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ART DIRECTOR **HEATHER FERRO**

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER **MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ**

COPY EDITOR **BILL BOWERS**

DIGITAL EDITOR **SCOTT ERGAS**

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

**CRAIG BODDINGTON, BRAD FITZPATRICK,
JEFF JOHN, PAYTON MILLER, LAYNE SIMPSON,
JON R. SUNDRA, STAN TRZONIEC,
JOSEPH VON BENEDIKT, KEITH WOOD**

**ELIZABETH CAREY, PRODUCTION MANAGER
ASHLEY HONEA, PRODUCTION COORDINATOR**

ENDEMIC AD SALES

SENIOR VP, ENDEMIC SALES **MICHAEL SAVINO** MIKE.SAVINO@OUTDOORSRG.COM

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES **JIM MCCONVILLE** (440) 327-3610

WESTERN REGION **HUTCH LOONEY** HUTCH@HLOONEY.COM

EAST COAST REGION **PAT BENTZEL** (717) 695-8095

NATIONAL AD SALES

SENIOR DIRECTOR, NON-ENDEMIC SALES
KEVIN DONLEY KEVIN.DONLEY@OUTDOORSRG.COM

NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
CARL BENSON CARL.BENSON@OUTDOORSRG.COM

DIRECT RESPONSE ADVERTISING NON-ENDEMIC
ANTHONY SMYTH (914) 409-4202

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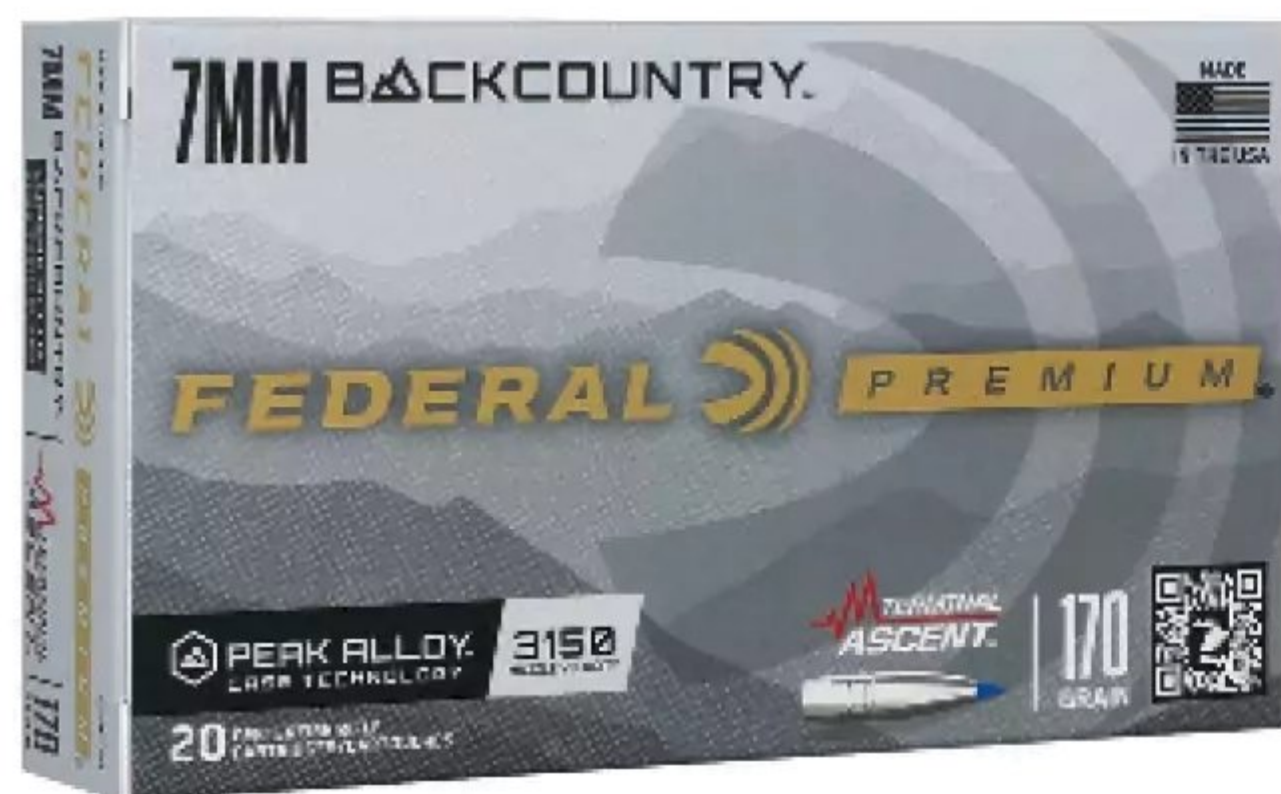
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Why Not Just Switch Cases?

Regarding the new 7mm Backcountry (“Backcountry Boomer,” May/June), why doesn’t Federal just use Peak Alloy in cartridges that already exist? I have a Ruger Scout Rifle in .308 Win. with a 16-inch barrel that could benefit from the extra velocity. I understand the new cartridge to “announce” the new technology, but the author does not bring up the possibility, nor the reasons not to.

Don Loken, Missouri

Good question, Mr. Loken. According to Federal, it has to do with being SAAMI compliant. SAAMI specifies a maximum allowable pressure for any given cartridge, independent of case material or what it can handle. So in your example, a .308 Win. cartridge has a SAAMI pressure limit of 62,000 psi. That is the limit to which the company can load the cartridge, regardless of case material.—Scott

Mean Machine

I loved Layne Simpson’s .416 article in the July/August issue. I have a Sako Model 995 rifle in .416 Rem. Mag. that took to Zimbabwe. It accounted for a buffalo taken with one heart shot and a zebra with one shot at 110 yards. That shot was a “Texas heart shot,” with the 400-grain Barnes TSX traveling through and through full body length, entering the back left cheek and exiting from the lower neck. The zebra dropped flatter than my wallet after paying for the trip. As my PH said, “That .416 is a machine!”

Jim Britton, Texas

.35 Rem. Alive and Well

I always look forward to reading Craig Boddington’s articles in each issue, as I find them very informative. In the recent May/June edition in his “Memoriam for Mediums?” he states in regard to the .35 Rem. cartridge “today no production rifles are so chambered.” I recently purchased a brand new Henry Side Gate Lever Action rifle chambered in .35 Rem. to replace my well-worn 1970s vintage Marlin 336 in .35 Rem. As Craig said, the .35 Rem. “puts down deer quickly,” and I know of other senior citizens like myself who will be grabbing up these .35 Rem. Henrys as more become available.

Ernest Perry, Ontario

Prime That Pump

I enjoyed Layne Simpson’s article “Priming the Pump” (May/June). It is good to read about great old gun designs. I have one correction to make. Layne writes that the

Model 14R carbine has an 18-inch barrel and the Model 141 carbine has an 18.5-inch barrel. Actually both have 18.5-inch barrels. The carbine barrels are described in the book *The Classic Remington 14 Plus Models 14½ and 141: Also the Versatile Model 25* by Ken Blauch. He states that the barrel has the built-in front sight ramp. He also states that Model 141 carbines were made using leftover model 14R barrels until supplies were exhausted.

In my collection I have several 14R and 141 carbines. All have the front sight ramp. They also have two dovetail rear sight cuts as used for the 14 thumbwheel rear sight. Their barrels all measure 18.5 inches.

Layne mentions that sight upgrades such as adding a scope involve modifications that degrade collector value. It is possible to build a wood riser that attaches to the receiver using the 6-48 tang peep screw holes. A small Picatinny rail section can be attached to the riser to support a red dot sight. This preserves collector value.

James Beasom

Clash Improvement

I always enjoy Brad Fitzpatrick’s “Cartridge Clash” column. Showing the actual cartridges being compared side by side rather than the cartoon boxing characters would be much more informative. Just saying.

Terry Thompson

We have thought about that, Mr. Thompson. Thing is, we don’t always have access to examples of both cartridges for side-by-side photography, so in the interest of consistency we’ve stuck with the illustration. I admit it’s not an ideal solution.—Scott

Interested in Handguns?

We figure at least some of you are, so we didn’t want to pass up the chance to promote “Handguns” TV, which is kicking off its 12th season on Sportsman Channel. Hosted by our own Brad Fitzpatrick and executive producer Scott Rupp—plus *Handguns* magazine writer, self-defense expert and firearms trainer Rich Nance—it’s a half-hour packed with gun reviews, training tips, ammo insights and more.

“Handguns” airs every Thursday at 10:30 p.m. Eastern on Sportsman Channel, plus additional airings; consult your local TV listings. You can also catch past seasons of “Handguns”—as well as a ton of other shooting, hunting and fishing shows—via the My Outdoor TV app. Visit MyOutdoorTV.com to start your free trial.



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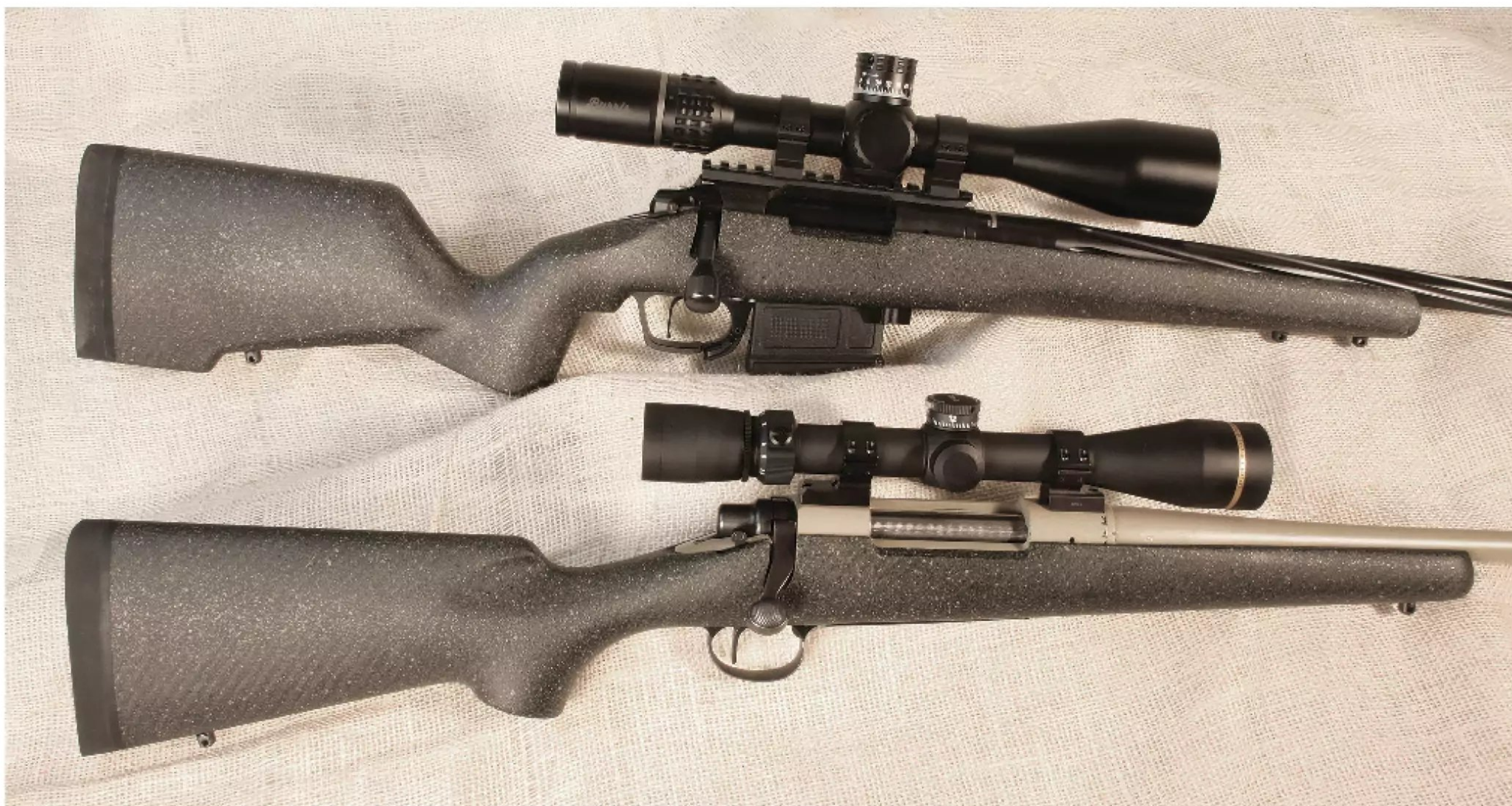
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Great Stock Options

LONGTIME CUSTOM RIFLE BUILDER MARK BANSNER IS NOW MAKING TOP-NOTCH DROP-IN STOCKS.

by J. Scott Rupp

Trigger aside, a rifle's stock is the most important interface between shooter and rifle because it affects how you carry, handle and shoot the gun. That being the case, one of the best ways to improve a rifle that's almost but not exactly perfect for you is to restock it.

That's where outfits like Bansner & Company (BANSNERANDCOMPANY.COM) come in. A longtime gunsmith and custom rifle builder based in Ad-

amstown, Pennsylvania, Mark Bansner's stockmaking enterprise grew out of, well, impatience.

"My main goal was never to have to wait on a stock in order to build a rifle," he said.

Initially he purchased High Tech Specialties out of California, a company from which he'd been buying stocks. Eventually he moved that operation back to Pennsylvania where he and his stock-manufacturing guru, Ben Moedinger, set to work revamping parts of their shop to focus on stocks.

And they offer a ton of choices. There's the Classic, a sporter style for the Winchester Model 70 and Mauser 98 actions. The David Miller-designed Miller is available for the Remington 700, Model 70 and pre-'64 Model 70, and there's a Miller Safari version with a shortened fore-end for those actions, too.

The Sheep Hunter is available in a carbon-fiber model for the Remington 700, plus fiberglass versions for the 700 and its clones, Remington Model Seven, Howa 1500 and Tikka T3x. The HVT

(Hunter, Varmint, Target) is similarly offered in carbon and fiberglass—but in both cases only for Remington 700 and its clones.

All Bansner stocks are offered in custom lengths of pull, with a big menu of barrel channels, inlets and accessories to choose from. Bansner sent me a Carbon Sheep Hunter (\$600) and an HVT Carbon (\$600) to try out.

I'll tackle the Carbon Sheep Hunter first. This is an incredibly light stock at just 20 ounces, but don't let the weight fool you. It's also incredibly strong.

Bansner said he and his team have broken more than 100 stocks, placing them in a fixture and applying force, to determine what worked and what didn't for ultralight stocks. The 20-ounce mark hit the sweet spot, he said, as going much lighter didn't provide sufficient strength.

Bansner & Co. creates its own master stocks—from which the molds are made—from scratch. In the case of the carbon models, the stock starts with a lightweight core over which layers of carbon cloth and resin are laid, with

extra layers applied to the wrist and the fore-end. The wrist is any stock's weak point, so it's important this area be as strong as possible. Bansner's goal for the fore-end is to keep it rigid to eliminate zero shifts when shooting off a bipod or with a tight sling.

After the carbon/resin layers are applied to the core, the stock goes into the mold. Once it's cured, the inletting is CNC machined to the chosen action's dimensions. The Pachmayr recoil pads that cap off the butt are precision ground. I ordered a 13.25-inch length of pull, a little shorter than standard, and the recoil-pad fitting was spot-on.

Bansner does offer a Signature Series service in which his shop does all the work, but the firm's stocks are really designed for easy DIY installation. The Carbon Sheep Hunter was intended for my old Remington Mountain Rifle in .280 Rem., whose barrel features a significant taper. Bansner offers the Sheep Hunter with this specific barrel channel—as well as 15 others, all delivering a 1/16-inch free float—and it was a picture-perfect fit.

The barreled action dropped right in, with an even amount of space on both sides of the barrel. That may not be the case 100 percent of the time because it depends on how square your action is. This action had been blue-printed when the current barrel was installed, and it sat straight as an arrow in the stock.

While Bansner said it's not absolutely necessary, he does recommend glass bedding the recoil lug and tang, and he sells a Pro-Bed 2000 kit (\$19) that he sent along so I could try it. It's been several years since I last bedded a rifle, and I did fret some about screwing it up. But between the Pro-Bed's easy-working epoxy and Bansner's outstanding instructional YouTube video, the job went without a hitch.

The Carbon Sheep Hunter is a classic sporter stock, with what I consider perfect proportions on the wrist and fore-end. The dark gray paint with its tan flecks looks great, and its texture provides a good gripping surface.

The rifle with its Leupold VX-3HD 3.5-10x40mm in Talley lightweight mounts now weighs six pounds, 14



Bansner stocks are available in a wide variety of barrel channels like this Mountain Rifle, and they're perfectly executed. (Below l.) Customers can specify length of pull, and the Pachmayr Decelerator pads are ground for a perfect fit. (Below r.) The HVT is designed to be comfortable for both hunters and competitors.



ounces—almost a full pound less than it did with its previous synthetic stock. It's now the rifle I always wanted it to be.

The HVT Carbon stock is available in the same barrel channels as the Sheep Hunter and in five inlet configurations. It uses the same core formulation as the Carbon Sheep Hunter, too, and even though the HVT is beefier it still weighs only 25 ounces. It went on an Aero Precision 700 clone action with a Proof Sendero-contour barrel, which Bansner said is the most popular contour choice for this particular stock.

The barreled action was originally in a chassis, which meant I had to hunt up aftermarket detachable-box bottom metal for the new stock, and it took a bit of light filing in order to install it in the HVT's Hawkins M5 inlet. This Aero action features a side-mounted bolt release instead of the factory 700's trigger-mounted release, so I also had to make a relief cut for that with some judicious Dremel tool and file work.

The HVT is a hybrid stock design, capitalizing on the popularity of long-range competition while still provid-

ing hunters with a stock that's suitable for the field.

"We want it to be comfortable for everyone," Bansner said.

I think it does strike the right balance. The grip is not too vertical, not too chunky, and there's a nice shelf on either side of the tang for resting your thumb. The butt has a relief cut in the belly and a flat toe for using with a bag.

The fore-end is well done. It's flat on the bottom but stepped on the sides so it'll work equally well on a bag or bipod or for gripping in field positions. It sports twin sling-swivel studs for attaching both a sling and a bipod.

This rifle currently wears an 18-inch steel barrel chambered to .308, but now that I have the HVT Carbon to play with, I have a new plan: swap out the barrel for a carbon-fiber job in something like .25 Creedmoor. Paired with a reasonable-size scope, it would be a great rig for competition or hiking after antelope and deer.

Bansner and his team have this stockmaking thing down pat. If you want to breathe new life into an old rifle to make it better, their stocks are worth checking out. ■

CARTRIDGE CLASH » J. Scott Rupp

7mm Rem. Mag. vs 7mm Backcountry

Remington introduced its 7mm Rem. Mag. in 1962 alongside its new bolt-action hunting rifle, the Model 700. Needless to say, both were a big success, and the 7mm Rem. Mag. is one of the most popular medium-bore magnums of all time.

A lot has happened since 1962. Man has landed on the moon, phones fit in our pockets, and a pile of other 7mm cartridges have hit the market. The newest of the 7mm contenders is Federal's 7mm Backcountry. To say it's different than the 7mm Rem. Mag. is an understatement. In fact, about all the two cartridges share in common is their bullet diameter.

The 7mm Backcountry case measures 2.417 inches long compared to 2.5 inches for the 7mm Rem. Mag., and the Remington has a rim diameter of .532 inch compared to .472 inch for the 7mm Backcountry. While the Federal cartridge is closer to the .280 Rem. in terms of case size, it pushes a 175-grain bullet faster from a 20-inch barrel than a 7mm Rem. Mag. fires the same weight bullet from a 24-inch barrel.

While that may sound like witchcraft, it's not. The 7mm Backcountry uses Peak Alloy steel cases, which can withstand higher pressures than traditional brass cases can. SAAMI lists the maximum average pressure of the 7mm Rem. Mag. at 61,000 psi, whereas the 7mm Backcountry has a maximum average pressure of 80,000 psi.

This difference means the Backcountry can outperform the 7mm Rem. Mag., even in shorter barrels. Federal lists the muzzle velocity of the 175-grain Fusion Tipped 7mm Backcountry load at 2,975 fps from a 20-inch barrel and 3,125 fps from a 24-inch barrel. The company's 175-grain Power-Shok 7mm Rem. Mag. load achieves 2,860 fps from a 24-inch barrel, and its 160-grain Trophy Bonded

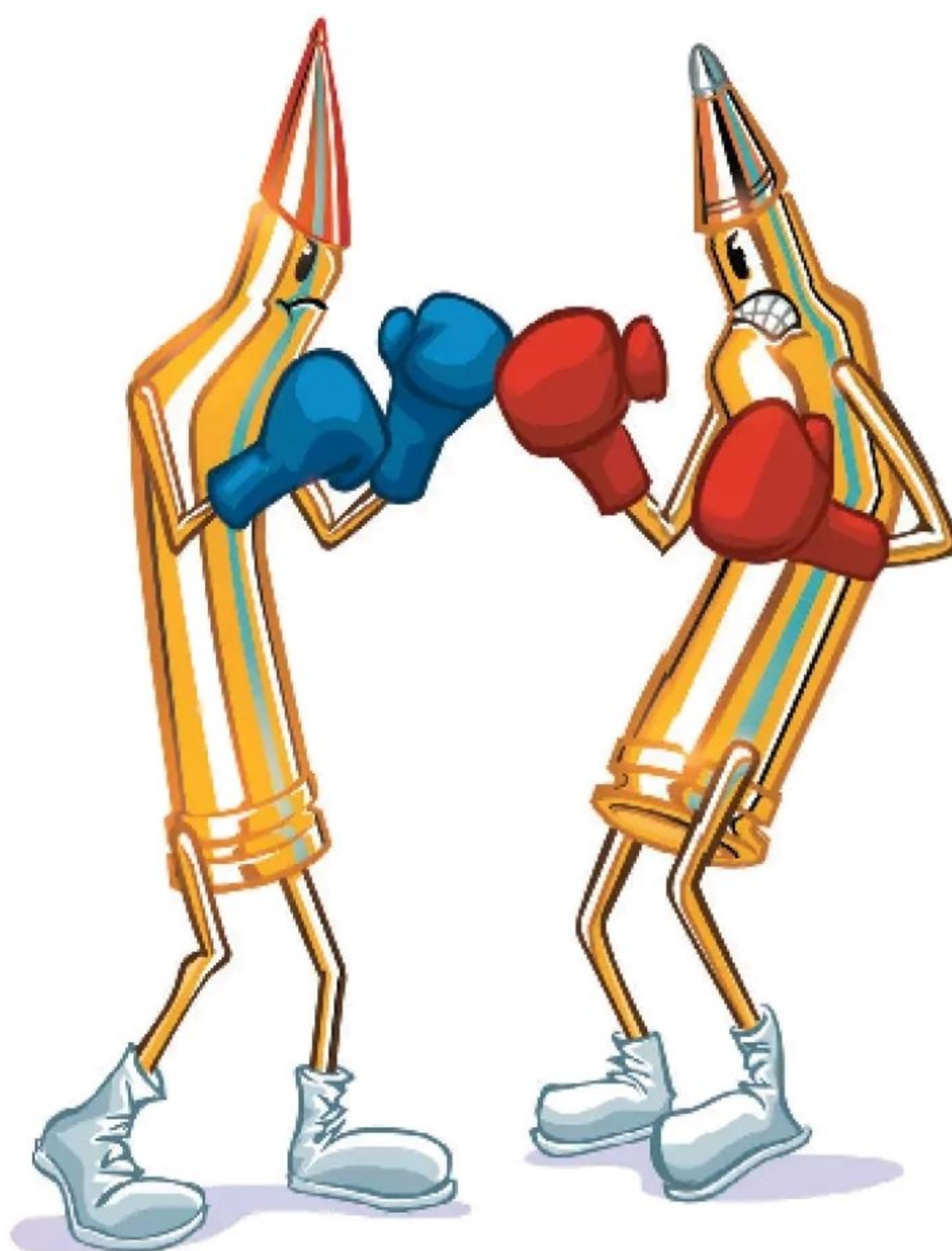
Tipped 7mm Rem. Mag. load is listed at 2,900 fps from a 24-inch pipe.

By obtaining those velocity numbers from a 20-inch barrel, the 7mm Backcountry appeals to hunters who prefer to shoot suppressed, and there are a lot of them. Sure, you can add a suppressor to the threaded 24- or 26-inch barrel of a 7mm Rem. Mag., but the rifle will be so long it would be unwieldy. And chopping down a 7mm Rem. Mag. barrel to 20 inches to make it handier for a suppressor would reduce velocities to .280 Rem. levels.

Federal is currently the only company that offers ammo for the 7mm Backcountry, but there are already five factory loads ranging from 155 to 195 grains and designed for both long-range shooting and big game hunting.

Fans of the 7mm Rem. Mag. will certainly laugh at just five available loads compared to the more than 70 available for their cartridge. The same disparity applies to rifles, although companies like Christensen Arms, Weatherby, Savage, Seekins, Gunwerks and others have already jumped on board the 7mm Backcountry train.

What about reloading? Obviously the 7mm Rem. Mag. has been hand-loaded for decades, so there's no shortage of components or recipes. The 7mm Backcountry can be reloaded, although Federal suggests using its premium cases, such as the ones from their 170-grain Terminal Ascent load,



and not the "non-premium" matte-finished cases. RCBS is developing dies, but at press time they were still a work in progress.

I've shot both the 7mm Backcountry and the 7mm Rem. Mag., and while the Backcountry hits harder, if you can handle one you can handle the other. The 7mm Backcountry certainly produces plenty of muzzle blast, especially with a 20-inch barrel, but these guns are tailor-made for suppressors, and a can makes them quite comfortable to shoot.

Which 7mm do you prefer? The high-tech upstart or the stalwart classic? The good news is there's no wrong answer here.

7MM REM. MAG.

HITS

- The Remington has a great track record
- Ammo and rifles are widely available
- A robust used rifle market

MISSSES

- Requires longer barrel for best performance
- Lower magazine capacity
- Twist not ideal for super-high-BC bullets

7MM BACKCOUNTRY

HITS

- High velocity out of short barrels
- Several rifle makers already on board
- Five factory loads already available

MISSSES

- Currently only Federal loads ammo
- More limiting for handloaders
- Too new to predict future acceptance

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>>\$1,129, RUGER.COM

Berger Classic Hybrid Hunter Additions

This ammo is loaded with Berger's Classic Hybrid Hunter bullet, which promises two to three inches of penetration and extreme hydrostatic shock for quick kills big game. Available this fall will be a 185-grain .300 WSM and 168- and 185-grain .30-06 rounds. Classic Hybrid Hunter ammo features Lapua cases and Vihtavuori powder. Velocity and price details weren't available at press time, so check out the company's website soon.

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Leupold Tracer w/Daylight Max Lens

Ballistic rated with interchangeable lenses, Leupold Tracer eyeglasses with Daylight Max lenses offer polarization without sacrificing light transmission. What that means for hunters and shooters is better visibility early and late in the day, which is important for spotting game and targets. The yellow-tinted lenses cut glare while delivering contrast, and the lenses are housed in a lightweight, impact-resistant frame. Amber and plain yellow lenses also included.

>>\$180, LEUPOLD.COM



Vortex Pro Rifle Clamp Tripod Mount

Constructed of lightweight magnesium and weighing less than a pound, the clamp installs easily on any Arca-compatible tripod. It adjusts from 1.3 to 3.2 inches wide to fit a variety of fore-ends, and the soft rubber jaws hold the gun securely and help absorb recoil while being kind to stock finishes. Maximum load is 44 pounds.

>>\$155, VORTEXOPTICS.COM



Remington Standard V

Standard V .22 ammo is for high-volume shooters looking for a quality, affordable load. Manufactured at Remington's Arkansas plant, Standard V features a revamped primer mix for improved reliability, and it pushes a 38-grain lead roundnose bullet at 1,080 fps at the muzzle.

>>\$42, 550-count box; REMINGTON.COM



BERGER

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260 Remington
308 Winchester

300 WSM **NEW**
30-06 Springfield **NEW**
300 Winchester Magnum
300 Norma Magnum **NEW**
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NEW FOR 2025



300 WSM HUNTING AMMUNITION



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AMMUNITION



300 NORMA MAGNUM 245 GRAIN
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338 NORMA MAGNUM 300 GRAIN
HYBRID OTM TACTICAL

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#SHOOTBETTER

The Marvelous Mauser

THE K98K MAUSER IS TRULY ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST BATTLE RIFLES.

The major rifle faced by the Allies in World War II was Germany's Mauser K98k that was issued to all branches of its military.

Since 1898, the gun's rugged strength and reliability was as feared on the battlefield as it was celebrated in the hunting fields, and to this day Mauser's action remains a top choice for a custom rifle. Between 1934 and 1945, more than 14 million 7.92x57 carbines were produced among the Axis factories throughout the Third Reich.

The original concept underwent considerable change during World War I. Germany's Mauser Gew 98, with its 29.1-inch barrel and straight bolt handle, was designed for an open battlefield against line formations and cavalry similar to those faced in Napoleonic times.

In 1914, all that fell apart in the face of machine guns and high explosive artillery. The long Gew 98 proved equally unwieldy in the trenches and within cities. Sighted for a point-blank zero of 400 meters meant aiming very low when firing at the closer-range opponents in trenches or behind walls. As reality set in, the shortened K98a carbine appeared, although wartime needs meant rifles and carbines were turned out together rather than making a production switch midstream.



The K98k rifle in 7.92x57mm was literally the backbone of the Wehrmacht in World War II with more than 14 million made throughout the Third Reich from 1934 to 1945.



The Gew 98's cartridge was a game-changer worldwide. The 7.92x57—also known as the 8x57—was topped with a new flat-shooting ballistically superior 154-grain flatbase spitzer pointed bullet at 2,880 fps rather than the heavy roundnose bullet at 2,000 to 2,300 fps then in general use worldwide.

The Gew 98 and 7.92 quickly became the models for the U.S. M1903 and our new .30-06 round. It was copied so closely that Mauser won a judgment for patent infringement against the U.S. in American courts.

Postwar, the Treaty of Versailles stripped Germany of any but token military ability. The newly formed state of Czechoslovakia found itself in need of small arms. Mauser, with excess capacity, sold a complete Gew 98 rifle manufacturing plant to the Czechs, and their first product was the 24-inch-

barreled M1924 rifle that quickly became a hit worldwide. FN in Belgium had been making Gew 98 rifles during World War I and followed with its own 24-inch M1924, and soon the Czechs and Belgians were in competition, rearming militaries worldwide.

Mauser Waffenfabriken changed its name to the less warlike Mauser Werke Oberndorf AG and secretly began work on a rifle called the Standard Modell. By 1933, Hitler was in charge, and the Standard Modell was issued to the German Post Office. It was now very close to the K98k of World War II.

Minor changes improved the Standard Modell, and it became the Karabiner 98 kurz. Overall length was 43.7 inches, with a barrel of 23.62 inches, and a tare weight of 8.38 pounds.

The five-shot magazine could be loaded singly or via a five-round char-

ger, and a soldier could fire eight to 10 shots per minute. The four-groove barrel had a right-hand twist of 1:9.45. The front sight was an inverted V, allowing a little latitude for windage adjustment. The rear sight with its V notch was now graduated from 100 meters to a rather optimistic 2,000 meters but without windage.

During World War I, the original 154-grain load performed well in the Gew 98, but it didn't provide sufficient long-range power in machine guns, and a new 196-grain load featuring a spitzer boattail was issued for those. During K98k development, the 154-grainer created excessive muzzle blast, and Germany settled on the 196-grain load for all its small arms.

The K98k is simple to use. Open the bolt, draw it all the way back and the magazine follower pops up, holding the bolt open. Insert the charger and press straight down. A scallop on the left side of the receiver ensures the thumb easily presses the five rounds flush into the magazine. The rounds orient themselves for feeding from either side of the magazine.

In closing the bolt, the extractor picks up the cartridge rim as it rises from the magazine in controlled-round feed, meaning if anything goes wrong in the loading cycle, such as a defective round, a quick backward jerk of the bolt will eject the cartridge. That feature is what makes the Mauser-system rifles so popular with hunters of dangerous game.

With the bolt closed, swing the wing safety over 90 degrees from left to right. The rifle is now on Safe, and the bolt locked closed. To fire, swing the safety with your right thumb 90 degrees from right to left.

World War II saw major changes. The beautiful bluing and oil-finished walnut stock with many of the elegantly machined parts carefully numbered to the gun slowly gave way to stampings for the trigger guards and spot-welded barrel bands, laminated wood stocks, far less polish, and Parkerizing instead of bluing.

The once-prolific serial numbering of the parts was reduced to speed



The rear sight matches the front with a V notch sensibly beginning at 100 meters to an optimistic 2,000 meters but is not windage adjustable. The front sight (below) is a simple inverted V post in a base offering minimal windage adjustment.

production. Late war guns may have a mix of machined and stamped parts as older stocks were depleted. My example with code "dot" atop the receiver was made by Waffen Werke Brünn, the German name for the city of Brno in Czechoslovakia. It's dated 1944. Only the barrel and stock have a serial number.

This one might very well be a Russian capture, but has anomalous features. The Russians captured millions of rifles and rebuilt them postwar. They struck the top of the receiver with an X, took them apart, reblued them and reassembled them without the cleaning rod, sight hood and the lock screws on the trigger guard screws. They electro-penciled the receiver's serial number on the mixed parts of the bolt, floor-plate, trigger guard and others. The extractor turned red after rebluing.

I purchased this rifle at an estate sale, and the various machined, stamped and missing parts are the hallmarks of a Russian capture. However, it does not have the electro-penciling, and it's missing the X and an importer's mark, so its postwar history will remain a mystery. I've since added lock screws and the 12.5-inch cleaning rod segment and replaced the broken red extractor with a new one.

Many K98ks are found with mismatched bolts, since the Allies separated the rifles from their bolts when surrendered. If you end up with one of these, have the headspace checked before shooting it.

Prices are currently sky-high for rifles with matching serial numbers,



fetching \$2,500 to \$4,000 depending on condition. Russian capture and mismatched guns can be quite reasonable, selling for just above or below \$1,000.

Back in the early 2000s, Mitchell's Mausers rebuilt quite a few World War II K98k rifles in Yugoslavia and force-matched the serial numbers. As a rule, they are good-looking shooters and hover in price around the Russian captures and wartime bring-back.

The plethora of gadgetry issued to the German soldier is equally fun to collect. The unique sling is complicated and expensive, but it's easy to adjust, and the cleaning kit is full of seemingly incomprehensible tools. Many of the uniforms and leather gear are faithfully replicated.

Today's collector's pieces require deep pockets. Tread carefully, and buy only from reputable dealers. Although now out of print, *Backbone of the Wehrmacht, The German K98k Rifle, 1934-1945* by Richard D. Law is a very detailed reference on their construction and seemingly endless markings. The book can be found on eBay and other sites. ■

For the Record

PRESERVE YOUR DATA AND LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR LOADS BY KEEPING GOOD RECORDS.

Keeping an accurate record of your handloading activities seems like a no-brainer, right? Unfortunately, all too many shooters neglect to write down the details that matter most.

Handloading records should be an addition to your typical rifle records. These should include how many rounds have been fired, accuracy results with various types of ammo and so forth.

Handloading notes should be more extensive. Equipment-specific notes should detail the rifle, cartridge, barrel types and twist rate. Component notes must include type of cartridge cases and number of firings on those cases, and types of primers, powders and projectiles used.

Operation-oriented notes should address case trim dates, neck sizing versus full-length sizing, powder charge weights, bullet seating depth—plus details on whether a crimp was applied and the results of any ladder tests. And naturally you'll want to include accuracy and velocity data.

Sound overwhelming? It's really not. Here's how recording crucial info can be kept simple. For starters, I use a one-page chart to jot down all perti-



Maintaining a good logbook with the details of your handloads is crucial. You can create your own system or use a commercially available notebook.

nent handload data. At the top I note the specific rifle, along with relevant info such as the cartridge, barrel length and rifling twist rate. Those are one-time entries. If you use a specific reloading die set for that rifle, note that as well.

My data sheets are set up with columns for all the most important info. In the component columns I record date loaded, number of rounds created, powder type and charge weight, cartridge case type, primer type, bullet type and seating depth.

You can create your own record sheets or use the stickers or cards supplied with many reloading die sets and bullet boxes. You can use a normal journal or a notebook of graph paper. Better yet, shop online and buy a reloading logbook that's laid out in a way that suits your needs.

You can also use a good reloading app such as RCBS's to record your activities. These have the added advantage of allowing you to tag records with photos of ammo loaded, groups fired

and so forth. I do use these but still keep paper-record backups.

As secondary notes in several categories, I also record whether cases were trimmed recently, and how many firing cycles they've been through since trimming.

I organize my notes chronologically as they pertain to the loading process; i.e. case conditions before powder weight and charge, bullet type and seating depth and any crimping process.

For super-accurate rifles, I jot down refined notes such as whether the cases were neck sized versus full-length sized. I used to take notes if I felt cases were developing slightly loose primer pockets after a number of firings, but these days, I err on the safe side and discard all cases that develop loose pockets.

In the powder charge column, I add a secondary note if the charge is significantly compressed. This can have bearing on how much higher you can pursue maximum velocity because

there's little room left in the case for increasing the charge. It also can have an effect on the bullet seating process, particularly when using soft-cored, thin-jacketed bullets that can distort when crushed between a stack of gunpowder and a bullet seating stem.

Second in importance only to powder type and charge weight records are your notes on bullet seating depth. I always measure maximum potential overall cartridge length in my rifle's chamber when starting work with a new projectile.

With maximum overall length deciphered, you can then make educated estimates on potentially good seating depths. Whether the projectile you're working with typically likes to jump 0.050 inch to the rifling leade or prefers to lightly engrave on the rifling, you have a baseline to work with.

You may also find that the max overall length your chamber allows is too long to fit in your magazine. Or you may discover that the base of the

Key Data w/Examples

Rifle: Dumoulin Mauser
Cartridge: 9.3x62
Barrel length, twist: 20 in., 1:14
Date loaded: 5/1/25
No. of rounds loaded: 50
Case, times fired: Norma, 1X
Primer: Federal 210GM
Powder type: Varget
Powder charge: 61.0 gr.
Bullet type, weight: Barnes TTSX, 250 gr.
Max OAL, loaded OAL: 3.390, 3.300
Muzzle velocity: 2,510 fps
Extreme spread: 37 fps
Standard deviation: 15 fps
Average group: 0.95 in.
Sizing, crimp: full length, yes

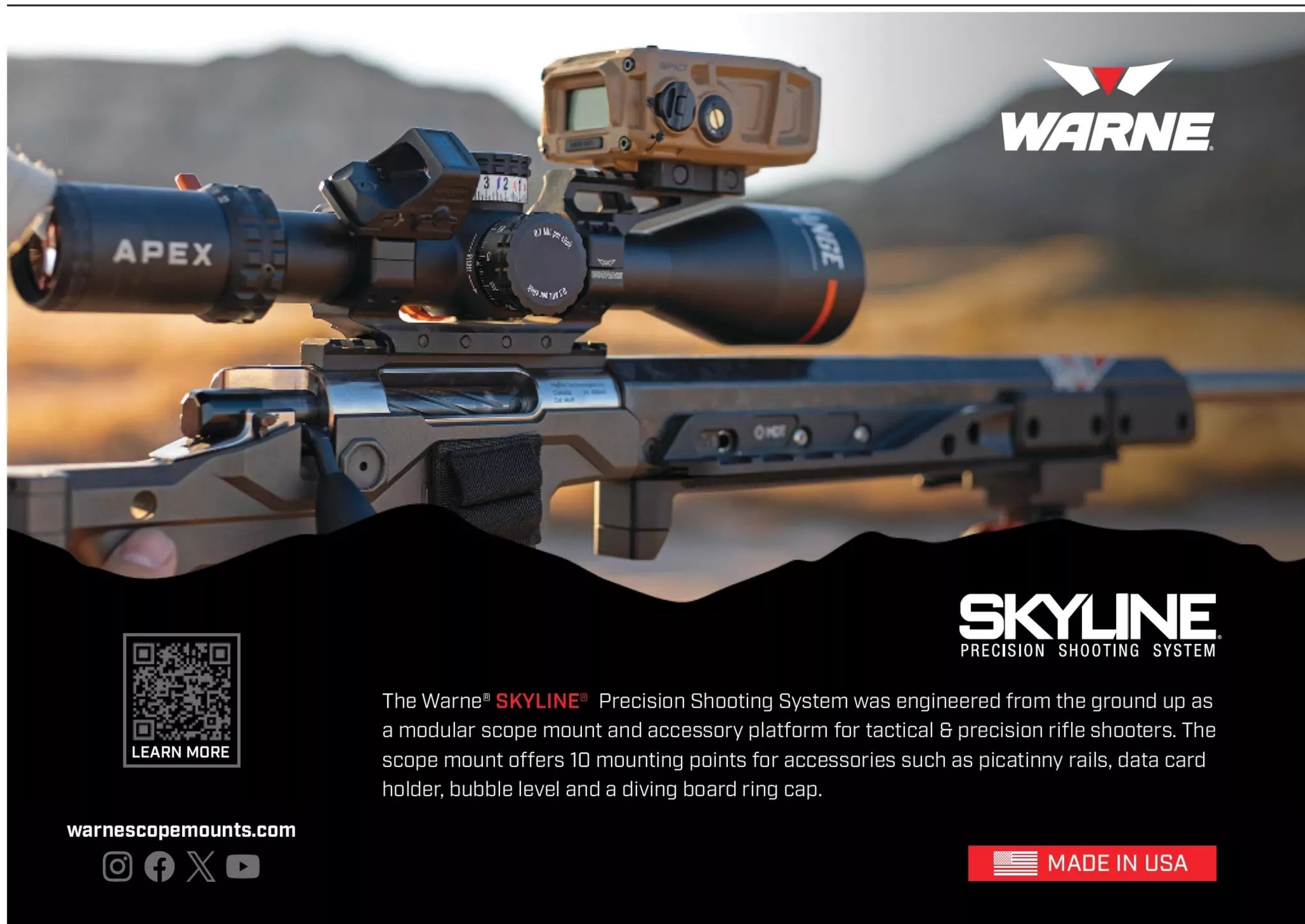
bullet barely engages the mouth of the case. In such situations, you'll need to seat deeper for practical purposes, but at least you'll have a grasp on how far your bullet has to jump until it engages the rifling.

If you crimp your handloads,

be sure to record that. A crimp can increase consistency in some cartridges, but applied incorrectly it can also cause pressure spikes or accuracy anomalies. So if you crimp, record that.

Here's the fun, and sometimes frustrating, part. After test-firing your handloads, return to your notes and add chronographed velocity, extreme spread and standard deviation. Add comments on any pressure signs you see. And of course record accuracy results and any pertinent observations on accuracy potential—crimped loads versus non-crimped, for instance.

Working up a good handload can be quick and easy, or it can be a drawn-out process. It depends on the individual taste of your rifle, and the characteristics of the components you choose. Keeping good notes makes a crucial difference when charting what works and what doesn't—and is particularly vital for those times when you return to a rifle and load you haven't worked with for a while. ■



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The Warne® **SKYLINE**® Precision Shooting System was engineered from the ground up as a modular scope mount and accessory platform for tactical & precision rifle shooters. The scope mount offers 10 mounting points for accessories such as picatinny rails, data card holder, bubble level and a diving board ring cap.

Keeping It Simple

BUSHNELL'S R5 DELIVERS GOOD TRACKING AND CLARITY, BELYING ITS LOW PRICE.

Shooting equipment has evolved over the last decade. There's newfound interest in precision shooting, and as a result more and more guns and optics offer features traditionally found only on tactical rifles.

Bushnell's new R5 series scopes are something of a throwback. They don't offer exposed turrets for rapid dialing to extended ranges. The tube measures one inch in diameter, and they are second-focal-plane optics. They're simply designed for the hunter who wants a robust, reliable scope that's suitable for most big game hunting and is priced affordably.

The R5 4-12x40mm version—which has a magnification range suitable for most hunting—I tested featured a few extra upgrades. First, it has a side-focus knob and an illuminated DOA-LRH800 reticle. The glass-etched reticle features a center dot that is illuminated and BDC holdover points that range from 2 to 8. There are also horizontal stadia lines.

The R5 doesn't have any onboard tech such as Bluetooth, but you can download the Bushnell Ballistic App and set up a profile that contains your rifle, scope and ammunition. These data provide yardages for the BDC holdover lines and wind holds de-



The R5 from Bushnell doesn't offer all the features of more high-end scopes, but its adjustments track well, and it will work fine for a variety of hunting situations.

pending upon your ballistics. The app even allows you to set up multiple gun profiles and sync with a Bluetooth-enabled rangefinder, and you can obtain environmental data from local weather stations. You can even build DOPE cards and email them to yourself for printing.

If that's more tech than you care to worry about, that's fine. Perhaps you're a traditionalist who believes in hold-over, knowing your DOPE and sights in every rifle two inches high at 100 yards to zero the gun at 200 and never shoots past 300. The R5 will serve you very well. The reticle is clean and offers a wide enough field of view—nine to 27 feet at 100 yards—for most hunting.

The Bushnell R5's one-inch tube, relatively small objective lens and lightweight capped turrets (which Bushnell refers to as target-style) keep mass to a minimum. Weight is a manageable 19.6 ounces, which is considerably lighter than other riflescopes available today.

SPECIFICATIONS

BUSHNELL R5

POWERxOBJ.	4-12x40mm (tested)
LENGTH, WEIGHT	11.5 in., 19.6 oz.
MAIN TUBE	1 in.
RETICLE	DOA LRH800 w/holdover marks, second focal plane, illuminated
ADJUSTMENTS	1/4 m.o.a. adjustments; 70 m.o.a. range
BATTERY	CR2032
EYE RELIEF	4.0 in.
PRICE	\$269 (as tested)
MANUFACTURER	Bushnell, BUSHNELL.COM

The relatively small main tube and objective also allow you to mount the scope very close to the bore of the rifle, which is not always possible with larger scopes. Length is 11.5 inches. The scope comes with flip-up lens caps.

The elevation and windage turrets offer 1/4-inch clicks and allow for 70

A LEGEND REBORN

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AP5-SD



9mm

AP53



5.56

AP51



.308



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m.o.a. of adjustment with 15 m.o.a. per revolution. The clicks are pleasantly crisp and clean, none of the mushy feeling associated with inexpensive scope turrets. There's an audible and tactile click with each adjustment. The threads for the windage and elevation caps are quite fine, which is common for affordably priced scopes, so take care not to cross-thread when replacing the caps.

Illumination is powered by the included CR2032 battery. You'll need to remove the tab that prevents the battery from activating during shipment. The battery housing/illumination control is part of the side-focus knob, and removing the battery compartment cap requires a flat tool, although I used a penny. Rethreading the cap can be a challenge, and again you'll want to avoid cross-threading.

The Bushnell's illumination control is simple to operate even though it's integral to the side-focus knob. The illumination setting—which sits on the outside of the focus knob—has six brightness settings with intermediate off positions. The settings are marked 1 to 6, and the intermediate settings all have a 0.

The focus knob was initially quite tight but seemed to loosen a bit with use. Minimum focus is 10 yards, so this scope will work on rimfires and air rifles. Eye relief on the R5 is a substantial four inches and allows you to mount the scope slightly farther forward than competing optics and also reduces the risk of getting "scoped."

The R5 is IPX7 waterproof rated and features Bushnell's EXO coating that prevents dust, rain and smudges from obscuring your view.

To someone who grew up with one-inch hunting scopes with capped turrets, the R5 felt familiar and comfortable. Clarity was impressive, especially for an optic in this price range. The lens coatings don't match those of higher-end optics, but for a hunting optic they're perfectly suitable.

I tested the R5 in low light, waiting until the traditional end of legal hunting hours here in Ohio (half-hour after sunset) to see how the optic



The windage and elevation knobs are capped, which is traditional for hunting scopes, and the side-focus knob doubles as the illumination control. (Below r.), the R5 offers a generous four inches of eye relief, and the 40mm objective (below l.) permits a low mount.



performed. Even in overcast conditions with diffused light the target was clearly visible at last legal shooting light.

There was a bit of chromatic aberration visible when looking at a white target taped to a dark background, but it shouldn't be an issue when you're centering your scope on a whitetail buck. Edge clarity was quite good for a budget scope, and I'd judge the quality of the lenses and clarity in this scope to be exceptional for the price.

I conducted a tracking test using Rite in the Rain's 100/200 m.o.a. targets, which I like because they offer four rows of three targets, and from the center of one bullseye to the next vertically is exactly three inches. This allows me to shoot the bottom bullseye, adjust 12 clicks (for a 1/4 m.o.a. scope) in any direction and easily judge vertical and horizontal tracking—as the groups should land at or near the appropriate bullseye.

We assume that a \$2,000 target scope will track accurately, but a

budget \$200 riflescope may not. The Bushnell does track properly, so there will be no guessing when you make adjustments.

Overall the Bushnell R5 was a pleasant surprise, performing better than its price might indicate. While the Bushnell ballistic app doesn't offer all the bells and whistles you'll find on some other ballistic apps, it will tell you where your bullet will strike when you hold at a fixed point in the BDC reticle. I plugged in some basic ballistic data, got my holdover data and was able to register a first-shot hit at 400 yards.

Some affordable scopes are complete rip-offs with cheap lenses, middling coatings and the like. Not the R5. If you're looking for a hunting optic and don't need fancy features like exposed dials, big main tubes with loads of adjustment and onboard electronic gadgetry, you should consider the Bushnell R5. It's a scope that hits well above its price point, and it's guaranteed for life. ■

MODEL 1854™



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Outdoors on Demand



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.

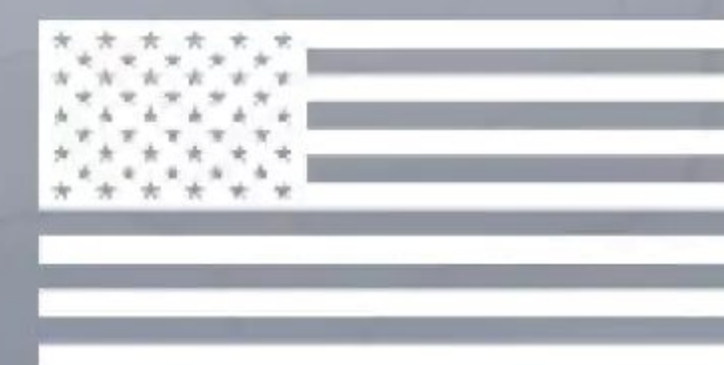
Perhaps even better for shooters and hunters on the go, in addition to

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.

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BIG GAME

RIFLE ROUNDUP

2025

by Brad Fitzpatrick

THIS YEAR'S LINEUP FEATURES
A FEW NEW MODELS ALONG
WITH GREAT LINE EXTENSIONS.

Of all the articles I write each year, the annual big game rifle roundup is one of my favorites. It's always exciting to catalog the new advancements in hunting rifle design, and 2025 does not disappoint. Many companies are expanding their catalogs this year, offering everything from line extensions and cartridge additions to entirely new firearms.

There have also been several significant new cartridge releases over the last 12 months, perhaps most notably Federal's new 7mm Backcountry but also Hornady's .25 Creedmoor and .338 ARC. The straight-wall cartridge market also appears to be strong and growing, with a mix of lever actions and bolt guns chambered for these rounds.

There's something on this list for every hunter and every budget. Regardless of the game or conditions there's a gun here that will suit your big game hunting needs.

Benelli

This year Benelli is expanding its Lupo line with the addition of the Lupo Charred Timber. The barreled action receives Benelli's impenetrable BE.S.T. DLC surface coating in Labrador Grey. That not only gives this rifle a striking appearance but also protects the metal against the elements. In fact, Benelli is so confident in this surface finish that it backs it with a 25-year warranty. The new Charred Timber color features

multi-color webbing, and the buttstock incorporates Benelli's Progressive Comfort recoil management system and length-of-pull spacers.

Lupo Charred Timber rifles ship with a one-piece Picatinny rail and a radial brake that helps to reduce recoil. As with other Benelli Lupo rifles, the Charred Timber features a three-lug one-piece bolt with short bolt lift, an adjustable trigger, double-stack detachable magazine and integral sling studs.

Blaser

Many hunters are familiar with Blaser's R8 straight-pull rifle, which allows hunters to swap out barrels and bolt heads, but the big news this year is the addition of a new barrel system: the Silence Barrel. This barrel fits onto existing R8 rifles but has an integral suppressor that helps reduce noise to hearing-safe levels. The outer sleeve is made from titanium, and the overall diameter is similar to a bull barrel.

Because the barrel acts as the suppressor it reduces overall length considerably when compared to rifles with screw-on suppressors. The Blaser system offers superb baffle geometry while still maintaining the look, weight and feel of a traditional unsuppressed gun. Buyers do have to go through the NFA process to purchase the barrel.

Browning

[Ed. note: The information we have here came straight from the company,

and at press time some of it didn't jibe with what was on the Browning website. That could easily change by the time you read this.] The X-Bolt 2 family now includes several new models like the X-Bolt 2 Medallion. This elegant bolt action has a grade III/IV black walnut stock with rosewood fore-end and pistol grip caps, gloss finish and 18 lpi cut checkering.

The barrel and receiver feature a striking gloss blue finish, and the receiver has scroll engraving. Other high-end touches include a gold Buckmark emblem on the trigger guard and a gold-plated trigger. The threaded Sporter-weight barrel has a M13-0.75 thread pattern and a muzzle brake. Other features include the Browning detachable rotary magazine, DLX adjustable trigger and a kick-absorbing Inflex recoil pad.

That gun's stablemate is the X-Bolt 2 Medallion Maple. It has an AAAA grade white maple stock with a gloss finish and rosewood caps on the fore-end and pistol grip. The receiver features scroll engraving and has brilliant gloss bluing.

Browning has also expanded the X-Bolt 2 Speed line with OD green and flat dark earth versions. This rifle has Browning's versatile Vari-Tech stock that offers comb and height adjustments as well as interchangeable pistol grips. The barrel is threaded and has a removable brake and M13-0.75 threads. The Vari-Tech's length-of-pull spacers fit inside the stock for a refined look.



**Benelli Lupo BE.S.T.
Charred Timber**



**Browning X-Bolt 2
Medallion Maple**

The OD green Vari-Tech stock has overmolded grips for added comfort, and the stock looks great alongside the Cerakote Forest Shadow finish on the receiver and fluted barrel. The flat dark earth model pairs that stock color with Desert Shadow Cerakote metalwork.

And there's one more: the X-Bolt 2 Speed Maple. It has a AAA-grade dark maple stock with a satin finish that looks beautiful alongside the Tungsten Cerakote finish on the receiver and Sporter-weight fluted barrel with muzzle brake. Unlike the other Speed models listed above, the muzzle is threaded 5/8x24, so it will accept a broad range of muzzle devices without the need for an adapter.

Browning is also bringing a Hunter Composite Stainless model to the X-Bolt 2 family. It has a rugged black Vari-Tech adjustable stock with overmolded grip surfaces. The rifle incorporates a silver-finished DLX trigger along with standard X-Bolt 2 features. A companion Hunter Composite Two-Tone shares the same features but sports a blued barrel. Both are modestly priced for X-Bolt 2s.

Christensen Arms

Christensen released the Evoke rifle last year, and this year it's adding a .375 H&H chambering—at under \$900 making it the least expensive rifle chambered for this versatile old cartridge. The Evoke is loaded with modern features like a precision-machined push-feed

receiver, 416R stainless steel barrel with 5/8x24 threads and a muzzle brake, and an adjustable TriggerTech trigger. It feeds from a detachable box magazine and comes with a zero-m.o.a. Picatinny rail. The polymer stock has a raised comb and vertical grip.

Weight is 7.7 pounds, which is rather light for a .375 H&H, and recoil should be stiff but manageable for experienced shooters. Adding a suppressor would make the Evoke an affordable, smooth-shooting medium bore.

Citadel

If you miss hunting with a classic gas-operated autoloading rifle like the Remington 742, then you'll love the new Citadel AD500 series guns. All chambered in .308 Win., they're available with walnut or synthetic stocks with either black or gray metal finish.

All four versions also include Picatinny rails, detachable box magazines and fiber-optic sights; the ramped adjustable rear even brings to mind the 742's sight layout. They have 20-inch barrels, making them ideal woods rifles for fast shots on big game. The reliable gas operation system is also tuned to run with a range of .308 Win. hunting ammo.

Franchi

Franchi's new Momentum Carbine Elite, which *RifleShooter* covered in the May/June issue, offers features found

on its popular Momentum Elite rifles in a shorter overall package. The .308 and .350 Legend models have 18-inch barrels while the 6.5 Creedmoor version is outfitted with a 20-inch barrel. Barrels are quipped with removable muzzle brakes, and metalwork has a Cobalt Cerakote finish. The compact Evolved Ergonom-X stock features Franchi's Terra camo pattern.

Other features include a one-piece, three-lug Dependable bolt; Relia adjustable trigger; TSA recoil pad; one-piece Picatinny rail; integrated QD swivel and M-Lok mounting points; and a detachable box magazine.

Franchi is also adding a new exclusive camouflage pattern, Biome, to its Momentum Elite rifle. This camo blends shades of brown, tan and green to break up the outline of the rifle, and the Evolved Ergonom-X camo stocks are paired with Patriot Brown Cerakote metalwork. The company is also adding the 7mm PRC to the Biome lineup.

Franchi is also releasing the Momentum Varmint Elite in another exclusive camo pattern: Verdant. This rifle has a heavy-contour spiral-fluted 24-inch barrel with muzzle brake, Verdant Evolved Ergonom-X stock with adjustable soft-touch cheek riser, optic rail, Midnight Bronze Cerakote finish, and a detachable box magazine. In addition to traditional varmint cartridges it's also available in .308 Win., making it a suitable big game rifle.



Citadel AD500 Walnut Tungsten



Franchi Momentum Varmint Elite Verdant

Marlin

A couple new lever actions are shipping out of the company's Mayodan, North Carolina facility this year: the 1894 and 1895 Guide Guns. The 1894 is chambered to both .357 Mag. and .44 Mag. They have straight-grip gray laminate stocks and a traditional Marlin ramped semi-buckhorn rear/hooded bead front sight arrangement. The .357 has an 18.63-inch cold-hammer-forged alloy steel barrel and a nine-round tubular magazine while the .44 has a 20.25-inch alloy steel barrel. That keeps overall length to a minimum—just 36 inches for the .357—and makes these rifles ideal for tight quarters.

The 1895 Guide Gun is chambered to .45-70 and features a brown laminate stock. Its 19.10-inch barrel is threaded 11/16x24, and it's compact enough for close-cover or blind hunting. It offers the wallop and six-round capacity to make it a suitable rifle for large game like elk and moose and an impressive bear defense tool. Sight setup is the same as on the 1894, and at 7.4 pounds it's light enough to carry long distances yet comfortable to shoot even with hot .45-70 loads. I've had the opportunity to shoot both rifles, and they are fantastic.

Mossberg

The Mossberg Patriot turns 10 years old in 2025, and to celebrate the company is adding a new Suppressor-Ready Patriot Carbine. It offers all the features

that have made the Patriot a popular hunting rifle like a dual-lug push-feed bolt with spiral fluting, a detachable flush-fit box magazine and a free-floated carbon steel barrel.

The primary difference is the shorter barrels—16.5, 18 or 20 inches. All are threaded, of course, but even if you don't add a silencer the Patriot Carbine is handy for hunting in tight cover, blinds or tree stands. They feature Mossberg's adjustable LBA trigger and a Picatinny rail for mounting optics. The stock is black synthetic and equipped with sling studs.

Sauer

Sauer introduced its new 505 bolt-action rifle to the European market last year, and in 2025 these rifles will be available in the States. The 505 offers an incredibly smooth action, and superb fit and finish. Perhaps the most exciting features on these rifles are its interchangeable precision barrels, so swapping between chamberings is simple and straightforward. Because the Sauer can easily be broken down and reassembled without having to rezero, it's a great rifle for traveling hunters. The 505 employs a fire-control system that doesn't cock the rifle until the safety is disengaged, adding an additional layer of protection. The trigger has four preset weights that range from 0.77 pound to 2.75 pounds.

The base Titanium Gray model

features a synthetic stock, and there's also a version of that rifle available with a thumbhole stock. The wood-stocked version starts at grade 5 walnut and is striking, but you can upgrade to grade 10 if you want. There's also a Synchro XTC Carbon model with a carbon-fiber stock. Sauer offers several upgrades and accessories like fluted barrels, special grip caps cases, and more.

Savage Arms

The new 110 Trail Hunter Lite is built on the proven Savage 110 action and has a fluted and threaded heavy Sporter barrels in either 16.5- or 20-inch lengths—perfect for hunting heavy cover or blinds or for adding a suppressor. Metalwork is treated to a Cerakote Tungsten finish, and Weaver-style bases are included. The barreled action is mated to a rugged black Hogue Overmolded stock for hunting in any weather.

As with all 110 rifles, the Trail Hunter Lite has Savage's outstanding AccuTrigger, a three-position tang-mounted safety and a detachable box magazine. Of particular interest is the new 7mm Backcountry version with a 16.5-inch barrel—a light, handy mountain rifle that takes full advantage of Federal's exciting new cartridge.

Last issue I reviewed one of the new Axis 2 rifles. This line offers superb performance at a modest cost, and it has some modern touches like redesigned



Marlin 1895 Guide Gun

Savage Axis 2 XP Wood

2025 RIFLESHOOTER BIG GAME GUN GUIDE

MAKE/MODEL	MSRP	.243 Win.	6mm Creed. (6mm ARC)	.25-06 Rem.	.25 Creed. (.257 Wby.)	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 PRC	6.5-300 Wby. (6.5 RPM)	.270 Win.	6.8 Western	.270 WSM (.277 Fury)	7mm-08 Rem.	.280 Ackley	7mm Rem. Mag.	7mm PRC	7mm Backcountry	.300 BLK	.308 Win.	.30-06	.300 WSM	.300 Win. Mag.	.300 PRC	.300 Wby.	.350 Legend (.338 ARC)	.357 Mag.	.375 H&H Mag.	.400 Legend	.44 Mag.	.450 Bush. (.45 Colt)	.45-70 Gov't
Savage Axis XP	\$479	•		•		•			•			•					•	•	•					•			•			
Savage Axis 2	\$489	•		•		•			•			•					•	•	•					•			•			
Mossberg Supp. Ready Patriot Carbine	\$500					•	•							•				•			•			•					•	
Savage Axis 2 XP	\$549	•		•		•			•			•					•	•	•					•			•			
Savage Axis 2 Pro	\$599	•	(•)			•			•			•					•	•	•					•			•			
Winchester XPR	\$630																									•		•		
Savage 110 Trail Hunter Lite	\$669	•				•	•		•			•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•			•			•		•	
Savage Axis 2 XP Hardwood	\$689	•		•		•			•			•						•	•					•			•			
Win. XPR Sporter, Hunter True Timber & LH	\$720																									•		•		
Citadel AD500 Synthetic	\$739																	•												
Winchester XPR Stealth Supp. Ready	\$750																									•		•		
Citadel AD 500 Walnut	\$759																	•												
Weatherby Vanguard Black Hills	\$769	•		•	(•)	•	•	•	•			•		•	•			•	•		•		•	•						
Win. XPR Hunter True Timber Strata LH	\$890	•				•	•		•	•				•				•	•		•			•						
Christensen Arms Evoke	\$899																								•					
Franchi Momentum Elite Biome	\$899					•	•								•			•	•		•			•					•	
Win. XPR Extreme True Timber Midnight LH	\$900	•				•	•			•	•			•				•	•		•			•						
Browning X-Bolt 2 Hunter Composite 2-Tone	\$1,220	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•		•									
Franchi Momentum Elite Carbine	\$1,249					•												•						•						
Franchi Momentum Varmint Elite Verdant	\$1,249																	•												
Marlin 1894 Guide Gun	\$1,279																								•			•		
Marlin 1895 Guide Gun	\$1,279																												•	
Weatherby Model 307 Range XP 2.0	\$1,279				•(•)	•	•	(•)				•	•	•	•			•	•		•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Hunter Composite SS	\$1,283	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•	•	•	•								
Smith & Wesson 1854 SS Synthetic	\$1,399																												•	
Smith & Wesson 1854 Stealth Hunter	\$1,399																								•			•	(•)	
Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed OD Green & FDE	\$1,462	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•		•	•								
Smith & Wesson 1854 Traditional Hunter	\$1,499																												•	
Browning X-Bolt 2 Medallion	\$1,760	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•		•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed Maple	\$1,762	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•		•	•								
Seekins NX15	\$1,795																								(•)					
Tikka T3x Ace Game	\$1,799					•	•							•	•			•			•									
Browning X-Bolt 2 Medallion Maple	\$1,885	•				•	•		•	•				•	•			•	•		•									
Seekins Havak PH3	\$1,895		•			•	•			(•)				•	•	•		•			•	•								
Benelli Lupo Charred Timber	\$2,299					•									•			•	•		•									
Springfield Armory Model 2020 Heatseeker	\$2,355					•												•												
SIG Sauer Cross Short Action	\$2,599					•												•												
SIG Sauer Cross Magnum	\$2,699														•						•	•								
Seekins Havak Element M3	\$2,895		•			•	•			(•)				•	•	•		•			•	•								
Seekins Element Hunter	\$3,200		•			•	•			(•)				•	•	•		•			•	•								

2025 RIFLESHOOTER BIG GAME GUN GUIDE

MAKE/MODEL	MSRP	.243	6mm	.25-0	.25 C	6.5 C	6.5 P	6.5-5	.270	6.8 W	.270	7mm-	.280	7mm	7mm	7mm	.300	.308	.30-0	.300	.300	.300	.300	.350	.357	.375	.400	.44 M	.450	.45-7
Blaser R8 Silence Barrel	\$3,395	•				•												•			•									
Sauer 505 Titanium Gray	\$3,520	•				•	•		•		•			•				•	•		•					•				
Sauer 505 Titanium Gray Thumbhole	\$3,850	•				•	•		•		•			•				•	•		•					•				
Sauer 505 Grade 5 Walnut	\$4,950	•				•	•		•		•			•				•	•		•					•				
Sauer 505 Synchro XTC Carbon	\$7,150	•				•	•		•		•			•				•	•		•					•				

• **New caliber addition**; also available in other chamberings. Abbreviations: LH, left-hand; SS, stainless steel; Supp., Suppressor; Win., Winchester
 Prices are suggested retail based on the best information we had at press time and reflect average price for the line. individual variants may cost more or less.

ergonomic stocks with more vertical pistol grips and ambidextrous palm swells. There’s also a redesigned bolt knob that allows for better control when cycling the action. Axis 2 rifles have the AccuTrigger and tang-mounted safety.

The base model has the new polymer stock design in your choice of OD green, flat dark earth or gray and includes scope bases. It’s also available in both compact and left-handed versions. The Pro model has a one-piece zero m.o.a. optic rail and a camo stock in Woodland, Western or Forest SP patterns. The metalwork sports a Gun Metal Bronze Cerakote finish, and the muzzles are threaded. As with the standard Axis 2, right- and left-handed and compact versions of the Axis 2 Pro are available.

Savage is also adding XP versions of the Axis 2 that offer a choice of OD green, flat dark earth or gray polymer stock and come with a mounted and bore-sighted 3-9x40mm scope. There’s also a hardwood-stock Axis 2 XP rifle with the same vertical grip design as the polymer guns. Last, Savage is also selling an Axis XP model. It has the new ergonomic stock on the Axis 2 in black

as well as a mounted and bore-sighted 3-9x40mm scope, but it does not come with the AccuTrigger.

Seekins Precision

While some companies on this list are adding just a rifle or two, Seekins has revamped and updated its entire hunting rifle line, and that starts with the Havak PH3. This precision bolt-action rifle offers an integrated 20 m.o.a. Picatinny rail, M-Lok slots on the fore-end, a Seekins PH3 carbon composite stock with adjustable comb, 416R stainless steel threaded spiral-fluted barrel and a TriggerTech adjustable trigger.

The three-lug bolt is extremely smooth, and toolless bolt disassembly allows for easy cleaning and caliber changes. The Seekins Quick Change Barrel System allows you to easily swap out barrels at home in a few minutes without special tools. The PH3 action is also compatible with Seekins chassis and stocks so this gun can be easily customized.

Seekins also updated its Havak Element M3 line, which utilizes a light-weight aluminum action and Seekins’s

PH3 carbon composite stock with a full-length M-Lok rail. The anodized black receiver is light but strong enough to handle the 7mm Backcountry’s 80,000 psi pressure. The 20 m.o.a. rail has an integral bubble level for shooting at extended ranges.

The carbon-fiber-wrapped 416 stainless steel barrels are 20 or 22 inches depending on caliber and have the Hunter removable brake. Thanks to the Quick-Change Barrel Collar you can swap barrels on these rifles very quickly. Like the PH3, the Element M3 has detachable box magazines, a TriggerTech adjustable trigger and a bolt that is designed for toolless disassembly. If you’re looking for a mountain rifle, the Element M3 weighs six pounds or less.

The Element Hunter has many of the same features but uses the Havak Hunter Chassis, which has a folding stock that was designed by hunters to be quiet, snag-free and stable. As always, Seekins rifles are backed by a no-questions-asked lifetime warranty.

On the AR side, Seekins has added the .338 ARC to its NX15. Weighing just seven pounds and with a 16-inch 416R



Seekins M3 Element

stainless barrel that's threaded 1/2x28, it features ambidextrous controls and a low-profile adjustable gas block for shooting with or without a suppressor.

SIG Sauer

SIG's bolt-action Cross rifle has been a big success, but those guns were a bit on the heavy side for most hunting. This year SIG is offering a lighter version, the Cross Sawtooth. Available in both short-action and magnum models, the Cross Sawtooths have Proof Research carbon-fiber threaded barrels, lightened M-Lok/Arca handguards, 20 m.o.a. Picatinny optic rails, detachable box magazines and adjustable triggers.

Both versions come with a Cerakote Moss finish, folding adjustable stock and muzzle brake, and are backed by a sub-m.o.a. accuracy guarantee. The short-action version weighs from 6.6 to 7.2 pounds depending on caliber and has a 16-, 18- or 24-inch barrel. The magnum models weigh 8.1 pounds and feature 24-inch Proof barrels.

Smith & Wesson

Smith & Wesson has been offering the 1854 lever action for a few years, but heretofore it has only been available in pistol-caliber configurations. For 2025, the company is launching two new .45-70 models of the rifle: the traditional walnut version and the stainless steel

synthetic model. Both have threaded 20-inch barrels, and they feature XS ghost ring rear sights and gold bead front sights as well as an optics rail. Capacity is six rounds, and they have a large lever loop and feature a forged stainless steel receiver. The Traditional Walnut has a black Armornite finish and walnut stock while the stainless steel/synthetic version offers a polymer stock with M-Lok attachment points.

Smith & Wesson also launched its 1854 Stealth Hunter lever action. Chambered for pistol-caliber cartridges, this model blends the compact design and ease of carry of a lever gun with modern features like an aluminum handguard with M-Lok attachment slots. These guns are threaded and come equipped with XS ghost ring rear sights and HiViz H3 front sights. They're well-balanced, fast-shooting "brush guns" for hogs, deer or bears.

Springfield Armory

Springfield's bolt-action lineup continues to grow with the addition of the new Model 2020 Heatseeker rifle. This gun has a Sharp Bros. Heatseeker M-Lok chassis and B5 Systems' large Collapsible Precision Stock and P-Grip 23. The barrel is a 16-inch carbon fiber installed in a Model 2020 stainless steel receiver. The 2020 push-feed action has EDM raceways that offer buttery smooth bolt operation, and the 4140

tool steel nitride bolt is a robust design that is easy to maintain in the field. The Remington 700-pattern optics rail is held in place by 6-48 screws, and the rifle feeds from five-round AICS detachable magazines. The TriggerTech trigger is adjustable.

With the stock collapsed, overall length of this rifle is just under 36 inches—small enough to strap alongside a backpack for ease of transport. The short barrel works well with a suppressor, and the Coyote Brown Cerakote finish protects it against the elements. Weight is a manageable seven pounds, seven ounces so this is a precision rifle that's light enough for the field.

Tikka

New from Tikka is the T3x Ace Game, a target-style rifle that's designed with the big game hunter in mind. For all the details, please see the feature article elsewhere in this issue.

Weatherby

Late last year, Weatherby announced its new Model 307 Range XP 2.0, a value bolt-action hunting rifle based on its new push-feed, two-lug 307 action. Available in both short and long-action versions, the 307's bolt is designed to allow for toolless takedown, and the stout M16-style extractor ensures reliable operation even under tough conditions. The skip-fluted magnum Sporter



**Smith & Wesson 1854
Stainless .45-70**

**Springfield Armory
Model 2020 Heatseeker**

contour barrel has a Graphite Black Cerakote finish and a muzzle brake. The stock is hand-painted and features an adjustable comb and length-of-pull spacers—as well as a modern vertical grip that offers control and comfort from a variety of shooting positions. Dual front sling studs allow owners to mount a bipod while still leaving space for attaching a sling swivel.

The trigger is a TriggerTech externally adjustable model, and since the Model 307 action is compatible with Model 700 platform parts, you can customize the rifle as you like. These rifles, which are built in Sheridan, Wyoming, ship with Magpul magazines and are AICS mag compatible—except for the 7mm PRC, which comes with an MDT magazine.

I've long been a fan of Weatherby's Vanguard rifles and was excited to see the announcement of a new addition to the Vanguard family: the Black Hills model. Like other Vanguard rifles it is sourced by Howa in Japan and built to

Weatherby's specifications. It's a push-feed with an M16-style extractor. The action features an integral recoil lug and has a three-position rocker-type safety and a two-stage trigger that is smooth, crisp and predictable.

Two barrel diameters are available—No. 2 and No. 3 contour—both of which are cold-hammer-forged and equipped with a muzzle brake. The synthetic stock is hand-painted in Sheridan and has a Monte Carlo cheekpiece. A Peak 44 JRail Picatinny top rail is included, and I particularly like the addition of the Peak 44 Arca/Picatinny adapter on the fore-end that makes it easy to add or remove a bipod or tripod. Well-built and affordably priced, they're backed by a sub-m.o.a. accuracy guarantee.

Winchester

Winchester is offering a pair of new rifles this year, both of which are designed for southpaw shooters. The XPR Extreme True Timber Midnight MB and XPR Hunter True Timber Strata MB

are now available in left-hand models, and both come with features common to other XPR rifles: M.O.A. Trigger; detachable box magazine; muzzle brake; and precision button-rifled barrel. The Extreme True Timber Midnight has a Tungsten Cerakote finish and polymer stock in True Timber Midnight camo while the Hunter True Timber Strata MB has a Perma-Cote FDE metal finish and True Timber Strata camo polymer stock.

Winchester has also added some straight-wall caliber extensions to existing models. The XPR Stealth Suppressor Ready, XPR Sporter, XPR and XPR Left-Hand are all now available in both .400 Legend and .450 Bushmaster. That's good news for deer hunters, and the powerful .400 Legend and .450 Bushmaster are also great cartridges for black bears and hogs. The Sporter model features a walnut stock and the XPR Stealth Suppressor Ready version has a short 16.5-inch barrel, just right for a suppressor. ■

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GAME ON!

TIKKA'S T3X ACE GAME, A NEW CROSSOVER TARGET/HUNTING RIFLE, OFFERS UP TOP ACCURACY AND FLEXIBILITY.

by Joseph von Benedikt



My first impression when pulling the new Tikka Ace Game from the box was that it is an instrument, not a tool. Although borderline too heavy for hunting, this is a refined precision rifle with popular modern characteristics. It looks like a \$3,000 rifle, but to my surprise suggested retail is just \$1,849.

The T3x Ace Game is a bolt action with a fluted, semi-heavy, Sporter-weight barrel, and it's mated to an aluminum chassis that's configurable for cheek rest height, recoil pad position, length of pull and so forth. At 9.3 pounds, it's just heavy

enough for the precision rifle crowd and just light enough for open-country hunting.

Presumably, that's why Tikka chose to name it the Ace Game—to distinguish it from its heavy-barrel, higher-capacity Ace Target stablemate. Appropriately, Game suggests both shooting games and big game hunting. It's a crossover rifle, and my testing shows it's a darned good one.

This example is chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor and wears a 24.3-inch barrel. It's anodized Midnight Bronze on aluminum parts and Cerakoted Midnight Black on steel. Tikka offers a wide spectrum of

variations, including all-black versions, and an impressive lineup of chamberings including .223 Rem., .22-250 Rem., 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, 7mm Rem. Mag., 7mm PRC, .308 Win. and .300 Win. Mag.

Available barrel lengths are either 20 inches or 24.3 inches, and there's about a half pound difference between the two. The 20-inch version is certainly handier when fitted with a suppressor for field use. The 24.3-inch version offers around 100 fps more velocity with the 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge.

More velocity enables bullets to buck the wind better and carry more impact speed way downrange. Both are key

advantages to competitive shooters and hunters alike when firing a mild cartridge such as the 6.5 Creedmoor. It's up to you whether compact packability or maximum reach is more important. The good news is that Tikka offers both, so you have the option.

Tikka's T3x action has been around for many years, so it's well proven. It features dual locking lugs on the bolt head, with a stout 0.22-inch-wide extractor set into the right-side lug at about two o'clock in the bolt face. A spring-loaded plunger-type ejector opposes the extractor at about 10 o'clock in the bolt face.

Both bolt shroud and bolt knob are

made of high-impact polymer. Spiral fluting in the bolt reduces weight slightly and provides a place for crud to accumulate when shooting in muddy, dusty or other dirty conditions while allowing smooth bolt operation.

The bolt handle dovetails into the bolt body and is secured by the cocking piece. A small tab with a dab of red paint in a divot serves as a visual cocking indicator. Tikka T3x rifles employ a two-position safety at the right rear of the action. When engaged, it locks the bolt.

According to company brand manager Joe Cuniffe, the barrel on the T3x Ace Game is the same as on the Tikka

Roughtech models. The Ace Game's barrel is fluted, which reduces weight without compromising stiffness and helps with rapid cooling. Up front, the muzzle is threaded 5/8x24 and ships with a simple thread protector. The fact that it does not have a muzzle brake is indicative of the overwhelming popularity of suppressors.

Some iterations of the Ace Game ship with a simple "black steel" finish. Those are generally priced a tad lower. For the \$100 upgrade cost, I'm a big fan of the enhanced corrosion resistance and visual appeal of the Cerakoted version I tested.

Triggers are single-stage adjustables. As received, mine released at a very crisp one pound, six ounces. It's perfect.

Magazines for the Ace Game are Tikka's traditional composite single-stack mags, just like the company uses in its hunting rifles, except these are five-round versions rather than just three rounds. Ace Target rifles, on the other hand, use Tikka's more expensive double-stack metal 10-round magazines.

Because so many precision rifle shooting competitions—from PRS to NRL Hunter—require eight to 10 rounds per timed stage, I wish Tikka had used the 10-round magazines in both versions of the new Ace line. However, it's worth noting that the magazine well inserts are made of composite, and all three current mag-well types—T1X, single-stack T3x and Tikka CTR double stack—are interchangeable.

Cuniffe also said the company is currently developing an AICS magazine well for the Ace. The molds are being cut even as we speak, so that will soon be an additional option as well.

What's really unique about the T3x Ace Game is its chassis. Machined of lightweight aircraft-grade aluminum, it's got all the bells and whistles modern precision shooters demand. As a bonus, Cuniffe said the Ace chassis will be available for sale separately, so if you already own a T3x or T1x you can drop that barreled action right in.

The chassis is super adjustable. The cheek rest features dialable height adjustment, with a release button and a spring-loaded return spring that enables the shooter to lower the cheek rest in an



The rifle is built on the time-tested T3x action and features an optics rail up top and a fantastic single-stage trigger. The bolt is fluted for sure operation in tough conditions.



The buttstock features an adjustable cheek rest and recoil pad, and an M-Lok slot in the toe is factory-fitted with a composite bag rider. The thumb rest is reversible.

STEINER

Nothing Escapes You

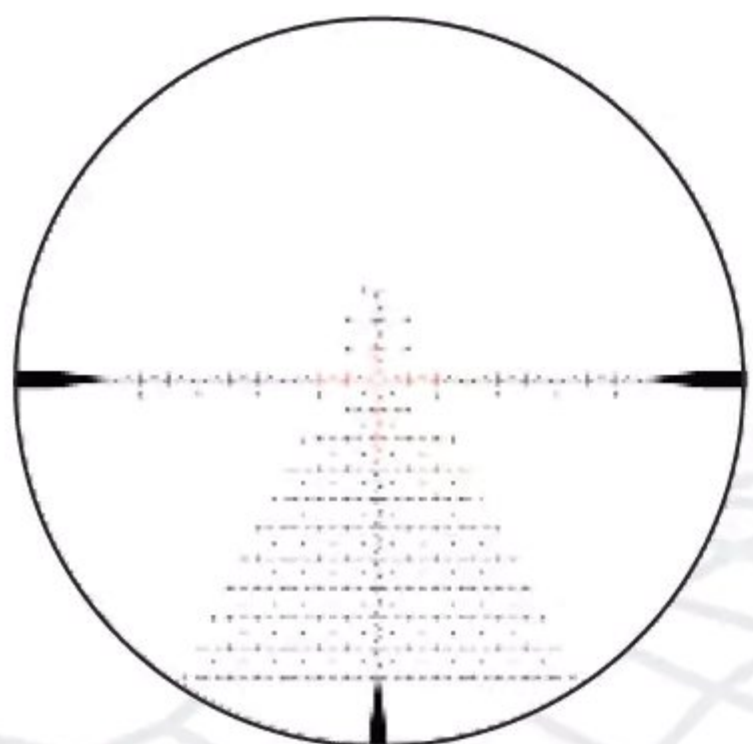


H6Xi

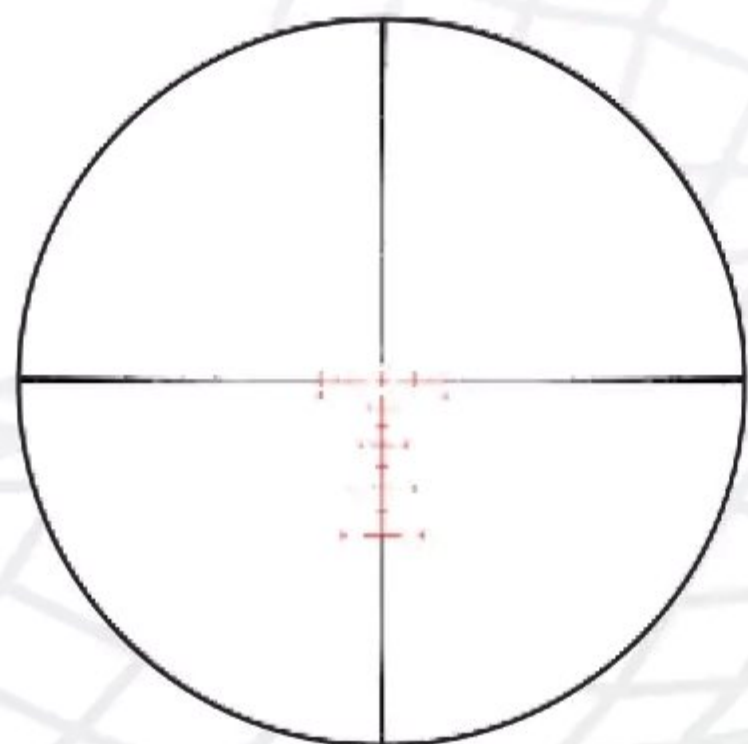
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STR- MIL RETICLE
FRONT FOCAL PLANE



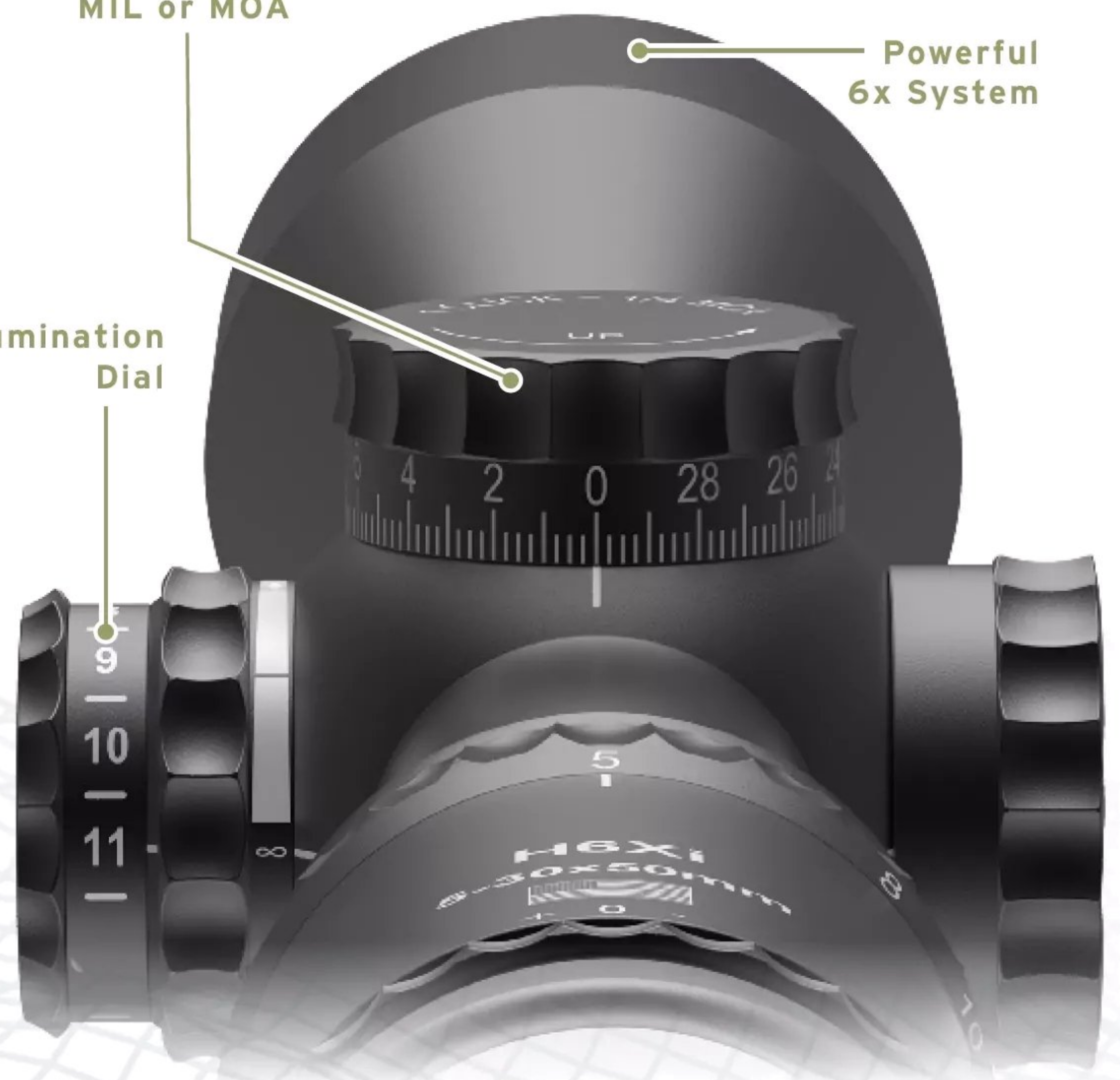
MHR- MOA RETICLE
REAR FOCAL PLANE



Available in
MIL or MOA

Powerful
6x System

Illumination
Dial



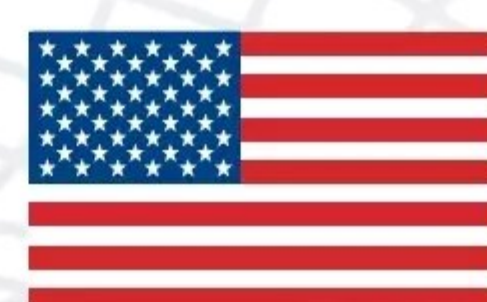
5-30x50mm



3-18x50mm



2-12x42mm



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GENERATION
TO GENERATION



SCAN FOR INFO

instant to remove the bolt and clean the bore. Push the locking button, and the cheek rest will spring back up into place at the predetermined height.

The recoil pad is easily adjustable for height. Beneath it, the toe of the stock has a flat section with an M-Lok slot, and the rifle comes with a nice bag rider with a thumb hook installed into that slot. QD sling cups are machined into each side of the skeletonized stock.

Some shooters may lament that the stock does not fold. I'm not one of them. Non-folding stocks are more rigid, lighter and less costly. Adding a hinge would likely have bumped up the price of the Ace Game significantly. I seldom use the folding feature on the hinged stocks I do own, and I think a hinge has little practical use—while I recognize the cool factor.

Tikka sells the T3x Ace Game with a good hand-filling AR-type grip installed. While I haven't seen the need to try it, literature indicates it can be adjusted for angle and distance to trigger. If you don't like it, it's easy to change. Above the grip there's a reversible thumb rest.

The chassis is machined identically on each side, making it compatible with left-hand Tikka barreled actions. Cunniffe told *RifleShooter* it's likely the company will offer southpaw versions of the Ace Game at some point.

A quality section of 1913-spec optic rail is factory-mounted to the top of the action. On its forward end are a cutout and a screw that would allow the end user to add an additional section, lengthening the rail to provide a mounting surface for accessories.

The standard Tikka dovetail is machined into the top of the action, so if you want to mount your scope low and close, you can remove the optic rail.

The trigger guard and magazine well are combined into one nicely contoured composite part sandwiched between the vertical AR-type grip and a textured metal barrier stop in front of the magazine.

As for the fore-end, it's a well-designed flat-bottomed affair with an integral machined Arca rail. M-Lok slots run down the length of both sides and the bottom. A QD sling cup is installed near the rear of the fore-end on each side.

Notably, the tip of the fore-end is fitted with a serrated anti-slip block of composite. This adds a surface that can be wedged against a barrier to achieve adequate stability in challenging positions.

Enough tech specs. How does this rifle shoot? For testing I mounted a Nightforce ATACR 4-16x42mm F1 scope and added an MDT bipod. My very first three shots after bore-sighting resulted in a 0.40-inch group.

With that great start, I bore down and



A five-round magazine is supplied, but 10-round aftermarket mags are available for competitors who need more capacity—or you can swap in a Tikka double-stack mag well.

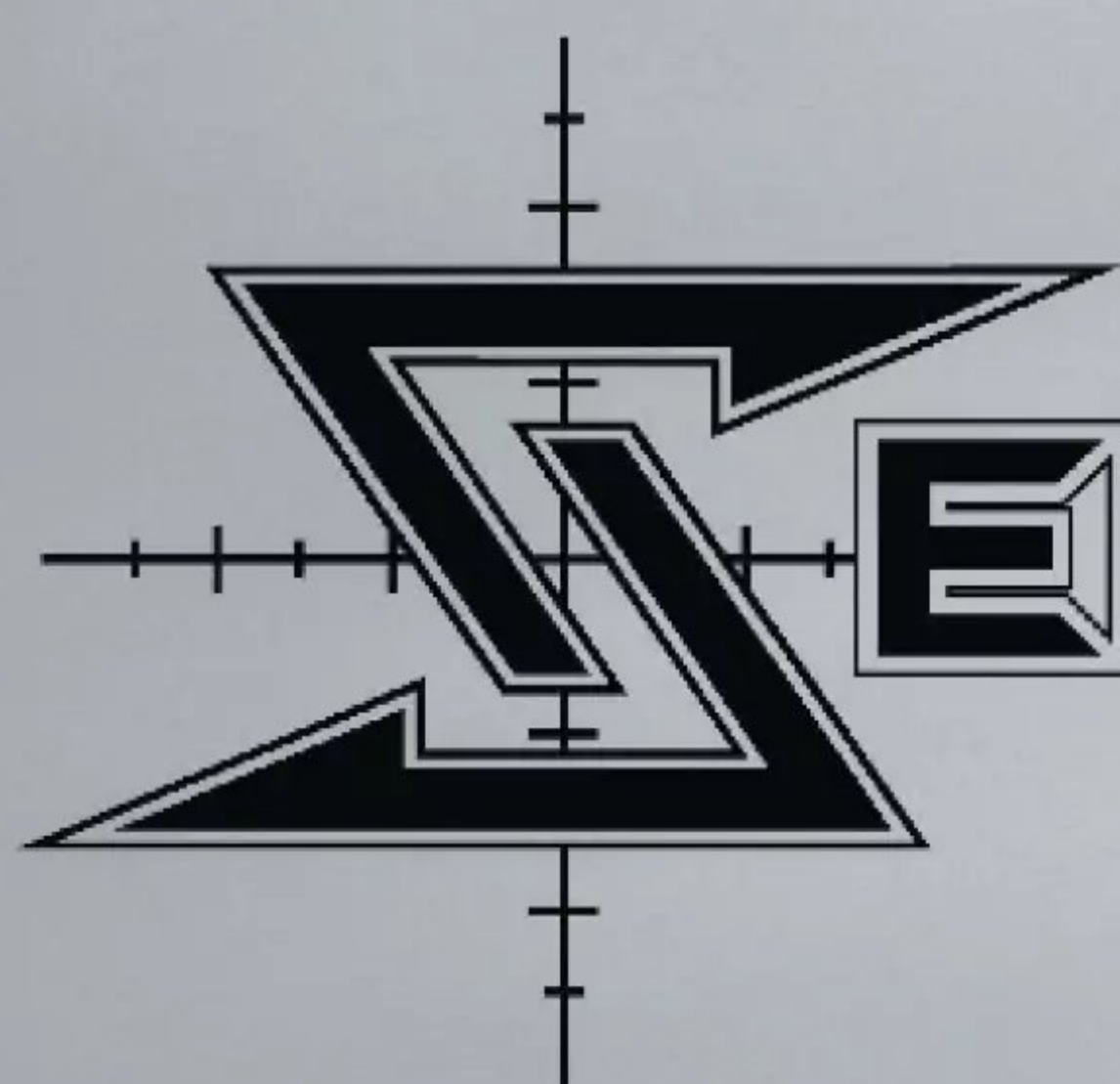


The fore-end incorporates a built-in full-length Arca rail, M-Lok slots on both sides and bottom, QD sling attachment cups on each side, and a built-in barrier stop.

SPECIFICATIONS

TIKKA T3X ACE GAME

TYPE	bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	.223 Rem., .22-250 Rem., 6.5 Creedmoor (tested), 6.5 PRC, 7mm Rem. Mag., 7mm PRC, .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag.
CAPACITY	5+1
BARREL	24.3 in. medium profile, 1:8 twist, threaded 1/2x28; Midnight Black Cerakote finish
OVERALL LENGTH	44.3 in.
WEIGHT	9 lb., 5 oz
STOCK	configurable Midnight Bronze chassis; fore-end w/M-Lok slots and Arca rails
TRIGGER	adjustable single stage; 1 lb., 6 oz. pull (measured, as received)
SAFETY	two-position bolt locking
SIGHTS	none; optics rail
PRICE	\$1,849
MANUFACTURER	Tikka, SAKO.GLOBAL

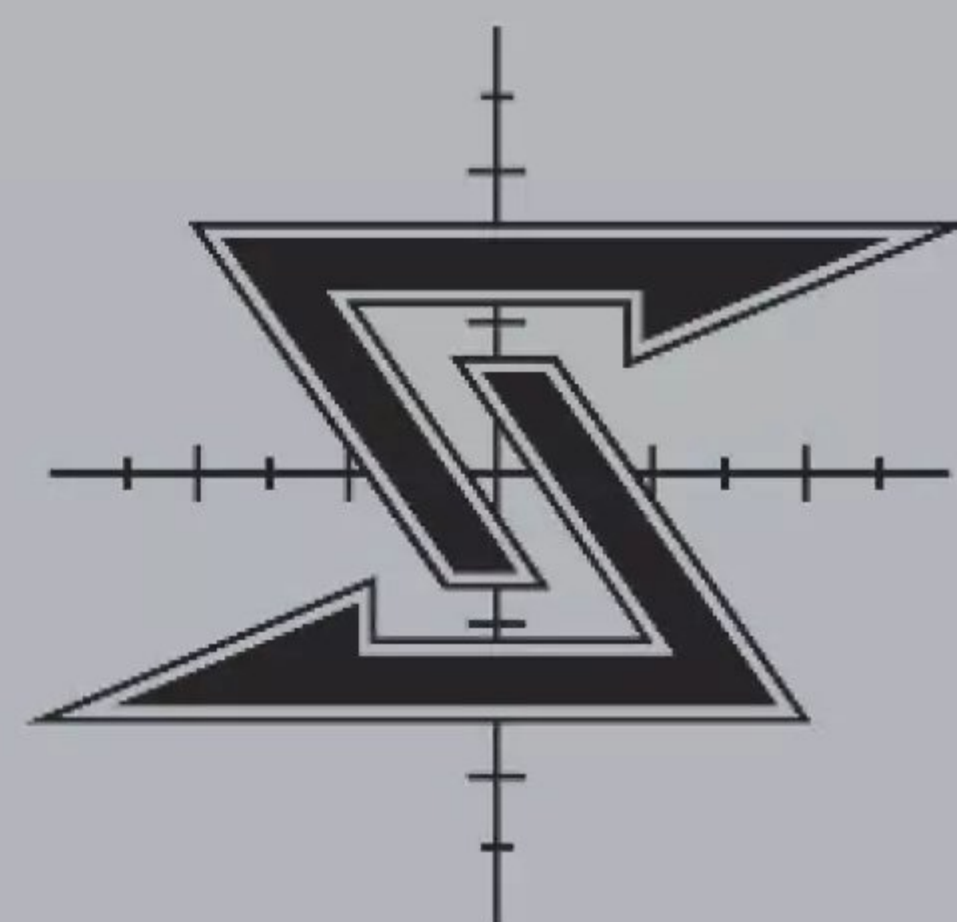


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fired two more three-shot groups. To my astonishment, the second group cut a ragged 0.24-inch hole, and the third group an itty bitty 0.14-inch hole.

From a clean, brand-new barrel, without any break-in, the new Tikka produced a three-shot average of 0.26 inch at 100 yards. That was with Sako TRG ammo loaded with 136-grain Scenar bullets.

This Sako load would prove to be the most accurate, but not by a whole lot. As you can see in the accompanying chart, of the seven loads I tested, not one averaged more than three-quarter m.o.a. Even more impressively, five of the seven averaged less than one-half m.o.a. There were no fliers, no unexplained impacts—nothing but impeccable accuracy.

As if that level of accuracy alone wasn't impressive enough, I allowed the barrel to cool only between different ammo types. As a rifle destined for precision shooting disciplines, the T3x Ace Game rifle must maintain its accuracy and hold its point of impact over long shot strings and with a very hot barrel. In order to test its integrity when hot, I fired those three consecutive three-shot groups back to back, as quickly as I could re-stoke the magazine.

I don't think I'm sticking my neck out to say this is the most accurate 6.5 Creedmoor I've ever tested. That's saying a lot considering the cartridge's propensity to shoot well in most rifles.

Throughout testing the T3x functioned smoothly and reliably, never

threatening to hiccup. I fed cartridges from the magazine and I chucked them in through the ejection port. No issues either way.

Ergonomics of the Ace Game is typical of chassis-stocked rifles. It's easy to make the chassis fit you perfectly, but it's cold to the touch, angular in the hand and heavier than a similar wood- or composite-stocked rifle would be.

But it offers a lot of great shooter-friendly features. I particularly like the barrier stop in front of the magazine, the thumb rest that helps with consistent shooting-hand placement, and the easily activated magazine release. The cheek rest's quick release for lowering and spring-back function are really nice for removing the bolt and cleaning the bore.

Any discussion of ergonomics wouldn't be complete without mentioning the one-pound, six-ounce trigger pull. It's crisp, clean and consistent. Overtravel is a tad more than you'd find with some aftermarket triggers, but you'll pay a lot of money to buy a better trigger than what comes stock in this gun.

Although the Ace Game is much too heavy to serve as a mountain rifle—or even an all-around backcountry hunting rifle—its weight is just fine for hunting from a stand or in open country. The weight would be an advantage in windy conditions or when jacked up on adrenaline from spotting a giant buck.

While it's not classy in a historic sense, in today's world of technical shooters, it's got panache and style to spare. This rifle would be at home anywhere from your local PRS match to the far-reaching senderos of South Texas whitetail country.

What's impressed me most about the T3x Ace Game is the combination of world-class accuracy, consistency, reliability and shooter-friendliness. A decade ago, you'd pay north of \$5,000 to get a custom rifle that would come close to equaling this one. You can have almost three of these Tikkas for that price.

If you've been looking for an honest precision centerfire rifle that'll shoot lights out but won't break the bank, I recommend Tikka's T3x Ace Game. Short of spending \$5,000 or more, nothing else touches it.



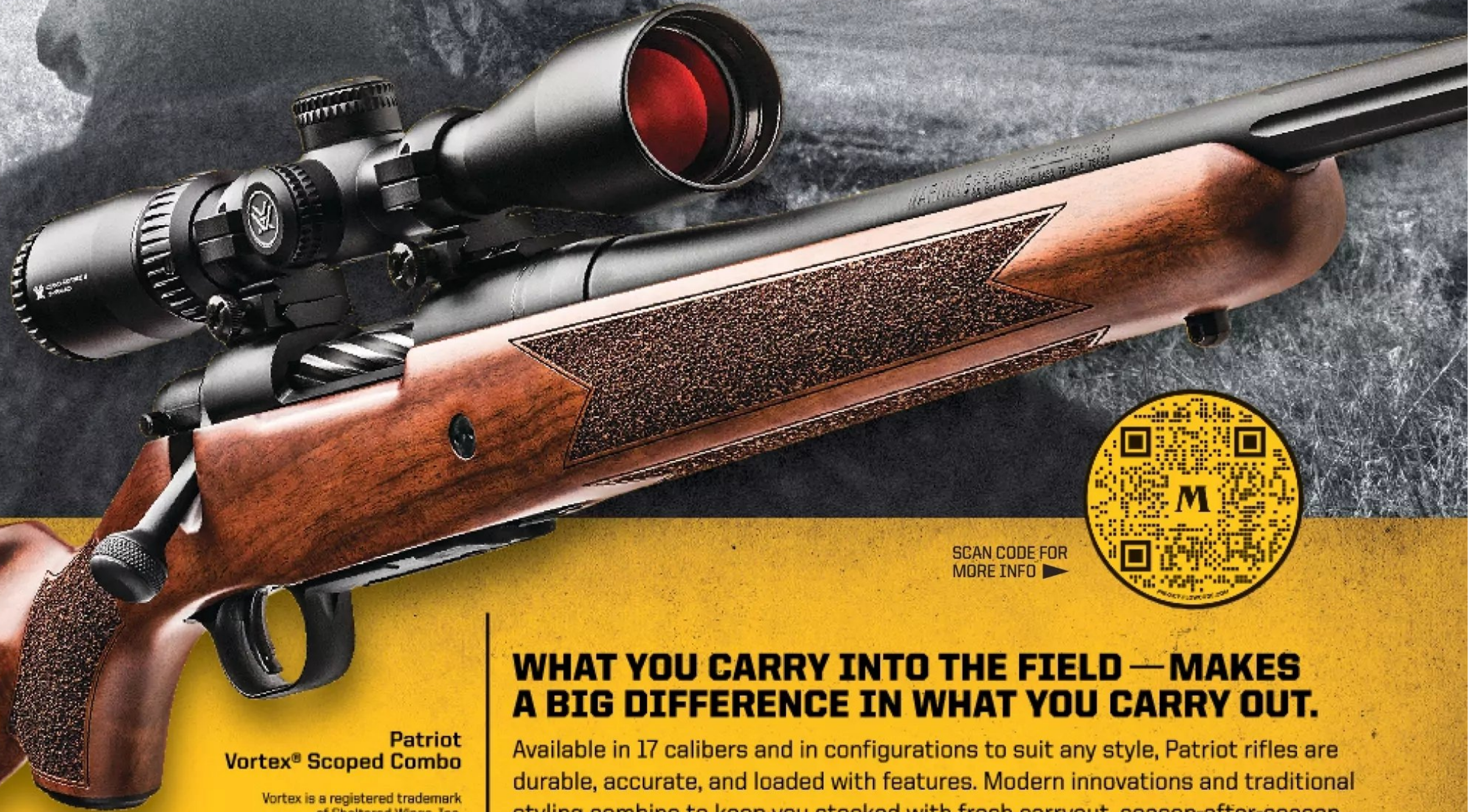
The Ace Game demonstrated outstanding accuracy. Four of seven loads averaged under 0.5 m.o.a., and all were under 0.75.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
TIKKA T3X ACE GAME				
6.5 Creedmoor	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Sako TRG Precision Scenar	136	2,778	14	0.26
Federal Gold Medal/ Berger Hybrid OTM	130	2,812	9	0.31
Hornady American Gunner HPBT	140	2,629	9	0.43
Norma Match HPBT	130	2,827	15	0.44
Barnes Precision Match	140	2,680	16	0.51
Remington Long Range Impact	130	2,600	12	0.54
Hornady ELD Match	147	2,659	5	0.72

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three consecutive three-shot groups fired from a bipod at 100 yards. Velocities are averages of nine rounds measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Temperature, 50 degrees; elevation, 4,700 feet. Abbreviations: HPBT, hollowpoint boattail; OTM, open-tip match

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THE H&H HITS 100

**THE ICONIC .300 HOLLAND & HOLLAND CARTRIDGE
CELEBRATES A CENTURY OF GETTING THE JOB DONE.**

by Craig Boddington



In 1925, the Jazz Age was in full swing. Mount Rushmore was dedicated, and the Scopes “monkey trial” involving teaching evolution in schools was held. F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*. At the other end of the literary spectrum, Adolf Hitler published *Mein Kampf*.

At the beginning of the year, the 10-year-old .250-3000 Savage was still the

fastest commercial rifle cartridge. That would change. Winchester introduced its .270 and, across the pond, Holland & Holland introduced the Super .30 Belted Rimless, the cartridge we’ve long known as the .300 H&H Mag. It’s unclear which came first, but in quick succession they became the second and the third cartridges to break 3,000 fps.

The Super .30 was initially offered in 150-, 180- and 220-grain bullet weights at, respectively, 3,000, 2,750 and 2,300 fps. These velocities sound pedestrian today, but propellants were different back then, and the .300 H&H was fast and powerful for its time. It was a success, and shooting journals noted it.

The cartridge achieved rather sudden stardom when, in August 1935 at Camp Perry, Ohio, Ben C. Comfort won the 1,000-yard Wimbledon Cup match with a .300 H&H. His rifle was built by Griffin & Howe with a 30-inch barrel. The action was a 1917 U.S. Enfield, although it’s uncertain whether it was a military action or a commercial Remington action. Both have been reported.

Comfort’s win didn’t open the floodgates, but serious rifle shooters took notice. And they did so again in 1937 when a .300 H&H won the international 1,000-yard match. That year, Winchester chambered its new Model 70 to .300 H&H, probably the first production rifle in .300 H&H.

The Super .30 was created by necking down the .375 H&H, retaining its long 2.850-inch case. In a time when smokeless propellant velocities were new and the cartridge world was expanding, it’s unclear exactly why Holland & Holland chose the “American” .308-inch bullet for its Super .30. One must wonder why the company didn’t go with the .312 bullet of the .303 British. This seems odd, and an obvious tip of the hat to the .30-06, which was superior to the .303 in all ways except recoil.

One note of caution: Case dimensions for the Super .30 and .300 H&H as it evolved in America, although very similar, are not identical. The original 1925 specifications held the Super .30 to 54,000 psi, while SAAMI specs for .300 H&H are 62,000 psi, in line with later fast cartridges. If an older rifle is roll-marked “Super .30,” it’s best and safest to be conservative with handloads.

The .300 H&H is often touted as the first magnum .30. This is almost but not quite true. It was the first fast .30 to achieve popularity, but in 1913, New York attorney and rifle crank Charles Newton developed a fast .30 caliber for gunsmith Fred Adolph. It was initially called the “Adolph Express” and later known as the .30 Newton, and it propelled a 180-grain bullet at 2,860 fps, much the same as the .300 H&H.

As a footnote to cartridge history, here’s what’s fascinating about the forgotten .30 Newton: An unbelted case with a .523-inch base diameter and 2.52-inch length, it’s eerily similar to today’s .300 PRC. Regardless, the .30 Newton failed, and the .300 H&H succeeded.

With a tapered shape and long neck, the .300 H&H case was ripe for improvement. Good old American wildcatters quickly got to work, increasing powder capacity and velocity by removing body taper, shortening the neck and sharpening that gentle shoulder. Using the full-length case, the best known and most successful improved version of the .300 H&H is Roy Weatherby’s .300 Wby. Mag., which was introduced in 1945.

His was not the only version. From the 1940s, my uncle, Art Popham, did most of his hunting with a .300 H&H Improved. There were several .300 H&H Improved versions, with various necks and shoulder angles—all increasing velocity by another 200 fps or so, depending on who was doing the loading. But the .300 Wby. Mag. is the only improved .300 H&H to make it into factory production.

Since about 2000 we’ve accepted what Peter Paul Mauser and Charles Newton knew a century and much more ago: The belt is unnecessary for headspacing, to contain pressure or to increase velocity. But all our various unbelted fast .30s—.300 Rem. Ultra Mag. and Rem. Short Action Ultra Mag., .300 WSM, .300 Ruger Compact Mag., .30 Nosler and .300 PRC—owe their lineage to the .300 H&H.

So too does the world’s most popular cartridge to bear the magnum suffix, the .300 Win. Mag. In fact, virtually all belted magnums are based on the .300 H&H case or its parent .375 H&H.

The great .300 Win. Mag. is simply the .300 H&H case shortened, body taper removed and employing an unusually short neck to maximize powder capac-

ity. It wasn't initially popular. Fans of the .300 H&H, while never vast in number, were loyal and particularly miffed that their darling was so summarily displaced. They were even more miffed when the Model 70 got its post-'64 facelift and left the .300 H&H chambering behind.



(L.-r.): .30 Newton, .300 H&H, .300 Wby. Mag. The little-known Newton preceded the H&H by a decade as the first fast .30, and the Weatherby is the only "improved" H&H that achieved production status.

The .300 Win. Mag. and .300 H&H are essentially ballistic equals, as Winchester's engineers intended 60 years ago. But this depends on the load and who does the loading. With careful handloading in strong modern actions (more on this later), the .300 H&H can exceed .300 Win. Mag. performance—but not by enough for any game animal to notice.

However, in today's product-liability-conscious world, older cartridges are at a huge disadvantage. Factory loads and even most handloading manuals have been quietly downgraded, often holding older cartridges to lower standards.

I've said several times that the .300 H&H is known for accuracy, and with its archaic tapered case, it's hard to explain exactly why. However, as I've often written, cartridge design is a small part of rifle accuracy. Mated with a good barrel, rigid action, soundly bedded and assembled—and fed good ammo—any cartridge is likely to shoot.

I'm not going to pound the pulpit and suggest the .300 H&H is more accurate than any other fast .30. But there is one small secret to the .300 H&H that nobody

ever talks about, though: That long, tapered, archaic, almost obsolete case feeds like a dream. In the No. 1, I simply drop it in. In a bolt action, whether a controlled-round or push-feed design, it seems to almost throw itself into the chamber. The long case is not efficient, nor is the shallow shoulder. Especially with 1925 manufacturing tolerances, it probably needs the belt to avoid sloppy headspacing, but it sure does feed smoothly.

While the .300 H&H cartridge was introduced with some fanfare, actual rifles were uncommon for several years. For one thing, Holland & Holland was—and is—primarily a "made to order" firm and at least initially maintained the Super .30 as a proprietary item.

Over here, action length was a problem. The 1917 U.S. Enfield action was long enough, likewise its civilian variant, Remington's Model 30, but commercial Mauser actions long enough to house it were scarce. American custom makers took orders, but not in large numbers.

The Model 70 I referenced earlier could handle it, of course. Other options included the Browning Safari on an FN Mauser action, which was gorgeous but costly.

The most affordable was Remington's Model 721, which was chambered in .300 H&H from 1948 until it was replaced by the Model 700 in 1962. Although the long-action Model 700 will house it, initial chamberings didn't include .300 H&H. In 1983 Remington offered its Model 700 Classic in .300 H&H. That was probably the last production bolt action so chambered.

Ruger built a small number of No. 1 single-shots in 1989 and has continued to do occasional runs. One was the African Adventure series I worked on with Ruger in 2008—250 rifles in each of five different chamberings, of which the Kudu model was in .300 H&H.

It's the most accurate Ruger No. 1 I've ever owned. With fast handloads using

WARNING: The loads shown here are safe only in the guns for which they were developed. Neither the author nor Outdoor Sportsman Group assumes any liability for accidents or injury resulting from the use or misuse of this data. Shooting reloads may void any warranty on your firearm.



Winchester chambered its Model 70 to the .300 H&H in 1937. This example was manufactured in about 1948. The H&H chambering was dropped from the post-'64 Model 70 lineup.

HANDLOAD COMPARISON

FAST .300 H&H LOADS

Source	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Powder	Powder Charge (gr.)	Primer	Overall Length (in.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)
Hodgdon	150	IMR 4831	75.5	Win LRM	3.560	3,200
Hodgdon	180	IMR 4831	73.0	Win LRM	3.560	3,035
Nosler No. 9	200	RL 25	69.5	Win LRM	3.560	2,848
Hodgdon	220	IMR 4831	67.0	Win LRM	3.560	2,710

Notes: Loads shown are the fastest currently published .300 H&H loads the author could locate, based on a 24-inch barrel. All are suggested maximum loads. Drop five percent in propellant charge and work up in one-grain increments, adhering to safe and sound handloading procedures and noting pressure indicators.



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150- and 200-grain bullets, it's always sub-m.o.a. and on good days has produced quarter-inch 100-yard groups.

A long-action left-hand Remington Model 700 rebarreled to .300 H&H with a good Pac-Nor barrel was just as accurate and more consistent. The rebarreled Model 700 was my first .300 H&H. Its initial use came when I took my first desert bighorn in 2003. I'd be the first to say that kind of power isn't needed for small-bodied desert rams, but I was so struck by the rifle's accuracy that it was an easy choice. Later, I hunted with that rifle in New Zealand, also a couple times in Africa.

The Ruger No. 1 .300 H&H has also been to Africa multiple times, accounting for various antelopes large and small.

Like any fast .30 with good bullets, the .300 H&H did everything I asked it to do.

The .300 H&H has been the choice of several friends as well. John Batten, hunting buddy to Jack O'Connor and my mentor in his later years, hunted widely in the 1940s and '50s with a Holland & Holland .300 H&H. Mahlon "Butch" White, 1983 Weatherby award winner, did all his extensive mountain hunting—all over the world—with a pre-'64 Model 70 in .300 H&H, long worn silver.

A few years ago, I shared a sheep camp in Alaska's Brooks Range with Dave Dressler. His rifle, lovingly carried up and down every mountain in a waterproof soft case, was another pre-'64 Model 70 in .300 H&H. My right-handed son-in-law recently acquired an incredible pre-

'64 Model 70 built in the 1940s, complete with vintage receiver aperture sight—an awesome and classic rifle.

Try a .300 H&H if you get the chance. You might like it. Unfortunately, no production rifles are currently chambered for it, and fewer current actions are long enough to house it. Of the well-known ammo makers, only Nosler offers a factory load—a 180-grain AccuBond at 2,850 fps. Sure, it's fast enough, but it's barely out of maximum .30-06 territory and not what a cartridge with that case capacity is capable of.

Today the .300 H&H is a handloader's cartridge. In my Ruger No. 1—one of the strongest actions, with a 26-inch barrel—I recently clocked some old loads and was shocked to see they approached 3,400 fps with 150-grain Sierras. You won't find that recipe in current data. But with current published data, and depending on your barrel length, the .300 H&H can be worked up to 3,200 fps with 150-grain bullets; 3,000 fps with 180-grain bullets; more than 2,800 fps with 200-grain bullets; and 2,700 fps with 220-grain bullets.

Even today, competing against so many brave new unbelted magnums, these are credible velocities and speedy enough to do almost anything one needs to do with a fast .30 caliber.

Today there are many new propellants I haven't used. Slow-burning powders like Reloder 22 and Reloder 25 are good. However, good old IMR 4831 gives me the best results. I went to Hodgdon's Reloading Data Center (HODGDONRELOADING.COM), plugged in the .300 H&H and was delighted to see IMR 4831 pop right up.

So as it reaches the century mark, the .300 H&H is mostly historic, now uncommon and hard to find. Yet it's still a great old cartridge that gets the job done, and some of us still value tradition and nostalgia.

In December 2024, on the eve of its centennial, I was amazed to see that three hunters brought .300 H&H rifles to our deer camp, and I took a nice buck in Oklahoma—the one in the lead photograph for this article—as well as a cull buck here in Kansas. The old .300 H&H still gets things done. ■



While its star has faded, the .300 H&H is still a very capable big game round. Boddington took this sambar with a rebarreled Remington Model 700.



Boddington's Ruger No. 1 in .300 H&H is the most accurate No. 1 he has ever owned. With good handloads it can be amazing, as evidenced by the three-shot group at top right.



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BAR POWER

BROWNING'S EXCELLENT SEMIAUTO HUNTING RIFLE IS ALIVE AND WELL. CHECK OUT THE BAR MK 3 OVIX.

by Keith Wood

These days, when we consider a semiautomatic rifle for hunting big game, some flavor of AR probably comes to mind. But over most of the past 50 plus years, that crown would have gone to a different rifle, one that is still very much relevant today: the Browning BAR. Browning's BAR Mk 3 OviX is proof that this age-old design isn't going anywhere.

The original BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), also known as the M1918 and M1918A2, was a workhorse carried by American troops during both world wars and beyond. That BAR was

designed by John Moses Browning. His son, Val, actually traveled to France to help train U.S. troops in its operation.

The sporting BAR was the brainchild of John Moses Browning's grandson and Val Browning's son, Bruce. In 1966, Bruce Browning brought together a talented team of design engineers to develop a sporting rifle befitting of the BAR name.

The project was code named "Carbine 66" until the rifle was officially launched in 1967 as the new BAR. The BAR was and is a gas-operated semiautomatic rifle that feeds from a detachable magazine.

The rifle was marketed as being

well-balanced, rugged, strong, simple to operate, accurate, safe and with "pleasant recoil." All those attributes turned out to be true, and the BAR was an immediate success. It was the first popular semiautomatic offered in magnum chamberings and remained so for decades.

Browning has continued to evolve and improve the design over the years. The BAR Mark II was released in 1993 and the Mk 3 announced in 2016. The Mk 3 has more modern lines than the more traditional Mark II, but the most important difference is a receiver made of aluminum instead of steel. The Mk 3 OviX combines many of the



SPECIFICATIONS

BROWNING BAR MK 3 OVIX

TYPE	semiauto centerfire
CALIBER	.243 Win., .270 Win., 7mm Rem. Mag. (tested), .308 Win., .30-06, .300 Win. Mag.
CAPACITY	3+1 (as tested)
BARREL	24 in., 1:9.5 twist (as tested), fluted
OVERALL LENGTH	46.125 in.
WEIGHT	7 lb., 8 oz.
FINISH	Smoked Bronze Cerakote
STOCK	two-piece synthetic, w/ shims to adjust cast and drop
SIGHTS	none; drilled and tapped
TRIGGER	gold-plated lever; single-stage, 3 lb. pull (measured)
SAFETY	crossbolt
PRICE	\$1,980 (as tested)
MANUFACTURER	Browning, BROWNING.COM

mechanical attributes of the classic BAR with design elements we'd expect from the latest bolt-action hunting rifles. One might say it is the least traditional among the current BAR offerings.

The Mk 3 OviX, named after Browning's proprietary camouflage pattern that adorns the stock, is the semiautomatic equivalent of the rifles in the Browning X-Bolt 2 Speed line. The Mk 3 OviX is available in six chamberings from .243 Win. to .300 Win. Mag. Regardless of cartridge length, all the rifles are built in a long-action configuration. My test rifle came chambered in 7mm Rem. Mag.

The heart of this rifle is its receiver, which is machined of an aluminum alloy to minimize weight. On the OviX model, the receiver and barrel are treated with Smoked Bronze Cerakote.

Inside the receiver is where the magic happens. The BAR employs a seven-lug rotating bolt that locks into recesses in a steel barrel extension. The bolt assembly is operated by a short-stroke gas system housed under the rifle's fore-end. Propellant gases redirected from the bore actuate a gas piston that, in turn, cycles the system

and reloads the rifle. Although it has been tweaked over the years, the basic operating system remains true to the 1966 design.

The Mk 3 OviX uses a hammer-forged steel Sporter contour barrel with six gentle flutes that run most of its length. The muzzle is not threaded and the crown is recessed. Barrel length varies from 22 to 24 inches depending on the chambering; my 7mm Rem. Mag. sample was fitted with a 24-inch barrel. The twist rate is 1:9.5, and the chamber is chrome lined.

The Mk 3 OviX features a manual crossbolt safety located at the rear edge of the trigger guard, where you'd expect to find it on many semiauto shotguns. The trigger is a single stage. My sample broke right at three pounds, which is just about perfect for a hunting rifle.

In terms of controls, there are also a right-side charging/operating handle and a bolt release that sits on the right side of the receiver below the ejection port. The magazine release is on the forward edge of the trigger guard.

The magazine system is sort of a hybrid between a traditional hinged floorplate and a detachable box. The

magazine is attached to the floorplate, and when the release is actuated, it swivels downward for loading. The box can be removed from the hinged assembly by pulling it directly away from the floorplate.

A spare magazine, available from Browning, can be carried and the rifle reloaded in this manner. Capacity is three rounds for magnums and four rounds for non-magnums.

The synthetic two-piece stock on the Mk 3 OviX is printed with the OviX camouflage pattern and features overmolded textured surfaces on the grip and fore-end. The recoil pad is a soft

Inflex design that you'll also find on many Browning shotguns.

Given the BAR's hunting role, which often involves fast offhand shooting, stock fit can be vitally important. To that end, six shims that allow you to

customize cast on/off and raise or lower the comb are included with the rifle. Front and rear sling swivels come installed on the stock.

While the Mk 3 Ovis is usually loaded via the magazine, it is possible to

drop a single round into the chamber. As with any semiauto rifle, it is important that the bolt seats fully during the loading process. If it doesn't, the rifle won't fire.

The easiest way to ensure that the bolt closes fully is to load the rifle with the bolt locked to the rear and use the bolt release lever to let the bolt assembly slam forward. This makes quite a bit of noise, though, and isn't ideal for all hunting situations.

In scenarios where more stealth is required, a hunter may want to ride the charging handle forward so the bolt does not audibly slam into battery. The Mk 3 Ovis has a small red dot, known as the "bolt forward indicator," painted on the lip of the ejection port. If that dot is visible, the bolt is fully forward and the rifle should fire.

Since the receiver is aluminum, threaded steel bushings are installed on top of the receiver to facilitate scope mounting. I used Talley lightweight aluminum alloy rings Browning provided to mount a Trijicon AccuPoint 3-9x40mm scope.

When zeroing the scope, I ran out of windage adjustment but got things close enough to be on target. This ailment usually indicates a misalignment between the mounting holes on the receiver and the axis of the bore, but I had no way to properly diagnose the problem. It wasn't the scope's fault, but an optic with a 30mm tube and more erector travel could have been helpful in this scenario.

The rifle was very ammo-sensitive when it came to group size. The Barnes Vor-TX and Federal Fusion loads showed respectable dispersion. But the groups from the Remington Premier CuT ammo, which uses monolithic copper alloy bullets, were substantially larger. I initially suspected a scope/mount failure, but I switched back to the Fusion load and ruled that out. The bottom line is that this rifle and that Remington load simply didn't get along. It happens.

Although the gas system no doubt lessens recoil, physics still applies. A midweight rifle chambered in a magnum cartridge is going to kick a bit, no



Inside the machined aluminum receiver is a seven-lug rotating bolt that locks into recesses in the steel barrel extension. The crossbolt safety is at the rear of the trigger guard.



The red "bolt forward indicator" lets you know the bolt is fully in battery, which is especially important when trying to load the chamber quietly.



The barrel is finished in Smoked Bronze Cerakote and is lightly fluted. The muzzle sports a recessed crown.

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matter how much inertia is redirected to the operating system. When shooting from the bench, I would completely lose the target in the scope during recoil. Many years ago, some custom

BARs were chambered in .458 Win. Mag. I'm sure those were a handful! You may notice from the accuracy table that the velocity spreads during testing were fairly significant, with

an average standard deviation of 28.9 across the 30 rounds measured. I believe this variation was caused by the gas system since it bleeds propellant gases from the bore. Slight variations in the amount of gas traveling through the port will influence muzzle velocity, something that we are not used to encountering if we only shoot bolt actions. This isn't an issue in most real-world hunting scenarios, but it is something interesting to observe.

The rifle functioned as intended most of the time, but on two occasions the bolt failed to snap fully back into battery after firing a shot and would not fire until I ran the charging handle manually. I shot the Mk 3 Oviz just as it came out of the box, and I suspect insufficient lubrication was the problem. If I were headed back out to the range, I would certainly lube the bolt's locking lugs.

Although I own and shoot many semiautomatic rifles, I do most of my hunting with a bolt action. Unless I am hunting feral hogs or predators, the ability to fire a quick follow-up shot isn't something I value. That said, hunters who participate in drives or hunt with dogs often seek out repeating rifles. In parts of the South where driving deer with dogs is common, the BAR is an extremely popular choice.

One might question why a hunter would choose a BAR over an AR-15-style rifle. To me, that choice is clear. As much as I love ARs for certain applications, they are bulky, poorly balanced and don't point well. At more than 46 inches long, the BAR Mk 3 Oviz isn't compact, but it handles like a shotgun. For a repeating rifle that is slick, well-balanced, portable and points well, the BAR is hard to beat.

In many circles, the Browning BAR is the epitome of a hunting rifle. For those who value the attributes of this classic design but would prefer a more updated look and improved ergonomics, the Mk 3 Oviz just might be the perfect rifle. Given the available chamberings, this rifle is suitable for most hunting applications in North America. Whether you pronounce it "BAR" or "B-A-R", the Mk 3 Oviz has a great deal to offer.



The floorplate swings open, allowing access to the three-round detachable magazine, which can also be fully removed from the floorplate.



The trigger is gold plated, and the trigger guard bow features the iconic Browning Buckmark engraving.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
BROWNING BAR MK 3 OVIX				
7mm Rem. Mag.	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Federal Fusion Tipped	175	2,795	28	1.1
Barnes Vor-TX LR	139	3,166	32	1.5
Remington Premier CuT	150	2,952	27	3.6

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups fired at 100 yards from a benchrest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph. Temperature, 71 degrees; elevation, 194 feet

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THOROUGHLY MODERN RIMFIRE

**CHRISTENSEN ARMS' MPR RIMFIRE IS A SUPER-ACCURATE .22
WITH FEATURES THAT SET IT APART FROM OTHER GUNS.**

by J. Scott Rupp



Christensen Arms has become well known for its high-end centerfire rifles, which are sought after by hunters and long-range practical shooters. But why should centerfire guys and gals have all the fun? The company recently introduced a Modern Precision Rifle (MPR) Rimfire, and it delivers the goods whether you're a hunter, competitor or recreational shooter who wants the latest and greatest.

A chassis rifle, the MPR Rimfire is available in .17 HMR, .22 Long Rifle and .22 Mag., and in barrel lengths from 16 to 20 inches. The 18-inch barrel on the .22 LR sample I tested is where a lot of the magic happens.

The liner starts as a solid bar of 416R stainless that is drilled to a .0020-inch tolerance, button rifled and given a match chamber. At this stage it's heat-treated to relieve internal stresses, followed by precision lapping to produce a flawless bore finish. Finally, the liner is turned down to its final dimensions.

Now here's where you should know that Christensen, which has its roots in aerospace engineering, is a pioneer in carbon-fiber barrels. It takes that barrel liner and lays up multiple layers of multidirectional carbon fiber to add back the rigidity and strength that's lost when the liner is turned down to such a thin diameter. The result is a barrel that's much lighter than an all-steel one and offers

superior control of barrel harmonics as well as thermal control.

Granted, heat isn't such a big deal with a .22 Long Rifle, but harmonics are. A .22 bullet spends a comparatively long period of time in the barrel, and inconsistent barrel oscillations can wreak havoc on accuracy.

Harmonics control doesn't end with the carbon-fiber process, because the MPR Rimfire's barrel is also tensioned, which is the final step in the barrel production process.

"Essentially, the 416R stainless barrel is tensioned using a tensioning nut on the muzzle threads against the carbon fiber over-casement that draws the barrel taut and rigid, giving it consistent har-

monics,” said Christensen Arms brand ambassador Jeff Bradley. “The barrel tensioning yields a lightweight and accurate barrel in a low pressure application like rimfire calibers.”

The Christensen barrel production method is one reason the company can promise 0.5 m.o.a. accuracy at 50 yards with the MPR Rimfire. More on this later.

The final touches on the barrel include 1/2x28 muzzle threads, and a thread protector is included. When I disassembled the rifle it looked to me like the barrel was a slip or press fit secured with two opposing screws, and that it might be possible to remove the barrel à la a Ruger 10/22—although on such a pricey gun I chickened out on actually trying it. Bradley said in fact it is a slip/

press-fit barrel, but he added that the company has no immediate plans to offer component barrels due to headspacing concerns on a user-swappable barrel.

The receiver is machined aluminum and given a black Cerakote finish. A zero m.o.a. optics rail is secured to the receiver with stout Torx screws. The MPR Rimfire uses the same receiver as the company’s Ranger—in fact it’s engraved “Ranger” on the side—and if you’re into the long-range .22 competition or varmint sniping with the .17 or .22 Mag. chamberings, Christensen sells 20, 40 and 60 m.o.a. optics rails.

A flat-style bolt rides within the receiver. This design shaves a surprising amount of weight: The bolt weighs only five ounces. I compared that to the bolts

on a CZ 457 competition-style gun and a CZ 452 sporter—both what you would consider “standard” rimfire bolts—and these weigh eight and 8.5 ounces, respectively. So the MPR Rimfire’s flat bolt results in a significant weight savings.

The bolt has one other distinguishing characteristic, and that’s the offset extractors. Normally, rimfire bolt extractors are opposite one another at three and nine o’clock. With the bolt facing you, the MPR Rimfire extractors are at two o’clock and about 8:30. Bradley explained this was done to achieve the optimum angle of departure for the spent case.

The trigger is TriggerTech’s Field model, and it’s Remington 700 compatible if you’re someone who likes to change out triggers. While the pull weight on this adjustable trigger was heavier than I would normally want on a rimfire at two pounds, 14 ounces, I didn’t change it. It’s so crisp, and the straight finger lever provides such a great direct-line pull, that



The rifle’s receiver has a zero m.o.a. rail up top and houses a TriggerTech Field trigger. The AR-style grip is from Magpul. The circular area just forward of the bolt handle is where the Magelock stock-folding system locks up.



The butt features an inch of comb-height adjustment and two inches of length-of-pull adjustment for customizing fit. The pad is a LimbSaver that does a great job of keeping the rifle in the shoulder pocket.

SPECIFICATIONS

CHRISTENSEN ARMS MPR RIMFIRE

TYPE	bolt-action rimfire
CALIBER	.17 HMR, .22 Long Rifle (tested), .22 Mag.
CAPACITY	10-round BX-1 rotary magazine supplied
BARREL	18 in. tensioned carbon fiber w/416R stainless liner; threaded 1/2x28, thread protector supplied
LENGTH	35.5–37.5 in
WEIGHT	6.2 lb.
CONSTRUCTION	machined Burnt Bronze Cerakote aluminum chassis w/Magelock folding butt, adjustable comb and length of pull; FFT carbon fiber handguard w/M-Lok slots
TRIGGER	TriggerTech adjustable single-stage; 2 lb., 14 oz. pull (measured, as received)
SIGHTS	none; 0 m.o.a. optics rail
SAFETY	2-position non-bolt-locking rocker
PRICE	\$1,250
MANUFACTURER	Christensen Arms, CHRISTENSENARMS.COM

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I felt like I was breaking good shots right out of the box. So why mess with it?

The safety is a two-position rocker that does not lock the bolt. Feeding is from Ruger's BX-1 rotary magazine, and one 10-rounder is supplied with the rifle.

The MPR Rimfire's chassis is everything a competitor, hunter or serious recreational shooter could want. It's machined from 7075 aluminum billet, and it folds by pressing an unobtrusive button on the left side. It swings with a just-right tension, and when folded it stays put thanks to the company's Magelock system. A strong round magnet in the butt locks up against a disk on the right

side of the receiver for secure, latchless retention. Just pull firmly on the butt to unfold.

The cheekpiece is adjustable by loosening a pair of 1/8 hex screws and sliding it up or down for a total of one inch of adjustment, and a well-marked scale ensures you can return it to its original position every time. The cheekpiece itself is made of Christensen's FFT carbon fiber. FFT or Flash Forged Technology produces super-light but strong carbon-fiber components. The cheekpiece is flat on top and angled on the sides.

The length of pull can be changed by loosening an additional set of 1/8 hex

screws, and it features two inches of adjustment and another well-marked scale for returning to position if it's moved. The buttpad is from LimbSaver, and it features a series of ridges that work with the soft material to keep the stock anchored in your shoulder.

Six QD sockets, three on each side, provide a lot of flexibility in adding a sling. A pair of threaded holes in the toe allows you to install a bag rider. Christensen sells the necessary slotted MPR monopod rail (\$27-\$40) for its adjustable bag rider (\$275), but companies like Long Shot Precision (ADJUSTABLE BAGRIDER.COM) also make aftermarket rail/bag rider setups for the Christensen MPR chassis.

The pistol grip is Magpul's K model. Featuring a 20-degree grip angle, it's nothing fancy, just a perfectly serviceable grip. But this is the beauty of chassis guns like the MPR Rimfire that use standard AR-style grips. The world is your oyster in terms of aftermarket options, and they're a snap to install.

The 14-inch handguard—a 10.5-inch length is also available—is made of the same FFT carbon fiber as the cheekpiece, and man is it light. How about just a tad over seven ounces? But again, it's strong thanks to the company's FFT technology, so you can feel confident about attaching accessories to its multiple M-Lok slots at three, six and nine o'clock.

The handguard is attached to the chassis with eight Torx screws, and you'll need to remove the handguard if you want to pull the barreled action from the chassis. Should you decide to do this, you'll find that the action screws have thread-locking compound on them and require a bit of force to break free the first time. The owner's manual lists the recommended torque values for reassembly.

For testing I mounted my Bushnell Match Pro 6-24x56mm atop the zero m.o.a. rail. With high rings I was just barely able to look squarely through the scope with the comb in its lowest position, so I went with extra high to give me more latitude in comb height. I also added a Warne Skyline Pro bipod for part of the test by installing a short M-Lok rail section on the bottom of the handguard.



The stock folds with a simple press of a button on the left side, and it locks up courtesy of a strong magnet that keeps the stock folded without the need for a mechanical latch.

ACCURACY RESULTS

CHRISTENSEN ARMS MPR RIMFIRE

.22 Long Rifle	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
50 Yds.				
Lapua Midas+	40	1,027	9	0.32
Lapua Super Long Range	40	1,048	10	0.32
Fiocchi Range Dynamics	40	1,038	26	0.44
CCI Green Tag	40	1,022	15	0.50
100 Yds.				
Lapua Super Long Range	40	1,048	10	1.23
Lapua Super Long Range*	40	1,060	11	1.26
Lapua Midas+	40	1,027	9	1.32
Fiocchi Range Dynamics	40	1,038	26	1.51
CCI Green Tag	40	1,022	15	1.52

Notes: (*With Banish 22 suppressor.) Fifty-yard accuracy results are averages of five five-shot groups from a Caldwell Fire Control rest with a Bushnell Match Pro set on 10X. 100-yard results are averages of three five-shot groups fired prone with a Warne Skyline Pro bipod and the same scope set at 16X. Velocities are averages of 25 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Temperature, 34 degrees; elevation, 4,900 feet

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Earlier I mentioned that the MPR Rimfire promises 0.5 m.o.a. accuracy at 50 yards, and my test rifle came with a test target—complete with serial number, test date and SK Match ammo noted—with a group measuring a tiny 0.15 inch. I was guessing the test group had been fired from a cradle, and I was doubting my chances of achieving anything that good myself.

Wrong on both counts. I learned that Christensen tests its groups hands-on, not from a cradle. And while it was only a single group, one of my first efforts produced a 0.15-incher with Lapua Super Long Range, along with a 0.20-inch cluster with the same ammo. And those were five-shot groups, as opposed to the three-shot group on the test target.

Take a gander at the 50-yard results in the accompanying chart, which are averages of five five-shot groups. Every single average makes the grade in terms of Christensen Arm's accuracy guarantee.

The 50-yard testing was from the bench with a Caldwell front rest and Pro-



The fore-end is constructed of FFT carbon fiber, which is super light but also strong. It features plenty of M-Lok slots. The barrel is a carbon fiber as well, and it's threaded 1/2x28.

tektor rear rest. For the 100-yard portion, I went prone on a mat with the Skyline Pro bipod and a WieBad rear bag. These results are the averages of three five-shot groups instead of five, and while I wasn't able to keep that 0.5 m.o.a. accuracy at the farther distance, the groups were still quite good because, hey, 100-yard .22 shooting is hard.

I did test one load at 100 yards with a Silencer Central Banish 22 suppressor,

and as you can see it made little difference. While I have found that suppressors can affect accuracy significantly with centerfire rifles, in my experience that hasn't been the case with rimfires. Still, depending on your load, you might find that a suppressor will change the accuracy profile of the MPR Rimfire.

I didn't have any barriers to shoot from like you might find at an NRL22 match, but in dry-firing the rifle off some

A large graphic featuring a Spartan helmet with a red plume, set against a dark background with falling red petals. The Black Hills logo is in the top right corner. The text "WE BUILD SHARPER SWORDS FOR OUR WARRIORS." is in the bottom left, and "BLACK-HILLS.COM" is in the bottom right.

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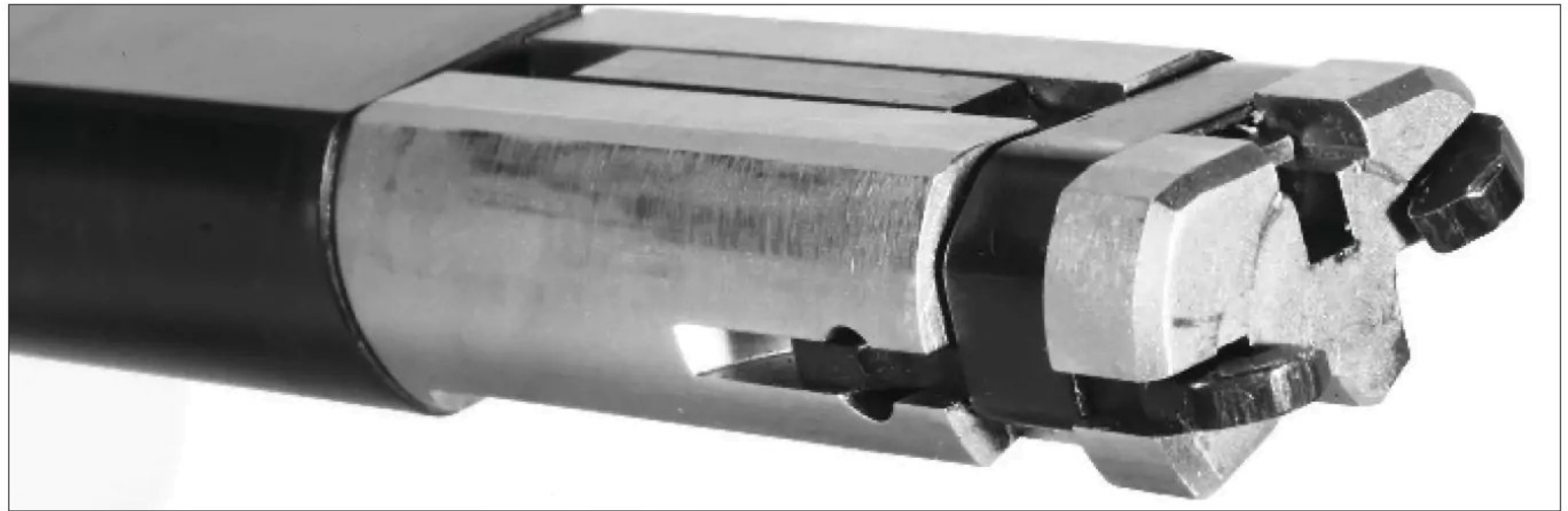
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improvised rests at home I found the rifle to be nicely balanced for such work.

The trigger is fantastic, and the ability to adjust the length of pull and comb height is key to good practical accuracy. I remember from my old three-position smallbore days that we were constantly making these adjustments because when you go from, say, prone to offhand, your orientation to the rifle changes—so the fit needs to change as well. The MPR Rimfire's chassis gets you there.

My only criticism is how the rifle feels when working the bolt. There were zero issues getting the rifle to chamber a round or eject an empty, but between the lightweight bolt and the rotary magazine it simply didn't feel as smooth as a rimfire with a standard-weight bolt and single-stack magazine. I did check to ensure the cartridges were presented properly to the chamber and not shaving bullet lead, and it was good to go.

The MPR Rimfire really is a do-it-all rimfire. While I don't have the scratch to drop more than a grand on a plink-



The extractors on the bolt are slightly offset to ensure that spent cases get out of the ejection port like they should—every time.

ing rifle, there are people out there who can and will. Weight with the Bushnell in those extra-high steel rings was about 8.25 pounds, which I think is a good weight for practical or long-range competition—where it would excel—or for field-bench varmint sniping.

But if you threw on a smaller scope in ultralight rings, you could conceivably knock off a pound or so to create a great stalking rifle for groundhogs, squirrels and such—folding the stock for easy stowing in a pack. For this pursuit, the platform's versatility is boosted by the

flatter-shooting .17 HMR and .22 Mag. chamberings, and since it takes Ruger rotary magazines, you're not limited to the 10-rounder that comes with the rifle.

Christensen Arms is one of the more forward-thinking outfits in the firearms world, pushing the boundaries of what is possible for sporting rifles. And it seems to me the firm is not about tech for tech's sake, but rather it comes up with sensible solutions for discriminating shooters and hunters. The MPR Rimfire is a shining example of this, a rifle that brings the cutting edge to all us rimfire fans. ■



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BIG SKY BOOMER



MONTANA RIFLE CO.'S HIGHLINE IS A MODERN TAKE ON THE CLASSIC CONTROLLED-ROUND-FEED RIFLE.

by Brad Fitzpatrick

If you're a fan of bolt-action big game rifles, the last 10 years have been a boom time. However, the lion's share of new designs utilize push-feed actions. Sure, Winchester, Ruger and Kimber still offer controlled-round-feed bolt actions, but none of them has rolled out many new such rifles in the last few years.

If you like controlled-round-feed actions as much as I do, you'll be happy to hear about a couple new models available from the new Montana Rifle Co.: the Highline and Junction. I say "new" because the original company has been sold and purchased a couple times and is now part of the Grace Engineering Corporation family. With that acquisition comes a change in manufacturing,

and today's Montana Rifle Co. rifles are made in Memphis, Michigan.

During the leadership of founder Brian Sipe, the original Montana Rifle Co. offered some very good controlled-round-feed bolt-action rifles based on its Model 1999 action, which was poised to become a significant player in the bolt-action rifle market. However, things changed when the Kalispell-based company was sold to an investment firm. The new company promised to continue to produce these Mauser-inspired bolt actions, but by 2020 it seemed that MRC had become a footnote in firearms history.

Some good news arrived last year when Grace Engineering promised once again to bring Montana Rifle

guns to market, and Grace had the machining know-how to do so. This third-generation American company specializes in high-tech machining, and it set about rebuilding the Montana Rifle brand.

As I mentioned, Montana Rifle is offering two controlled-round-feed rifles. The Junction is a wood-stocked rifle. It features a striking walnut stock and ebony fore-end and looks very much like a high-end Mauser 98 or top-tier Winchester Model 70 Super Grade.

The Highline—a name that traces its origin to a railway that traverses northern Montana and also that region in general—is a different type of controlled-round-feed rifle. It's built for the shooter or hunter who loves the reliability of a rifle with a full-length, non-rotating Mauser-style claw extractor and fixed blade ejector, but it also offers some modern touches found primarily on today's popular push-feed guns.

Highline rifles are equipped with McMillan Game Hunter stocks featuring wide, vertical grips that are popular

on long-range target rifles. The substantial palm swell fills the hand, and the vertical design is very comfortable for shooting from a bench or prone. There's also plenty of space for a thumb-forward grip.

The green stock is accented with black and tan specks, and the comb is high enough to allow the eye to properly align with large optics. Length of pull is 13.5 inches. There's an M-Lok rail on the underside of the flat fore-end, and the stock has front and rear sling studs.

The most exciting aspect of this rifle is the action. MRC's new owners could simply have churned out more 1999 actions, but instead they took a deep dive into the design and, while similar in many ways, the new 2022 action is a different animal altogether.

For starters, the 1999 action was cast whereas the 2022 action is fully machined from a previously heat-treated 416 stainless steel blank. This reduces inconsistencies and keeps tolerances very tight, allowing for interchange-

ability of parts. Producing one 2022 action requires about three hours on the company's five-axis mill.

The concept of the original 1999 action was to combine the best features of the pre-'64 Model 70 and the Mauser 98. While the 1999—and subsequently the 2022—actions look very much like a Model 70's, they borrow key features from the Mauser, including the barrel ring and feed cone. But one feature the Model 2022 action offers that neither the Model 70 nor the Mauser 98 does is a relief cut on the extractor, allowing you to drop a round in the action and close the bolt without fear of damaging the extractor. This allows hunters to fully load their rifles.

Like the Model 70, the MRC 2022 has a flat-base action. Historically, it's been more expensive to produce flat-base actions than cylindrical actions because the latter could be turned on a lathe. Controlled-round-feed actions, though, have been more complex to build properly and therefore more expensive.

That's the perfect challenge for a company like Grace Engineering, which specializes in producing metal parts with exceptionally tight tolerances. The MRC 2022 action is held to within 0.002 inch, which is exceptional, and the barrel interface is half that.

Highline rifles feature front and rear optic mounting rails. This is a substantial benefit on a hunting rifle simply because it eliminates the risk that the optic bases will come loose while you're in the field. I've had it happen, and unless you plan on spending a day at the shooting range and have the right tools to address the problem, a loose scope base could ruin a hunt.

Highline barrels are hand-lapped



The Highline is built on Montana Rifle Co.'s 2022 controlled-round-feed action, and the receiver features integral scope bases—a rock-solid setup.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
MONTANA RIFLE CO. HIGHLINE				
.300 Win. Mag.	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Norma Oryx Bonded JSP	180	2,815	18	0.91
Hornady Precision Hunter ELD-X	200	2,869	12	1.03
Winchester Expedition Big Game/Nosler AccuBond Long Range	190	2,945	9	1.11

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups at 100 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a Caldwell VelociRadar. Temperature, 48 degrees; elevation 1,020 feet. Abbreviation: JSP, jacketed softpoint



The non-rotating extractor features a relief cut that allows it to slip over the rim of a cartridge without damage, so the rifle can be single-loaded.

and button-rifled, and they're machined using the same methods and equipment as the original MRC 1999 rifles. Muzzles are threaded, and a brake and thread cap are included.

Thread pitch is 5/8x24, and the twist rate on the .300 Win. Mag. version I tested was 1:8, the same for the 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC and 7mm PRC. The .308 has a 1:10 twist. Magazine capacity for the 6.5 PRC, 7mm PRC and .300 Win. Mag. is three rounds; the Creedmoor and .308 versions hold five rounds. The barrel and receiver are protected by a Burnt Bronze Cerakote finish.

The .300 Win. Mag. I tested has a 26-inch barrel, which put the overall weight right at 7.25 pounds unloaded—very manageable for a hunting gun.

All MRC rifles use internal box magazines and hinged floorplates, and their gold pre-'64-style triggers are factory set at 3.5 pounds but can be adjusted down to around two pounds if you like. The Highline features a three-position Model 70-style wing safety that allows the rifle to be loaded and unloaded with the safety engaged.

In anticipation of range testing the Highline, I mounted a Leupold VX-6 HD 2-12x42mm and also attached a Magpul M-Lok bipod. So equipped, the rifle weighed about 9.25 pounds, call it 9.5 pounds with a full mag.

This overall weight made the rifle pleasant to shoot, especially since I ditched the included muzzle brake in favor of the thread protector because I avoid shooting with brakes under a metal roof whenever possible. Still, recoil was quite manageable.

The company has promised that Highline rifles will be available in .375 H&H soon, and perhaps they'll even be available in sizes large enough to accommodate the whopping .505 Gibbs, even if the action is available only for custom builds. Those heavy-hitting cartridges imply that these rifles are suitable for hunting dangerous game, and being able to quickly top off the rifle without the risk of a broken extractor is an enormous selling point.

In addition to the safety, there's a bolt stop/release on the rear left portion of the receiver, and a magazine floorplate release located at the front of

the trigger guard. The release is similar to the Model 70 design, although I found the MRC's a bit tough to operate.

Overall fit and finish is superb. The Highline is clearly built to a high standard, and rifle nerds can enjoy hours just cycling the sleek action. The 26-inch pipe is a bit long for those among us who like to run suppressors, so adding some models with shorter barrels would make sense for Montana Rifle Co.

The test rifle had clearly spent some time on the range, likely at media events, and someone had lowered the trigger down to about 2.2 pounds from the factory setting of 3.5. That certainly didn't hurt accuracy, and the gun proved capable of shooting groups around 0.8 inch with loads it liked. A few groups went over an inch, but overall this was roughly an m.o.a. rifle with all three loads. For hunting out to moderate or even long distances, that's ample accuracy.

The action is buttery smooth thanks to the precision-machined raceway, and there's plenty of room to top-load the rifle—or single-load it, if you like,



The black hinged floorplate's release is located at the rear of the floorplate, similar to a Model 70. The adjustable trigger sports a gold finger lever.



The M-Lok fore-end rail makes it easy to mount bipods and other accessories and offers plenty of real estate for adjustment.

SPECIFICATIONS	
MONTANA RIFLE CO. HIGHLINE	
TYPE	controlled-round-feed bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, 7mm PRC, .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag. (tested)
CAPACITY	3+1
BARREL	26 in. button rifled, 1:8 twist; threaded 5/8x24
OVERALL LENGTH	47.25 in.
WEIGHT	7 lb., 4 oz.
STOCK	McMillan Game Hunter, green with tan/black specks; M-Lok fore-end rail
FINISH	Burnt Bronze Cerakote
TRIGGER	user adjustable; 2 lb., 3 oz. pull (measured, as tested)
SIGHTS	none; integral bases machined into receiver
PRICE	\$2,595
MANUFACTURER	Montana Rifle Co., MONTANARIFLECO.COM

which I did on multiple occasions. I'd be hesitant to do that with my old Model 70s but had no issues with the Highline.

I did encounter two malfunctions. In one instance, as I extracted a spent casing the last round in the magazine spilled out on the tabletop. I couldn't get the issue to recur, and I blame it on either a poorly seated cartridge in the magazine or ghosts in the machine.

I also had a hangfire with the Norma ammo—a pronounced click as the firing pin fell and a split second before ignition. A weak or broken firing pin can be the culprit for hangfires, but upon examination the primer had a proper dent, and once again the problem never resurfaced. More ghosts, I guess.

My most important yardstick in a rifle review is: Would I take the test rifle on a personal hunt? The response in this case is an unequivocal Yes. The Highline is reliable—the two weird issues notwithstanding—and is accurate



McMillan's Game Hunter stock features a vertical grip, and the comb is tall enough to properly align the eye with a scope—even one set in tall rings.

enough for any hunting situation. I'm not crazy about the color combination, but the overall function of the rifle is superb. I would have cased the rifle, grabbed boxes of ammo and boarded a flight to Johannesburg or Anchorage without reservation.

At \$2,595 the Highline isn't inexpensive, but it isn't terribly out of line with similar rifles like the Winchester Model 70 Extreme Weather MB (\$1,869), Ru-

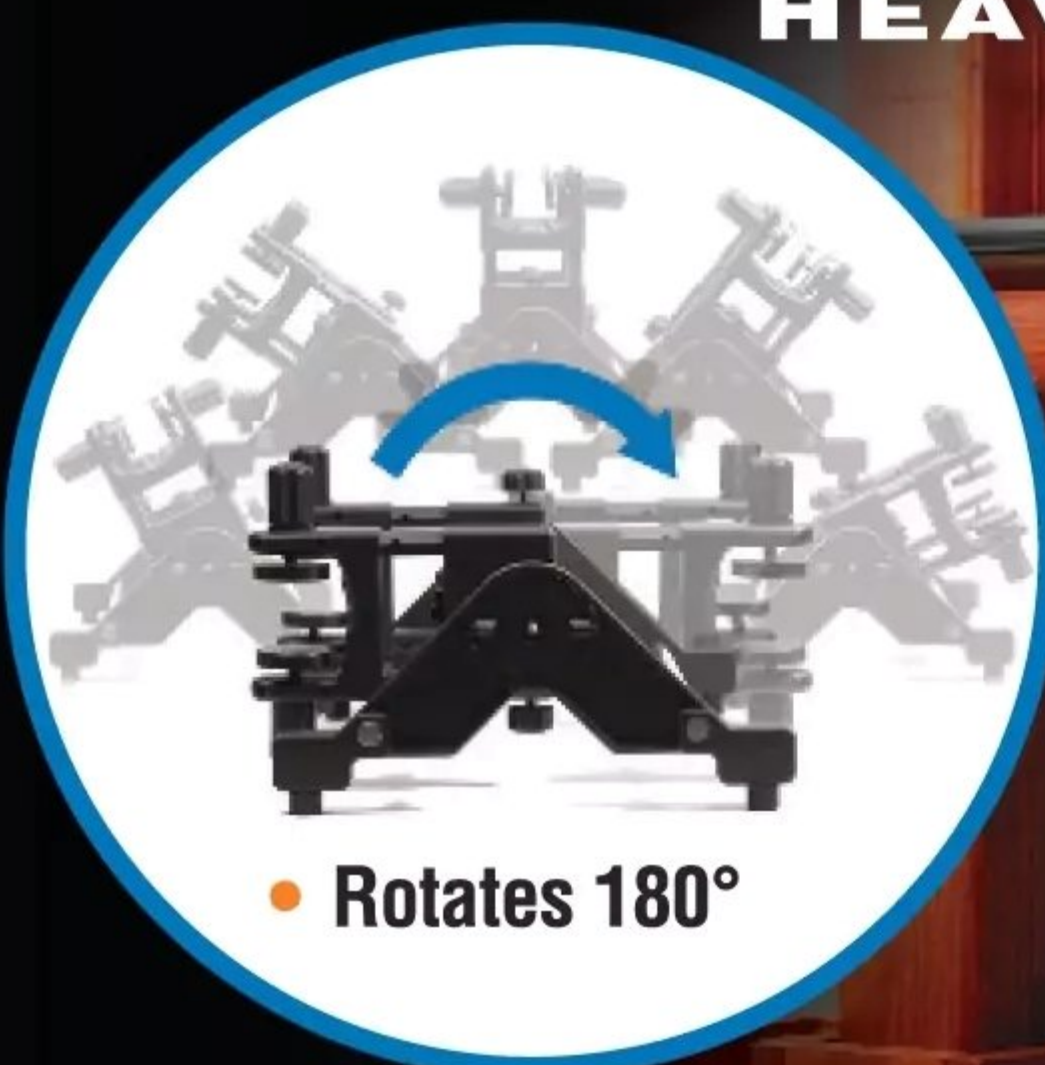
ger Hawkeye FTW Hunter (\$2,049) and Kimber Mountain Ascent (\$2,632)—at least not when you consider it has features the others don't.

Montana Rifle Company is back, and it's a shot in the arm for the controlled-round-feed rifle market. The Highline is one high-class hunting rifle, and I hope the Highline's release prompts other brands to invest in feature-rich controlled-feed rifles. ■

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RIFLE REPORT

by
Frank Melloni



Ruger RPR Gen 4

Ruger's latest generation of its revered Precision Rifle, now in its fourth iteration, provides even more to the aspiring long-range marksman, with features that better support today's shooting equipment and practices. At its core, the RPR Gen 4 retains all the features that put the first version on the map—starting with the linear action that directs recoil straight into the buttstock, quashing muzzle flip. This allows shooters to spot their own impacts, a critical aspect of long-range shooting on the clock.

Inside the action rides a three-lug one-piece bolt, which is aided by dual cocking cams. This balances and spreads the cocking effort over a wider area, making it easier to keep the crosshairs on target through the bolt's abbreviated 70-degree travel.

The bolt is of a full-body design, which means the head is not wider than the rest of the shaft. This reduces binding and offers greater momentum when stripping rounds from the detachable magazine. The RPR uses Ruger's patented Multi-Magazine Interface, and while the gun ships with

a pair of 10-round SR-25 PMags, it can also accept AICS-pattern magazines and even some M14 mags.

While most shooters see this as simply a means of utilizing magazines they already have, there is a much bigger picture. Seating bullets closer to the lands is a typical practice for handloaders looking to achieve better accuracy. The SR-25 magazines don't allow for extra-long rounds, but the more modern AICS magazines do. So if you plan on using factory ammo, enjoy the easy-filling, low-profile SR-25s. But if you like to tinker, there is a provision for you, too.

Among the new features, the Gen 4's stock is likely to stand out the most. Like previous versions, it still folds to allow bolt removal. However, this generation's is far more ergonomic and adjustable. A generous 3.5 inches of length of pull can be added with the press of a button. There is also a locking position to ensure this doesn't happen inadvertently during a string of fire.

A conventional click wheel allows for cheekpiece height adjustment, keeping it in place under vigorous tension. You can also slide this compo-

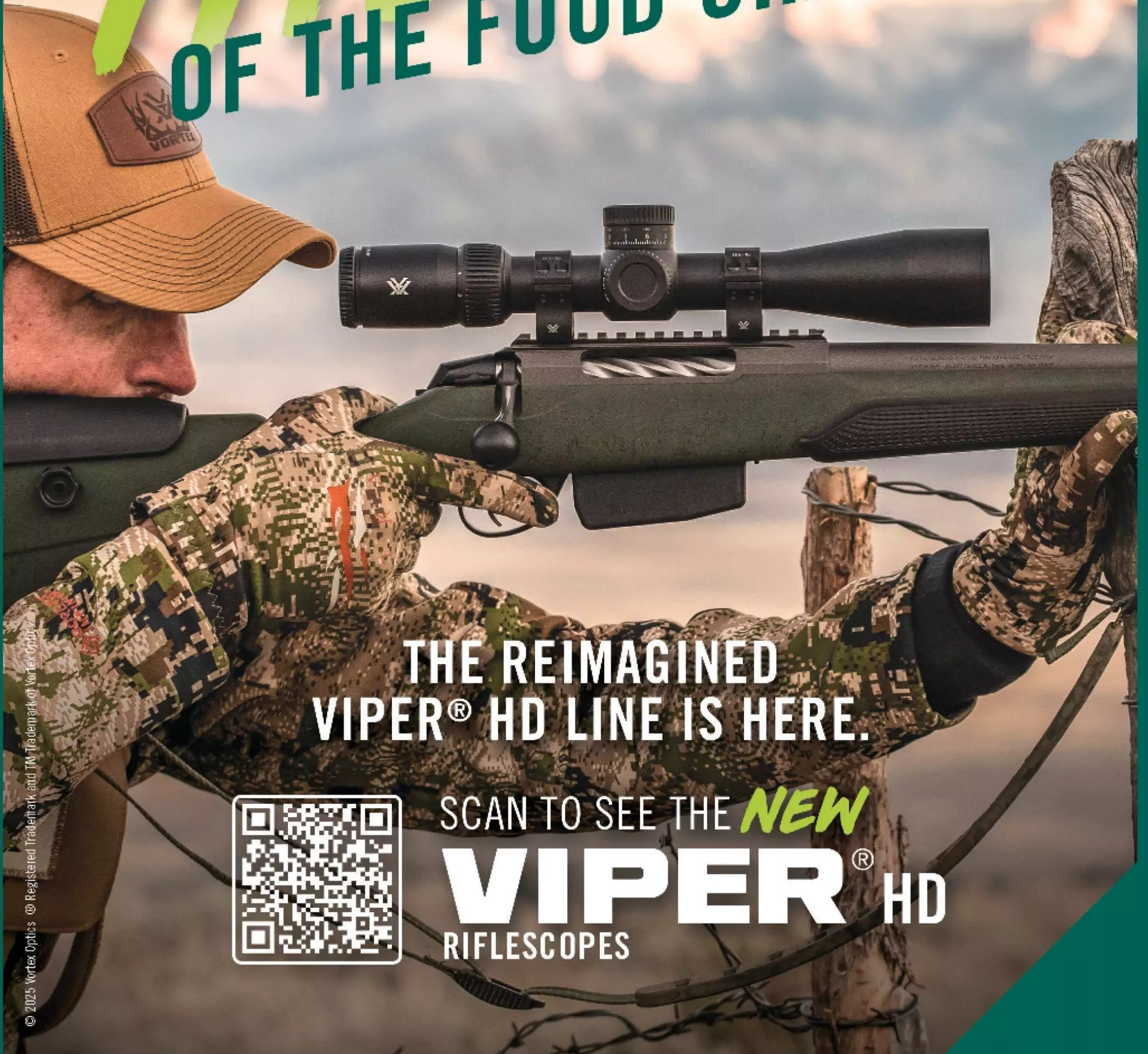
SPECIFICATIONS

RUGER RPR GEN 4

TYPE	three-lug bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	6mm Creedmoor, 6mm GT, 6.5 Creedmoor (tested), 6.5 PRC, .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag., .300 PRC, .338 Lapua
CAPACITY	10+1, detachable box magazine
BARREL	heavy contour 24 in., 1:8 twist; threaded 5/8x24 w/three-port radial RPR brake
OVERALL LENGTH	43.5–47 in.
WEIGHT	12.5 lb.
FINISH	Smoked Bronze Cerakote
STOCK	aluminum chassis
TRIGGER	single-stage Ruger Marksman Adjustable; 2.25 lb. pull (measured, as received), 2.1 lb. pull (as tested)
SIGHTS	none; 20 m.o.a. optics rail
SAFETY	ambidextrous two-position rocker
PRICE	\$2,146
MANUFACTURER	Ruger, RUGER.COM



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nent fore or aft to accommodate your facial structure. This is accomplished via a flush-set button that stays out of the way and can be reversed for left-handed shooters. Numbered serrations are provided to enable positive recall between different shooters or shooting positions. And the buttstock can be slid up or down to accommodate a shooter's unique shoulder and neck geometry.

The new RPR's fore-end represents modern advancements in the long-range shooting arena. A free-floating unit machined from aluminum, it replaces the old KeyMod slots and 12 o'clock Picatinny rail with M-Lok slots that cover its entire surface. More modern still is the Arca rail, which is fully integrated into the fore-end, ridding it of any hardware that might shake loose. The fore-end's Smoked Bronze Cerakote finish matches the receiver and buttstock.

Each RPR ships with a pre-mounted 20 m.o.a. rail to make adding glass a cinch. For my testing, I chose a Leupold Mark 4HD 8-32X optic. After locking it down in a Talley one-piece mount, I selected a variety of ammunition for my live-fire testing. As my sample was chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, I had plenty of options. Hornady's ELD Match was an obvious choice, as competition shooting is the primary purpose of this rifle, but I also included some hunting ammo for those who carry guns like this into blinds and such. To that end, I also added the Black Hills ELD-X as well as Barnes's Vor-TX loads.

The first shot surprised me a bit because I wasn't expecting a sub-2.5-pound trigger press to be dialed in from the factory. Because it can be adjusted in the field through the magazine release, I found that I could crank it down to a mere 2.1 pounds, so I did. Those who like a firmer trigger press will be happy to know that I was able to spin it up to just over five pounds.

I found the gun capable of sub-m.o.a. groups with each load, although the averages were at or just above one m.o.a. I ended the day by banging a 600-yard gong. The gun pushed straight back with each shot, and even



The chassis butt offers plenty of adjustment: length of pull, cheekpiece height and position and buttstock height. The settings are easy to change and lock securely.



A big change on the Gen 4 involves the fore-end, which cashiers the old KeyMod slots and Picatinny rail in favor of M-Lok slots and an Arca rail.



The RPR action features a fat bolt and short 70-degree throw. It accepts SR-25, AICS and even some M14 magazines for maximum flexibility. The gun ships with a 20 m.o.a. optics rail.

ACCURACY RESULTS				
RUGER PRECISION RIFLE GEN 4				
6.5 Creedmoor	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Barnes Vor-TX LR	127	2,825	14	0.94
Hornady ELD Match	140	2,584	11	1.03
Black Hills Gold/Hornady ELD-X	143	2,563	24	1.11

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three five-shot groups fired at 100 yards from a Caldwell Rock Rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a Caldwell G2 chronograph. Temperature, 35 degrees; elevation, 700 feet

with the scope zoomed all the way in, I had no problem spotting impacts. Ergonomics and accuracy are important, but for my money, this is easily the most important quality for a rifle with long-range aspirations.

Ruger has once again impressed me with a new product introduction. When students ask me for a recommendation on a precision rifle, the RPR is always among the few that I'm

comfortable staking my reputation on. The advancements found on this rifle are squarely in line with current demands and only reaffirm my recommendations. These additions also stave off a lot of aftermarket customization. While one can easily swap much of the furniture and controls with items from the vast AR-15 aftermarket, if you ask me I think it's better to leave well enough alone. ■

ings. However, production is limited, and they're scarce.

This year I saw two lever actions with a wrinkle I'd never seen before. Henry's new Lever Action Supreme and the Herring Model 2024 from FightLite Industries both feed from Magpul AR magazines. Chamberings are limited to AR-15-compatible cartridges, and this seems the beginning of a brand-new class of lever actions.

I'm not sure they're my thing. For my purposes, I don't need increased magazine capacity, and something I love about lever actions is they're slim and trim all around. There are no protruding bolts or magazines, and they're easy to carry with the hand curled under the receiver, the balance point about where the barrel joins. Again, that's me. These new lever actions are sure to appeal to younger shooters who love their ARs and are hungry for something different.

As much as I admire classic tubular-magazine lever guns, the five most practical centerfire lever actions—at least from a hunter's standpoint, which is my standpoint—are those that feed from an internal or flush-mounted detachable magazine. There have been just five: Browning BLR, Henry Long Ranger, Sako Finnwolf, Savage 99 and Winchester 88.

All are sized for and strong enough for the entire .308 family. All can be scoped low over the receiver. All can digest sharp-pointed bullets. These are superior to tubular-magazine rifles. Unfortunately, only BLR and Long Ranger are currently in production.

Most popular was the rear-locking Savage 99. In production for a century, a million were made. Savage discontinued the 99 at the turn of the millennium because it was too expensive to produce. The rimfire Revel is thus Savage's first entry into lever guns in 25 years. I'd love to see a new Savage 99. Or a new Finnwolf or Winchester 88, both with forward-locking bolts. With modern manufacturing and the greatest interest in lever guns in 70 years, maybe it's not too late. ■

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The Great Lever Revival

I just received the new lever-action Savage Revel, which is “lever” spelled backwards. Clever. I haven’t shot it yet because I’m waiting on scope mounts, but the action is smooth. The trigger pull—often a lever-action bugaboo—is light and crisp. Its traditional saddlegun style looks good.

Right now, the all-American lever action is making a strong comeback. On the rimfire side, aside from the Revel we also have the new Ranger from Winchester. I don’t have a Ranger and can’t make a comparison, but I can say that both are surprisingly affordable, which is great news for lever-action fans.

Most centerfire lever guns are expensive. The reason is simple. Because they are based on 19th century design and manufacturing techniques, lever-actions are difficult and costly to produce. The folks at Ruger discovered this when they acquired Marlin.

One of my major flaws is lack of mechanical aptitude, and during many factory tours over a long career, much of what I saw was lost on me. A notable exception was the Ruger plant in Mayodan, North Carolina, where current Marlin lever actions are made.

Eric Lundgren and his team succeeded in giving me a sense of the engineering and manufacturing challenges when they uprooted Marlin from the old Ilion, New York, plant, and relocated it to Mayodan. It was a brutal process that took longer than expected, but the new Marlins are excellent, smooth and accurate.

I love lever actions, old and new. I respect their history, and as a lefty, I love the ambidextrous operation. But I don’t know exactly why the lever action is once again a hot commodity. Pragmatically, the design has issues.

Between two-piece stocks, tubular magazines, and rear-locking actions—none of which are common to all lever guns—it’s difficult to make lever actions as consistently accurate as bolt actions. And it’s impossible to make lever actions that can house the range of cartridges bolt-actions can digest.

The lever action’s speed is often touted. However, a century ago, when bolt-action sporters were coming on, “speed drills” between bolt and lever guns were popular. It’s more difficult to run a bolt-action fast but, with equal skill, there’s little difference in speed.

Twenty years ago, Hornady’s LeverEvolution ammo with compressible polymer-tipped bullets allowed aerodynamic projectiles to be safely used in tube magazines. This enhanced capability breathed new life

tional, with good old ’94s and periodic reissues clear back to the ’73. Offshore firms like Pedersoli, Rossi and Uberti also have a long history of producing faithful copies of classic lever actions.

Just three years ago, Ruger started with the Marlin 1895 .45-70, followed with the 336 .30-30, then the short-action Marlin 1894. Current Marlins go from basic walnut and blue to modern. Last year, I was delighted to see Smith & Wesson jump into lever guns with its 1854—a mostly traditional lever gun chambered in .44 Mag. and .357, along with a recently added .45-70.

Big Horn Armory was one of the first small companies to jump on the lever-action bandwagon. The company split the difference between the Winchester ’86 and ’92 actions, creating the Model 1889 series, perfectly sized

**TODAY, WE HAVE LEVER ACTIONS
ALMOST ANY WAY WE WANT THEM,
FROM TRADITIONAL TO FUTURISTIC.**

into the lever. This was a factor, but there’s more. Maybe for younger shooters the lever action is just different, while there’s much sameness between one synthetic-stocked bolt action and another. There’s perhaps even more sameness from one AR to another.

Suddenly we have choices, and today’s lever actions don’t always look like John Wayne’s Winchester 1892. Or granddad’s 1894. Today, we have lever actions almost any way we want them, from traditional to futuristic. There are metal finishes in blue, Cerakote and stainless; stocks in walnut, laminate and synthetic; ghost ring sights and Picatinny rails; and large loop levers and AR-style handguards.

Browning and Winchester lever actions run more toward the tradi-

for the .460 and .500 S&W magnums. These guns aren’t inexpensive, but they’re gorgeous, and I love mine in .500 S&W.

Henry probably produces the largest variety of lever actions, tubular-magazine rimfires and centerfires in various styles and action sizes. It also offers the Long Ranger with box magazine under the bolt and chambered to rimless cartridges including .223, .243, 6.5 Creedmoor and .308.

Until recently, this Henry and Browning’s BLR were the only remaining box-magazine lever actions, thus suitable for all sharp-pointed bullets. Like all Browning firearms, the BLR is wonderful, with numerous chamber-

Continued on page 71

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