Charles E. Petty

Some years ago I spent some time shooting with J.D. Jones's .300 Whisper wildcat. He took a small cartridge – the .221 Fireball – blew it out to .30 caliber and, using heavy bullets, turned it into an accurate round that did some neat stuff.

Whisper to Blackout

.300 Blackout Loads for a Bolt Rifle

The problem, of course, is that the Whisper cartridges are wildcats, and while there's absolutely nothing wrong with them, the average shooter wants a gun and cartridge that he can buy off the shelf without resorting to custom guns and handloaded ammunition. So, in 2011 the Whisper was reborn as Advanced Armament Corporation's .300 AAC Blackout and introduced as a SAAMI standard cartridge by Remington.

There often is neither rhyme nor reason for the naming of cartridges, and more than a few have asked how it came to be called Blackout. The last time that word was a common part of the vocabulary was during World War II when cities turned off the lights to foil enemy attack.

The .300 Whisper was originally found in single-shot handguns and AR-15 rifles, so it is not entirely surprising that the Blackout appeared in a host of AR-15 type carbines. The rifle's semiautomatic action does place some restrictions on what the cartridge has to do for the rifle to function, so it was a very pleasant surprise to learn that Remington was once using it in the Model 700 LTR (Light Tactical Rifle), now discontinued.

Even though the rifle has a 16-inch barrel, the 0.85-inch diameter at the muzzle would qualify as "heavy" to most, and when topped with a Meopta ZD 4-16x Tactical scope I had on loan, the rifle weighed an even

10 pounds. I quickly came to view that as a blessing in disguise, because the combination of a small cartridge and moderate weight results in minimal recoil even with top loads and heavy bullets. Not to mention that the bolt action opens a whole new world of bullet choices for reloaders, because there is no worry about enough energy to work the action.

The scope has adjustment clicks graduated in the metric system of 0.5 cm at 100 meters, which converts to 0.2 inch at 109 yards, which is between ¼- and ⅛-minute click value. Practically speaking, it was not a problem, although it might be a good idea to tape a small conversion chart to the scope for field use.

Trying to work with a specific cartridge during the current Ice Age of ammunition and component availability would have been impossible had I not already been a fan of the Whisper and had everything needed to get started. My original Whisper ammunition was made from .221 Fireball brass, either by fireforming in the Whisper chamber or by using expanding dies. Fireforming was done in a Contender barrel using a charge of 5.0 grains of Bullseye and then filling the case up to the neck with Cream of Wheat topped by a plug of toilet paper.

The Remington .300 AAC Blackout was fitted with a Meopta 4x16 Tactical scope. The Remington's muzzle is threaded to accept a suppressor.

Normally groups are shot first with factory loads as a basis for comparison, but that wasn't possible. I was able to score one box of Remington .300 Blackout ammunition with a 220-grain bullet and had some old Cor-Bon Whisper

For comparison (left to right): .221 Remington Fireball, .300 AAC Blackout and .223 Remington.

Whisper to Blackout

Table I **.300 Blackout Supersonic Loads**

bullet (*grains*)	powder	charge (*grains*)	velocity (*fps*)	velocity spread (*fps*)	accuracy (*inches*)
125 Nosler Ballistic Tip	H-110	18.0	2,156	65	1.01
	Lil'Gun	16.0	1,846	46	0.74
135 Sierra Match	H-110	17.8	2,136	43	0.85
	Lil'Gun	15.5	2,026	28	0.56
150 Nosler Ballistic Tip	H-110	17.0	2,015	42	1.25
	Lil'Gun	15.0	1,955	32	0.91
155 Sierra Match	H-110	17.0	1,995	33	0.88
	Lil'Gun	14.5	1,877	26	0.93
168 Sierra Match	H-110	15.0	1,788	56	0.59
	Lil'Gun	14.0	1,810	12	0.49

Notes: All loads were shot with a Remington LTR rifle. Velocity readings are five-shot strings at 12 feet. Accuracy results are five-shot groups at 100 yards.

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ammunition with 125-, 150- and 220-grain bullets, but they were only used for velocity reference. Factory loads then available focused on either light or heavy bullets, leaving quite a bit of unexplored territory to visit.

With the current shortage of components, Blackout shooters are making cases by cutting down 5.56 or .223 Remington brass. Sizing can be done in standard dies and then the cases trimmed to length and chamfered. A word of warning here: GI brass is almost always heavier than the commercial stuff, and that means it has a smaller powder capacity. The old advice of reducing charges a bit is still valid. My thought is that published starting loads will be fine, but work up slowly from there.

With the knowledge that the only difference between the Whisper and Blackout is the name, I was able to round up quite a bit of loading data with Internet searches. Most of those were meant for AR-type rifles, and since I didn't have to worry about making the gun function, I was free to use any .30-caliber bullet and, since I had no desire to set new speed records, was able to cautiously infer or deduce loads for most of the weights I wanted to try.

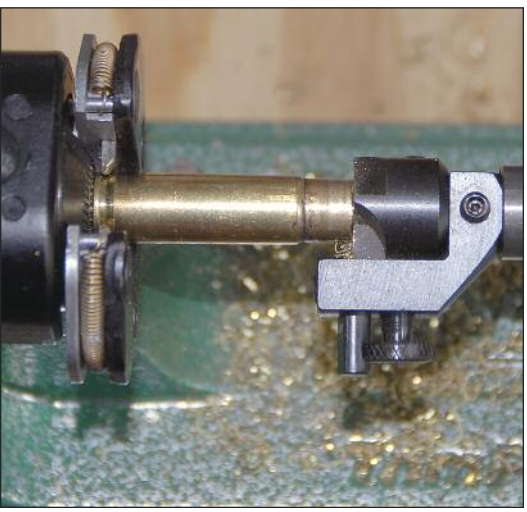
Load development for the bolt-action rifle included bullets from 110 up to 220 grains and velocities from 2,400 fps down to less than 900. The research was divided into supersonic and subsonic loads with the basic goal of finding the best accuracy combinations for each. Since some of my re-formed

Fireball brass was a bit long in the tooth, it was trimmed to 1.360 inches with an RCBS Trim Pro power case trimmer.

Because I simply couldn't find enough factory ammunition to establish any sort of baseline, the best I could do was to look at catalog data and try to come close with velocities. I also dug up data from a long-ago Whisper story and started there, and once I got going with some loads using light bullets, I gradually expanded the search. Earlier work had used a good bit of H-110, and I found some more recent data with Lil'Gun. That turned out to be a great choice.

Experience has taught me that neck sizing is a good thing in bolt guns, so I ordered a set of Redding dies for both full-length and neck sizing, and loading was done using re-formed Fireball cases that were fired in the Remington and then neck sized. Federal Match primers were used.

The Remington's muzzle was thoughtfully threaded, and I happened to have a surpressor. While factory loads are limited to 110- to 115-grain or 204- to 220-grain bullets, I wanted to see how some of the other weights would work, especially the common *match* weights of 168 and 175 grains. Obviously the two classes of ammunition need vastly different scope adjustments, so I began with



Left, old brass was trimmed on an RCBS Tri-Pro trimmer using its clever three-way cutter that also chamfers and deburrs the case. Right, all loads were assembled on a Redding turret press.

Whisper to Blackout

the faster loads, and the work progressed without event. With subsonic loads things got complicated. My normal practice is to chronograph a bunch of handloads then shoot groups with those that show promise, but when I moved to the 100-yard range, I simply ran out of elevation adjustment.

While I could easily get decent hits using the mil dots in the Meopta scope, that really isn't precise enough for shooting groups. So the next step was to order a long-range base that gave an extra 15 MOA elevation. To my surprise, that wasn't quite enough either.

This is really one of those situations that happens when one ventures outside the box. My range is limited to 300 yards, and those powder-puff Trail Boss loads I like so much have never challenged a scope's elevation range, but a ballistics program indicated my subsonic loads for the Blackout were blazing along at 800 to 900 fps and would probably break new ground for parabolic trajectories. The scope would have to be shimmed.

In the meantime, preliminary testing suggested that H-110 (or W-296) and Lil'Gun did well in the Blackout, so I embarked on load development for both supersonic and subsonic velocities. Bullet choices were really dictated by the speeds I wanted, so the supersonic loads used weights of 125 to 168 grains, and the subsonics used 168- to 220-grain bullets.

That wasn't an entirely arbitrary choice, because the first few subsonic loads with lighter bullets wouldn't hit the proverbial barn. After firing a few shots and finding no bullet holes on the paper, I finally spotted a single oblong hole at the bottom of the target. The meandering velocities simply were not enough to stabilize the short,

Table II

.300 Blackout Subsonic Loads

bullet (*grains*)	powder	charge (*grains*)	velocity (*fps*)	velocity spread (*fps*)	accuracy (*inches*)
165 Cutting Edge	H-110	9.0	1,066	34	1.36
	Lil'Gun	8.0	1,044	40	0.90
168 Sierra Match	H-110	9.0	1,028	64	1.16
	Lil'Gun	8.0	1,059	56	1.02
175 Sierra Match	H-110	9.0	1,034	100	1.03
	Lil'Gun	8.0	1,070	52	1.02
175 Berger OTM	H-110	8.5	1,021	55	0.45
		9.0	1,065	76	0.84
	Lil'Gun	7.5	1,034	76	0.75
190 Sierra Match	H-110	8.5	1,049	58	0.83
	Lil'Gun	7.5	1,018	31	1.62
		8.0	1,131	44	1.09
200 Sierra Match	H-110	8.5	954	85	1.61
	Lil'Gun	7.5	914	70	1.21

Notes: All loads were shot with a Remington LTR rifle. Velocity readings are five-shot strings at 12 feet. Accuracy results are five-shot groups at 100 yards.

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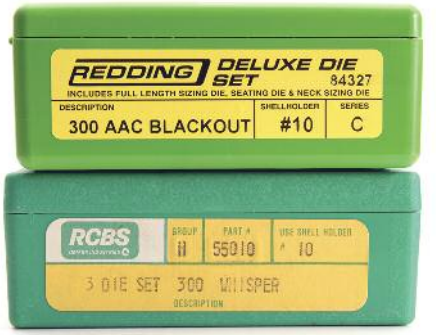
light bullets, even with the rifle's one-in-7-inch twist.

Even though I had a 100-yard zero, I didn't solve the scope issue. To raise point of impact, shims were added to the mount. Having only done this once or twice in the distant past, I decided to make shims of 0.005, 0.010 and 0.015 inch and started with the 0.010 inch but took the others, plus everything needed to make more, to the range.



Redding AAC Blackout and RCBS Whisper dies were interchangeable.

The Meopta was left with the elevation cranked all the way up, so I counted how many clicks it took to reach the bottom – 266 – then brought it back up halfway for a starting point. With a 0.010-inch shim installed, I checked it with the bore sighter and made a very small adjustment. At the range, the very first shot was a couple of inches high of point of aim. Don't you just love it when something turns out the way you want? When the scope was returned, it was replaced with a Leupold 16x Mk IV. ●