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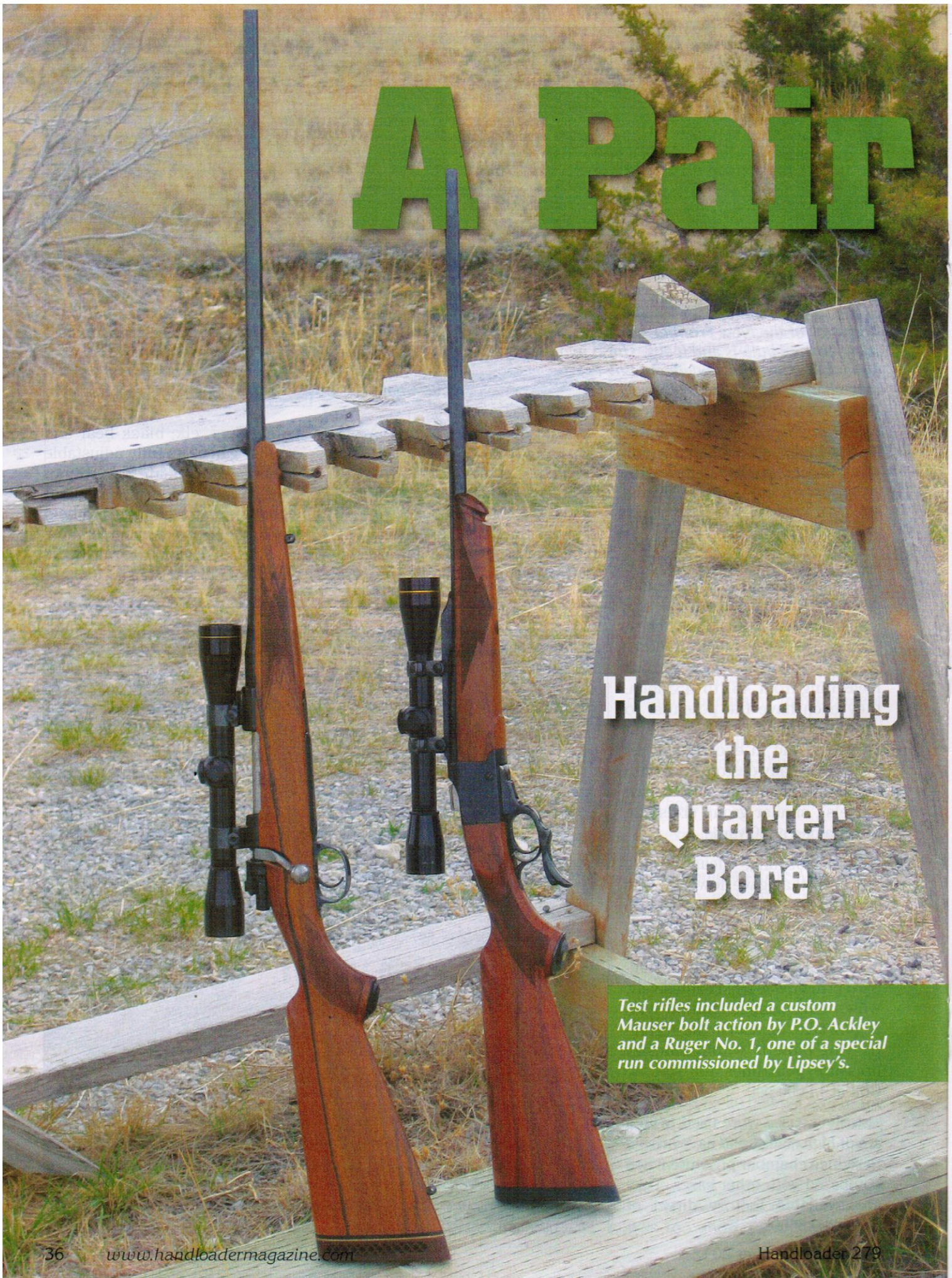

A Pair

Handloading the Quarter Bore

Test rifles included a custom Mauser bolt action by P.O. Ackley and a Ruger No. 1, one of a special run commissioned by Lipsey's.

of .25-06s

John Barsness

The biggest mystery surrounding the .25-06 Remington is why it took so long to become a factory cartridge. According to various sources, several experimenters came up with the same basic design early in the twentieth century, but the most prominent – and perhaps the first – .25-06 developer was custom gunsmith Adolph Otto Niedner.

Niedner was born in 1864 and grew up in Malden, Massachusetts, where he apprenticed as a machinist in his father's factory and fell under the spell of firearms. He lived in Malden, doing some gunsmithing on the side, until moving west in the mid-1880s, where he served a short stint in the U.S. Army in Colorado until the military discovered he was underage.

After his discharge, Niedner moved to Milwaukee and worked in a store for several years, then joined the Milwaukee police force. But he wanted to be a gunsmith and about 1900 moved back to Massachusetts, again working in his father's factory until 1906, when he became a full-time gunsmith, opening a one-man shop in Malden.

During this period Niedner joined the Massachusetts Rifle Association. Founded in 1875, the club is often called Walnut Hill after its range near Woburn and today is the oldest active firearms club in the United States. The association had many notable members, including famed barrelmaker Harry Pope; groundbreaking ballistician Dr. Franklin Mann, author of *The Bullet's Flight*; and Eugene Patridge, who hired Niedner to build the first of his famous sights. Niedner also worked closely with Franklin Mann, who had a personal range with both pressure-testing equipment and a chronograph. Niedner not only made tools and rifles for Dr. Mann's experiments, but also helped Mann develop jacketed bullets (using a core mould made by Harry Pope) and a successful scope mount eventually used by the U.S. Marine Corps. Yet most twentieth-century rifle lore ignores all those accomplishments and the Malden years, usually calling him "A.O. Niedner, gunsmith of Dowagiac, Michigan."

In *Cartridges of the World*, Frank Barnes states that Niedner "first supplied" rifles in .25-06 about 1920, the year he opened a much bigger shop in Dowagiac and hired several employees. The Barnes quote is probably the reason so many sources state the .25-06 originated in 1920, but by then A.O. Niedner had been making custom rifles for many years, including quite a few in .25 Niedner. Among his early customers were Ned Roberts, Charles Newton and then-Lieutenant Townsend Whelen.

More of Niedner's pre-Michigan career is detailed in *Custom Gunmakers of the 20th Century*, a fine book by firearms collector, historian and author Michael Petrov. Copies can be ordered directly for $30, which includes priority mail postage, by writing Petrov at 923 West 74th Avenue, Anchorage AK 99518.

The .25 Niedner, like Ned Roberts's .257, was originally designed as a long-range varmint round. In the early 1900s, big game was scarce in most settled areas of the U.S., and a lot of rifle development and manufacturing took place in the northeast, where plenty of woodchucks terrorized cow pastures and hayfields. The .25 Niedner worked pretty well on chucks with the faster-burning

Left to right, the most popular .25-caliber cartridges are the .257 Roberts, .25-06 Remington and .257 Weatherby. The .25-06 is by far the most popular of the three.

A Pair of .25-06s

Left, a Heym SR-30 straight-pull bolt action, used on a cull hunt in Ireland, convinced John the .25-06 was a great hunting round. Above, he shot a doe fallow deer in thick timber late on a cloudy November day.

powders of the era and traditional 87-grain bullets.

Powder development made rapid strides after World War I, resulting in DuPont IMR-4350 in 1940. World War II slowed civilian production, but some IMR-4350 still reached handloaders, including Roy Weatherby, who used the new powder when developing the first Weatherby Magnum, the .270. After the war a young midwesterner named Bruce Hodgdon started selling an even slower-burning DuPont military surplus powder he called H-4831. As a result, the magnum craze dominated the postwar years, while the .25-06 shuffled along as a wildcat.

Eventually most hunters realized neither Weatherby's thunderboomers nor various Remington and Winchester belted magnums were necessary for whitetails, but many also wanted something faster and flatter than the .243 and .308 Winchesters, the popular new "short" cartridges introduced during the 1950s. The .243 and .308 pretty much killed off the .250 and .300 Savage cartridges, and by the 1960s the .270 Winchester started smelling moldy to many hunters, who, like rifle loonies of any era, wanted something new and exciting.

In 1965 Remington started making ammunition and rifles for the .22-250 Remington, a very successful move, and the next year introduced the 6.5 Remington Magnum. The 6.5 might have put a dent in the popularity of the .243 and .308, but Remington chambered it in its Model 600 carbine with an 18.5-inch barrel. The few remaining woods hunters apparently preferred real woods rifles to a cut-down pronghorn rifle.

Evidently Remington learned something from its .22-250 and 6.5 Magnum experiences, in 1969 chambering the .25 Niedner in its full-sized Model 700 rifle with a 24-inch barrel. Soon the ".25-06 Remington" became a worldwide cartridge. While not quite as popular as the .243 and .270 Winchesters, it nicely fills the ballistic slot between them.

A very small .25-06 Remington mystery is why one slow gun writer didn't appreciate its virtues until taking part in a hunt in Ireland, of all places. In 2006 the German firearms manufacturer Heym invited a few American writers to field-test some rifles by culling deer on the estate of Lord Rosse, the last British earl in Ireland. The plan was for me to use an over-under double in .308 Winchester, but the Remington ammunition supplied by local sporting goods dealer John O'Malley didn't agree with the European dimensions of the double's chamber, refusing to go *bang* every time. Our host on the estate was Liam Kenehan, an

Left, bullets tested covered the weight range from 75 to 120 grains. Below, though a century old, the .25-06 Remington didn't become a great cartridge until the 1940s with the appearance of IMR-4350 and H-4831.

affable local plumber who leased the deer hunting. Liam loaned me his personal rifle for the hunt, a Heym SR-30 straight-pull bolt action in .25-06.

Contrary to the thin historical knowledge of many American shooters, we did not invent the rifle. Germans did, and they still know how to build very accurate rifles. Liam's rifle had a 3-12x Schmidt & Bender scope with a long-range ballistic reticle, and he'd used the SR-30 out to almost 600 yards on the fallow and red deer of the Rosse estate, mostly with Remington ammunition purchased from his friend John O'Malley. Even in my hands, Liam's rifle shot 120-grain Core-Lokts into tiny groups at 100 yards. Over the next few days, I took several fallow deer out to 400 yards, in the process becoming very impressed with not just the rifle and scope but the .25-06 Remington.

Soon after returning home from the multicultural cull hunt, a Ruger No. 1 .25-06 found a place in my gun safe, one of a special run commissioned by the distributor Lipsey's, with a slim 24-inch barrel and stock made from nice European walnut. It shot very well from the get-go with both handloads and Remington factory ammunition. These days our house is so full of heads and horns that I've

A Pair of .25-06s

gotten pretty picky about adding more, so the No. 1 has only taken doe deer and pronghorn, performing just as well as the Heym did in Ireland.

In the winter of 2011, a group of local rifle loonies attended the gun show in Livingston, Montana. Even though Livingston isn't a big show, interesting firearms seem to turn up fairly often, perhaps because Livingston isn't dominated by the dealers who repeatedly bring truckloads of overpriced rifles to the "big" Montana shows.

An interesting custom .25-06 Remington followed me home. The slim 26-inch barrel and all the metal work on the BRNO VZ-24 Mauser action were done by the famous P.O. Ackley for an American Air Force officer stationed in Germany. The officer had the barreled action custom-stocked over there, and the workmanship is first-class. Like many German bolt-action stocks, it's very slim with a typical pancake cheekpiece and subtle Schnabel. Apparently the rifle hadn't been hunted much at all.

P.O. Ackley really knew how to make a barrel, my Hawkeye scope revealing a flawless cut-rifled and lapped bore. The scope-friendly Buehler safety also works smoothly, the Winchester-style bolt handle is precisely fitted, and the Dayton Traister trigger breaks cleanly at 3 pounds. With a 6x36 Leupold scope the rifle weighs 2 ounces over 8 pounds, exactly the same as the Ruger No. 1 with a 6x36 Leupold.

When shooting buddies who'd missed the Livingston show asked if we'd seen anything interesting (winter in Montana sometimes creates a certain desperation for any news), I told them about picking up a genuine P.O. Ackley .25-06. Several guys instantly assumed this meant a .25-06 Ackley Improved. Evidently many twenty-first-century rifle enthusiasts don't know that P.O. Ackley's entire career did not revolve around blowing cartridge shoulders out to 40 degrees. Their assumption reminded me of the modern reputation of A.O. Niedner, who accomplished far more than turning the .30-06 into a woodchuck cartridge.

Since World War II, .25-06 Remington enthusiasts have known exactly what IMR-4350 and H-4831 brought to the table, and over the past quarter-century Reloder 22 also became a standard .25-06 powder. A pair of .25-06s with different barrel lengths seemed like an ideal opportunity for experimentation with newer powders, including H-4350, which has replaced IMR-4350 for many reloaders, thanks to easy metering, short-cut granules and increased temperature resistance, and normally results in about the same velocities and accuracy as IMR-4350 with similar powder charges.

Select .25-06 Remington Handloads

bullet (*grains*)	powder	charge (*grains*)	velocity Ruger (*fps*)	velocity Ackley (*fps*)	group Ruger (*inches*)	group Ackley (*inches*)
75 Hornady V-MAX	Hunter	59.0	3,839	3,854	1.28	.80
	AA-4350	58.0	3,657	3,663	.53	1.74
85-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip	Magpro	61.0	3,545	3,571	.75	1.90
	RL-17	53.5	3,601	3,645	.90	3.14
100 Barnes Tipped TSX	H-4350	52.0	3,312	3,389	.98	.72
100 Speer boat-tail	RL-17	52.0	3,384	3,453	1.39	1.44
110 Nosler AccuBond	Retumbo	58.0	3,182	3,260	1.74	1.56
115 Berger VLD	Magnum	60.0	3,148	3,316	.99	.91
117 Sierra Pro-Hunter	RL-25	55.0	3,112	3,320	1.25	1.17
120 Nosler Partition	Retumbo	56.5	3,089	3,167	.75	2.37

Notes: All loads featured fired and neck-sorted Remington brass and Federal 210M primers. Velocities are instrumental, from an Oehler 35P chronograph with the front screen 15 feet from the muzzle.

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

Whenever starting to load for a new-to-me round, the first task is a "literature search" of available data, and one invaluable resource is the big book of Ken Waters' "Pet Loads" from *Handloader*. Ken covered the .25-06 Remington twice, in 1973 and again in 1984, the second time using a pair of rifles with 24- and 26-inch barrels. One load common to both tests was a 100-grain bullet with around 52 to 53 grains of IMR-4350 or H-4350, and the 1984 test has a "very accurate" or "best accuracy" next to every 4350/100-grain load.

The all-around big game load settled on during early experimentation with the No. 1 turned out to be 52.0 grains of H-4350 and the 100-grain Barnes Tipped TSX, and it also proved accurate in the Ackley rifle. In fact, ammunition loaded for the Ruger shot very well, since the difference in throat length between the two rifles was about .02 inch. This is kind of contrary to modern handloading theory: Accurate powder charges are supposed to fill the case, and 52.0 grains of H-4350 doesn't even reach the shoulder of the .25-06.

With bullets under 100 grains there wasn't much difference in muzzle velocity between the barrels, but as bullet weight increased, the 26-inch barrel really started to gain. The largest difference was 208 fps with a 117-grain Sierra and 55.0 grains of Reloder 25. In fact, with several of the 100- to 120-grain loads, the longer Ackley barrel approached .257 Weatherby velocities with powder charges a grain or so under listed maximums and no signs of high pressure.

The Ruger No. 1 turned out to be more accurate overall, probably due to its shorter, slightly heavier barrel. While stories of the inaccu-

A Pair of .25-06s

racy of No. 1s still circulate, especially on the ever-reliable Internet, my experience over the past 20 years (after Ruger started making its own barrels) is new No. 1s shoot as well as most factory bolt actions.

Long, slim barrels often turn out to be pretty picky about ammunition, and the Ackley rifle's barrel only measures .575 inch at the muzzle. Also, the barreled action is bedded in the wood, without help from epoxy, though the inletting is typical German precise. I don't know how much effect the bedding might have on accuracy and don't intend to find out, preferring to keep the rifle as-is, since it shoots quite well with the right loads.

The most accurate load in the No. 1 turned out to be the 75-grain Hornady V-MAX and 58.0 grains of Accurate 4350. The latest Accurate powders are manufactured specifically for Western Powders, Inc. in Miles City, Montana. The new Accurate 4350 turned out to be short-grain, and it kept putting the little V-MAXes into one-hole clusters. The average spread for four, three-shot groups was .56 inch, and that included one high flier. Without the flier the groups averaged .38 inch. At a muzzle velocity of close to 3,700 fps, the 75-grain V-MAX will really reach out and touch coyotes, though it isn't the best pelt bullet.

Twenty-five caliber cartridges are not favored among the ultralong-range boys, because the standard one-in-10-inch twist won't stabilize the ultrahigh ballistic coefficient bullets deemed necessary for sniping deer way out there. Most hunters, however, tend to shoot game at less than 600 yards, where the .25-06 Remington works fine.

One year at a game convention, I met a woman outfitter from western Canada who used a .25-06 Remington when backing up moose and grizzly hunters. That may be stretching the cartridge some, and since then she's apparently switched to a lever-action .45-70 when grizzly hunting; but an awful lot of caribou and elk fall to .25-06s every year, and it does work great on deer, whether in Ireland or Montana!