

.308 WINCHESTER:

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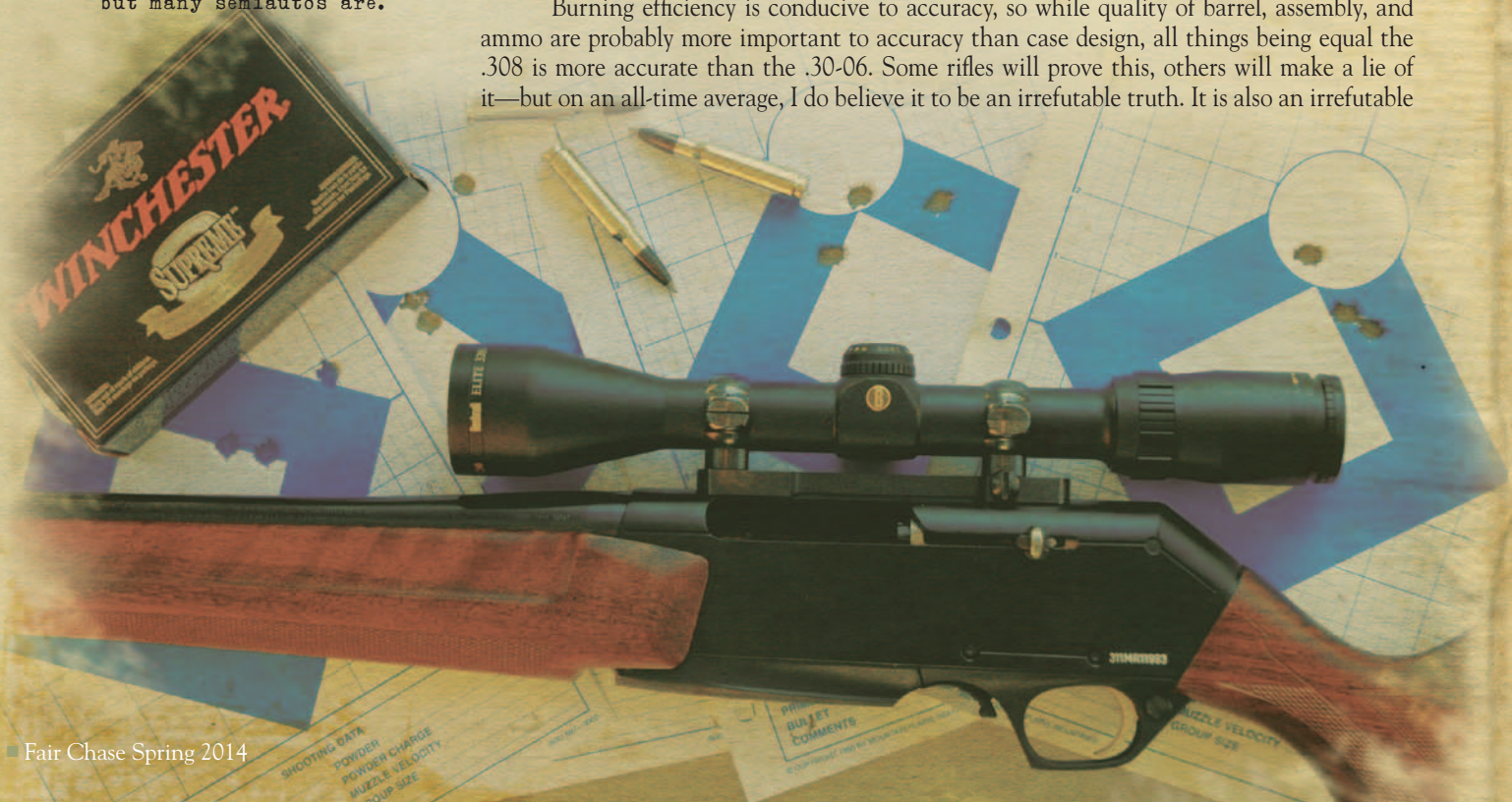
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In this business of choosing (and writing about) hunting cartridges, it is almost impossible to be impartial. We all have our favorites, and none of us can either use or love all cartridges equally. So I will say right up front that I personally prefer the .30-06 to the .308 Winchester. This is partly based on familiarity: I've used the .30-06 a great deal more. It is also based partly on practicality: I am mostly a bolt-action guy, and I'm left-handed. The majority of (the relatively few) left-hand bolt actions are .30-06 length, so one might as well use a cartridge that fills the action! Also speaking practically, the .30-06 is faster and carries more energy.

However, an increasing number of hunters prefer the .308. They aren't wrong. In terms of velocity and resultant energy, the .308 is about 96 percent of the .30-06. This is not damning with faint praise when it's understood that, at 2.015 inches the .308 case is nearly half an inch (.479-inch) shorter than the 2.494-inch .30-06 case. That's roughly a 20 percent reduction in case length (meaning ammo bulk and weight) for only a 4 percent reduction in performance. So it's obvious that the .308 does what it does while burning less powder. Cases that are shorter and wider are more efficient, and the .308 is more efficient than the .30-06.

Burning efficiency is conducive to accuracy, so while quality of barrel, assembly, and ammo are probably more important to accuracy than case design, all things being equal the .308 is more accurate than the .30-06. Some rifles will prove this, others will make a lie of it—but on an all-time average, I do believe it to be an irrefutable truth. It is also an irrefutable

The Browning BAR is one of few semiautos ever made in left-hand action. This BAR in .308 wasn't a tackdriver, but many semiautos are.





LEFT: A great Columbia blacktail, taken with a Winchester Model 88 in .308 Winchester. The .308 is a marvelous cartridge for modern lever-actions with box-magazine feed. **MIDDLE:** Nevadan Jim Jurad used Boddington's father's old Model 70 Featherweight to take this Kansas whitetail. This is just about the only rifle Bud Boddington ever hunted with, and it served him well from pronghorn to moose. **RIGHT:** I used a Turnbull TAR10 to take a Kansas whitetail in 2012. The "AR" action is extremely popular today, and for big game hunting the .308 chambering offers by far the most versatility.

truth that the .308 produces less recoil than the .30-06. This would be the case even if the velocities were equal, because the formula for deriving foot-pounds of recoil includes the weight of the powder charge along with the bullet (together called the ejecta).

From the hunter's perspective, it's really pretty simple: The .308 will do everything the .30-06 will do. Period. Aside from, possibly in some rifles a bit more accuracy, the primary advantage is that the .308 fits into more compact actions and also fits into more types of actions. Semiautos that will handle .30-06-length cartridges are rare, but there are plenty of .308-length semiautos. Lever actions the same—great old-timers like the Savage Model 99 and the Winchester Model 88 in .308 Winchester are incredibly versatile platforms. Short-action bolt guns designed for the .308-length case are lighter and handier, and because of its inherent efficiency, it does somewhat better in shorter barrels than longer cartridges.

Introduced by Winchester in 1952, the .308 is very simply based on a shortened .30-06 case. The primary intention was to create a shorter military cartridge that would be more easily housed in semi- and fully-automatic military arms. This came to pass in 1955 when we adopted the M14. Today the cartridge is not as common in infantry rifles as the 5.56mm, but it remains a world standard machine gun cartridge. The military designation is 7.62x51mm NATO, which is absolutely and completely interchangeable with the .308.

Over the years as new and better propellants have been developed, .308 velocities have been gradually upgraded. This is even truer of the .30-06, since it's been around nearly a half-century longer,

but the gap between the two is very narrow. Today "standard velocities" for the .308 are 2,820 feet per second (fps) for a 150-grain bullet; 2,700 fps for a 165-grain bullet; and 2,620 fps for a 180-grain bullet. Standard velocities for the .30-06 are: 150-grain, 2,910 fps; 165-grain, 2,800 fps; 180-grain, 2,700 fps. Loads from some companies are faster, while others are slower. The gap remains about the same across the board—80 to 90 fps in these standard weights. Eventually case capacity tells, so the .30-06 starts to pull away with heavier bullets. But realistically, our hunting bullets are so good today that there is limited utility for bullets much over 180 grains for anything likely to be hunted with a .30 caliber.

Although I have never become a staunch .308 fan, it's just about the only cartridge my dad ever used, and I still have his Model 70 Featherweight. He used it to hunt pronghorn, mule deer, whitetail, elk, black bear, moose, and so forth! The cartridge probably doesn't shoot flat enough to be ideal for mountain game or pronghorn, but the same can be said of the .30-06. Likewise, it's very marginal for our biggest bears. But there isn't much in North America that you can't do with a .308 Winchester. It's a great deer cartridge, plenty adequate for elk and black bear, just fine for moose. And a whole lot more.

Like the .30-06, it is actually aided by relatively mild velocity. Bullet performance can be expected to be consistent and routinely outstanding, and it doesn't need the more expensive super-premium bullets to strut its stuff. As a hunting cartridge, it probably isn't quite as popular as the .30-06, but as a shooting cartridge—thanks to the current popularity of semiautomatics—it has become

one of our top-selling cartridges. My greatest regret in the rifle world is that lever actions like the Savage 99 and Winchester 88 are no longer available; they are perfect platforms for the .308. But Browning's BLR in that chambering is a slick, handy, and versatile package, and these days a lot of people are hunting with .308s on the AR-10 and similar modern sporting platforms. I've done it myself, and why not? With the .308 it doesn't really matter what action or model one chooses. The cartridge will get the job done! ■

LEFT: .308 Winchester
RIGHT: .30-06 Springfield
The .30-06 is not only the .308's parent case; it is also the cartridge that the .308 is best compared against. Despite its much shorter case, the .308 offers about 96 percent the performance of the '06.

