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SALES**

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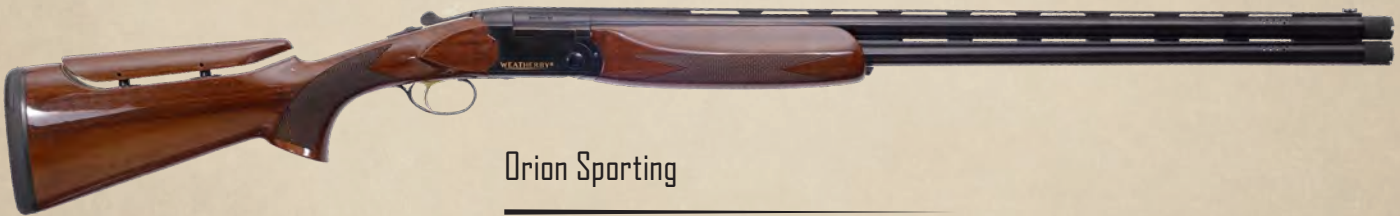
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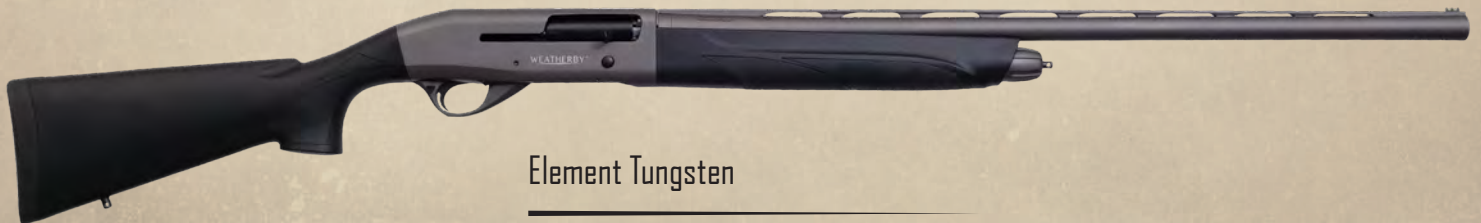
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Getting Comfortable With Candor

While the truth can hurt, everyone benefits from honest feedback.

BY KEN WYSOCKY

In the business world, it's so much easier for managers to gloss over employees' weaknesses or for employees to give some manager's zany proposal a free pass, no questions asked. Just go with the flow and it's all good.

Until it's not.

Here's the thing: When managers don't give employees the critical intel they need to get better, they're tacitly indicating that underperformance is OK. That then places an unfair burden on high-performing employees who pick up the slack. And that, in turn, leads to resentment and low morale, poor team results and higher turnover as star employees tire of the charade.

The same is true for a group-think mentality where no one raises questions about proposals and projects. There are many reasons for this. One obvious factor is concern about retaliation. Or employees are afraid they'll be the only one to say something — even if they know others share their skepticism. Or perhaps they lack the confidence or conviction to express an opinion, fearing it's without merit.

How can you tell if an organization cultivates a culture of fear instead of candor? The telltale signs are obvious, says Dana Brownlee, the founder of Professionalism Matters.

"You probably know the drill: There's the 'meeting after the meeting,' where employees who smiled

and nodded their approval as the boss announced another doozy of an idea then gather in a break room and whisper about the ridiculous proposal.

"Or you're attending a large, all-hands meeting and the president of the company asks if anyone has questions about a new proposal, and no one raises their hand," she adds. "If you have that many people in a room and you have zero questions, you're working in an organization with low trust."

Worse yet, it convinces leaders that bad ideas are viable, she says.

It's All About Context

While honesty truly is the best policy, it can also have negative conse-

quences if not presented tactfully and diplomatically. Like so many things in life, it's not what you say, but how you say it, along with the context you provide for your candid comments, experts say.

Best-selling author and executive coach Kim Scott has a name for it: radical candor.

"It's a simple idea — care personally while at the same time you challenge directly," says Scott, the co-founder of Radical Candor, a consulting firm that helps organizations create a culture of effective feedback. "It's like delivering love and truth at the same time."

"Very often we think there's a dichotomy between the two, but



I believe that's wrong," continues Scott, the author of the best-selling book, *Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity*. "If you truly care about someone, you also must challenge them — tell them when they make a mistake."

That raises a crucial point about radical candor: It only works when employees know their managers care about them. Without that key ingredient, praise sounds insincere, and criticism becomes what Scott calls obnoxious aggression.

The converse to that is when managers care about employees but fear that delivering bad news will hurt their feelings. Scott calls this "ruinous empathy."

But when managers both care about and challenge employees, they've entered the radical candor zone.

TWO-WAY STREET

If managers realize they're obnoxious-ly aggressive, how do they change without making their team members leery about the sudden transformation? Start by first inviting criticism, rather than dishing it out, Scott suggests.

"If you solicit feedback and respond well to it, they see that you view feedback as a gift," she explains. "And going forward, they'll now understand the spirit in which you offer them feedback."

When managers ask for feedback, it's important to ask questions that can't be answered with simple "yes" or "no" answers. For example, managers might start by asking what they can do to make employees' jobs easier.

Moreover, it's important to first give praise for what employees do well. "It's not a complicated process," Scott notes. "After you solicit feedback and give praise, you're in a better frame of mind and the employees

are in a better frame of mind, and it becomes easier to offer criticism."

Radical candor also requires two-way dialogue, not a monologue. In short, managers must be mindful that they're not the sole arbiters of good or bad performance. Instead, they should emphasize that they're

raise red flags. Do you want me to bring those up to you or keep it to myself?"

"It's always good to ask for permission up front, and phrasing concerns as a question is much less threatening."

On a broader level, organizations

for people who don't want to push back, because for that one person, it's their assigned job."

Brownlee also suggests a tactic she used back when she was a team leader and project manager for a major telecommunications company. When she'd hold meetings to announce



not passing judgement, just sharing a point of view, she recommends.

"It's better to say, 'Here's what I see and I'm curious to understand what you see,'" Scott suggests. "You don't want to sound like you have a pipeline to God, where you know what's true and what isn't. You're simply trying to find a better answer together. This should be more about listening than talking. Be humble."

GET PERMISSION TO CRITICIZE

Similar guidelines apply when questioning crazy managerial proposals. For instance, it's a bad idea to just tell someone an idea is terrible, Brownlee says.

"Instead, tell them it's a good idea, but I'm concerned about x, y and z," she suggests. "Or say, 'I know this is your baby, and I fully support it, but I've heard some rumblings that could

need to let employees know that candor is a corporate value to be prized, not punished. They should encourage employees to play devil's advocate because it's better than finding problems with projects or products after the fact.

There are ways to make employees feel more comfortable with candor. Brownlee says one manager she's worked with puts \$5 in a jar every time one of his reports pushes back on a new idea. He then uses the money to fund a once-a-month pizza party.

Managers also can pick a rotating devil's advocate that's responsible for raising tough questions during meetings.

"It might sound silly, but when you do things like that, it starts to shift the culture," she explains. "You take away the fear factor and pressure

new initiatives, she'd place an index card on every chair in the room. On the card was written, "My biggest concern about this project's success is _____."

When the presentation concluded, she'd ask employees to anonymously fill in the blank and drop the card in a bag as they left.

"This technique gave me tons of candid feedback," she explains.

START SMALL, BUT AIM BIG

In the end, changing an organization's culture can be a lot like turning around an aircraft carrier: It takes time. And it's the little things that matter, Brownlee says.

"There's no real formula for changing it," she notes. "It takes a lot of role modeling by managers. It's the small things you do at the granular level that change the paradigms." **HR**

New Hunting Rifles for 2023

These three rifles with mid-range price points are new for 2023 and should sell well.

BY MARK CHESNUT

Over a couple of beers at deer camp last year, the subject of new rifles came up and was subsequently thoroughly cussed and discussed. “Just how many hunting rifles does a guy need?” one friend asked. Incidentally, he’s one of those friends who just has one or two deer rifles that he has owned for the last 30 years, and he thinks the rest of us might be a touch crazy.

“Just because you’re a tightwad, doesn’t mean the rest of us are,” noted another friend, who tends to buy a new rifle every year or so, whether he needs it or not. Often, he’ll take a different one to the stand with him each day, and most of us are actually quite jealous of his collection.

“Well, you’re certainly doing your part to keep the gun companies in business,” the first retorted. “And my part, too, I suppose.”

In the end, nothing was decided (unbelievable, I know). But it did start me thinking about something that many of us as hunters — and even some hunting retailers — sometimes take for granted.

As with other industries, new products are the lifeblood of the hunting and firearms industries. While it might seem strange for most companies to introduce new rifle models year after year, they’ve got to do it to stay in business. Such annual new product introductions give magazines something new and exciting to write about, retailers something new and profitable to sell and hunters new and improved products to buy for their upcoming hunting seasons. It’s a win-win-win proposition.

That said, let’s look at a few quality hunting rifles introduced at this year’s Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade (SHOT) Show. Any or all of these rifles should be considered for a prominent place behind your firearms counter.



Photo: Courtesy Christensen Arms





WEATHERBY MARK V APEX

When it comes to American-made rifles, the Weatherby name has been greatly respected for generations. The new Weatherby Mark V Apex isn't likely to change that fact, and the company touts it as "where long-range accuracy meets light-weight hunting."

The first thing you'll notice about the Apex when you see it is how stunning it looks. Featuring Weatherby's Mark V steel action, the Apex has a fluted, two-tone (coyote tan and graphite black) Cerakoted barrel that, combined with the carbon fiber stock with tan/brown sponge pattern accents, gives the rifle a very attractive appearance. The trigger guard and receiver are Cerakoted coyote tan, and the bolt, bolt knob and safety are finished in a graphite black Cerakote.

The rifle's TriggerTech trigger provides true zero-creep break and extremely

short overtravel and is externally adjustable, helping meet the gun's sub-MOA guarantee. The Apex also has Weatherby's Accubrake ST, which is blended to match the profile of the muzzle and has 30 symmetrically-spaced ports to help manage recoil.

The 54-degree bolt offers one of the shortest bolt throws in the industry and is deeply fluted for weight savings and smoothness. The stock, sourced from Peak 44, has the distinction of being the lightest production aerospace-grade carbon fiber stock on the market. Weight of the rifle is a svelte 6.5 pounds.

The Apex is a good buy, especially for a Weatherby. MSRP starts at \$2,799. It's available in 12 different cartridges ranging from .240 Weatherby Magnum to .338-378 Weatherby Magnum.



CHRISTENSEN ARMS MODERN HUNTING RIFLE

Christensen is known for manufacturing state-of-the-art precision firearms and custom carbon fiber barrels, and the company teased its Modern Hunting Rifle at the 2022 SHOT Show. But at SHOT 2023, Christensen had the gun up and ready to go, with hundreds of media members getting a chance to shoot it at a media day prior to the beginning of the show.

The Modern Hunting Rifle is truly a rifle of a different kind and won't appeal to every hunter. But to those who believe that accuracy is the most important thing and who have come to love the modularity of modern sporting rifles and long-range target rifles, this might just be the hunting rifle for them.

"We've taken what we've learned from making the Modern Precision Rifle and transferred it to the Modern Hunting Rifle," said Jeff Bradley, brand ambassador for Christensen. "We have an aluminum chassis. The barreled action is V-block bedded into that aluminum chassis so that the accuracy is great."

With an aero-grade carbon fiber barrel, The MHR provides the accuracy potential of a chassis rifle and the ergonomics of a hunting rifle all while offering exceptional modularity. The all-new FFT stock, forearm and grips can be swapped out to create configurations that suit any shooter and situation. Incidentally, the stock is adjustable for both length of pull and cheek height.

The unprecedented versatility presented in the MHR makes evolving and adapting effortless. Whether stalking elk in the mountain West or hunting from a blind in the backwoods of Kentucky, the MHR is versatile enough to take on all terrain and hunting scenarios.

While this rifle carries a sub-MOA accuracy guarantee, the price tag isn't for the faint of pocketbook. The MSRP starts at \$3,499. It's available in 308 Win., 6.5 PRC and 6.5 Creedmoor.





SAVAGE IMPULSE MOUNTAIN HUNTER

Savage makes some great rifles, and the company's straight-pull-bolt Impulse — originally offered in four different models — has taken hunting camps by storm since its introduction back in 2021. I've hunted deer and hogs several times with the Savage Impulse Big Game in .308 and have loved everything about it except the fact that it was somewhat heavy for a short-action cartridge deer rifle.

Savage's new Impulse Mountain Hunter, debuted at SHOT Show 2023, should be a good answer to that problem. With its exclusive Proof Research carbon fiber-wrapped stainless steel barrel and rugged polymer frame, the Impulse can achieve lighter weights for hunters who are trekking into the backcountry or who just don't like lugging a heavy rifle to their deer stand. The .308 Win. version weighs in at just over 7 pounds, more than a pound and a half lighter than the Big Game model.

Of course, the Mountain Hunter keeps the same straight-pull bolt action that

many have come to love, and it features Savage's excellent user-adjustable AccuTrigger, which helps lend to the accuracy of many Savage rifle models. Overall length for the .308 version is 44.75 inches, and the barrel is threaded for a suppressor or other muzzle device, with a muzzle brake coming standard.

The aluminum receiver features an integral one-piece 20-MOA rail, and the polymer stock features length-of-pull and comb height adjustability. The stock is a rugged gray color, the receiver finish is matte black, and the barrel is black carbon fiber. The detachable box magazine holds four rounds.

The Savage Impulse Mountain Hunter isn't a cheap rifle, but its predecessors certainly don't perform like one, and it won't either. MSRP is \$2,437. It's available in .308 Win., 6.5 Creedmoor, .300 WSM, 6.5 PRC, .270 Win., .30-06, 28 Nosler, 7mm Rem. Mag. and 300 Win. Mag. **HR**



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WEATHERBY



9 Hunting Airguns to Inflate Your Sales

Every old is new again, and that's true for air rifles, which are enjoying a resurgence in popularity driven by new tech.

BY KEVIN REESE

Considered by many airgun enthusiasts (in the know) to be the “real” gun that won the west, air rifles are steeped in centuries of rich history — most notably for Americans, the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

“Capt. Lewis fired his air gun which astonished them in such a manner that they were orderly and kept at a proper distance during the time they continued with him.” — April 3, 1806.

Authorities agree, the air rifle carried by Lewis and Clark on their

famed expedition west from 1803 to 1806 was a Girandoni chambered in .46 caliber. The air rifle is mentioned 39 times through the 13 volumes of their expedition journal and was used extensively to show superior firepower so that natives would allow them to pass. Most certainly, safe passage and ultimately, charting the path through what would later be America's northwest, clear to the Pacific Ocean, was due in part to Captain Lewis' air rifle. While the rifle was used for exhibition shooting, it also was a fine hunting rifle.

Of course, two centuries of airgun combat and hunting history pre-date Lewis and Clark's expedition; in fact, Austrian soldiers were issued air rifles to combat Napoleon's forces. A Roman author and military expert mentioned an arrow-propelling airgun back in 120 B.C. Even so, the first clear representation of an air rifle is credited to Marin le Bourgeois in 1590.

With history as an amazing backdrop and numbers that simply don't lie, the suitability of airguns as hunting tools is inarguable, and we live in

an era where innovation and quality craftsmanship mean there is no better time than the present for hunters to hit the field with air-rifle technology. No, we're not talking about Ralphie's Red Ryder (although super cool — I had one as a kid). We're talking about precisely accurate, hard-hitting, ultra-reliable air rifles capable of knocking down varmints and big game and grouping well at 100 yards, perhaps more. Take a look at 10 of premium-performing air rifles more than capable of taking game and inflating your overall retail sales.





UMAREX HAMMER (.50-CAL)

As a fan of big-bore air rifles, I have shot my fair share and still own a number of different models — among them, the Umarex Hammer, and it remains a favorite. Chambered in .50 caliber, with a 29.5-inch rifled, 1:24-twist .510 Walther barrel, the pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) Hammer Air Rifle launches bullets — you can't really call them pellets, right? — at blistering speeds: 185-grain bullets at over 1,100 fps, 250-grain bullets at over 1,000 fps and 550-grain bullets still moving at over 750 fps. And, in a world where numbers underscore or detract the efficacy

of a hunting tool, the Umarex Hammer boasts muzzle energy at over 700 ft./lbs. with the 550-grain bullet setup.

The Umarex Hammer boasts a 4,500-psi fill capacity, regulated 3,000 psi shooting, 24-inch carbon-fiber tank, two-round chamber magazine, three mechanical safeties, lightweight 8-pound cocking weight, 2.5-pound trigger weight, built-in pressure gauge, Picatinny scope base, PolyOne synthetic stock and a quick-disconnect Foster fitting for quick and easy air refills. www.umarexusa.com



UMAREX AIRSABER ELITE X2 (ARROW)

A testament to Umarex innovation, the Air Saber Elite X2 is a PCP airbow capable of launching arrows with precision accuracy at up to 450 fps, resulting in up to 130 ft./lbs. of energy, and for archery geeks like me, up to .58 slug-fps of momentum. In a world where numbers don't lie and broadheads are razor-sharp, there's no question the AirSaber Elite X2 packs more than enough punch to take down any big-game animal in North America. Even better, if one arrow wasn't enough, the two-shot AirSaber Elite X2 features a side-by-side, double-barrel type design — two 22.63-inch Umarex Straight Flight Technology Arrows are loaded and

ready to go. With respect to accuracy, not long ago, I was able to spend quality time with the AirSaber and shot accurately out to 100 yards; of course, I would suggest keeping shots to 60 yards or less — that is the bowhunter in me talking.

The two-shot AirSaber Elite X2 is based on a PCP system and features a 240 CC air tank with a 4,000-psi fill capacity. The AirSaber Elite X2 also boasts an integral pressure gauge, crisp 3-pound trigger pull and an all-weather stock with a rubber recoil pad. The AirSaber Elite X2 includes three arrows so your customers are nearly ready to hit the woods right out of the box. www.umarexusa.com



HATSAN BT65SL QE BIG BORE CARNIVORE (.30/.35-CAL)

Perfect for predators, hogs and deer, the Carnivore PCP Air rifle is a contender for those looking for a value-packed rig with high-pressure, repetitive shooting. The Carnivore is available in .30- and .35-caliber options and fires 19 and 12 shots respectively on a single charge. It features velocity up to 920 fps and muzzle energy up to 105 ft./lbs. of energy. Shooters and hunters are sure to appreciate the Carnivore's side-lever repeating action and detachable 255cc 200 BAR air cylinder.

The ability to take repeating shots makes it perfect for engaging multiple animals; however, the Carnivore is more than a hunting air rifle. For precise accuracy,

the Carnivore boasts QuietEnergy technology, including a shrouded, precision-rifled, German steel barrel. According to Hatsan, the result is reduced downrange noise by up to 50%. The Carnivore also features a manual safety, optic-ready receiver (11mm dovetail and 22mm Weaver), fully adjustable Quattro 2-Stage Trigger, rubber grip and forearm inlays, and an adjustable comb and rubber butt pad for perfect height, angle and length of pull. For customers looking for a complete airgun kit, the Carnivore includes two detachable magazines, quick-fill nozzle, air-cylinder discharge cap and a Hatsan sling. www.hatsanaairgunusa.com





AIR VENTURI SENECA DRAGON CLAW DUAL (.50-CAL/ARROW)

As a fan and owner of a Seneca Dragon Claw Dual .50-Caliber Air Rifle, I can personally attest to the system's comfort, accuracy and tried-and-true, multi-purpose hunting capabilities. When it comes to airgun power, the Dragon Claw is a beast; in fact, the Dragon Claw has been used repeatedly to take down big African game animals, including eland and Cape buffalo. Perhaps more intriguing, the Dragon Claw dual is a single-shot, bolt-action system with dual purpose as an air rifle and airbow. Yes, you read correctly: The Dragon Claw shoots .50-caliber pellets as well as arrows.

In my original testing, I shot 230-grain pellets as well as 330-grain arrows (Air Bolts) with 100-grain field points (430-grain overall weight), employing the Dragon Claw's two air chambers (totaling 50cc) and a rifled 21.2-inch barrel. The

Dragon Claw maintained solid velocities, up to 670 fps through 10 pellet shots. The Air Bolts also shot consistently through six shots, with velocity beginning at 497 fps and ending in the 480s. While I have shot the Dragon Claw accurately out to 100 yards, with original testing groups at 50 yards, I would suggest hunting around 75 yards or closer. That said, the Dragon Claw is great for hunting deer, feral hogs, coyotes, foxes and other, smaller game animals. The Dragon Claw features a Monte Carlo style walnut stock with a checkered grip and forearm, built-in manometer, 11mm scope rail and open sights, and two power levels.

www.airventuri.com



GAMO SWARM BONE COLLECTOR 10X GEN3i (.22-CAL)

If you've ever wondered if GAMO makes a hunting air rifle, this name is a dead giveaway. The GAMO Swarm Bone Collector 10X Gen3i .22-Caliber Air Rifle is great choice for varmints and small game. Powered by GAMO's IGT Mach 1 system, the Swarm Bone Collector 10X Gen3i employs an inertia action to auto-feed and shoot up to 10 alloy pellets at an average of 1,100 fps. For more an heirloom look

and comfortable shooting, the Swarm features a premium, checkered beechwood stock; laser-engraved, non-slip, textured grip and forearm and a Shock Wave Absorber Recoil Pad. For precise accuracy, The Swarm includes a metal-jacketed, rifled-steel barrel and an adjustable CAT (Custom Action) 2-Stage Trigger.

www.gamoussa.com



FX IMPACT M3 (.17/.22/.25/.30/.35-CAL)

Founded in 1999 in Mariestad, Sweden, by passionate airgun enthusiast Fredrik Axelsson, and pushing through over 20 years of innovation with the help of 50 Swedish craftsman, FX Airguns has grown to become an industry leader in air rifle quality and performance, with scores of patents. As a recent example, the FX Impact M3 shines as a phenomenal hunting airgun choice. From deer and feral hogs to small game and varmints, the FX is ready to meet the demands of hard-core hunters with a variety of caliber options: .17, .22, .25, .30 and .35.

Truly a match air rifle but also a great for hunting, the FX Impact M3 is most

assuredly the culmination of decades of experience and drive for excellence. The Impact M3 boasts a wealth of macro and micro adjustability via FX's QuickTune system and dual regulators, including the amount of time the air valve is open, hammer strength and post position of the two-stage match trigger. The Impact M3 also features a carbon-fiber air tank and a match-grade, free-floating, smooth Twist X barrel with integrated shroud. If your customers are looking for a match air rifle also perfect for scratching their hunting itch, the FX Impact M3 is a great choice. www.fxairguns.com





AIRFORCE TEXANSS (.257/.308/.357/.457/.510-CAL)

AirForce Airguns are world-renowned for their industry-leading big-bore power. As the example, the AirForce Texan, chambered in .50-caliber, was heralded by industry insiders as the most powerful air rifle on Earth. The Texan held the highest honors for years but was recently unseated by the .72-caliber AEA Zeus Air Rifle. Even so, the lighter Texan is definitely more suitable for hunting — the AEA Zeus weighs 12 pounds. With years of experience using AirForce Airguns, the TexanSS has been a favorite. The Texan SS is available in .257-, .308-, .357-, .457- and .510-caliber options, and all are more than capable of taking down deer, feral hogs, predators and other critters.

The AirForce TexanSS boasts a proprietary Sound-Loc system; 490cc air tank with 3,000-psi fill capacity; carbine-length, rifled barrels (Lothar Walther Barrels on .257, .308, .357 and .457); adjustable power distribution; pressure relief device; low-effort side-lever cocking; automatic safety and an adjustable two-stage trigger — all housed in AirForce's unique, always-recognizable, black-matte chassis. While the TexanSS offers superb accuracy, it also offers hard-hitting energy, up to 500 ft./lbs. with up to 930 fps muzzle velocity depending on caliber.

www.airforceairguns.com



RAW HM1000X LRT (.22/.25/.30/.35-CAL)

With nearly 20 years of premium airgun manufacturing under his belt, Martin Rutterford founded Rapid Air Weapons in 2006. Years later, Rapid Air Weapons evolved to Rapid Air Worx (better known as RAW) and in 2018 was acquired by AirForce Airguns. Today, with more than 35 years of Rutterford's experience and AirForce Airguns' commitment to continuing the renowned brand's drive to produce best-in-class, premium air rifles, RAW Airguns are still considered by many to be the pinnacle air rifle brand for precision shooting and hunting. That said, among the long list of RAW Airguns making the grade of great air rifles, the best

representation, in my opinion, is the RAW HM1000x LRT.

The RAW HM1000x LRT Air Rifle features a polygon rifled Lothar Walther barrel; jaw-dropping, ambidextrous laminate wood stock in several color options with adjustable comb and length of pull; rubber butt pad; steep-angled, checkered grip; flat-bottom forend for solid, full-contact support and a Picatinny scope base. For numbers' sake, the RAW HM1000x LRT Air Rifle sends .22- and .25-caliber pellets at muzzle velocities up to 930 fps and 900 fps respectively, and muzzle energy sits at 50-60 ft./lbs. www.rapidairworx.com



BENJAMIN ARMADA (.22/.25-CAL)

For your hunting customers with an affinity for a more tactical look, the Benjamin Armada PCP Air Rifle, with hybrid bolt-action and AR-platform looks and chambered in .22- and .25-caliber, is the perfect solution for varmints up to predators at closer range. While the Armada's cool factor rests at the top of this roundup's heap, The Armada also is a well-equipped, reliable hunting rifle.

The Benjamin Armada Air Rifle includes iron sights, machined receiver with

an integral Picatinny scope base, stock compatibility with AR grips and stocks, 10-round magazine, two-stage trigger, reversible bolt and a rifled, shrouded, choked barrel with integrated resonance dampening. For reliable, repeatable and consistent-pressure shooting, the Armada also boasts regulated air distribution capable of delivering up to 30 rounds at consistent pressure on a single fill.

www.benjaminairguns.com



Skinner Sights

In an increasingly tactical world, Skinner Sights is catering to the traditional customer — and the future is bright.

COMPILED BY HR STAFF

Hunting Retailer spoke to Andy Larsson, owner of Skinner Sights, to talk about going scope-free, the history of his company, the future of the industry, and more.

HR: Can you talk about the company's history and its place in the industry today?

AL: Skinner Sights was started in 2008 by Dr. Tim Skinner as a hobby in retirement. He was hunting on horseback and the rear sight on his Marlin Guide Gun first fell apart, then broke in the scabbard. He set out to build a robust, bullet-proof, recoil-proof sight for his rifle and began refining the prototype until he had a winner. Then he made another one and gave it away, and made a few more. He started selling them on ebay, then through a small website. By 2010, he was working eight hours a day in retirement, making sights in his basement.

In July of 2010, Dr. Skinner asked me to build a few sights for him, and I did. He looked at the first one and said, "Why don't you buy my company?" A few days later, we signed papers, and I've never looked back.

Six months later I hired my first employee, then hired my daughter to handle packaging and shipping. Within a year, we moved into a larger facility, added a CNC machining center, hired a couple more employees and continued to grow. In 2016, we built a new 5,000-square-foot facility where we are still making

sights today.

In 2011 I designed and started producing some unique gun storage and carrying cases along with a few other soft goods. We had these made for us at a local "cut and sew" shop, which I eventually purchased in 2019.

Our industry relationships started soon after I acquired the sight company. Henry Repeating Arms began putting our sights on a rifle at the factory. Chiappa USA started using our sights on several models of their lever guns, and we made some fine finished sights for special runs of commemorative or presentation rifles by Marlin. Bighorn Armory approached me about building a recoil-proof sight for their 500 S&W model 89 lever gun. I had close ties to Buffalo Bore Ammunition, and the owner, Tim Sundles, introduced me to some key players in the firearm industry. Spending quality time with these dedicated industry insiders resulted in close friendships we cherish to this day. When Ruger took over the Marlin line, we continued making sights for the Marlin Trapper 1895 .45-70's. The demand for our sights is increasing, both as after-market to the consumer and by the manufactures as OEM.

Our main focus has always been consumer direct via our website, although we are happy to work with dealers, and our OEM manufacturing has been strong. We have been fortunate to be featured in many firearm magazines, blogs, YouTube



reviews and, more recently, participate in a TV show (Trigger Time TV) on the Pursuit Channel.

When I first purchased Skinner Sights, one of my gun buddies said, "Who? I've never heard of them." A while back he called me and said, "You were featured in three of my gun magazines this month and I saw you on TV!" In one of those magazine articles, the author referred to our sights as, "the premier lever-gun

↑ Sheila and Andy Larsson, owners of Skinner Sights, have been avid hunters and shooters for many years and enjoy testing Skinner products in the field.



sights.” We will take it! We also make sights for many other action types: bolt, pump, auto, etc.

HR: What specific product or model have you seen the most growth in recently?

AL: The most growth has been in various optic rails. While an optic is somewhat of a compromise on a slick, compact lever gun, it’s still a strong segment of the market. Customers like to accessorize their firearms. We make standard aluminum Picatinny/Weaver type mounts and machined-from-solid-steel-barstock scope mounts with integrated peep sights. Our scope mount selection is consistently growing. We currently have models to fit almost everything from Henry, Marlin, Ruger Americans, Tikka, Mossberg and Rossi. For some reason, our Rossi 92 scope mount is our top-selling rail.

HR: Have the ongoing supply chain

problems translated into supply issues in your corner of the industry as well?

AL: They have. We have had to find new screw vendors, as some of our sources were impacted by COVID. Stainless steel was another difficult-to-find material. We have compensated by looking forward, getting our tooling and material orders placed further in advance and staying on top of what is available.

Besides the supply chain issues, somewhat related, has been the increasing costs of materials, tooling, utilities and shipping. Some of those costs have as much as doubled. Unfortunately, not all those costs can be passed on to the customer, since they are also being hit with the effects of inflation. We have worked to mitigate some of the profit loss by increasing market share, automating more of our processes and creating a lean manufacturing environment.

HR: You’ve got a great little niche,



making sights some would call old-school in an increasingly tactical world. Talk to me about the benefits of going scope-free that your customers love.

AL: “Scope-free” is a great place to be! We hear a lot about, “my old eyes need a scope,” but the magical benefits of a properly made aperture sight allow even our older shooters to be accurate and effective.

Think of it this way: In the archery world there are compound shooters with wheels, fancy rests, bulky sights, cable control devices, quivers, and other accessories hanging off their bows. That’s a lot to keep track of and maintain, especially in the hunting environment.

Then there are the traditional archers whose bows are simple, with few if any accessories — just a bow, string, rest and an arrow. If you have ever spent time in the field with a

recurve or longbow, you know what I am referring to. Simple, fun, easy.

While the traditional bow is much more difficult to master, the good news is peep sights are very easy to learn to shoot. They are intuitive, quick and quite accurate. Look through the hole, not at it. Once you are looking through the hole, put all your attention on the front sight and its alignment on the target. Then remember the fundamentals of trigger squeeze, breath control and follow-through, same as with any sighting system. Shooting a peep sight is easy and effective. They are also more durable than optics, including the popular red-dots. Our sights are essentially unbreakable. In over 12 years, the only “broken” sights I’ve replaced (we have a lifetime warranty) have been due to serious catastrophic events. One exited a vehicle doing 70mph down the highway and was



ground off on the pavement, and the other was slammed in a safe door between the heavy steel plates.

Up until very recently, for more than 100 years, all U.S. battle rifles wore aperture/peep sights. Those rifles were used effectively to ranges of 500 yards and beyond. Quigly matches are quite popular, where the competitors (mostly old guys) shoot peep sights to 1,000 yards with good results. Olympic, NRA, biathlons, and other competitive shooting is almost exclusively done with peep sights.

Bottom line: they work and make the gun much quicker, sleeker and less cumbersome to use. Our customers often tell us that Skinner Sights have made their shooting fun again.

HR: Is there developing technology that might change the way shooters

toward these newer technologies. There is a lot of emphasis on mounting systems for accessories. M-Loc, Picatinny, QD and other mounting systems are making it easier to add stuff to your firearm. It's good for retail add-on sales and for the wow factor of "it looks cool."

This is where appealing to the simpler side of things can also reach customers. To be honest, there is little a person can add to a sleek, svelte, slick lever gun that will enhance its usefulness. A good set of aperture sights (huge improvement over the stock Buckhorn sights), a simple, non-bulky sling, perhaps a butt cuff with a few loops for ammo and maybe a way to mount a small flashlight... Those would be practical additions that wouldn't detract from the inherent, intuitive and easy use of a rifle.



buy or use sights and firearms accessories in the future?

AL: There are a lot of new innovations on the market. To be honest, many of them are like lures that catch fishermen more than they catch fish. Others are a help for some. An optic will magnify and folks seem to like red-dots for some applications. The market will always have a trend

HR: Do you have any predictions on what we can expect out of the hunting industry in general in the next year? The next five years?

AL: I would predict we will see increased use of electronics, as they are easier for some to use. The use of modern materials (aluminum chassis, carbon fiber parts, molded stocks in-



stead of wood) will likely increase due to easier and less expensive manufacturing processes. My crystal ball says while the new generation of hunters and shooters embrace the modern designs and construction, there will also be a renaissance of getting back to the old ways, especially when they see how effective and enjoyable the "old-school" guns can be. Lever guns are a strong market right now. I don't see that going away anytime soon.

We will continue to see new cartridge designs developed (been happening for decades), and some of those will come into the more traditional platforms. The .360 Buck Hammer, for example made quite a splash at SHOT. We will see how it plays out in the market.

HR: Where does Skinner see potential for growth? How about non-growth? Is there part of the industry that's shrinking?

AL: In our lineup, we will embrace some of the newer trends with mounts for the electronics, lights, carrying and storage solutions (check out our concealed carry garment bag, for example) and expanding our line to fit new models. Right now I'm working on some cool sights, mounts and cases for the Henry Homesteader 9mm carbine. With our lever gun manufacturers going strong, we will be keeping up with that niche market, which only grows bigger as new models become available.

As for the industry as a whole, it seems the AR platform market is always a bit volatile with its ups and downs. Remember when the MSR (Modern Sporting Rifle) was all about the AR lineup being used in the field? Today it seems the Modern Sporting Rifle is a chassis-framed bolt gun in a flat-shooting, mild-recoiling cartridge with a detachable box magazine and topped with a larger-than-life piece of



glass. I see the semi-autos flatlining a bit while the long-range craze continues.

HR: What can we expect out of Skinner in the middle of 2023? What products have you most excited for the future?

HR: Our big thing right now is a streamlined, no-gunsmithing, ambidextrous flashlight mount for lever guns that looks like it grew in place on the rifle, which is our goal with all our products. These new mounts are slick and add a useful component to the traditional lever-action without taking away from its classic looks or handling. They're easy to sell with the added opportunity for the dealer to sell the light along with it.

We have some new soft goods coming out, mostly geared to some of the niche guns on the market, like cases dedicated to certain specific models — the Cricket 410 and the Homesteader are good examples.

HR: How does Skinner support its dealers?

AL: We are pretty easy for dealers to connect with. Non-distributor based, we deal with the dealers directly. There's no minimum order quantity for the standard discount; for larger dealers we have larger discounts, of course. We handle the customer service — and don't forget our lifetime warranty.

HR: Do you have any advice for retailers about selling sights and accessories and Skinner Sights specifically?

AL: Stock a few of the best selling models like our Henry / Marlin Large and Small frame sights, an assortment of our Patridge blade front sights, and some of our unique cases for specialty guns you may have on the shelf. They're great add-on sales that make sense to the customer.

Contact us directly and we will take good care of you.

HR: What's your personal favorite Skinner Sights product, and why?

AL: I like our BUSH PILOT take-down carbines. Why? They are super cool guns. I designed the features based on my lifetime of experience in the outdoors, and they encompass all our products of sights and cases all rolled into a cool survival package.

HR: Is there anything you'd like retailers to know

about Skinner and its products?

AL: Our products are machined from solid steel barstock, no cheap materials, and they are aesthetically pleasing on the rifle yet as rugged as the rifle itself. We have a lifetime warranty and great customer service, and our products are made in Montana, USA. No gimmicks — just products

that customers can count on. I've spent a lifetime in the outdoors, and these products reflect my experiences with what works.

We operate on the Golden Rule, and our customers' success is the goal. I won't sell something that I don't believe in or haven't used myself. Simple, rugged, effective. **HR**

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ZEISS SFL 30

ZEISS SFL 40

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12 Must-See Waterfowl Shotguns for 2023

We scoured the industry to find the shotguns you'll want to stock ahead of waterfowl season this year.

BY HILARY DYER

SHOT Show 2023 and the gun introductions that came along with it revealed a few trends. First, sub-gauge shotguns are bigger (figuratively speaking) than ever, with many companies adding 28-gauge and .410-bore guns to their normal lineups. Second, a few companies have taken enduring lines and given them a complete reboot for 2023 — Benelli and Stoeger in particular. And lastly, a handful of smaller companies and imports you might not be aware of are making a splash in the industry and are worthy of a good look.

With those trends in mind, here are 12 shotguns waterfowlers will want to find on your shelves ahead of the 2023 season.



CZ-USA 712 G3

CZ has updated its popular 712 gas-operated gun with a Gen 3 version. It handles 2 3/4- and 3-inch shells and includes two pistons, which allows the gun to operate with light and heavy loads for target or waterfowl shooting. For Gen 3, they've redesigned the receiver and enlarged the bolt handle, bolt closure, and safety button for easy operation, and they've moved the safety to in front of the trigger (a benefit for left-handed shooters in particular). Shims for adjusting the

fit are also a new addition. Features include chrome-lined 26- or 28-inch barrel, five longer Active choke tubes, matte black finish, choice of stock (camo, black or walnut), and a trigger borrowed from the company's 1012 inertia-driven gun line. At an MSRP of \$579, this gun should sell well to those who want adjustability and the ability to cycle a variety of loads but who don't have a ton of money to spend.



BROWNING WICKED WING AURIC

Browning isn't known for big splashy introductions each year — the company tends to build a gun that works well and then stick with it, updating camo patterns and making small tweaks over time. This year is no exception. No new or redesigned guns to report, but Browning is now offering the Wicked Wing Auric pattern on its popular Maxus II, Cynergy and A5 (pictured) gun. You're likely familiar with those models, and all the same great features apply, but with what

they call "Browning AURIC concealment" featuring burnt bronze Cerakote on the barrel and a burnt bronze camo Cerakote finish on the receiver. It's definitely a cool look on a gun your customers already trust. MSRP on the A5 starts at \$2,280; it's \$2,580 for the Cynergy and \$2,250 for the Maxus II.



BENELLI M2

Benelli has revamped and modernized the M2, taking the classic M2 and slimming everything down for ergonomics and to lower the weight. It uses the same bolt and same inertia-driven action as the company's more expensive Super Black Eagle III but at a friendlier price point: MSRP is \$1,400 for black and \$1,499 for camo. The bolt release has been upgraded from the standard circle to a larger, longer bar shape for easier operation, and the bolt itself has been redesigned to be quieter, smoother and stronger. The M2 has a 3-inch chamber and comes in 12- and

20-gauge versions in various finishes. Five choke tubes, a shim kit, a new recoil pad, and a hard case are included, and Benelli Crio-treats its barrels and choke tubes to increase pattern density.

And, it should be noted, following the sub-gauge trend, Benelli is now also offering its SBEIII in 28-gauge with the company's BE.S.T. coating, with a 25-year warranty on all treated parts. MSRP on that one is \$2,099.





MOSSBERG 940 PRO FIELD

Mossberg made a splash a couple of years ago with the introduction of its 940 gas-operated shotgun, and it's been expanding the line every since. For 2023, the Pro Field version of the 12-gauge 940 is available with a classic walnut stock that should appeal to your more traditional shoppers. It will run 2 ¾- or 3-inch shells, and Mossberg says it can go up to 1,500 round without cleaning. Features include oversized and beveled loading port with redesigned elevator and shell catch to allow for efficient and pinch-free loading; new barrel-making process to

help maintain point-of-aim and impact; slim-profile forend; ambidextrous safety; adjustable stock for length-of-pull (13 to 14.25 inches), drop and cast; oversized charging handle and bolt release; and anodized follower. The internal parts feature a nickel boron coating for durability and reduced maintenance. The 28-inch vent rib barrel includes a front fiber optic sight and is threaded for the three included Mossberg AccuChoke choke tube. MSRP is \$1,061, fitting this solidly in the middle price point for waterfowl guns.



STOEGER 3500

Like its parent company, Benelli, Stoeger has revamped its 3000, 3020 and 3500 lines. These inertia-driven shotguns (M3500 in Max-7 shown here) are now slimmer and more ergonomic. The receiver and forearm have been slimmed down for better handling, while the controls have all been beefed up for easier operation, especially with gloved hands in cold conditions. The M3500 is chambered for 3

½-inch shells and includes a recoil reducer, a shim kit for fit adjustments and four choke tubes. They're all 12-gauges, and the assorted models come with 26- or 28-inch barrels (24-inch for the turkey version). There's even a white-camo snow goose version. As shown, the M3500 in Max-7 carries an MSRP of \$769 — a bargain for a licensed camo pattern, an inertia action and a 3 ½-inch chamber.



WINCHESTER SXP HUNTER

For pump-action enthusiasts, Winchester was showing the SXP Hybrid Hunter in Mossy Oak Bottomland as a SHOT Show special; contact your distributor to see if it's still available in this pattern. It comes in 12- or 20-gauge with a 3- or 3 ½-inch chamber in the 12. Both gauges come in 26- or 28-inch barrels depending on your preference. Bottomland camo with Perma-Cote on the barrel and receiver gives it a cool look, and the chrome-plated bore and chamber and matte black chrome

bolt are made for durability and fast, smooth cycling. The barrel is back-bored and the bore and chamber are hard chrome. A TRUGLO fiber optic front sight, Inflex recoil pad and three Invector-Plus choke tubes are included. At an MSRP of \$450, this is a good-looking and proven-reliable pump gun that will serve customers well.





WEATHERBY 18I WATERFOWLER

Weatherby's 18i isn't new, but its list of features make it worth a spot on your shelves. The Waterfowler model is a 3 ½-inch 12-gauge inertia-driven gun made to be evenly weighted and reliable. The single-piece receiver is precision machined from billet aluminum for strength and simplicity. Features include soft-

touch area on the cheek rest, aggressive texture in the palm and foregrip, LPA fiber front sight, five choke tubes, safety behind the trigger, Elastomer stock for reduced felt recoil, ventilated full-length rib, chrome-lined bore, and choice of camo patterns. MSRP is \$1,199.



EAA MC312

The Girsan MC312 from EAA is a 12-gauge, inertia-driven semi-auto that's built to do it all. Your shoppers might be new to the EAA name, but if they're looking for an affordable gun that can handle home defense, waterfowling, turkey hunting and more, this might be the one. To prove the rugged durability of the MC312, EAA ran a 10,000-round endurance test with no replacing of any parts! It's

got a 28-inch barrel, a vent rib, a Picatinny rail, a fiber optic front sight, a blued-and-black or camo finish and polymer stock and forearm. Although the standard MC312 is designed as a do-all gun, it also comes in goose, turkey and sport models. MSRP is an everyman-price of \$484.



POINTER FIELD TEK 4

Pointer shotguns from Legacy Sports International might not be familiar to many of your buyers, but they're worth a look. The Field Tek 4 is a gas-operated semi-auto that comes in 12- and 20-gauge as well as .410. It comes in black or camo, with a 26-inch chrome-lined barrel, raised vent rib, fiber-optic front sight, a ventilated

butt pad and five choke tubes. A youth model is available in 20-gauge and .410 with a shorter length of pull. With an MSRP starting at \$279, this is a no-frills option that can make a great starter gun or a full-time gun for anyone who doesn't want to sink a lot of cash into a gun that's going to take a beating in the field.





ZANDERS IMPALA PLUS FIELD

The Impala Plus shotgun, distributed by Zander, debuted a few years ago at SHOT, and the company continues to expand the offerings. The Field version comes in several camo patterns and features the company's inertia action, a 3-inch chamber and multiple barrel lengths depending on the buyer's need and the model

chosen. Five choke tubes and a recoil pad are included, as is a two-year, no-hassle warranty. At an MSRP of \$579, the Impala Plus will appeal to hunters who are looking for an inertia gun at a budget-friendly price.



ATI CAVALRY SX

Now for something different: Customers seeking an over-and-under they can hunt ducks with but not fret much over in the blind might be interested in ATI's Cavalry SX. This 3-inch 12-gauge over-and-under comes in multiple barrel lengths, including 30-, 28-, 26- and even 24-inch in some models. Features include a brass front bead, single selective trigger, oiled Turkish walnut stock (camo synthetic available in turkey versions), engraved aluminum receiver, and auto ejectors.

20-gauge, 28-gauge and .410 versions are also available in different configurations, but the 12-gauge versions start at an MSRP of \$639. We don't see a lot of wood-stocked over-and-unders in duck blinds these days, but they do have their loyal followers among the more traditional set, and this price point is a great entryway to the world of over-and-under waterfowling. Remind customers how handy it would be to have two different choke tube options at their fingertips.




TRISTAR VIPER G2 PRO

Buyers might be familiar with Tristar as an affordable brand with a solid reputation. The Viper G2 Pro is a gas-operated gun that comes in every gauge from .410 to 12 (and yes, that includes the hard-to-find 16-gauge) depending on the model. Waterfowlers will want the camo model, which comes in 12- or 20-gauge with 28-inch barrels in FDE/Mossy Oak Terra Bayou finish or 12-gauge only with 30-inch

barrels in a white snow camo finish. Both models have a 3-inch chamber and come with three choke tubes. Other features include oversized operation hardware, over-molded rubber grips on the stock and forend, enlarged triangular safety, and a larger mag well for easy loading. A 5-year warranty is included, all for an MSRP of \$855.





The Wide World of Optics Warranties

When it comes to selling optics, make sure the customer understands the brand's warranty and reputation.

BY DAVID REARICK

In the world of hunting, optics are a critical component to success. Simply put, if a scope fogs up or loses zero, all the time, work, and money spent to get there is lost. So, whether a customer is looking for a new scope for their deer rifle or something for their plinker .22, a scope's ruggedness, warranty and company reputation are important aspects of the purchase. This should be a consideration when you're helping a customer decide what optic is right for them.

Optics fall into three basic categories: scopes, binoculars and electronics. While warranties for non-electronic optics are straightforward,

the added electronic complexity in rangefinders, thermal, and night-vision requires additional warranty scrutiny as terms vary greatly, and only one is stated as "lifetime." Also, it goes without saying that if you are considering adding low-cost, off-brand manufacturers, especially for electro-optics, they are often too good to be true. As a rule of thumb, off-brand optics and electronics may come at a good price point that can encourage sales, but getting in the middle of an angry customer and a non-responsive manufacturer will cause a lot of aggravation and time, often negating the initial benefit or profit.





If you have worked in retail for any amount of time, I am sure you have gone through the warranty/return/exchange process. In most cases, the process is simple: The company issues an RMA and you, or the customer, returns the optic to the manufacturer, where it is either repaired or replaced. In most cases, this is the process, and there will be no deviation. Despite the process being straightforward, there are times when waiting two to three months to get an optic repaired or replaced is far from being satisfactory to a customer, and retailers end up in the middle.

My personal experience has run the gamut. I have dealt with brand-new scopes that were faulty and scopes that were 15 years old that had been put through the wringer. While we generally didn't get involved with the warranty at the store, sometimes the manufacturer, or situation, forced us to get involved. While I have been in the middle of many claims, one stands out boldly in my memory.

To set the backdrop, I sold a customer a brand-new Leupold scope two weeks before deer season, matched to a new rifle. About a week later, the customer returned with the scope, stating he couldn't site it in. I immediately put the gun back on the boresighter and turned the dials to watch the crosshairs move. The elevation tracked fine, but the windage was no bueno. Clearly, something was wrong. Having sold hundreds of Leupold scopes with nary a complaint, I found this a strange occurrence, and one I was going to attempt to handle directly.

I explained the situation to the customer, and despite being unhappy, he was calm and understanding. I looked at the time, and knowing that Leupold was still open, I called customer service and explained the urgency of the situation. After all,

deer season opener in Pennsylvania is a state holiday of sorts! Without hesitation, the customer service representative told me to replace the scope on the spot, and that they would note in the RMA to send a brand-new scope to me. I jotted down the info and began replacing the scope as the customer shopped. (I never did ask the owner, but he never complained, either...)

When the customer returned to the optics area, I had just about finished up, and he asked me, puzzled, what was going on. I explained what Leupold had offered and handed him back his rifle, hopefully, good to go. He thanked me more times than I can remember and left the store.

**“While I have been
in the middle of
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company] claims,
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boldly
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That is where the manufacturer, not just the warranty, matters. While many brands offer a lifetime warranty, reading between the lines of the warranty and understanding and experiencing a company's reputation firsthand is what makes the difference. While this article focuses on the warranties of different optics manufacturers, the printed warranty coupled with your personal experience is what really tells the tale. If a customer is trying to decide between Brand A or Brand C, knowing the printed warranty and how the process works is critical information that can help seal the deal. After all, a lifetime warranty that takes six months to sort





out is not a situation any customers want to find themselves in.

While this list is not fully comprehensive, it contains many brands across all price points. In addition to a summary of their stated warranty, I compiled results of internet research on customer opinions, after reading between the lines and separating opinion from fact. While the research is far from a scientific study, it does highlight the high points/comments of those that have dealt with the company firsthand.

BURRIS

Warranty: “Forever Warranty” — All optics, except thermal, are covered by this warranty. Warranty transfers automatically to future owners. No receipts, warranty card, or questions asked AND no repair or replacement charges. Customer visits Burris support portal to submit warranty claim and sends optic back. Customer pays for shipping to Burris; Burris pays for shipping back to customer. Thermal optics are covered for three years from date of purchase.

Feedback and Reputation: Mostly positive. Most complaints are for scopes that need replaced but are

↑ Bargain optics that come with a poor or non-existent warranty aren’t such a bargain. Be sure the customer knows what they’re buying when it comes to repairs and replacements.

no longer a product-line offering. In these instances, a credit towards a new optic is given. Otherwise, customers are generally happy, and the complaints referenced above seem slightly out of line.

BUSHNELL

Warranty: Claims lifetime, but states lifetime is 30 years for riflescopes and 20 years for binoculars and spotters, and five years for electronics (i.e., rangefinders). Warranty is only valid for defects in workmanship or materials. It doesn’t cover accidents, misuse, or abuse.

Feedback and Reputation: In general, it seems like obvious issues were handled correctly, but a few customers felt that some failures weren’t covered when they should have been. It’s hard to say “the customer is always right” in a case like that, because some people are never happy.



That said, most scopes and binoculars should last more than the year limit stated above, so this is not truly a lifetime warranty, and they ask a lot of questions to receive the warranty. Bushnell has also been bought/sold, so new ownership carrying old warranties/products can sometimes lead to hiccups.

HAWKE

Warranty: “No-Fault Lifetime Warranty” — Optics are repaired/replaced regardless of fault. Applies only to non-electronic optics. Rangefinders and red-dots, etc. have a two-year warranty. No-Fault warranty applies to optics purchased through authorized dealers after January 1, 2018 only, and older optics fall under the previous warranty. The customer must register the purchase to be eligible or keep the receipt. Warranty applies to original owner only.

Feedback and Reputation: I found some complaints, but they seem to have been handled correctly according to the company’s warranty policy, despite customer dissatisfaction that is just not justified. Focus of research was on posts that were after 2018. Some BBB complaints exist that were unfounded and have been handled appropriately. Hawke is a “newish” optics manufacturer in my eyes to the U.S. market, as they are a UK company founded in 1978. Overall, there is less history to dig into.

LEUPOLD

Warranty: “Lifetime Guarantee” — Leupold offers a performance-for-life guarantee. It covers scopes, red-dots, spotting scopes, and binoculars. No questions asked, will repair or replace for free. No time limits, proof of ownership, or receipt required. Electronic products are covered by a two-year warranty, and proof of purchase may be required.

→ Every brand (Leupold shown here) goes through different testing that, when done thoroughly, can reduce warranty claims in the first place.

Feedback and Reputation: Overwhelmingly positive posts regarding Leupold’s warranty service, even for optics that are greater than 20 or 30 years old. The only “real” complaint focused on timeliness of repair/return to customer (one instance of five weeks), but generally most repairs/returns were very quick. I am sure timing of return and supply chain all play a part. Leupold has been around a long time, so there is a lot of history here that indicates their warranty is very solid with many satisfied customers.

SWAROVSKI

Warranty: Swarovski has a complicated warranty matrix that really depends on what the optic is and when it was made. In any event, the longest stated warranty is 10 years, with all non-electronic items having a 10-year goodwill that includes parts and labor. Electronic optics, like the EL Range, have a max of five years. They also state proof of purchase is required. It’s unclear if it is transferrable. Warranty seems to have changed recently from previous iteration.

Reputation and Feedback: Warranty reviews online are very good, despite “limits.” Some posts state that the goodwill policy in the U.S., rather than the warranty, is what makes it exceptional. My personal experience, as the second owner of a pair of Swarovski binoculars, is that it has been very good. I sent in at-fault damage for repair and the item was fixed free of charge AND was more than 10 years old. No real complaints circulating the internet.





TASCO

Warranty: No longer lifetime. Tasco offers a one-year very limited warranty on both optics and electronics. Only covers defects to workmanship or materials. Unclear how previous “lifetime” warranty products are covered.

Reputation and Feedback: It goes without stating that there are many complaints due to changes in the warranty policy for Tasco. The company was sold, and transferring these warranties is always difficult. That said, there are complaints about resolving warranty issues, and with Tasco only offering a one-year limited warranty, the low price point is the only major selling point.

“Customers are paying for the warranty up front — just in some cases more so than others.”

VORTEX

Warranty: “VIP Warranty” — Vortex will repair or replace their products in the event it becomes damaged or defective for free. No fault, unlimited lifetime, fully transferable, and no receipt required. Applies to scopes, red dots, rangefinders, and seemingly every type of optic they make.

Reputation and Feedback: Many good reviews online, minimal negative posts. Overall, the warranty is

bulletproof and it covers rangefinders! Any posted complaints I found were clearly not a fault of the company. Turnaround repair/replacement times were generally fast.

ZEISS

Warranty: Zeiss Sports Optics Optical Systems have a limited lifetime transferrable warranty. Electronic items are covered for five years. It does explicitly state that it warrants against workmanship and materials for life. No receipt required; however, one may be required for the five-year No-Fault policy in the U.S. or Canada. The No-Fault policy applies only to Victory and Conquest product lines. If no

receipt, date of manufacture is used.

Reputation and Feedback: Online reviews are good and complimentary of Zeiss’ fast service. I couldn’t find much on products that were out of warranty for items that were damaged at the fault of the buyer.

The devil with warranties is, as they say, in the details. Combining the details with real-life experience is how you can separate fact from fiction, giving your customer the best, and most up-to-date information. Generally speaking, in addition to paying for optical quality, customers are paying for the warranty up front — just in some cases more so than others. **HR**



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A detailed photograph of a black AR-style rifle with a large scope and bipod, resting on a brown and black camouflage shooting bag. The rifle is positioned horizontally across the frame. In the background, a dry, brushy landscape with a blue sky and distant mountains is visible. The title 'TRENDS AT THE RANGE' is overlaid on the top right, with 'TRENDS' in white on a dark grey background and 'AT THE RANGE' in white on a red background.

TRENDS AT THE RANGE

Hunters know what they are doing in the field, blind or tree stand. But at the range, not so much. Here's a look at what they need now.

BY JEFF KELLER

You may be a hunter; you may not. But if you work, manage or own a hunting retail business, you'll probably be talking to hunters every day. Sure, hunters like to chat about big bucks or piles of ducks, but few are so naturally gifted that they don't have to regularly practice to tag a distant deer or connect with a rocket-like teal. And they practice at a range.



Often it's an outdoor range at their deer lease or at a sporting clays course, or maybe they bring their centerfires, rimfires or handguns to an indoor range to better control the variables. Regardless of where, hunters need help knowing what's out there, what they can buy, to help them practice more efficiently and be better hunters.

I see this all the time at the outdoor range I go to. One lane will have a shooter who has a \$2,000 AR-15, a fine spotting scope, Lead Sled, electronic muffs, new targets and a DOPE card app on their phone. And here comes the hunter. He's got one box of .30-06 he's had for the last three years, portable 8x42 binos, a backpack for a rest, cardboard and a Sharpie.

“Hunters need help knowing what's out there to help them practice more efficiently and be better hunters.”

Who is going to have a better day at the range and be a more accurate shooter?

Hunters are always looking to use their gear in the field, but they first should be gearing up for the range so they are comfortable, effective and efficient.

I spoke with a number of hunters and people who work at guns stores across the country to find out what hunters who are hitting the range

→ Ear and eye pro continue to improve, with electronic options selling at good margins.



← Electronic target systems save time and are popular with high-volume shooters.

be in the way. The stock pushes the muff up, breaks the seal and opens an area for the sound to go right into the ear canal. Next thing you know, they're moving their head all around to see through the sights and accommodate the muffs. The gun's report, and anyone else's nearby, will cause them to flinch, and we all know that's a bad habit.

At the very least, low-profile, slim ear muffs will help. Walker's Razor and Champion Vanquish muffs are very thin and work for many. But if a hunter wants it to be as natural as possible, in-the-ear electronic protection checks all the boxes.

“Electronic hearing protection is big thing right now,” said Paul Kaufmann, owner of Timberline Sporting Goods in Rifle, Colorado. “We're selling electronic ears 10 to 1 over others. Anyone who has been doing a lot of shooting knows electronic hearing is the way to go.”

Electronic in-ear plugs and muffs amplify quieter sounds, like talking or game-animals sounds, but cut out loud gun reports that would otherwise damage your ear.

Kaufmann said the electronic options are a higher-ticket item, yet they are big money-makers with about 10 to 15% margins. They're able to sell them for just barely over MAP, minimum advertised price, he said.

Still, there are some very high-end electronic ear protection options out there, like TETRA's Multi-Pursuit

← Simple paper targets will probably never go out of style.



→ Priscilla and Sam Rainey of Georgia visited their local gun shop and range so Priscilla could shoot for the first time. The bought range time, targets, ear muffs and eye protection for Priscilla, plus the clerk suggested a 9mm speed loader, which they added to their tab.

AlphaShield in the \$1,500 range, or Westone DefendEar, which is well above \$1,000. They are becoming more popular and more widely available, too. On the other end, Walker's In-Ear Silencer Era Buds go for \$60.

While the top-end products are



not for everyone, it seems people are paying more attention to the need to protect hearing. So don't avoid the topic: Suggest quality hearing protection.

TARGETS

A good friend of mine never buys targets. He makes his own steel plates — tiny ones, medium ones and big heavy plates. Good for him, and if you have an arc welder, go for it. But most of us need paper targets to improve accuracy for inside and

outside shooting. Sure, you can make an X with a Sharpie on that Bud Light case, but if you want to get precise, you'll need some decent paper targets.

As a retailer, you can't go wrong with whatever you choose — almost. A few retailers told me targets with

→ Even for hunters, animal targets don't seem to be very popular. Humanoid targets (including zombies) and precision targets sell better.

small animals just don't sell. Sighting-in targets with 1-inch squares, B27E, IPSC targets, targets with bad guys, and even zombie targets, are popular. But squirrels, groundhogs and prairie dogs, not so much.

One retailer said that anyone who is plinking might shoot a game target

once, but then they'll be shooting the real thing. When they do, they'll want to improve accuracy at long distances. Precision targets help a hunter see improvement much better than steel or random carboard.

A few quality products and consistent companies are Birchwood Casey



and Champion. BC's Long Range Sight-In Target is a popular one because it's reactive — that is, the bullet doesn't just make a hole, but it splatters, so it's visible for a distance. Champion's VisiColor also splats, is adhesive, and has a 1-inch grid.

Don't forget about game targets. They sell well, said retailers. Billiards, chess, darts, poker and even corn-hole targets — help make sure your customer is having a good time and getting more accurate at the same time.

GUNS FOR HIRE

Speaking of fun, firearms rentals are also rising in popularity, according to Bill Cazier of Hi-Caliber Firearms in Georgia. Of course, it's a good way to serve a customer who does not yet have a gun. But more often, people are trying out more guns to decide which they will purchase.

"They're now renting two or three guns at a time," said Cazier. "Most people want to be better shooters and be well-armed if they need to defend themselves. When they rent, they

range from a .22LR Buck Mark pistol to a UMP .45 ACP in full auto. You can bet they make money on the ammo — you go through a lot of cartridges shooting full auto.

STEADY AS SHE GOES

Kaufmann of Timberline also mentioned that monopods and tripods seem to be selling extremely well recently.

"I've had to re-order Trigger Sticks three or four times recently," said



↑ Steady rests, particularly those that absorb recoil at the range, are always in demand.

→ Consider some portable shooting tables with built-in rests. They come in handy for shooters at outdoor ranges and for prairie dog hunters, as shown in this setup.



can find out what gun works best for them."

Many are also just looking to have fun at the range.

Hi-Caliber rents pistols for \$5 an hour, long guns for \$7 and even machine guns for \$29 an hour. Guns

Kaufmann. "They keep selling out."

That may have to do with the fact that, for whatever reason, predator hunting is taking off in the Rifle, Colorado, area. Coyotes especially have been the target of hunters, and sticks, where you can't go prone, are

an excellent option. Other popular brands are BOG Deathgrips and Vortex High Country tripods.

Other rests, like Caldwell's Lead Sled and Champion's Premier Shooting Rest, help shooters get better groups.

WHAT'S NOT HOT

As someone who shoots at outdoor ranges frequently, I thought for sure range cams would be growing in popularity by now. Who wouldn't want to see their shots on an iPad or on their phone as they happen? In these systems, you set up a cam and a Bluetooth transmitter on a tripod

near your target. Back at the bench, you connect to the transmitter and view the target you're shooting. You can record your shots in video and people can react to them as they happen. It makes shooting more social. None of the six or so retailers I spoke with indicated that their customers ever asked for them. Sounds like their time has not yet come.

Hunters know exactly what they want during the hunt, but they could use a hand gearing up for range day. Better ear protection, useful targets, solid rests and encouraging having safe fun at the range will help make sure more hunters darken your doors. **HR**





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 **GRAND VIEW
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GEAR UP FOR COYOTE HUNTERS

You can make sure your store is a four-season shop by stocking the gear die-hard coyote hunters and trappers are looking for.

BY TRENT MARSH

Those who pursue predators are a special lot, with special needs. The coyote is the most widely distributed predator in North America, and as such, there has been more focus in recent years on them. But have you adjusted the offerings in your store to meet the needs of the new-age coyote or predator hunter? What gear do you need to have for these customers this year?



STATUS CHECK

The first thing you need to do is take AWOC around your store and do an honest assessment. Are you really stocking the items coyote hunters are going to want and need, or are you just trying to offer them repurposed goods from other customer categories?

Yes, I noticed that I spelled “a walk” wrong.

Any specialty customer category requires that you first evaluate the four main categories of products that they are going to be looking for when they hit your store. AWOC covers all of those with ammunition, weapons, optics and clothing. If you have those basic categories covered with category-specific options that a serious coyote hunter is going to be looking for, you're in good shape. If not, let's look at what you need to get into the store, ASAP.

AMMUNITION

Coyote hunters are no different than any other group of hunters. They all have their own factions of cult-like followings of certain calibers, neither side willing to concede that another choice for another hunter is just as likely to accomplish the job. Coyote hunting is usually a long-range endeavor, relying on flat-shooting cartridges, most often of the center-fire variety, delivering a medium-size bullet with unquestionable accuracy and reliability.

For years, the battle between .22-250 and .223 enthusiasts has raged on in the coyote hunting world. “I'm faster,” is met with “more ammo availability,” and the war rages on to this day. I'd wager these two rounds account for the vast majority of ammunition used to pursue coyotes, and you're probably already pretty well stocked on both. The also-rans are going to include stalwarts like the .243,

and maybe even the 6.5 Creedmoor. Again, rounds you should be stocking anyway.

Don't stop your assessment there, though.

The proliferation of the MSR in the last two decades has given rise to some rounds that are less popular, but whose following is just as intense as those mentioned above. Sure, the most common chambering of MSRs is still something in that .223/5.56 family, but here are two more you might want to make sure you have a few cases of behind the counter.

.224 Valkyrie: Longer, more slender bullets built on the 6.8 SPC case set this round apart from the .223. While not quite as fast as the .223, and certainly not as fast as the .22/250, these rounds do hold more energy downrange and offer a little more range than the .223 in most

↑ Stock the most popular predator rounds for your area: Likely the .22-250, .223, 6.5 Creedmoor, .243 and more.

applications. For MSR-specific applications, the .224 Valkyrie is getting a reputation as a great compromise for predator hunters.

6.5 Grendel: There's a lot of love for 6.5s in all their forms right now, and the 6.5 Grendel offering is no different. You won't get the performance of a bolt-gun 6.5 Creedmoor, but it is a remarkably solid all-around caliber for the MSR platform. With bullet offerings relatively easy to find from 90 to 130 grains, you can cover a lot of ground with the Grendel, from varmints to big game. That flexibility has a lot of appeal to a certain type of hunter, and if the Grendel isn't already on your radar, it probably should be.





WEAPONS

For years, super-accurate bolt guns dominated this space. Over time, as the accuracy and caliber options for MSRs improved, we've seen a major transition over to that platform. Modularity and easier customization certainly play a part, but I think the semi-auto functionality allowing for quicker follow-up shots on doubles or misses is the biggest reason we've seen the jump.

Chances are, you're already pretty close here. You might talk to some of your regular customers or ones that you know are into the coyote hunting scene and see if they think one of those dedicated calibers is catching on in your area to add options to your MSR lineup.

.....
↓ Traditional optics, especially those suited to longer ranges, will sell well to coyote hunters, as will thermal scopes.



OPTICS

This has been the big change of the last decade. As technology has evolved and gotten more affordable, night-vision and thermal scope options have absolutely exploded on the scene and changed the optics game for coyote and predator hunters.

It wasn't so long ago that spotlights or gun-mounted lights were considered essential gear for coyote hunters, and while there are still some hunters who go that route, for the most part, they are investing in optics that are doing the heavy lifting for them.

Brands like ATN and Pulsar have done a great job of driving affordability into the night-vision and thermal market. With many of these

new options being digital, they also offer through-scope recording, which means it's easier than ever for hunters to share their hunts on social media, which we know continues to grow in popularity as well.

Traditional long-range optics still get used quite a bit as well. Large objective lenses are a must, and many prefer the tactical-style turrets, especially in the West where longer shots are the rule. In the East, it may be more of a low-power, variable-optic game depending on location conditions. Where 200 yards is a long shot, the action may be fast and in-your-lap, so the zoom ratio is actually more important than the top end.



CLOTHING

Nothing is more location-specific than clothing. Make sure you have the pattern style and clothing weight that matches the peak of coyote season. This probably means snow camo in the North, and some drab mid-weight stuff further south. It's possible it's slightly different than your deer-hunting gear, so just be sure you're thinking about that for your dedicated coyote hunters.

SPECIALTY ITEMS

As much as coyote hunters have to move, they typically like to hunt as light as possible, so with the AWOC items in hand, you're mostly there. There are really only two other things you really need to make sure you're covering: calls or callers, and decoys.



Many serious hunters have transitioned over to using e-calls in place of traditional mouth calls. FOXPRO offers models across the spectrum, and familiar brands like Icotec, Primos and Mojo all offer e-calls that will work for your hunters. While most e-calls used to be a pretty expensive proposition, smaller hand-held units have become more popular as well, so make sure you're presenting a good-better-best offering, especially if chasing coyotes is on the upswing in your area.

Decoys round it out. I know a guy that absolutely won't even go to the field without his Flambeau Lone Howler. He wants the eye appeal of every set he makes. I don't argue with him — he's stacked up more coyotes

← Electronic calls, particularly those operated by remote or a phone app, are hugely popular. Stock a few different options, as price points vary widely in this category.

↑ Your buyers likely won't need coyote-specific camo, but you do need to stock patterns that are suitable for every season and for the terrain in your area.

than me by a factor in the triple digits.

Lucky Duck and Montana Decoy offer some slightly more portable options than the full-body Flambeau offering, so look at those as well.

DON'T FORGET THE TRAPPERS

The days of long-lining and paying for your first car with fur money may be long gone, but if you talk to people in the space, I think there's a quiet resurgence happening in the trapping space. Largely these newer trappers are working smaller properties and aren't doing it for the money as much as they are for the habitat management side of things.

Talk to many hunters around here and the decline in turkey numbers



is starting to get pretty concerning. Habitat is a factor, for sure, but you can't tell hunters running trail cameras year-round, and seeing more raccoons than ever, that predation isn't part the problem.

The same is true for coyotes. Anyone that runs trail cameras year-round is getting more pics of coyotes than they would expect, and in the spring, it's hard not to find someone who has had pictures of fawns in the jaws of ole Wiley E.

Count me among the coyote hunters that have largely transitioned over to trapping instead of trying to hunt them. With the arrival of my kids, and a life that is more hectic than ever, the prospect of sitting in the cold for a few hours overnight in pursuit of coyotes with such a low hit-rate in my part of the world just lost its luster. It's far easier for me to dedicate an extra hour to errands I'm already running to check traps that can be in the field trying to catch a coyote 24-7.

I'm willing to bet if you start asking some of your regulars, trapping is on the radar of more of them than you think. And you may be missing sales by not catering to them.

Trapping supplies may seem intimidating if you haven't done this before, but as a relative newbie myself, I can tell you it's really not that bad. It's no different than anything else: You can't stock it all, but you can cover a lot of bases with a little research.

Here's some tips for getting started:

- Don't bother with inventory that isn't suitable for your area. Figuring out what furbearers people are targeting in your area isn't hard, and you can probably narrow it down to just a handful of traps and sizes to pursue those. Dogproof traps are simple to use and super effective for raccoons. Coil-spring 1.5 or 1.75 are as well,

and they can also be used for things like mink and skunk. Conibears are popular for water trappers if you have a population of muskrats, beavers or otters. Then you'll want larger coil-springs for bobcats, foxes, or coyotes. A single brand like Duke can supply all of those, and knowing local laws and species means you can probably

get it down to five or six trap offerings to cover all the bases.

- Find local(ish) bait and lure makers. While I have no interest in making my own bait or lure, it's not uncommon for this to be a hobby for entrepreneurial trappers in your area. This gives you a local source for a product you will need that is likely



hyper-focused on what is relevant and works in your area, and very likely a resource that can help you with the balance of your trapping supply mix as an expert voice for the category. That's a win-win-win.

- Special-order fur-handling supplies. The value of furs for most of the country just isn't there. Many trapped animals simply go to the bone pile because the fur isn't worth enough to invest the time processing it. You may well have some folks that do, and when they see you have some other trapping items, they may ask about some fur-handling equipment. Offer to get what they want or need, but reduce your investment by not stocking something that may be slow to move or not quite right for your market. You can gauge the category over time to see if it warrants more investment.

- Find local crafters. With the commercial fur market in the tank, more and more we're seeing people turn to the novelty or craft market for their furs. They will process and tan the fur and turn them into garments or wallhanger pieces of décor. There's a certain appeal to a coon-lined bomber or trapper hat or a set of heavy sledding gloves with coyote trim. You may be able to move more of them than you think, and you may well have a local crafter looking for additional distribution. Don't ignore consignment opportunities.

Coyote hunters don't need a whole new set of gear, but they can't just take deer hunting gear off the shelf and make it work either. Ensure your shop is a four-season shop, not just a deer-hunting shop, by staying stocked for all the game in your area.

Sadly, coyotes are probably in your area, in bigger numbers than you think.

And so are the coyote hunters. And trappers. **HR**







BIG SKY DOUBLE- DOWN

Visiting Big Sky country is an exhilarating experience. Going there with a pair of big-game tags in your wallet is pure nirvana, as *Hunting Retailer's* product editor recently found out.

BY GORDY KRAHN

The mid-November winter storm sweeping through the Dakotas had my white knuckles locked firmly in the 10 and 2 o'clock positions. Scattered patches of ice covered I-94, and wreckers were clearing out several tractor-trailers that had overturned due to the heavy winds and slick conditions. I was on the tail end of the storm, but the weather report was dismal: The first winter storm of the season to blast off from the Rockies is unloading its energy primarily in North Dakota, where it could dump up to 18 inches of snow and kick up winds as high as 50 mph. The system started with a round of freezing drizzle that made driving tricky in the Dakotas. It led to a chain reaction crash that totaled a state trooper's vehicle and closed Interstate 94 in eastern North Dakota for several hours.

It was 25 degrees when I left Minnesota an hour before daylight, but the mercury had dropped to zero as I plodded across North Dakota. Luckily, the wind had dropped to a 20-mph North Dakota “breeze.” As I passed another tangled 18-wheeler wreck, I eased up on the gas and dropped the FJ Cruiser 25 mph below the 75-mph speed limit, knowing the 10-hour drive to Miles City, Montana, where I hoped to overnight, had just gotten a whole lot longer.

I was en route to the 9,000-acre Jumping Horse Ranch near Ennis, Montana, a sportsman’s paradise sur-



rounded by three picturesque mountain ranges: the Madison Range, Gravelly Range and Tobacco Root Mountains. In addition to hunting opportunities that are off the charts, local shops and numerous resorts in Ennis cater to fly-fishing anglers, with guided trips on the Madison and in nearby Yellowstone National Park. I would pass on the fishing but had a couple of nonresident tags in my wallet — one for elk and another for deer. I was meeting up with some industry buddies for four days of

← After a long crawl to get into position, the author settled in to wait out the bedded buck he and his guide had been trying to locate all day.

pure hunting bliss.

Thankfully, I made it to Miles City shortly after dark and pulled over for the night, where I turned in early. Another six or so hours of driving the next day would see me to the ranch — if the roads improved.

As I pulled into Ennis, just 15 minutes from the ranch, I was white knuckled again — but for an entirely different reason. I had been listening to my Minnesota Vikings for the past three hours, and they were locked in an overtime battle with the Buffalo Bills. Behind by four points, the Vikings almost reached the endzone three times during the final minute of the game, failing to score each time. All was lost, it seemed — until the Vikes recovered a Josh Allen





↑ The first morning of the hunt proved challenging, as a snow squall reduced visibility and made locating elk more difficult.

fumble in his own endzone to take a 30-27 lead. Tyler Bass converted a field goal on the Bill's final drive to take the game to overtime. After an unsuccessful Vikings drive, Allen made several impressive scrambles to get inside field goal range and take a few shots at a touchdown to win the game. Then Allen threw his second interception of the game, handing the Vikings the win. Skoll!

I arrived at camp (in an elated mood) with just enough daylight left to check the zero on my rifle and take

EPIC ELK OPTICS

Hunters rely on riflescopes designed specifically for the task at hand. For retailers, that means stocking the shelves with a wide selection to fit every need.

When it comes to riflescopes, there is no one size fits all. Hunters must match optics to rifle and cartridge selection to obtain optimal performance on the game they are hunting, in the terrain and weather in which they're hunting — settling on the best combo to finish what they started when they put their bino to the landscape in search of their quarry and boots to turf once a buck or bull is spotted. When the pursuit is done, the outcome of the hunt depends on a well-placed bullet, and it's a quality riflescope that guides that bullet to the promised land.

Customers looking for an optics edge will undoubtedly be familiar with the adage: Buy the best optics you can afford. It doesn't make sense to invest hard-earned cash in a rifle capable of punching minute-of-angle groups and then equip it with sub-standard glass that inhibits that capability. There are several factors to consider when purchasing a scope: the type of firearm on which it will sit, the animals you will be hunting, and the type of terrain where you will be hunting. Patrons of your store or those who visit your website should carefully consider those qualities that make sense for the type of rifle they own and the type of hunting they do. You and your staff can help make that decision-making process a little less daunting by stocking a good selection of optics and having a working knowledge of each model's attributes and features.

I wanted a versatile scope for my elk/deer hunt that would stand up to rugged terrain and winter weather conditions but wouldn't add a lot of bulk to my T/C Icon chambered in .300 Win. Mag. Knowing that my host, EOTech's John Bailey, had hunted the Jumping Horse Ranch for nearly a decade, I asked his advice. His recommendation was spot on — the 1-10x28mm first focal plane riflescope from the company's relatively new Vudu line.

For EOTech, the addition of the Vudu line of riflescopes marked the company's expansion into the hunting market. "We wanted to diversify our product line from our holographic one-trick-pony prod-



uct line," Bailey said of the Vudu launch. "We knew they had to be high-quality, high-precision optics, so we designed a high-end line of scopes to start off — a 1-6X, 2.5-10X and 3.5-18X. The 1-6X did really well because it still had our circle/dot reticle like you see in our holographic sights. But as you dial it up, [the circle expands] out of the picture, and you have a very clean reticle for medium- to long-range shooting."

EOTech's Vudu 1-10x28mm riflescope features a robust 34mm, single-piece aircraft aluminum tube with an anodized finish for extreme durability, with laser-etched adjustment indicators and push-button illumination controls for simple manipulation. It has a single-piece eyepiece that includes a removable throw-lever for fast changes in magnification, and its low-profile elevation turret has a push/pull locking system and a capped windage turret for a secure zero, and the first focal plane illuminated, glass-etched reticle allows for distance estimation at any magnification and lighting condition. The nitrogen-gas-purged Vudu 1-10x28mm riflescope is fog-, shock- and water-resistant, and XC high-density, low-dispersion glass with anti-reflective coated lenses provides efficient light transmission and edge-to-edge clarity.

"We've been coming out here for 10 years, and I think we've had only one or two hunters who shot past 400 yards," John told me. "So, the 10X is good for those longer shots, but you can also dial it down to 1X if you get up in the mountains where there's a lot of brush and trees. Now, if we had to shoot 600 or 700 yards, I'd probably recommend something different, but I think this scope is a perfect fit for this hunt."





a quick cruise around the property to get a feel for what the morning might bring. Glassing the surrounding slopes that extended down from the mountains to the ranch, we spotted several nice bull elk working their way down to the field where they would feed at night. And it was the visions of those elk that I played back in my mind over and over when my head hit the pillow that night, the alarm set for 4:30 a.m.

It was cold and calm when I woke, got my stuff together and climbed

into Jeff Klein's F350. Jeff is the ranch manager at Jumping Horse and my guide for the hunt — I figured I was in good hands. After a short ride, he pulled the truck through a gate leading into a hilly pasture and eased it down into a shallow gravel pit. "Good place to stash the truck," he said as he killed the engine.

Jeff told me he had been keeping an eye on this area. "I've seen some elk coming down late at night and going back up in the morning," he said. "I just thought it was a good

place to see if we could get the wind right and catch them in that transition zone. The elk should be coming off that ridge to the left and from out in the crops behind us," he pointed to the dim skyline. "Let's hike up the hill a bit and wait for it to get light."

A gentle snow was falling as we gained elevation, just enough to mess with visibility. "Up there on the closest ridge," Jeff pointed up the hill. "Can you make out those elk just to the left of that farthest juniper? There are three of them." It was still

↑ The author's elk showed up unannounced as he and his guide were sneaking up on three other bulls that they were having difficulty closing in on.

.....
about 20 minutes till sunup — legal shooting light — but with the snow, I could barely make out the dark forms walking up the ridge.

As I watched the elk disappear over hill crest, Jeff tapped me on the shoulder. "There's another bull coming in behind us, looks like a



“As I watched the elk disappear over the hill crest, Jeff tapped me on the shoulder. ‘There’s another bull coming in behind us, looks like a decent five by five,’ he whispered. Being a bird-in-the-hand kind of guy, I pivoted to my right and got on the shooting sticks.”

decent five by five,” he whispered. Being a bird-in-the-hand kind of guy, I pivoted to my right and got on the shooting sticks. The elk was striking a pose at 200 yards, quartered toward us, and I thumbed the safety. “He’s not spooked,” Jeff whispered. “Hold off till he turns broadside. The stand-off lasted about 10 minutes. Then the bull turned and started walking parallel to us. Jeff gave a cow call and it pulled to a stop and looked up at us. A shot through the lungs ended the drama, and we walked over to

check out our early morning prize.

I often experience an odd combination of elation and emotional letdown when a hunt wraps up so quickly, but I immediately got over it. I still had a deer tag in my wallet — good for a muley or a whitetail — and Jeff told me they’d been seeing an impressive whitetail buck hanging out close to the ranch house. “I got some pictures of him in the middle of September, and he’s one of the nicest bucks I’ve seen here on the ranch,” he said. “There’s all those pockets of

does around here and a couple of little shelterbelts with a lot of cover where I think he’s been bedding.”

The thing was, I wasn’t the only

one with my sights on the buck.

That night after dinner and a few adult beverages, we came to a decision. We would draw straws for

FORMIDABLE FOOTWEAR

Elk hunting is synonymous with difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions, and having good footwear that keeps feet warm and dry, built to handle the toughest terrain should be every hunter’s No. 1 priority. And that means investing in quality boots that stand up to the rigors of the hunt — in any kind of weather in any landscape. The best boots a hunter can own are those he or she rarely thinks about — those that quietly go about the business of keeping feet dry, blister-free and toasty warm. High-quality boots provide the impetus to keep hunters going — one step at a time — when the going gets tough, whether it’s a sub-zero all-day sit waiting in ambush or a long backcountry trek to the horizon and back.

For my Montana elk/deer hunt, I enlisted the Irish Setter VaprTrek waterproof hunting boot, with 1,200 grams of insulation to keep my feet toasty warm and made with full-grain leather and abrasion-resistant materials to ensure durability. I had worn them on several upland bird hunts during the fall to make sure they were

well broken in before heading west, and they performed to expectations and beyond. I was confident they would serve me well in my pursuit of antlers and meat. Retailers take note: There is no-one-size-fits-all remedy when it comes to hunting boots. It’s imperative to stock a wide variety to fit not only a wide range of customers’ feet but all their hunting needs.

The VaprTrek’s PrimaLoft insulation keeps feet warm, while an UltraDry waterproof membrane keeps them dry. The company’s exclusive ScentBan odor control technology kills bacteria and eliminates odor. The VaprTrek’s Memory Foam insole provides under-foot comfort, and Armatex XT technology adds durability and abrasion-resistance in high-wear areas of the heel and toe while leather reinforcement is strategically placed to protect flex points. A lightweight, nylon shank adds arch support, and EnerG technology within the dual density midsole delivers extra comfort in the heel and forefoot impact zones.



a chance at the stud buck. I drew the short straw ... but in this case it was a good thing, and Jeff and I would try to locate the buck in the morning and put a sneak on it.

We drove around at first light glassing for the short-straw buck, to no avail. We spotted several does and smallish bucks, but the big guy was nowhere to be found. We took a short break for lunch and headed back out at 3 p.m. and almost immediately spotted him in the middle of a wide open field bedded down with a single doe. Jeff quickly came up with a game plan. "See that pop-up blind on the fence line? If we can put it between us and the deer and get to the fence line we might have a shot."

Hunkered over, I followed Jeff as we sneaked to the blind without spooking the deer from their beds. Jeff eased the tripod around the



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◀ The author's Big Sky buck was a dandy — the result of a successful stalk and a well-placed shot.

edge of the blind and I inched into position and slowly placed the rifle up on its cradle, and settled in for the waiting game.

I was shifting positions to restore feeling in my legs about 20 minutes later when the buck stood up to stretch, and I quickly planted the crosshairs on center mass and squeezed the trigger. I stood and shook the snow from my pants and walked the 200 yards to where the buck had piled up, taking a deep breath to drink it all in. The crisp mountain air. The postcard-perfect backdrop. The exhilaration and fading adrenaline rush. The perfect end to a perfect day. **HR**

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Outsourcing From Within

If your company has grown so big that you can't do all the management by yourself, it's time to hand over some trust to others. Here's how.

BY JOSH FIORINI

Arguably the father of modern business and personal success philosophy, Napoleon Hill said, "First comes thought, then organization of that thought into ideas and plans, then transformation of those plans into reality." This one sentence concisely describes the essence of the entrepreneurial process — but as many of you have no doubt learned from experience, the devil is in the details.

Many successful entrepreneurs reach a period in their careers that can best be described as frustration. They feel overwhelmed, consumed by mundane tasks and managing emergencies in their business — i.e., they're putting out what feels like a never-ending string of fires. Inevitably, the entrepreneur in this very common (and hopefully temporary) phase wishes for a return to simpler times, when their business was smaller or when the mission seemed clearer and the day less cluttered. The realization has struck: Somewhere in between that first thought and the state of the business today, things got, well, complicated.

That complication is inevitable as businesses grow, because no matter the original idea, passion or mission, eventually it needs a real organization to become reality. Of course, the more successful or ambitious the idea is, the bigger that organization grows, and the bigger and more complex the organization becomes, the higher the risk becomes of the organization running you rather than the other way around. The path to correcting this lies in systems.

CLOCK BUILDING

As your business grows, many of the things you once could handle personally now require teams, and things that used to be periodic tasks are now constant. To continue your business' success without micromanaging every detail, you'll need to create organizational systems with your team that mirrors the personal habits and approaches that made you so successful.

One of the great management gurus of our time, Jim Collins, called this "clock building." As the entrepreneur, you may be able to "tell the time" — it



was your vision that began the business, after all. But for your organization to grow, you need others to carry that vision forward, and so you must build a clock so that your team can "tell the time" without you.

An example: If you found weekly sales meetings with your people and monthly contests to be successful motivators when you were personally running the sales team, make that an institution within your organization for your new sales manager to follow. Instill it as tradition and standard operating procedure, and in that way, with minimal oversight on your part, your successful methods are being carried forward.

MONITOR AND MENTOR

As your business grows, you have no doubt made every effort to hire the best people you could find for your management team. These people arrived, of course with their own experiences and skill sets. Indeed, they may be specialists and have skills you don't. But just because they are qualified and smart and committed does not make them you.

Be open to new ideas and approaches new people bring to your company, but balance that with a sculpting hand to ensure that you are molding their approach to fit your style and your vision. Set aside regular times to meet with



your top people and check in, set goals and give advice. You are expecting these people to, ideally, prevent the aforementioned “fires” or at least put them out for you.

MEASURE AND OBSERVE

The larger your business becomes, the more removed you will become from its routine activities. Early on, when you were cutting all the checks, you had your finger on the pulse of the budget. When you were on the sales floor, you had an intimate feel for which products and services were hot or cold. An unfortunate consequence of a growing business is the inevitable disconnection from this first-hand, hands-on knowledge.

This is when data becomes your friend. Take steps early to utilize technology that allows you to stay

“The larger your business becomes, the more removed you will become from its routine activities. Early on, when you were cutting all the checks, you had your finger on the pulse of the budget.”

on top of the happenings within your business. Eventually, that data and your management team may be the only day-to-day connection to

those things for which you once had a “feel,” so you’ll need to make sure you have the data you need to manage from your new position.

As your business grows, spend some time planning and preparing for the day you might not be or want to be around so much. Growing pains are a great problem to have, but they’re also exhausting. Rather than being in a business where you’re doing everything just to get through the day, solve that problem by building systems.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION EXERCISES

To apply the lessons in this article, here are some questions to ask yourself.

Immediately after reading:

1. What are some good habits I

have that my company could benefit from formalizing?

2. Which aspects of my business am I uniquely adept at managing successfully?

3. What types of policies can I develop or what kinds of training can I implement that will allow my team to be just as successful in the future as I have been in the past?

4. What aspects of my business feel most unpredictable or problematic? What are some options at my disposal to encourage and mentor my team to take successful ownership of those aspects?

Three months after reading:

1. In what ways have I created new organizational systems that reflect my values and approach to my business?

2. What are the next steps to plan for continued growth? **HR**



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HUNTING RETAILER GEAR ROUNDUP

Thermal and IR Optics

Hunters who work the graveyard shift can rely on these top-shelf optics to turn night into day.

BY GORDY KRAHN

Critters such as coyotes, foxes, bobcats, raccoons and wild hogs are most active at night, which helps them avoid human encounters — especially true east of the big river, where high human population densities are the norm. And in many regions of the South and the Southwest, temperatures can be blistering hot during the day, and prowling

during the relatively cool hours of the night — when prey species are more active — is more of a necessity than an option. Bobcats, foxes and raccoons, by their very nature, prefer working the night shift, their large nocturnal eyes able to gather enough available light to navigate the landscape and seek out prey in the dark. But what all these critters have

in common is that they become emboldened at night, gaining confidence under a cloak of darkness — those reluctant to expose themselves during the day exhibiting their brave alter egos at night. That's why savvy hunters set their alarms for the wee hours of the morning, to take advantage of this behavioral trait. And, thankfully, they can engage these nighttime

prowlers on an even playing field by using the latest and greatest thermal and IR optics. And that's where you, the savvy hunting retailer, come in — arming your customers with the latest and greatest makes and models. Be sure you're not in the dark when they visit your store or website looking for optics that turn night into day. Here's an assortment to get you started.



AGM ADDER TS35-384

The Adder TS35-384 thermal imaging scope from AGM Global Vision (\$2,744) was developed for hunters who prefer a traditional scope body design. It comes with a 30mm American Defense MFG (ADM) AD Recon QD mount but can be attached to any firearm using standard 30mm scope rings. The traditional body style meets the needs of hunters who value a traditional form factor and technological superiority. The Adder TS35-384 is equipped with a unique dual power system — two built-in 18650 rechargeable batteries and one CR123A replaceable lithium battery that provide up to 15 hours of continuous operation. Other features include onboard video and audio recording, 64GB of storage, shot-activated recording, onboard Wi-Fi and more.

www.agmglobalvision.com



ARMASIGHT CONTRACTOR 640

Armasight's Contractor 640 series thermal optic sight (\$5,499/2.3-9.2x35mm; \$5,799/3-12x50mm; \$6,999/4.8-19.2x75mm) brings cutting-edge capability in a lightweight yet durable metal alloy housing. Built as a mil-std military-grade thermal scope, the Contractor 640 can be used in all environmental conditions to improve object detection. It features 60Hz 1024x768 AMOLED display resolution, USB and Wi-Fi video streaming, shot-activated recording capabilities, four hours of onboard video recording, eight user-selectable reticles and six color palettes. The Contractor 640 also comes equipped with a digital compass, inclinometer and stadiametric reticles that help users calculate distance, direction and shot angles. The Contractor 640 ships with an integrated quick-detach mount that attaches to any standard 1913 Picatinny rail and comes in three models. www.armsight.com





ATN THOR 5 XD SERIES

ATN's Thor Gen 5 series of thermal scopes (starts at \$5,695) uses cutting-edge technology to deliver better-than-ever quality in a smaller profile. With more power and more memory, the latest sensors and custom chips make the Gen 5 line a revolutionary leap forward in thermal optics — powered by a new Quad Core processor with enhanced sensors that produce stunning image quality in both night and day modes. A high-resolution OLED display offers rich colors and stark blacks, while the upgraded lenses, improved 12μm technology and enhanced algorithms provide sharp resolution. All models are available with a laser rangefinder that delivers unprecedented precision at up to 1,000 yards. ATN's exclusive Custom Reticle Builder lets the user create a reticle that suits specific shooting needs. www.atncorp.com



BLACK DIAMOND TH-38L

The next generation of thermal imaging devices from Black Diamond Optics (\$5,500) is here. The TH-38L thermal riflescope features 1024x768 high-resolution image quality, germanium glass and 10 optional color palettes on its HD OLED display. With a detection reach out to 2,000 yards, it features sharp imagery while being able to range targets out to 1,100 yards. External video features PAL WiFi and 32GB of internal storage. Its 50mm objective lens harnesses a wide field of view and zoom capabilities of 2X/4X/10X/PIP. The TH-38L thermal riflescope weighs in at only 22 ounces. www.blackdiamondoptics.com

INFIRAY OUTDOOR MATE 640 CLIP-ON

The InfiRay Outdoor MATE 640 50mm clip-on thermal optic (\$5,999) brings an all-new level of versatility to any existing day scope. With a high-performance 12μm detector, magnesium alloy housing, distortion-free display, removable control pad and a detection range of up to 2,400 yards, the MATE 640 ensures a precise and repeatable transition when day turns to night. It can be mounted directly to the objective of any day scope or can be attached via a mil-std 1913 Picatinny rail. Additional accessories, including an external LRF module and monocular extension, provide improved flexibility on any hunt or trip to the range. Other features include distortion-free display, threaded eyepiece, manual focus, 32GB internal memory and much more. www.irayusa.com



BERING OPTICS SUPER YOTER LRF

The Super Yoter LRF 3-24x50mm compact thermal scope from Bering Optics (\$5,699.95) features advanced 12μm vanadium oxide (VOx) 640x480 core resolution that makes it a great choice for predator hunting at medium- and long-range distances. Equipped with a QD mount (LaRue, ADM or Bering Optics), it has an integrated laser rangefinder with Constant Scan mode that has a range of 10 to 1,000 yards. It features an aluminum-magnesium alloy body, and it is powered by common AA-type batteries. The Super Yoter LRF also features a zeroing app with BDC function, magnetic external battery port with cable, built in 32MB memory to record videos and photos and built-in sound recording. www.beringoptics.com



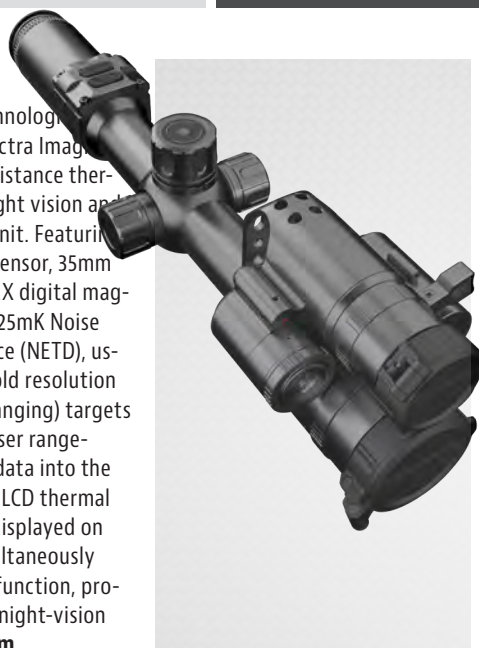
EOTECH CLIPNV-LR

Made from lightweight aircraft-grade aluminum, the compact EOTech ClipNV-LR (\$10,125) is a clip-on night-vision device developed to provide users with a rifle-mounted sighting solution with unrivaled target detection and identification capability. It is designed for use with medium to high (4-20X) magnification day sights to provide targeting at night while maintaining the day optic's ballistic zero and attaches quickly and simply to Picatinny (1913) rails. It also features an integral auxiliary Picatinny rail for installation of accessory equipment such as IR illuminators/designators. The ClipNV-LR's auto-gated power supply provides an automatic high light cut-off system to help protect the image intensifier tube for improved resolution in high light environments. Simple On/Off, Manual Gain Control and Focus knobs are ergonomically positioned. www.eotechinc.com



PARD TD5

The TD5 (\$4,099) is the latest technological innovation from Pard — Dual Spectra Image technology that combines long-distance thermal detection, high-definition night vision and a laser rangefinder into a single unit. Featuring a 384x288 resolution IR thermal sensor, 35mm lens, 2.4X optical magnification, 2X digital magnification, 12µm pixel pitch and ≤25mK Noise Equivalent Temperature Difference (NETD), users will enjoy rich contrast and bold resolution when acquiring (and accurately ranging) targets with the 1,200-yard integrated laser rangefinder that seamlessly feeds the data into the on-board ballistics calculator. IPS LCD thermal imaging and night vision can be displayed on the 800x800 IPS LCD display simultaneously with the picture-in-picture (PIP) function, providing a clear heat signature and night-vision depth perception. www.pard.com

**PULSAR THERMION DUO DXP50**

Pulsar's Thermion Duo DXP50 (\$6,499.97) combines high-tech thermal imaging with the clarity and vividness of a full-color daytime optic. Designed primarily for hunting, it has a detection range of 1,800 yards, and with its picture-in-picture feature, a hunter can simultaneously find an animal through dense fog or foliage with its 640x480 high-sensitivity thermal sensor while observing the area around it in full color 4K HD. The Thermion Duo DXP50 includes one-shot freeze zeroing, 1024x768 photo and video recording with audio, Wi-Fi integration with the Stream Vision 2 app, and advanced image processing. With its solid aluminum alloy construction, it is both shockproof and waterproof, with an IPX7 rating, capable of withstanding the most rigorous hunting conditions. www.pulsarnv.com

**SECTOR OPTICS FUSION BINO T6B**

The T6b Fusion binocular from Sector Optics (\$5,995) offers a robust feature set, including a Starvis full HD sensor + LWIR or SWIR 640x480 core, on board image processing enhancement modes and IMU, GPS capability. It has a removable ocular and remote control and multiple fusion display views: single sensor, fusion, etc. The T6b Fusion features flexible mounting options — tripod, handle mount and more — and a field of view of 8.7 degrees. It has a focus range from 6 yards to infinity and two 1920x1080 color OLED displays. Optical characteristics with wide or narrow FOV systems are available for custom orders. www.sectoroptics.com

**SIG SAUER ELECTRO-OPTICS ECHO3**

Designed for predator and wild hog hunters, the compact, lightweight Echo3 thermal reflex sight (\$3,249.99/1-6X; \$3,899.99/2-12X) utilizes Sig Sauer BDX technology to capture images and record video in eight different color palettes. Available in 1-6X and 2-12X magnification options, the Echo3 can be used with multiple reticles that change with KIL0 rangefinder input. The Echo3 features a motion-activated MOTAC display that powers up when it senses motion, and its two CR123 lithium batteries provide more than six hours of continuous runtime. It includes a quick-disconnect mount, easy-to-adjust zoom lens with throw-lever attachment and six brightness settings. www.sigsauer.com

TRIJCON IR-HUNTER

Trijicon's IR-Hunter thermal riflescope (\$6,694/24mm; \$7,724/35mm; \$9,269/60mm) features improved system controls for faster system response and reduced lag time, while a new manual focus adjustment for 60mm versions provides improved image quality at all distances. The main housing is constructed from forged 7075 aluminum and features an updated top-loading internal battery compartment for faster access, a slimmer profile and increased durability. Its quick release mounting system featuring Trijicon Q-LOC technology provides multiple mounting locations to affix a scope rapidly and reliably in the dark. This feature also decreases sight-in time and rounds fired with "return to zero" repeatability. The IR-Hunter has improved reticle choices, and all Trijicon Electro Optics thermal scopes feature 640x480 resolution and 12-micron thermal sensors with 60Hz frame rates. www.trijicon.com



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BY GORDY KRAHN

HUNTING RETAILER NEW PRODUCTS



HAWKE TURKEY DOT SCOPE

The Turkey Dot 1-4x20mm scope features Hawke Sports Optics' new Dot IR reticle, helping the shooter get on target quickly when every second counts. Its 2 MOA illuminated center dot aimpoint is surrounded by a horseshoe that measures 10 inches at 25 yards when on 4X magnification, with floating posts at the 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions to further aid in rapid and accurate target acquisition. Covered under Hawke's no-fault lifetime warranty, the Turkey Dot IR scope is nitrogen purged, shockproof, waterproof and fogproof. It is also all-caliber rated to provide rugged reliability. It has 4 inches of eye relief, ½-MOA low-profile turrets and red and green illumination options. MSRP \$239 www.hawkeoptics.com

REMINGTON PREMIER LONG-RANGE SPEER IMPACT AMMUNITION

Speer Ammunition has partnered with its sister brand Remington in Big Green's new line of Premier Long-Range ammunition. This is the first time Speer's Impact bullets are available in loaded ammunition, in seven popular cartridge options. Built for hunting and long-range shooting, Speer's Impact is a tough bonded bullet that penetrates deep on targets yet doesn't break apart on closer shots. When longer shots are needed, the Slipstream polymer tip helps expansion start at 200 fps lower than standard polymer tips. Adding to the performance of the bullet is its aerodynamic design. With longer-range shots in mind, the Speer Impact features a boat-tail bullet design, with a rear-adjusted center of gravity that promotes long-range accuracy. MSRP: \$59.99-\$97.99/Box of 20 www.remington.com



FIOCCHI 5.7X28MM SUBSONIC AMMO

Fiocchi, a global leader in defensive, target and hunting ammunition, recently announced the availability of its latest 5.7x28mm cartridge. The new subsonic ammo joins two 5.7x28mm cartridge models introduced at the 2023 SHOT Show in Las Vegas. The newest Fiocchi 5.7x28mm cartridge

is offered in the company's Range Dynamics series. Sporting a 62-grain FMJ bullet, the Range Dynamics Subsonic is the ideal option for high-volume suppressed or un-suppressed fun on the range. Available in 50-round boxes, Range Dynamics Subsonic is a great choice for personal defense carbine training and semi-auto pistol use, and it rounds out Fiocchi's 5.7x28mm lineup that includes 35-grain Hyperformance jacketed frangible and Hyperformance 40-grain hollow point cartridges. MSRP: NA www.fiocchiusa.com

PRIMOS CUSTOM MILL TURKEY PLAQUES

Handcrafted in Mississippi, each Primos Custom Mill turkey plaque is individually marked for authenticity and can be fully customized to celebrate any successful hunt. Custom Mill Shop turkey plaques feature a cherry wood baseplate and a select maple fan holder, and purchasers can select between two styles: Field Report or Custom. The Field Report version includes personalized text, the state the bird was taken in or shotshell size (12- or 20-gauge or .410-bore), as well as stats such as spur and beard length. The Custom style offers a choice of multiple turkey graphics and text options on the top and bottom of the plaque. Each plaque is crafted and shipped within 15 days. MSRP: \$85 www.primos.com



FOXPRO X360 E-CALLER/DECOY

The Foxpro X360 electronic game caller utilizes three XHD speakers in a seven-speaker system, producing Advanced 360 24-bit sounds with a dramatically improved frequency range. The unit's new Advanced 360 FOXMotion feature moves the selected sound to different random speakers in a 360-degree directional range while increasing and decreasing the volume. This creates a realism and chaotic urgency that can fool even the wariest predators. The X360 comes with 350+ sounds and can store up to 2,000 sounds. It features two built-in decoys and its Bluetooth feature allows users to play audio files from their mobile phone. And for the first time ever, a built-in scale allows users to weigh predators in the field and FOXFusion now works with 24-bit sounds. MSRP: \$1,199.95 www.gofoxpro.com



PRO-TRACKER ARCHERY ARROW RECOVERY SYSTEM

The Pro-Tracker Arrow Recovery System uses a signal emitter and receiver that is activated upon arrow impact with game animals, allowing bowhunters to recover them day or night and in any weather. It tracks the game animal, not the arrow, by detaching from the arrow and staying in the hide of the animal. The tracker works with fixed-blade and mechanical broadheads, and the transmitter has a battery life of 18 to 20 hours and a range of up to 2 miles. It uses the same basic technology as radio tracking collars used with hunting dogs and is not affected by weather or lighting conditions. And since the transmitter stays with the animal, it is more reliable than lighted nocks. MSRP: \$449 www.pro-tracker.com





SAVAGE ARMS IMPULSE DRIVEN HUNTER

Available in four popular chamberings, the Savage Impulse Driven Hunter rifle features a straight-pull action that refines the basic function of the conventional bolt action into one fast and intuitive movement. At the heart of the rifle's bolt is Hexlock, six hardened steel bearings that lock the bolt in place inside the receiver's barrel extension. As pressure increases, Hexlock's hold tightens, ensuring there can be no rearward movement of the bolt. Once the round has left the barrel, the pressure subsides, and the action can safely open again. Driven Hunter features include a user-adjustable AccuTrigger (1.5 to 4 pounds), one-piece 20 MOA rail, ambidextrous multi-positional bolt handle, AccuStock with three-dimensional aluminum bedding, carbon steel sporter barrel options, sling swivel studs and two-position tang safety. MSRP: \$1,399 www.savagearms.com



TRUFIRE EXERT FLEX BOW RELEASE

Designed to fit a wide range of hand sizes and shooting styles, the Exert Flex bow release from TruFire maximizes adjustability and minimizes torque in a comfortable new ultra-soft strap system. With its dual-sear trigger system, the Exert Flex index finger release employs a precision-milled internal sear system that eliminates "stack" of bow weight and features a crisp trigger with micro-adjustable tension and travel with unprecedented feel in a hunting-style release. The trigger is easily set with the push of a button, while the open hook design allows for fast and frictionless hookups. Each unit ships with a standard trigger and a knurled peg to provide personalization for an ultra-custom fit. MSRP: \$199.99 www.feradyne.com/trufire



LEUPOLD 2-10X30MM MARK 5HD RIFLESCOPE

Leupold's new Mark 5HD 2-10x30mm riflescope defines accuracy, precision and optical performance in a shorter, lighter model for carbines and designated marksman rifles. With three revolutions of elevation adjustment, the Mark 5HD was designed to max out the performance of the latest long-range rifles and ammunition. It features Leupold's Professional-Grade Optical System, with optimal light transmission for the most challenging conditions, industry-leading glare reduction for a clear image in harsh, direct light and high resolution and clarity. The Mark 5HD 2-10x30mm is 11 inches long and weighs 24 ounces. Three models are available, all in first focal plane with three reticle choices: TMR reticle with milliradian adjustments, illuminated TMR reticle with milliradian adjustments and PR1-MOA reticle with MOA adjustments. Retail: Starts at \$1,899.99 www.leupold.com

ICOTEC OUTLAW+ E-CALLER/DECOY COMBO

ICOTec's new flagship e-caller, the Outlaw+, features 300-yard non-line-of-sight remote control as well as Bluetooth connectivity with a range of approximately 70 yards with the caller on the ground and over 100 yards if raised off the ground a few feet. The Outlaw+ utilizes ICOTec's two-sound technology that plays two sounds at the same time with its easy-to-use remote control. Streamlined sound file organization allows for up to 128 categories and a maximum of 500 sounds to a category folder. Users can store up to 2,000 sounds on an externally accessible SD card. All ICOTec e-callers are equipped with high-performance batteries that routinely get 40 to 60 hours of operating time. The Outlaw+ includes an AD400 adjustable speed predator decoy with two toppers. Retail: \$449.99 www.icotec.com



LAST CHANCE ARCHERY READY BLADE

The Ready Blade from Last Chance Archery is a knife made specifically for archers — a great option for working with bowstring serving material and peep ties when extremely close and controlled cutting is needed. The Ready Blade uses standard razor blades, which can be purchased from any hardware store once the included blades are depleted. It can be used in either left- or right-handed configurations and includes a foam pad to place on the knife body to protect the thumb. The knife body is designed with the bottom half of the handle cut off, exposing the blade, so there's no interference between the blade and what the user is cutting. A magnetized sheath is included for quick and easy access. MSRP: \$22 www.lastchancearchery.com



MILLENNIUM G-450 GROUND BLIND CHAIR

Cloaked in Mossy Oak Bottomland camo, the Millennium G-450 ground blind chair is extremely lightweight at just 7.9 pounds, thanks to its all-aluminum powder-coated frame. It is equipped with an adjustable padded shoulder carry strap and folds up to allow the user to transport the chair comfortably and easily while toting other hunting gear — a go-to for hunting deer, turkeys and waterfowl. The G-450 ground blind chair swivels 360 degrees, and its four-legged design gives it stability, with independently adjustable legs balancing it out and providing a solid base. The G-450 is quiet and easy to set up and features ComfortMAX technology, allowing hunters to sit comfortably all day. MSRP: \$243.99 www.millennium-outdoors.com



Is the CDC a Gun Control Group?

BY BOB ROBB

While I try to shy away from politics in this space, sometimes, like death and taxes, you just can't avoid it. As famous ancient Greek statesman Pericles (495 BC-429 BC) so sagely stated, "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

It's no secret the Biden administration is about as anti-Second Amendment as any our nation has endured, ever. We all get that. But within any administration, one hopes that certain departments remain politically neutral. One such department is the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one of the major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services. Known at its 1946 creation as the Communicable Disease Center, it was created to work on malaria, typhus, and other infectious diseases. Like all governmental agency creations, over the years it grew into a leviathan, with over 15,000 employees and a whopping \$10.675 billion budget for fiscal year 2022/23. You probably know it best for Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky, who appeared on television regularly during the height of the COVID crisis, where its reputation as an independent, science-based group took a real shellacking.

Did you know the CDC has also branched out to immerse itself in the gun-control movement?

I am not sure how the CDC got from malaria, typhus, and even COVID to gun violence, but on their own website, they say "Firearm injuries are a serious public health

problem." As such, they believe it gives them the authority to stick their nose into the gun-control debate. Which, I suppose, if you buy into this premise, would be fine, if they stuck to the data. But as has been the case with COVID, the CDC has proven itself incapable of doing any such thing.

Stephen Gutkowski is one of the nation's preeminent reporters covering the gun beat, founding the subscription-based *The Reload* in 2009. Back on December 15, 2002, in *The Reload* he reported that three gun-control groups apparently have a lot of influence with the CDC. Here Gutkowski reported, "The Center For Disease Control (CDC) deleted a reference to a study it commissioned after a group of gun-control advocates complained it made passing new restrictions more difficult." They did so after these groups — the Gun Violence Archive, GVPedia, and Newtown Action Alliance — lobbied the CDC for several months and had a private meeting between CDC and representatives of these groups to remove references to Professor Gary Kleck's landmark study that shows that annually, guns are used defensively (known as Defensive Gun Use, or DGU) between 60,000 and 2.5 million times in the United States. Kleck is a Professor Emeritus at Florida State University's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. *The Reload* obtained a collection of emails between the CDC and these gun-control advocates that show that introductions from the White House and Sen. Dick Durbin's (D-IL) office assisted the gun controllers in reach-

ing CDC officials so they could make their pitch.

"[T]hat 2.5 million number needs to be killed, buried, dug up, killed again and buried again," Mark Bryant, head of the Gun Violence Archive, emailed CDC officials after their meeting. "It is highly misleading, is used out of context and I honestly believe it has zero value — even as an outlier point in honest DGU discussions ... And while that very small study by Gary Kleck has been debunked repeatedly by everyone from all sides of this issue [even Kleck] it still remains canon by gun rights folks and their supporting politicians and is used as a blunt instrument against gun safety regulations every time there is a state or federal level hearing. Put simply, in the time that study has been published as 'a CDC Study' gun violence prevention policy has ground to a halt, in no small part because of the misinformation that small study provided."

Kleck told *The Reload* that the CDC did not reach out to him for his perspective before deleting references to a study it commissioned that included Kleck's research findings from its website. Arguing that removal of the reference to his estimate was "blatant censorship," he told *The Reload* that "CDC is just aligning itself with the gun-control advocacy groups. It's just saying: 'we are their tool, and we will do their bidding.' And that's not what a government agency should do."

Amy Swearer of the Heritage Foundation, who reports on defensive gun uses and manages their Defensive Gun Usage tracker, tweeted

her dismay with the CDC's decision. "The CDC acknowledged that its website's treatment of the scholarship on defensive gun use was solid and that gun control advocates' complaints were unfounded. It scrubbed the DGU portion anyway, because the agency has no backbone or integrity when it comes to gun violence," Swearer tweeted. In the same thread she tweeted, "Gun Control, Inc., doesn't hide the ball for the CDC. The more Americans find out that almost every major study [well over a dozen] has concluded that between 500,000 and 2.5 million DGUs occur every year, the less apt they are to think more gun control is logical."

Is "gun safety" really a part of the CDC's mission? Is gun use a disease? Of course not. Gun ownership is an inalienable right afforded to us by the U.S. Constitution. And not all medical professionals agree with this type of CDC advocacy. For example, Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership, a nationwide watchdog group of physicians and other health professionals educating their industry and the public about responsible gun use, have long campaigned against the promotion of gun control in the medical profession. On September 9, 2021, DRGO's Dr. Timothy Wheeler and Miguel R. Faria published an op-ed in *The Washington Times* entitled "The CDC's Forever War on Gun Owners," in which they slammed Dr. Walensky for her ramping up the CDC's gun control advocacy.

Should the CDC be such an advocate? Drop me a note at editor@grandviewoutdoors.com. I'd love to hear your thoughts. **HR**



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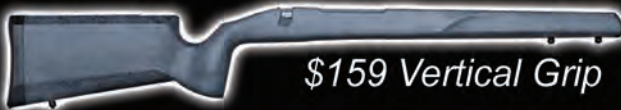
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