off the torch and leave the piece for about an hour or so, until it's cool.

A lathe or a milling machine is the most precise way to take a little metal off the surface of the shellholder. But if you don't have one of those machines, C-clamp your best file to your workbench, with the pointed end toward you. (An electric grinder is much too aggressive for this task.)

Hold the shellholder upside down and drag it toward you over the file's teeth. The first few drags will not remove much metal due to remaining surface hardness. Keep at it but rotate the shellholder about one-third of a turn before each successive drag. You want metal to be removed uniformly. The front of the piece has the slot for the cartridge rim, so material is removed from the front a little faster than from the back. Keep checking the thickness (front and back) with your calipers as you go.

The removal of about 0.005 to 0.007 inch is usually enough to allow the fired case to be inserted far enough into the sizing die to allow it to chamber in the rifle. You want the cone-to-head length to be shortened just a little.

It is easy to check your progress by screwing the sizing die down just a tiny bit, then size a case with the altered shellholder, and see if it will chamber. If not, turn the die just a little bit more and re-check. Cone-to-head length can also be checked with the Hornady Lock-N-Load Headspace Comparator. It's a gem of a tool. Keep in mind that you don't want the cone-to-head length of the cases too short, to avoid incipient head separations. A slight "crush fit" is okay.

Mark the thinned shellholder by filing a couple little notches in the back to distinguish it from unaltered shellholders. Keep the altered shellholder in the die box with the dies for that caliber. And make notes in your record book for the rifle that the thinned shellholder is to be used for.

Steve Gash

ST

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SHOOTER'S GALLERY

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Winchester 1894 NRA Centennial Rifle

The author says the vintage Winchester 1894 NRA Centennial Rifle is the single best balanced, nicest configured traditional lever action available for the money. **BY JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT**

ALTHOUGH MUCH-MALIGNED BY WINCHESTER savants and collectors, early Post-'64 lever-action Model 1894 rifles are probably the best value on the lever-gun market. They actually are quite well built, feature good wood-to-metal fit and nice bluing and wood finish, and are devoid of silly tang-mounted or crossbolt safeties. Plus, on the used-gun scene, they cost significantly less than what a new lever action from Marlin or Winchester brings.

The one featured here is a Model 1894 that was commissioned by the NRA in 1971 as a centennial rifle to celebrate the organization's 100th anniversary. It's configured with popular custom-order features often specified when discerning sportsmen of means ordered a special '94 during the heyday of the lever action. These features include a tapered, slender, 24-inch, round barrel; a half-magazine; a pistol grip; and a shotgun-style buttplate. The centennial rifle is also very similar to the popular but uncommon Winchester Model 64.

The '94 NRA centennial rifle is not a rare item; 21,000 were made. However, I will say this: I think it's the single best balanced, nicest configured traditional lever action available for the money. (They usually go for between \$800 and \$1,000 on Gunbroker.) It's not great for use with a scope, as the action predates angle-eject modifications, but it shoulders, points, and handles like a fine shotgun. Wood tends to be good, dense walnut with nice color and is very nicely fitted. Metal polish is crisp-edged and refined, and the bluing is deep and rich.

Perhaps most compelling is the lack of any lawyer-mandated safety blemishing the look and feel of the action. Lines of the stock and forearm are clean-cut and trim.

Provenance

The rifle pictured and tested here has little significant history. It shows no signs of actual use in the field. I found it for sale on Gunbroker. I put in a bid and

Post-'64 special-edition Winchester lever actions like this Model 1894 NRA Centennial rifle are well-made, attractive guns that tend to be a great value.

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won the auction for a surprisingly low price.

No original box or paperwork came with the rifle. Even though it's a so-called "collectible edition" in prime condition, it's not worth much if any more than any other Model 1894 of the same era that's in similar condition.

On the subject of condition, it's worth noting that many—even most—of the special-edition centennial and anniversary rifles found on the market are in great condition, probably because their original owners believed that they were investments and would gain in value. While that hasn't proven to be the case with most of them, that prime condition is a nice side benefit for those of us who purchase these half-century-old rifles.

Rangetime

To test how the NRA 1894 rifle performs, I headed to the range with two of my favorite .30-30 loads. The first, and perhaps the most useful of all modern .30-30 factory ammo, is Hornady's 160-grain LEVERevolution load, which features a boattail FTX bullet with a squishy composite tip. It's undoubtedly the most aerodynamic projectile currently loaded in .30-30 factory ammo. And while that's not saying a lot, if you like to shoot out to 250 yards with your lever action rather than just 150, it does make a difference.

The second type of ammo is a really unique one. It's Barnes Pioneer ammo loaded with 190-grain softnose Original bullets, which is Barnes's line of lead-core, copper-jacketed classic hunting projectiles. This is the heaviest-for-caliber factory-loaded .30-30 projectile I'm aware of. It's great for big black

NRA 1894 CENTENNIAL RIFLE	
MANUFACTURER	Winchester Repeating Arms Co.
TYPE	Lever-action repeater
CALIBER	.30-30 Winchester
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	4 rounds
BARREL	24 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	41.75 in.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	6.56 lbs.
STOCK	Walnut
LENGTH OF PULL	13.5 in.
FINISH	Polished blue
SIGHTS	Adjustable rear, brass bead front
TRIGGER	3.75-lb. pull (as tested)

bears, elk, and moose at close quarters.

Benchresting the NRA 1894 rifle over a sandbag front rest and a leather bunny-ear rear rest, I fired a series of three consecutive three-shot groups for average at 100 yards with the Hornady 160-grain FTX bullets. After allowing the rifle to cool, I repeated the process with the Barnes 190-grain Original bullets. Accuracy was plenty adequate. Hornady's load averaged 2.71 inches at 100 yards, and Barnes's load averaged

1.94 inches. That's easily sub-minute-of-deer out to 200 yards, if your vision is good and you are rifleman enough to hold that accuracy with iron sights.

On that note, I confess that although I once had match-winning eyes and a knack for shooting with iron sights, my middle-age vision certainly doesn't benefit the accuracy results I get when shooting these fine old shootin' irons. No doubt younger eyes would have held tighter groups. Were I to make this NRA 1894 my go-to deer rifle, I would swap out the bead front sight for a crisp post and install a nice peep sight on the receiver. It's factory drilled and tapped for just that.

Reliability, of course, was stellar. After all, it's a Winchester '94. Function was smooth and clean. Point of impact was about four inches left of center, but that's easily fixed by drifting one sight in its dovetail.

With clinical testing completed, I moved off the bench and ran casual drills with the fun, old lever action, shooting offhand and from three-legged African-style shooting sticks. My first impression of the rifle played out in practice. It's extremely lively in the hands, points like a magic wand, and balances beautifully.

There are those who may get their knickers in a twist about using a so-called collectible special-edition rifle for everyday shooting and hunting, but here's the crazy thing: These Model 1894 NRA rifles sold for \$150 in 1971. That's the equivalent of \$1,200 in today's economy. You can often pick up a like-new NRA 1894 rifle for less than \$1,000 on Gunbroker. I figure if a half-century has gone by and the model is actually diminishing in value, it's a perfect candidate to take afield and use and enjoy.

ST

NRA 1894 CENTENNIAL ACCURACY & VELOCITY

AMMUNITION	VEL. (FPS)	E.S. (FPS)	S.D. (FPS)	100-YD. ACC. (IN.)
.30-30 Winchester, 24-in. Barrel				
Hornady LEVERevolution 160-gr. FTX	2465	62	21	2.71
Barnes Pioneer 190-gr. Original	2035	66	20	1.94

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of three, three-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest. Velocity is the average of nine rounds measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Doppler chronograph. Ambient temperature, 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

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Handguns and Accuracy

Accuracy is not the ability to hit the target, but rather the ability of the firearm and ammo to consistently place multiple bullets in roughly the same place. **BY ALLAN JONES**

A good fit between bullet and chamber throat diameter is one key to revolver accuracy.

WHEN IT COMES TO HANDGUN ACCURACY, don't forget statistics, specifically sample size. For accuracy testing, at minimum that's either one seven-shot group or the average of two, five-shot groups to establish some statistical confidence that the sample you fired reasonably represents the accuracy of the larger population.

Always test correctly. At minimum use a rest that does not let the butt of the revolver strike the bench top or any body parts under recoil. Maintain a consistent strong-hand shooting grip by cocking

revolvers with your weak hand. Repositioning your grip between shots will make bigger groups.

Accuracy testing isn't the same as sighting-in. For example, my first .357 Magnum revolver was sighted dead-on at 25 yards with 158-grain .38 Special handloads doing about 900 fps. When I tested the then-new .357 Magnum Super Vel 110-grain JHP, it posted nearly 1,500 fps. And while the 1.2-inch-diameter Super Vel group was lovely, it was 10 inches below point of aim at 25 yards. The Super Vel loads exited the 6.0-inch barrel long before recoil could fully rotate

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“Many people think old handguns are inaccurate. My .44 Special Colt New Service Target from 1936 can do 6.0-inch groups at 100 yards all day,”

the sights. Was that revolver-ammo combination accurate? Heck yes. It was very accurate, but it needed sight adjustment.

I’ve found a significant source of inaccuracy in revolvers lies in that small area where the cylinder and barrel almost touch. Key issues here affecting revolver accuracy are misalignment and chamber throat diameter.

A bent revolver frame moves the barrel from directly in front of a chamber throat. Bent frames are more common than you think. Frames can be straightened, but here I will refer you to a qualified gunsmith for mitigation. The steps are not pretty.

If you can safely recover a fired roundnose bullet undeformed, it can show misalignment. A little is okay and actually within spec. The tolerance of the alignment gauges used at factories is the depth of the rifling. I own revolvers whose recovered bullets show minor misalignment, yet they shoot incredibly well. However, seeing metal shaved off the bullet’s ogive is not good.

Chamber throat diameters for older revolver cartridges are based on old lead bullet designs. Take the .45 Colt. Chamber throat specs for it are 0.4520+0.0075 inch. A diameter of 0.4595 inch is technically “in spec.” Most jacketed .45 Colt bullets are 0.452 inch, as are most barrels in post-World War II .45 Colt revolvers. I have one .45 Colt revolver with 0.458-inch throats. No ammo grouped well until the factory installed a new cylinder with smaller throats. Now it’s awesome.

Quality semiautomatic pistols can be surprisingly accurate. However, most are built to “service tolerances” for maximum reliability under adverse conditions. Three-inch groups at 25 yards are normal. Pistol management on the test range affects accuracy evaluation, and much of this management today is trigger related.

Semiautomatics that can be fired single action are easily tested. Like testing a revolver single action, you don’t have to shift your grip to recoil. Today, the market is dominated by pistols with long trigger pulls, be they double-action-only (DAO) or “trigger-action” (TA). They offer more of a test challenge.

If you are new to DAO and TA pistols, I recommend not trying to do serious accuracy evaluation until you are accustomed to a trigger pull that at first may seem very foreign. A dry-fire training exercise may help.

Tape a cheap “cat laser” to one side of an unloaded pistol’s slide pointing forward. In a safe area, hang up

a target about 20 feet away. Point at the target and dry fire while a helper watches the laser dot “wobble” as you cycle the trigger repeatedly. Heck, if you have no friends, you can video the target with your mobile phone.

The dot moves in little loops as you slowly squeeze the trigger. Practice should make the loops smaller. Subsequent live-fire accuracy testing will then be more representative of what the pistol can do.

If you test with handloads, consider trimming all cases to the same length before assembly. In revolvers using crimped bullets, a uniform crimp is an accuracy plus but requires cases to be the same length. In semi-automatic pistols that headspace on the case mouth, consistent case length means consistent headspace control and better accuracy.

Many people think old handguns are inaccurate. My .44 Special Colt New Service Target from 1936 can do 6.0-inch groups at 100 yards all day, witnessed and reproduced by the late sixgun genius John Taffin. But the noble old Colt is a premier target model in near-new condition. What about “entry-level,” or “abused,” or both?

Long ago I acquired a cheap, entry-level 1955 .38 Special Colt Official Police with a 6.0-inch barrel from a police surplus sale. It was filthy, and the grips were lumber grade. The other revolvers were reblued or “bumper-chromed,” but this one showed original Colt finish under the grime. Like a lost puppy, it needed a forever home. I mucked out years of goop and abuse and sprinkled a bit of love into the lockwork, restoring much of its physical and mechanical goodness. It became Dad’s “house gun” until he entered assisted living.

I packed it to a Shootists Holiday where, once again, John Taffin suggested we “stretch its legs.” I’d brought some Blazer .38 Special 158-grain LRN ammo for the Colt, and the 100-yard target with its 6.0-inch center-hole flapper was waiting to be clanged. The Blazer load was the least expensive .38 Special ammo CCI built, and it was from a lot made soon after I championed a bullet base redesign to reduce barrel leading.

From a two-handed standing position, Mr. Taffin and I each put six bullets on the 6.0-inch flapper a football field away. A tired revolver saved from becoming iron for a manhole cover showed that good breeding and a little love always shine through.

A sad footnote: John Taffin was called to ride the Long Trail on March 10, 2025, leaving a rich legacy of handgun knowledge that is invaluable. Rest in peace, old friend. We’re all better for the knowin’ of you. **ST**



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Reloading the .30-40 Krag—Revisited

The .30-40 Krag (aka U.S. .30 Army) is a viable hunting cartridge, and it's a prime candidate for reloading. **BY LANE PEARCE**

Due to reader interest, Lane revisited reloading the classic .30-40 Krag cartridge, but this time he used a vintage military rifle with a 30-inch barrel.

JUDGING BY THE NUMBER OF LETTERS WE'VE received in response to publishing a fairly recent vintage-gun column on a .30-40 Krag battle rifle (you can read some of them in this issue's "Readers Speak Out" department starting on page 8), readers are especially interested in this not-so-new cartridge. So we figured it was high time to revisit reloading this classic military and sporting round.

Several years ago, I wrote about a then-new Model 1885 Trapper .30-40 Krag single-shot rifle with a 16.5-inch barrel for *Shooting Times*, and, of course, I built some handloads specifically for that rifle. For

this column I used a U.S. military surplus battle rifle with a 30-inch barrel, so in preparing for this installment, I went back through a lot of reading material on handloading the .30-40 Krag. It's a good thing I did that because a few handloads for that stronger single-shot rifle would have been too hot for the vintage military rifle.

Many years prior to all that, I had owned a single-shot Ruger No. 3 chambered for .30-40 Krag. At some point I'd sold or traded it off, but I still had some ammo and brass and a set of reloading dies. Most Krag load data is geared toward 22- to 30-inch-barreled

rifles, so it took me a while to learn that the medium burn rate propellants and 150-grain to 180-grain bullets were more suitable for the Trapper's shorter barrel. Those handloads performed quite well, and I still have that carbine.

In its day, the .30-40 Krag was an effective military cartridge and a popular hunting round. Several hundred thousand Krag rifles were made from the early 1890s through 1905 or so. When the 1903 Springfield replaced it as the U.S. military rifle, thousands of Krags were transferred to the National Guard and/or sold to civilians as inexpensive sporting arms.

The renowned Townsend Whelen touted the .30-40 Krag cartridge topped with a 220-grain JSP bullet as an excellent elk and moose cartridge. Generating 2,000+ fps muzzle velocity, the bullet's exceptional sectional density assured deep penetration for deadly terminal performance. According to Whelen's writings, he carried an 1885 Winchester .30-40 Krag on his second foray into the Canadian wilderness in 1906. He also successfully used a Krag rifle in numerous military shooting competitions.

The Krag military rifles and carbines are not modern, high-pressure-capable firearms. SAAMI maximum average pressure (MAP) is just 40,000 CUP, i.e., slightly greater than the .30-30 Winchester (38,000 CUP) and about 10 percent less than the .303 British (45,000 CUP).

The .30-40 Krag was quite similar to the .303 British round; however, it featured a 0.308-inch-diameter bullet versus the .303 British's 0.311-inch-diameter bullet. I say that because in a pinch, you can reform .303 British brass into .30-40 Krag cases, albeit

they'll be a few thousandths of an inch shorter, but the remaining case neck is still long enough to ensure adequate bullet retention. Be warned: Although the two rounds are almost identical, do not use .303 British load data to charge your .30-40 Krag handloads.

Other than that, everything you need to reload .30-40 Krag is readily available. There's a plethora of .30-caliber bullets, weighing from 100 to 220 grains, including JHP, JSP, FMJ, and various cast configurations. Standard Large Rifle primers are more than adequate, and as the accompanying chart shows, propellants in the medium to slower burn rate deliver excellent ballistic results.

Here's a tip: After fireforming the factory-loaded ammo and handloads assembled in new cases, I adjust the sizer die so only the neck is resized about 0.38 inch before reloading. The Krag round headspaces on its rim; however, I prefer to partially neck-size to assure the fired case shoulder fits the chamber snugly to avoid stretching the case body when the round is fired.

All the test loads listed here except the Berger handload functioned reliably through the surplus military rifle's unique magazine. As I was warned when reading other reviews of what might likely occur, the sharp, pointy Berger bullet snagged the feedramp and jammed the round. There was no need to employ the magazine cutoff feature to singly load each round that I had carefully reworked to meet the Krag's specified cartridge overall length.

The Krag rifle/carbine is still an excellent option for hunting deer, sheep, and even elk and moose at reasonable distances and with precise bullet placement. ST

.30-40 KRAG ACCURACY & VELOCITY

BULLET	POWDER		CASE	PRIMER	COL (IN.)	VEL. (FPS)	E.S. (FPS)	S.D. (FPS)	ENERGY (FT-LBS)	100-YD. ACC. (IN.)
	(TYPE)	(GRS.)								
1898 U.S. Springfield, 30-in. Barrel										
Hornady 178-gr. ELD-X	H380	39.0	Win.	WLR	3.090	2277	52	22	2050	1.31
Sierra 180-gr. Spitzer	H4831SC	46.0	Win.	WLR	3.090	2195	63	24	1926	1.62
Berger 185-gr. VLD Hunting	IMR 4350	45.0	Rem.	WLR	3.090	2378	22	10	2324	1.45
Speer 190-gr. Impact	IMR 4895	39.5	Rem.	WLR	3.090	2372	47	22	2375	1.88
Sierra 220-gr. RN-JSP	Reloder 19	45.0	Win.	WLR	3.090	2135	42	18	2227	1.74
Hornady 180-gr. Sub-X		Factory Load			3.090	2393	52	23	2290	2.24
HSM 180-gr. GameKing		Factory Load			3.090	2117	33	15	1792	1.31
Remington 180-gr. Core-Lokt		Factory Load			3.090	2473	86	33	2445	2.55

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of three, five-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest. Velocity is the average of 10 rounds measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Doppler chronograph placed adjacent to the gun's muzzle.

All load data should be used with caution. Always start with reduced loads first and make sure they are safe in each of your guns before proceeding to the high test loads listed. Since *Shooting Times* has no control over your choice of components, guns, or actual loadings, neither *Shooting Times* nor the various firearms and components manufacturers assumes any responsibility for the use of this data.

A NEW FLAGSHIP

THE NEWLY DEVELOPED TX9 9MM STRIKER-FIRED PISTOLS FROM TAURUS ARE STYLED MUCH LIKE THE TREMENDOUSLY POPULAR TX22 RIMFIRE, AND THEY ARE DESTINED TO BE THE COMPANY'S NEW FLAGSHIP CENTERFIRE PISTOL LINE.

BY JOEL J. HUTCHCROFT

A LOT OF US WHO WORK IN THE FIREARMS industry were pleasantly surprised when the Taurus TX22 rimfire semiautomatic pistol was such a huge hit with consumers. It came out in 2019, it's a fun gun to shoot, and it has its own unique styling. Well, not anymore. Taurus has just unveiled a new line of centerfire pistols that look very much like the TX22. This new family of 9mm striker-fired, polymer-frame pistols is called TX9.

At the time of this writing there are three new TX9 pistols: the full-size TX9F, the compact TX9C, and the subcompact TX9SC. *Shooting Times* received samples of the TX9C and TX9SC for this report. Let's take a good look at these new pistols.

The TX9s Up Close

Except for the barrel lengths and magazine capacities, the two pistols have the same basic features. The TX9SC has a 3.4-inch stainless-steel barrel. The pistol is 6.6 inches in length and 4.9 inches in height. It weighs 21.1 ounces unloaded, with an empty magazine inserted, according to my digital scale. With its longer 4.0-inch barrel, the TX9C is 7.2 inches long and 5.2 inches tall. It weighs 23.5 ounces unloaded.





TX9C



TX9SC

A NEW FLAGSHIP



The new-for-2026 9mm Taurus TX9 pistols (TX9C shown at top) mimic the styling of the hugely popular rimfire TX22 pistol (bottom).

The frames on these pistols are 1.06 inches thick where they meet the slides, and the slides are 1.04 inches thick where they meet the frames. The top sides of the slides are beveled, and the tops of the slides are flat and smooth. As the accompanying photographs show, the tops of the slides are narrower than the bottoms. Measuring outside the lower portion of the grips, which is the thickest part of the pistols, these guns are 1.28 inches thick.

Both TX9 pistols have slim-profile, ambidextrous slide stops and unobtrusive magazine releases positioned in the usual location on the left side of the grips, slightly higher than the gently curved bottom of the trigger guards. Note that the magazine releases can be switched to the other sides. There are no

manual thumb safeties on our sample guns. And I can't emphasize enough just how sleek and slim these pistols are.

Safety features built into the design include the hinged trigger safety levers and internal striker blocks. The TX9s don't have magazine disconnect safeties, so they will fire without a magazine inserted. They have loaded-chamber indicators in the form of view ports on top of the chambers.

The TX9SC comes with two 13-round magazines, whereas the TX9C comes with two 15-round magazines. You also can get them with 10-round magazines if you live where magazine capacity is restricted. The magazine bodies are polished metal finished in a high-gloss black. They have numbered witness holes on the back sides. They are made by Mec-Gar, and that,



The compact TX9C comes with 15-round magazines, whereas the subcompact TX9SC comes with 13-rounders. You also can get 10-round mags in locations where magazine capacity is restricted.

TX9C

MANUFACTURER	Taurus taurususa.com
TYPE	Striker-fired autoloader
CALIBER	9mm Luger
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	15 rounds
BARREL	4.0 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.2 in.
WIDTH	1.28 in.
HEIGHT	5.2 in.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	23.5 oz.
GRIPS	Integral to polymer frame
FINISH	Black slide, black frame
SIGHTS	Black drift-adjustable rear, white-dot front, T.O.R.O. optic-mount system
TRIGGER	5.9-lb. pull (as tested)
SAFETY	Trigger safety lever, internal striker block
MSRP	\$438

The new TX9 pistols are striker-fired, polymer-frame pistols that come with all the most popular features that today's handgunners demand, and their suggested retail price is just \$438. (TX9C is shown here.)



The TX9 pistols feature fully textured grips and interchangeable backstraps. They come with four sizes: extra-small, small, medium, and large. The medium backstrap is installed on the TX9C shown here.

TX9SC

MANUFACTURER	Taurus taurususa.com
TYPE	Striker-fired autoloader
CALIBER	9mm Luger
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	13 rounds
BARREL	3.4 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.6 in.
WIDTH	1.28 in.
HEIGHT	4.9 in.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	21.1 oz.
GRIPS	Integral to polymer frame
FINISH	Black slide, black frame
SIGHTS	Black drift-adjustable rear, white-dot front, T.O.R.O. optic-mount system
TRIGGER	6.25-lb. pull (as tested)
SAFETY	Trigger safety lever, internal striker block
MSRP	\$438

along with "Made in Italy," is stamped on the front sides of the bodies. The caliber is marked on the left sides of the bodies. The followers are bright yellow polymer. The baseplates also are polymer, and they are removable.

The polymer frames have textured indexing pads above the trigger guards on both sides where the trigger fingers are to be placed. Also, the grips have one finger groove on the frontstraps and texturing wrapping around the grips, including the full length of the backstraps. All TX9 pistols have interchangeable backstraps, and each pistol comes with a total of four backstraps. The backstraps are sized extra-small, small, medium, and large.

Switching out the backstraps is easy. Using a 3/32-inch pin punch, push out the backstrap retaining pin from the left side of the grip to the right side. Remove the retaining pin and push the backstrap down. Install the chosen backstrap, being sure that the backstrap pin spring is positioned correctly. Push the retaining pin into the holes in the grip.

A NEW FLAGSHIP



Disassembly is easy and takes just seconds to accomplish. It requires no tools, but the trigger does need to be squeezed during the process.

The polymer frames have built-in accessory rails. The TX9SC's rail has one cross-slot, whereas the TX9C's rail has three.

Disassembling the TX9 pistols for regular care and maintenance requires no tools, and it is a simple procedure. With the pistol unloaded and the magazine removed, rotate the take-down lever located on the left side of the frame down 1/4 turn clockwise. Squeeze the trigger. Then simply remove the slide toward the front. Turn the slide assembly over and remove the recoil spring assembly and then pull the barrel forward and up from the slide.

The steel slides are finished with matte black finishes. And like I said earlier, the slides are contoured, beveled, and styled very much like Taurus's rimfire TX22 pistol. The slides feature wide grasping grooves on the rear and up front.

The serial numbers are stamped on the right sides of the slides under the ejection ports and also on the right sides of the barrels' chambers and on the backs of the internal steel chassis (visible through cutouts in the backs of the polymer frames just above the beavertails).

The sights are composed of fixed front posts with white dots and drift-adjustable, all-black rear sights. The rear sights have



The TX9 rear sights are all black and dovetailed into the slide. These pistols also are set up with the T.O.R.O. optic-mounting system.



The TX9 pistols feature flat triggers with grooved trigger safety levers. The sample TX9C shown here had an average trigger pull of 5 pounds, 14 ounces.

square notches and horizontal striations, and they are dovetailed into the slides. The sight radius of our sample TX9C measures 6.13 inches. The sight radius of our sample TX9SC measures 5.38 inches.

The TX9 pistols' slides are cut for optic mounting, using the T.O.R.O. system. T.O.R.O. stands for Taurus Optic Ready Option. The guns come with cover plates in place, and to use the T.O.R.O. system, simply remove the two cover plate screws, remove the cover plate, choose the appropriate adapter plate and mounting screws (based on your optic's footprint), and install the screws through the optic and adapter plate. Taurus suggests using Loctite 242 on the mounting screws. Oh, and Taurus provides a nice chart showing the correct mounting plates and screw types in the TX9 owner's manual.

We used a Swampfox red-dot optic on the TX9C, and it fit the pistol's slide well, but it did hang over very slightly on each side. We left the TX9SC as is, without an optic.

The TX9 triggers have flat faces, and the trigger safety levers have vertical striations. Our TX9C's trigger pull averaged 5 pounds, 14 ounces over the course of five measurements with my RCBS trigger pull scale. Our TX9SC's trigger pull averaged 6 pounds, 4 ounces over the course of five measurements. Both



The TX9C has a 4.0-inch barrel and is 7.2 inches long. It weighs 23.5 ounces. Note the ambidextrous slide stop.

triggers felt like your typical striker-fired trigger pull, but they were fairly consistent, with no more than 12 ounces of variation over the course of those measurements. I will point out that while the TX9SC's trigger pull was heavier, it was much more consistent, with just 4 ounces of variation.

Range Results

In the hand, the TX9C and TX9SC felt great. They balanced well, pointed easily, and felt like a natural extension of my shooting hand. I could easily get a full grip on the longer grip frame of the TX9C, and I also got all three fingers of my shooting hand on the grip of the subcompact TX9SC without any trouble whatsoever. In fact, I believe I prefer the feel of the TX9SC over the TX9C because it just seemed so compact, but that is a personal choice. Both guns felt quite good.

I fired nine different 9mm Luger factory loads through both TX9 pistols at my personal shooting range. Most loads were for self-defense use, and they included Browning, Federal, Hornady, HSM, SIG SAUER, Speer, and Winchester brands, with bullet weights ranging from 115 grains to 150 grains in BXP, FlexLock, FTX, Gold Dot G2, HST, JHP, V-Crown JHP, and XTP bullet styles. I fired three, five-shot groups with each load for accuracy from a sandbag benchrest at 25 yards. I also fired five rounds of each load for measuring the velocities at a distance of 12 feet from the muzzle with a Competition Electronics ProChrono Digital chronograph. The results are listed in the accompanying chart.

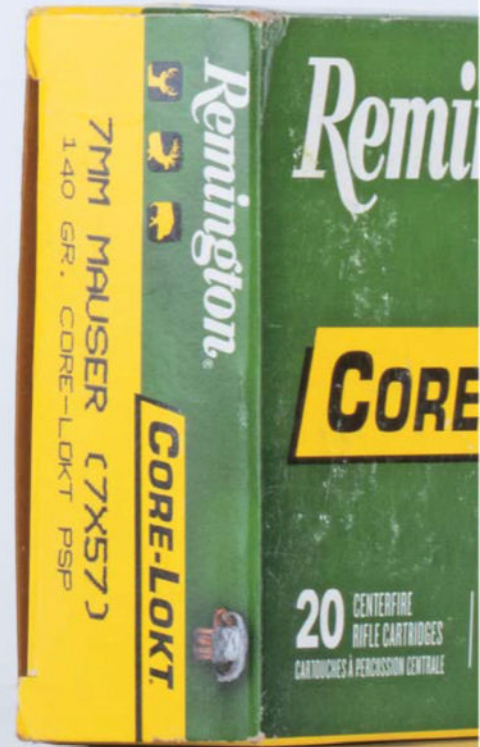
TAURUS TX9 ACCURACY & VELOCITY

AMMUNITION	VEL. (FPS)	E.S. (FPS)	S.D. (FPS)	25-YD. ACC. (IN.)
9mm TX9SC, 3.4-in. Barrel				
Hornady Critical Defense 115-gr. FTX	1056	30	19	3.50
HSM 115-gr. XTP	1129	34	16	3.90
Federal 124-gr. Hydra-Shok	1111	37	19	4.25
SIG SAUER 124-gr. JHP	1122	35	15	3.75
Hornady Critical Duty 135-gr. FlexLock +P	1066	27	13	3.95
Speer CarryGun 135-gr. Gold Dot G2	1039	30	15	4.50
Browning 147-gr. BXP	937	37	16	4.10
Winchester Defender 147-gr. JHP	890	44	21	4.00
Federal Personal Defense Micro 150-gr. HST	830	28	12	4.25
9mm TX9C, 4.0-in. Barrel				
Hornady Critical Defense 115-gr. FTX	1100	30	13	3.25
HSM 115-gr. XTP	1155	32	14	3.50
Federal 124-gr. Hydra-Shok	1129	35	17	3.50
SIG SAUER 124-gr. JHP	1148	39	18	3.75
Hornady Critical Duty 135-gr. FlexLock +P	1119	29	12	3.25
Speer CarryGun 135-gr. Gold Dot G2	1055	36	19	3.80
Browning 147-gr. BXP	965	40	23	3.20
Winchester Defender 147-gr. JHP	920	41	17	3.65
Federal Personal Defense Micro 150-gr. HST	860	22	10	3.25
NOTES: Accuracy is the average of three, five-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest. Velocity is the average of five rounds measured 12 feet from the gun's muzzle.				

As you can see, the TX9s achieved average accuracies ranging between 3.25 and 4.50 inches. Overall average accuracy for the TX9SC was 4.02 inches. Overall average accuracy for the TX9C was 3.46 inches. Again, that's at 25 yards from a sandbag benchrest. The best groups in each gun came with Hornady Critical Defense 115-grain FTX ammo.

The new TX9C and TX9SC pistols from Taurus have stylish contouring, sleek and slim profiles, and minimal snag points. They are comfortable to carry and comfortable to shoot. And they are plenty accurate for their personal-protection purpose. Both guns were 100 percent reliable with a wide variety of 9mm ammunition, and at a suggested retail price of \$438, they are very reasonably priced. Handgunners these days really do have an embarrassment of riches.





FAVORITE BOER CARTRIDGES

THE BOERS HAD TWO FAVORITE CARTRIDGES FOR EVERYTHING FROM CAPE BUFFALOES TO ELEPHANTS. THE 7X57 MAUSER AND THE 9.3X62 ARE STILL MORE THAN CAPABLE FOR JUST ABOUT ANYTHING THAT WALKS THE EARTH.

BY JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT

THE BOERS TAMED MUCH OF AFRICA. THEY WERE farmers and stewards of the land, excellent hunters, and formidable fighters. They were common folk possessed of uncommon tenacity and skill and resourcefulness. They used simple, sturdy, practical firearms. Mauser bolt-action repeating rifles became popular after the turn of the 19th century, but single shots were in widespread use long before that. Martini/Henry types, Farquharsons, and single-shot Mauser Model 1871s were common.

After the Second Boer War (1899–1902), many cartridges and rifles filled the needs of the Boer farmers spreading across Africa, but two cartridges became staples. They were the 7x57 Mauser, popularized during the Boer War in the Mauser Model 1895, and the 9.3x62, designed by German Otto Bock in 1905.

Unlike most of the Mauser-associated cartridges (the 9.3x62 was not technically a Mauser-named cartridge), this capable medium bore was engineered specifically for hunting in Africa. Bock conceived it to be easy to shoot day after day for filling the larder while still potent enough to sort out aggressive Cape buffaloes, rhinos, lions, and even elephants.



The author has two identical Ruger No. 1 single-shot rifles chambered in 7x57 Mauser and 9.3x62. He thinks of them as his “African farmer’s rifles.”

Because I love both the 7x57 and the 9.3x62, and because I’m rather enamored with Ruger’s elegant No. 1 single shot (a Farquharson-esque falling block with Victorian era aesthetics), I obtained a pair of No. 1s chambered for the two rounds. Thanks to the cartridges’ histories and the rifles’ appearances and panache, I began thinking of the pair as my “African farmer’s rifles.”

I also have a lovely old square-bridge Dumoulin Mauser chambered in 9.3x62 (profiled in a *Shooting Times* article back in 2023) and a superb Park West custom SD-76 Alpine in 7x57 Mauser, which I took to Namibia for a memorable safari with my two oldest kids.

The rifle models are conceptually and historically appropriate, but for the sake of this article I’ll focus more on the cartridges. Let’s take a look at Paul Mauser’s legendary 7x57 Mauser and Otto Bock’s excellent 9.3x62.

7x57 Mauser (aka .275 Rigby)

Introduced in 1892 and adopted by militaries and hunters around the world, the legendary 7x57 Mauser may be overshadowed by the .30-06, but no other. Initial loads shot 7mm (0.284-inch diameter) 173-grain roundnose, full metal jacket bullets at a velocity of about 2,300 fps, which generated about 2,000 ft-lbs of kinetic energy. Recoil was soft. Trajectory was flat, compared to the blackpowder cartridges it replaced. Firepower, in five-round Mauser bolt-action rifles, was adequate. Accuracy, for the time, was astonishing.

Other loads would follow, and these days softnose bullets of 140 to 160 grains are most popular. Velocity has increased substantially, but recoil is still mild, firepower is plentiful, and accuracy is more than adequate.

Legendary African hunter W.D.M “Karamojo” (sometimes spelled Karamoja) Bell was to the 7x57 what Jack O’Connor was to the .270 Winchester. Bell was a full-time ivory hunter

and explorer, and he became legendary for taking more than 1,000 elephants. Somewhere between 700 and 800 of those were shot with a 7x57 loaded with original 173-grain roundnose FMJ bullets.

How is this possible? The 7x57 is, after all, a relatively small cartridge in the world of African game. Karamojo Bell was a superlative marksman, having been trained by Scottish gunsmith and long-range British national champion Daniel Fraser (who made at least two of Bell’s rifles). Also, Bell made a practice of dissecting elephant skulls and became a master of elephant anatomy. The long, heavy-for-caliber roundnose FMJ bullets from the 7x57 proved to penetrate straight and deep, and Bell’s method was to brain-shoot elephants.

Perhaps the second most famous of the hunters notable for using the 7x57 was Jim Corbett. He became legendary for his work hunting down man-eating tigers and leopards in India. Corbett was a captain in the British army, and after he successfully hunted one of the most prolific man-eating tigers in India’s history, the government presented him with a Rigby bolt action chambered in 7x57 Mauser.

The rifle became a favorite of Corbett’s, and he used it to sort out a large percentage of the 19 man-eating tigers and 14 man-eating leopards he killed over his career. Those 33 cats, by the way, made more than 1,200 documentable human kills, and the actual number is believed to have been much higher.

Like Karamojo Bell, Corbett’s load of choice was 173-grain roundnose FMJ military ammo. It was reliable and could be counted on to break big bones and penetrate deeply on heavy-bodied tigers. (Corbett was known to switch to a .450-400 Nitro Express double rifle whenever expecting close encounters with tigers.)

Another notable lover of the 7x57 was Jack O’Connor’s wife Eleanor, who put one to use hunting around the globe with

FAVORITE BOER CARTRIDGES



Handloading the 7x57 is easy thanks to plentiful and readily available components. Useful bullet weights range from 139 grains to 175 grains, and medium burn rate powders are the most effective.



The 9.3x62 also is very easy to handload. Components are plentiful, and traditional medium burn rate propellants work perfectly.

Jack. I think it says something that the 7x57 is the cartridge Mr. O'Connor set his bride up with.

As with many other vintage cartridges, modern 7x57 ammo is loaded to quite-mild pressures out of respect to the many vintage rifles (with potentially weak actions) chambered for it. Handloaders crafting ammo for strong modern bolt actions can significantly surpass the performance of 7x57 factory ammo.

Although it's not gas-station-common across America, it is throughout Europe and Africa. There are plenty of great companies making ammo, including Hornady, Federal, Nosler, Remington, Winchester, Norma, Prvi Partizan, HSM, and Sellier & Bellot.

As governed by SAAMI, factory loads in the U.S. are held to 51,000 psi or lower pressure. European loads adhering to their countries' CIP standards are held to 56,565 psi or lower. That's better, but it's still significantly less than the 60,000 to 65,000 psi that most modern cartridges are loaded to.

Since the 7x57 doesn't produce extreme muzzle velocities, it doesn't stress thin-jacketed cup-and-core bullets like modern magnums do. As a result, hunters can expect excellent terminal performance with cost-efficient traditional projectiles. For deer-size game, 140-grainers are ideal. If elk and big black bears are on the menu, or perhaps a spectrum of African plains game, a heavy-for-caliber bullet in the 150- to 175-grain range is best.

If you choose to handload and hunt with premium bullets, there are myriad excellent options. Personal favorites are the Barnes 139-grain LRX; Swift's 150-grain Scirocco II; Nosler's 160-grain AccuBond; and for extreme penetration on moose, bison, or eland, Swift's 175-grain A-Frame.

If you prefer to start with virgin brass, you can buy new, properly headstamped cases from Norma, Nosler, Winchester, and others. Prime with standard Large Rifle primers and charge with medium burn rate propellants. The 7x57 is a very civilized cartridge to handload, and it usually responds with excellent accuracy.

9.3x62 "Mauser"

This fine cartridge was engineered along the lines of Europe's 8mm Mauser and America's .30-06 Springfield but with a bigger bore so as to be useful with heavier, harder-hitting projectiles—crucial when debating rights to your maize patch with an ornery Cape buffalo.

Introduced in 1905, the 9.3x62 predates England's excellent .375 H&H by seven years. Bock's 9.3x62 has a bore diameter of 0.366 inch and pushes 286-grain bullets at about 2,360 fps. Muzzle energy tops 3,500 ft-lbs. That's below the 4,000 ft-lbs threshold touted as sufficient by many of today's dangerous-game specialists, but the 9.3x62 cartridge proved to punch above its weight category.

Although 9.3x62 cartridges were available in a variety of bullet weights, most farmers and hunters tended to prefer the heavy, blunt-nosed 286-grain solids for all-around use. They were big enough in diameter to kill light, thin-skinned game quickly, and being of nonexpanding design, they provided enough penetration to kill Cape buffaloes, rhinos, and elephants with well-placed shots.

The 9.3x62 never had a Karamojo Bell or Jim Corbett to champion it, but there were many fairly notable hunters who favored it. Osa Johnson, wife of photographer and filmmaker Martin Johnson, used one with laudable prowess while protecting her husband. Martin had a penchant for getting close to dangerous game so as to capture really good footage, and many times Osa had to stop determined charges with her 9.3x62 rifle.

Another hunter notable for his use of the 9.3x62 was Harry Flederman. He hunted across Africa for a decade in the 1930s

and '40s and kept meticulous notes and a journal of his exploits with his Oberndorf Mauser sporter. He took an elephant with tusks that weighed 117 and 122 pounds, which to this day ranks as the third largest bull ever shot in Mozambique.

Another noteworthy animal taken with the 9.3x62 was Major Bosman's 56.5-inch-wide Cape buffalo bull, which my favorite source—the *9.3x62 Journal* compiled by Jendrik Van Der Schyff—regards as the standing world record until Jan Joubert shot his 62-inch Cape buffalo cow in the 1950s. Major Bosman was, sadly, later killed by a buffalo.

A more contemporary legendary hunter who uses this cartridge is Phil Shoemaker. Shoemaker is arguably the best-known brown bear guide alive. He once told me, "I liked my .35 Whelen...until I tried a 9.3x62." Apparently, the heavier bullets loaded in the 9.3 are more authoritative on big coastal bears.

I have a great love for the 9.3x62 cartridge personally, which was solidified in 2023 when I took a wonderful Cape buffalo along the Okavango River in Namibia with a single well-placed Barnes 286-grain TSX bullet. Of the three buffaloes I've shot, it died the fastest—and was the only one I killed with a single bullet.

Although clearly capable of taking elephants, rhinos, and Cape buffaloes, the 9.3x62 is probably better suited for hunting



Joseph's daughter Audrey shot this magnificent old free-range kudu bull in Namibia with a Park West rifle chambered in 7x57 Mauser.

FAVORITE BOER CARTRIDGES

lions than the bigger dangerous game species. That said, the cartridge has earned a well-deserved reputation for being one of the best all-purpose rounds in the world, and it's preferred by some experts over the ubiquitous .375 H&H.

Interestingly, World War II nearly killed the 9.3x62 for good. After 1945 German-designed products were not popular, and German ammunition manufacturers were severely curtailed. For nearly 60 years, 9.3x62 ammo was nearly extinct. African hunters created cases out of .30-06 brass, which was undersized at the base but served. They swaged or lathe-turned bullets to 0.366-inch diameter. In 2005 a group of enthusiasts held a 100th birthday celebration event for the 9.3x62 at a shooting range in South Africa. Many notable historic rifles were brought by collectors and displayed; shooting matches were conducted; and in general, the 9.3x62 cartridge was honored.

That event may be regarded as the beginning of the 9.3x62 renaissance. It's come back in a tidal wave of popularity, and today a cult following nurtures the 9.3x62. It's growing more popular by the year. Some of the most coveted modern rifles chambered for it are Ruger's Model 77 Hawkeye African, Ruger's No. 1, and more recently, Ruger's excellent stainless-steel/laminate wood Model 77 Guide Gun. Inexpensive 9.3x62s come in the form of the Sauer 100. Also, Steyr, Mauser, and

Merkel all chamber the cartridge. For a truly spectacular premium rifle, consider a Rigby Highland Stalker.

Ammo, too, is plentiful. Federal, Hornady, Swift, Norma, Buffalo Bore, Nosler, Lapua, Fiocchi, RWS, Sellier & Bellot, and PPU all manufacture 9.3x62. Handloaders have dozens of appropriate projectiles to pick from by several manufacturers and in myriad designs. Personal favorites of mine are Barnes's 250-grain TTSX, which I handload to 2,515 fps out of the 20-inch barrel of my Dumoulin Mauser; Barnes's 286-grain TSX, which I use in Federal's factory ammo; and Swift's 286- and 300-grain A-Frame, which I intend to handload for Cape buffaloes and perhaps lions in the future.

Being a cartridge expected to serve in the torrid heat of tropical climates, and in life-or-death situations, the 9.3x62 was engineered with an effective but reasonable max pressure threshold of 56,565 psi. It's not wise to push that threshold when handloading.

For handloaders, Norma, Lapua, PPU, Nosler, and others offer unprimed new brass. Unlike the 7x57, it's not easy to beat factory ammo ballistics because the 9.3x62 is loaded to proper levels, but you can tune for accuracy and save money.

Field Experience

In 2023 I took my two oldest kids and a pair of rifles to Namibia for a safari. The rifles were chambered in 7x57 and 9.3x62.



Joseph's son William made a perfect 220-yard shot on this gnarly old zebra stallion with a Dumoulin square-bridge Mauser chambered in 9.3x62.

Between the three of us, we shot 11 animals, about half with each cartridge.

Most notably with the 7x57, Audrey shot a beautiful ancient kudu bull with the Park West rifle. Federal's Custom Shop loaded 140-grain TBT bullets at modern pressures that generated 2,900 fps. The load generates 2,625 ft-lbs of muzzle energy. Zeroed at 200 yards, it drops 7 inches at 300 and 20 inches at 400 yards, where it's still packing 2,215 fps and 1,524 ft-lbs of kinetic energy.

Hunting partner Austin Brown managed to fill the action of his pet .280 Ackley with sand one afternoon while stalking a monster impala. Borrowing the Park West 7x57, he dropped the ram with a beautiful shot from several hundred yards.

My son William, although only 13, took a liking to the 100-year-old Dumoulin Mauser in 9.3x62. I handload Barnes 250-grain Tipped Triple-Shock bullets at 2,515 fps, which generates 3,527 ft-lbs of muzzle energy and shoots sub-inch groups in the vintage rifle. When zeroed at 200 yards, it drops 9.6 inches at 300 yards and 27.6 inches at 400 yards, which is the outside edge of our effective range. At that distance it impacts at 1,890 fps, packing 1,970 ft-lbs of energy.

In a nice turn of events, the handloaded 250-grain TTSX was zeroed at 200 yards, and Federal's 286-grain TSX factory ammo impacted dead on at 100 yards. This gave us ideal

options for both plains game and dangerous game without adjusting the scope.

William shot the "Nine-three" well, cleanly taking several plains game animals and culminating in the one he wanted most—a scarred, gnarly old Hartmann's zebra stallion.

At one point I shot through an eight-inch acacia log and killed a marauding bull baboon. The TTSX blew right through the log, penetrating straight through to where I envisioned the baboon's vitals to be, and literally bowled it over, dead.

In a land once called German South-West Africa, we hunted Cape buffaloes. It was November and 104 degrees during midday. The third day I got my chance and threaded the needle straight into the center of a big bull's chest, as he stood staring from 70 yards away. The 9.3x62 barked, the buffalo wheeled, and it was gone in a thunder of hooves and dust. Seconds later his death moan bellowed through the forest. The 286-grain TTSX had taken off the top of his heart, laid open both lungs, and lodged in his rumen.

We weren't feeding the family or weeding marauding buffaloes or elephants out of the family cropland like our ancestral users of the 9.3x62 and 7x57 did, but we ate much of what we shot, and the rest went to the local people. Although more than a century old, both cartridges did what they've always done so well. They were favorites of the Boers for good reason. **ST**



Joseph made a perfect frontal shot from 70 yards with the 9.3x62 Dumoulin rifle to drop this big Cape buffalo.



HOW TO **ACCURACY-TEST** HANDGUNS

HERE'S THE PROFESSIONAL WAY TO ACCURACY-TEST EVERY TYPE OF HANDGUN PRODUCED, FROM A PROFESSIONAL WHO HAS BEEN DOING IT FOR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES.

BY LAYNE SIMPSON

THE IDEAS FOR THE ARTICLES I WRITE FOR *SHOOTING TIMES* are usually mine or the editor's, but this one came from longtime reader Dan O'Brien, who wanted to know how we test the accuracy of handguns. So this article is dedicated to him.

I mostly accuracy-test handguns at two different firing ranges, and each has immovable benchrests made of either concrete or heavy wood. I have owned a Ransom International pistol rest for over 30 years and use it when testing pistols and revolvers with open sights at 50 yards and beyond. Bolts secure the rest to a thick wooden base, which is held firmly to the concrete top of the benchrest by large steel C-clamps. If the handgun wears a scope, the Ransom Rest stays at home and sandbags are used. Through the years I have accumulated several sandbag styles from Brownells. They include bunny ear, rabbit ear, and flat bags, the latter ranging in thickness from one inch to eight inches.

When testing a new handgun for a *Shooting Times* article, the session seldom lasts more than four to five hours. For this reason, my accuracy out to 25 yards or so when shooting a gun over a sandbag rest is as good as when shooting that same gun in the Ransom Rest. I don't often use Chuck Ransom's machine for that because shooting from it is considerably slower than when shooting over sandbags. But since that rest never grows weary, I often use it for longer test sessions. An example that springs to mind was the accuracy testing of 20 different .22 Long Rifle loads in my Clark 1911 match gun with a Marvel Precision Unit 1 conversion installed. With the load or loads it prefers, five bullets consistently land inside an inch at 50 yards. This assumes a sudden breeze does not sneak up on me and blow a bullet astray. The entire test took place over several days.





During the 30-plus years Layne has owned the Ransom Rest shown here C-clamped to the concrete top of a benchrest, he has often used it when accuracy-testing handguns with open sights at 50 yards and beyond.

HOW TO ACCURACY-TEST HANDGUNS

I still enjoy hunting big game and shooting varmints with long-distance handguns, such as my Remington XP-100s, Thompson Center Contenders, Springfield Armory SASS, MOA Maximum, and others, and I use a couple different types of rests when testing a new load for accuracy. If the gun has a post on its forearm for sling-swivel attachment, I attach a Harris folding bipod and support the grip of the gun with a soft, flat sandbag. When I'm preparing to fire a round, the grip of the gun is pressed into the sandbag until the crosshairs of the scope are resting a bit above where I want to place the bullet on the

target. I then begin slowly squeezing the sandbag with my left hand, and just as the crosshairs reach the center of the bullseye, the trigger is squeezed. This is an extremely stable way of testing that type of handgun. Regardless of the type of handgun or rest used, a couple soft, flat sandbags are positioned on the bench top to cushion and support my elbows.

If a long-distance gun does not have a swivel post on its forearm, I turn to the same Sinclair International adjustable front rest I use for accuracy-testing rifles. It's the one I used during my days of benchrest competition with rifles in 6mm PPC and



If a long-range handgun—such as this Nosler Model 48 Independence in 6mm Creedmoor—has a forearm post, attaching a Harris folding bipod and resting the bottom of the pistol's grip on a flat sandbag is an extremely steady combination for testing the accuracy of a new load.



If a long-range handgun, such as this XP-100 in .35 Remington built by the original Remington Custom Shop, is not suitable for bipod attachment, Layne uses the same Sinclair adjustable rest that he uses for testing rifles. Note the bottom of the handgun's grip rests on a flat sandbag.

6mm BR Remington. That rest has a pair of interchangeable sandbag platforms, and one is designed to adjust the distance between the inner surfaces of the bunny ears of its sandbag by squeezing the sides. This assures a snug fit with forearms of various widths. Precise windage and elevation adjustments of the rest are used to bring the crosshairs of the scope on target. The Birchwood Casey targets I use have multiple one-inch aiming squares, and the rest is initially adjusted for shooting the center square first. Then windage and elevation adjustments are quickly made for shooting groups inside the other squares.

I also use the Sinclair rest along with a sandbag beneath the grip when accuracy-testing autoloading pistols, ranging in size from medium to large. Guns recently tested included a double-stack 1911 with a 6.0-inch barrel in 10mm Auto from European American Armory and a Springfield Armory Echelon 4.5 Comp in 9mm Luger. A layer or two of Gorilla Tape on the sandbag of the rest protects it from wear and tear when the dustcover of an autoloader has Picatinny slots.

While in high school, I purchased a small height-adjustable steel shooting rest with a small platform from an unknown maker. During use, the sandbag kept slipping off the platform of the rest, so I used some of my dad's Barge All Purpose Cement to permanently bond it in place. The fact that the rest and its bag have not parted during decades of use is proof of its effectiveness. While writing this, I momentarily paused for a brief web search and was pleased to see that long-ago fix-it is still available from Barge Products. At any rate, that old sandbag is perfect for resting small autoloaders like my wife's SIG SAUER P365, my Springfield Armory Hellcat, and my Ruger LCP when testing new 9mm Luger and .380 ACP factory loads for accuracy. When shooting those guns with their three-finger grips, the bottom of my hand rests firmly on a bunny ear sandbag positioned bottom side up.

That same combination also works nicely when testing small revolvers, such as my 2.25-inch Ruger SP101 in .357 Magnum and my Smith & Wesson Model 442 Centennial Airweight in .38 Special with a 2.0-inch barrel. For larger revolvers like my Ruger Super Redhawk in .44 Magnum and Freedom Arms Model 83 Premier Grade with its interchangeable cylinders in .45 Colt and .454 Casull, I use the same



The Sinclair front rest and a flat sandbag are also used for accuracy-testing large autoloading handguns, such as this EAA double-stack 1911 in 10mm Auto. The Universal Brass Catcher from Brownells eliminates the chore of picking up spent cases after a shooting session.



Layne uses a large sandbag (protected by Gorilla Tape) attached to a rest he purchased when he was in high school along with a bunny ear sandbag positioned bottom side up when testing small autoloading pistols like the SIG SAUER P365. The same combination works equally well for shooting small revolvers.

HOW TO ACCURACY-TEST HANDGUNS

front rest but with the bottom of the grip resting between the ears of a bunny ear bag in its upright position. Gorilla Tape protects the leather sandbag from cylinder flame during firing. And why does that revolver have two cylinders when .45 Colt ammo can be fired in the .454 cylinder? Years ago, I needed a Model 83 in .454 Casull for a combination bear and moose hunt in Alaska, and the only one that could be shipped to me was in .45 Colt, and it had that caliber designation engraved on its barrel. But the good people out in Freedom, Wyoming, managed to fit a .454 Casull cylinder to that revolver and have it to me in time for my hunt. By the way, wearing a Burris 3-12X 32mm handgun scope, that wonderful handgun will consistently keep five Swift 300-grain A-Frame bullets inside 4.0 inches at 200 yards, with the occasional group measuring considerably smaller.

A couple of other accessories have proven to be quite useful through the years. One is a Universal Brass Catcher made by CTK Precision and available from Brownells. When positioned correctly, it eliminates the chore of picking up spent cases after a shooting session, and it works equally well for autoloading pistols and rifles. Extensive load testing of a heavy-recoiling handgun, such as my SSK Industries Contender in .45-70, can eventually become hard on the hand. For many years I relied on PAST padded shooting gloves to eliminate the pain, but once I got into long-distance bicycling on a Cervelo R3, I began to accumulate padded cycling gloves and switched to them when



The same front rest setup combined with an upright bunny ear sandbag is used when testing a load in a large revolver, such as this one in .454 Casull built by Freedom Arms.

shooting hard-kicking handguns. Most bicycle shops will have various styles in several sizes.

Well, there you have the ways I test various types of handguns. Many handgunners spend far less time accuracy-testing over rests, and for them I recommend flat sandbags of several different thicknesses and a bunny ear sandbag, combined with a bit of imagination. For example, the front rest used by a friend consists of a bunny bag glued to a foot-long section of wooden 4x4 from his scrap bin.

ST



Padded cycling gloves found at most bicycle shops, shown here with Layne's SSK Industries custom Contender in .45-70 Government, increase comfort when shooting hard-kicking handguns.



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BODDINGTON ON **BENELLI'S LUPO**

BENELLI'S "WOLF" IS NOW OFFERED IN THE MOST WOLFISH MODERN CHAMBERING, AND CRAIG PUT IT TO THE TEST.

BY CRAIG BODDINGTON

BENELLI'S LUPO IS NOT NEW. INTRODUCED in 2020 to rave reviews, it was Benelli's first and still only bolt-action platform. In Italian, lupo means "wolf." It's a good name for a rifle in my opinion. I've handled Lupos and read about them, but I didn't have an opportunity to spend time with one until recently.

Offered chamberings have grown, currently up to 11, from .223 Remington to .300 Winchester Magnum. In between are some of the most popular and versatile centerfires: .243, .270, and .308 Winchester; 6.5 Creedmoor and 6.5 PRC; 7mm Remington Magnum; and .30-06. In 2025, the 6mm Creedmoor and 7mm PRC were added.



Those two are great additions. With a faster twist and heavier bullets, the 6mm Creedmoor could be the best and most versatile of the 6mms. If I were a long-range competitor, I'd take a hard look. I'm just a poor benighted hunter, so for me, the 6mm Creedmoor won't do anything the old .243 Win. can't do. You could almost say the same thing about the 7mm Rem. Mag. and the 7mm PRC. Between the two, there isn't enough difference in velocity to argue about. With modern, efficient case design, all the PRCs are known for accuracy. However, I've seen so many tack-driving 7mm Rem. Mags. that I can't argue that the 7mm PRC will always be more accurate.

However, in addition to its modern, unbelted case sized for standard-length action efficiency, the 7mm PRC brings different capability. Fans of 7mms will always throw in your face that their darling uses bullets up to 175 grains. That's not quite true.

The original 0.284-inch bore, the 7x57 Mauser, started with a 1:8.66 twist, designed for its initial 173-grain bullet. Later 7mms, especially from American makers, have been variously barreled with 1:9, 1:9.5, even 1:10 twists. In 0.284-inch, a 1:9 or 1:9.5 twist will usually stabilize shorter 175-grain bullets (like semi-Spitzers and roundnoses) but is unlikely to group well with today's longer, super-aerodynamic 175-grain bullets, and it's likely hopeless with today's low-drag 7mm bullets up to 195 grains.

Hornady's 175-grain ELD-X states on the box "twist rate 1:8.5." The 7mm PRC is SAAMI-specified for a 1:8 twist and is able to stabilize not only the longest 175-grain bullets but also longer and heavier bullets up to 195 grains. That's awesome capability, but whether you need it depends on what you want. Heavy bullets must start slower, but across extreme range,

BODDINGTON ON BENELLI'S LUPO

Benelli's Lupo bolt-action rifle uses a chassis receiver mated to a free-floated, cryogenically treated barrel, and its detachable magazine holds four rounds of 7mm PRC ammo.



LUPO

MANUFACTURER	Benelli USA benelliusa.com
TYPE	Bolt-action repeater
CALIBER	7mm PRC
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	4 rounds
BARREL	24 in., 1:8 twist
OVERALL LENGTH	44.125 in.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	7.5 lbs.
STOCK	Composite
LENGTH OF PULL	Adjustable 13.8 to 14.75 in.
FINISH	Matte blued barrel and receiver, Granite Moss stock
SIGHTS	None, Picatinny rail
TRIGGER	Adjustable, 2.56-lb. pull (as tested)
SAFETY	Two position
MSRP	\$1,699

they fly better. So, again, if you're a long-range competitor, or shoot at game at extreme range, you probably want the longest, heaviest low-drag bullets. Understand they kick more. If you hunt deer-size game at moderate distances, you probably don't need the extra-heavy bullets.

Again, I'm not a long-range competitor, I don't shoot game at extreme range, and most of my hunting is for deer-size game. However, I do some elk hunting, and African antelopes vary greatly in size. On larger game, I'm a staunch believer in bullet weight, and like most American riflemen, I always want more accuracy than I really need. I've let a lot of new cartridges pass by with little comment, but I like the 7mm PRC because it tends to shoot well with modern heavy bullets.

The Complete Lupo

The Lupo 7mm PRC is model number 15104, with a 24-inch threaded barrel and a detachable magazine. You can find bolt-action rifles in the same chamberings at about a third of Lupo's suggested MSRP of \$1,699, but Benelli is unquestionably a premium brand, and the Lupo is a premium rifle. After spending some time with it, I'm surprised the MSRP isn't higher. You'll have to look hard to find a more complete production bolt-action rifle.

The Lupo starts with a chassis receiver mated to a free-floated, cryogenically treated barrel. We know this isn't the only way to achieve consistent bedding, but we also know the chassis system works and produces consistent accuracy. You can have a Lupo pretty much any way you want it, provided you want it with a Granite Moss composite stock and matte blue metal. In 7mm PRC, the barrel length is a sensible 24 inches, and it has a threaded muzzle with an oversize and effective muzzle brake, making it suppressor ready with a thread protector supplied. The weight is 7.5 pounds. Not a lightweight, but with the heavier bullets, I don't want a fast 7mm any lighter.

A small feature that I really appreciate is the front and rear sling-swivel studs are integral to the stock. Don't you get tired of sling-swivel studs that start unscrewing and constantly get twisted around? The Lupo's Picatinny rail offers a wide range of mounting options, yet the ejection port is uncluttered and generous enough for easy single-loading. Although old and old-fashioned, I've embraced the simplicity and consistency

of the rail mount, breathing a sigh of relief when a test rifle comes in with a rail.

The action is smooth, and the bolt body is one piece with three-lug lockup. In 7mm PRC, the surprisingly compact detachable polymer magazine holds four cartridges. Part of my old-fashioned preferences, on bolt-actions, I prefer non-detachable internal magazines and floorplates. Nobody cares what I think; detachable magazines are long since “in.” The Lupo magazine works; feeding is flawless; the magazine seats flush; and the forward release is positive. The tang safety at the rear of the receiver has two positions, with the bolt locked when the safety is engaged.

The Adjustable Lupo

Out of the box, the trigger felt good—crisp and clean. I measured it with a Lyman trigger gauge, and it averaged 2 pounds, 9 ounces—one ounce off 2.5 pounds and not worth messing with. But here’s how to adjust it. Remove the bolt, look down through the ejection port toward the rear (maybe use a flashlight). Once you locate the brass-colored screw, it’s easy. With the supplied tool, turn the trigger adjustment clockwise to increase pull weight, counterclockwise to reduce weight.

For a shooter, being left-handed is not an advantage. Being exactly Joe Average in height is. Factory stock dimensions usually fit me to a T. Not everyone is so fortunate. Adjustable stocks are increasingly common, but few stocks are as adjustable as the Lupo’s. Obviously, this borrows from Benelli’s shotgun expertise and technology. Out of the box, the Lupo stock can be adjusted to some 36 different positions.

The buttstock incorporates the patented, internal Progressive Comfort system that soaks up recoil, with supplied inserts to change length of pull. That’s not so unusual, but the Perfect Fit shim kit is. It’s a whole bag full of shims for use between the pistol grip and the receiver, allowing you to customize drop, cast, and trigger reach. For instance, although there’s nothing I can do about the right-hand-only bolt, I could put some left cast (“cast on”) for a perfect fit. The supplied soft comb insert reduces recoil to the face. It isn’t adjustable per se. However, Benelli offers replacement combs, so it can be switched out for shooters whose facial structure or high scope mounts require a higher comb.

Like I said, I’m Joe Average, maybe 5’10” (on a good day or in boots). As factory-configured, the Lupo fits me just fine. I put a Steiner Predator 2-16X 42mm scope on it in medium rings, and the cheekweld was near-perfect. If I were to set the rifle up for left-handed me, or for also left-handed Donna (my wife), I’d add some cast-on. However, my first thought was to set it up for my right-handed son-in-law Brad Jannenga.

First Shots and a Twisted Tale

I received the Lupo in midsummer. Brad had an August 1st tule elk hunt, method of take optional. Although he intended to use his bow, I wanted to make sure I had a good elk rifle on hand, just in case. Since Donna and I are both left-handed, there are not many right-handed rifles around our house. I thought the Lupo in 7mm PRC would be perfect.

California requires unleaded bullets for all hunting. The 7mm PRC is catching on fast, and factory loads are increasing rapidly. Copper-alloy offerings include the Barnes VOR-TX with 160-grain LRX and Hornady Outfitter with 160-grain CX. I couldn’t find either load down the street, but I had dies and an assortment of 7mm bullets. In unleaded, I had Cutting Edge 152-grain Maximus and plain old Barnes 175-grain X-Bullets. I didn’t have enough of either for a five, five-shot group protocol, but I had plenty for an emergency elk rifle.

So far, my experience loading for the 7mm PRC is that Reloder 26 is the ideal propellant, both for accuracy and velocity. That number is getting scarce, and I’m not sure what I’ll use going forward, but I had enough for this exercise. I worked up loads with both bullets.

I love the sleek, modern Cutting Edge Maximus, but in this rifle I got slightly better accuracy with the original Barnes X. I loaded up a box with 65 grains of Reloder 26, and three-shot groups averaged under 1.5 inches. That’s plenty good for elk.

But Brad didn’t need the rifle. On his third day, he arrowed a fine 6x7 bull, and his hunt was over.

Now it was my turn to work with the Lupo. Getting serious with the rifle should have been simple, but it got complex, partly through my stupidity. It’s a twisted tale.

I had on hand enough Hornady Precision Hunter 175-grain ELD-X and Hornady Match 180-grain ELD-Match ammo.

The Lupo’s adjustable stock incorporates the internal Progressive Comfort system with the Perfect Fit shim kit to allow customizing the length of pull, drop, cast, and trigger reach.



BODDINGTON ON BENELLI'S LUPO

Both group well in my 7mm PRC rifle, and I've seen them group well in other 7mm PRC rifles I've tried. However, any factory load is just one assemblage of components. Show me a factory load, regardless of quality and reputation, and there are rifles that won't shoot it well.

This Lupo didn't like either load. With the 175-grain ELD-X factory load, my five, five-shot group average hovered perilously close to a depressing 2.00 inches. The 180-grain ELD-Match was better, at 1.67 inches. Past experience showed both factory loads usually do better.

Obviously, I needed to get to the loading bench. But first I checked on something...and wound up chasing the wrong rabbit down the wrong hole. Never forget that stuff on the internet is generated by prone-to-error humans. At that moment, Benelli's website showed the new 7mm PRC was barreled with a 1:9.5 twist, same as their 7mm Rem. Mag. With the groups I was getting with usually accurate factory loads, I figured it made sense. My stupidity aside, I was curious. If the lighter bullets shot well, I'd have good, fast deer loads that kicked less and would perform at the ranges I usually shoot.

For the record, the Lupo in 7mm PRC has a SAAMI-spec 1:8 twist. Instead of believing what I read—or putting faith in anomalous groups with a couple of loads—I should have immediately measured the twist. Instead, I wasted powder, bullets, and primers trying lighter bullets.

I was at the range, wasting components, when I belatedly confirmed I was shooting a 1:8 twist. Cease and desist, go home, pull the bullets, save the powder. Naturally, neither 140- nor 150-grain bullets were going to group in that barrel. They did

not. In .284, a 1:8 twist should stabilize bullets from about 160 to 200 grains; a 1:9.5 twist should stabilize bullets from about 120 to 160 grains.

There is a gem in there. The crossover in normal bullet weight suitability between 1:8 and 1:9.5 twist is 160 grains. In 7mm PRC, most of us are probably shooting heavy bullets. Better for long range, but more recoil. The lightest factory load I can find in 7mm PRC is Federal's 155-grain Terminal Ascent, which is a long bullet that will stabilize in a 1:8 twist.

Again, it depends on what you're doing, but unless you really need extreme range and love maximum recoil, there isn't much that can't be done with medium-weight 7mm bullets in the 150- to 160-grain range.

Like everybody else, I've been shooting mostly heavy bullets in the 7mm PRC. So far, my pet load in my Flat Creek Precision 7mm PRC is 66.1 grains of Reloder 26 with the 175-grain ELD-X, slightly over-long at 3.347 inches. I tried this load in the Lupo and got a respectable five-shot, five-group average of 1.45 inches. The Lupo has a slender, unfluted barrel. On hot summer days, it heats fast and is challenged by five-shot groups. A sub-1.5 MOA average is getting there. I also tried Berger's 195-grain Elite Hunter under 63.5 grains of Reloder 26 and got similar accuracy, averaging 1.47 for five, five-shot groups.

I would have liked to have tried a modern low-drag bullet weighing in the 160s, maybe a 162-grain Hornady or a 165-grain Sierra, but I didn't have any. What I had were Nosler 160-grain Partitions. Back in the 1970s and '80s, when I was doing much of my hunting with a couple different 7mm Rem. Mag. rifles, that was the bullet I most frequently used. It produced good

Craig worked up handloads for the 7mm PRC Lupo with five different bullets, getting better accuracy with his handloads than with the limited factory ammo he had on hand.





Nosler 160-grain Partitions and Reloder 22 powder produced the best accuracy, but shooting five-shot groups was hampered by hot weather and the rifle's slender barrel. As these four, five-shot groups show, the first three shots were well within one MOA, and two were at or under 1/2 MOA.

accuracy, good velocity, and awesome penetration on game up to elk and larger African antelopes. I had two boxes, but they've been on my bullet shelf for 40 years.

With the lighter bullet, I switched to Reloder 22 and worked up to 63 grains at specified COL of 3.340 inches. At 1.32 inches, my five, five-shot group average wasn't dramatically better. However, I was shooting in August temps well into the 90s. I took lots of time between groups for the barrel to cool, but I lack the patience to let a barrel cool completely between shots.

The Lupo carries a 10-year warranty as well as a one-MOA guarantee. Over five loads, five groups each, thus 25 groups "for score," I never got a single five-shot sub-MOA group. The old 160-grain Partition came closest, with a 1.12-inch group.

However, with a cartridge this fast and a light barrel, that's asking a lot, especially in hot weather. Benelli's specific accuracy guarantee is MOA with three-shot groups. I got lots of those, fourth and fifth shots typically opening the groups. We all know the old Nosler Partition is best known for performance on game, not for the tightest groups. However, within its five, five-shot groups for score, in four of five, the first three shots measured 0.63, 0.57, 0.51, and 0.49. This Lupo has no accuracy issues, and I'm curious to see what it will do with other medium-weight loads with bullets designed for accuracy.

Overall, I'm very impressed by Benelli's Lupo. Sorry it took me five years to make its acquaintance. But, after all, it is a right-handed rifle. **ST**

BENELLI LUPO ACCURACY & VELOCITY

BULLET	POWDER		CASE	PRIMER	COL (IN.)	VEL. (FPS)	S.D (FPS)	ENERGY (FT-LBS)	100-YD. ACC. (IN.)
	(TYPE)	(GRS.)							
7mm PRC, 24-in. Barrel, 1:8 Twist									
Nosler 160-gr. Partition	Reloder 22	63.0	Hornady	CCI 250	3.340	3124	10	3467	1.32
Hornady 175-gr. ELD-X	Reloder 26	66.1	Hornady	Fed. 215	3.347	2819	27	3087	1.45
Berger 195-gr. Elite Hunter	Reloder 26	63.5	Hornady	Fed. 215	3.340	2635	22	3006	1.47
Hornady Match 180-gr. ELD-Match		Factory Load			----	2878	22	3311	1.67
Hornady Precision Hunter 175 ELD-X		Factory Load			----	2917	53	3306	1.94

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups fired from a benchrest. Velocity is the average of 10 rounds measured at the gun's muzzle with a Pro Radar Doppler chronograph.

All load data should be used with caution. Always start with reduced loads and make sure they are safe in each of your guns before proceeding to the test loads listed. Since *Shooting Times* has no control over your choice of components, guns, or actual loadings, neither *Shooting Times* nor the various firearms and components manufacturers assumes any responsibility for the use of this data.



5 STAR SPEEDLOADER

THERE'S A NEW SPEEDLOADER IN TOWN. IT'S A COMPLETELY NEW DESIGN, WITH A PUSHBUTTON POSITIONED ON THE SIDE.

BY BRAD MILLER PHD

A COMMON SPEEDLOADER DESIGN has a twist knob to catch and release the ammo's rim. The classic design, made by HKS, is made of molded plastic with an aluminum knob. It's been around forever. The company I'm highlighting here, 5 Star Firearms, makes that type of speedloader too, but the bodies are machined aluminum.

The new design of speedloader by 5 Star has a side-mounted, spring-loaded pushbutton to release the cartridges. It's called the DC Series. They claim the side button allows for a more natural hand position, making loads faster and more intuitive. These speedloaders are machined from billet aluminum.

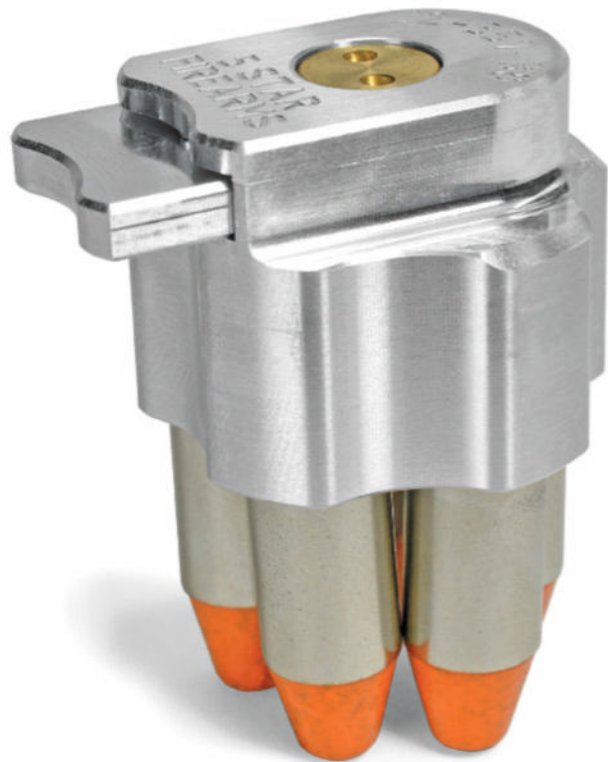
Operation is simple. To load and unload, you press the side button. Only the button is spring-loaded, not the cartridges, so gravity drops the rounds in the chambers.

The pushbutton design is orientation-specific, meaning the button must face away from the gun to be accessible. By contrast, the twist-knob design is orientation-blind; the release knob is on top of the speedloader. Both the side-button loader and the twist-knob loader hold the cases loosely. The rounds wiggle and wobble.

I bought one of the new 5 Star DC speedloaders for an S&W J-Frame five-shot .38/.357 revolver. I carry or use this gun at the range with some frequency, and I have all manner of speedloaders for it. I worked with both speedloader designs to compare ease of use. The pushbutton design requires a little more attention to get the correct orientation than the twist-knob design. But as far as pushing the button or twisting the knob was concerned, there was no obvious preference to me as far as ease of use goes. They're just different. Some folks might have a preference.

The pushbutton design does have an advantage. With a twist-knob speedloader, the cylinder has to be held fixed in place while rotating the knob, or else the cylinder will rotate and the knob won't release the rounds. This problem is averted with the pushbutton speedloader.

The 5 Star DC Series speedloaders are made for common wheelguns. The company offers 10 different models for five-, six-, seven-, and eight-shot revolvers in .38/.357, .44, .45, and .500 calibers, and .410 Bore. They retail for \$44.95. **ST**



The 5 Star DC Series speedloader is a high-quality machined aluminum speedloader. The one shown is for an S&W J-Frame and holds five rounds of .38/.357 ammo. It also works for five-shot Ruger LCR and Charter Arms revolvers.



As this height comparison photo of the new DC Series side-button speedloader (left) and 5 Star's rotating-knob speedloader (right) for the same gun shows, the DC series is about 1/4 inch shorter than the twist-knob type.







THE NEWEST HELLCAT

WITHOUT DOUBT THE SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT MICRO-COMPACT PERSONAL-PROTECTION PISTOL IS EXTREMELY POPULAR. NOW IT'S AVAILABLE CHAMBERED FOR THE MILD-RECOILING YET POTENT .380 ACP.

BY LAYNE SIMPSON

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY INTRODUCED THE striker-fired Hellcat in 9mm Luger in September 2019, and like many of today's pistols, it has a steel chassis nestled in a polymer frame. After receiving one for my 2020 *Shooting Times* report, I immediately attached a Shield RMSc red-dot sight with a 4-MOA dot. I liked the Hellcat so well that I bought it, and it has been my primary carry gun for six years. The Shield sight has not complained a single time during hundreds of rounds fired during practice sessions. I have mostly carried the 9mm Hellcat in a Predator pancake-style leather holster made by Wright Leather Works. On those occasions when even deeper concealment is desired, the gun rides in a CrossBreed Mini Tuck IWB holster.

The original Hellcat was black in color, but a few months after its introduction, Dark Earth became an option. In 2021 the 3.0-inch barrel was extended to 3.8 inches to make room for a compensator, and so the Rapid Defense Package version was born. Unlike the standard model, it has an ambidextrous thumb safety. Also during 2021, a 15-round magazine joined the 11-round and 13-round magazines originally introduced with the Hellcat. I have all three, and while they work perfectly, a magazine loader available from Springfield Armory and other sources is highly recommended.

THE NEWEST HELLCAT

With the exception of a few details like a narrower slide, smaller ejection port, and a bit less weight, the .380 ACP Hellcat is the same as the 9mm Hellcat. Note the textured touch points just forward of the takedown lever.



HELLCAT COMPARISON

	.380 ACP	9mm Luger
BARREL LENGTH	3.0 in.	3.0 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.0 in.	6.0 in.
OVERALL HEIGHT	4.0 in.	4.0 in.
GRIP WIDTH	1 in.	1 in.
SLIDE WIDTH	0.860 in.	0.880 in.
MAGAZINE DEPTH	1.080 in.	1.255 in.
MAGAZINE WIDTH	0.800 in.	0.800 in.
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	11 & 13 rds.	11 & 13 rds.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	16.1 oz.	17.9 oz.
WEIGHT WITH 12 ROUNDS	20.6 oz.	22.8 oz.
MSRP	\$653	\$653

HELLCAT MICRO-COMPACT OSP

MANUFACTURER	Springfield Armory springfield-armory.com
TYPE	Striker-fired autoloader
CALIBER	.380 ACP
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	11 and 13 rounds
BARREL	3.0 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.0 in.
WIDTH	1.0 in.
HEIGHT	4.0 in. (with flush-fitting mag)
WEIGHT, EMPTY	16.1 oz. (with flush-fitting mag)
GRIPS	Integral to polymer frame
FINISH	Black
SIGHTS	White-outline U-notch rear, yellow tritium/luminescent front, slide cut for optic
TRIGGER	6.5-lb. pull (as tested)
SAFETY	Trigger lever, internal striker block
MSRP	\$653



The windage-adjustable rear sight has a 0.145-inch-wide and 0.130-inch-deep U-shaped notch bordered by a white semicircle. Note the slide is cut for mounting a red-dot optic.



The front sight has a 0.155-inch-wide blade with a tritium dot. In combination with the U-shaped rear sight, Layne considers this among the very best setups for quick and accurate shot placement under all conditions and at typical self-defense distances.

Features of the New .380 Hellcat

While writing about the 9mm Hellcat six years ago, I asked when it would become available in .380 ACP. The answer to my question has finally arrived, and like the 9mm version, the .380 Hellcat comes with steel sights dovetailed to its slide. The windage-adjustable rear sight has a 0.145-inch-wide and 0.130-inch-deep U-shaped notch that's bordered by a white semicircle. Up front, a 0.155-inch-wide blade with a tritium dot catches the eye just as fast. I really like that combination and consider it among the very best for quick and accurate shot placement under all conditions and at typical self-defense distances. The sight radius is 5.75 inches.

The top of the slide is machined for owner-installation of the Shield RMSc and JPoint red-dot sights. Weights with a CR-2032 battery installed are 0.5 ounce for the former and 0.4 ounce for the latter, which is about the same as the weight of the metal milled from the slide of the gun for their installation. I have used both sights on various rifles and handguns for close to a decade and find them to be of excellent quality and indestructible thus far. Installing either optic on the Hellcat takes less than a minute. After making sure the gun is unloaded, remove the filler plate from the slide and use the wrench and two screws included with the sight to secure it in place. I tried the .380 Hellcat with and without a Shield sight, and either way it was dead on the money at 25 yards with a variety of ammo loaded with bullets ranging in weight from 60 to 102 grains.

The Hellcat slide is machined from Type 4140 carbon steel barstock, and it has a durable black Melonite finish. During the firing cycle, a sturdy, spring-loaded extractor attached to the side of the slide pulls a spent case from the chamber, and as the head of the case impacts a fixed ejector blade in the frame, it exits through a roomy port in the slide. Due to the shorter



The Hellcat features a trigger safety lever. Our review sample's trigger pull averaged 6.5 pounds.

length of the .380 ACP case, the ejection port is shorter than the port in the 9mm slide. Forward-slanted grasping grooves at front and rear make the slide easy for strong hands to retract. Those with less strength should take note of the fact that an optical sight serves as a handy handle, making slide retraction quicker and much easier. A peek through a topside port in the slide reveals the presence or absence of a cartridge in the chamber. The slide locks back on an empty magazine.

The 3.0-inch barrel is hammer-forged of Type 4150 carbon steel, and it has a 1:10 rifling twist. My Lyman 2.0 Wireless Bore Camera revealed relatively smooth lands and grooves, with only minor tool marks. Like the slide, the barrel has a black Melonite finish. Barrel-to-slide locking and unlocking during firing takes place as the underlug of the barrel cams against the angled surface of the locking block in the frame. A nicely polished surface on the extended feedramp of the barrel ensures reliable feeding of ammunition loaded with bullets having a variety of nose profiles. A round in the chamber is fully supported back to the front of its extraction groove.

The Hellcat has its share of safety features, and one is the familiar bladed finger lever of the trigger assembly. The trigger will not move unless the blade is depressed. In addition, a disconnecter prevents firing until both the slide and the barrel are completely locked into battery. Should the pistol be accidentally dropped, striker travel remains blocked. The trigger has to be squeezed to its release point before the striker can move. Trigger travel is 0.360 inch, and my Lyman digital gauge indicated the average pull weight was 6.5 pounds.

Twin recoil springs are held captive on a full-length steel guide rod. And how often does that assembly have to be replaced? During factory testing of the 9mm Hellcat, recoil spring service life exceeded 10,000 rounds. Not many Hellcat owners will exceed that, but for those who do so, online searching will turn up new spring assemblies from several sources. Before leaving the subject of round count I will add that during durability testing of several Hellcats, each was still going strong after digesting 40,000 rounds.

The grip has Springfield Armory's excellent Adaptive Texture surface treatment. That along with a couple shallow finger grooves in the front of the grip and a high-sweep beavertail at the rear work together to make the Hellcat maintain a solid weld with the hand for accurate, rapid-fire shooting. Shallow touch patches with the same surface texture on both sides of the frame are positioned perfectly for placement of the thumb of the support hand when maintaining a high-grip, thumb-forward hold on the gun. Wet or dry, the Adaptive Texture works,



The .380 Hellcat's grip is totally wrapped with Springfield Armory's excellent Adaptive Texture surface treatment.



The new .380 Hellcat comes with an 11-round magazine and a 13-round magazine. They feature stainless-steel bodies and removable baseplates.

THE NEWEST HELLCAT

and it will not snag on clothing during a draw from the deepest concealment. Muzzle rise of the Hellcat during firing is minimal. My trusty Pact Timer tells me I can get off snake-eye double-taps out to 10 yards as quickly and as accurately with the Hellcat in .380 and 9mm wearing a red-dot sight as with my heavier 9mm Glock G17 with open sights. In addition to being within easy reach of the thumb, the Hellcat slide latch is recessed in the frame enough to prevent unintentional engagement. Located just behind the trigger, the magazine release can be reversed for a left-handed shooter, although it is a job best handled by a good gunsmith.

The .380 Hellcat comes with a pair of stainless-steel magazines of double-stack, center-feed design with capacities of 11 and 13 rounds. Regardless of which of the two magazines is installed, the grip of the Hellcat has room for two and a half of my fingers or three of my wife's fingers. Light beveling of the magazine well opening and the tapered shape of the magazine make for smooth reloads in darkness and under pressure. The Hellcat will fire a cartridge in the chamber with the magazine removed.

Field-stripping the Hellcat is quick, and the first step is making sure its chamber and magazine are empty. With the slide locked back and the magazine removed, rotate the forward end of the takedown lever on the left side of the frame to its 12 o'clock position. While maintaining a firm grip on the slide, allow it to move forward until it stops and then squeeze the trigger. The slide is now free to be removed from the frame. Lift out the recoil spring assembly and the barrel. Begin reassembly by placing the barrel and recoil spring assembly back into the slide. Then align the rear of the slide with the rails in the frame, fully retract the slide, and latch it in that position. Rotate the takedown lever to its horizontal position, and the gun is back in service. When removing the .380 Hellcat from its padded case, I assumed it was dimensionally the same as my 9mm Hellcat. For the most part it is, but I discovered its slide is narrower when it fit loosely in my holster.

The .380 Hellcat at the Range

While I find my 9mm Hellcat to be quite comfortable to shoot, the difference in recoil between it and the new .380 version is



Takedown is easy. After making certain no round is in the chamber and the empty magazine is removed, lock back the slide and push the takedown lever on the side of the frame until it is pointing upward. With a firm hold on the slide, allow it to move forward, and when it comes to a stop, squeeze the trigger. The slide then can be removed from the frame, and the barrel and recoil spring assembly can then be removed from the slide.



substantial, and I am not alone with that opinion. While at the gun club, I invited another member who is an experienced handgun shooter to participate in a comparison of the two Hellcats. The magazine of the .380 Hellcat was charged with 10 rounds of ammo loaded with a 90-grain bullet. The magazine of the 9mm Hellcat was loaded with 124-grain ammo. The firing was offhand at seven-yard targets. My test subject described the difference in recoil of the two guns as “a lot.” Upon arriving back home I calculated the recoil energy dished out by the two Hellcats, and it was 3.77 ft-lbs for the .380 and 8.78 ft-lbs for the 9mm.

When shooting the Hellcat for accuracy over a sandbag rest, I fired nine different .380 ACP factory loads. Bullet nose shapes varied considerably, yet the little pistol gobbled up each and every one without a single complaint. Bullet weights ranged from the all-copper 60-grain HoneyBadger of Black Hills ammo to the 102-grain brass jacketed hollowpoint of Remington Ultimate Defense. Accuracy for three, five-shot groups with each load at 25 yards ranged from 3.18 inches for Lehigh Defense ammo to 4.71 inches for Federal HST ammunition, so the little gun was more than accurate enough with all test loads for the distances at which most deadly confrontations occur. Overall average for the nine loads was 3.92 inches. Each time I squeezed the trigger of the new Hellcat, I was reminded of the low level of recoil of the .380 ACP, even in a pocket-size autoloader.

BT

Layne found the new .380 ACP Hellcat to be accurate enough for self-defense. The pistol averaged 3.91 inches for five-shot groups at 25 yards with nine different factory loads. Plus the pistol produced significantly less recoil than the 9mm Hellcat.

SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT ACCURACY & VELOCITY

AMMUNITION	COL (IN.)	VEL. (FPS)	ENERGY (FT-LBS)	25-YD. ACC. (IN.)
.380 ACP, 3.0-in. Barrel				
Black Hills 60-gr. HoneyBadger	0.970	1136	172	3.25
Lehigh Defense 68-gr. Xtreme Defense	0.960	1122	190	3.18
SIG SAUER 90-gr. JHP	0.950	882	155	3.97
Speer 90-gr. Gold Dot HP	0.940	976	190	4.08
Underwood 90-gr. Xtreme Penetrator	0.960	1083	234	3.71
Wilson Combat 90-gr. XTPHP	0.975	930	173	3.70
Federal 95-gr. HST HP	0.940	1010	215	4.71
Black Hills 100-gr. FMJ	0.975	842	156	3.57
Remington Ultimate Defense 102-gr. BJHP	0.945	832	157	4.04

NOTES: Accuracy is the average of three, five-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest. Velocity is the average of 15 rounds measured by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Doppler chronograph.

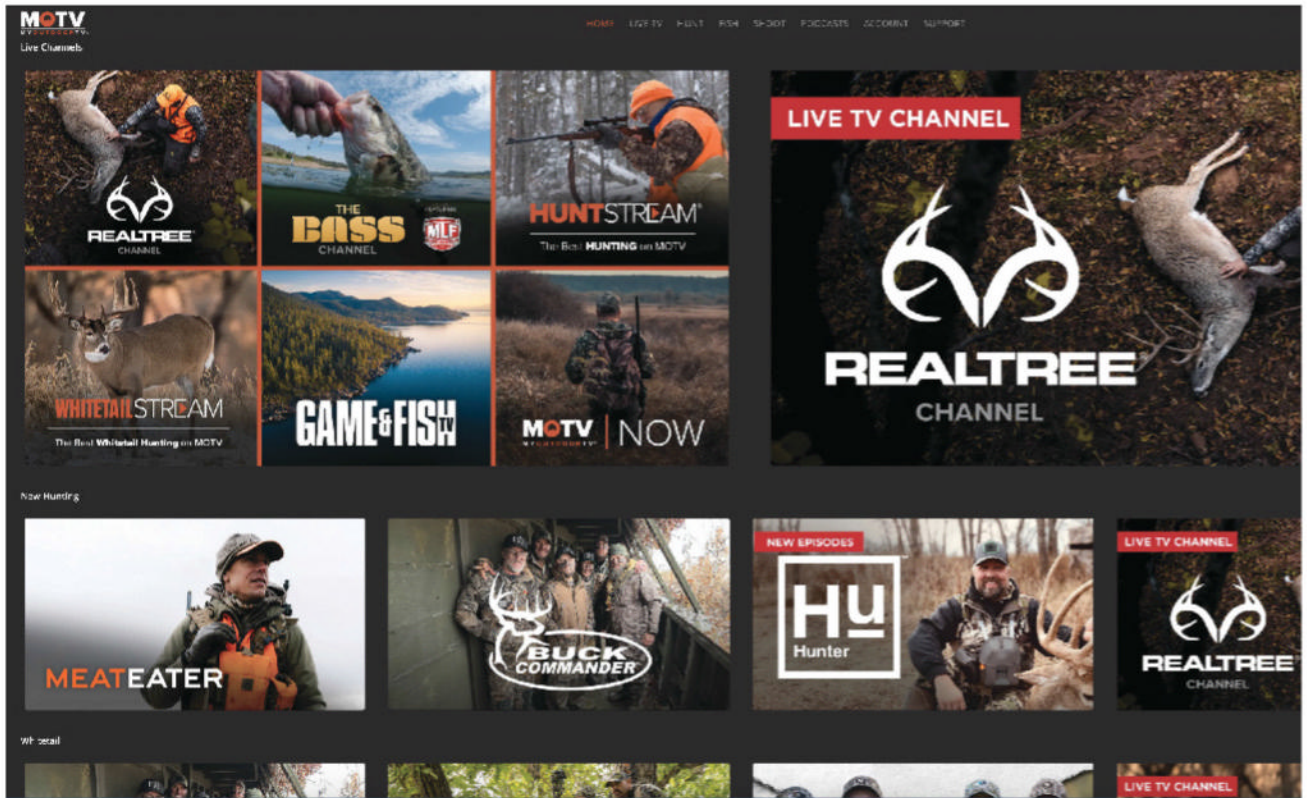


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A Pæan to the Ballard

The renowned single-shot Ballard had but a moment, but it was the moment of a shooting star. **BY TERRY WIELAND**

THE WORD “LEGENDARY” GETS TOSSED AROUND a lot these days, usually in the wrong direction. So does “iconic.” Norman Schwarzkopf was undoubtedly a fine general, but legendary? Hardly. And is Taylor Swift iconic? Really?

This is no less true in the world of firearms than anywhere else, but in the interests of saving space I won't burden you with misplaced examples. One rifle richly deserving of both adjectives, however, is the Ballard single shot. Renowned for its accuracy, admired for its workmanship, and a totally aesthetic masterpiece to boot, the Ballard had but a moment—but it was the moment of a shooting star.

The Ballard was in production less than a quarter-century, and for the first 10 years it was all over the place, made under this name or that, until it landed in the lap of John Mahlon Marlin and provided the foundation for the company Marlin was to become.

The Ballards produced by Marlin between 1875 and 1890 are the jewels. Earlier models were largely transitional. By the time Marlin began production, the design was finalized, and it arrived in time to make its indelible

mark in the world of American *Schützen* competition.

At that time, John Marlin was in the early stages of his own career, producing a variety of early revolvers. Commissioned by owners of the Ballard patent to produce the rifles, he set up a factory in North Haven, Connecticut. Details of production numbers, serial numbers, and specific models from the early period are hazy, to put it mildly, although historians have been trying to sort them out for the better part of a century.

Leaving all that aside, let's look at the rifle itself.

The action can best be described as a falling block, although it actually rocks back and down. It is unique in that the block consists of two halves, and the entire workings of the lock are sandwiched inside. The halves are fastened together with screws. The frame is long, with the rear part forming the grip. The whole is operated by an underlever, usually with a four-finger loop. This is the classic form of the factory Ballard.

It's fair to say the Ballard achieved its most recognizable form late in life, when Marlin introduced its “Union Hill” Models 8, 9, and 10 in the late 1880s. These followed the form described above, with

For 145 years, Ballard has been a byword for accuracy, and this Union Hill No. 8 chambered in .32-20 is a good example of its beauty.

half-octagon barrels and double-set triggers, and were chambered for the two cartridges that were arguably the most famous of the *Schützen* era: the .32-40 and the .38-55. Although later claimed by Winchester, these cartridges were actually Marlin-Ballard developments.

Although most famous as a target rifle, the Ballard was also made in configurations for hunting, including large buffalo cartridges for the Great Plains, and after Stevens introduced the .22 Long Rifle, for that cartridge as well. The Ballard was not noted for strength, but it was certainly versatile and adaptable.

The rifle shown here is a No. 8, and it is atypical in that it's chambered for the .32-20 but with a bore that is 0.308 instead of 0.314. With blackpowder and cast bullets, this arrangement was preferred for short-range target shooting.

Until he began working with Stevens, and ultimately helped produce the excellent No. 44½ action, barrelmaker Harry M. Pope preferred the Ballard to all others on which to build his superb offhand rifles. Writer Lucian Cary helped make both Pope and his Ballards famous in the pages of *True* magazine, where Cary wrote about firearms for more than a decade.

Probably Pope's most noted single rifle was made for benchrest shooting. It was a Pope barrel on a Ballard action, with a muzzle/breech loading arrangement and a bore of .33 caliber rather than .32.

In 1901 C.W. Rowland of Boulder, Colorado, used it to shoot the most famous benchrest group in history—10 shots, 200 yards, 0.721 inch. It was a record that stood for three-quarters of a century, only being broken, according to most reports, in 1978.

Marlin discontinued the Ballard around 1890 in order to concentrate on production of Marlin's own lever actions, which were far bigger sellers. In the years that followed, Ballard rifles and actions were sought after for custom rifles, with many being rebarreled.

In the 1990s, amid the flurry of reintroductions that included the Parker and A.H. Fox shotguns, a group of single-shot enthusiasts attempted to resurrect the Ballard, but it did not last. In the intervening century, the falling block had been perfected and was available in the strong, versatile, and less expensive Ruger No. 1.

Still, there exists a coterie of diehard Ballard lovers. Why? Because it is legendary, and it is iconic. Genuinely so. ST



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challenger who could beat Frank at aerial targets. Annie beat him by one with a score of 25. Frank apparently missed his last target. He later claimed to have been taken with her from the moment he saw her, but he managed to recover quickly enough to give her free tickets to his shows, and he soon began to court her. They eventually married, but just as with the cloudy birthdate and conflicting dates for when the two met, their actual wedding date has been disputed.

Around 1884, Annie became Frank's shooting partner in his act when his former partner (John Graham) became ill. They toured and eventually joined the Sells Brothers Circus, and then from 1885 until 1901 they were a fixture with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Over time, Annie became the star attraction, and Frank became her manager, handling financial matters, writing articles and press releases about her shooting feats, and taking care of anything else that needed to be handled. Some of his jobs included throwing glass balls into the

air for Annie to shoot and holding a cigarette or a cigar while Annie shot the ashes off. Famously, during one European performance, after witnessing the cigarette trick shot, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany asked to have Annie shoot a cigarette while he held it. She did the feat, and history was made. Later, Frank worked as a representative for Union Metallic Cartridge Co. and as a salesman for Remington Arms Co.

After Annie retired from exhibition shooting (1913), she and Frank lived in Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio. Annie passed away on November 3, 1926, and historians believe Frank stopped eating, which led to his malnutrition and eventual death from starvation 18 days later. If you go by his 1847 baptized date, Frank Butler was 79 years old when he passed away.

Frank might not have been the most famous marksman in history, but he was most certainly the mentor and the manager of the most famous female marksman of all time. ST

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Marksman, Mentor & Manager

Frank Butler may be best known as Annie Oakley's husband and manager, but he was an accomplished exhibition shooter in his own right. **BY JOEL J. HUTCHCROFT**

EVERYBODY BUT EVERYBODY OF A CERTAIN AGE who has been interested in guns and shooting since they were young knows of Annie Oakley. She is one of the most well-known shooting stars of all time. Of course, she had unique skills, which are chiefly responsible for her great fame, but she also had a devoted manager who just happened to be her husband. His name was Frank Butler, and prior to taking on managing Annie's career, he was an exhibition shooter himself. In fact, he met Annie for the first time in a shooting competition.

We don't know for certain when Francis E. "Frank" Butler was born (some sources say February 25, 1852, others say 1850, and some say he was baptized on January 30, 1847), but we do know he was born in Ireland and moved with his family to the United States sometime around 1860. He worked a number of jobs, including as a glassblower, cleaning out stables, and managing an on-stage dog show, before

developing a shooting act. Once he had established himself as a sharpshooter, he toured with various variety shows. He married Henrietta Saunders in about 1870, and they divorced a few years later.

Frank's variety-show shooting act included one-handed shots with rifles, shooting between the legs with the rifle reversed, bending backward and shooting, shooting various objects held by his partner, doing a double William Tell type of shot with him and his partner both shooting apples placed on their heads, and shooting glass balls thrown in the air. Often, he would issue a challenge to anyone in the audience to try and beat his score.

And that's how Frank met Annie Oakley. It was in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1875 (or maybe 1881, accounts vary) during a Thanksgiving Day turkey shoot. Annie was a petite 15-year-old girl; Frank claimed to be 25. As the story goes, a local hotel owner arranged for a purse of \$100 to any

Before becoming Annie Oakley's husband and manager, Frank Butler was a successful and popular shooting showman himself.



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