

...308 Winchester

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How can that be when so many new cartridges have arrived in recent years that deliver superior ballistic performance? Ammo makers say there are several reasons for this. In addition to being a very versatile round for hunters pursuing deer, elk and other big game, the .308 is still a favorite for target shooters and it's very popular for use in semi-automatic rifles for hog hunting and personal protection to some extent. It has for decades been the one of the most widely used sniper cartridges by militaries and law enforcement, and while other cartridges have made inroads into that market, the .308 Win. arguably remains the world's most popular short-action rifle cartridge with a bullet diameter larger than 223. Those who predicted the demise of the .308 weren't just premature. They were wrong.

It's Accurate

The .308 Win. long ago earned a reputation for delivering good accuracy in the field and at the target range. Of all the rifles chambered in .308 Winchester that I've tested this year, most could print their best 3-shot group at a half-inch or better with ammo they liked. OLStaff Writer Tyler Freel did a massive test on both budget and mid-priced hunting rifles this year and shot 217 groups with 15 different loads through a variety of rifles in .308. With 5-shot groups, the most accurate hunting rifles averaged between 1.1-inch and 1.3-inch groups. Mind you, that was with hunting ammo and hunting rifles. Match-grade ammo fired in match-grade rifles can do better.

Although several other cartridges are favored for some forms of competitive shooting, the .308 Win. is still used in PALMA shooting, and it's one of two choices allowed in F-TR class matches. According to some sources, it was the 308 Win. that reportedly caused the NRA at one time to reduce the size of targets used in some competitions to reduce the number of ties.

It's Versatile

You'll hard-pressed to find many other factory cartridges loaded with as many different bullet weights and styles as the .308 Winchester. Current listed offerings, with bullets in the 110-grain to 185-grain range, demonstrate that there's a .308 load to suit every preference and accomplish most any task. Current loads from Federal Ammunition include three different Gold Medal target rounds and 13 different loads in the Federal Premium line using bullets such as the Trophy Bonded Tip, Berger Hybrid, Nosler Partition, Terminal Ascent, Barnes TSX, Swift Scirocco II, Trophy Copper, Nosler Ballistic Tip, and Nosler AccuBond. There are, in addition, three varmint and predator loads using light bullets

as well as an American Eagle FMJ load, four Fusion loads, two Non-Typical Whitetail loads and three affordable Power-Shok loads.

Winchester makes no fewer than 18 different .308 loads, including a new 150-grain Copper Impact round along with others in the PDX1 Defender, Ballistic Silvertip, Power Max, Super X, Deer Season XP, Match, Expedition Long Range, and white box FMJ lines. Winchester's lineup notably includes some subsonic loads.

Hornady lists 15 different .308 Win loads using 125-grain to 168-grain bullets, including four new loads employing Hornady's new CXand ECX copper bullets. Black Hills Ammunition offers a dozen different hunting and match .308 loads in the Black Hills Gold line using everything from 125-grain Hornady CX to 178-grain Hornady ELD-X bullets. Nosler makes more than a dozen .308 loads, including some topped with a couple of the best hunting bullets ever made, the Nosler Partition and

Nosler AccuBond.

Handloaders know that the .308 Winchester is not difficult to load for, and there's a wide array of available bullet weights and styles.

It's Plenty Potent

The .308 Win. is more than adequate for most North American game at normal hunting distances. It's a dandy deer cartridge. It's routinely used to take elk and moose, and it's hard to imagine a more perfect all-purpose black bear cartridge. It's surprisingly popular in parts of Europe. In Africa, the .308 Winchester has long been used by hunters to take every species of antelope, up to and including eland. (Freel used a .308 and Norma 180-grain Bondstrike ammo with great success on his 2019 plains game hunt in South Africa). In 7.62X51 NATO form, it has even been used by poachers to kill elephants.

The .308 Win. does have its limitations. It's not as fast recent hotrods like the 28 Noslerand it's not as powerful as big

boomers like the .338 Win. Mag. Its bullets don't have as high of a ballistic coefficients as those of the new, trendier cartridges. But most hunters need not worry about any of that. At 400 yards a .308 Terminal Ascent bullet (175 grains) is still delivering 1,503 foot pounds of energy, which is plenty for North American game. And that is, of course, more energy than the 6.5 Creedmoor bullet (130 grains) delivers at the same distance.

You Can Find Ammo

There are few places in the world where ammunition is sold where you can't find .308 Winchester. That can't be said of many other cartridges. The 308 Win./7.62X51 NATO is a long-established, global standard. Even at the peak of the recent ammunition shortage, when the most popular hunting cartridges were all but impossible to find, it was easier to find .308 than other popular rounds like the 6.5 Creedmoor. I suspect that was partly because there was simply so much of it in circulation, in so many different loadings, before

the shortage arrived in full force. For a while, things got so bad that even the .308 Win. disappeared in some areas, but it was one of the first popular hunting cartridges to rebound and trickle back onto retailers' shelves. I've recently found .308 Win. ammo at every significant retailer I've visited. This is not the case for some hunting loads, like the .300 Win. Mag.

Everyone Chambers for it

Virtually every major rifle manufacturer makes bolt-action guns in .308 Winchester. They do so for one simple reason: the rifles sell. In the affordable rifle category popular choices include the Ruger American, Mossberg Patriot, Winchester XPR, Savage Axis, Franchi Momentum, Mauser M18, Thompson Center Compass II, CZ 457, and others.

There are good mid-priced rifles, like the Weatherby Vanguard and a number of Howa models, plus some of the more affordable Bergara models, as well as the Kimber Hunter, Tikka T3X, and Savage 110.

You'll find no shortage of more

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