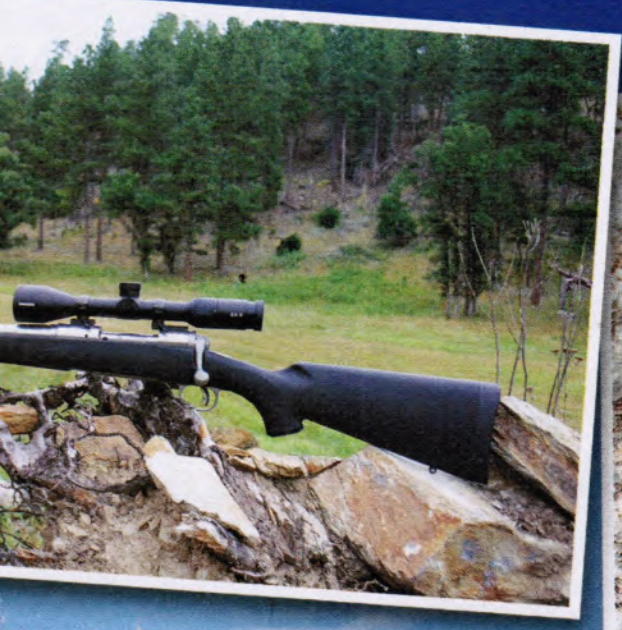
THE QUARTER-BORE

This Wyoming mule deer was taken at long range by the flat-shooting .257 Weatherby. A Barnes 100-TTSX bullet from the Remington 700 rifle did the job.

QUARTET

Bigger isn't always better. From classics to modern, these four .25-caliber cartridges get the job done on big game

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICHARD FOLSLAND

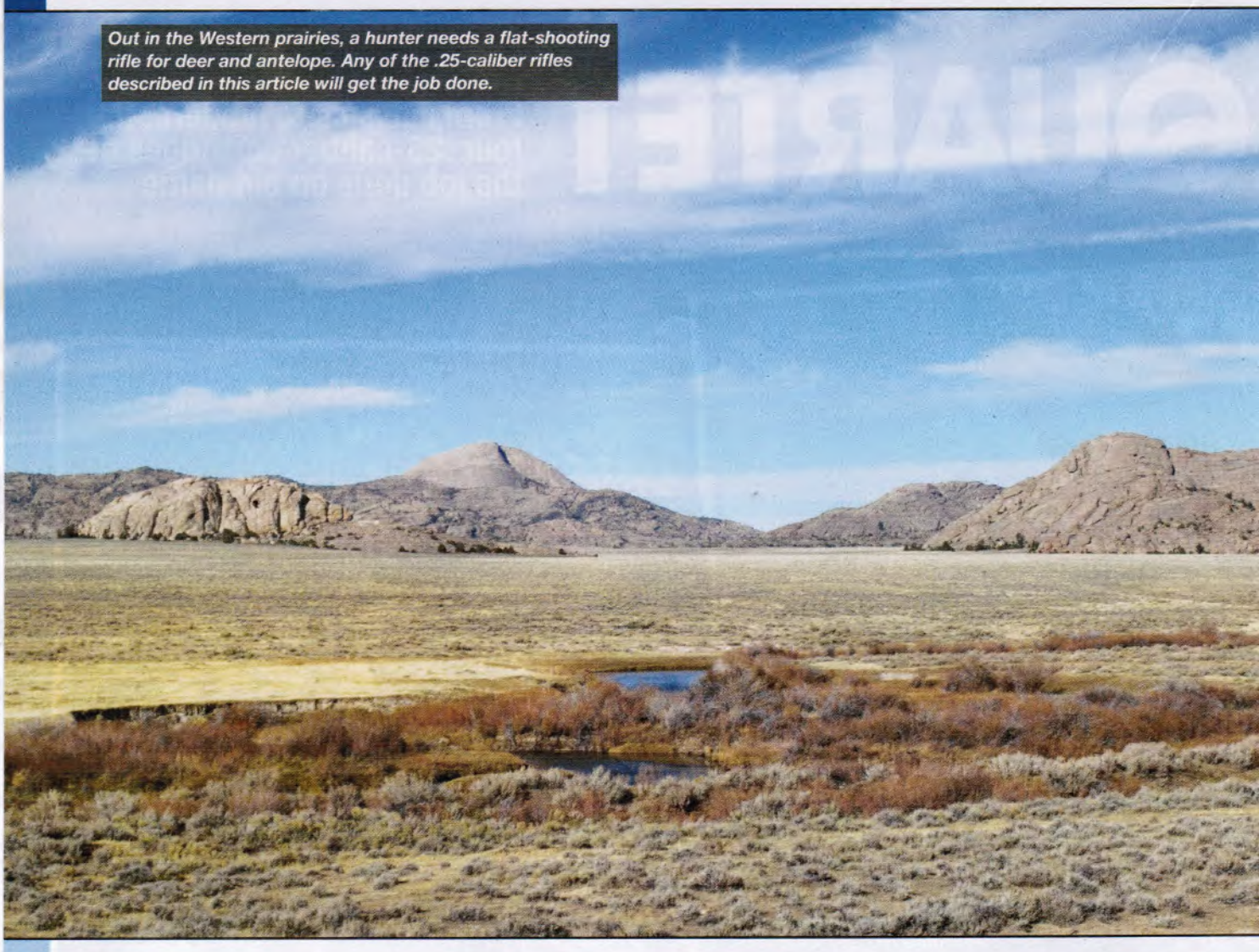


ABOVE AND RIGHT: This fine collection of quarter-bore rifles includes (above) an AccuStock-equipped Savage Model 16 in .250 Savage; (right) a Savage/Shaw .257 Roberts; a Remington 700 .25-06; and a Remington 700 .257 Weatherby.

In this day and age of the "new cartridge of the month" mentality we live in, it can be a good mental exercise to inject a little sanity into the "bigger is better" madness. It does seem that unless you have one of the latest and greatest designer cartridges and shoot game from several hundred yards, you must be living in the Stone Age.

However, long before these slick, new, wonder calibers came out and hunters felt the need to take game at really long range, there were calibers that worked extremely well. These calibers have been performing the task of knocking down big game with authority for longer than the portable wind meter/computer generation of hunters has been alive.

One group of cartridges that really fits the bill is the .25-caliber. From the classic .250 Savage and .257 Roberts to the more-modern .25-06 Remington and .257 Weatherby, the quarter-bore quartet of cartridges has enjoyed a long and healthy track record of



Out in the Western prairies, a hunter needs a flat-shooting rifle for deer and antelope. Any of the .25-caliber rifles described in this article will get the job done.

field success among journeymen hunters.

While there is a big ballistic disparity between the .250 Savage and the .257 Weatherby, the little .250 still has a place at the table. Regarding the .257 Roberts and .25-06: Their credibility has been well established.

In my opinion, the best way to assess the merits of each of the four .25-caliber cartridges is to discuss them individually, from oldest to newest.

THE NEAR-CENTURY-OLD .250 SAVAGE

The .250 Savage is coming up on the century mark in 2015. Although this cartridge is almost 100 years old and has lost ground to newer and more powerful cartridges, it is not finished yet. Loaded ammunition may be hard to find at the local co-op, and brass is on a "seasonal-run" basis, but the .250 Savage is still hanging around.

The original .250 Savage load, which fired an 87-grain bullet at a velocity of 3,000 fps, was pretty darned impressive in 1915—and it's not that bad, even today. A 100-grain load was added later to satisfy deer hunters who felt the 87-grain load was just for varmints. Depending on the rifling twist rate, some of the oldest Model 99s were only accurate with the 87-grain load. Newer-built rifles had the faster twist and shot the heavier bullet well.

Even though most of the major rifle manufacturers chambered the .250 Savage, it was discontinued from production some time ago. Today, the main firearm seen in .250 Savage is the Savage Model 99 lever-action, which is highly sought after. Cooper Rifles, in Montana, and the Savage Custom Shop still produce the .250 Savage.

I shared my own experience with the .250 Savage recently in the May issue of *Gun World*. The particular

"My two uncles in Montana and a whole host of other hunters know the .257 Roberts is just too good to die, and it probably never will."

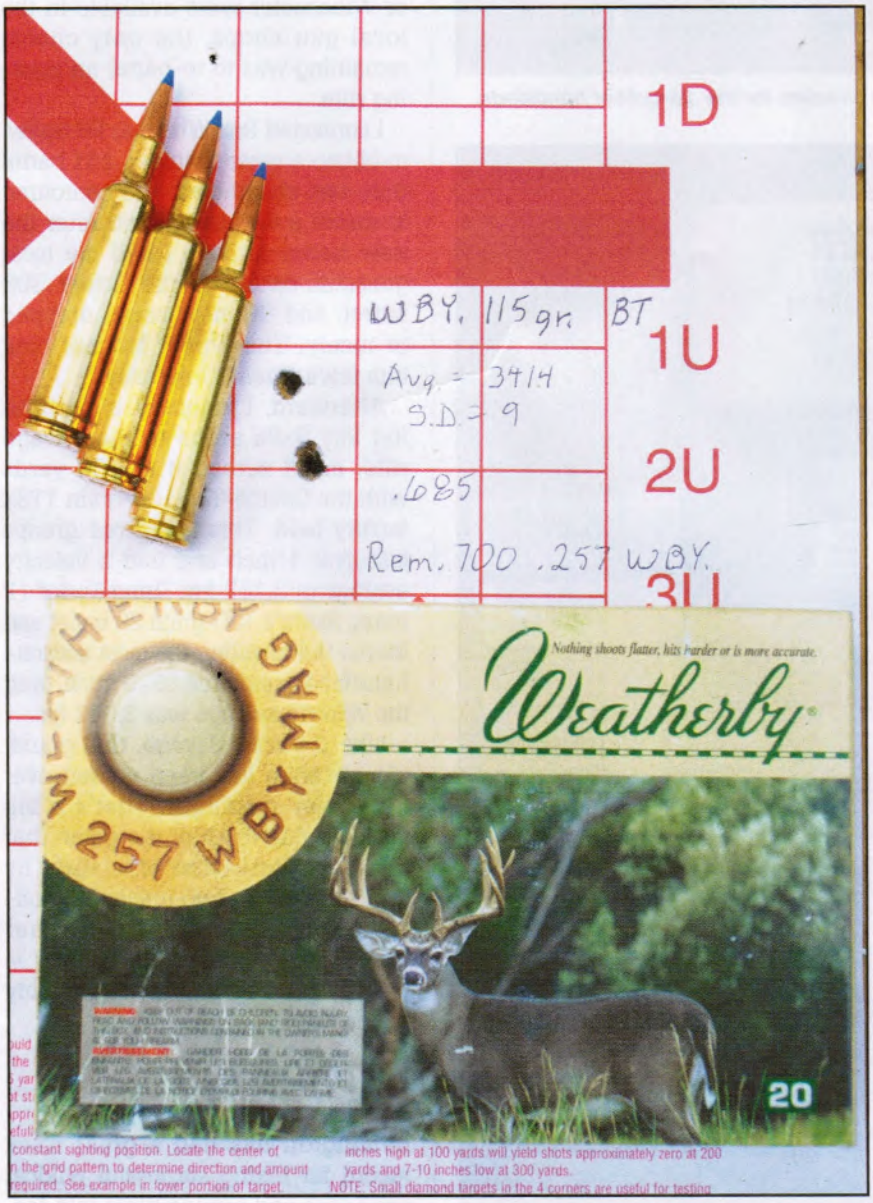
rifle in that article was a Savage Model 16, which was assembled in the Savage Custom Shop. It had a Minox Z5 2.5-10x scope mounted on it. That rifle shot and handled quite well.

THE CLASSIC .257 ROBERTS

Remington may have introduced the .257 Roberts as a commercial cartridge in 1934, but Ned Roberts is credited for designing this popular cartridge. The .257 Roberts is basically a necked-down 7mmx57 Mauser, which is another one of our "dinosaur" cartridges (it dates back to 1892).

Long before the .243 Winchester (1955) and 6mm Remington (1964) burst onto the scene, and there were no powders slower than IMR4350, the .257 "Bob" was considered to be the "cat's meow" among North American hunters. In fact, some of the gun writers in the 1940s and 1950s thought the .257 Roberts was one of the best big-game hunting cartridges ever invented.

While looking over reloading data for various cartridges, I noticed that



The Weatherby factory .257 Weatherby load using the Nosler 115 Ballistic Tip shot very well in the Remington 700 rifle. This 100-yard group measures .685 inch and had a velocity average of 3,414 fps.

For accuracy-testing, the author used these powders for the .25-caliber handloads.

These are the bullets that were used for the .25-caliber handloads the author tested for accuracy.

most comments about the .257 Roberts had it teetering on the edge of obsolescence—if not completely outclassed by other cartridges. Reloaders shooting modern bolt-actions could bolster the velocity/energy of the Roberts, but downloaded .257 Roberts factory ammo was the real culprit.

I was a latecomer to the .257 Roberts fan club, but even so, I could see that this round, handloaded to its full potential, could reach a level not far from the .25-06. Since those two Model 722s were not available, and no .257s from Remington, Ruger or Winchester were available in the local gun shops, the only choice remaining was to re-barrel an existing rifle.

I contacted Rex White, at ER Shaw, to obtain a new, stainless .257 barrel that was chambered and contoured to match a Savage sporter. After the new barrel arrived, I had my local gunsmith switch out the factory .308 barrel, and the new barrel dropped in nicely. The whole process took him fewer than 20 minutes.

Afterward, I mounted a Sightron Big Sky 3-9x scope to the Savage rifle, and I zeroed it at 100 yards with the Double-Tap 100-grain TTSX factory load. This load fired groups just over 1 inch and had a velocity average of 3,182 fps. Using Nosler +P brass, Sierra's 100-grain SP bullet and Norma URP powder, the most accurate handload measured .529 inch, and the velocity average was 3,043 fps.

Like the .250 Savage, this grand, old cartridge has been passed over for newer cartridges. That's a big mistake, due to all of the game that has been harvested efficiently by the Roberts. My two uncles in Montana and a whole host of other hunters know the .257 Roberts is just too good to die, and it probably never will.

THE LOW-RECOIL .25-06 REMINGTON

Remington has had a great track record for taking successful wildcat cartridges and turning them into factory rounds. Remington thought the .25-06 wildcat cartridge would be a sure hit and standardized it as the

.25-06 Remington in 1969. That bet has really paid off, and the .25-06 has turned into the best seller of today's commercial .25-caliber cartridges.

Of all of the .25-caliber cartridges, I have far and away the most experience with the .25-06. From as far back as the mid-1970s, I have always had a .25-06 ready and sighted-in for hunting deer and antelope. Most of these rifles were Remington 700s, but there was an exceptionally accurate Ruger #1 in the fold for a few years.

As someone who has spent most of my life hunting deer-size game, I am often asked what caliber/s I prefer. Because of my experience using everything from a .243 Winchester to a .300 Win. Mag. for the task, it makes for an interesting question. Yet, without the least bit of hesitation, my answer is always the .25-06.

After field testing a lot of *good* cartridges, the reason for my answer of a .25-06 is really simple: In my opinion, the rationale for picking the .25-06 is because it is a flat-shooting cartridge without a belt that has the energy to drop game in its tracks while dishing out the least amount of recoil.

The .25-06 currently in my rack is a Remington 700 (surprise!). This rifle has a Leupold VX-III 3.5-10 scope mounted to it and shoots most 100-to-120-grain bullets into little tiny groups. There are many loads that shoot well under an inch, but the hunting load I use most in this rifle is the Barnes 100-grain TSX. With a stout load of Reloader 19 powder, it averages more than 3,300 fps and has a long list of one-shot kills.

The most accurate handload fired by the .250 Savage measured .342 inch using the Sierra 87-SP bullet and IMR4064 powder. The group's velocity average was 3,110 fps.

The most accurate handload fired by the Savage .257 Roberts measured .529 inch using the Sierra 100-SP bullet and URP powder. The group's velocity average was 3,043 fps.

25-CALIBER FAVORITE LOADS

Caliber	Bullet	Primer	Powder	Group (inches)	Velocity (fps)
.250 Savage	Barnes 80-TTSX	Fed. 210	39.1-AA2520	.943	3,133
.250 Savage	Nosler 85-BT	CCI-200	38.9-Big Game	.859	2,910
.250 Savage	Sierra 87-SP	Rem. 9½	37.0-IMR4064	.342	3,110
.250 Savage	Hornady 100-SP	Fed. 210	33.5-AA2520	.586	2,783
.250 Savage	Nosler 100-BT	CCI 200	34.1-H4895	.925	2,810
.257 Rbts. +P	Hornady 90-GMX	CCI 200	43.5-AA4350	.713	2,934
.257 Rbts. +P	Barnes 100-TTSX	CCI 200	46.1-Hunter	.843	2,925
.257 Rbts. +P	Barnes 100-TTSX	CCI 200	43.5-H4350	.866	2,959
.257 Rbts. +P	Nosler 100-ETip	CCI 200	43.2-IMR4350	.600	2,909
.257 Rbts. +P	Sierra 100-SP	Fed. 210	43.1-URP	.529	3,043
.25-06 Rem.	Hornady 90-GMX	WLR	58.1-R22	.641	3,508
.25-06 Rem.	Barnes 100-TSX	WLR	55.3-R19	.760	3,320
.25-06 Rem.	Nosler 100-BT	WLR	55.5-H4831	.941	3,300
.25-06 Rem.	Nosler 110-AB	WLR	53.0-MRP	.855	3,018
.25-06 Rem.	Berger 115-VLD	WLR	53.3-H4831	.456	3,010
.257 Wby.	Barnes 100-TTSX	WLRM	71.0-MRP	.717	3,547
.257 Wby.	Barnes 100-TTSX	Fed. 215M	71.0-IMR7828	.950	3,540
.257 Wby.	Swift 100 Scirocco II	Fed. 215M	71.0-IMR7828	.885	3,547
.257 Wby.	Berger 115-VLD	WLRM	68.0-MRP	.995	3,402

- *Velocity measured 10 feet from muzzle with an RCBS chronograph.*
- *All listed loads were safe in test rifles. Reduce all starting loads by 5 percent.*
- *Remington brass was used for the .250 Savage. Nosler +P brass was used for the .257 Roberts.*
- *Norma brass was used for .25-06 and .257 Weatherby.*

THE FLAT-SHOOTING .257 WEATHERBY

After previewing the other .25-caliber cartridges regarding any efficiency, the .257 Weatherby doesn't look so good on the ledger. If the .25-06 is overbore for a .25-caliber bullet, then the .257 Weatherby must just go right off the charts. When perusing load data, it's no secret that the big Weatherby takes 12 to 15 more grains of powder to coax another 100 to 200 fps of velocity over the .25-06.

For sure, despite the fact that the

> "From as far back as the mid-1970s, I have always had a .25-06 ready and sighted-in for hunting deer and antelope."

The most accurate handload fired in the Remington 700 .25-06 measured .456 inch using the Berger 115-VLD bullet and H4831 powder. The velocity average of this group was 3,010 fps.

The most accurate handload fired in the Remington 700 .257 Weatherby measured .717 inch (at 200 yards) using the Barnes 100-TTSX and MRP. The velocity average was 3,547 fps.

.257 Weatherby will never win the .25-caliber efficiency award, it remains a great long-range hunting caliber. In fact, Mr. Roy Weatherby, himself, proclaimed that the .257 Weatherby was his favorite caliber. When you consider the Weatherby lineup of calibers, that is quite an endorsement.

When Roy Weatherby took his favorite .257 Weatherby rifle hunting, he killed a variety of large big game with what would today be considered inferior cup-and-core bullets. Even elk and moose fell to this cartridge. Imagine what he could have done with today's bonded-core and controlled-expansion projectiles.

"For sure, despite the fact that the .257 Weatherby will never win the .25-caliber efficiency award, it remains a great long-range hunting caliber."

A few years back, I had the hankering to try a .257 Weatherby to see what all the fuss was about and whether it really offered any more performance than the proven .25-06. Since the only choices in this caliber were Weatherby MK-V rifles, which were out of my price range, I had a Remington 700 in .300 Winchester Magnum rebarreled with a new Shilen barrel chambered in .257 Weatherby.

The first rounds fired in the new caliber were Weatherby factory 115-grain loads with the Nosler Ballistic Tip. Those loads were first zeroed at 100, 200 and then 270 yards. With a best three-shot, 270-yard group measuring .685 inch and a velocity of more than 3,400 fps, it was tempting to forego handloading and simply hunt exclusively with this load.

As tempting as that idea was, I ordered a set of dies to attempt to better this already-fantastic factory load. With a large stock of .25-caliber bullets and slow-burning powders already on hand for the .25-06, it wouldn't take long to get up and running with handloads.

During load development, two new controlled-expansion bullets were received for testing: the Barnes Tipped Triple-Shok X (TTSX) and the Swift Scirocco II. Both bullets weighed 100 grains. The Barnes TSX bullets are accurate in the .25-06, and Swift Scirocco bullets have proven to be accurate in several calibers I tested.

Realistically, any hope of bettering the factory 200- to 300-yard groups was a mighty tall order. The Weatherby factory ammunition loaded by Norma is of the highest quality, and it is responsible for Weatherby's famous accuracy guarantee. Surprisingly, the Barnes 100-grain TTSX came real close. Using Norma's MRP powder, the best 200-yard group measured .717 inch and had a velocity average of 3,540 fps.

The flat-shooting capabilities of the .257 Weatherby came in handy on a Wyoming mule deer hunt a few years ago. After glassing some bucks on a patch of public ground, one buck stood out as a reasonable trophy. Yet, the terrain would not allow stalking for a close shot. The .257 Weatherby's flat-shooting ability was put to the test, and the buck was taken cleanly at around 400 yards with a Barnes 100 TTSX in the neck.

WHAT THE FUTURE BRINGS

The .250 Savage and .257 Roberts are true classics in every sense of the word, but both are really fighting for their very existence. Only time will tell how long the manufacturers will continue making ammo or components for them.

On the other hand, the .25-06 Remington and .257 Weatherby are actually thriving, and they can perform any task a .25-caliber cartridge is reasonably expected to do. They will be around for a long, long time. **GW**

SOURCES

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