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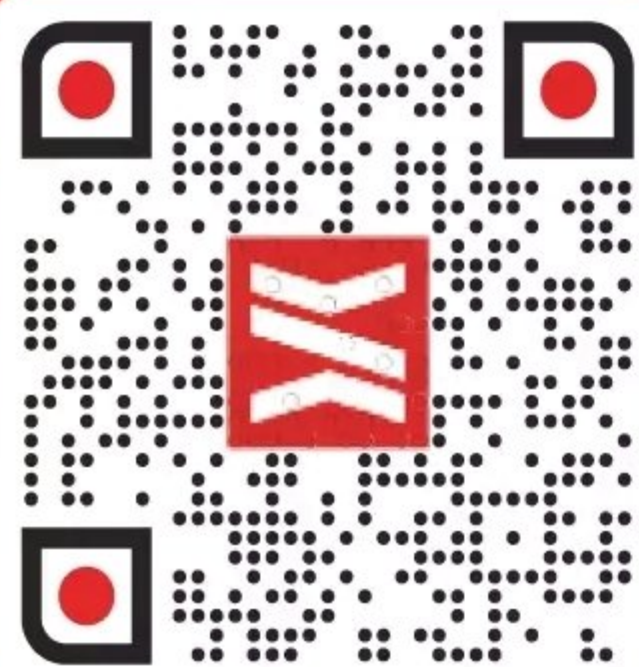
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BIG GAME RIFLE ROUNDUP 2024

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HORIZONFIREARMS



Wood Is Good

I am very encouraged and excited to read in the July/August "Commence Fire" commentary that you plan to offer more coverage of traditional wood guns. I look forward to the article in the next issue on the Sako 90 Hunter, as well as future articles on CZ and Montana Rifles. If you really want to get into the wood-stock rifles, may I suggest you feature the Ruger model No.1 RSI International and/or the Ruger M77 II International. They both have full-length Mannlicher-style fore-ends that, in my humble opinion, only add to their exceptional beauty. Thanks again for keeping us older hunters in mind. We don't have much use for "black guns."

Dick Parker, North Carolina

Thank you, Mr. Carl A. DiMatteo ("Commence Fire," July/August). My guess is that you speak on behalf of the silent majority.

Ron A. Cohen, Illinois

Thanks to all who have written in about stock preferences. Our feature on the Sako 90 Hunter begins on page 42, and while it's good looking, we do need to point that unbeknownst to us Sako sent a pre-production version of the rifle—one not being imported here. The model that will be available to Americans has black metal and a threaded muzzle. Sorry for any confusion.—Scott

Sweet Savages

I enjoyed the article "One Speedy Savage." The 99 Savage design had features before its time, and the .250-3000 was and still is a great cartridge. My first deer rifle was a 99 chambered for .300 Savage. I now have two 99s in .250. One is a 99A made with a 1:10 twist, which enables use of bullets heavier than 100 grains compared to the original 1:14 twist used in earlier .250 guns.

There is a minor error in the description. Early models did have a visible/tactile cocking indicator atop the bolt, but the cocking indicator was changed to one mounted in the top receiver tang behind the bolt opening in 1909—as described in David Royal's *A Collector's Guide to the Savage 99 Rifle*. The design change also included radiusing the rectangular back of the bolt, which reduces the risk of stress cracking at the matching back corners of the receiver so an older bolt cannot fit into a newer receiver.

James Beasom

Could've Been Cooler

I was somewhat disappointed in S&W's 1854 (July/August). The company whose Volcanic created the look that became the 1860 Henry and the 1873 Winchester chose to make another Marlin clone. I would much rather see something like the Volcanic-Winchester with updated internals, if needed. The removable mag tube might be a good idea. We'll see.

Robert Hovell



More Stock Matters

Just read the article on the new Browning X-Bolt 2 (July/August). While I did see some improvements on the action, I can't help but wonder why they only offer it in that terrible-looking stock. Why not offer it in a plain Jane sporter stock or, better yet, an honest-to-goodness walnut stock? Come on Browning, get back to some basics.

Dave Eanneta, New York



Limited Edition M1A

Springfield Armory is commemorating 50 years of Geneseo, Illinois, production of its M1A with a limited edition. Only 1,974 will be produced, and they'll come inside a hand-built display crate and include extras like a certificate of authenticity, canvas sling, technical manual and more. The stock is hand-selected walnut and features an inletted 50th anniversary medallion, and the rifle has a custom-engraved 1 of 1,974 operating rod. Suggested retail is \$2,499. If you want one, better act fast.

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L.-r.: 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag., .350 Legend

Current Cartridge Trends

HOW DID YOUR
FAVORITE ROUND
FARE IN THIS
YEAR'S BIG GAME
RIFLE ROUNDUP?

by J. Scott Rupp

We've been publishing our annual roundup of big game rifles for 15 years now, with Brad Fitzpatrick ably doing the heavy lifting once again. Rifle trends have come and gone, and come 'round again, but with cartridges it's been more of a sea change. Yes,

blips appear—new rounds that gain everyone's attention for a little while and then fade—but there are some long-term trends that appear to be establishing themselves.

I thought it would be interesting to take a look at what this year's cartridge list may or may not tell us, and I'll go by caliber. Do keep in mind that this roundup, while extensive, is not all-inclusive, and just because a particular cartridge fares well or not so well in new-rifle offerings is not the final word on its popularity or lack thereof.

.243/.257

To be honest, I thought a few years back that the 6mm Creedmoor—a darling among the long-range target set—would have overtaken the time-honored .243 Win. by now. Not happening. If anything, the .243 has become the dominant “small” big game cartridge, and at least this year nothing else

comes close. The 6mm ARC is too new to make any predictions, although it might be telling that Ruger is offering several of its American Gen II rifles chambered in this round.

The .25-06 Rem. clings to life, barely. Last year there wasn't a single new rifle chambered to this cartridge, and this year there's just one. Sigh. I love the .25-06, and I know there are others out there who feel the same way, but it's fading fast. Like the .240 Wby., the .257 Wby.—which I consider the coolest of Weatherby's cartridges—is limited to that firm's rifles.

6.5mm

The mighty 6.5 Creedmoor is still one of the most popular cartridges out there, but it's no longer the undisputed king, which I'll explain later. For one thing, it has a lot more competitors than it used to. Chief among these is the 6.5 PRC, another Hornady cre-

ation that's really caught on. If you've studied up on this one, you know one reason why: It's a better all-around cartridge than the Creedmoor.

The 6.5 Grendel makes an appearance thanks to Ruger, but it's not made a strong showing otherwise—this year or any recent year. And then there are the new Weatherby 6.5s. They're both fine designs, but they're limited to just Weatherby rifles. If the other Weatherby cartridges, which have much longer histories, are any guide, the 6.5-300 and 6.5 RPM will probably remain largely proprietary rounds.

.277

The .270 Win. is still with us, thank goodness, but the 6.5s seem to have taken a big bite out of this diameter. The .270 Win. actually accounted for a larger percentage than it did last year, which will be comforting to its fans. The .270 WSM failed to make the list the past two years, and I think you can thank the 6.5 PRC and 7mm PRC for that. The well-regarded 6.8 Western is still limited to the Browning family of rifles, despite its ballistic pedigree. The foregoing notes on the Weatherby cartridges apply to the .270 Wby.

7mm

My favorite .280 Rem. is and has been a goner, and the recent appetite for its Ackley Improved cousin seems to be slacking. I was glad to see the 7mm-08 make a return, albeit a small one, this year. It's a great round that doesn't often get its due, and the overwhelming popularity of the 6.5 Creedmoor almost certainly has had an impact on the little '08s popularity—as they're fairly close in performance.

The big dog this year is undoubtedly the 7mm PRC, and it's definitely come at the expense of the iconic 7mm Rem. Mag. The Remington round isn't going anywhere anytime soon, but it's gone from undisputed 7mm champ to runner up. The .28 Nosler continues to be represented, although it has slipped considerably from last year, when Browning offered a bunch of X-Bolts in this caliber. This year, the new X-Bolt 2 includes the Nosler in only two of its variants.

.308

If there's a boat that's benefited from the rising tide that is the 6.5 Creedmoor, it is the .308 Win. Thanks to the big demand for short actions, the .308 is now so far ahead of the legendary .30-06 that it's not even funny. No way I'm predicting the demise of the '06, but short-action cartridges rule the roost when it comes to non-magnums.

The .30-30 is still around, thanks to renewed interest in lever actions, while the .300 BLK no longer seems to have the legs it once did.

On the magnum side, I thought the .300 PRC might soon knock the venerable .300 Win. Mag. off its pedestal. Not yet at least, and it's not particularly close. Years back some thought the .300 WSM might spell the end of the Win. Mag., too, but Winchester's short magnums are definitely in a downward trend. Long live the king.

Over .30

Hey, have you heard of the .350 Legend? Of course you have and, wow, what a year it's having. While last year's list of rifles was way shorter than this year's, the .350 Legend showed up in only two models in 2023. This year that number swelled to 16.

On the total opposite end of the spectrum, you might notice one glaring omission. There's no .338 Win. Mag. on the list. Again, our roundup doesn't include every single new rifle out there, but it does cover the large majority, and it's telling the .338 is missing in action.

The .350's younger, bigger brother, the .400 Legend, is off to a decent start, especially considering that calibers over .30 have never been overly popular. If you thought the .350 was a flash in the pan, you might think the same of the .400, but I wouldn't bet the farm on it.

The recent interest in straight-wall cartridges means rounds like the .45-70 (alas, not the .444 Marlin) will continue to show up in new rifle models. You'll see the .450 Bushmaster has a few dots on the chart, but it's mostly thanks to Ruger. It'll be interesting to see what the future holds for the Bushmaster in the face of the lighter-recoiling Legend cartridges.

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.308 InterLock SP (150 gr.; special 75th anniversary box)

.311 (7.62x39) Sub-X (255 gr.)

Winchester Bullets

6mm Extreme Point (95 gr.)

6.5 mm Extreme Point (125, 140 gr.)

.277 Extreme Point (130 gr.)

7mm Extreme Point (140 gr.)

.308 Extreme Point (150, 180 gr.)

.35 Extreme Point (150 gr.)

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.300 WSM

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6mm ARC



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News Note: Hodgdon Buys RCBS Reloading

In May it was announced that powder company Hodgdon has acquired RCBS Reloading. This is exciting news for reloaders. We'll keep you up to date with any new product announcements.

CARTRIDGE CLASH » Brad Fitzpatrick

.30-06 vs .308 Win.

In 1906 the military officially adopted the Ball Cartridge, Caliber .30, Model of 1906, the cartridge that would later become known as the .30-06 Springfield or, more simply, the .30-06. The '06 saw use in both world wars and Korea, and aside from its long, distinguished military service career, the '06 also became the darling of sportsmen.

The cartridge arrived at precisely the right time. Bolt-action rifles with telescopic sights were coming into vogue, and bottleneck cartridges using smokeless powder provided hunters and target shooters with weapons far more capable than the guns their fathers carried. The .30-06 was well-positioned to become the universal standard for big game hunting, and that's precisely what happened.

After World War II, the U.S. military was again in search of a cartridge for use in machine guns and automatic firearms, and it settled on the 7.62x51 NATO. Winchester recognized the benefits of offering a commercial version of the round and launched the .308 Win. in 1952.

For more than seven decades, hunters and shooters have been arguing about which of these cartridges is better for big game hunting. The .30-06 case has a max case length of 2.494 inches while the .308 boasts a max case length of 2.015 inches. Not surprisingly, you can stuff more powder in a .30-06 case and can subsequently push a bullet at a faster velocity.

The .308 nips closely on the '06's heels, however. The standard for .30-06 loads has been roughly 2,900 fps for 150-grain bullets, 2,800 fps for 165-grainers and 2,700 fps for 180s. Traditional .308 Win. factory loads have run about 100 fps slower than the '06 with similar bullet weights.

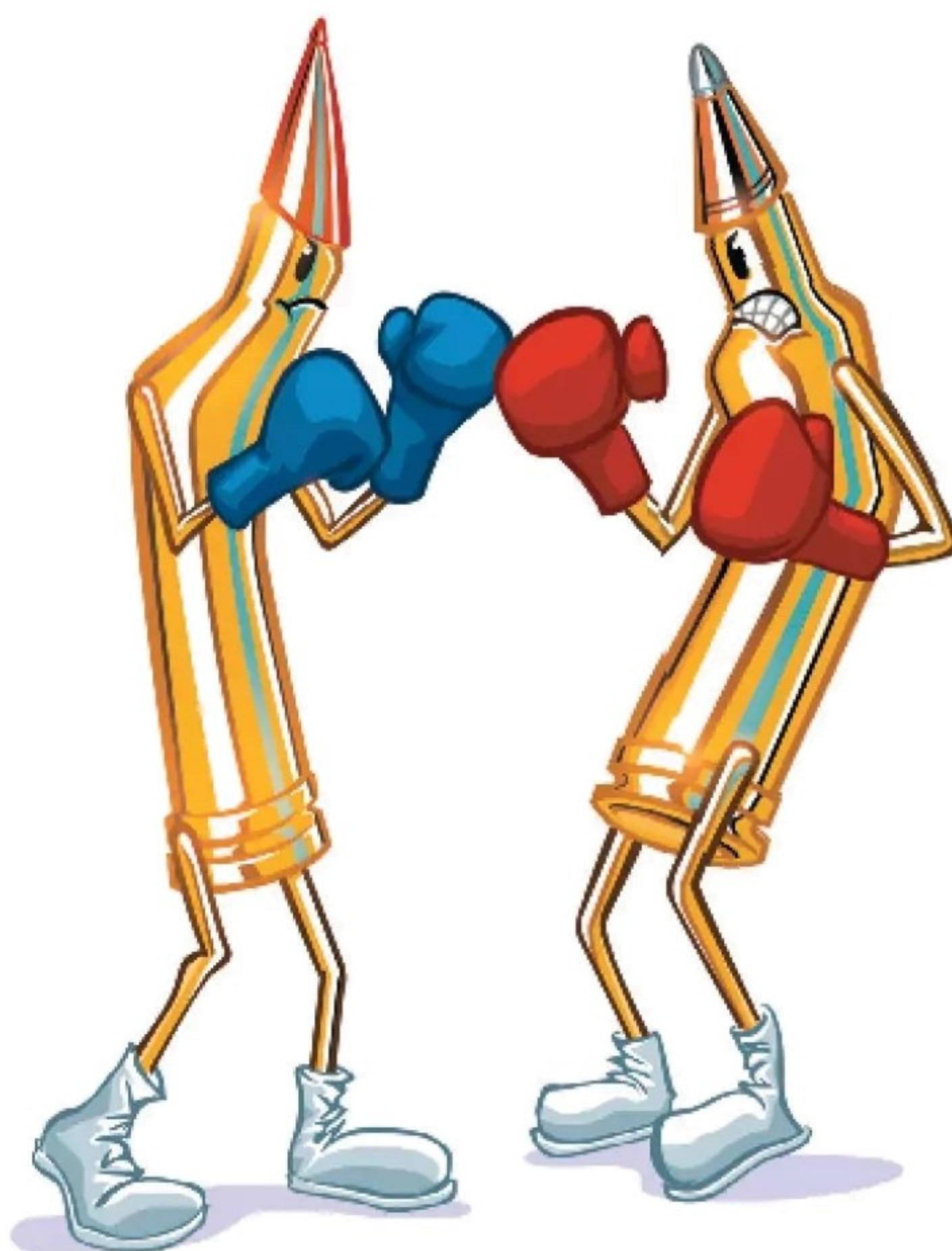
Fans of the .30-06 are quick to point out that anything the .308 can do the

.30-06 can do better. The '06 shoots flatter. It drops about three inches less at 400 yards than the .308 when zeroed at 200 yards using standard hunting bullets at factory velocities. Further, the .30-06 carries about 250 additional foot-pounds of energy at 400 yards—without a substantial increase in recoil.

Both rounds are easy to reload and offer volumes of load data, and both use widely available bullets. The .30-06 requires a standard length action while the .308 fits in a short action so .308 guns can be built a bit lighter for mountain hunting.

The fortunes of these two cartridges have changed dramatically in recent years. The .308—always seen as the '06's less popular little brother—has grown in popularity in recent years. In our 2024 big game rifle roundup in this issue, there are more than 40 new rifles chambered in .308, more than twice as many as in .30-06.

When I began my career as a gun writer, badmouthing the .30-06 was tantamount to career suicide, but it has become popular today to bash the '06. What on earth happened? For starters, hunters and shooters have changed, and more people are interested in shooting farther. Because the M40 family of bolt-action sniper rifles were in use by the military, the .308 became the popular choice for target guns on the civilian side. Simultane-



ously, ultra-light mountain rifles came into vogue, and the short-action .308 was a better choice when building a barely-there mountain gun than the .30-06.

Let's not write an obituary for the .30-06 quite yet, though. There are still lots of rifles out there, lots of load data, and many factory cartridge offerings. Animals are no tougher than they were a century ago, and a .30-06 is still a viable round for darn near anything you want to hunt on the planet.

The future favors the .308, but the '06 won't disappear. Both cartridges will work for just about any big game animal in the world. There's no wrong option between these two rounds.

.30-06

HITS

- A little faster and flatter
- Can handle 200-grain bullets
- Excellent used gun market

MISSES

- Somewhat more recoil
- Very few AR-platform options
- Longer, heavier action

.308 WIN.

HITS

- Tons of target and hunting loads
- Wide range of rifle types
- Better average accuracy

MISSES

- Not quite as powerful
- Older 1:12 twist barrels limit bullet choice
- Heavy competition from other short actions

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The Bino/Tripod Solution

Last year, my wife drew a Colorado bighorn tag, and I was allowed to tag along. She'd hired a guide, but you can never have enough eyes on a hunt like this, so I decided to make myself useful. Years ago, I'd hunted Coues deer in Mexico and used 15X binoculars on a tripod. I'd always thought it was a superior way to glass for long periods while still having sufficient power, and I figured this kind of setup would be ideal for a sheep hunt.

I already had the tripod, one I had carried to support a spotting scope I'd taken on several elk and deer scouting trips. It's Leupold's Alpine CF-425 (\$400), a versatile and affordable tripod that weighs only 32 ounces thanks to its carbon-fiber legs. At its smallest, it's only 18 inches long and fits easily into a pack. Max height is 58 inches, and it'll handle up to 13 pounds and can also be used to support a lightweight rifle.

The ball head features an Arca plate, and with the addition of a binocular adapter, you're ready to glass. The ball head rotates smoothly for panning and locks in place easily by tightening its clamp. The twist-lock legs make positioning and repositioning fast and easy. Unlocked, the legs can splay out for a five-inch minimum height.

When you're picking up and moving to another spot, loosen the top screw on the adapter and press the release button to free the binoculars to stow in a pack or attach to an optics harness.

With a tripod, the binoculars stay locked on a spot, and instead of holding them you just sit behind them while you pick apart every rock and vegetation clump. It's more effective and far less fatiguing than holding a pair of binoculars, especially larger ones. Further, if you want a hunting partner to look at something, you don't have to spend a bunch of time directing him or her to the location—just get out from behind the glasses and let them have a look.

The binoculars I chose for this were



The combination of Steiner's HX56 15X binoculars and Leupold's Alpine CF-425 tripod packs up light for field use. The binoculars mount to the tripod via an adapter and are powerful enough to spot targets at long distances. The carbon-fiber legs feature twist-lock adjustments for quick positioning of the optics for fatigue-free glassing.



Steiner's HX 15x56 binoculars (\$1,265). Offering a 332-foot field of view at 1,000 yards, they're of roof-prism design. The Makrolon housing is durable polycarbonate, and the exterior is treated to an NBR Long Life rubber coating. The combination delivers light weight—they're only two pounds, 11 ounces—yet they can withstand 11 Gs of impact. That's no small thing on rough-and-tumble hunting trips. The HX 56s are nitrogen-injected for fog-proof performance in any weather.

The lens coatings produce crisp and clear images, and light transmission

was excellent early and late in the day. A hydrophobic nano coating sheds moisture, dust and dirt, and it resists fingerprints as well.

What I liked most about them, aside from the power and clarity, is the focusing wheel—something I'm really fussy about. It not only turns with the right amount of tension, it doesn't take much rotation to focus near to far.

I'm not abandoning my spotting scope entirely, but now that I have this rig, it's going to see way more use than the spotter because it's handier and more versatile.—*J. Scott Rupp*



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Savage B22 Magnum Precision Lite

Chambered to .22 Mag., the rifle sports an exclusive MDT one-piece aluminum chassis with an adjustable cheekpiece and length-of-pull spacers for a custom fit. The fore-end has M-Lok slots for accessories, and a 20 m.o.a. Picatinny rail provides plenty of long-range adjustment. The button-rifled barrel gets a carbon-fiber wrap. It feeds from a 10-round rotary magazine, and of course it incorporates the adjustable AccuTrigger. Weight is 6.77 pounds.

>>\$949, SAVAGEARMS.COM

Federal Fusion Tipped

Federal Fusion is an electro-chemically bonded bullet that provides all the benefits of bonding at a lower cost than competing bonded bullets, and it now comes in a tipped version that boosts ballistic coefficients. The addition of a tip should also improve accuracy potential. The polymer tip is paired with a skived nose for consistent expansion. Initial offerings include 6.5 Creedmoor (140 grain), 6.5 PRC (140), .270 Win. (150), 7mm Rem. Mag. (175), 7mm PRC (175), .300 BLK (190), .308 (180), .30-06 (180) and .300 Win. Mag. (180).

>>\$45–\$81 per 20, FEDERALPREMIUM.COM



Leupold Mark 4HD

The new family of tactical scopes includes 1-4.5x24mm, 2.5-10x42mm, 4.5-18x52mm, 6-24x52mm and 8-32x56mm. The two smaller powers have 30mm main tubes, while the higher ones have 34mm tubes. The 1-4.5X is a second focal plane optic, the 2.5-10X is available in either first or second focal plane, and the rest are first focal plane. All are available with either mil or m.o.a. adjustments. The reticle is the new PR3 that dispenses with the lower Christmas tree, and illuminated models are available.

>>\$1,000–\$1,600, LEUPOLD.COM



Alps Outdoorz Waterproof Case

The case has a waterproof 500D welded PVC outer shell outside and high density closed-cell foam inside to protect your rifle from damage and weather. It has a dry-bag-style roll-up closure system for a tight seal, and three external compression straps are handy for mounting on a vehicle as well as strapping accessories like tripods to the outside. Fits rifles up to 53 inches long and 10.5 inches high. Weight is two pounds, nine ounces.

>>\$100, ALPSOUTDOORZ.COM



XS Sights Rossi Add-Ons

The rail/ghost-ring sight set for the R95 includes a precision-machined aluminum optics rail that easily mounts to the .30-30 or .45-70 via the existing screw holes. The fully adjustable ghost-ring sights are steel, and the front post has a white stripe for easy visibility in low light. XS also offers a rail (shown) that allows R92 owners to mount a scout scope or red dot on their .44 Mag. or .357 Mag. carbines.

>>\$193 (R95 set), \$77 (R92 scout mount rail); XSIGHTS.COM



From Russia with Love

THE OLD MOSIN-NAGANT WAS AN OBSOLETE BATTLE RIFLE ALMOST RIGHT OUT OF THE GATE.

A truly amazing rifle was created as the M1891 Mosin-Nagant. Amazing because the action never really evolved as did every other rifle born during the late 19th century's smallbore/smokeless powder revolution. More amazing is its 7.62x54R cartridge—a living fossil that still serves strong 133 years later with no signs of slowing down, even though both rifle and cartridge were obsolete by Western standards well before World War I.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the Mosin-Nagant is the wallflower of guns. No one copied its design, although many countries fielded versions of the 10 million or more of all models produced. That makes the M1891 a hard rifle to ignore, and its size makes it stick out.

The M91/30 version's overall length exceeds 48.5 inches. Add the bayonet and it's a whopping 65.5 inches and weighing an ounce shy of 10 pounds. That may be fine for forming a square against Napoleon's cavalry, but World War I and the machine gun shook all that cavalry jazz out of every army in short order. The length quickly became a burden in the trenches of World War I and street fighting in World War II.



The Russian Mosin-Nagant in 7.62x54mmR served in two World Wars, and the M91/30 was the last of the long infantry models fielded. To apply the safety, pull back the large knob and turn it counterclockwise. It will be trapped and lock the bolt.



The straight bolt handle was found on many rifles throughout World War I and contributed to a higher incidence of elbow wounds. A lot of torque is required to lift a cock-on-opening bolt. When it is 45 degrees to the bore and you lift it upright, your elbow tends to rise to shoulder height, exposing it to return fire.

Most countries moved on from bolt guns after World War I, but the new Soviet Union continued production of these rifles more or less unchanged throughout World War II. There are 10 distinct models for the collector to pursue in addition to an even wider cornucopia of guns made or rebuilt by many different countries.

Once an inexpensive way to begin collecting, all models are creeping up in price yet not approaching the prices of the average German K98k Mauser.

Rarer models such as the Cossack and Dragoon rifles approach Mausers in price, but the standard rifle is still affordable. Prices average between \$400 to \$800, depending on condition, for average World War II models.

The Soviet Union provided tens of thousands of Mosin-Nagants to client states and allies, and they can often be found with marks identifying Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Communist China, many of which are uniquely marked. A must-have reference with a roadmap to the various markings is *The Mosin-Nagant Rifle* by Terence W. Lapin, now in its sixth edition.

My sample M91/30—the last long-rifle type—was made in the Soviet Union in 1942 at Izhevsk and captured by Finland during the Continuation War from 1941-44. It has the Soviet



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marks intact and the Finnish “SA” for *Suomen Armeija* (Finnish Army) stamped on the barrel.

Finland had been part of Czarist Russia until 1917 and was armed with the Mosin-Nagant. They made them and rebuilt them there with their own unique markings. Finland fought off the Bolsheviks after World War I and formed its own nation. The Soviet Union attacked the Fins in 1939, and Finland lost much territory to them. Finland counterattacked in 1941, and my gun was one of the many Soviet rifles captured.

The Mosin-Nagant is a rugged, dependable workhorse able to function reliably in harsh conditions. Its execrable trigger generally breaks after a long, heavy, spongy, eight- or nine-pound pull. This does serve a purpose. In biting cold weather, when feeling in the fingers is lessened by numbness, the trigger remains manageable. You simply hold the sights steady and squeeze. It eventually breaks.

Accuracy with the open sights is sketchy at best, and most rifles are good for only four or five m.o.a. with good ammunition, although the scoped sniper models shoot far better. If you learn to shoot a decent group even at 50 yards with one of these monsters, no trigger will ever intimidate you again.

The Soviet-era rear sights are optimistically graduated to 2,000 meters—another hangover from the days of long-range volley fire before the machine gun became common—and are not windage adjustable. The front sight is a post protected by a globe set in a dovetailed base fixed to the barrel. Despite being in a dovetail, it isn't really adjustable.

The safety is perhaps the clumsiest of all early battle rifles. To apply, draw back the cocking piece far enough to rotate it counterclockwise until it locks in place.

It's tedious, but it is visually obvious when the safety is on, and it locks the bolt closed. To release it, draw the cocking piece back and turn it clockwise. If a recalcitrant primer is encountered when firing, you can draw



The rear sight is optimistically graduated to 2,000 meters. The front sight is a simple post protected by a globe set in a dovetail atop the barrel. Soviet rifles were sighted with the bayonet attached.

back the cocking piece for another try at firing the round.

Because the cartridge has a large rim, loading the rifle requires some care. If you place a round in the magazine and don't push it all the way back before pushing it down, the next round will cause the rim of the first round to jam between the interruptor/ejector and the side of the magazine box. It will take several minutes to clear, and getting it free usually ruins the round. The “interruptor” holds down the cartridge below the one feeding to prevent jams from the fat rims.

Loading from a charger mitigates the problem. There are still plenty of chargers available at gun shows and from online vendors—along with the cartridge boxes, combo tools, cleaning kits, oil bottles and the like. These are all reasonably priced. Most of these rifles came with all this stuff when they were imported. Almost every country using these rifles had uniquely marked oil bottles, and rooting out the correct ones can be a nice Easter egg hunt.

Slings are the most unusual encountered, and why the Russians thought their design was a good idea remains a mystery. Originally, the rifle had normal sling swivels, albeit placed where they were in Napoleonic times. By 1910, swivels were discontinued and the stock slotted for a pair of leather “dog collars” with buckles and keepers fitted into the slots and sling looped through them.

The slots were protected by escutcheons on either side, held by two screws each fore and aft. Wartime pro-

duction saw the elimination of these escutcheons, but often a thin metal plate was crimped into the front slot for strength. Most slings are leather, but mine is a late war Finnish cloth one marked “SA.”

Mosin-Nagants were zeroed with the bayonets affixed, since doctrine called for fixed bayonets before an attack. The bayonet is a cruciform-bladed socket style as had been used for more than 100 years. There are quite a few Mosin-Nagants with fixed bayonets sprinkled among the period flintlocks in Sergei Bondarchuk's epic movie “War and Peace.”

There is still quite a bit of corrosive ammo for these rifles in circulation, so cleaning is imperative if you shoot any of it. Field-stripping is quite easy. Open the bolt and ensure the chamber and magazine are empty. Draw the bolt to the rear while depressing the trigger and the bolt comes out. Hoppe's No. 9 is still my go-to cleaning solvent after shooting corrosive primers, and if you clean soon after shooting, you will keep the barrel pristine. To reinstall, insert the bolt, depress the trigger and push it home.

This is truly an interesting rifle if only because of all the oddities in its construction, the vast number made and because it was found in almost every 20th century conflict—with the sniper versions still being used in the Middle East.

Launching a 150-grain 0.312-inch bullet at 2,800 fps, the ballistics of the 7.62x54R cartridge—Old Babushka—are quite acceptable, and it is an able medium-game round. ■

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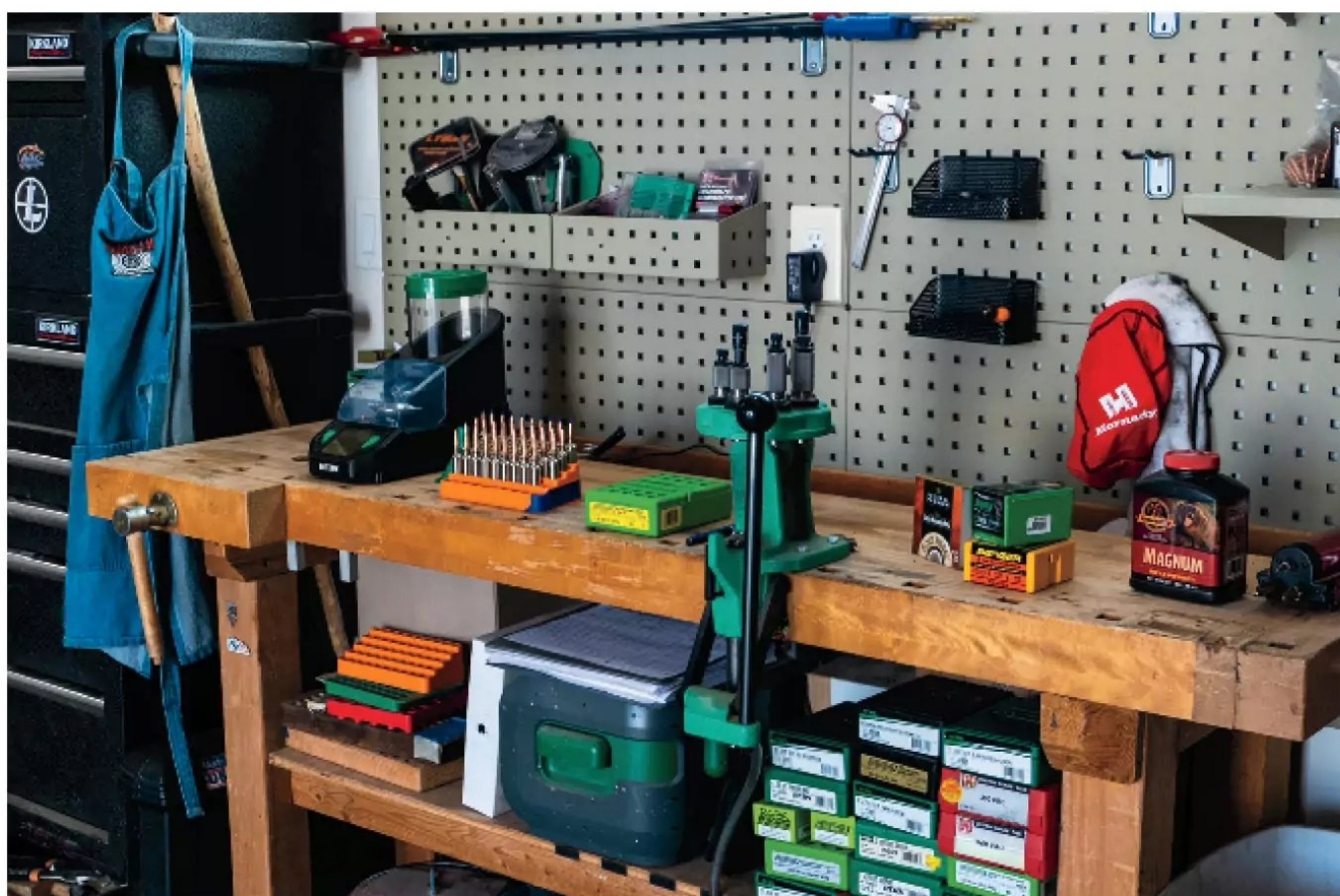
WITH HELP FROM HORNADY, ONE WRITER REDOES HIS LOADING BENCH—AND CHANGES HIS OUTLOOK.

If there's any place where it behooves us to be OCD about organization, it's at the reloading bench. After all, we are creating small items that harness the power of explosions and use that energy to drive projectiles downrange at extreme speeds. A simple mistake can cause a catastrophic failure. And although good organization isn't a cure-all for temporary stupidity, it goes a long way toward circumventing an absent-minded oversight that just could blow up your favorite shootin' iron.

Plus, it just feels good to work in a clean, organized space. Tidy up your loading area, and you'll impress your spouse and make your workbench the envy of your shooting pals. Here's how to get started.

When I began this project I was embarrassed to even look at my loading bench. My last reloading project had been weeks before, when I loaded a bunch of 9.3x62 ammo for an upcoming hunt in Namibia. A winter's worth of garage dust and Christmas bedlam and winter clutter choked my hand-loading area. It needed help.

To get started, I ordered several of Hornady's Square-Lok wall panels along with appropriate organizational bins and shelves and hooks. Then I



A well-set-up, properly organized reloading bench optimizes work flow and safety. The author used Hornady's Square-Lok wall panels hung with shelves, bins and hooks to renovate his reloading operation.

swiped a broom and dustpan from the kitchen pantry and got to work.

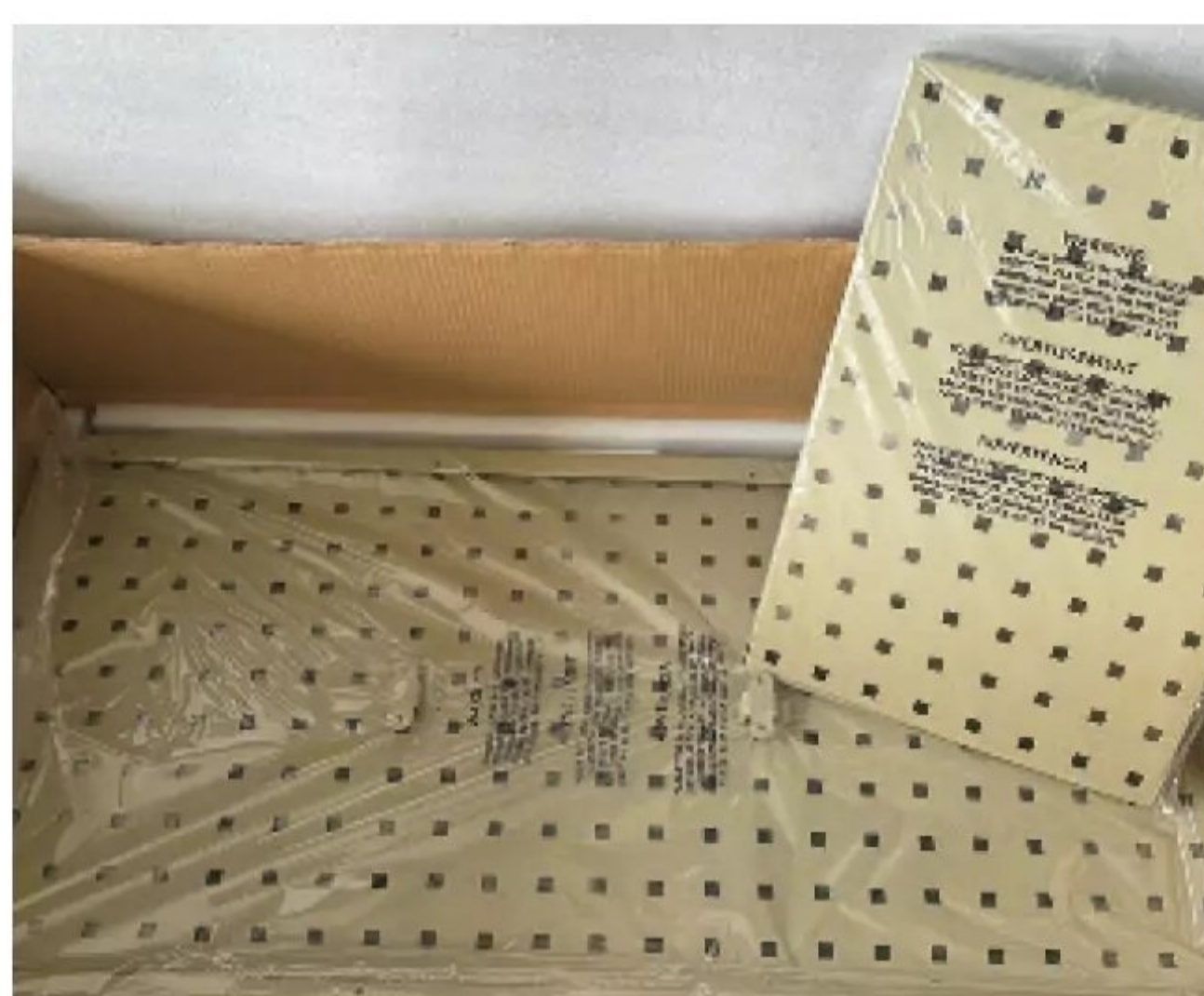
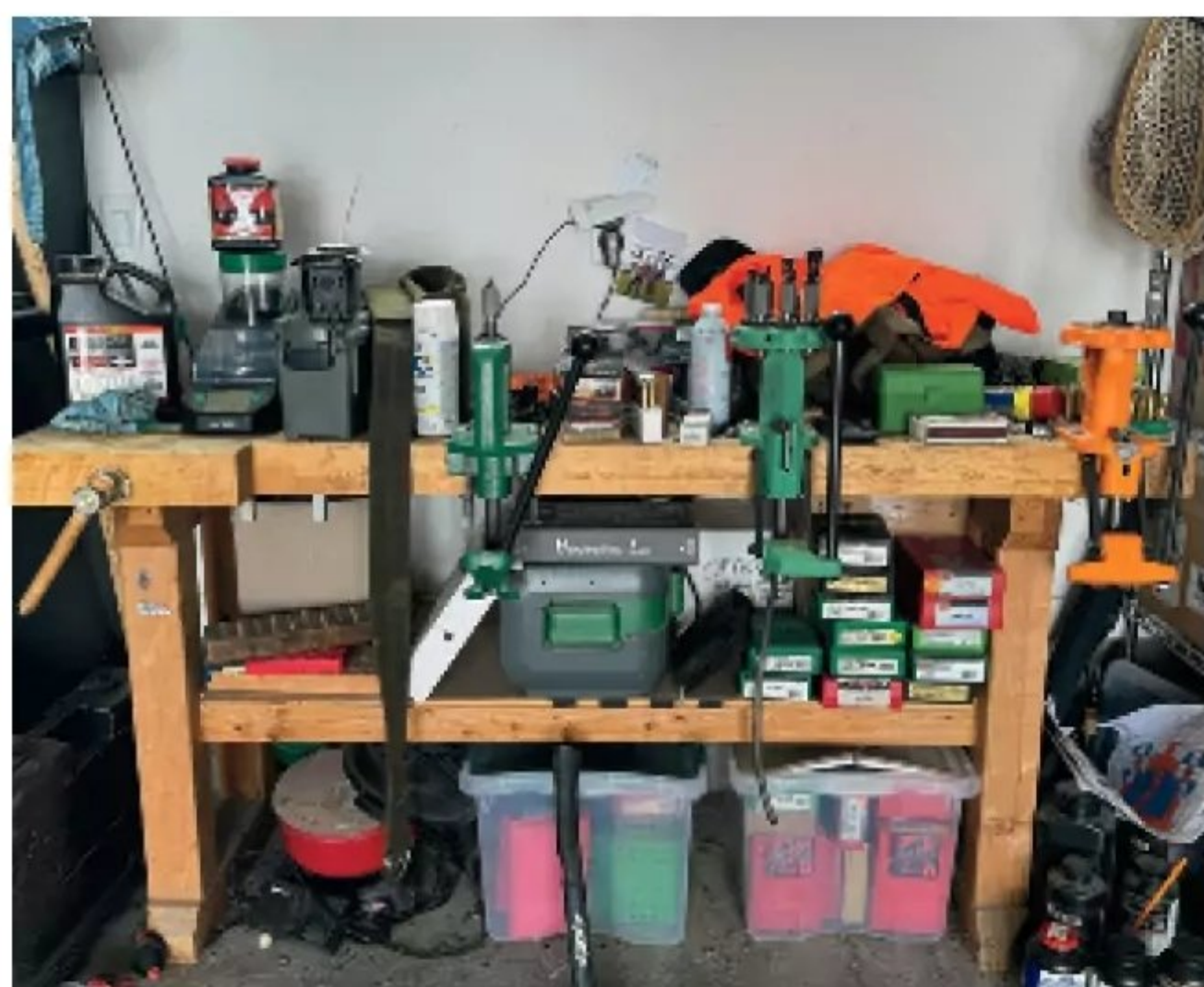
Because there was so much dust and dead-bug detritus behind and under my bench and the boxes under it, I pulled everything away from the wall. I swept and dusted and scrubbed until it was the cleanest place in the garage. Then I began reassembling my loading area with an aim to make it organized—and easy to keep organized.

I added a rubber floor mat where I stand at the bench. I'd had enough of aching feet and back from standing for hours on the hard concrete. Next, I unboxed four 18x36-inch sections of Square-Lok wall paneling (\$159 each) and hung them on the wall behind where my bench would go. This was the crucial addition to my reloading setup that would make it easy to become organized and stay that way.

Usually Hornady's Square-Lok

panels hang easily. They're designed to marry up with the standard 18-inch spacing of the structural studs inside the wall. However, the studs inside the wall behind my bench don't have standard spacing. They support a big window and are spaced about 15 inches apart. And there's an electrical plug smack in the middle of the wall, which is convenient for powering my electronic powder charger and case trimmer and so forth but awkward for easy Square-Lok panel installation.

Not to worry. With the help of a stud finder and a power drill, I created fresh holes in the paneling for the 15-inch stud spacing. My wife ran to the hardware store and bought me an electrical box extender, and with a jigsaw I cut a rectangular hole for the extender. With 18 square feet of Square-Lok paneling in place, I heaved the reloading bench back into place.



A messy bench (l.) doesn't do you any favors in loading efficiency or safety. Hornady's sturdy Square-Lok panels (r.) measure 18x36 inches and allow you to customize your workspace with various bins and racks.

Handloading doesn't require a ton of space. My entire operation is only about seven feet wide and two feet deep—although it's a far cry from the tiny 30-inch-wide bench under the basement stairs when I was in college.

As the old-timers used to say, have "a place for everything, and everything in its place." It's an adage I'm not good at following, but the older and more forgetful I get, the more I value order.

Whether working in a small space or not, it's necessary to create positions for the unique gear that is your reloading setup. Attacking the stack of Square-Lok accessories in the middle of my garage, I began adding shelves and hooks and bins of various sizes. These range from \$15 to \$35 apiece.

The cool thing about Square-Lok accessories is they're easily set in place and shifted around until you figure out the best positioning. Then, using the little black grommets and screws provided, you secure the hanging bins and shelves and hooks to the wall. And even after that, they're still movable if you find a better spot. You just use the tiny supplied plastic crowbar to pry out the black grommets.

It was like a giant Lego set. I gleefully wasted more time than was strictly necessary shifting bins and shelves and hooks around before settling on the setup I liked best. I was amazed at how much "bigger" my work area seemed with just a few organizational bins and shelves hanging on the wall above the bench.

An organized reloading operation has a workflow. The smaller your work-

space, the more seamlessly the flow must be. I start in the center, where I lube, size and prime cases. Shifting to the far left, I charge cases with propellant, then slide to the far right, where I seat the bullets. Strategically placing shelving and tool hangers and parts bins streamlines your flow.

On a heavy shelf beneath my workbench, I stack my reloading dies, an Apple computer box top that I use for a case lube spray tray, and whatever cartridge blocks I'm not currently using. My reloading logbook lives there, too.

On the floor beneath I keep case-cleaning tumblers and boxed-up reloading dies I don't regularly use. The key is having the tools and accessories you need ready to hand where you're going to need them.

What about components? I store them separately. Boxes of component bullets require extra-sturdy shelves. Propellant should always be stored in a different location than primers.

Like most of us, I am always on the go. Deadlines rule my work scheduling, and I've a bad habit of leaving the remnants of an article project scattered about, and moving immediately into the next project.

It's a poor method. No doubt I'd save time by cleaning up after myself rather than ahead of my next project's needs. So that's my reloading repentance confession, folks: From now on I intend to maintain the near-industrial organization of my reloading operation. Try it. I'll wager you'll find it makes a difference too—and make you a better handloader. ■

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by Brad Fitzpatrick

Affordable Ranging

THE NEW RANGE-FINDING BINOS FROM BURRIS GET YOU DISTANCES SUPER FAST AND WON'T BREAK THE BANK.



Burris Signature LRF 10x42s are easy to operate and offer exceptionally fast return times while ranging reflective objects to 2,600 yards.

Burris has offered its Signature LRF and other rangefinders for years, but now it has stepped into the rangefinding binocular market with the Signature LRF 10x42. They combine quality glass with a built-in rangefinder, meaning you have one less thing to carry with you.

The Signature LRF binoculars don't have onboard ballistics. You simply get a range to the target, and you get it quickly. The lack of onboard ballistics isn't a bad thing. Adding a ballistic calculator requires extra mass, and that makes your binos more of a burden.

There's also a cost factor. Competing rangefinding binoculars with built-in calculators cost from hundreds to thousands more. If all you want is to get your range and apply your own dope, these offer everything you need.

That's not to say that the Signature LRF 10x42s don't have lots of onboard tech. With a simple press of the range button, the optics display a range that's accurate to within one yard to 1,000 yards and accurate to two yards beyond that. This ranging comes quickly. I think these are noticeably faster than other rangefinding binos that cost more, even at extended ranges.

In scan mode, the Burris binos are spitting back ranges as fast as you can move your hand. That's not a big deal at the range, but it is significant when you're hunting and you've got a narrow window of time to make a shot. Sometimes milliseconds don't matter, but at other times they do.

The binoculars have three programmable modes: Hunt, Sport and Auto. In Auto mode, the binos return a range for the target with the strongest signal. Hunt mode ranges the farthest target object within the circle, which is useful when hunting in timber or grass so other objects don't interfere with range accuracy.

Sport mode ranges the closest target in the group, which is primarily aimed at golfers, but it could also be used when ranging small steel targets on distant hillsides. Sport mode also has a slight but perceptible delay on returning ranges.

There are five different display op-

SPECIFICATIONS	
BURRIS SIGNATURE LRF	
POWERxOBJ.	10x42mm
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MAX RANGE	2,600 yd. reflective; 1,100 yd. deer-size game
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MANUFACTURER	Burris Optics, BURRISOPTICS.COM

tions when ranging: line of sight, horizontal, both LOS and horizontal, LOS with angle calculation, and horizontal with angle calculation. Each mode has its own virtues and times when it is appropriate, but most hunters will likely find the horizontal distance setting the simplest and most versatile to use because it provides an accurate "hold to" distance. You can also select yard or meter measurements and brightness.

I don't want to fiddle with too much tech when I'm in the field. I want equipment that is intuitive and easy to use, and that's one benefit of the Burris Signature LRF binos. The range button is located on the bridge between the top hinge of these binos and the right barrel. Its textured and easy to feel when you're glassing, so you can fire ranges without having to stop and hunt for the button.

The only other control is a power button on the left bridge that allows you to run through menu settings. Across the board, Burris optics are really intuitive and easy to use—far easier than competing European optics—and you can master the controls in a matter of minutes no matter how much you dislike technology.

Press and hold the left power button for a few seconds, and it brings up mode settings. Use the right button until the mode you want is flashing, then it's back to the left button to move through the menu. Choose the setting, mode, measurement and brightness

you want, and you're finished. It's simple and straightforward.

The scan mode is, as I said, really fast. Hold the right button, move the binoculars with the target, and you'll continuously receive new ranges. This is important when a target is moving and you need to keep obtaining new ranges. A fast scan mode isn't always required on hunting binos, but it's an asset when you need it.

What's as amazing as the speed is the distance at which these binoculars perform. I couldn't range anything at the maximum effective distance of 2,600 yards for reflective objects, but I did manage to range a barn at 2,240. When I spoke to Burris's Jordan Egli, he told me he managed to return a range of 3,265 yards on a cliff face in Wyoming.

Burris promises 1,100 yard ranges on deer-size game, but I managed to range a cow at 1,214. There's no need to point out that cows are larger than deer, but I believe that Burris under-sells its products a bit.

These binoculars feature a roof-prism design and weigh in at 36 ounces. They offer twist-up eyecups, adjustable diopters and tabs on each barrel to anchor a neck strap or tether. The battery compartment sits on the rear portion of the center focus knob and holds a CR2 lithium battery that powers the unit for 2,000 ranges. Published operating temperature ranges are from five degrees to 131 degrees. They're tripod-adaptable and feature really aggressive rubber texturing on the exterior.

At \$1,200 the Burris Signature LRF 10x42s are competitively priced, coming in at a couple hundred dollars less than similar products from Leupold and Vortex while offering comparable optical quality. I've been impressed with the optics I've seen from Burris of late, and the Signature LRF 10x42s are no exception. They do most things as well as more expensive binoculars, and they offer extremely fast feedback. These might just be the best value in rangefinding binos today. ■



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These days, America's sportsmen and women are clamoring for more "content," as we call it in the media: more articles, more television shows, more website info. Outdoor Sportsman Group—which publishes this magazine as well as bringing you the Sportsman Channel and Outdoor Channel—has answered that call with the My Outdoor TV (MOTV) app.

It's a resource like no other, a curated treasure trove of outdoor-oriented television shows and videos. Think of it like your own personal Netflix, with episodes of "Gun Stories" with Joe Montegna, the gun restoration show "The Gunfather," "Guns & Ammo," "Shooting USA" and more. The universe of content is even bigger when it comes to hunting, and I know a lot if not most of you enjoy your time in

the field. Check out "Petersen's Hunting Adventures," shows by hunting legends Fred Eichler and Jim Shockey, "Meat Easter" and many, many more. Plus there is a ton of fishing as well, including live streams of various angling competitions.

MOTV is an incredibly deep library containing more than 20,000 episodes of outdoor television shows as well as short-form video encompassing how-to instructional and history topics you can watch anytime, anywhere.

In addition to the TV episodes, I think *RifleShooter* readers will really appreciate short-form videos such as "Gun Stories Tidbits" on iconic rifles as the M1 Garand, the Remington rolling block and the AK-47. And, again, it's all HD-quality video for the ultimate viewing experience.

Perhaps even better for shooters and hunters on the go, in addition to

streaming video, you can take this content with you via the "Take With Me" feature that allows you to download content for later viewing when you're without Internet access—say, at the range or in hunting camp.

If you're one of the folks out there who can't get Sportsman Channel or Outdoor Channel through your television provider, this is your porthole into the awesome world of true outdoor programming. MOTV is available on the web, as well as Apple and Android platforms.

A subscription is just \$9.99 per month or \$98.99 per year, and you get multiple device accessibility with one account. New content is loaded every month, and with the yearly subscription you can get a free magazine subscription. MOTV is the TV you want, your way. Check it out today at MYOUTDOORTV.COM. ■

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2024 BIG GAME

by Brad Fitzpatrick

WOW—TALK ABOUT A TON OF BIG GAME RIFLES! THIS YEAR'S ROUNDUP IS A BUMPER CROP OF BOLT GUNS, LEVER ACTIONS AND SEMIAUTOS

There's a lot for hunters to be excited about this year, and there are lots of good excuses to part with your cash and make space in your gun safe for a new addition. As always, our annual Big Game Rifle Roundup includes rifles chambered in suitable .243/6mm or larger hunting cartridges. With fall fast approaching it's high time to add another hunting rifle to your collection, and there are plenty of excellent options in 2024.

Benelli

The company adds a new hybrid hunting/target version of the popular Lupo, the HPR—which was *RifleShooter's* cover gun in the March/April issue. The rifle utilizes the same three-lug push-feed bolt and double-stack magazine, but it incorporates a three-part

chassis, heavy-contour, straight-fluted CRIO barrel and a muzzle brake. The crisp, user-adjustable trigger (2.2 to 4.4 pounds) is on par with some of the best aftermarket triggers.

An eight-position adjustable comb allows for perfect eye alignment with the optic and a secure cheek weld. Cast and drop shims allow you to further customize the rifle, and the included bag rider is removable. Borrowing technology from their semiauto waterfowl guns, Benelli equips its Lupo rifles with Progressive Comfort recoil reducers with interlocking baffles that absorb recoil before it impacts the shooter's shoulder.

There are QD attachment points on the buttstock and fore-end as well as M-Lok attachment points on the sides of the fore-end for adding accessories to the rifle. The built-in Picatinny rail makes mounting optics a breeze.

Despite its heavy barrel and target gun profile, the Benelli remains at a manageable weight for hunting.

Beretta

This year, Beretta is launching a new hunting rifle, but instead of a traditional bolt gun it's a straight-pull. Known as the BRX1, it offers several noteworthy features that set it apart from most other straight-pulls. For starters, you can easily swap out the cold-hammer-forged barrel/barrel extension/Picatinny rail combo as well as the bolt head. This allows owners to switch chamberings without having to rezero. The BRX1 is also ambidextrous. By removing the bolt body and swapping the bolt handle you can transition these guns from right- to left-handed use in a matter of minutes.

In addition to the standard model—which offers a choice of black or green negative-comb stock with length-of-pull spacers and grip modules—there's also a carbon version that has a green polymer stock and carbon-fiber barrel and bolt system.

The BRX1 offers the fastest follow-up shots of anything save semiautos and other straight-pulls, and my initial test accuracy has been simply outstand-



Benelli Lupo HPR



Beretta BRX1

RIFLE ROUNDUP

ing from these guns. And, considering all that they offer, the price makes the BRX1 rifles a real value.

Bergara

Its rifle line continues to grow and get more interesting each year. Joining the B14 family of rifles this year is the Stoke, which has a shortened stock that is designed with small-statured shooters in mind. Length of pull is just 12.25 inches, which is more than an inch shorter than competing sporter-style rifles with standard stocks. Further, it comes with quarter-inch spacers to get the fit just right. Bergara did more than simply chop the buttstock with this gun, though. Instead, the company redesigned the entire stock geometry. The Stoke has a shortened fore-end that looks balanced with the stock and features a trim, redesigned pistol grip. It has a splatter-pattern finish and is designed with a bag rider.

The result is a truly compact rifle that weighs just six pounds and has the high-end features you'd expect on a premium hunting rifle, like a 4140 chromoly steel barrel that measures from 16.5 to 20 inches depending upon chambering. There's a Graphite Black Cerakote finish

on the metal. Depending on chambering it feeds from an internal magazine with floorplate or AICS detachable mags.

Also new is the Premier Series MgMicro Lite bolt action that features a folding XLR magnesium chassis, making this the perfect choice for backpack hunts. The stock has an adjustable comb, and Bergara's Cure carbon-fiber, threaded barrel measures just 18 inches. The rifle weighs just 5.8 pounds, and it feeds from AICS mags.

Bergara also launched its new B14 Wilderness Sierra rifle, which is similar to the popular Ridge but comes with a splatter-pattern camo polymer stock with adjustable comb. The 4140 chromoly barrel is fluted and features a threaded muzzle. Barrel lengths are 20 to 22 inches. All metalwork receives a Sniper Grey Cerakote protective surface finish, and there are left-handed versions.

Bergara is also adding a new member to its B-14² series rifles, the Crest Carbon. This premium rifle comes with a carbon-fiber stock with a carbon spine, Cure carbon-fiber, 20- or 22-inch threaded barrel. It feeds from AICS magazines and has a Sniper Grey Cerakote finish. The Crest Carbon weighs

just over six pounds but has the precision of a target rifle.

Browning

The biggest change with the new X-Bolt 2 is the addition of the Vari-Tech stock, which allows the shooter to make modifications to comb height and length of pull. But unlike some other designs, the length-of-pull spacers are internal. The stock features interchangeable overmolded pistol grips—sporter or vertical—and soft-touch overmolding on the fore-end. There are pre-molded holes inside the stock that can be drilled out to add accessories like Picatinny or Arca rails, but it also has traditional sling studs.

X-Bolt 2 rifles also feature slightly redesigned receivers for a smoother bolt stroke without a lot of added weight, and the one-piece machined bolt body has stylish new fluting and an ergonomic bolt knob that's easy to grasp and operate. It has a new trigger, the multi-lever user-adjustable DLX. The Plus Magazine system allows users to swap the traditional floorplate and rotary magazines for a redesigned polymer floorplate that accepts Browning detachable magazines for increased



Bergara B14 Stoke



**Browning X-Bolt 2 Mountain Pro
Carbon-Fiber Smoke Bronze**

capacity. Like the original, the X-Bolt 2 comes with a three-lug bolt with 60-degree bolt lift, X-Lock optics mounting system, tang safety with bolt unlock button, durable exterior finishes and threaded barrels with muzzle brakes.

There are 10 different X-Bolt 2 models. Of the various hunt-centric X-Bolt 2 models, the Speed version is the most traditional “sporter” type rifle in the bunch, and there’s also a Speed SPR version with a shortened steel barrel with 5/8x24 threads that make mounting suppressors simple.

The X-Bolt 2 Speed Carbon Fiber sports a carbon-fiber barrel for barrel cooling and weight reduction, and there’s an X-Bolt Speed LR version with the Plus Magazine System installed and a Pic rail and sling stud in place of the standard sling stud.

The X-Bolt 2 Pro McMillan Carbon Fiber model comes with a McMillan Game Warden 2.0 carbon-fiber stock and a carbon-fiber barrel, and there’s also an X-Bolt 2 Pro McMillan SPR Carbon Fiber model with a shortened barrel.

Browning has also added two Mountain Pro Series X-Bolt 2 rifles, the Mountain Pro Carbon Fiber Smoked Bronze and Mountain Pro Carbon Fiber Carbon Gray, both of which have carbon-fiber stocks and barrels to cut weight without reducing accuracy. There’s also a Hell’s Canyon McMillan LR X-Bolt 2 with a McMillan Game Scout Stock in Brown-

ing’s Ovis camo pattern, the Plus Magazine System, and a heavy-contour fluted barrel with Recoil Hawg muzzle brake.

Christensen Arms

This firm has a reputation for building premium hunting rifles, but we’ve never seen a Christensen centerfire hunting rifle priced under a grand—until now. The company’s new Evoke bolt-action rifle looks and feels like a premium gun and is loaded with features. These include a Christensen push-feed three-lug action with a 60-degree bolt throw; polymer stock; detachable box magazine; adjustable TriggerTech trigger; Cerakote finishes; Picatinny accessory rails with integrated sling studs on the fore-end; and a 416R stainless steel barrel with the company’s Reduced Felt Recoil (RFR) muzzle brake.

Barrel lengths vary from 18 to 22 inches, so the Evoke is suitable for suppressors, and at a minimum weight of 7.7 pounds it is manageable as a mountain rifle—even if it isn’t as light as some of the company’s premier mountain guns.

The standard Evoke comes well-appointed for under \$900, and there’s a Mossy Oak version as well as a Hunter model with a zero m.o.a. Picatinny rail and Hunter camo stock. The line-topping Evoke Precision, which clocks in at a reasonable \$1,048, has a Flash Forged Technology (FFT) carbon-fiber cheek riser, hex pattern-engraved barrel, an

integrated Arca rail in place of the Pic rail, and proprietary camo pattern.

Christensen’s other new centerfire hunting rifle this year is the Modern Carbon Rifle, an aptly named bolt action that is, as the name suggests, slathered in carbon fiber. There’s a free-floating Aerograde carbon-fiber barrel with an RFR brake, an FFT carbon-fiber stock with push button-adjustable cheek riser, even an FFT carbon-fiber bolt knob. Built on a coated stainless Remington 700-style action, with 20 m.o.a. rail, it weighs in at as little as 6.7 pounds.

Connecticut Valley Arms

CVA is adding three new Cascade bolt actions. The Cascade LRH (Long Range Hunter) features a polymer stock with adjustable comb and length of pull, a medium-heavy fluted barrel with muzzle brake, and 20 m.o.a. rail. These rifles have a push-feed action and Smoked Bronze Cerakote finishes and a choice of Realtree Hillside or black with Smoked Bronze webbing stocks with dual front sling studs.

Also new is the Cascade VH (Varmint Hunter). It’s primarily chambered in several .22 centerfire cartridges, but it’s also available in .243 Win. The VH has some of the same features as the LRH including a medium heavy fluted, threaded barrel and a Realtree Hillside camo polymer stock that is adjustable for both comb height and length of pull.

The final new one is the Cascade SR-



Christensen Arms Evoke



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2024 RIFLESHOOTER BIG GAME GUN GUIDE																														
MAKE/MODEL	MSRP	.243 Win.	6mm Creedmoor	6mm ARC (.240 Wby.)	.25-06 (.257 Wby.)	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Gren. (6.5 Wby. RPM)	6.5 PRC	6.5-300 Wby.	.270 Win.	6.8 Western (.270 Wby.)	7mm-08 Rem.	7mm Rem. Mag. (.280 AI)	7mm PRC	.28 Nosler	.30-30 Win.	7.62x39 (.300 BLK)	.308 Win.	.30-06	.300 WSM	.300 Win. Mag.	.300 PRC (.300 Wby.)	.338 Lapua	.350 Legend	.357 Mag.	.400 Legend	.44 Mag.	.450 Bush. (.45 Colt)	.45-70 Gov't	.400+ NE (.350 Rigby)
Mossberg Patriot Synthetic	\$484																													
Weatherby Vanguard Obsidian	\$549	•			•(•)	•		•	•	•		•	•		•			•	•		•	(•)		•						
Savage 110 Trail Hunter	\$639	•				•		•		•		•	•	•				•	•	•	•			•		•		•		
Mossberg Patriot Walnut	\$669																										•			
Ruger American Gen II Standard	\$729	•	•	•		•	•	•		•		•		•				•	•		•			•		•		•		
Ruger American Gen II Ranch	\$729			•		•	•										•(•)	•						•		•		•		
Ruger American Gen II Predator	\$729	•	•	•		•	•	•		•		•		•				•	•		•			•		•		•		
Winchester XPR SR	\$730																										•			
Howa M1500 Super Deluxe Walnut	\$749	•				•		•		•		•	•					•	•											
Winchester XPR LH SPR	\$780	•				•		•			•							•	•		•			•						
Franchi Momentum	\$799																		•					•					•	
CZ-USA 600 American	\$849	•				•				•								•	•		•									
Winchester XPR Scope Combo	\$850																										•			
Winchester XPR Extreme LH TT Midnight	\$880	•				•		•		•	•		•					•	•		•			•						
Christensen Evoke	\$899	•				•		•		•			•	•				•	•		•	•		•						
CVA Cascade VH	\$900	•																												
CVA SR-80	\$900																	•						•						
Bergara B14 Stoke	\$929	•				•		•				•					(•)	•						•						
CVA Cascade LRH	\$933					•		•					•	•				•			•	•								
Christensen Evoke Mossy Oak	\$949	•				•		•		•			•	•				•	•		•	•		•						
Taurus Expedition	\$985																	•												
Christensen Evoke Hunter	\$999					•		•						•				•			•	•								
Franchi Momentum Elite	\$999																		•										•	
Weatherby Vanguard Spike Camp	\$999					•												•						•						
Christensen Evoke Precision	\$1,048					•		•						•				•			•	•								
Howa M1500 Superlite Short	\$1,089	•				•						•						•												
Bergara B14 Wilderness Sierra	\$1,110		•			•		•		•			•	•				•	•		•	•								
Rock River Arms LAR-15M CAR A4	\$1,125																							•						
Tikka Roughtech Ranch	\$1,199																	•						•						
Tikka Ranahan Ranch	\$1,249																							•						
Marlin 1894 Classic	\$1,279																								•		•			
Smith & Wesson 1854	\$1,279																											•		
Ruger SFAR	\$1,364					•																								
Howa M1500 Superlite SB Vortex Combo	\$1,399	•				•						•						•												
Tikka Drover Ranch	\$1,399																	•												
Marlin 336 Dark Series	\$1,429															•														

2024 RIFLESHOOTER BIG GAME GUN GUIDE																														
MAKE/MODEL	MSRP	.243 Win.	6mm Creedmoor	6mm ARC (.240 Wby.)	.25-06 (.257 Wby.)	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Gren. (6.5 Wby. RPM)	6.5 PRC	6.5-300 Wby.	.270 Win.	6.8 Western (.270 Wby.)	7mm-08 Rem.	7mm Rem. Mag. (.280 AI)	7mm PRC	.28 Nosler	.30-30 Win.	7.62x39 (.300 BLK)	.308 Win. (.300 Ham'r)	.30-06	.300 WSM	.300 Win. Mag.	.300 PRC (.300 Wby.)	.338 Lapua	.350 Legend	.357 Mag. (.375 H&H)	.400 Legend	.44 Mag.	.450 Bush. (.45 Colt)	.45-70 Gov't	.400+ NE (.350 Rigby)
Marlin 1895 Dark Series	\$1,429																													•
Franchi Momentum All Terrain Elite	\$1,449																	•												
Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed	\$1,492	•				•		•		•	•		•	•	•			•	•		•	•								
Marlin 336 Trapper	\$1,499															•														
Marlin 1894 SBL	\$1,529																										•			
Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed SPR	\$1,545					•		•			•		•	•				•			•	•								
Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed LR	\$1,560					•		•		•	•		•	•							•	•								
Beretta BRX1	\$1,599					•												•			•									
Uberti 1873 Short Rifle Hunter	\$1,699																										•	(•)		
Weatherby 307 Adventure SD	\$1,799			(•) (•)		(•)		•	•	(•)			•						•		(•)									
Beretta BRX1 Carbon	\$1,899																				•									
Bergara B14 ² Crest Carbon	\$2,116					•		•					•					•			•									
Weatherby 307 Alpine GT	\$2,199	•		(•) (•)	•	(•)	•					(•)	•		•			•			•	•(•)								
Springfield Armory Waypoint 2020 Redline	\$2,299					•												•												
Christensen Modern Carbon	\$2,400					•		•					•					•			•	•								
Montana Rifle Co. Junction	\$2,495					•												•			•									
Sako 90 Hunter	\$2,499	•				•				•		•						•	•		•									
Sako 90 Bavarian	\$2,499											•									•		•	(•)						
Sako 90 Varmint	\$2,499	•				•																								
SIG Sauer Cross Magnum	\$2,500																				•									
Montana Rifle Co. Highline	\$2,595					•		•					•					•			•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Hell's Canyon McMillan LR	\$2,665					•		•			•	•	•	•	•						•	•								
Savage 110 Klym	\$2,699					•		•					•					•		•	•									
Browning X-Bolt Speed Carbon Fiber	\$2,728					•		•			•	•	•								•									
Sako 90 Adventure	\$2,899	•				•				•		•						•	•		•									
Benelli Lupo HPR	\$2,949					•		•										•			•	•	•							
NULA Model 20S	\$2,995																(•) (•)							•						
Bergara Premier MgMicro Lite	\$3,116					•		•										•												
Savage Ultralight Elite	\$3,299					•		•					•					•		•	•									
Savage Impulse Klym	\$3,309					•		•					•					•		•	•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Mountain Pro Carbon Fiber	\$3,791					•		•			•	•	•	•							•	•								
Sako 90 Peak	\$3,899	•				•				•		•						•	•		•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Pro McMill. Carbon Fiber	\$4,058					•		•			•		•					•			•	•								
Sako 90 Quest	\$4,499	•				•				•		•						•	•		•									
Rigby Big Game Lightweight	\$22,995																													(•)
Rigby Shikari Double	\$38,000																													•

Prices are suggested retail based on the best information we had at press time and reflect base price for the line; individual variants may cost more. The .400-plus Nitro Express cartridges include .450-400, .450, .470 and .500.

80, the company's take on a Scout rifle. It features a forward-mounted Picatinny rail; sights include a Williams peep rear and adjustable front. The 18-inch heavy-contour barrel has a muzzle brake and is finished in Graphite Black Cerakote, and the gun feeds from a detachable box magazine.

CZ

The big news from CZ this year is the launch of the new 600 American, a sophisticated bolt action with the look and feel of a classic sporting rifle. It offers CZ's push-feed 600 action with what CZ refers to as a "short extractor controlled feed" system that effectively prevents double feeds from the magazine. The magazine is removable, but when locked in place in the Turkish walnut stock it acts as an internal box magazine that allows for top loading.

The bolt has six locking lugs, and the walnut stock sports an elegant fleur-de-lis pattern. The safety operates vertically through the pistol grip, which will be something new for most shooters. The single-stage adjustable trigger is crisp and consistent, and the 20- or 24-inch cold-hammer-forged barrels are threaded for mounting muzzle devices.

Franchi

The Momentum Elite line of rifles adds two new chamberings: .30-06 and .450 Bushmaster. Both rifles have 22-inch free-floated, threaded barrels

and feature a Midnight Bronze Cerakote finish on the metalwork. The Elites have Relia triggers and incorporate a top rail for optics mounting. The rifle's Evolved Ergonom-X stock is finished in True Timber Camo and has a TSA recoil pad.

The new Momentum All-Terrain Elite, which is chambered to .308 in addition to .223, is profiled elsewhere in this issue.

The standard Momentum, with its Hunter Gray stock and blued metal finish, is now available in .30-06, .350 Legend and .450 Bushmaster.

Howa

The Howa M1500 action celebrates 45 years in production in 2024, and to celebrate the company is offering up several exciting new M1500 models. Fans of wood-stocked rifles will love the look of Howa's new M1500 Super Deluxe Walnut, which comes with a stylish Turkish walnut stock and contrasting laminate fore-end and grip caps. The Monte Carlo-style rollover cheekpiece and red recoil pad are extra touches that give this gun a very cool look.

Like other Howa rifles, it's a push-feed design featuring the HACT two-stage trigger, a machined receiver and forged bolt with a reliable M16-style extractor. Bolt faces are trued and square to the chamber. M1500s have a sub-m.o.a. accuracy guarantee with premium ammo.

Howa's 4.7-pound Superlite adds

an SB (short barrel) version. It shaves weight down to a barely-there 4.25 pounds, and that's thanks in large part to the carbon-fiber Stocky's Stock with AccuBlock bedding system that mates with the recoil lug on the action. The SB version is available with 16.25- or 20-inch barrels, and there's also a combo version with a Vortex Diamondback 3-9x40 scope mounted.

Marlin

New for 2024 is the launch of the 1894 lever gun. Marlin catalogs its rifles by series rather than model, and the 1894 lands in the Dark, SBL and Classic series lineups. The 1894 Classic features a beautiful black walnut stock and satin-blue finish on the metal. The .44 Mag. version has a 20.25-inch barrel, the .357 Mag. a 18.63-incher. Both are equipped with adjustable buckhorn rear sights and hooded gold bead front sights. The 1894 SBL has a gray laminate stock and stainless steel 16.1-inch barrel. It features an aperture sight and extended top rail for mounting optics.

Marlin Dark Series guns are making a comeback. This series features nylon-reinforced polymer stocks with M-Lok and QD cup attachment points for mounting accessories, a tritium/fiber optic front sight and aperture rear sight along with an extended optics rail. Their 16.17-inch barrels have muzzle brakes. The 1895 Dark rifle, which is profiled elsewhere in this issue, is chambered in .45-70 Gov't



**Franchi Momentum Elite
.450 Bushmaster**



Marlin 336 Trapper

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MOMENTUM ELITE RIFLE
Realtree[®] EXCAPE[™], Burnt Bronze Cerakote[®]

Experience the superior ergonomics and features that set the Momentum Elite bolt-action rifles above all others in their class. Control one of the few things you can on your next hunt – make sure you're carrying the right rifle.

MOMENTUM ELITE

while the 336 Dark is chambered in .30-30 Win.

New to the Trapper line this year is the Trapper 336, a stainless/gray laminate .30-30 lever gun with a short 16.17-inch barrel.

Montana Rifle Co.

The brand is now owned by Grace Engineering Corporation, and it has revived the Montana Rifle brand by offering two new guns: the Highline and Junction. The Highline features a McMillan Game Hunter synthetic stock and Burnt Bronze Cerakote finish while the Junction sports a beautiful Monte Carlo walnut stock with ebony fore-end cap and a Midnight Blue Cerakote finish. Both have 24-inch barrels that are threaded and have brakes installed.

These rifles are built on the new MRC 2022 receiver, which is an advancement over the original controlled-round feed found in the original Montana Rifle Co. guns. Machined from 416 stainless steel blanks at the Montana Rifle facility in Michigan, it employs the company's unique Adaptive Controlled Feed Technology—a controlled-round-feed action that allows you to single-load a cartridge into the chamber.

Mossberg

There are two noteworthy additions to the Patriot family of rifles. Both the Patriot Synthetic and Patriot Walnut are now available in .400 Legend. Both rifles

are push-feed and have 20-inch threaded barrels, the LBA adjustable trigger and detachable box magazines. The Synthetic model has a black injection-molded stock while the Walnut version features a wood stock.

New Ultralight Arms

When rifle maker Melvin Forbes retired, he sold his New Ultralight Arms (NULA) brand to Wilson Combat, which has created a revised versions of Forbes's original design. The first was the NULA 20, and for 2024 the company is launching the NULA 20S with an even smaller, lighter push-feed action. These sub-five-pound rifles have carbon-fiber stocks and adjustable Timney triggers in several short-action calibers. They feature Wilson's light contour 416R stainless threaded barrel, and the action and bolt are protected by an Armor-Lube DLC surface coating. The barrels feature an Armor-Tuff coating while the lightweight aluminum bottom metal is hard anodized.

Rigby

If you've inherited a large sum of cash or your stock portfolio is bursting at the seams, the Rigby Big Game Lightweight bolt action and Shikari double rifle are the two most expensive we've ever included in this roundup. The Big Game Lightweight is modeled after the pre-war Rigby expedition safari rifles. It's a combination of a German

Mausers 98 double-square-bridge action with three-position safety and a slim barrel with barrel band. The rear sights include an express island-style fixed and windage-adjustable folding leaf. The yellow-ramped front bead is adjustable for elevation. The stock is Grade 5 walnut with hand-checked panels, an oil finish and red rubber recoil pad.

The Shikari boxlock double rifle features an Anson & Deeley boxlock action with barrels that are regulated at 50 yards with the customer's choice of ammunition and barrel lengths. Grade 5 Turkish walnut with a London's Best hand oil finish comes standard, as does a Rigby grip-catch on the fore-end and classic quarter-rib sight with circle-jointed doll's head top extension. Do I own one? Heavens no, but a boy can dream. I was almost too afraid to even hold the Shikari at the launch event. Almost.

Rock River Arms

If you're a fan of straight-wall cartridges and AR rifles you'll appreciate the newest gun from Rock River Arms, the LAR-15M CAR A4 .350 Legend, which I reviewed in the last issue. It has a 16-inch chromoly barrel with a 1:16 twist and RRA Operator muzzle brake. Rock River's excellent two-stage trigger comes standard, and it's set inside RRA's oversize winter trigger guard for when you're hunting with gloves.

Furniture includes a Rock River CAR



**Mossberg Patriot Walnut
.400 Legend**



Ruger SFAR 6.5 Creedmoor



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Sub MOA accuracy, advanced ergonomics and recoil-reducing comfort are engineered into this innovative chassis-style rifle. Now, with the addition of Benelli's industry-leading BE.S.T. treatment, it is unmatched when it comes to corrosion and abrasion resistance in the field. To find out more, visit **Benelli USA.com**.

Operator six-position adjustable stock, A2 pistol grip and 13-inch extended lightweight aluminum handguard. The low-profile gas block and carbine-length gas system offer excellent reliability. The full-length top rail offers plenty of room for mounting optics, and the M-Lok attachment points allow hunters to configure their rifle as they wish. The gun ships with a 10-round magazine.

Ruger

Ruger didn't Radically change the original American rifle when it launched the new Generation II version. The new version still features a one-piece CNC machined stainless steel bolt with three locking lugs and a short bolt lift, Ruger Marksman adjustable trigger and Ruger's Power Bedding integral bedding block, and a cold-hammer-forged barrel.

The Gen II stocks have interchangeable combs and length-of-pull spacers. The rifle ships with a low comb and 13.75-inch length of pull, but other comb heights and a kit to adjust length of pull to 12.75 or 13.25 inches are available at SHOPRUGER.COM. An improved bolt knob geometry makes it easier to operate the action, and the Gen II gets a tang-mounted three-position safety.

The Standard Gen II gets a gray splatter-pattern polymer stock while the Ranch's splatter-pattern stock is tan and the Predator's is green. Barrels on the Gen II are fluted, threaded and come

with a removable muzzle brake but no thread protector. The metal is treated to a Cerakote finish. The bolt is spiral fluted as well.

All Gen II rifles feed from detachable magazines—AI, AR, single-stack or flush-fit depending upon model—and all are equipped with Picatinny rails for mounting optics. Standard models have 20-inch barrels, Ranches' are 16.1 inches and the barrels on the Predator version are 22 inches.

There's another new release that will catch the attention of hunters: The SFAR is now available in 6.5 Creedmoor. The SFAR, or Small Frame AR, is considerably smaller than other .308-sized ARs, making it much more practical for hunters and shooters. It has a 20-inch barrel.

There are currently two models available, one with a Magpul MOE SL stock and another with a Magpul PRS Lite stock. All feature 15-inch M-Lok aluminum handguards, chrome-lined 8620 steel bolt carriers, nitride-processed gas keys that are staked in place, Ruger two-port Bommer muzzle brakes, and 4140 chromoly cold hammer-forged barrels with 5R rifling.

Sako

It's big news anytime this historic brand offers up a new rifle. The Sako 90 is an evolution of its time-tested bolt-action rifle design. The broached, flat-bottom receiver offers ultra-smooth cycling and the receiver is designed to

reduce torsional twisting and maintain rigidity.

The firing system features a 1.3 millisecond lock time, and the adjustable trigger is extremely light and crisp. Barrels are cold hammer-forged, and Sako makes certain all crowned barrels are geometrically uniform.

The 90 Peak has a lightweight Sako 3D-meshed carbon-fiber stock to keep weight below six pounds. Also new is the Model 90 Quest. It has an adjustable carbon-fiber stock that's more target-centric, but weight remains around 6.6 pounds. The rugged 90 Adventure comes with an adjustable fiberglass stock and Tungsten Cerakote finish.

But Sako hasn't forsaken fans of wood-stocked rifles. The 90 Hunter, which is featured elsewhere in this issue, sports a classic select walnut stock. There's also a 90 Bavarian wood-stock model complete with European touches like rounded comb and schnabel fore-end—plus iron sights. The Varmint model features an attractive birch laminate stock with a wide fore-end.

Savage Arms

Savage has teamed up with Proof Research and FBT stocks to bring us the 110 Klym. It's built on blueprinted, lightweight stainless steel 110 actions with Blackout Cerakote finish. The stainless steel bolts have a diamond fluting. The Proof threaded carbon-fiber barrel is cut-rifled and has an Omniport brake.



Sako 90 Peak



Savage 110 Ultralight Elite



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A testament to Unrivaled Innovation and unparalleled precision. Crafted for the discerning shooter, it's more than just a rifle, it's a trusted companion in every adventure. Embrace the journey with Seekins Precision - where innovation meets excellence



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The carbon-fiber FBT thumbhole stock offers a one-touch adjustable comb and dual sling studs as well as a MagnaSwitch attachment point. Weight ranges from six to 6.4 pounds depending upon caliber. Other features include an AccuTrigger that's adjustable from 1.5 to four pounds, three-position tang-mounted safety, 20 m.o.a. rail, detachable magazine and a threaded carbon-fiber bolt handle.

There's also an Impulse Klym rifle, which employs Savage's sleek Impulse straight-pull action for a fast-cycling, deadly accurate mountain-weight rifle.

The Klym rifles aren't all that's new. The 110 Ultralite Elite rifle offers many of the same features as the 110 Klym—like a blueprinted 110 action, Proof Research barrel with Omnibrake—and pairs them with an exclusive MDT HNT26 folding chassis. By folding the stock you can reduce overall length of the rifle by nine inches. The MDT chassis features a carbon-fiber fore-end with M-Lok attachment points and an Arca rail, and it also comes with a carbon-fiber pistol grip and buttstock. The buttstock has a bag cutout and is adjustable for comb height and length of pull.

If you're looking to spend less than \$2,700 on a hunting rifle, Savage also offers the new 110 Trail Hunter. This gun combines a 110 action and button-rifled, threaded barrel with a rugged Hogue overmolded OD green stock. A detachable magazine, two-piece Weaver

bases and a 2.5- to six-pound adjustable AccuTrigger come standard. Metal is finished in Tungsten Cerakote.

SIG Sauer

SIG's Cross is now available in .300 Win. Mag. With a user-interchangeable 24-inch medium-contour 5R rifled stainless steel barrel with a threaded muzzle and brake, it features a SIG Precision adjustable side-folding stock with a Coyote Brown finish. When folded, it reduces overall length to just 36 inches. The various stock adjustments make it simple to size the gun for a perfect fit.

The receiver has a top rail for mounting optics. A free-floating, full-length Arca handguard with M-Lok attachment points is out front, and the PRS-style pistol grip has a right-side thumb rest. It feeds from AICS magazines, and a metal six-rounder ships with the rifle. The two-stage match trigger is crisp and clean. Despite its accuracy-enhancing features it weighs in at a manageable 8.9 pounds unloaded.

Smith & Wesson

The company surprised the industry this year by launching a new lever-action hunting rifle. It's known as the 1854, and it comes in two varieties. The standard model is chambered to .44 Mag. and it has a unique, detachable nine-round magazine tube. The 410 stainless steel barrel and steel receiver get a silver finish; sighting systems

include an aperture rear and gold bead front plus a and Picatinny rail. The black polymer stock is M-Lok compatible and includes sling studs.

There's also a Limited Edition 1854 (only 1,854 will be made; get it?) It features a high-grade satin finish fore-end and buttstock, and it boasts a striking black PVD metal finish. It's a stunner, and it commands a premium price: \$3,849. We didn't put this one on the price chart because there may or may not be any left by the time you read this. But we're saying there's a chance, so if it's of interest, don't delay.

Springfield Armory

Springfield has followed up on its lightweight Waypoint 2020 bolt gun by making it even lighter. The new Waypoint 2020 Redline utilizes the Waypoint action, which is equipped with a fluted bolt with dual locking lugs and an action that's machined following heat treating and features a silky smooth EDM'd raceway.

Springfield combines the action with a lightweight, durable Grayboe Trekker stock that's adjustable from 13.25 to 14.25 inches—and up to 16 inches with optional spacers. The stock alone weighs a scant 28 ounces and has not only a trio of sling swivel studs but also an integrated bubble level.

The barrels are carbon fiber with a Springfield radial muzzle brake, and they're offered in either 16 or 20



**Smith & Wesson 1854
Limited Edition**

Taurus Expedition

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



inches, making them perfectly suited for suppressors. The 16-inch version of the Redline weighs in at six pounds, so it can truly be considered a mountain rifle. It's also backed by a 0.75 m.o.a. accuracy guarantee.

Taurus

It might be surprising to see Taurus listed among this year's hunting rifle manufacturers, but the company's new Expedition rifle is well-appointed, accurate and a great value. Initially available only in .308 Win., it has an 18-inch threaded steel barrel, and the unique spiral pattern on the barrel is a remnant of the hammer forging process.

The Expedition uses a Remington 700 action footprint, and its gray polymer stock offers lots of intelligent touches like a built-in bag rider and M-Lok, Spartan Precision attachment point. The receiver and barrel are stainless steel and treated to a black DLC coating. They feed from AICS magazines. Unloaded weight is right around seven pounds, and overall length is under 38 inches.

Tikka

This year the company introduced three versions of the Tikka T3x Ranch. The Roughtech Ranch rifle has a black Roughtech stock and 16- or 20-inch barrel. The new Ranahan Ranch also has a Roughtech stock, in tan, with interchangeable small, medium and large grip inserts. Battue sights sit atop the 20-inch cold-hammer-forged, fluted, threaded barrel. The new Drover Ranch

has a 20-inch fluted cold-hammer-forged barrel with battue sights and 5/8x24 threads. Its Roughtech stock is green. The Drover is also equipped with a detachable 10-round box magazine. All incorporate Tikka's integral 17mm optics rail, oversize bolt knobs and a crisp, adjustable trigger.

Uberti

The new 1873 adds a level of practicality to one of the most popular firearm designs of all time. The engineers at Uberti designed the new 1873 Short Rifle Hunter's barrel with an octagonal rear section that acts as an interface for a forward-mounted rail section, so now you can mount optics on the "Gun That Won The West." The metalwork has a black finish, except for the lever, which is color case-hardened. The rifle features an A-grade walnut stock, and the tubular magazine holds 10 rounds of .44 Mag. or .45 Colt. The 20-inch round/octagon barrel keeps overall length to a manageable 38.9 inches.

Weatherby

New this year is the Model 307 Adventure SD, a rifle that will speak to the Weatherby purist with a fancy walnut monte carlo stock with rosewood grip cap and fore-end, and maple spacers and a maple diamond on the grip. The metalwork features a Graphite Black Cerakote finish, and the fluted, threaded barrels are topped with a detachable muzzle brake.

The 307 Alpine CT blends a hand-

painted Peak 44 Bastion carbon-fiber stock with a 307 action and threaded BSF carbon-fiber barrel. It has a TriggerTech trigger, hinged floorplate and directional self-timing muzzle brake.

Weatherby also rounded out its Vanguard line with the Spike Camp and Obsidian models. The Spike Camp has a Boyds thumbhole laminate stock paired with a Vanguard action and threaded, fluted No. 3 contour 20-inch barrel. The receiver and action receive a Tungsten Cerakote finish while the bolt, bolt handle, and safety are Graphite Black Cerakoted. Vanguard Obsidian rifles wear a black polymer Monte Carlo stock and a blued receiver and barrel.

Winchester

Introduced in 2015, the XPR was Winchester's first new rifle action since the Model 70 in 1936. This year, several XPRs are adding the .400 Legend chambering. The XPR Scope Combo comes with a Vortex Crossfire II 3-9x40 scope, while the XPR Suppressor Ready rifle has a threaded barrel.

The XPR is also now available in left-handed models. The Left-Handed SR is suppressor ready, while the XPR Extreme Left-Handed True Timber Midnight sports a stylish gray and black camo stock.

Winchester's XPR rifles incorporate an M.O.A. trigger system and a nickel-Teflon coated three-lug bolt. They feature detachable box magazines and a locking safety with separate bolt unlock button. ■



Uberti 1873 Hunter

**Winchester XPR Extreme
True Timber Midnight LH**



Remington 700 Short Action Footprint | 60-degree head

3-lug interchangeable bolt head

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A RIFLESHOOTER'S RIFLE

by J. Scott Rupp

THE SAKO 90 HUNTER LOOKS LIKE A MILLION BUCKS AND INCORPORATES THE SMALL DETAILS THAT MAKE A GOOD GUN GREAT.



You'll have to forgive me if I've told this story before, because I may have. When I was a wet-behind-the-ears assistant editor at *American Rifleman* magazine—and way more a hunter/shooter than a “gun guy”—I had the good fortune to have the late, great NRA technical editor Pete Dickey as my mentor. He'd hold court every morning before work, and

I'd pester him endlessly about various hunting rifles I was thinking about buying. “Scotty,” he finally said, squinting through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, “just get a Sako .308.”

A couple of Sakos have passed through my hands since then—a 75 and an 85—and both made me appreciate what Pete was talking about. I'm even more impressed with the new Sako 90 Hunter, a traditional beauty that show-

cases both the company's craftsmanship and its forward-thinking designs.

The Sako 90 represents the latest iteration of the brand's hunting rifle. It's available in several models, including the synthetic-stocked Quest, Quest Ultra, Peak and Adventure, and the wood-stocked Varmint, Bavarian and Hunter.

The Hunter is available in black or stainless. However, we received word just before we went to press that the

stainless version won't be imported into the United States, although that's what they sent me to test.

The stock is a real looker, 2.5 grade select walnut that on my sample showed beautiful figuring on the butt and fore-end. The checkering on both was well-executed. The comb is ever so slightly raised, and it has a gentle forward slope. The left side exhibits a gracefully carved cheekpiece, and the butt features the classic red rubber pad with black spacer.

The stock's wrist has a nice curve to it, and it's comfortably hand-filling, with a small palm swell on the right side and the Sako logo on the grip base.

The fore-end gently rounds into a relatively flat bottom. It feels good in the hands and sits nicely on a bag or pack.

The barrel on my .308 sample measures 22 inches long, with a sporter contour that tapers from 1.125 inches in diameter in front of the receiver to 0.65

inch at the target-crowned muzzle. But it turns out Sako sent me a pre-production sample, and the barrels on production models are threaded M15x1 and come with a 5/8x24 adapter.

The barrel is cold hammer forged, a process that produces consistent, smooth bores, and a look at the 90 Hunter's with a borescope showed it to be pristine indeed. The finish is matte, so you won't get glare in the field, and it looks fantastic against the walnut.

There are two receiver types for the Sako 90. Most versions have a Picatinny rail, while the Hunter has the company's Optilock scope-mounting system. Regardless of type, the receiver is a flat-bottom design, sculpted on the left side to shave weight. That flat is engraved with the model and serial number.

The action has been redesigned from the 85 to provide more torsional stability. The 85 had an open ejection port

while the 90's is partially enclosed. It's not as crowded as some designs of this kind, and the port's edges are gracefully beveled. I think it strikes a nice balance of allowing easy access to the chamber while still providing the added rigidity of a partially enclosed receiver.

The forward action screw threads into the recoil lug, and the lug in turn fits into a cut in the stock. This cut is reinforced with a metal plate that extends about 1.75 inches forward of the lug. To my way of thinking, this should help prevent point-of-impact changes due to changes in humidity—as a portion of the barrel is resting on the plate and not the wood. It's almost but not quite glass bedding or bedding block.

The Sako 85 was controlled-round feed, but the 90 action is a push feed. It retains the three-lug design for a short lift, as well as the claw extractor, but instead of the fixed blade ejector of the 75 and 85 you've got twin plunger ejectors opposite the extractor for positive ejection. This design comes from Sako's TRG action, which has been embraced by the tactical world for its dependability.

The Sako action sizes are tailored to specific cartridge families. This approach provides the shortest, most efficient bolt travel so you're not hauling the bolt way back on, say, a .243 Win. that has a .30-06-length action. Optimizing receiver length also means you don't have to carry more weight than necessary.

The bolt's three lugs are machined to match the receiver's broached raceway, a sort of ridge/valley profile that minimizes contact but keeps the bolt running smooth and true. Like the receiver sizes, the lugs are optimized so each caliber group has maximum lug surface area, furnishing the appropriate amount of locking strength.

The bolt is easily disassembled for maintenance. Sako supplies a cocking tool that fits over the shroud. With the tool positioned on the shroud, push the shroud release button and twist the shroud clockwise—maintaining control of the parts since they're under spring pressure.

Clean and lubricate and reassemble in reverse order. Note that reinstalling



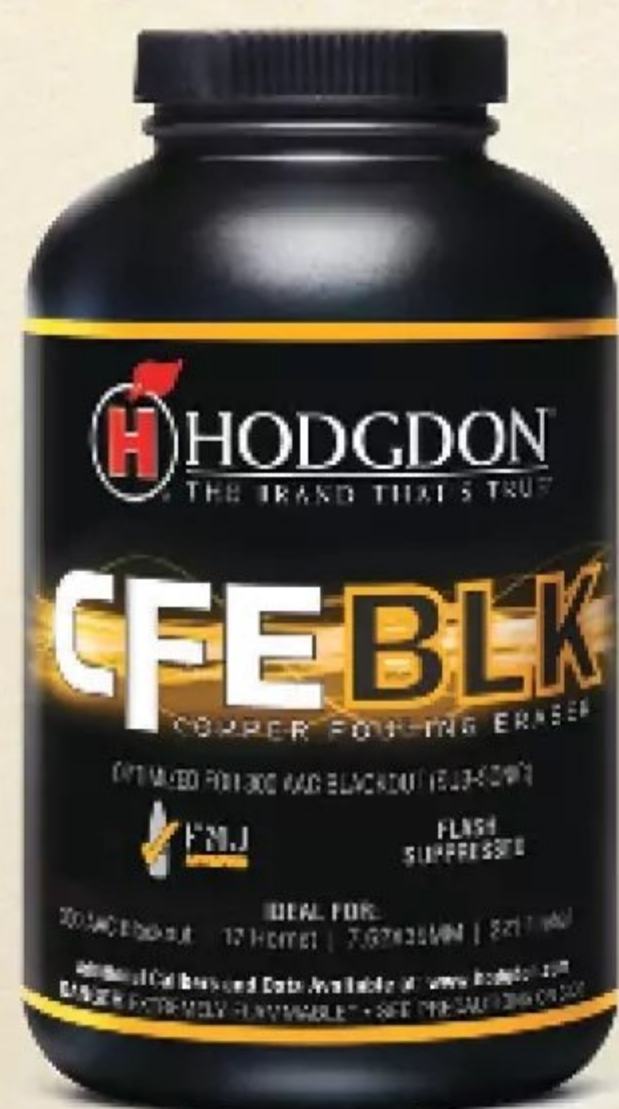
The 90's action is partially enclosed for increased rigidity, and the Hunter version features the Optilock scope-mounting system. The rifle employs a two-position bolt-locking safety with unlock button. Note the company doesn't plan on importing the stainless version here.



The adjustable trigger has five preset pull weights that can be changed without removing the barreled action. Loosening a set screw in the finger lever allows it to move on its rail to customize trigger reach.

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the bolt requires the safety to be in the Fire position.

The safety is a two-position bolt-locking design, and there's a bolt unlock lever forward of the safety so you can open the bolt with the safety engaged. A silver tab with a red dot protrudes from the rear of the bolt shroud when the rifle is cocked.

The trigger is really something. First off, it's adjustable, which isn't uncommon these days, but two things stand out. One, it's externally adjustable and

two, it offers five different preset trigger pull weights, denoted by white hash marks of differing widths on the black adjustment screw.

It comes set on the middle/third mark, and the average pull weight on my sample at this mark was two pounds, three ounces. The lightest setting/smallest hash mark averaged one pound, six ounces; the second lightest was one pound, 12 ounces; the fourth was two pounds, nine ounces; and the fifth, heaviest setting came in at three

pounds, three ounces. The adjustment screw is accessed through a hole in the trigger guard, and Sako provides a long Torx wrench with a polymer grip to accomplish this. And lo and behold, it's the same Torx size as the action screws, which is super convenient.

It gets better. If you pull the barreled action, you'll find the trigger finger lever has a small set screw in it. If you loosen this, you can move the finger lever forward and back on its bar to customize trigger reach. There's about 0.3 inch of adjustment. Sako doesn't provide a wrench for this, but it's a standard 2mm Allen bit.

I'm sure I've seen this before on competition rifles, but I can't recall off-hand if I've seen it on a hunting rifle. All I can say is it's a truly welcome feature and another indication of how much thought went into the Sako 90.

The rifle feeds from a detachable box magazine secured by the company's Total Control latch, which made its debut on the Sako 85. It's ingenious, but there's a trick to it. If you simply press



The stock is select 2.5 grade walnut. The butt has a slightly raised cheekpiece and red rubber pad. This sample showed excellent figuring.



The detachable box magazine holds five rounds and is secured via Sako's Total Control latch. The magazine must be pushed in before operating the release, a system that ensures the mag can't fall out accidentally.

SPECIFICATIONS	
SAKO 90 HUNTER	
TYPE	3-lug bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	.243, 6.5 Creedmoor, .270 Win., 7mm Rem. Mag., .308 (tested), .30-06, .300 Win. Mag.
CAPACITY	5+1 (as tested)
BARREL	22 in. stainless (as tested, not imported here); threaded M15x1 w/5/8x24 adapter (per specs)
OVERALL LENGTH	42.25 in.
WEIGHT	7 lb., 2 oz.
STOCK	2.5 grade walnut, red rubber butt pad
TRIGGER	single-stage adjustable for weight and position; 2 lb., 3 oz. pull (measured, middle position)
SIGHTS	none; Optilock scope mount system
SAFETY	two position bolt-locking w/bolt unlock button
PRICE	\$2,499
MANUFACTURER	Sako, SAKO.GLOBAL/HUNTING

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the latch, it won't budge. What you have to do is push inward on the magazine first, which frees the latch for operation. It works best for me to wrap my left hand around the receiver, thumb across the top, and press in on the mag with all four fingers while my right index finger works the latch.

The benefit here is obvious: There's no chance the magazine is going to fall out accidentally. The possibilities of this happening with other designs are small, but they're not zero, and the Total Control latch gives you the peace of mind that your magazine is secure.

The magazine can easily be top-loaded, which is important to me. Granted, I'm used to internal magazines with hinged floorplates, and snapping more rounds into the ejection port is familiar. But I think it's also faster—and easier to keep your vision downrange—than even



The bolt now boasts two plunger ejectors instead of a fixed blade.

swapping an empty mag for a full one. And if you have to eject your one and only mag in order to reload it, well that's super slow.

When I ordered the test rifle, my contact at Sako asked if I needed bases and rings. I figured I didn't because I had a set of Optilocks on hand from a previous project. Thankfully he sent rings and bases anyway because my older Optilock bases didn't work on the 90.

The receivers on the 85 had a tapered 17mm dovetail while the 90's dovetail is straight. The benefit here is that while the 85 Optilocks required action-specific bases, with the 90 any new-style Optilock base will fit the dovetail—regardless of receiver size or chambering.

I mounted a Burris Veracity PH 4-20x50mm on the 90 Hunter for range testing. As I mentioned, I've shot a Sako 75 and an 85 in the past. The 75—a .280 Rem. I still kick myself for not buying—was a real tack-driver. The 85 was just okay. So I was anxious to see what the 90 would do. In a word, it was great.

As you can see in the accompanying table, of five loads, three were under an inch, one was right there, and only one was significantly over. The trigger was everything Sako promised and more—light and perhaps the crispest, cleanest-breaking factory trigger I've shot.

The Sako 90's fire-control system boasts a 1.3 millisecond lock time—the time that elapses between when the sear is released and the firing pin strikes the primer. The faster the lock time, the less chance a minuscule change in your hold can influence the shot. I could go way into the weeds explaining this concept,

but I'll just say it does actually matter, and it's one of the small details that Sako sweats to produce the best possible rifle.

The action is everything Sako says it is. It's incredibly smooth and incredibly fast to operate. Why does smooth and fast matter? Fast is self-explanatory; there are times you need to get a follow-up shot down the bore in a hurry. The smoother an action is, the less force you have to apply to operate it, and with less force it's easier to keep the rifle on target—recoil notwithstanding. I can't remember the last time I worked an action I liked this much.

At seven pounds, two ounces, the 90 Hunter is not a quote-unquote mountain rifle. Sako has other 90 versions to satisfy those looking for a super-light gun. While the scope I paired it with weighs a hefty 29 ounces—taking total gun weight to nine pounds, four ounces—if you hung a lighter scope on it you could shave as much as a pound. Then you'd have a rifle tipping the scales at a bit over eight pounds, and that's the type of gun most of us have been carrying all our lives.

Everybody seems to be ultralight-crazy these days, and I do appreciate lighter rifles. But there's absolutely still a place for "normal" weight rifles. They carry just fine, and while the Sako might not be my first choice for lung-busting death marches above tree line in the Rockies, it would be right at home in any of the places the majority of us actually hunt—the Eastern hardwoods, Southern tree stands, the plains and foothills of the Midwest and West.

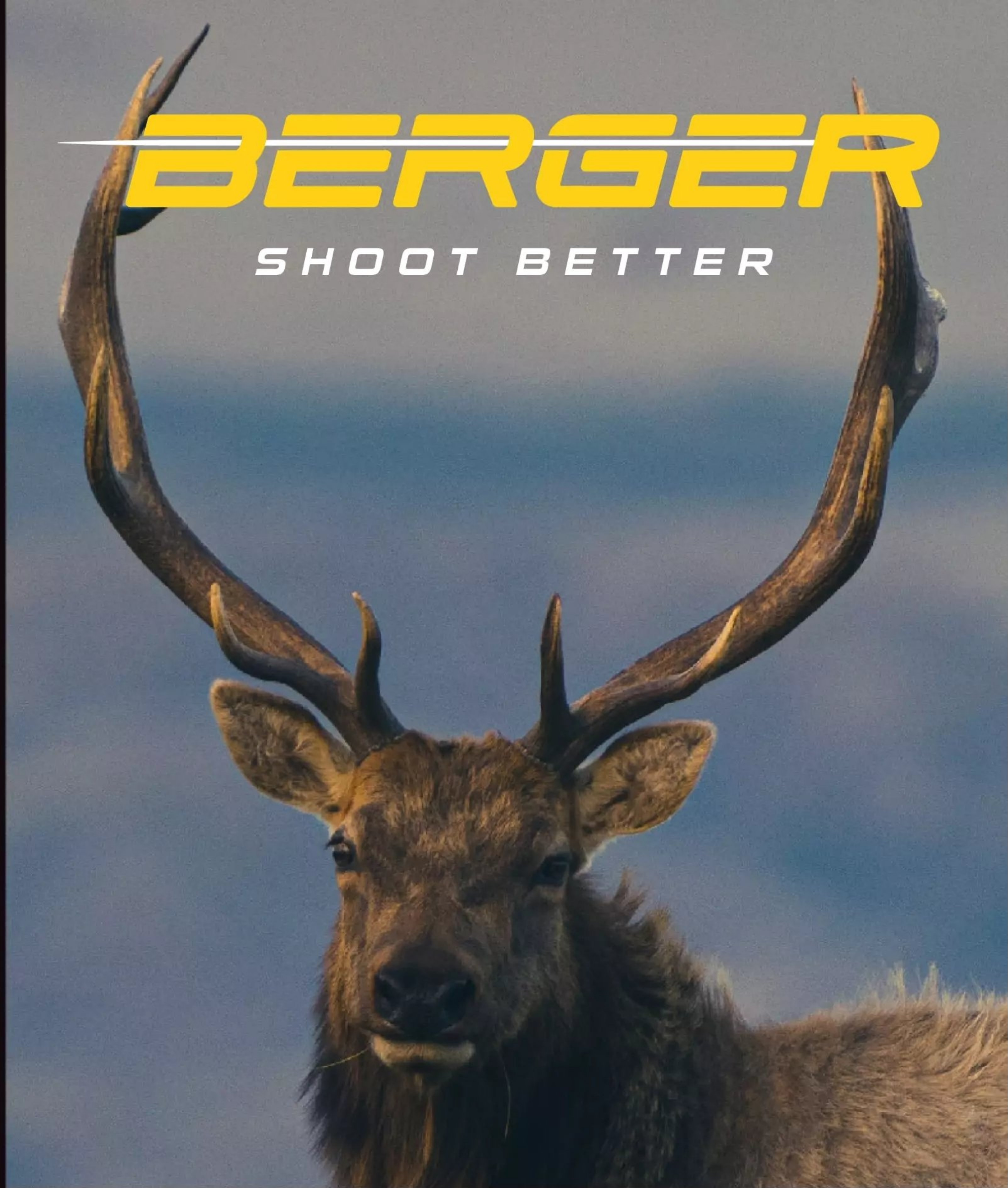
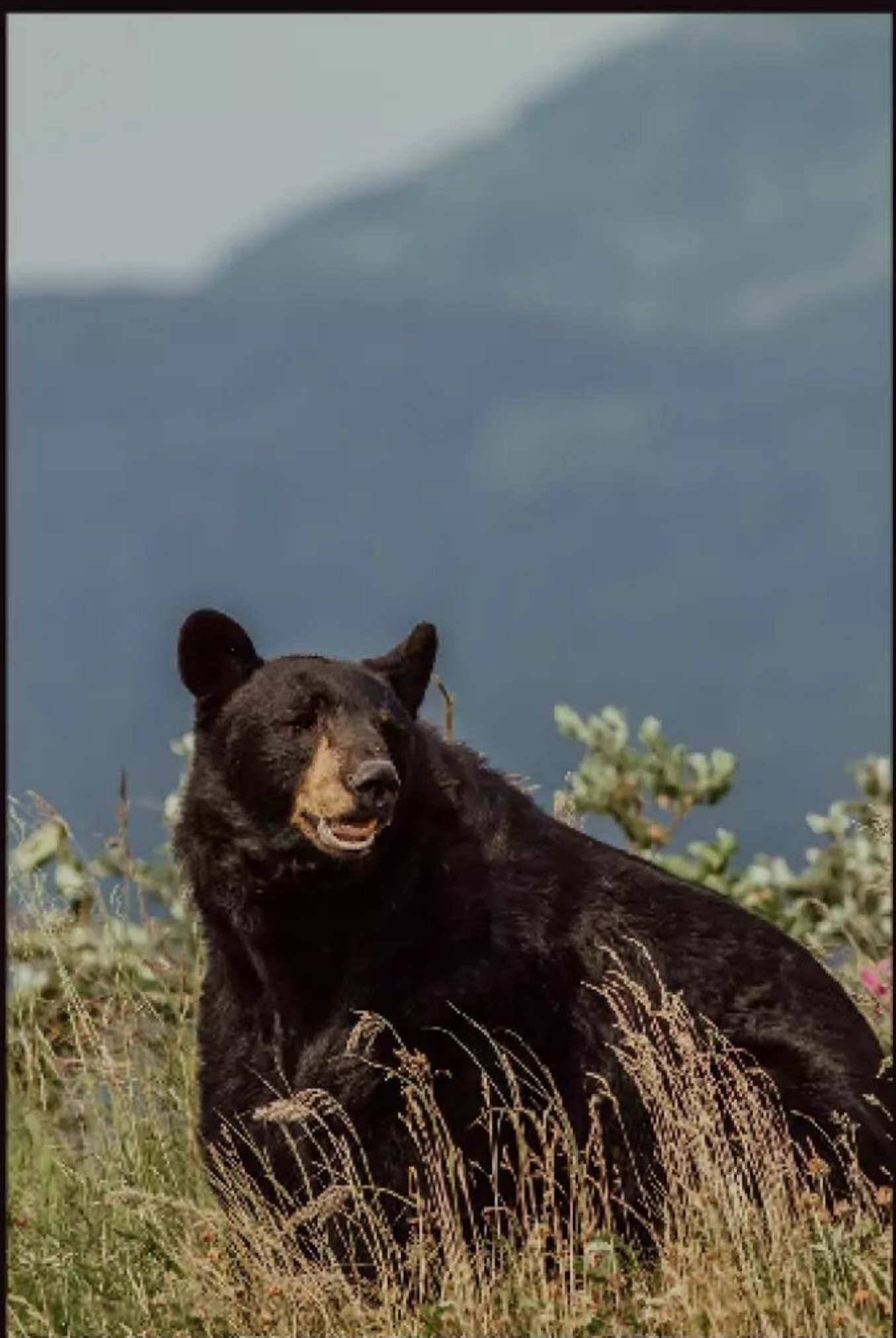
For years, the Winchester Model 70 was considered "the rifleman's rifle," but a lot of water has passed under the bridge since that was the case—if it ever truly was. I do apologize for circumstances beyond my control that the rifle Sako sent doesn't exactly match up with what you can buy here, but if I had to nominate a modern production gun for the "rifleman's rifle" title, the Sako 90 Hunter would be a top choice.

It's nothing fancy per se, just an incredibly well-engineered and well-executed hunting rifle with all the performance, accuracy and good looks you could want.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
SAKO 90 HUNTER				
.308 Win.	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Norma BondStrike	180	2,534	27	0.64
Federal Terminal Ascent	180	2,533	11	0.79
Hornady Precision Hunter	178	2,520	19	0.97
Fiocchi Hyperformance/Hornady SST	150	2,808	28	1.06
Black Hills Dual Purpose	152	2,747	19	1.43
Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups at 100 yards from a Caldwell Fire Control rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Temperature, 35 degrees; elevation, 4,900 feet				

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BETTING ON BULLETS

by Craig Boddington



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Whether you're trying to drop the buck of a lifetime in your back 40 or hoping to anchor a big bull elk on the next ridge, it's the bullet that does the most important work. Whatever you're hunting, the bullet must be right for the task. This is not a simple decision. Today we are blessed with an amazing array of projectiles—and accompanying hype that can make decisions difficult.

Fortunately, bullet making today is highly advanced, their designs greatly aided by computerized modeling. I doubt there are any “bad” bullets out there today, and I also doubt that any are perfect for all seasons and all reasons. As the ancient knight says in “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade,” “Choose wisely.”

American rifle shooters are traditionally fixated on accuracy and velocity. Both are good, but they're not necessarily the end-all under all circumstances.

If you're trying to win a benchrest match or compete in a long-range discipline, then accuracy sort of is everything. In hunting, though, just hitting a target isn't enough. Sure, you need enough accuracy to get your bullet into the vital zone of your game, but once it gets there, it needs to penetrate deeply and do enough damage to ensure a quick, humane demise.

The size of the vital zone and the amount of penetration required vary widely. A deer's chest area is not a small target. An elk or a moose offers a huge target.

In other words, it's okay to sacrifice a bit of accuracy in favor of a bullet that you are certain will penetrate and do its most important job on the animal in question. This can be a hard choice because accuracy builds confidence, and I want more accuracy than I need because confidence is essential when the chips are down.

It depends on what I'm hunting. For prairie dogs, there's no such thing as too much accuracy, and I want frangible bullets so any hit does the job. Deer-size game is different, larger game more different still. You must have enough accuracy for your range

envelope, whatever it might be, but bullet performance comes first.

Velocity is good because it increases energy yield, but it can be the arch-enemy of bullet performance. At the extremes, a bullet that expands well and holds together at, say, 2,500 fps impact velocity may be an unreliable bomb if it's 1,000 fps faster on impact. The opposite can also be true. An expanding bullet that performs well at high velocity may upset much less—even act like a non-expanding solid—after it has slowed down.

I don't recommend hunting with any match bullets. They often expand too quickly, especially at high velocity. Worse, since they aren't designed for hunting, they are inconsistent, and their performance depends on what they encounter. But because their accuracy is seductively tempting, some hunters use them, and a few swear by them.

But the current interest in long-range shooting and the trend toward longer, heavier, low-drag bullets has thrown us a bone. The best way to overcome weakness in bullet construction is to use heavier bullets. Sheer bullet mass matters on game, and heavier bullets cannot be pushed as fast, so some bullet-eating velocity is out of the equation.

The 168-grain .30 caliber is a classic match bullet. Today we have .30 caliber match bullets of 225 grains and heavier for fast-twist barrels. Like I said, I don't suggest hunting with any match bullet, but if you must, I submit that heavy-for-caliber bullets have more going for them on impact.

In my experience, the most accurate non-match bullets are good old cup-and-core bullets: copper jackets over a lead core, what I've long called “plain old bullets.” They're simple and easy to make accurate. Good examples include Sierra GameKing and Winchester Power-Point. They aren't fancy, but they are designed for hunting, usually with thicker jackets than match bullets.

Those two have exposed lead at the tip, but many cup-and-core bullets have polymer or metal tips. On impact, the tip is driven down into the bullet, initiating expansion. Aside from looking sexy, tipped bullets have the advantage of not becoming misshapen

due to battering in the magazine like exposed-lead tips can.

Some cup-and-core bullets have mechanical features that lock core and jacket together. Remington's Core-Lokt was introduced clear back in 1939, Hornady's InterLock in 1977. This locking aids in weight retention.

All cup-and-core bullets are relatively quick-expanding. During penetration, a fair amount of lead is likely to be wiped away. If recovered, these bullets often aren't "pretty." My old friend, the late Chub Eastman, fielded many customer calls during his years at Nosler. When dealing with a hunter unhappy with the appearance of a recovered bullet, Chub would ask, "Sir, can you please tell me, at what point in the death of the animal did the bullet fail?"

If you like to recover perfectly mushroomed, "pretty" bullets, cup-and-core bullets are likely not your cup of tea. But they work because they provide excellent accuracy and good expansion.

Despite the availability of many

more modern designs, I still do a lot of hunting with a variety of cup-and-core bullets. I do consider them somewhat velocity-sensitive. However, in fast magnums this is easily mitigated by stepping up in weight, which is always a good idea with larger game.

For deer-size game, I might use 140-grain 7mm bullets and 150-grain .30 caliber bullets. For elk or African plains game, I usually step up to 7mm bullets in the 160s and 180 grains in .30 caliber.

For years, my go-to load in the .30-06 has been the 180-grain Hornady InterLock. There isn't much one can't do with a 180-grain .30 caliber, but you can take another step up. I had a .300 H&H that just loved the 200-grain GameKing, a fast-opening bullet that's usually quite accurate. With that extra weight, it produced awesome performance up to elk and larger African antelopes.

When I was doing a lot of hunting with the 8mm Rem. Mag. I usually used 220-grain GameKings. I pushed them fast, and they often weren't

pretty, but with that much weight they always worked well.

Today I'm staying on the same page. In both .300 Win. Mag. and .300 Wby. Mag. I'm hunting mostly with Hornady's 200-grain ELD-X. I haven't recovered one that's particularly pretty, but they shoot well and take game effectively, no doubt aided by the extra weight.

Since penetration deeply into, if not completely through, the vitals is mandatory for hunting bullets, let's talk about that. Penetration with long-proven cup-and-core bullets is generally adequate. Just how deep depends on velocity, weight for caliber, and the size of the animal—plus how much bone and heavy muscle the bullet encounters. Since expansion is large and weight loss is typical, these bullets are likely to remain inside the animal, rather than provide through-and-through penetration and exit wounds.

Some hunters like exit wounds, on the theory that a larger exit wound creates a better blood trail. That's true, but there's an opposite theory holding that a bullet that expends all its energy within the animal, rather than wasting what's left on rocks and trees beyond, is better.

Both have validity. When I was young, I wanted penetration. Today, I lean more toward the second school. Although it's impossible to orchestrate consistently, I love to find bullets "under the hide on the far side." Neither is right or wrong; it depends on your preference.

Since upset or mushroom is considerable, and some—often much—bullet weight is lost, the cup-and-core bullets cannot be the deepest-penetrating bullets. Neither can bonded-core bullets, which offer the largest upset of any expanding bullets.

The bonded-core bullet has its lead core chemically bonded to the jacket. This allows greater expansion and better weight retention because bonding prevents the lead from wiping away. Bullet expansion is good, and it creates a large wound channel. However, the more a bullet expands, the more resistance is created, and this reduces



Cup-and-core bullets are going to shed some weight, and it's not uncommon for jacket and core to separate. But they're hard to beat for most deer-size game in most conditions.

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penetration. However, the increased resistance is offset by greater retained weight that drives the bullet.

Bill Steigers's Bitterroot was the first bonded-core bullet, followed by Jack Carter's Trophy Bonded Bear Claw. Today there are many: Federal Fusion, Trophy Bonded Tipped and Trophy Bonded Bear Claw; Hornady InterBond and DGX Bonded; Nosler AccuBond; Remington Core-Lokt Bonded; and Swift A-Frame and Scirocco.

If you like to recover gorgeous bullets, you'll love bonded-core bullets. Weight retention does vary. The Swift A-Frame has a dual core with the front core bonded and the rear core protected by a wall of jacket material. Weight retention into high 90 percent is common, with large upset. The rest vary, but weight retention can range from maybe 75 to above 90 percent, depending largely on what the bullet encounters. Across the board, this is more weight than cup-and-core bullets will usually retain.

If bonded-core bullets are that good, why would anyone hunt with anything else? Now we're into compromises. Bonded-core bullets are more expensive, often not the most accurate and usually not the most aerodynamic. However, they work so well on game—especially large, tough game—that these may be acceptable trade-offs.

On the other hand, if you like through-and-through penetration, you won't like these, either. Ultimate for penetration is the full metal jacket or "solid." Since they don't expand, they leave caliber-size exits. They're actually illegal for hunting in many U.S. states, and their only hunting purpose is elephants, hippos and rhinos.

There are just two expanding bullets that I see as penetrating bullets likely to deliver consistent exit wounds: the Nosler Partition and the homogeneous alloy or "copper" bullet.

Invented in 1948 by John Nosler, the Partition is legendary. It is dual-core, with a rear core protected by a wall or "partition" of jacket material. Partitions are rarely pretty when recov-

ered. The front core expands and some lead wipes away, while the rear core often acts like a mini-solid and continues to drive. Weight retention may not be 60 percent, but the Partition is a sound, deep-penetrating bullet.

Its reputation is that it's not especially accurate, but you never know. I hunted with 180-grain .30 caliber Partitions for years, and they were accurate in the .30-06 I was shooting back then. Partitions also shot well in both a .338 Win. Mag. and .340 Wby. Mag. I used in the 1980s and '90s.

I'm headed to Alaska soon for brown bear, and I'm taking a .338 barrel on my Blaser R8. I had several

lighter bullets in my stash, but the only 250-grain loads on hand were Nosler Custom with Partitions that had been loaded for Diana Rupp and acquired from her husband (our editor) in an ammo swap.

Back in '92 I shot a big bear in Kamchatka with a 250-grain Partition from my .340 Wby. The bear was quartering to, and I recovered the bullet against the hide on the far hip—just the way I like it. I decided to see how this custom load would shoot in my Blaser. I fired five three-shot groups, the largest just over one inch, the rest under. The last group was one not-so-ragged hole. I'd found my bear load—and made



Bonded-core bullets probably create the widest-diameter mushrooms, plus high weight retention. However, they're not as likely to exit, if that's what you're after.



Copper-alloy bullets are typically the deepest-penetrating expanding bullets. They generally retain almost all their weight unless petals break off, which does happen.

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BARREL

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CHROME LINED, 1:9 TWIST

WEIGHT

6.85 LBS

LENGTH

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a lie of all the stories about Partition accuracy.

The all-copper or copper-alloy expanding bullet is relatively new. The Barnes X was the first, introduced in 1989. There are many today. Some are tipped, some are not, but all work essentially the same way. A skived or serrated nose surrounds a nose cavity. Upon impact, material is driven into the cavity, and the nose peels back

in petals. Expansion is limited by depth of cavity, and upset is generally smaller in diameter than with cup-and-core or bonded-core bullets, which is partly why the copper bullet is such a penetrator.

This penetration is aided by nearly full weight retention. Unless petals break off, which does happen, the all-copper bullet retains almost all original weight. Initially, copper foul-

ing was an issue, but that's long since been rectified by grooves and driving bands in the bullet's base.

Accuracy is spectacular in some rifles but not in others. As always, you never know until you try. Since copper is lighter than lead, copper bullets are long. Today's copper bullet is highly advanced from the 1990s, but because of length and cartridge overall length restrictions, there are limits on weight and how high the ballistic coefficients can be. At longer ranges, as velocity drops, expansion is reduced.

Many hunters love them, others not so much. For sure, they penetrate. You won't recover many copper bullets. When you do, most of them are pretty. For me, the bigger the animal, the better they work.

In California, we must use un-leaded projectiles for all hunting. The all-copper bullets are almost too tough for our small-bodied blacktail deer. On deer-size game, instead of the behind-the-shoulder lung shot American hunters love, go for the center of the shoulder in order to offer that bullet as much resistance as possible. Most of the time it's still going to exit, so if you want through-and-through penetration, you'll like the copper bullets.

The important thing about bullet selection is to ignore the hype and understand how a given bullet is designed to perform. Match that against the game you're hunting, the cartridge you're shooting, and your most likely ranges.

In open country on deer-size game, where close shots are unlikely, perhaps you can use fast-opening bullets like Ballistic Tips and SSTs. In thicker cover, where shots may be close, maybe you want tougher bullets, especially in fast cartridges. It's almost impossible to make a bonded-core or copper bullet come unglued. On larger game, for sure you want tougher bullets of at least medium weight for caliber.

Today, there are lots of good bullets for any application. Try to make a sound, educated choice—without getting wrapped up in accuracy and velocity. When in doubt, add some bullet weight. ■



Bonded bullets like the Federal Fusion are great choices for large, tough game like elk, thanks to their good expansion and high weight retention.

Big Bears and Bovines

The biggest Alaska brown and polar bears can weigh about the same as a Cape buffalo—1,500 pounds—and bullet selection must be dealt with carefully. Thankfully there are no compromises to deal with. Ranges are short and the target is large, so you don't need extreme accuracy. Bullet performance is everything, and penetration must be deep.

This story is not about cartridges and calibers, but both must be adequate for large, tough game. Use at least medium- to heavy-for-caliber bullets and choose a tough bullet that will hold together and penetrate deeply.

Both Alaskan guides and African professional hunters typically recommend either

bonded-core or copper-alloy bullets, and the good old Nosler Partition retains a following. I have no qualms about taking it for brown bear in 9.3mm or larger, and I wouldn't hesitate to use Partitions for buffalo—and I have, many times.

In recent years, I've done most of my buffalo hunting with Swift A-Frame, Hornady DGX (now Bonded) and Federal Trophy Bonded Bear Claw. I also love the Barnes X in appropriate calibers, but where I hunt buffaloes in Mozambique, we're often into big herds and have to worry about overpenetration. Therefore I like big bonded-core bullets, which provide lots of expansion and deep penetration but are unlikely to exit on broadside shots.—CB



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IN ELITE COMPANY

THE ALL-TERRAIN ELITE, A SCOUT-STYLE RIFLE, JOINS FRANCHI'S MOMENTUM ELITE LINEUP.

by Layne Simpson



Franchi introduced the Momentum bolt-action rifle in 2018, and it is still going strong. A modified version called the Momentum Elite came along in 2021, and it was initially available in .223 Rem., 6.5 Creedmoor and .308. Also unveiled that year was the Momentum Varmint Elite with a heavy barrel in .22-250, .223 Rem. and .224 Valkyrie.

The latest variation from Franchi and the star of this report is the Momentum All-Terrain Elite in .223 Rem. and .308. Putting camouflage finishes on hunting rifles is mostly an American thing, so the same rifle is sold in other countries as the Horizon All-Terrain Black Synthetic.

Beginning with the action, the cylindrical receiver measures 1.350 inches in diameter, is 8.5 inches long and has the same roof contour as the Remington

Model 700 receiver. A 21-slot Picatinny rail held in place by four screws extends almost four inches beyond the front of the receiver—allowing a forward-mounted, Scout-style scope to be used in addition to traditional optics. Unlike the Remington with its washer-style recoil lug, a thick V-shape lug embedded in the Momentum stock engages two deep grooves in the receiver ring.

Machining away steel from the front

of the 0.860-inch diameter body of the bolt left three locking lugs equally spaced on 120-degree centers. As Roy Weatherby and other rifle builders discovered many years ago, using this type of bolt in no way compromises strength, and it reduces production cost by eliminating the need to broach raceways in the receiver for locking lugs that extend beyond the surface of the bolt body.

At 13 ounces, the bolt does add a bit of weight compared to a two-lug bolt of more conventional shape, but it does offer advantages. Bolt travel can be smoother and less binding than for a two-lug bolt, and reducing its rotation to about 60 degrees minimizes the possibility of bolt handle interference when a scope is mounted low on the receiver. Rather than brazing the handle to the body of the bolt as on some other

designs, the Franchi's is mechanically attached.

The bolt has a spring-loaded, plunger-style ejector, and while the face of the bolt encloses about 0.130 inch of a chambered round, the counter-bore wall is interrupted for passage of a Sako-style extractor. In the event of a pierced primer or ruptured case during firing, most of the escaping propellant gas and debris would be dumped into the magazine well, while any gas that makes its way back around the body of the bolt should be deflected away from the shooter's face by a well-designed bolt shroud.

A slight protrusion of the cocking piece serves as a visual indicator of a cocked firing pin.

Franchi calls the trigger Relia, and the owner's manual clearly explains its adjustments. From-the-factory pull

weight on the test rifle averaged 3.5 pounds with very little variation and no detectable creep or overtravel.

Strong spring detents hold a two-position safety lever firmly in its two positions, with a slightly oversize knob making it easy to operate when wearing gloves. Engaging the safety blocks trigger movement, but it does not block bolt rotation.

Here's a tip for those who might be concerned about the bolt accidentally flopping open as the rifle is carried. With the chamber empty, hold back the trigger while pushing and rotating the bolt to its locked position. This leaves the firing pin resting in its uncocked position, and due to resistance from its strong spring, the bolt will not likely be fully rotated in the event its handle snags on something in the field.

Finished in a green/gray camo pattern called True Timber Strata, the injection-molded stock has three flush-attached sockets for quick-detach sling swivels: one at the bottom and one on each side. Moving to the fore-end, we see M-Lok receptacles, two on the bottom and two on either side.



With its extended Picatinny rail, the All-Terrain Elite allows the mounting of a traditional optic or a forward-mounted Scout-style scope.



The rifle comes with two easily switched comb risers, allowing shooters to get the right head position whether using the irons flipped up or down, or a scope.

SPECIFICATIONS

FRANCHI MOMENTUM ALL-TERRAIN ELITE

TYPE	three-lug bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	.223 Rem. (tested), .308
CAPACITY	10-round detachable magazine
BARREL	18 in. (measured), muzzle brake, 1:9 twist
OVERALL LENGTH	38.5 in.; 39.75 in. with brake
WEIGHT	7 lb., 10 oz.
STOCK	injection-molded polymer w/2 comb risers
TRIGGER	adjustable, 2.5 lb. pull (measured)
SAFETY	2-position trigger-blocking
SIGHTS	flip-up irons and Picatinny rail
PRICE	\$1,449
MANUFACTURER	Franchi USA, FRANCHIUSA.COM

Measuring two inches wide at its centerpoint, the flat-bottom fore-end is nicely shaped for shooting over a sandbag at the range or atop a daypack in the field. Girder-style reinforcing in the barrel channel minimizes deflection when pressure is applied to the bottom and sides of the fore-end.

Everything including appearance, stock to metal fit, overall quality, rigidity and attention to detail considered, this one is several levels above most injection-molded stocks I have examined. And just how strong is it? After removing the stock from the barreled action, I placed it on the floor with both ends supported by short sections of 2x4 boards and then stood on it. The stock did flex slightly, but it resisted 180 pounds of solid muscle with no dam-

age whatsoever. The rifle's molded-in checkering is aggressive enough to offer a no-slip grip while offering very little resistance to sliding over a sandbag during recoil.

Turning out the two Torx-head action bolts and removing the polymer bottom assembly allows the front of the grip to be removed and switched to other styles. Two easily switched comb risers are included with the rifle—one high enough to position the eye for scope use and the other low enough to use when shooting the rifle with its iron sights folded down.

In order for its objective to clear the top of the rail, the scope I used required high Weaver six-screw 30mm rings, and the higher of the two comb risers proved to be just right for a solid cheek weld.

Length of pull with Franchi's own TSA recoil pad is 14½ inches. Recoil pads, comb risers and grip inserts of other sizes are available at SHOPFRANCHI.COM.

Iron sights on bolt-action rifles have become scarcer than hen's teeth. But a rifle designed for all-around use should have irons. This new outfit from Franchi does, and the design is quite interesting. The rear sight is attached to the aft end of the Picatinny rail while the front sight is out on the barrel. The rear sight is adjustable for windage, while the front sight is elevation adjustable.

With the sights in their folded position, the picture consists of a 0.135-inch notch flanked by white dots at the rear and a 0.180-inch-wide blade with a single white dot up front. With the sights in that low position, I found it necessary to install the lower of the two stock comb risers.

Flipping up the two sights presents a very small aperture at the rear and a black post at the front. With the sights in that position, most shooters will use the higher comb riser, as I did. If the rifle were mine, I would take a Dremel tool and increase the size of the aperture a bit, although others may be quite happy with it.

The 18.5-inch, hammer-forged barrel measures 1.060 inches in diameter at the receiver, and from there it tapers to 0.545 inch at the muzzle where it is crowned and threaded 1/8x24 for an included 18-port muzzle brake.

While I was wringing out the rifle over sandbags, another club member a couple of benches to my right was shooting a .22 rimfire, so I removed the brake. After he finished and departed, I rapid-fired 10 rounds with the brake and 10 rounds without it at 300-yard steel plates. As expected, the device virtually eliminated what little recoil the .223 Rem. produces.

I like the extreme durability of the Cerakote coating on the barrel and receiver, not to mention its effectiveness at keeping rust at bay.

As detachable magazine designs go, the top-quality Magpul P-10 polymer single-stacker chosen by Franchi may be the best of them all in terms of smooth feeding. The magazine is easy to load to



The rear sight presents an aperture in the up position, a traditional notch when folded down. The gun comes with a slick-feeding Magpul magazine.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
FRANCHI MOMENTUM ALL-TERRAIN ELITE				
.223 Rem.	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Black Hills OTM	77	2,421	14	0.68
Hornady Match BTHP	68	2,788	13	0.74
Black Hills/Hornady V-Max	60	2,882	26	0.91
Federal/Nosler Partition	60	2,924	15	1.02
Black Hills/Barnes TSX	62	2,915	10	1.29
Nosler Varmageddon FB Tipped	55	3,012	18	1.42
Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups fired at 100 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocities are average of 10 shots clocked 12 feet from the muzzle with an Oehler chronograph. Temperature, 68 degrees; elevation, 866 feet. Abbreviations: BTHP, boattail hollowpoint; FB, flatbase; OTM, open-tip match				

full capacity, and each round flows from magazine to chamber with almost no resistance felt as the bolt is pushed home.

Pushing a loaded magazine home in the polymer bottom unit is smooth and snag-free, and extending the trigger finger to punch a paddle-shaped, ambidextrous latch drops the magazine when it goes empty. Unlike some magazine release designs that are just waiting to snag on something, this one is smoothly contoured and hardly noticeable until it is needed.

Every Momentum rifle is accuracy-tested with commercially loaded ammunition, and if it fails to shoot three shots inside an inch at 100 yards it is tweaked until it behaves. A group included with my rifle fired with Sako ammo measured a respectable 0.83 inch. I tried six different factory loads with bullet weights ranging from 55 to 77 grains; three shot inside an inch, with a fourth coming awfully close. The thin barrel was water-cooled after each nine-round string.



When flipped up, the elevation-adjustable front sight presents a post. When down, it brings a blade with white dot in view.

A few months after Phyllis and I were married, we loaded two rifles in .243 and .25-06 along with everything else that could be squeezed into a Volkswagen Beetle and headed cross-country to Wyoming for mule deer and pronghorn antelopes on a cattle ranch owned by Dick and Dorothy Keenan.

We became very good friends, and Phyllis and I hunted with them several more times in the following years. And what does this have to do with the

price of eggs? Well, Dick absolutely hated coyotes, especially during calving season, and his medicine for them was a Remington Model 722 in .222 Rem. He mostly shot from his truck, and shortening the barrel of the rifle to 18 inches made it easier to maneuver in cramped quarters. The old cowboy passed away many years ago, but if he were still with us I am sure the compact Franchi Momentum All-Terrain Elite in .223 Rem. would meet with his approval. ■

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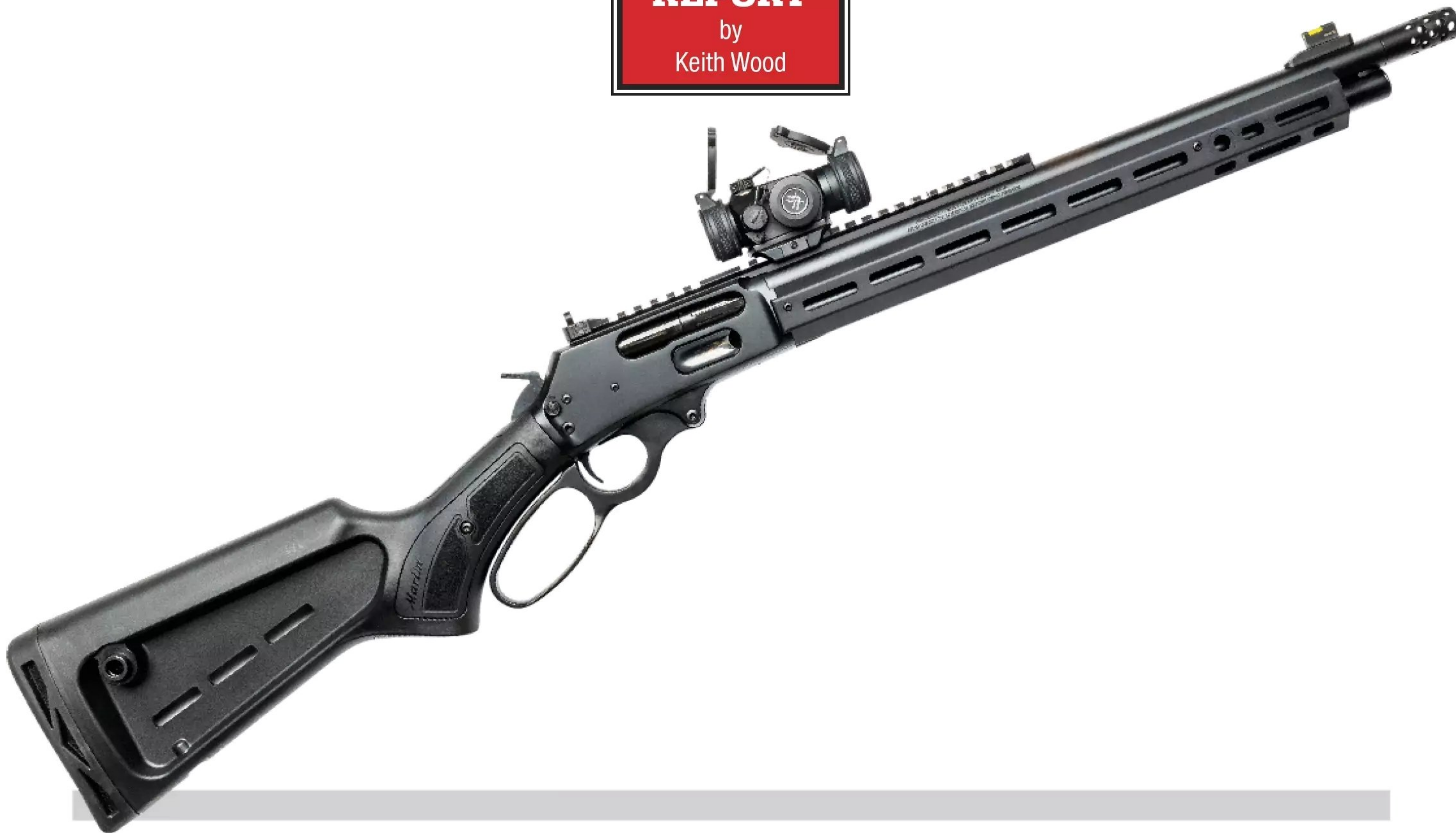


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Marlin Dark Series Model 1895

It's no secret that lever-action rifles have enjoyed a well-deserved resurgence of late. It's also not a news flash that Marlin Firearms is back in business under Ruger ownership. One of Marlin's last ventures before its previous parent company's bankruptcy was the Dark Series, a lineup of lever guns that blurred the lines between traditional and modern. Marlin has now redesigned and reintroduced the Dark Series, pushing the boundaries of modernism even further.

Among the choices in the Dark Series lineup is the Model 1895 chambered in .45-70 Gov't. The receiver is machined from steel alloy. The operating lever incorporates a slightly oversize loop so it can be used while wearing heavy gloves. The loading gate and ejection port are standard 1895, located on the right side of the receiver. The tubular magazine gives this carbine a capacity of 5+1.

This lever gun retains the tradi-

tional crossbolt safety and half-cock-capable hammer, so there is flexibility in how you choose to carry it. The trigger on my sample broke at 4.75 pounds after a hair of creep.

The finish is all black, with many of the major components coated with Graphite Black Cerakote. Since they will be subject to regular movement, the bolt and lever are treated with black nitride, which is considerably harder and more wear-resistant.

The 1895 Dark Series barrels are produced in-house by Ruger using the cold hammer forging technique. This process creates barrels with serious longevity as well as accuracy. The barrel on the 1895 Dark Series is 16.17 inches long and threaded 11/16x25 at the muzzle. The muzzle comes equipped with a removable multi-port brake as well as a thread protector. Suppressor use has become more common on lever-action rifles, and the common thread pattern used will readily accommodate mounting one.

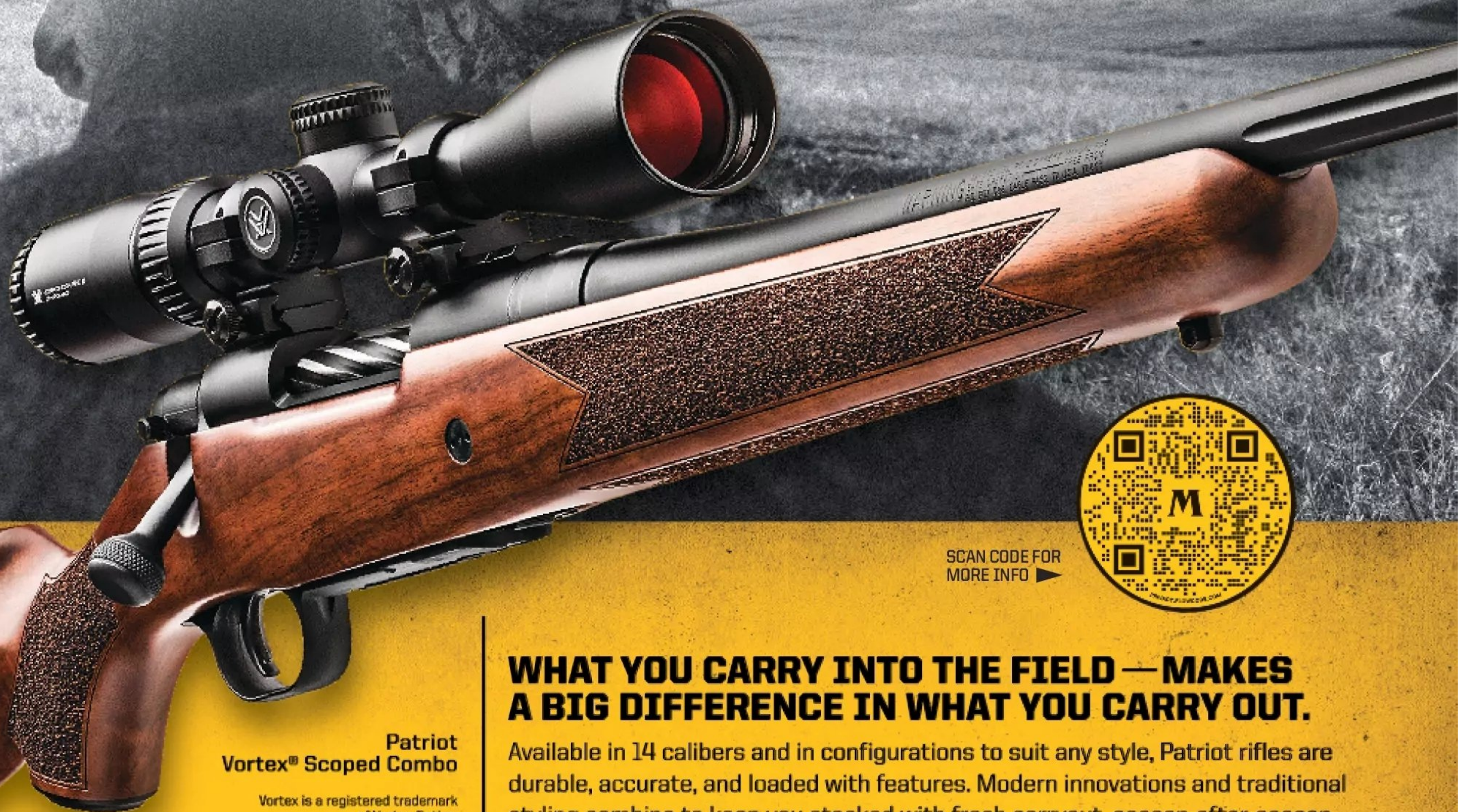
SPECIFICATIONS

MARLIN DARK SERIES MODEL 1895

TYPE	lever-action centerfire
CALIBER	.45-70 Gov't
CAPACITY	5+1
BARREL	16.17 in., 1:20 twist, threaded 11/16x24
OVERALL LENGTH	35.50 in.
WEIGHT	7 lb.
FINISH	Graphite Black Cerakote, black nitride
STOCK	synthetic butt, aluminum fore-end w/M-Lok slots
SIGHTS	tritium front, adjustable ghost ring rear; Picatinny rail
SAFETY	two-position crossbolt, hammer half-cock
TRIGGER	4.75 lb. pull (measured)
PRICE	\$1,429
MANUFACTURER	Marlin Firearms, MARLINFIREARMS.COM

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Ghost ring sights were common aftermarket accessories for lever-action rifles, but Marlin elected to mount them on the 1895 Dark Series as a standard feature. These combine a fully adjustable rear aperture with a green fiber optic and tritium front. These sights are fast, simple to use and capable of more precision than many would assume.

A single interrupted Picatinny rail is mounted to both the receiver and to the top of the barrel. This provides a long mounting surface for everything from traditional riflescopes to red dots and even Scout-style scopes with extended eye relief. I mounted a Vortex Sparc II on the forward rail section.

The stocks on the previous Dark Series Marlin were simply wood stocks painted black. Not so on the new versions. The buttstock is nylon-reinforced polymer with an extended comb designed to properly position the shooter's eye for optics use. This cheek riser is removable if you plan to stick with iron sights. The stock is



The 1895 Dark features a slightly oversize loop for use with gloves, and the interrupted Picatinny rail on the receiver can accommodate a red dot, regular scope or Scout scope.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
MARLIN DARK SERIES MODEL 1895				
.45-70 Gov't	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady LeverEvolution FTX	325	1,881	16	1.2
Remington Core-Lokt JSP	405	1,480	12	1.4

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups at 100 yards from a benchrest. Velocities are 10-shot averages recorded on a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Temperature, 84 degrees; elevation 194 feet. Abbreviation: JSP, jacketed softpoint

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slim and trim and combines QD-style swivel inserts on both sides as well as three M-Lok attachment points. A soft rubber buttpad helped mitigate recoil.

The fore-end is where the 1895 Dark Series really sets itself apart from tradition. The entire assembly is a one-piece aluminum rail that provides a ton of real estate for accessories. A traditional Picatinny rail would be a poor choice on this rifle since the teeth would be punishing to skin under recoil. Instead, Marlin's engineers chose slick aluminum with a combination of 22 full-size M-Lok compatible attachment points as well as female QD sling swivel interfaces.

I tested the 1895 Dark Series with two factory loads, shooting groups at 100 yards in addition to more informal range evaluation. Recoil was stout from the bench but very tolerable offhand. Accuracy was excellent, especially considering I used a non-magnifying optic.

The 1895 Dark Series is a utilitarian carbine that could easily do double



The ghost ring aperture sight provides fast action and good accuracy. The rifle has a half-cock hammer as well as a crossbolt safety.

duty as a home defense weapon as well as a hunting arm. This carbine would also be a natural choice for self defense in bear country, and the ability to easily mount a white light to the fore-end makes it a great choice for indoor or outdoor defense.

Ammunition for the .45-70 is among our highest-volume centerfire rifle loads because of the round's versatility. Shooters can opt for relatively flat-shooting loads such as 250-grain Hornady MonoFlex, traditional loads such as Remington's 405-grain Core-



There's a ton going on at the front: a fiber-optic sight, threaded muzzle with installed muzzle brake and a fore-end with M-Lok slots and QD cups.

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The 1895 was the first of the Dark Series carbines to be reintroduced, with the Model 336 .30-30 and the 1894 .44 Mag. trailing closely behind in terms of production. For a shooter who seeks the practical advantages of a lever action that include easy portability, speed, capacity and power but prefers the aesthetic or functional properties of a more modern carbine, the 1895 Dark Series is just the ticket. ■

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WHAT REM 700 AND REM 700 CLONE ACTION FIREARM OWNERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TRIGGERS



At RISE, we design triggers that solve problems. After assessing the popular triggers made for Rem 700 and Rem 700 clone action firearms, we recognized that all had at least one serious (and some potentially unsafe) design flaw.

If you own a Rem 700 or Rem 700 clone action firearm, you need to be aware that there are several standard and replacement triggers made for these firearms that have significant design flaws. Everything from triggers that you must disassemble the gun to adjust (really?) to pull-weight adjustment that doesn't lock down, meaning vibration could result in inadvertent slam fire (mind-boggling).

So, we created the Reliant line of Rem 700 and clone action triggers to solve every problem, while also offering unmatched ease of use and performance.

RISE Reliant Triggers check all the boxes!

- ✓ Advanced safety features
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- ✓ Models that are compatible with clone actions



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diameters are likely over-bore capacity, accelerating throat erosion. Larger-diameter bullets like those used in the .378-based Weatherbys and the Ultra Mags solve the over-bore capacity issue, but recoil goes up sharply.

In most races, speed is important. Ballistic coefficients have become more studied and more important, and the outer limits are still being explored. When I was young, a bullet with a G1 BC in the high .400s was considered exceptionally flat-shooting. Today we have numerous bullets with BCs into the .600s, a few into the .700s.

The Tradeoff

But you can't get there without adding weight, and doing so reduces velocity. However, bullets with super-high BCs don't need to start as fast to cross the finish line first. Longer, heavier bullets may bump against traditional rifling twists and action lengths, but folks are making that adjustment. New cartridges like the PRCs, 6.8 Western and the Nosler family are specified for faster twists. And although the 6.5 PRC is technically a short-action cartridge, a lot of builds use standard .30-06-length actions to accommodate longer bullets.

When I was a kid I mostly shot 140-grain Hornady InterLock in my .264, G1 BC .465, good for the day. Today, its 143-grain ELD-X has a BC of .625, with heavier 6.5mm match bullets up to the .700 BC mark. My .264s used long-standard 1:9 twist and probably wouldn't stabilize those long match bullets. The 6.5 PRC is standard at 1:8 twist, and faster 1:7 twists are common, intended for such bullets.

Interestingly, 6.5 PRC velocity is essentially the same as the 66-year-old .264: a 140-grain bullet at about 3,000 fps. Velocity hasn't increased much—and cannot—without burning more powder in bigger cases. However, whether velocity is the same or a bit lower, today's low-drag bullets with off-the-charts BCs are going to reach the finish line first. Dead flat, maybe raising up just a little. ■

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The Need for Speed

By virtue of longevity and timing, Col. Charles Askins (1907-1999) was among the last of the old breed of colorful gun writers, full of stories of gunfights in his Border Patrol days. Askins referred to kinetic energy as “muzzle swoosh.” When the .264 Win. Mag. was new he took one on safari. His story “The .264 Winchester Magnum in Africa” made me want a .264. I got my first .264 in 1966, and I still have one. Years later, the .264 already a rarity, I asked Askins’s honest opinion of the cartridge. “Shoots dead flat to 400 yards. Then it raises up just a little.”

Naturally, that’s impossible. Gravity and air resistance go to work on all projectiles as they leave the launching device. Introduced in 1958, the .264’s original specification was a 140-grain bullet at 3,200 fps from a 26-inch barrel. That number was never quite true. Within a couple of years, the 140-grain load was downgraded to 3,030 fps, where it remains today. Back then, few shooters had access to chronographs. Still, the word got out: The .264 wasn’t as fast as claimed.

At first the .264 took off like a rocket, but sales soon faltered. The velocity issue didn’t help. Also, it was over-bore capacity and got a reputation for throat erosion. In 1962 Remington brought out the more versatile 7mm Rem. Mag., pretty much ending the .264’s short days in the sun.

In the 1960s I was just a kid, and I didn’t know anyone who had a chronograph. I have no idea how fast my hottest .264 loads were. Not as fast as I thought, since my .264 was an early Remington Model 700 with a 24-inch tube. It didn’t matter, and it also didn’t matter to me that the 7mm Rem. Mag. was already more popular. I thought my .264 was magic, fast and powerful.

It wasn’t magic, but it was powerful and plenty fast. It’s funny, but what we think of as “fast” in rifle cartridges hasn’t changed much. Today’s hand-loaders have something over 160 propellants to choose from. Burning rates and other properties vary, but you can figure burning nitrocellulose-based smokeless propellant expands at about 5,000 fps. Until we discover different propellants this is the theoretical velocity limit. However, because of friction in a rifled barrel, you can’t get there. Acceptable heat, pressure and barrel wear are constraints.

In 1915, Charles Newton, working for Arthur Savage, shortened the .30-06 case, necked it down to .25, and created the .250-3000 or .250 Savage. It was the first commercial cartridge to

all of them are varmint cartridges or light-bullet loads, such as Winchester’s 55-grain load for the .243 Win. They all have the same issues in terms of excessive heat, pressure and barrel life.

There has never been a big game cartridge with a hunting-weight bullet that broke 4,000 fps. The heavier the bullet, the more powder—thus heat and pressure—required to get it down the barrel.

John Lazzeroni’s fat-cased unbelted magnums, whether short or long, are the fastest in their caliber class. Twenty-five years ago, I was shooting a .308 Lazzeroni Warbird and John cooked up some ammo using a 130-grain Barnes X. It was right at 4,000 fps and surprisingly accurate.

To this day we consider a hunting

INTRODUCED IN 1925, THE .270 WIN. WAS PROBABLY THE SECOND 3,000 FPS CARTRIDGE. THE ORIGINAL LOAD ADVERTISED A 130-GRAIN BULLET AT 3,140 FPS.

break 3,000 fps, but that was only possible with a light-for-caliber 87-grain bullet. The .250 Savage was popular in its day, but in 1915 bullet technology wasn’t quite ready for such velocity. Most hunters found it more reliable with 100-grain bullets at 2,800 fps.

Introduced in 1925, the .270 Win. was probably the second 3,000 fps cartridge. The original load advertised a 130-grain bullet at 3,140 fps, soon downgraded to 3,060 fps. That remains the standard load a century later. It was fast then and is still fast today.

The 4,000 fps barrier was broken by the .220 Swift in 1935. In the 90 years since, only a small handful of cartridges or specific loads have crossed that boundary. At least in factory form,

cartridge that reaches 3,000 fps with bullets of medium weight for their calibers to be fast. A few get into the mid-3,000s but not many. Roy Weatherby’s first family of belted magnums got there in the 1940s. Even today, few factory cartridges are as fast or shoot as flat as his .257 and .270 Wby. Mags. The second Weatherby family, based on the extra-large .378 Wby. Mag. case, is even faster. The long-cased Remington Ultra Mags followed this pattern, and they’re almost as fast as the big Weatherby cartridges.

Problem is, it takes a lot of powder to get up to speed—generating lots of heat and pressure—and smaller bullet

Continued on page 71

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