

## HANDLOADING

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# THE .30-30 WINCHESTER

Sometimes we forget how well our old-timey cartridges work.

**T**he first question about handloading the .30-30 Winchester is why anyone would bother. Factory .30-30 ammunition is very affordable, widely available, and works fine on deer (and even larger game) despite “cheap” bullets, due to the modest velocity. While .30-30’s can be very accurate, many are used with the factory open sights so sub-inch groups are uncommon, though I’ve yet to encounter one that didn’t shoot inside minute-of-deer. Iron-sighted .30-30’s tend to remain sighted-in for years—even decades—so there’s no reason to burn a box of ammo every year while attempting to rezero a cheap scope. So why not just buy ammo at Wally World?

I’m kidding, of course. Handloaders handload because they must and, like most hobbies, practicality has nothing to do with it, whether in saving time or money.

Many hunters think of the .30-30 as an Eastern deer cartridge, because the wide-open West “requires” scoped rifles chambered for longer-range cartridges. But when I started big-game hunting in Montana as a skinny junior-high student in the late 1960’s, lever-action .30-30’s were very common, and the only one I recall with a scope was the Glenfield lever-action carbine my father purchased after I started hunting. (“Glenfield” was a Montgomery Ward trade name for items made for them by other companies, in this instance a Marlin 336.)

He’d hunted as a kid while growing up on a homestead in central Montana, but quit after going away to college—until I started becoming interested. The local “Monkey Ward” store was only three blocks from our house, and back then they sold actual firearms, ammunition and other shooting



John used his father’s .30-30 to take his first deer 50 years ago.



One of the great virtues of the .30-30 is relatively mild recoil (above). Even with modern advances such as the Hornady Flex-Tip (below) bullet making spitzers safe for use in tube magazines, the .30-30 still isn’t a long-range round.



stuff. My father’s eyesight wasn’t great, so he also bought a Japanese 4X scope (not named Glenfield but something suggesting astronomy), plus two boxes of store-brand ammo. He was a good shot, thanks to growing up in a subsistence-hunting family and grown-up plinking with .22 rimfires, and that fall killed a deer on opening day.

I did not, partly because of the clumsy “safety” on my Mosin-Nagant military rifle, purchased with paper-route money and sporterized with a hacksaw. Toward the end of the season my father loaned me the Glenfield, and the day before Thanksgiving I took a big mule deer doe with one round of Monkey Wards factory ammo.

Since then I’ve owned, handloaded for and hunted with several other .30-30’s, including a Marlin 36 (not 336) rifle with a 24-inch barrel, a pair of Savage 99’s, and an ancient outside-hammer drilling imported by the original Charles Daly firm. But I’d never owned the quintessential .30-30, a Model 94 Winchester, despite owning other 94’s, including an octagon-barreled .25-35 made in 1898, and .32 Special and .38-55 carbines.

This began to seem like a gross dereliction of duty, so I started looking around. It finally happened at Whittaker Guns in Kentucky, a store that would

satisfy the “needs” of almost any avid shooter. Whittaker has several long aisles of double-stack racks filled with used long guns, among them an older Winchester lever-action in .30-30 in very good condition.

It wasn't a 94 but a Model 64, a version of the 94 with a pistol-grip stock, 24-inch barrel, and “half-length” magazine (actually about 2/3 the length of the barrel). Like all earlier Winchesters the barrel was marked “.30 WCF,” the original cartridge name.

My credit-card was already twitching but almost leaped out of my wallet when I took the rifle off the rack, finding it had an all-steel Lyman 56 receiver sight, with the insert still screwed into the aperture. Since using the Glenfield, all my .30-30's have had iron sights, and even 50 years later my eyes still aim pretty well with a peep.

Back home I checked my collection of .30-30 brass, finding a minimal, eclectic and grungy collection. I knew new brass wouldn't be found in any local store so searched the Internet, and the best deal turned out to be Nosler cases for a very good price at Graf & Sons. (Nosler's website didn't show these, though it did list .30-30 ammo, loaded with their two roundnose bullets designed for tube-magazine rifles, the 150-grain Ballistic Tip and 170-grain Partition. After ordering a bag of 100 cases, I emailed Zack Waterman, Nosler's writer contact, and Zack said the Graf brass was from an overrun for orders of factory ammo.)

My handloading notes didn't show a very wide range of .30-30 handloads. Instead I'd just worked up a load for each rifle passing through, in recent years mostly using 170-grain Nosler Partitions, in case an elk wandered by or I had to defend myself from a grizzly—though thousands of elk and quite a few grizzlies have been killed with ordinary .30-30 bullets during the 120-odd years since the cartridge appeared.

As a result, after searching all available loading data, I threw everything plus the kitchen sink through the 64. Most of the range-testing was done at 50 rather than 100 yards, because at 100 the front sight was a little too large for the 7-inch paper plates I normally use for testing rifles with traditional beads. Afterward, however, I shot a few groups at 100, confirming they'd average twice the size of 50-yard groups.

Overall the rifle shot very well, not surprising considering the perfect bore and the high quality of “pre-war” Winchester rifles. (The serial number indicates it was made just before World War II.) According to my Timney gauge, on average the trigger breaks cleanly at exactly 5 pounds. This might seem like too much to a 21st-century shooter, but the trigger breaks so cleanly it doesn't feel anywhere near that heavy, and certainly didn't hinder the shooting. (Interestingly, my Marlin 36 had a very similar trigger pull.)

The only slight glitch in the loads occurred with the Missouri Bullet Company 165-grain cast bullets. The printing

### .30-30 HANDLOADED AMMO PERFORMANCE

BULLET (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	POWDER (BRAND)	CHARGE (GRAINS WEIGHT)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)
Speer 100 Plinker	Reloder 7	35.0	3,006	1.30
Speer 100 Plinker	VV N130	32.0	2,725	1.96
Prvi Partizan 110 RN	Reloder 7	34.0	2,909	1.24
Sierra 125 FNHP	CFE223	35.5	2,358	1.26
Sierra 125 FNHP	LT-32	35.0	2,725	1.10
Hornady RN 150	IMR4895	32.0	2,157	1.16
Hornady RN 150	LeverEvolution	38.5	2,455	2.15
Hornady RN 150	TAC	33.0	2,358	1.59
Hornady FTX 160	LeverEvolution	37.0	2,466	1.40
Missouri 165 Cast FN	Red Dot	6.5	1,311	1.26
Missouri 165 Cast FN	IMR3031	23.0	1,642	1.56
Missouri 165 Cast FN	IMR3031	27.0	1,995	10.50
Nosler 170 Part. RN	Varget	32.5	2,202	1.26
Speer 170 FN	LeverEvolution	36.0	2,397	1.31
Speer 170 FN	Norma 201	32.0	2,305	1.07
Speer 170 FN	Acc. 2015	28.5	2,113	1.46

NOTES: Groups the product of 3 shots at 50 yards. CCI 200 primers used in Nosler brass.

on the box states, “Brinell 18, optimized for .30-30 lever guns.” Two loads shooting very well were a reduced load of Red Dot powder, and a starting load of 23.0 grains of IMR3031, which averaged about the same as jacketed loads. But somewhere between the 1,642 fps of the starting load and the 1,995 fps of the maximum 27.0 grains of IMR3031 listed in my Lyman *Cast Bullet Handbook*, the velocity apparently became too much. That's OK, because a 165 flatnose at 1,600+ fps is faster than the similar black-powder loads many deer hunters used successfully in the .32-40 and .32 Special.

The original jacketed factory load of the .30-30 WCF used a 160-grain roundnosed bullet at a listed muzzle velocity of 1,960 fps, considered pretty hot stuff in the 1890's. Today's powders and bullets have upped performance considerably, but the .30-30 still isn't a super-zapper. Even with 160-grain Hornady FTX spitzers at nearly 2,500 fps, when sighted-in 2 inches high at 100 yards the bullets land 6 or 7 inches low at 200.

That's OK, because a lever-action .30-30 still performs the same tasks the rifle and cartridge were designed for in the 1890's: easy carrying, light recoil and sufficient power for most big game at moderate ranges. Which is why the .30-30 remains one of North America's most popular hunting cartridges, even in the 21st century.

*Half of John Barsness's dozen books are on firearms and shooting. His latest is The Hunter's Guide to Handloading Smokeless Rifle Cartridges, published in the fall of 2015 by Deep Creek Press. It's available through [www.riflesan-rectipes.com](http://www.riflesan-rectipes.com), P.O. Box 579, Townsend, MT 59644-0579, (406) 521-0273.*