

# Under-rated Superstar

# .280

# Remington:

BY CRAIG BODDINGTON

B&C Professional Member

Photos courtesy of Author

The .280 Remington is considerably faster and more versatile than the two other common "non-magnum 7mm" cartridges. In actuality it is very, very close to the 7mm Remington Magnum in performance.



7mm-08  
Remington

7x57  
Mauser

.280  
Remington

The 7mm bullet diameter, .284-inch, is the only metric that has achieved great popularity in the United States. The 7mm Remington Magnum has been the world's most popular belted magnum. It seems to be slipping a bit, perhaps because we now have several 7mms that are even faster. The mild, efficient, and accurate 7mm-08 Remington has a solid fan base, and the ancient 7x57 Mauser retains a small but dedicated following. However, one of our very best and most versatile 7mm cartridges, the .280 Remington, is often overlooked.

This is partly a matter of history—and partly a really weird mistake in marketing. The .280 is based on the .30-06 case necked down, but with a slightly shorter neck than the .270 Winchester so it cannot be mistakenly chambered in a .270 Winchester rifle. It was introduced in 1957, not necessarily as Remington's answer to the long-established .270, but primarily to offer ".270-like" performance in Remington's slide-action and semiautomatic rifle. It was also offered in the bolt-action Model 721, but this was almost an afterthought. With semiauto and slide-action performance, the primary goal of these factory loads were kept fairly mild—not for safety, but to ensure reliable functioning in these actions (which have less camming power for extraction than bolt actions). We Americans love our velocity, so the .280 rolled along for the next 20 years but never approached the popularity of either the .270 or .30-06.

In 1979 Remington decided a facelift was in order, and sales could be enhanced by modernizing the loads and giving the cartridge a new name. Initially they decided on 7mm-06, and although I've never seen a factory cartridge so marked, the occasional rifle with that rollmark is seen. This was confusing, and it got much worse a short time later when the cartridge was officially renamed 7mm Express Remington. The new loads were indeed faster, approaching the genuine potential of the cartridge—but some consumers confused it with the larger-cased 7mm Remington Magnum. I actually saw this happen once on a bolt action, and the results were spectacular! In 1981 Remington formally—but fairly quietly—returned to the .280 Remington designation.

Over the past 30 years, the .280 Remington has continued to roll along. It has never been nearly as popular as the .270 or .30-06, but a lot of manufacturers chamber for it. Selection in factory ammunition is also not as robust, but it's available in most brands, with the most common bullet weights 140, 150, and 160 grains. How much the confusing name change hurt the cartridge will never be known. It's entirely possible that its biggest problem is simply that it lies between America's two perennial favorites, and it's almost impossible to love equally the .270, .280, and .30-06. This is probably the reason that I haven't used it all that much, but honestly, it could well be the very best cartridge developed on the redoubtable .30-06 case!

The heavier hunting bullets in .284-inch diameter (140 grains and up) tend to be long for caliber, with high ballistic coefficients. So, while it probably isn't as good for larger game as the .30-06, it shoots flatter and has better ranging abilities. Provided bullets are picked with care, it shoots as flat as the .270 but has the capability of handling heavier bullets (up to 175 grains). This is insider knowledge. The average hunter may pick a .270 for

RIGHT: This whitetail was taken in the Oklahoma sand hills with a New Ultra Light Arms .280. The morning was so foggy that the distance was unknown, but it took about a foot of holdover so Boddington's estimate of 350 yards was probably close.



open country or a .30-06 for utmost versatility, and either for the greater load selection. A serious rifle nut might instead choose a .280 Remington. Over the years I've used it off and on and like it, but it has been the darling of great rifle authorities such as the late Finn Aagaard and Jim Carmichel.

Some years ago Remington upgraded its 140-grain spitzer load to 3,000 feet per second (fps), which is plenty fast enough for any and all purposes. 150-grain loads should be about 2,900 fps, and the 160-grain AccuBond from Nosler Custom is a speedy 2,800 fps. All said, however, the .280 Remington is probably at its very best as a cartridge for handloaders. The bullet selection is far more robust, and through careful loading it is usually possible to exceed factory velocities by 50 to 100 feet per second, with one exception: Hornady's Superformance load with the 139-grain SST bullet is rated at 3,090 fps! With faster loads the .280 treads right on the heels of the vaunted 7mm Remington Magnum—but does it with more compact ammunition and loses less velocity with shorter barrels.

Despite my long affinity for both the .270 Winchester and .30-06, I've gone through several phases with the .280. I've

used it on hunts for Dall's sheep, bighorn, and caribou; and a tremendous variety of deer: whitetail, Coues', blacktail, mule deer, and my very best desert mule deer. Never, ever did it let me down, but the shot I remember most was just a few years ago in the sand hills of central Oklahoma.

These days we are incredibly spoiled by laser rangefinders. We always know that key variable of range, and knowing that precisely simplifies all else, except that laser rangefinders don't work worth a darn in fog or precipitation. This was an incredibly foggy morning, the mist so thick that I barely found the knoll top I'd scouted. Once there I could see nothing for more than an hour. Then the clouds started to lift, and I spotted a nice buck across the valley on the far ridge. There was no way to get a range reading, but the buck was a long way off. I took a wild guess at 350 yards. I was shooting one of Mel Forbes' new Ultra Light Arms rifles in .280, loaded with Winchester Supreme 150-grain Ballistic Silvertips. Continuing to guess, I held just a sliver of daylight over the buck's shoulder, and at the shot the buck collapsed and rolled to the bottom of the ridge. I haven't used the .280 since...but clearly there is no reason not to! ■

BELOW: Boddington's best desert mule deer, taken in Sonora, Mexico, with a Remington mountain rifle in .280 Remington and a 160-grain Nosler partition. The buck was tracked to its bed and taken at about 60 yards.



ABOVE: Boddington and Tom Willoughby with a nice California coastal buck, surprised at a waterhole at midday and taken with the .280 Remington.

BELOW: The .280 Remington requires a .30-06-length action, but even so this Ultra Light Arms .280 barely weighed six pounds. Initial groups, left, spread a bit, but after the barrel started to break in, the rifle settled down and shot sub-Minute of Angle (MOA) groups.

