

# Remington's "Big Seven," the world's most popular magnum. 7mm

## Remington Magnum

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Photos courtesy of Author

So far in this column I've been fortunate to write about cartridges that are not only popular, but that I particularly like. Unfortunately no one can like all cartridges equally, so I'll say up front that the 7mm Remington Magnum is not among my personal favorites. It is not possible for any rifleman to have equal or even extensive experience with a wide array of cartridges. So, since the 7mm Remington Magnum isn't one of my darlings, it would stand to reason that I haven't used it very much, and thus have no business writing about it.

Uh, that part simply isn't true. Sometimes rifles choose us, not the other way around. I've owned and used a variety of 7mm Remington Magnum rifles since 1979. Despite the chambering, a couple of them have been among my all-time favorite rifles, based on accuracy and handling qualities. I have used the cartridge on all six continents, and it has accounted for sheep, goat, pronghorn, whitetail, mule deer, Coues' deer, blacktail, caribou, black bear, and much more. I have not used it for moose, although I certainly would. I have not used it for big bears and would prefer not to. I prefer a .30-caliber or larger for elk, so it wasn't until 2011 that I finally took a wapiti with the 7mm Remington Magnum. It worked just fine. And I can say that in an aggregate of game animals into the hundreds, the 7mm Remington Magnum has never let me down.

So what do I have against it? I'm more of a .30-caliber guy if I want power, and I'm more of a .270 guy if I want flat-shooting capabilities. Although campfire cartridge arguments are lots of fun, it's important to point out that there is just .007-inch difference in bullet diameter between the .270's .277-inch bullet and the 7mm's .284-inch bullet. So Jack O'Connor

**BELOW:** Remington's 50-year commemorative of their Model 700 (1962-2012) was a "retro" design chambered to, naturally, the 7mm Remington Magnum. After a few shots, this rifle settled right down and produced sub-one-inch groups with both Hornady and Winchester factory ammo. This is the kind of accuracy I expect from a 7mm Remington Magnum.



7mm Remington Short Action Ultra Mag.  
 .280 Remington  
 7mm Remington Magnum  
 7mm Weatherby Magnum  
 7mm Shooting Times Westerner  
 7mm Remington Ultra Mag.

was mostly right when he said that the 7mm wouldn't do much of anything that his .270 wouldn't do. There is a .024-inch difference between the 7mm and the .30-caliber's .308-inch bullet, and I have always believed that, especially on larger game, that's enough difference in frontal area to make a difference in impact.

Not everyone agrees. To paraphrase Mark Twain, that's a difference in opinion that makes for a horse race. In fact, a lot of people don't agree! Introduced in 1962 in Remington's new Model 700 bolt-action rifle, the 7mm Remington Magnum has been one of Remington's most successful cartridges, almost an iconic choice for Western big game and all-around use. It blew the then-popular .264 Winchester Magnum almost off the market and went on to become the world's most popular belted magnum, followed by the .300 Winchester Magnum. It is more versatile than the .264, but develops considerably less recoil than the .300s. It shoots about as flat as the .270 Winchester and is considerably flatter than the great old .30-06. But remember that I said Jack O'Connor was "mostly right" in his assessment of the 7mm Remington Magnum? It does offer the advantage of considerably heavier bullets, with plenty of choices available from 160 to 175 grains. So it must also be judged to be more versatile than the .270, although perhaps not as versatile as a fast .30-caliber, but easier to manage.

Through the 1950s Warren Page touted the benefits of a fast 7mm and must be given the majority of the credit for the cartridge's development. As the long-time shooting editor of *Field and Stream*, Page was O'Connor's peer, and I suppose you could say, chief competitor. O'Connor extolled the virtues of the .270 for decades, while the fast 7mm was Page's baby. The great old 7x57 Mauser has had some following in the U.S. since the 1890s. It's a wonderfully effective and mild-mannered little cartridge, its efficiency greatly aided by the traditionally heavy-for-caliber 7mm bullets. Page theorized that a faster 7mm based on a larger case would be a whole lot better, and he wildcatted fast 7mms on a variety of different cases.

He certainly wasn't wrong—but it's also fair to say that the concept wasn't new. In fact, "magnum 7mms" existed before 1920. Two good ones were the .275 H&H Magnum and the .280 Ross. The .275 H&H was actually very similar to Remington's cartridge while the .280 Ross was an unbelted magnum

much ahead of its time. Both probably failed because the bullets of the day weren't up to the velocity levels they produced. Fast-forward to 1944: The 7mm Weatherby Magnum, also quite similar in case dimensions to Remington's cartridge, was one of Roy Weatherby's earliest cartridge developments.

In the postwar years, American wildcatters Phil Sharpe and Richard F. Hart developed the 7x61 Sharpe & Hart. It has a bit shorter case (2.394 inches, as opposed to the 7mm Remington Magnum's 2.5-inch case and Weatherby's 2.545-inch case), but all three are based on the belted .300 H&H case shortened, necked down, and blown out, so the 7x61 is a very capable cartridge. In 1953 Norma offered factory ammo and Danish Schultz & Larsen 7x61 rifles were imported into the U.S. The cartridge might actually have had a future, but the 1962 introduction of the faster 7mm Remington Magnum just about finished it—and relegated the 7mm Weatherby Magnum to perpetual obscurity.

The 7mm Remington Magnum stood as the world standard "fast 7mm" for nearly 30 years. The recent rash of new magnums has confused its market somewhat. The two "short, fat" 7mms, the 7mm Winchester Short Magnum (WSM) and 7mm Remington Short Action Ultra Mag (RSAUM) develop similar performance with lighter bullets, but are not as versatile. Neither has become popular. The 7mm Shooting Times Westerner (STW) and 7mm Remington Ultra Mag (RUM) are longer cartridges with greater powder capacity. They are demonstrably faster and have some following, but both are over bore capacity, which makes them a bit finicky and limited in acceptable propellant powders.

I don't think any of these new cartridges have diluted the 7mm Remington's appeal, but there are signs that it is not as wildly popular today as it was just a few years ago. For instance, when Kimber introduced the standard-length version of their bolt-action sporter, the 7mm Remington Magnum was, astonishingly, not among its chamberings: Their dealer network didn't want it! In 1993 I did a survey of North American guides and outfitters for my book *American Hunting Rifles*, asking about personal choices and recommendations of cartridges for various types of game. In most categories the 7mm Remington Magnum was clearly at the top of the heap. Last year, in 2012, I did a similar survey for the revised

version, *AHR II*. In this survey, recommendations for the 7mm Remington Magnum were most notable for their absence!

So, for unknown reasons, the 7mm Remington Magnum might be slipping a bit in popularity—but it remains a very fine choice for virtually all North American big game short of our biggest bears. It is perhaps at its best as a classic choice for mule deer and mountain game, but it remains as it was in 1962: A versatile and effective cartridge. Common factory loadings range from 120 to 175 grains in a wide array of bullet choices, and the selection of bullets for handloaders is second only to the .30-caliber.

Although the 175-grain heavyweight load is faster and flatter-shooting than the .30-06's 180-grain load, for my purposes I always preferred bullets from 150 to 165 grains. These take full advantage of the 7mm's typically high sectional density and ballistic coefficient, and depending on who does the loading, this entire weight range is capable of velocities running one side or the other of 3,000 feet per second. Personal favorites have long included Hornady's 154 and 162-grain bullets; Nosler's 160-grain Partition; and Sierra's 165-grain spitzer boat-tail. Faster yet—and probably most popular, since we American riflemen love velocity—is the 140-grain bullet. With the great modern bullets we have today, this is plenty of weight for deer-sized game and probably the flattest shooting over normal game ranges.

Over the years I've had dozens of 7mm Remington Magnum rifles on the range. Accuracy tends to range from good to magnificent, and although there's a bit of luck involved in this, I have never seen a 7mm Remington Magnum rifle that was a problem with accuracy. The gun isn't my cup of tea for game the size of elk and larger, but there is truly nothing in North America that cannot be taken with a 7mm Remington Magnum and an appropriate bullet. Whether its popularity is fading or not, and whether I particularly adore it or not, it remains an awesome North American hunting cartridge, especially for our Western big game. ■

There's no secret that I prefer larger calibers for elk, so it wasn't until 2011 that I took a wapiti with the 7mm Remington Magnum. Of course it worked just fine, as thousands of elk hunters have known since 1962.

