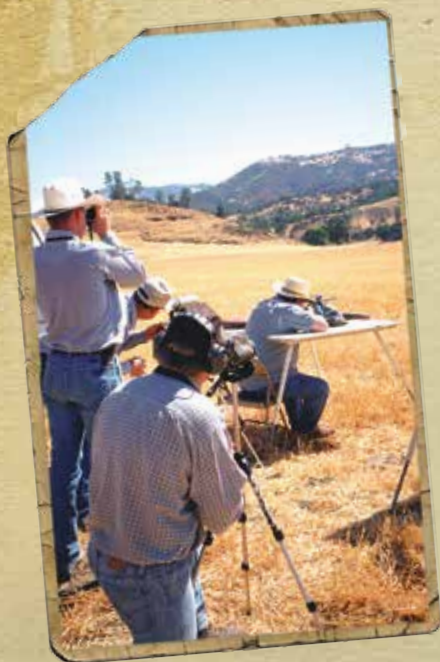


Our most popular
 .25-Caliber

.25-06

REMINGTON

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 Photos courtesy of Author



ABOVE: The .25-06 is the largest and most powerful cartridge generally considered as a crossover for both varmints and big game. In open country it bucks wind far better than any .22, but for extended shooting sessions for critters like prairie dogs, it has more recoil than most shooters want.

RIGHT: Left to right: .257 Roberts, .25-06, .25 WSSM, .257 Weatherby Magnum. The .25-06 is considerably faster than the .257 Roberts, though not nearly as fast as the .257 Weatherby. The short-lived .25 WSSM was similar to the .25-06 in performance. Among the .25-caliber cartridges only the .25-06 seems to have achieved lasting popularity.



What do the .22-250 Remington, the .35 Whelen and the .25-06 have in common? They were all once wildcat cartridges that Remington has picked up over the years and moved into their line. A wildcat cartridge is a non-standard round created by a hand loader, usually by altering the dimensions of an existing case such as increasing or decreasing neck diameter, changing shoulder angle, or removing body taper. Wildcats are not offered by major manufacturers. There are literally thousands of wildcats out there. Some are “one-of”—a personal and sometimes whimsical statement by its designer; others achieve considerable popularity, especially considering that factory-loaded cartridges are not available. Of course, if a wildcat appears to have lasting popularity, it isn't unusual for a major manufacturer to legitimize it as a production cartridge. Although Remington has introduced many cartridges designed by their own engineers, they also have a track record of picking up successful wildcats.

First developed by A.O. Niedner back in 1920, the .25-06 was an often-seen wildcat up until 1969, when Remington introduced it as the .25-06 Remington. To be clear, putting its name on it should not be construed as Remington taking credit for someone else's design. One of the problems with many wildcats is there are often multiple versions with slightly different case dimensions. Factory cartridges are run through a certification process with the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Institute (SAAMI) so dimensions are standardized; the .25-06 Remington

is thus one unique cartridge with a set of specific dimensions.

The .25-06 is created by necking the .30-06 case down from (nominally) .30 caliber to .25 caliber, maintaining the same gentle 17-½-degree shoulder angle. Actual bullet diameter is .257-inch, a uniquely American bullet diameter with its roots at the end of the blackpowder era. The rimmed .25-35 Winchester Center Fire (WCF) was introduced in 1895 along with the .30-30, and was a popular chambering in lever actions and single shots. The Charles Newton-designed .250 Savage (or .250-3000), introduced in 1915, was the first commercial cartridge to break the 3,000 feet-per-second (fps) barrier. It wasn't long before wildcatters started necking down larger cases to .25-caliber, thus gaining more

powder capacity and increasing velocity. The .25-06 was clearly one such development, but so was the .257 Roberts, wildcatted by Ned Roberts by necking the 7x57 Mauser case down to accept the .257-inch bullet. Interestingly, Remington introduced the .257 Roberts in 1934, but another 35 years would pass before the .25-06 became a standard factory cartridge.

Both the .250 Savage and .257 Roberts are still loaded, although neither is currently chambered in production rifles. Roy Weatherby designed his .257 Weatherby Magnum in 1944. He often stated that it was his personal favorite among the cartridges he designed, and although it remains an important Weatherby proprietary, it has never achieved widespread popularity. Much more recently, in 2006, Winchester introduced the .25 Winchester Super Short Magnum (WSSM), but it has already been discontinued. The total universe of .25-caliber cartridges is thus very small, but without question the .25-06 is the most popular of them all.

And while it may be the most popular, the .25-06 is not the fastest; that honor goes to the .257 Weatherby Magnum. The .25-06, however, is very fast and very flat-shooting. Because of its popularity, all major manufacturers offer it, with factory loads exceeding two dozen choices. These range from a Federal 85-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip load at a sizzling 3,550 fps on up to a Remington 120-grain Pointed Soft Point Core-Lokt load at a credible 2,990 fps. While the .25-06 is probably most generally used for pronghorn and open-country deer, it is probably the largest and most powerful cartridge used as a crossover round for both varminting and big game. Bullets below 100 grains in weight are generally considered varmint bullets, while 100 grains and heavier are usually intended for big game.

Although some hunters use the 6 mms for game up to the size of elk, the .25 caliber is the smallest that should be considered for elk-sized game—and that's pushing it. The .25-06 is at its very best for small to medium-sized deer, and because of its flat trajectory, it's not a bad choice for sheep and goat. Slightly flatter-shooting and definitely more powerful than the .243, yet still reasonably light in recoil, there was a time when I considered it the perfect choice for pronghorn. I still think it's a very good choice for pronghorn, but I'm no longer convinced it's the best there is. Here's why: In the windy West some serious prairie dog shooters love the .25-06 because .25-caliber varmint bullets tend to resist wind far better than .22-caliber varmint-weight bullets. However, this trend continues on up the caliber scale and can be

seen in careful study of wind-drift tables. While we certainly don't need cannons to hunt pronghorns, .25-caliber bullets simply don't hold up in the wind as well as 6.5mm (.264-inch) and .270-caliber bullets. Pronghorn and prairie dog country are often the same—and the wind blows more often than not. I have actually seen conditions out on the open prairie where hitting with .25s became very difficult, while a .270 held up much better.

Although its popularity and lasting impact is unquestionable, the .25-06 seems especially popular in certain areas and not as popular in others. Along the Great Plains a lot of hunters rely on it for coyotes and deer—and occasionally take elk with it, which it can surely handle with heavier bullets. Perhaps its greatest bastion, however, is among Texas deer hunters. There it's one of the most popular cartridges, almost surely seen in any Lone Star deer camp.

Regional cartridge popularity usually develops for good reasons, so let's examine that. Texas deer range from smallish to medium in body size, but rarely huge—perfect for the .25-06! Much deer hunting there is done in brushy country, with deer stands looking down endless cut lines (or senderos) where it is almost impossible to judge distance, so when a big buck steps out, there may not be time to use a rangefinder. This places a premium on a flat-shooting cartridge, and because there's usually ground cover, extreme wind conditions aren't common—again, perfect for the .25-06!

Take an aerodynamic 115- or 117-grain .257 bullet and push it to about 3,100 fps velocity—available in factory loads and easily achievable with handloads. Sight in just 1.5 inches high at 100 yards, and you will be dead-on at 200 yards and just 6 inches low at 300 yards. Then don't worry about that long sendero, just shoot your buck! ■



TOP: Hunter Ross and I with a nice pronghorn, one of my favorite game animals. There was a time when I thought the .25-06 to be perfect for pronghorn. Today I'm not so certain because the .25 caliber doesn't hold up in wind as well as larger bullet diameters.

MIDDLE: This West Texas mule deer was standing on top of a rimrock at an uncertain distance when the .25-06 struck like lightning. Medium-sized deer plus uncertain ranges equals a perfect situation for the .25-06!

BOTTOM: The late gunwriter Gary Sitton with a fine Texas whitetail taken with his .25-06. In Texas, the .25-06 is one of the most popular of all deer cartridges, and it is indeed ideal for deer hunting under Texas conditions.