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Sporting Firearms Journal

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The First
Super .30:

**.300 H&H
Magnum**

**3-Inch,
.300 WSM:**

The Ballistic Truth!

Evolution
of the
Mini-Caliber
Varmint Cartridges

May 2005

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Page 14...



6 **Kimber Model 8400 Spotting Scope** -
Dave Scovill

14 **Preparing a Rifle for Inclement Weather**
Mostly Long Guns -
Brian Pearce

20 **Bad Scope?**
Optics -
John Barsness



Page 24...

24 **Set Triggers**
DownRange -
Mike Venturino

28 **A Triad of .204 Rugers**
New Models from Remington, Ruger and Kimber
Stan Trzoniec

34 **Saddle Ring Carbines**
Lost in History
Mike Venturino

42 **The .300 H&H Magnum in Africa**
The First Super .30
Brian Pearce

50 **Smaller Varmint Cartridges**
The Evolution of the Mini-Calibers
John Barsness

60 **3-Inch, .300 WSM - Does It Matter?**
The Ballistic Truth
Chub Eastman

Page 34...



Page 50...



Page 28...



On the cover . . .

The Remington XR-100 .204 Ruger is outfitted with a Leupold 4.5-14x 40mm Long Range VX-III. Photo by Stan Trzoniec.



66 Records

Keeping Track
Al Miller

74 Web Site Showcase

Special Advertising Section

78 Winchester Model 70 Featherweight

Queries & Comments -

86 What's New in the Marketplace

Inside Product News -
Clair Rees

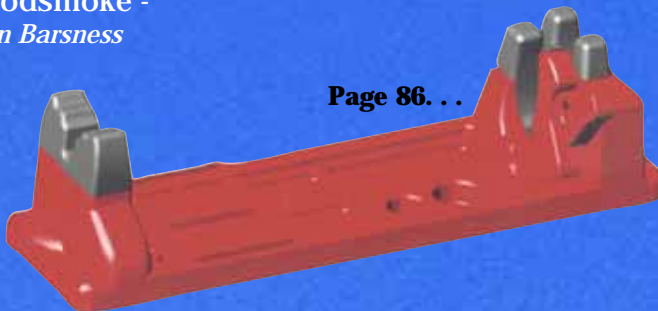
94 Trigger Talk

Rifles & Woodsmoke -
John Barsness

Page 66. . .



Page 86. . .



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Publisher/President - Mark Harris

Editor in Chief - Dave Scovill

Managing Editor - Roberta Montgomery

Art Director - Gerald Hudson

Production Director - Becky Pinkley

Contributing Editors

Associate Editor - Al Miller

John Barsness Ron Spomer

Brian Pearce Stan Trzoniec

Clair Rees Mike Venturino

Gil Sengel Ken Waters

Advertising

Advertising Director - Donald Polacek
don@riflemag.com

Advertising Representatives

Mark Webb: markw@riflemag.com

John Claybaugh: john@riflemag.com

Tom Bowman: bowmant@mauryboyd.com

Circulation

Circulation Manager - Michele Morgan
circ@riflemagazine.com

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BAD SCOPE?

Just like humans, riflescopes can go bad in various ways – and early symptoms are sometimes just as hard to diagnose. Let's look at what might be called real life, and see what can go wrong. You go to the range a month before Opening Day, to check the scope on a .30-06. All visible screws have been checked for tightness and the scope lenses and the rifle's bore thoroughly cleaned. The shots land where they should, but instead of the nifty triangles you expected, three-shot groups are strung up and down. What's the deal?

I can list five possibilities. I have experienced them all – and three don't have anything to do with the scope:

- (1) The ultraclean barrel hasn't settled down yet. Many rifle barrels need some fouling before they do their thing, sometimes as many as a dozen, but generally fouling shots are scattered, not strung up and down.
- (2) The wooden stock is putting pressure on the barrel. As the barrel heats up from shoot-

ing, subsequent shots rise. This can happen straight from the factory or when the stock of an older rifle warps. In this particular case, perhaps the second and certainly the third shot strike higher than the shot before. This can even happen with synthetic stocks, especially the injection-moulded models on many factory rifles, since a warm day can warp an injection-moulded stock.

Even if free floated, the barrel can sometimes tap the forend during a shot. This normally results in a high shot – but one that can occur anywhere in the shooting sequence.

(3) The spring that controls vertical adjustment in the scope has gone blooey. If this is the case, groups will string **very** vertically, sometimes a foot or more, with no sequential pattern.

(4) The reticle cell has shifted, due to time and recoil. This creates excessive parallax, meaning the reticle apparently wanders around the aiming point when you shift your head behind the scope. In this case groups tend to string up and down because the buttstock of the rifle tends to keep one's head in firmer horizontal than vertical alignment.

(5) The stock has more drop at heel than normal, along with weird "pitch."

Pitch is an obscure stock dimension. If you stand a long gun up against a wall, with the recoil pad or buttplate flat against the floor, the angle between barrel and wall is called pitch. Most rifles (and

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shotguns) have down-pitch, meaning the barrel points away from the wall. This is because the normal human shoulder isn't flat but slopes outward from the shoulder joint down across the chest. Some down-pitch allows the butt to meet our chest evenly. This not only minimizes felt recoil (because the butt spreads the effect over more area), but keeps the muzzle pointed in the same general direction during recoil.

Long guns with zero or up-pitch tend to jab the bottom of the butt into our chest. During recoil, the firearm pivots on this point, flipping the muzzle upward. When combined with a buttpad with a top edge 2 inches or more below the barrel (excess drop at heel), the upward flip is accentuated. In extreme cases, this can create groups very similar to (3) above.

From the above examples, we can see that scopes often get blamed for problems that have



Sometimes it's hard to tell whether the scope, ammunition or rifle is messing up. The only way to make sure is time at the bench.

nothing to do with the scope. On the other hand, some shooters never suspect the scope. We've been brain-washed about the relia-

bility of modern scopes so often (especially in print) that we're loathe to blame the scope at all, especially a scope costing a lot of

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money. "Why, my Zeiburshniko-leupiski can't be the problem. It cost nearly a thousand bucks!"

Here's a clue: Anything made by humans can go bad – and some aren't designed for the uses we choose. I recently tested a varmint rifle made by a small company claiming excellent accuracy. The rifle shot very well when sighting-in at 100 yards, but when I attempted to shoot a prairie dog at 350 yards, the results were disappointing. I am not the world's best rifle shot, but I am not the worst. After several erratic misses in a row, I rested the rifle on my day pack so the reticle pointed toward the distant dog, still sitting there unalarmed. When I moved my head around behind the scope, the reti-


Scope Problems

Interviews with scope companies indicate that the erector tube causes the most problems in variable scopes. This tube is what's shifted when you adjust the clicks in the turrets, so any looseness in the adjustment springs and their bearing surfaces can cause odd groups. The cam surfaces at the rear of the erector tube (which make variable magnification possible) can also wear during use or become damaged during recoil. All these ailments require a trip back to the factory.


cle moved in a wide circle around the prairie dog.

This particular European scope was designed for big game hunting in Europe, so was corrected for parallax out to about 250 yards – about as far as Europeans ever shoot at wild animals. Beyond that range (and especially at its highest magnification) the scope had severe parallax problems.

Depending on their size, large groups are often blamed on the rifle, load, wind – or the shooter. Any of those other links in the chain can cause the problem, the reason bad scopes are so often misdiagnosed. The easiest way I know to see if the scope's the problem is to check the parallax at various ranges, just as I did above on that prairie dog hunt. There can still be problems created by loose parts that only shift when the rifle goes off, but these generally show up as severe fliers.

Scopes can go bad. As Claude Rains said in *Casablanca*, "Round up the usual suspects!" Rifle shooters should always include their scopes in the lineup, even if they cost \$1,000. 

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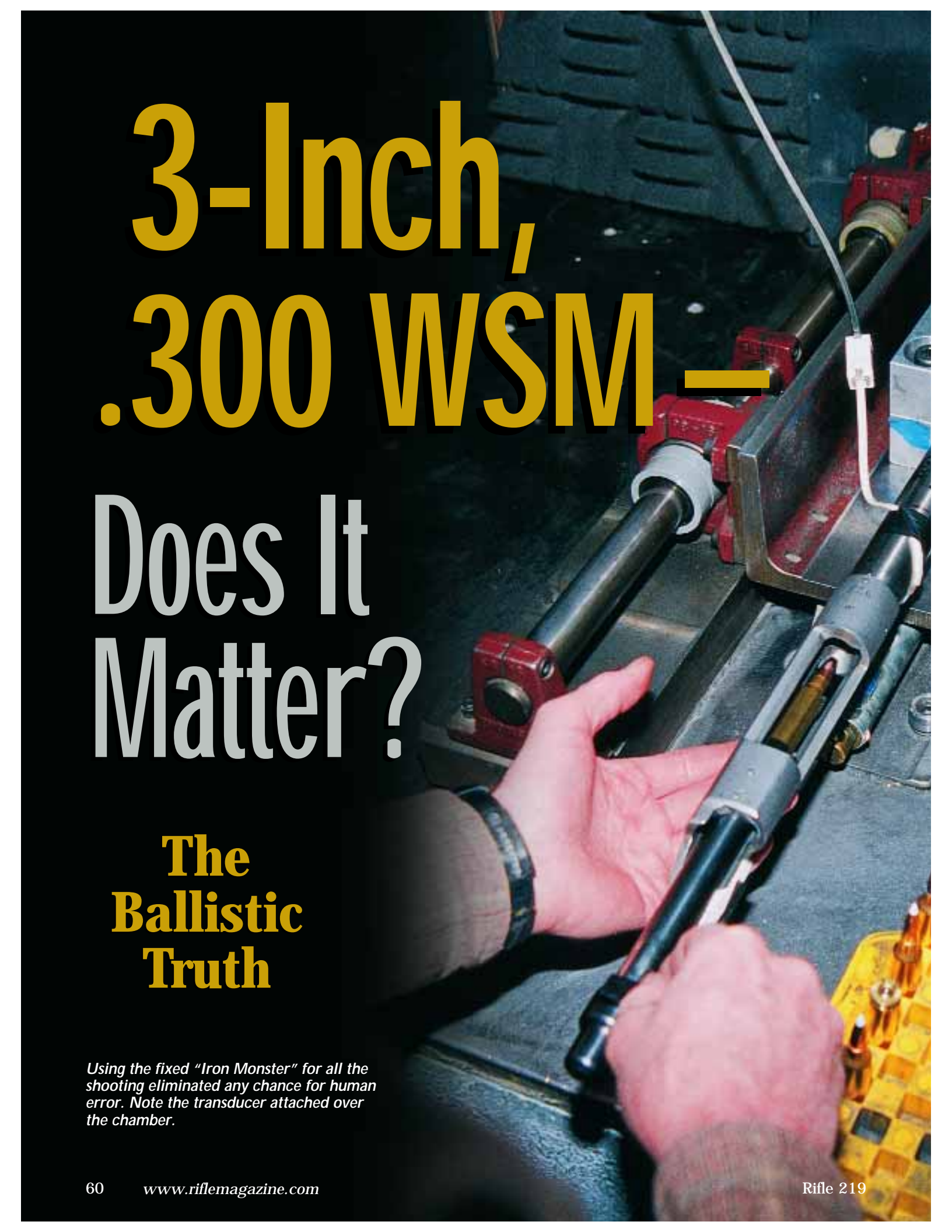
John's book *Optics for the Hunter* is available by check for \$23.50 U.S. (Canada/foreign – please add \$4.00 U.S.) from Deep Creek Press, PO Box 579, Townsend MT 59644, or order online: www.riflesandrecipes.com.

3-Inch, .300 WSM —

Does It Matter?

The Ballistic Truth

Using the fixed "Iron Monster" for all the shooting eliminated any chance for human error. Note the transducer attached over the chamber.





Chub Eastman

With the introduction of any new cartridge you invariably hear someone make a comment about long bullets being seated too deeply. The perceived problem being that the rear of the bullet extends too far in the case, restricting the amount of powder that can be used. The theory is that anytime the base of the bullet extends past the break in the shoulder of the case, you lose a certain amount of case capacity. Consequently the maximum efficiency of the cartridge cannot be reached.

The first barrel was chambered to SAAMI specifications. The second barrel was chambered with the same reamer except for a straight .250-inch lead.

This was especially true when the .284 Winchester, .350 Remington Magnum and the 6.5 Remington Magnum were introduced years ago. These were cartridges designed to produce lots of horsepower in a short-action rifle.

When the .300 Winchester Magnum was introduced, the same comments were heard. It was designed to equal or better the performance of the .300 H&H, which required a long action, while the Winchester case fit in a standard .30-06 length action. With the Winchester's short neck and fairly sharp shoulder the same perceived problem cropped up when bullets over 165 grains were seated well below the shoulder.

When Winchester and Remington introduced their new lines of short magnum cartridges, the same old arguments were resurrected again. The bases of heavy bullets extend too far in the cases, taking up powder capacity, etc., etc.

3", .300 WSM

During a conversation with Mike Lake, plant manager at Nosler, Inc., the question: "Does it really make a difference?" came up. Would chamber pressure rise or fall as the bullet is seated farther out? How much can be gained or lost in velocity and accuracy?

In some respects ballistics is a form of black art, and a good ballisticians sometimes reminds you of a medieval alchemist when someone poses the "what if?" scenario to them. Mike, being an inquisitive ballisticians, couldn't hold back the juices of curiosity to answer the question.

A few days after our conversation, I got a phone call from Mike saying there were a couple of test barrels chambered for the popular .300 WSM available, and there was a time slot during the night shift we could take advantage of. This was the time, under controlled conditions, to see if the seating depth theory was true or not and



The .300 WSM cutaways show how far the bases of the bullets extend into the case at the four different OALs used in the test: (left to right) 3.000, 2.940, 2.880 and 2.820 inches.

how much difference it really makes.

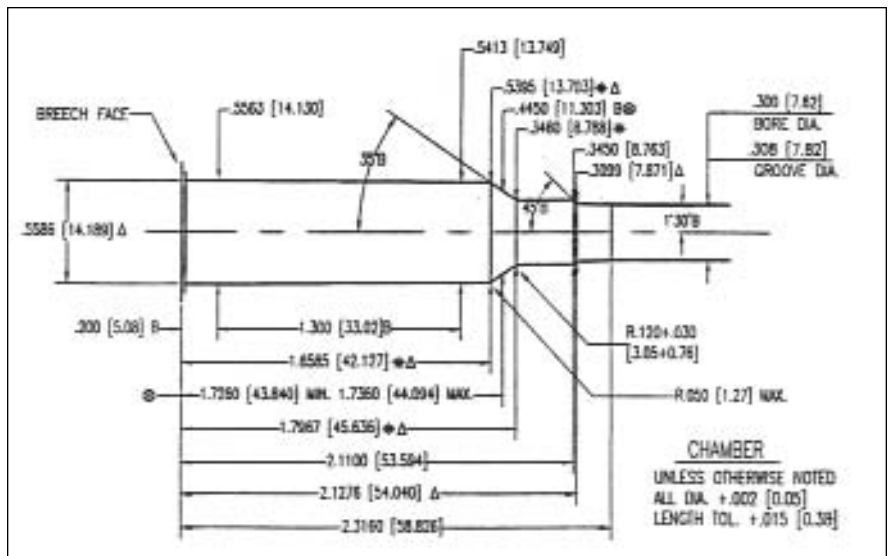
The first barrel was chambered to SAAMI specifications. When you look at the chamber, it appears as if there is no lead or freebore

before it goes to the lands and grooves. In reality there is a taper at 1.5 degrees that extends .188 inch from the case mouth.

The second barrel was chambered with the same reamer except for a straight .250-inch lead or freebore ahead of the case mouth with a 1.5-degree taper to the lands and grooves. This straight lead was chosen to make sure a cartridge overall length of 3.000 inches could be chambered.

Both barrels were Wiseman test

Left, chamber casts show the two different leads used in the test: factory SAAMI chamber and tapered lead (left) and factory chamber with modified straight lead to .250 inch (right). Below, the SAAMI chamber drawing.





Ballistician Jason McCullough developed loads for the project.

Factory overall loaded length (OAL) for both Federal Premium and Winchester Supreme with the same 180-grain AccuBonds measured 2.820 inches. This was also the starting OAL with the hand-loads.

After working up a load with each powder that equaled factory ammunition in pressure, velocity and OAL using the same 180-

grain AccuBond, the shooting started.

Starting OAL was 2.820 inches and was increased .060 inch at a time until an OAL of 3.000 inches

was reached. Three-shot groups were fired at each OAL. In theory, as the bullet was seated farther out, the subsequent drop in pressure would require an increase in powder to maintain loads at factory pressures.

Starting OAL was 2.820 inches and was increased .060 inch at a time until an OAL of 3.000 inches was reached.

The first surprise that proved this theory was questionable came when the second series of shots were fired when OAL was set at 2.880 inches. No increase or decrease in powder was needed to obtain near the same pressure or velocity using the barrel with the modified chamber. Surprise again, when we found the same results at 2.940 inches OAL and at a full 3.000 inches OAL.

barrels 1.25 inches in diameter. Each was affixed with a transducer to measure chamber pressure and attached to an Oehler Model 83 Pro-Ballistic Lab chronograph. Each was mounted in a solid machine rest, lovingly called the "Iron Monster." This was done to eliminate any human error that might occur if shooting was done by the hand-held method.

It should be noted the only difference between the two barrels, besides the chamber leade or free-bore, was length. The standard chamber barrel was 26 inches long while the modified chamber barrel was 24 inches. It is interesting that the velocity differences between the two were not that much.

To further eliminate any variance that could occur, each round was fired using new, unfired Winchester brass.

Factory Winchester Supreme and Federal Premium ammunition using the same 180-grain AccuBond bullets were fired in each barrel to establish the chamber pressure and velocity to be used as the benchmark. The goal was not to exceed pressures of factory ammunition.

With the help of ballistician Jason McCullough two popular and logical powders for the .300 WSM were chosen: H-4831sc and Reloder 22.

An advertisement for Boyd's Gunstocks. It features a black and white photograph of four hardwood gunstocks standing upright against a textured background. To the right of the gunstocks, the text reads: "Never Leave the WOODS" in large, bold, black letters. Below this is the "BOYD'S" logo in a red oval. Underneath the logo, it says "Gunstock Industries, Inc." and "The World's Foremost Supplier of Hardwood Gunstocks". At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a black banner with white text: "Call today for your FREE 40-page color catalog! 605-996-5011 www.boydsgunstocks.com".

3", .300 WSM

When the same loads were used in the barrel with the SAAMI factory chamber, it was a different story. Using the same powder charge, as the OAL length increased, the pressure and velocity increased. It was not expected that the cartridges loaded to a full 3.000 inches OAL would chamber, but they did, albeit with less than .005 inch to spare. From the table, the 3.000-inch OAL cartridges exceeded factory parameters with chamber pressures over 63,000 psi.

What was learned by this interesting exercise? The boys at Winchester knew what they were doing when they designed the .300 WSM to give the best performance when SAAMI specifications are used.

A point of interest is the fact that Nosler's ballisticians use the .300 WSM as the cartridge of choice when testing production runs of all .30-caliber bullets.

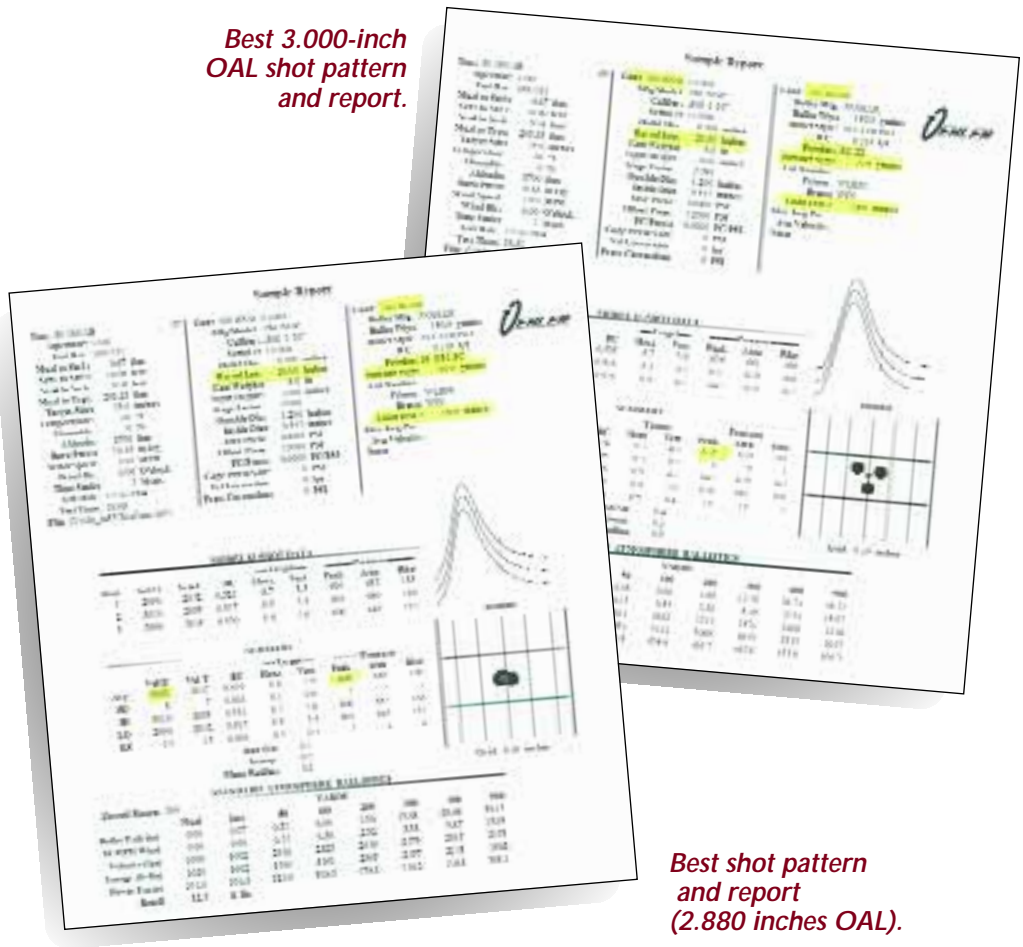
While new brass was used for each shot during the project, a few rounds were fired using once-fired brass to see if there were any major changes. There was a slight difference when once-fired neck-sized cases were used but not enough to see any differences in the pattern of performance.

There is a possibility the numbers could be different if slower powders were used, but that is doubtful. The two powders chosen were ones that were suggested in most reloading manuals and seemed to be a popular choice.

Theories and logical reasoning sometimes go down the drain when you actually pull the trigger and record the results.

Having shot a .300 WSM for the past couple of hunting seasons with great success, I had wondered if performance could be increased with a little longer barrel and a little longer OAL length to the cartridge so the base of the bullet doesn't take up extra space in the case. I guess the old adage is true: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Best 3.000-inch OAL shot pattern and report.



Best shot pattern and report (2.880 inches OAL).

Ballistic Comparisons

bullet (grains)	powder	charge (grains)	pressure (psi)	velocity (fps)	overall loaded length (inches)
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.300 WSM – SAAMI CHAMBER WITH .250 STRAIGHT LEADE					
180 Nosler AccuBond Winchester Supreme factory			59,800	2,969	2.820
180 Nosler AccuBond Federal Premium factory			59,300	3,011	2.820
180 Nosler AccuBond	H-4831sc	69.0	59,400	2,912	2.820
		69.0	59,600	2,913	2.880
		69.0	59,200	2,909	2.940
		69.0	59,300	2,913	3.000

Notes: Above loads fired through a Wiseman 24-inch test barrel. New W-W brass and Winchester Large Rifle primers used throughout. Pressure and velocity numbers are three-shot averages. An Oehler Model 83 with transducer used to measure velocity and pressure.

bullet (grains)	powder	charge (grains)	pressure (psi)	velocity (fps)	overall loaded length (inches)
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.300 WSM – SAAMI FACTORY CHAMBER AND LEADE					
180 Nosler AccuBond Winchester Supreme factory			59,700	3,002	2.820
180 Nosler AccuBond Federal Premium factory			60,200	3,064	2.820
180 Nosler AccuBond	H-4831sc	69.0	59,200	2,976	2.820
		69.0	60,500	3,002	2.880
		69.0	61,200	3,011	2.940
		69.0	62,800	3,029	3.000
	RL-22	70.5	59,500	3,045	2.820
		70.5	60,700	3,058	2.880
		70.5	60,700	3,062	2.940
		70.5	63,500	3,101	3.000

Notes: Above loads fired through a Wiseman 26-inch test barrel. New W-W brass and Winchester Large Rifle primers used throughout. Pressure and velocity numbers are three-shot averages. An Oehler Model 83 with transducer used to measure velocity and pressure.

Be Alert – Publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors in published load data.

INSIDE PRODUCT NEWS

MTM® GUN VISE

Every rifle owner needs a vise to firmly anchor firearms while scopes are mounted, cleaning rods are passed through the barrel and other maintenance is performed. I have a couple of portable vises that work pretty well, but none as economical as the \$59 model just introduced by the MTM Molded Products Company.

The new MTM Gun Vise does a good job of steadying rifles and shotguns for a variety of gunsmithing and maintenance chores. It features a single, easy-to-use clamp that provides a firm, rubber-padded grip that won't mar the

gun. High and low supporting forks keep the firearm vertical while you're mounting a scope or in a sloped position for draining away solvents and oils during the cleaning process.

In addition to being inexpensive, the MTM Gun Vise is rugged, light and small enough to throw in your car or truck and take to the range. Dedicated prairie dog shooters typ-



Fourteen separate moulded-in compartments keep screwdriver bits or cleaning supplies handy, while a small divided tray slides from the base to accommodate smaller, easily misplaced items. A special rest keeps a pair of cleaning rods handy but out of the way. The gun vise is made of chemical- and solvent-resistant polypropylene plastic.

ically clean their rifles two or three times a day when shooting is hot, and this vise is easy to take along.

This new budget-priced gun vise should be available by the time you read this. See it at your sporting goods retailer, or for more information, contact MTM Molded Products Company, Dept. R, PO Box 13117, Dayton OH 45413; call toll-free: 1-800-543-0548; or visit www.mtmcase-guard.com online.

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I've worn prescription eyeglasses for the last 35 years. They're a pain in the posterior whenever I misplace them, read a newspaper or tie on a black wooly bugger. On the other hand, their photo-sensitive lenses darken in the sunshine so I don't need sunglasses. But this is the best part – the lenses are hardened to protect my eyes, so I don't need to buy shooting glasses for myself.

That doesn't mean I don't need several pairs of shooting glasses



on hand. My three grown sons and four preteen and teenage grandchildren all have great eyesight – and I'd like to keep it that way. Whenever any of them accompany

me to the range, the first thing I do is fit them with decent ear and eye protection. Hearing gear is no problem – disposable foam plugs or muff-type protectors will fit just about anyone. But when it comes to shooting glasses, I've often come up short. Most shooting glasses on the market are designed for adults – children and teenagers often have heads too small to wear them.

That's why I was happy to learn about a new product from Uvex. The company's FitLogic™ glasses are the first safety eyewear claimed to provide a custom fit for any face. Combining new design and material technology, FitLogic makes it possible for wearers to adjust these glasses at four separate points – face, cheekbone, ear and nose. They can be adapted to provide a custom match for any user.

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