

# THE SIXGUNNER

SHOOTING  
ACCURATELY  
IN THE FIELD

IN THE CHAMBER

POWDER COATING CAST BULLETS

NEXT GENERATION OF HUNTERS

A WEEK TO REMEMBER

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF HANDGUN HUNTERS INTERNATIONAL



# THE SIXGUNNER

## FROM THE SIXGUNNER ARCHIVES

With a rich history running from 1979 to 2016, The Sixgunner was the semi-monthly print periodical of Handgun Hunters International. Under the editorial guidance of one of the godfathers of handgun hunting – J.D. Jones – this newsletter collected some of the greatest stories, data and advice available about handgun hunting.

In an effort to preserve these many years of great work, we've begun digitizing old issues to make them available to our community. Don't mind the tilting, crease marks or tears – the information remains and that's what is important!

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PAST ISSUES OF THE  
SIXGUNNER? SCAN THE  
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By Ryan Hoover

Last month, we got the news that Leupold is discontinuing their entire line of handgun scopes. Leupold scopes have long been the gold standard in the handgun hunting world, and it is another product lost that we will miss severely. It's made me face a big truth about our sport that is hard to swallow.

The truth is that our sport is waning. Our numbers are shrinking. I don't believe that the industry would have canceled so many of our beloved products in the past decade if that weren't true. Of the products still being made, it's obvious that they take a back seat to the high-speed gear the shooting world seems to prefer these days.

So what does that mean for us?

Well, because hunting as a whole is declining, it's good news that it's not just us! This means that, at a base

level, we need to be encouraging people to hunt no matter what method they use.

I truly believe that there is a segment of people out there who would latch on to handgun hunting if they were given the opportunity. We are up against two major issues in getting the word out, though. The first is that the majority of the hunting media ignores handgun hunting. We can combat this by continuing to put out handgun hunting related media, and we are doing just that.

The second is the handgun hunting community itself. I've given up on the idea that all handgun hunters will fit in the same exact group. That's OK; it's human nature. Still, all of us have the tendency to get, or at least sound arrogant about subjects we have experience in. This is extremely exacerbated by the damned social media! Go read some of the more contentious posts

and think about what it would be like if you were reading it from the outside. Would you want to get involved"? I hope that we can all publicly support other handgun hunters, even if we disagree with them about some of the details. HHI members are already good at this.

Despite all of this, I remain optimistic. HHI is comprised of fantastic folks who all get along very well. Just compare our forum to the big sites. I know we have the nucleus of a big community growing there. In the field, we are getting out there and busting convention. We challenge ourselves and have the proof to show what works and what doesn't. As more people find out how awesome handgun hunting is (and that we are a welcoming community), more hunters will want to try it. We'll be there to help!



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***Handcrafted by Randy Miller***

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# THE HAND GUN BUCK

By Randy Miller

**T**he 2018 season marked my 12th year on my current deer lease. It's a 1000 acre, low-fence ranch about two hours west of San Antonio, TX in the Junction area. When our group got this lease, it was a very typical hill country ranch with an abundance of deer that looked more like oversized rabbits. It had never been managed for age or genetics, so body size and antler quality were lacking to say the least.

We took this ranch and even though it was a low-fence operation, we committed ourselves to managing it as best as we could. Our approach would be somewhat simple; protein feed year-round, get our doe population inline, and let the bucks age. Once we started to see bucks age and develop antlers to whatever their individual potential would be, we'd then start culling anything with inferior genetics. Knowing full well this would be a long process, we committed to sticking with this plan and let the generations of better genetics build upon themselves.



Fast forward 12 years and essentially two new generations of whitetails, we are finally seeing this strategy pay off. In the first 12 years, we certainly killed a few decent deer, especially when you consider the location of our ranch and the typical stereotype that comes with a hill country lease. Meaning a great buck for our ranch wouldn't even come close to a trophy buck further south. It's all relative.

Twenty eighteen was quite literally a break-out season for us. Again, as stated, we had killed a few decent deer over the years, but this was the first year that all of us consistently saw good, mature bucks through-out the season. The other critter that is clearly proliferating is hogs. It was almost overnight that we went from the very occasional hog sighting, to seeing them on trail-cams every single night. We are doing our best to keep this population in check, but as every Texan knows, once you 'think' you have a hog problem – it's probably too late. A perfect way to sum this up is by saying this; in my first 11 years on this lease I didn't

kill a single hog and very rarely saw one on a trail-cam. During the 2018 season alone, I killed four.

#### **Back to the whitetails.**

One of my lease mates and good friends, David, killed one heckuva buck last year. The buck had 13 scorable points and was without a doubt the best deer ever killed out there. He killed it late in the season with a rifle and that buck now hangs on his wall to forever commemorate the hard-work, patience, and delicious venison that comes with a solid management approach.

So, when 2018 rolled around, you can imagine that his standards were elevated a bit and boy was I glad for it. On the opening weekend, David saw a really nice, mature 11-pointer at one of his blinds. When he relayed the description that night around a campfire, he described the buck as being somewhat narrow with a lot of character. He also said that had he not killed the big 13 the previous season, he would have made an attempt on this one. This story certainly had our attention,

especially since it was opening weekend and like any hunter, our hopes are always high leading into the year.

The very next weekend I would be returning for a three-day hunt at the lease, and as unusual as it sounds, I was on the ranch by myself. It was the second weekend of the season, and I was the only one out of six hunters that was there. I arrived Thursday afternoon, just in time to change clothes, grab my gun and head out to my blind. The weather had turned really cold for this time of year, as we usually don't see these crisp temperatures until later in the season.

My firearm of choice was a recently acquired handgun Smith & Wesson XVR in .460 magnum, with an 8 3.8" barrel. I've been a dedicated handgun hunter for about 18 years now and quite frankly, am consumed by hunting with short barrels. I love the challenge and I love the simplicity of handguns. I've been all over the

***“ I’ve been a dedicated handgun hunter for about 18 years now and quite frankly, am consumed by hunting with short barrels. I love the challenge and I love the simplicity of handguns.”***

board in these 18 years in terms of handgun platforms, calibers, barrel lengths, and iron sights/optics. In all my time, I've discovered that my favorite handguns to hunt with are big-bore straight-walled calibers on a revolver platform. For years I hunted exclusively with a Ruger Super Blackhawk .44 magnum with iron sights and absolutely loved that gun. It was responsible for a plethora of venison and pork that graced our freezer. However, this past year I had an itch to step up in caliber and try something new. That led me to the Smith XVR in .460. I purchased this gun the summer before and shot it every chance I could, spending countless hours at the range. This was a critter killing machine just waiting to be unleashed!

So, back to the hunt. It was Thursday evening, crisp temperatures, with my new handgun that I couldn't wait to take aim with. I was fully planning on taking a healthy doe that weekend but had planned to wait a few hunts just in case I saw something more enticing. Thursday evening closed out with a great hunt having seen a lot of deer, but nothing to pull the trigger on.

Friday morning, I awoke to a coffee pot percolating that very distinct liquid black-gold aroma. After sufficiently caffeinating myself, I headed out for the morning hunt in the pitch black. My stand isn't far from camp, so I opt to walk to and from it every hunt. That walk is something I look forward to every day of hunting season.

Shortly after the sun came up and with several deer and turkey milling about, I caught movement

about 200 yards down my right lane which faces due south. It was a buck for sure, but with the sun just starting to peek over the horizon it was difficult to get a good look at him. It was a quick sighting and then he buried himself back into the thick cedar brush. Typical.

Well, less than 20 minutes later he reappeared down the same lane, this time at about 100 yards in clear view. I quickly maneuvered my binoculars up and had a very nice surprise waiting on the outer edge of my comfort zone with a red-dot topped handgun. The buck looked to be mature, with a narrow rack. Although I couldn't get a good "head-count", I could see this buck had some nice character to his antlers. After studying him enough to realize this was in fact a good, mature buck for our place, the decision was made. I smoothly reached for my handgun and positioned myself for a shot on this buck that was without question, the best deer I'd seen in all my years out there. And there he stood, calm and perfectly broadside almost as if he had read my script this morning. My heart was pounding at the thought of taking this buck with a handgun.

I eased the hammer back and steadied the dot right behind the shoulder, all the while trying to get my breathing under control. The nerves were high, but I felt really good about the rest so I slid my trigger finger down to that familiar cold, curved piece of metal that was begging to be squeezed.

Just as I was getting the perfect grip and finger position, he was gone. Again. My heart sank as

I watched the reason they are called whitetails disappear into the brush, just as cool and calm as he came in. The good news here severely outweighed the letdown. He didn't appear to see or smell me, and he didn't leave as if he was spooked for some reason. And more than that, our 12 years of intense management was clearly paying off.

Well, I was laser focused on this buck now and wanted to spend as much time as I could in the stand, to see if he reappeared. Because we are on a low-fenced ranch, I knew that if he crossed a fence onto a neighboring property he'd for sure end up wearing someone else's tag. So, I snuck out of my blind and walked back to camp for a quick bite to eat, then it was back on stand until dark. I sat in the stand for over 10 hours that day and though I saw quite a few deer, turkey, and other small critters, I never saw him again.

Saturday morning came with high hopes and once again I snuck into the blind. This time I took water and a sandwich with me, as I was prepared to stay until noon if I had to. And I did. And he never showed up. After a quick trip back to camp for more water and food, I was back on stand again till dark. Saturday ended much the same as Friday – 10 hours in the stand with stiff muscles, and no buck. The walk back was much needed to loosen up again and reset my brain. Buck or no buck, I was hunting beautiful country on a crisp weekend.

#### **But I still wanted that deer**

Sunday morning was a repeat of the last two in terms of morning routine to get in the blind. My plan



was to hunt till mid-morning and if he didn't present himself, I had hoped to get a shot on a nice size doe. I wanted to be on the road and headed back home no later than noon. With all that is involved in closing up our camp,

I gave myself a 10:00 am "last call" for taking a shot on an animal. The morning progressed, once again seeing a lot of animals, mostly doe and young bucks.

At about 9:30 I had two deer left, a doe and a yearling spike. By this point in the weekend I had resolved that I probably wasn't going to

see that 11 again, so I raised my handgun and was excited about possibly tagging a delicious doe for the freezer.

Just as I was reaching for my handgun, both deer took off as if they'd been hit with a hotshot. I was trying to figure out what I had done to get them spooked like that when...out...steps...the...buck. This time he was directly in front of me at 65 yards, head down and perfectly broadside. I didn't hesitate and slowly cocked the hammer. The red-dot settled nicely right behind his shoulder as my trigger finger found its home. That

.460 is extremely loud and thank goodness I've never forgotten or neglected hearing protection. From my perspective, the gun made a familiar muffled bark and I immediately saw the buck kick those back legs high in the sky. He made it about 30 yards before succumbing to the .460's hard-hitting, heart-stopping power.

The buck weighed 145 lbs. 'on the hoof' and provided more venison than any other deer I'd killed on this ranch. Delicious venison in the freezer and a beautiful buck hung in my living room. Is there anything better?



*Randy was all smiles after over 24 hours spent in his blind. He took this nice buck 30 minutes before he had to stop hunting and hit the road.*

# A WEEK TO REMEMBER

By Jason Whitehead

I always save at least 1 week of vacation for the first week of Arkansas' modern gun deer season, and this year's opening week was one I'll long remember.

Saturday (opening) morning, I passed on a good buck. He was broadside at 60 yards and I only had a few seconds to make the call to shoot/don't shoot so I passed. Our club's management plan says bucks must meet a 3/5 criteria to be camp legal. I'm confident he would have met the criteria but I wasn't sure he was a mature buck of 5.5+ years or a good 3.5-4.5 with a lot of potential for next year. Shortly after he left, a good sized hog crossed the lane in front of me. He was at a full trot and didn't give me long to look but I knew he was big. I also had a spike followed by a doe with two yearlings wandering around that afternoon but neither the buck nor hog showed back up.

Sunday morning was slow with a few does. The afternoon picked up when a bachelor group of hogs began rooting around in my food plot. Three were sure-enough bred Hampshire hogs (a whole other story) while one was a typical black-as-coal river bottom rooter. They came out at 130 yards but

were headed my way so I let them come. I tried to find one without cajones but they were a bachelor group so I waited for one to at least slow down. A sounder of feral hogs feeding on acorns is not much different than a flock of fall turkey hens doing the same, always on the move and always looking for a threat. When the unlucky Hamp turned broadside I let my Super Redhawk .454 Casull eat. The hog made it about 20 yards into the timber before expiring.



Monday morning started slow. The same doe and her yearlings made an appearance, picking up red oak acorns and going about their daily business. The doe kept a

divided watch between the thicket from where she came and another acorn to consume so I was paying close attention to her hoping for the buck to appear when my phone chimed. A buddy sent a text about something unimportant and of course I answered and pressed send just about the time that a spot of black moved to my left. I looked up to see a big boar moving from my right to left. I gave a short yell and he stopped just long enough to put a 120 grain Barnes TTSX into him from my 15" Encore chambered in .284 Winchester. Why that and not the Casull? Well, the Encore was already pointing that way. The shot was low, no doubt a bit rushed. I knew he was hit hard and lost sight as he'd made it into a dry cypress slough. He was bulldozing best he could, skidding on his chest and pushing with the hind legs. It took two follow up shots from the Casull to take the adrenaline and flight out of him. When I stood over him all I could think was how big he was and how glad I was to have had the Casull as backup.

Tuesday was slow for most of the hunters in our club and I didn't see much. Wednesday through Thursday morning took me in another direction with a couple of

trips to my aunt and uncle's house. Thursday afternoon, I decided to make another afternoon hunt on the same "lucky" stand. At 4:30, a mature doe stopped for a fraction too long at 36 yards and I took her with a heart shot from the .454 Super Redhawk. On the way home Thursday, I got a text from a buddy, Chad, who said he was free to hunt the rest of the week if I were available. We made plans for a Friday-Saturday hunt. After skinning and quartering that doe, it's safe to say I was running on low Thursday night but pushed through and got enough sleep for Chad to show up and enjoy the next two days.

We met Friday morning for a biscuit then drove south to my 6'x6' tower stand located on a hillside of three intersecting pine plantations. It wasn't the hardwood hotspot but this place had enough room for two and a few deer to boot. Friday morning was the slowest day of the week. Fewer shots were heard and other members gave slow reports as well. After lunch (and an hour nap in the truck) we went back to the pines. Chad is very interested in hunting with a handgun but opted for a more secure option in his

suppressed Weatherby Mark V .270 Winchester to secure some meat for the freezer. A lone deer showed up at 230 yards but I wouldn't give the OK being it was as likely a button or spike as a doe. I've met a lot of people in years past who didn't correctly identify their "doe at 200 yards" and then said "doe" turned out to be a 5" spike. I've sworn not to be one of those folks! Once the unknown deer left, a set of twins showed up and Chad took the yearling doe with a well-placed chip shot to the shoulder. Then I had another deer to quarter...a blessing and a curse.

Saturday morning came pretty dad-gum early, if I'm being honest, but we were back in the pines before daylight with Chad again as the primary shooter. At 7:35 he spotted a dark figure making its way toward us through a light fog. I saw it was a hog and gave the go ahead to shoot when he had the chance. Chad had never killed a hog so he was ready faster than a jackrabbit on a date. The boar, nose down in a trail of corn, turned broadside and Chad squeezed off round #2 of the trip, dropping the hog in its

tracks. It was a young boar and a fine specimen at that. No cutters to speak of but Cadillac long!

Sunday wrapped up a long week with a hunt on another club. I was joining my friend, Charles, whose text had nearly made me miss the big boar on Monday. Charles saw some does and chose not to shoot, while I had another sounder of hogs arrive at 4:20pm. This club, like mine, has far too many hogs. Being the good guest I am, I poked a hole into a pig-heavy sow with my Winchester Model 70 .270 Winchester, a rifle my mom had given me for Christmas in 1996. This was the first time I've carried a rifle hunting in years and the first animal I've taken with one short of a few dozen squirrels. And I do miss shooting a fine rifle.

I've had other memorable opening weeks but it's been a while since anything as interesting as the week I'm writing about! I am truly blessed to have the hunting opportunities and friends that I do, not to mention a very understanding wife who aids and abets my hobbies.



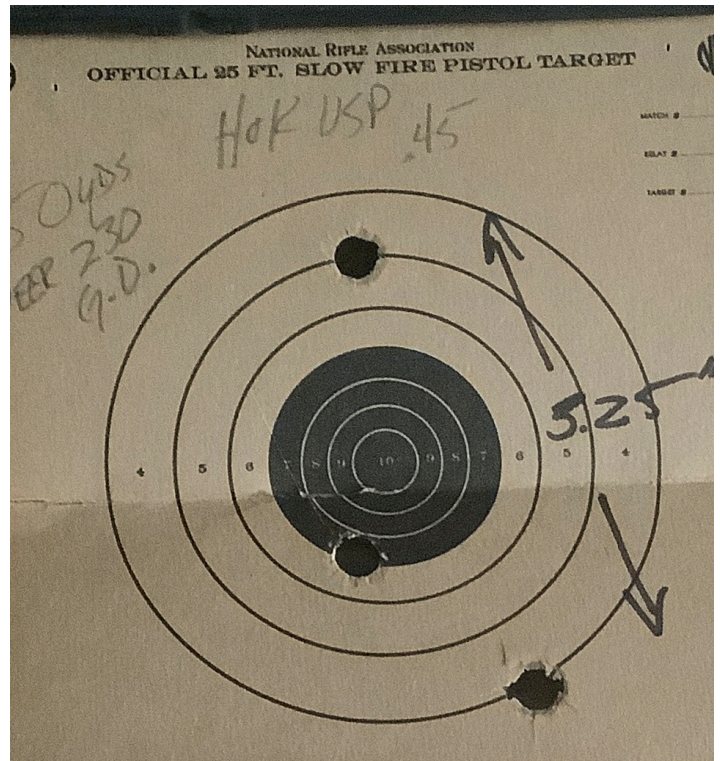
*Saturday morning, the author's friend took his first-ever pig. (He's working on the handgun part!)*

# SHOOTING ACCURATELY IN THE FIELD

By Trapper Swanson

The off season is the perfect time to brush up and work on your shooting fundamentals. We can all use more practice but we need to do it from field positions, not the bench. One of my favorite ways of working on my field position shooting is while handgun prairie dogging or walking the pastures and looking for jack rabbits.

Since many struggle to obtain acceptable and consistent accuracy for hunting with a handgun, I decided to share some of the tips and methods I've learned and used over the course of my teaching and shooting career. First and foremost, DO NOT over gun yourself. Accuracy is more important than power, and bullet placement is more important than bullet size. Since most of us will start shooting at medium sized game, deer, pronghorn, and pigs, a 357 magnum or 45 ACP is an adequate starting point. Consistency is the key to getting any kind of accuracy from a firearm. Grip tension, trigger press, sight alignment, follow through, shooting position, and gun position all play a vital part of accuracy. The basic fundamentals of trigger press and sight alignment, I'm going to assume you already know. I'll deal with grip tension, gun position, and shooting position.



*Iron sights from a HK USP 45ACP at 50 yards produced excellent 3.25" field accuracy. A 25-year-old STI Eagle still produces excellent field accuracy for medium game.*



*Gun supported by bag, arms supported by pads, torso erect and relaxed or leaning forward.*

I said CONSISTENCY was key to accuracy, once you've decided what gun you'll be using, grip tension should become consistent with that gun and load. Grip tension should always be the same no matter the gun, it should only be "enough". You need to discover how much enough is, you only need enough to keep the gun in your hand when it recoils. Enough for me varies considerably depending on which gun/caliber combination I'm shooting. My XP100 in 7mm-08 and my Ruger 357 maximum require minimal grip tension. Upon firing they simply come back into my grip slightly, the barrel raises up and then flops back down. However when I shoot a 454 Casull or 500 Linebaugh, my grip tension is about half of maxed out. This is just to keep the gun in my hand upon firing, and achieve the most accuracy I can. I need to remember which gun I'm currently using so that grip tension remains as close to what is needed as possible. The more grip tension you use the harder it is to get a nice clean trigger break, so use only enough. If you choose to use a muzzle brake on your handgun then grip tension can be reduced as recoil and gun flip is reduced. Whatever amount of grip tension you develop that gives you confidence in your gun control as well as provides you with good accuracy is right. No one can tell you how much or how little is right, you determine what works for you.

When I speak of gun position, I'm referring to how and where you rest the gun when you shoot. When I shot practical pistol competitions the guns really don't recoil much so if a rest was needed I could simply press

my shooting grip into a tree, barricade, wall, or the ground and press the trigger. Do that with a heavier recoiling hunting handgun and you could be taught a lesson to not do it again. There are proponents of resting the grip bottom on something, resting the gun frame on something, shooting off of a bipod, some will rest their arms or wrists, some even resting the barrel on something. Experiment with each and decide which you prefer. Remember you need to be able to replicate it in the field in order to be consistent.



*The 1911 recoils softly with no ill effects from this placement. The Ruger is likely to leave skin and blood attached to bark upon firing.*

My method is one that works for me, and I've been able to keep consistent for almost all of my hunting use. It is easy to replicate on the range, hunting from a stand of some sort, or stalking about and relying on shooting sticks, remember consistency!! I rest the frame on something, either my pack, or shooting bag, or shooting sticks. Something that is firm but not hard and with some give or flexibility to it. I use that method 99% of the time, I have on occasion needed to shoot off of tall shooting sticks like the kind a rifle shooter would use in Africa. When I use them I will be resting my wrists and the gun will be unsupported. I know the gun will recoil differently because of this, and I will need to adjust my grip tension to keep the gun in my hand.

Using the frame supported method I am able to consistently make shots beyond 150 yards with optics, or 75-85 yards when using iron sights, and traditional handguns. When using my XP100, I am steady enough for shots beyond 300 yards. Since the



*Resting the gun in the bush is a field expedient for the frame supported position.*

XP doesn't really have a frame to rest, the gunstock is simply rested like a rifle. Using the same method to shoot on the range, as when hunting allows me to know that the accuracy I'm capable of on the range is equal while hunting. Provided that I'm just as relaxed, stable, and calm as I am while practicing.

I carry a small shooting bag in my pack that I use as my gun contact support. This allows use of a log or tree limb, or a hard edge to support the gun but still give a soft and firm cushion for the gun to rest on for firing. The bag varies from a small 4"x6" wedge bag to a 8"x8" bag that is 4" thick, depending on conditions and gun. I've also used a 6" square piece of foam sleeping mat that is 3/4" thick. The foam is great for pack hunts as it takes up very little room and weighs nothing.



*various bags and pads used while improvising a solid field shooting position*

When using my shooting sticks for sitting or kneeling, there is a piece of paracord wrap that the frame rests on. This support works well regardless

of which gun is used. An extra piece of paracord is held by my support hand and it keeps the shooting sticks from falling once recoil lifts the gun from the sticks. If I'm shooting off of my pack, no extra bag is used; just rest off the pack and hold steady. I do use either a piece of leather or heavy canvas to protect the pack from blast and flash from the cylinder gap of the revolver. One or two shots can damage a good pack severely, so a 6"x10" piece of leather or canvas is used.

The last part of being accurate is you having a stable



*Frame resting on paracord effectively simulates frame resting on pack or bags.*

shooting position. In reality this should be your first concern. Because if you are not comfortable you will not be stable for long and not hold steady for an accurate shot. Forcing your body into an uncomfortable position will cause muscle fatigue which leads to oxygen deprivation which causes muscle tremors and vision issues. Typically the closer we get our torso to the ground the steadier we will become. This is why standing is our least steady position and prone is our most steady. A true prone position, however, is seldom a practical position in a hunting situation; grass or brush make it almost worthless - almost!!!

Kneeling can be useful, but our knees can be used for better accuracy enhancing purposes than digging into the ground and supporting our body. Sitting, especially in conjunction with shooting sticks or shooting off of one's pack is probably my most used shooting position. Sitting can also be from a chair or stool and using a window ledge or shooting sticks for support. When I use a sitting position I always try to use my pack or my knees to support my arms.



*Sitting on small folding stool, arms supported by pack, handgun frame resting on paracord and extra loop being held by fingers to maintain control of sticks during recoil. Relaxed, comfortable, and capable of accuracy to the limit of the gun.*

Giving the elbows some support allows for a much steadier position and allows for much more precision. Whether using your knees or pack depends on what the rest of your position looks like. If I'm placing my butt on the ground then I can use my knees for elbow support and rest the gun on my pack. I can also rest my back up against my pack, rest my elbows off my knees and shoot off of sticks. If I'm sitting on a stool or in a chair, then my elbows can be supported off my pack which will be in my lap, and the gun on some other support.



*Elbows resting on knees and gun supported by pack and bag, leather protective piece for cylinder gap flash. A seemingly effective position, except body leaning rearward held only by abdominal muscles is a poor position worth improving. Either lean back against something or pull butt back and lean forward.*

It doesn't matter what configuration you utilize, the more stable contact you can gain, the less stress you place on your body and the more precise your shooting can be. Consistent shooting will result from being as comfortable as you can be while you're shooting. When you give support to your body, you use less muscle tension to maintain a stable platform. So, your body uses less oxygen and you stay in a more relaxed state.



*Sitting, leaning forward slightly, pack in lap supporting arms, gun on sticks, a hasty and stable shooting position*

When I must shoot from standing, my first choice is standing supported. My last choice is offhand. If I'm hunting an area with little to no chance of being able to get in a solid sitting position, then I will carry my tall sticks. I have fired my hunting revolvers from this position and practice from it routinely enough to know I can consistently hit a 6"x8" plate out to 100 yards. It is not nearly as stable as I would prefer, but it is adequate and if a shot presents itself I am confident I can make it. Practicing with your gear and chosen method in the field will bring confidence in your ability.

When presented with a shot at an animal that requires a lot of precision, I get into a stable position, as comfortable as I can. Utilizing any and all support to my body so I use little muscle tension. Then I place the gun in a stable shooting position so I can hold the gun on the animal where I want the bullet to land. This accomplished, I apply my necessary grip and the basic shooting fundamentals: breathing, sight alignment, trigger press. Practice all of these things so that you are able to accomplish them quickly and efficiently. If I'm trying to be quick and I'm already calm and



*If no suitable field rest is available and the target is*

relaxed, I want to be able to get in position and break a shot in less than a minute. If I'm not stable and can't hold on the spot where I want the bullet to land, then improving the position, breathing and calming down take precedence. If the animal is moving around a lot, I wait for it to settle down.

I had a shot at a feral hog once where I had a good solid position and could easily hold on the animal. It, however, would not settle down. There were 8-10 others competing for the food that was set out. I cocked and lowered the hammer on my revolver 5 or 6 times before actually getting to fire. Each time I would take aim, start to apply pressure to the trigger, it would either move or another hog would get in front or behind it. I would lower the hammer and wait for it to clear the others, this all happened in about 5-10 minutes. All the while my position was comfortable so I was able to maintain it easily. Being comfortable,

there were no muscle tremors from straining to maintain position, no blurry vision from inadequate breathing. When the opportunity to make the shot presented itself I was able to confidently make it.

Hopefully some of my suggestions will help you become better handgun shooters. It takes consistent practice, patience, and a calmness that comes with experience. We owe it to the animals to provide as swift and humane a death as we can, so accuracy must be at the forefront.



*The one time when a prone position in the field was actually possible for the author. Resting his XP on a pack and elbows on the ground, an effective shot was delivered beyond 300 yards.*

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# Our Next Generation of Hunters

**By Mike Mendes**

I was excited last year when my son, Mike, told me he wanted to get into hunting again. He was exposed to my excursions his whole life, and hunted a lot as a kid living at home. The outdoor lifestyle suited him well, and he now has the ability to plan and organize hunts, travel and vacation, all while making a great living.

Plans were made last year for our father/son elk hunt. He would be using a 300 Win Mag rifle on this hunt, but I'll work on him getting back into handguns. I was using my FA83, in 41 Mag, with 260 grain cup point, hard cast bullets. This FA stacks these bullets in one hole, and is incredibly accurate and consistent with my load.

It turned out that our plans worked perfectly. Even the late

October weather cooperated. However, the cuts and draws in the area made for some challenging spotting, and clearings for open shots had to be planned in advance as lots of deer and any Elk just crossed over to get to the deep draws of cover.

Mike had never shot off a tripod, but really liked the stability of a long range standing rest. With deer all over, we had to limit movement so as not to spook anything into running. We did lots of glassing, attempting to catch them heading to a clear shooting lane. It paid off! Late the first morning a heavy beamed 6x7 followed two females across a hillside. My son was up first, and I heard the thump of the bullet strike. He made a perfect heart shot. The bull barely dipped

his head, showing no other sign of the shot and as he cycled another round, I whispered, "perfect shot" as we could see him waver and fall. I think I was more excited than him!

After that exciting morning, I was up with my 41 Mag. I cast a "cup point" bullet, a very light HP, mostly a solid, that this gun shoots extremely well. With my standard accuracy load with 2400 powder, I felt confident. The cold clear weather was perfect, the sun was bright in the southern sky, and a cool breeze blowing a light chill. As if on cue, we spotted a small group of elk in the trees on the down side of a draw. There was a nice little 6x6 in the group that I had my eye on. Using the shooting tripod that I have used so many times, I had



*Mike shot his bull at 138 yards with his Freedom Arms M83 in 41 Mag.*



*The author's recovered .41 bullet next to an unfired version. The bullet is a cast and powder coated 260 gr cup point.*



*A couple of nice sets of antlers make the perfect memento of this father/son hunt!*

a rock solid rest. I found an eight-foot opening between the trees and waited. As he stepped out, a whistle stopped him and I started my trigger pull. Exhale, squeeze, boom!

I estimated him at 150 yards, so I held about 3-4" above the heart. Which is exactly where the point-of-impact was. Zero drop. ( I later measured the shot at 138 yards.) It was a full-pass-through, low double-lung hit. He went down quickly, but leaned on the side of the hill on his way down so I added a finisher through both shoulders to make sure he was anchored.

I later found the second bullet. After blowing both shoulders, it lodged under the off side hide, probably held there by the mountain side he was leaning against. The tip was smeared, but it held 95% of its weight.

We were able to get a cable and strap and pull him up. It wasn't long before he was loaded, cleaned, and cooling 40 miles away - hanging in my buddy's shop just before dark. What a fantastic day for my son's first Elk hunt!

We had two more days of boning, cutting, etc, and filled both of our freezers back home. There is no greater joy than hunting with your kids. Going through equipment choices, planning out the travel and hunt, attempting to get everything arranged in a certain time frame, and the successful outcome of a memory of a lifetime.

On the long drive home, through howling winds and sideways blowing rain, we started discussing future hunts...



# POWDER COATING CAST BULLETS

By Randy Barnett

Powder coating cast bullets has been the latest rage in recent years, with manufacturers now offering coated bullets for sale. The advantages of coated cast bullets over traditional lubed bullets are many. Equipment cost are lower, especially for startup. Traditional lubed bullets require a bullet sizing press with specific sizing dies. The press is designed to hold a tube or stick of bullet lube with a heater that will heat the lube to allow it to flow easier. The sizing dies are designed to apply the lube through ports in the dies to the bullet to fill the lube groove. These presses are costly as are the sizing dies especially when a different die is required for each diameter. Powder coated bullets can be sized with LEE sizing dies which can be picked up for around \$20 each. These dies can also seat gas checks if needed (more on gas checks later) and they fit in a standard reloading press. Coated bullets don't produce the smoke upon firing that is common with traditionally lubed bullets. Powder coated bullets can be pushed to maximum velocities

with no leading. Because of this, most of the molds I purchase now are of a plain base design. Eliminating the gas check lowers the overall cost and eliminates a step in the process.

If you already cast your own bullets, getting into powder coating only requires a few items and the cost is not significant. You will need the powder paint of course, a small toaster oven, plastic bowls, a small screen or tray to use in the oven, and bullet sizing dies that you should own if you're already a caster.

Choosing the correct powder is

the hardest part of the process. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to trial over thirty different colors of powder from various manufacturers. In my trials it became apparent that the color of the powder is the determining factor in how well the paint adheres to the bullet. In manufacturing, the powder paint is applied by an electrostatic spray gun. The part being painted is grounded and the spray gun emits the powder paint with a negative charge. This causes the paint to adhere to the part with the excess powder being reclaimed during the process. You can purchase a powder paint spray





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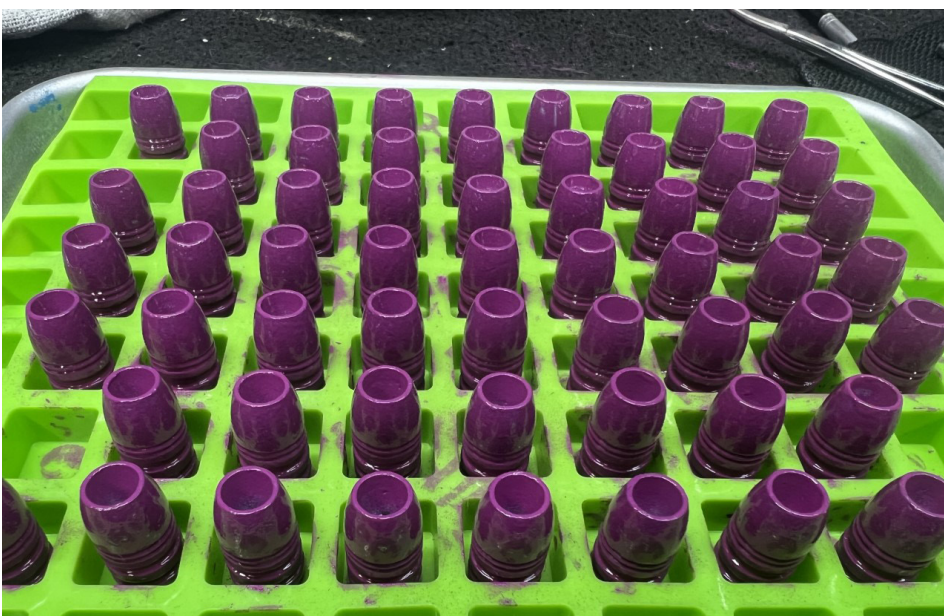
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gun system, but you have to deal with having some way of catching the overspray of the powder. Most of these systems start at \$400. This will increase the cost of the overall process and negate the cost advantage of powder coating your bullets. If you decide to go this route, you will have the advantage of using any color of paint you want. With the dry tumble method you are limited on colors, but will still have many options to choose from.

In my trials, the colors blue, green, gray, purple, and clear have been the easiest to work with. White, yellow, red, gold, and black did not stick to the bullets very well. I did have an orange that covered bullets decently. It appears that the pigment that determines the color is the factor that determines how much static is generated during the coating process. I believe this is one reason some people try powder coating

then give up because of bad results. The most convenient place to buy powder paint is Harbor Freight. They only offer white and black and I have never achieved good results with these colors regardless of the manufacturer. That being said, solid complete coverage is not required to produce bullets that will shoot well. During my trials any bullets that turned out bad were simply returned to my furnace and remelted. One day I loaded some of these bullets and shot them side by side with ones with complete coverage. There was no difference in accuracy, but my OCD tendencies want bullets that look good!

I have found that Eastwood Powders is one of the best brands to use. At one time these were only available directly from Eastwood, and required a minimum of several pounds on the order. Now you can purchase Eastwood powder on Amazon in one pound containers. There are people selling powder on various gun forums and eBay



as well. Purchasing the Eastwood brand off Amazon is the easiest route. The best Eastwood colors I have used are Ford Light Blue, Kawasaki Green and Clear.

You will need a toaster oven to bake your bullets in. Do not, I repeat do not bake your bullets in your kitchen oven! The powder paint releases fumes and you never want to cook food in any oven that has been used for powder paint. A cheap toaster oven can be picked up at your local Walmart for \$20.

You will need ¼” hardware cloth from your local Lowes or Home Depot. It is a metal screen and comes in a roll.

You will need some type of plastic container to tumble the bullets in. Almost any plastic bowl can be used, but you want to look on the bottom of the bowl for a triangle with the number 5 in it. This tells you what type of plastic the bowl is made from. Number 5 indicates polypropylene and the bowls I use are empty Cool Whip bowls.



Now let's get everything set up. Determine what size tray your toaster oven can accept. Let's say

an 8” square tray will fit inside your oven. Cut a 10” by 10” square from the hardware cloth. Cut a 2” square from each of the corners. Now bend each of the four sides up to make a basket. A couple pieces of wire on each corner will keep these secure. Now is also a good time to check the temperature of your oven. Standard powder paint curing calls for 400° at 15 minutes. Most toaster oven temperature settings are wrong. Get a decent oven thermometer and check your toaster oven over a variety of ranges. To achieve 400° on my oven I have to set the dial to 350°.

Get your clean and dry plastic bowl and add a handful of bullets. I usually add enough to cover the bottom of the bowl, trial and error will determine how many bullets to do at one time. I don't do anything special to the bullets before powder coating. I store them in plastic containers after casting and I just grab some and add to the bowl. Add about a tablespoon of the powder paint to the bowl. A little extra won't hurt anything as everything is reclaimed. Some people opt to keep a couple of tablespoons of Airsoft BB's in their powder paint bowls claiming it enhances the amount of static produced during tumbling. I usually keep some in mine if nothing else to help keep the powder moving. Put the lid on tight and give the bowl a good swirl for about a minute. I don't shake the bowl, I move it in a circular motion causing the bullets to spin in the bowl like they were in a washing machine. If you do this correctly, it will look like you're trying to Hula-Hoop!

A variation of this is setting the bowl on top of a vibratory tumbler. This worked for me, but it takes longer to coat the bullets and you have to watch the bowl to keep it from falling off. After about a minute of swirling, raise the lid and take a look. A good quality powder will usually give complete coverage after about a minute. Now, atmospheric conditions have a huge effect on powder coating. More static is produced in a low humidity, low temperature environment. For this reason I try to get all my bullets coated during the winter months after hunting season is over. That being said, I have also coated in August when both the temperature and humidity were excessive. It just takes a little longer swirling with high humidity.



After you're satisfied with your coverage, lay the wire basket on top of a piece of newspaper. Dump the entire contents of your bowl into the basket (using this technique doesn't work well with the Airsoft BB's as they won't fit through the mesh of the basket). Pick up the wire basket and give it a couple of good hard shakes. You are trying to remove the excess powder from the bullets but don't worry because you can't shake the coating from the bullet. Once you are satisfied,

place the basket in the 400° preheated oven and set the timer for 15 minutes. Don't worry if some of the bullets are touching each other as they can be easily separated after curing with no issues. Pick up the sheet of newspaper and gently transfer the excess powder back into your bowl to use next time. This is one of the big advantages of powder coating - not much goes to waste.

When the timer goes off, remove the bullets from the oven. At this point you have two options, let the bullets air cure or you can water quench them. If I'm working with regular hardcast bullets I immediately water quench them, if they are hollow point bullets I allow them to air cure. Water quenching will increase the hardness while air curing yields a softer bullet. Once the bullets have reached ambient temperature they are ready to be sized. This can be done immediately or at a later time. I sometimes keep a large quantity of coated bullets and size them when needed.

After curing, I use a LEE size die to size the bullets. If the bullet is a gas check design, I install the gas check at this point as well. I have sized and installed the gas check before coating with no ill effects. If you choose this method you will still need to size after coating as the powder paint adds about .002" to the bullet diameter.

I have recently switched from using the wire baskets for curing and use silicon ice cube trays. This requires

removing the bullets individually from the baskets after knocking off the excess powder with a pair of fine point tweezers and placing each in their own cavity in the tray. Using the ice cube trays isn't necessary, it's just my preference.

If you already cast your own bullets give powder coating a try. Initial investment to get started is around \$50. There's a good chance you will never go back to traditional lube.



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# WHAT A YEAR!

By: Larry “The Hitman” Rogers

Twenty twenty-three was one crazy year for me. It started really bad, because I had to get a new knee. I asked my patients how theirs went, and they all said “piece of cake”. They lied! I had nonstop, severe pain for 6 weeks. I stopped eating, lost 30 lbs in 6 weeks, and only slept 15-30 minutes a few times a night. I thought my hunting career was over! Fortunately, I picked a local therapist that had the drive of Atilla the Hun. She pushed me hard. It was necessary. By March 1st, I was walking a mile in 15 minutes and saw some light in my life. During this time I turned officially ANCIENT in age. That and a new

knee had me worried. I was ready to try my seasonal hunts.

Most people think there are 4 seasons in each year. Not for me. Let me explain.

Groundhog season normally takes place from March 1st through May 31st. I was shooting well, and

I have some honey holes I save for myself. By mid April I was much like my old self. The .223 Contender and SSK .22-250 XP were performing well. Next up was rock chuck season. I’ve taken so many groundhogs in WV that I’ve started invading Southern Idaho each year. Since rock chucks and groundhogs are about identical I include them in my yearly totals now. My grand total reached a new pinnacle in Idaho. The overall total as of now is 15,674 - all handguns, of course.

I’ve hunted 4-8 days for the past 5 years in Idaho. That separate total for chucks taken there is 1615.

This year’s total of ‘hogs and chucks was only fair...for an old guy. Idaho had a week of -35\*





temps in the spring before I went. I think a lot of chucks got excessively cold. I used to take my 6mmAI Encore and SSK .250 Sav. AI XP, but now it's 100% .223 T/C and .22-.250 XP-R with 40 gr. Boattails (BT's). At first I was worried about the ID wind, but found I didn't need the heavier calibers. The 40s have done quite well out to 400 yards. Also, I shot a badger running with the XP-R at 120 yards.

Summer deer season. Oh, I like this time! Farmers know me and keep me busy all summer. Due to my new knee and an old, not quite normal knee, I didn't want to walk a lot to retrieve deer. All my handguns will kill deer, but many calibers are not 100% in dropping deer. However, here is one gun/caliber/bullet that stands above the rest in this aspect- my SSK .375/284 XP-100 with 260 gr. Nosler Accubonds (AB's). It took 43 deer this summer. One ran 5 yards. The others dropped. Most of these shots were over 250 yards. Several were 350-360 yards - DRT! It actually out performed old 260 gr. BTs. Go, figure! Other large calibers were used: A 325 WSM (Bullets: 200 AB, 180 BT), 338 JDJ Mag (Bullets: Horn. 200 FP, Nos. 200 BST), as well as a 6.5/.284 and .300 Whisper. None of these were as good as the .375.

By the way, despite my new knee I cleaned these deer by myself ( it took me 7 ½ minutes each) and donated all the meat to older or needy people. I also reached a new deer pinnacle this year.

After deer permits ran out I had a few weeks before the next season, the fall groundhog season. Hey, I can't sit still - I got 2 with my bow.

For my handgun, I used only my SSK .22-250 with 50 gr. BTs. I'm trying to shoot all my 50's up since the 40's do fine in my .22 handguns, and I found a big supply of 40's.

In West Virginia, if you're under 15, or ancient and beyond, you can hunt a 2 day season with the whipper-snappers without dogs. I have a good friend with a massive farm and massive corn crop that bears just love. He's not fond of bears. I set up a blind 150-200 yards from where the bears come to the corn from a large mountain. They usually came to the corn at 6:30-7 PM. I read magazines and look out every few paragraphs.

One day, at 4:10 pm, I see there's a BIG bear coming OUT of the corn! Range- 156 yards. I took the shot with my .375/284 XP shooting a 260 gr. AB (what else!). Corn stalks fall over. I walk up and a big blood trail is apparent. I pulled out my "bear defense gun," an FA .475 Linebaugh stoked with 385 gr. powder coated cast HP's, and followed the 25 yard trail to a very big, very dead bear. He's so huge I can't move it for pics! I estimate he was between 275-300 pounds. I couldn't find anyone to help clean it. It took 2 hours, 45 minutes and, in the 85 degree heat, 2 gallons of sweat. I was bone tired, but a very happy old guy. Oh, and that's 7 bears in the last 12 years on this farm. It obviously has a special place in my heart.

A few weeks later I could go again with the youngins for the youth doe season. It's a two day season, and you can take two does. I took the first at 156 yards with the SSK .250 Sav. AI shooting a 110 gr. ELD-X. (Note: I didn't like these

bullets in my 6.5/.284. Too soft, too fragile, very poor penetration on angled shots.) I did this doe behind the shoulders, double lungs. She walked 10 yards and dropped. Total penetration! There was 3" of internal damage. It's a super accurate bullet, but I need to do a double shoulder before it gets my seal of approval. Guess I can use this gun/round when I'm even more ancient due to its minimal recoil.

The second deer for that short season was taken with my 308 HS Precision pistol, loaded with a 150 gr. AB. The shot was taken at 325 yards, with the doe quartering to me. I hit the left shoulder, and the bullet exited behind the right shoulder. Hit one lung but went behind the other. She ran 75 yards. Accubonds usually need to hit both shoulder blades to get the best effects. There was a 3/4" exit with 1 1/2" of internal damage.

Next up was turkey season. I'd seen a group of 6 gobblers on my farm several times during bow season, so I dedicated several days each week to hunt them when gun season came in. Enough of this bow crap. I also decided to give my turkey gun (FA .454 Casull, Speer 260 gr. Mag HP, 30 kills) a rest. It had been a while since I'd used a .44 on turkeys.

My two Colt Anacondas burned in my house fire. I got another a few years ago, but had only shot groundhogs with it. It shoots a lot of bullets really well, but not close together. It did put 240 gr. Sierra JHCs and 240 gr. Win. HPs right together at 100 yards.

I called many days on my farm

with no luck. Finally, in the third week of the season, here come the 6 gobblers up from my neighbor's farm. I was on the ground against a tree fully camoed. Ryan sent me the prototype HHI field rest, but I couldn't use it since I didn't know what direction they were coming from. The first in line had a very long beard, but was walking too fast. Number two was big bodied, but had a tiny beard. He hesitated. I didn't. High shoulder/wing shot with the 240 JHC, 1 flutter, DOA at 59 yards! Double wing butt hit with a 1 1/2" hole. The 15 lbs jake suffered no meat damage. That'll give the ol' .454 a rest for a while.



Buck season! This is what everybody in WV waits for. For me, it's just another season. I'd seen 4s, 6's, two 8s and lots of spikes on my farm. First day didn't look so good. Saw 1 doe and 2 fawns in the morning. At 4:00 pm, does started coming into my big field (400 yards long). I saw 17 does and fawns, but no bucks! Then HE walks out. He had 10 points, but was not gigantic. He was feeding along with the does, no sign of rut. I wanted to give my big guns a rest and do something with a challenge with my FA 454 Casull.

I'd gotten some Win. 250 gr. Platinum Tip hollow points on Gunbroker. Never saw them on any other site. I took a groundhog this spring with one, offhand at 56 yards. They were massively destructive. Research seemed to say

they were the old Black Talons with a color change.

I let the buck (and me!) calm down and separate from the does. Range was 137 yards, a poke for sure. I turned the Burris Elite scope up to 6X. At the shot, he jumped and ran 30 yards and went down. The hit was a low double shoulder. The heart was shredded. A 1" exit with 4" of internal damage. Not bad.



The next week and a half were bad. Bad weather - rain, snow, high winds - then a little sickness with GI upset. Didn't see many deer. Finally, the next to last day of season a fair 6-point came out of the woods at 129 yards. I was still in .454 mode. Hold a little high. He dropped at the shot. Double shoulder. A 1" exit with 3" internal damage in lungs and shoulders. The Platinum Tip is pretty good, but doesn't shoot the same POA as my other bullets.

The regular doe season is a season for everyone, young, middle, old. Actually, buck season coincides with doe season. I'd seen almost no does for the last 8 or 9 days. I was due to get surgery on my shooting wrist in a week or so. My trigger finger was getting itchy, even after the 6 point. A fawn came out in my big field. It kept looking back in the

woods. Finally, a big doe came out at 249 yards. I shot her with 6.5/284 XP, 120 Nosler Ballistic Tip. She was DOA. It was a high shoulder hit with 2 1/2" internal damage and a 3/4" exit.

A few days later was a doe only season. I went back to my bear farm. There's one field I set up on where I've been 100% successful for does for 20+ years. I decided to use the HS .308 again, but with a 150 gr. Nosler BST. A big doe dropped at 229 yards with a double shoulder hit. The exit was only 1", but internal damage was 2 1/2".

My surgery was in a few days, but there was one more doe season in 3 weeks, but I didn't know if I'd be ready for it. Maybe I could shoot the low-recoiling 250 Savage? I'm not the doc on that decision. The surgeon said OK to shooting 2 weeks after surgery. Got skunked the first 3 days of the 4 day season. Went to my farm the last day and ten minutes before dark a big doe came out at 173 yards. I waited for a double shoulder shot. Finally, I put a 110 gr. ELD-X from my .250 AI in the shoulder. She ran 75 yards!! The bullet only penetrated one shoulder, but did mess up the lungs pretty good. That ends my experimentation of ELDXs on deer. It's a good groundhog bullet. My .250 deer bullets will be ABs, Xs, and solid bases.

In any event, this was one unbelievable year for a guy my age; 448 groundhogs, a badger, big bear, 59 yd. revolver turkey, 8 point & 6 point revolver bucks, plus a ton of does for a total of 70 deer this year.

I'm already looking forward to next year, but, boy, what a year 2023 was!!