


THE BEST SIGHTS

A man wearing a camouflage cap and jacket is shown in profile, aiming a rifle with a scope. He is positioned behind a large, light-colored rock. The background is a blurred green field. The title 'THE BEST SIGHTS' is printed in large, white, bold letters at the top of the page.

By Wayne van Zwoil
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER

The Leupold scope on this Weatherby Mark V in 7mm Weatherby Magnum has an adjustable objective—useful for very long shooting, but not for most hunting.



Stainless finish, as on this Swift variable, is a recent option, to match stainless steel rifles.

Scopes are sights for shooters who want to hit farther than they can aim without help. They can also help you aim farther than you can shoot without help.

Iron sights gradually fell out of favor after bullets outdistanced our range of unaided vision. You might say Sharps rifles could hurl their big bullets accurately and with deadly effect farther than the buffalo hunters and mountain men could aim. But scopes of that day weren't any better than iron sights. Indeed, a couple of decades after the .30-06 appeared, scopes remained frail, costly and hard to use. Then, in the depths of the Depression, Bill Weaver came up with his homely 330. After World War II scopes got bigger and better. Lately, they've just gotten bigger, with higher magnification so you can see farther. The folks who design optics design them with the market in mind. These days, the market prefers big glass.

Shooting and hunting aren't the same.

The big, powerful scopes popular now can help you shoot precisely at the range, but not necessarily in the field.

TOP LEFT: Right to left, 50mm, 40mm, 32mm, and 20mm objectives. For most big game hunting, scopes with smaller objectives make sense. Only in dim light at high power do big ones shine.

TOP RIGHT: This 3-9x Sightron scope is competitively priced but optically excellent. The group was shot from hunting positions with a Lazzeroni rifle in 8.59 (.338) Galaxy.

BOTTOM: After spotting this bull's antlers at nearly a mile away, the author sneaked to within 160 yards and shot the animal through the heart with an iron-sighted Springfield in .30-06. A scope and longer shooting were obviously unnecessary.

Unlike cartridges, many of which are now so big as to tax the magazines of magnum bolt rifles, scopes have no box to limit their growth. They can be made as big as you want to carry. For awhile now, hunters haven't objected to weight and bulk—partly because, collectively, they don't walk as much as hunters used to. They seem to depend more and more on long-range shooting. High magnification calls for a big front lens to maintain brightness when they crank the power up. So the 40mm lens once standard in hunting variables has been replaced by 50mm glass. Tubes have grown to 30mm in diameter—though most have the same innards as a one-inch scope and offer no optical advantage. (More space inside *does* allow more adjustment latitude for the erector tube, so you have more “clicks.”)

While high power can help you see more detail, it also magnifies your wobbles. We all want the sight to be still. Alas, it never is and we must tolerate some movement. A low-power scope doesn't show you all the little movements that a target shooter or prairie dog hunter wants to see. But shooting big game is different because you're generally not very steady, and you can't correct for all those little bumps, or wait for them to go away. It's better not to see them at all, in my view, because by seeing them, you want to eliminate them—like cooks who can't rest when they see a spider dash into a cupboard. Probably a lot of spiders live in that cupboard, and while they're hidden, nobody minds. But there's a lot of tension when one shows itself. Shooting at big game, you're tense enough. You don't want to fret about details that you can't do anything about. A 4x scope will show you the reticle movement that counts for shooting at game with vitals as big as microwave ovens. Powerful glass can't help you hold the rifle steady or stop a flinch.

Lighted reticles, adjustable objectives, reticle locks, and target knobs, with rangefinding and range-compensating devices, make scopes costly and more complex—but not necessarily better if you concede that a scope is, first and last, a sight. You must see your target well. You don't need a lot of technical stuff to

think about when it's time to shoot. Durability is more important. Most scopes are more durable than necessary; those with iron-clad warranties, like Leupold's, give you an extra measure of confidence.

What you see though a scope depends on the quality and fit of the lenses, and on coatings applied to enhance light transmission. While higher price should indicate higher quality, you may be hard-pressed to see it. In an optics lab recently, I peered through a variety of scopes at a grid used to measure resolution. (It's a variation of the letters chart your optometrist uses to test your eyes.) I was astonished to find little visible difference between the most costly scopes and the cheapest. In fact, it would have been tough to rank the scopes by price based only on the images. Poor light might show more clearly differences in the quality of glass and coatings. Even if inexpensive sights look good over the shop counter, or give you a sharp image of the license plate across the parking lot, they may not carry that brilliance into the woods at dusk. For this reason, I insist on fully multi-coated optics (*all* lens surfaces given multiple treatments to enhance light transmission).

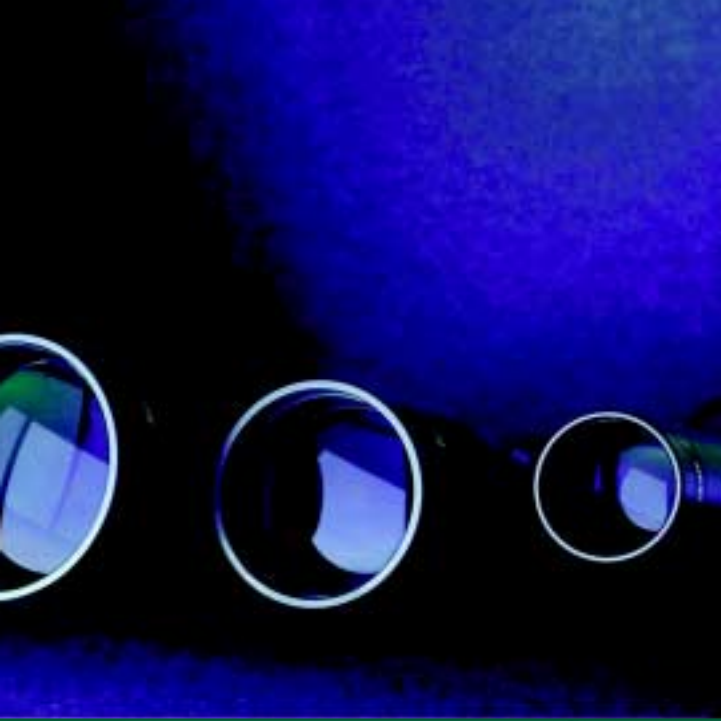
Fortunately for companies that manufacture optics, not everyone thinks as I do. Many scopes that, in my opinion, do not match the rifles I like to carry are nonetheless top-quality instruments. Scopes with lenses that lack full multi-coating are much less expensive and may in every instance give you the sharp aim you want. Charity compels me to list a few of these scopes here, with my favorite big game sights.

AIMPOINT

7702 Leesburg Pike, 3rd Floor, Falls Church, VA 22043, 800-680-6866, www.aimpoint.com

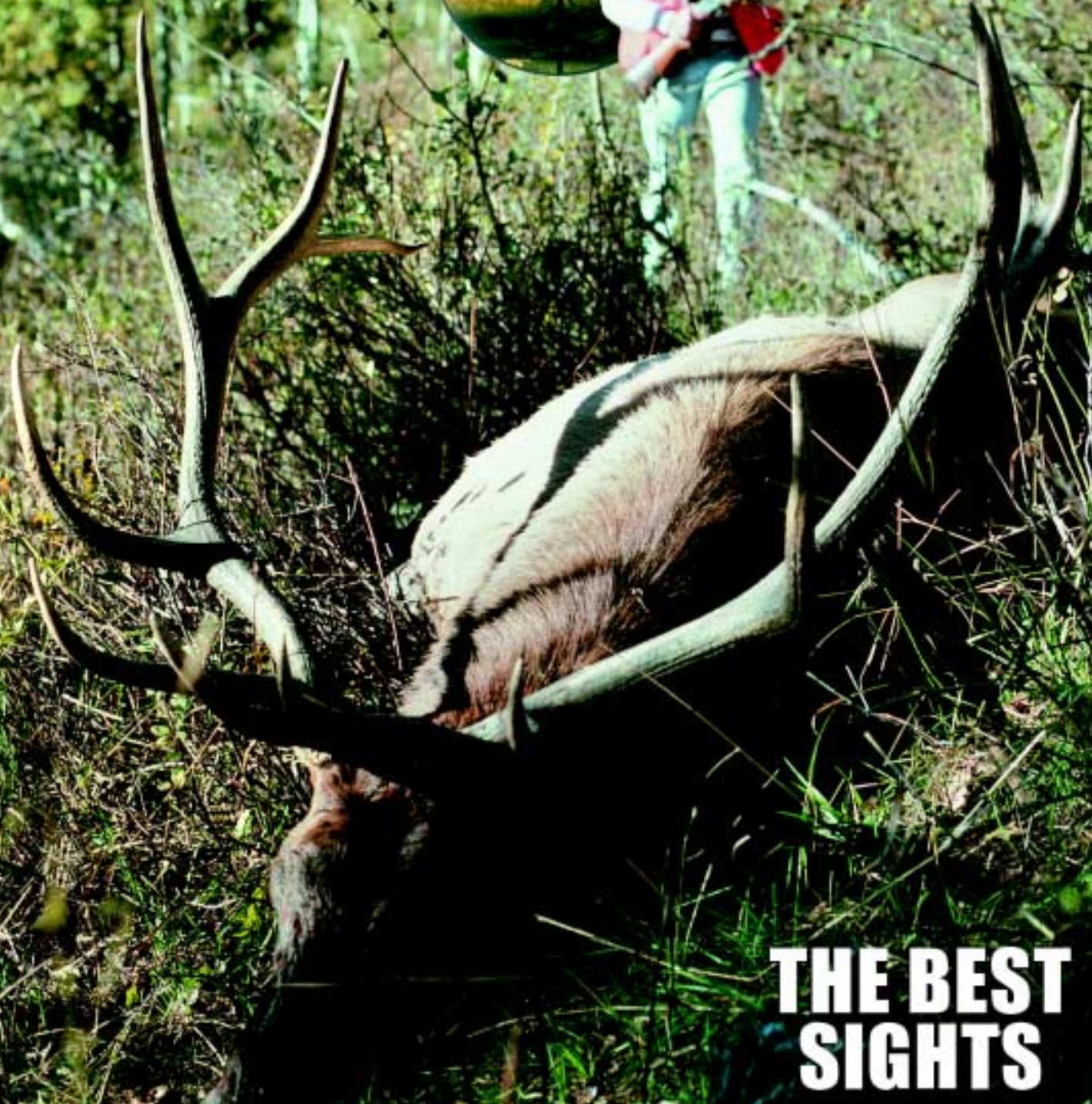
Red dot sights, available now from several optics companies, were pioneered in Sweden in 1975 by entrepreneur Gunnar Sandberg. Sandberg established the Aimpoint firm to produce what he called the “single-point sight.” You saw the dot with one eye and the target with the other. You couldn't see through the tube at all! Three models and two years later, a better sight appeared with a detachable 3x or 1-4x lens to magnify the





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High scope power is a mistake when you hunt elk in trees, where most elk live.
INSET: Lighted reticles are in vogue now. There's some benefits under very dark conditions. You'll have to put up with that battery canister though.

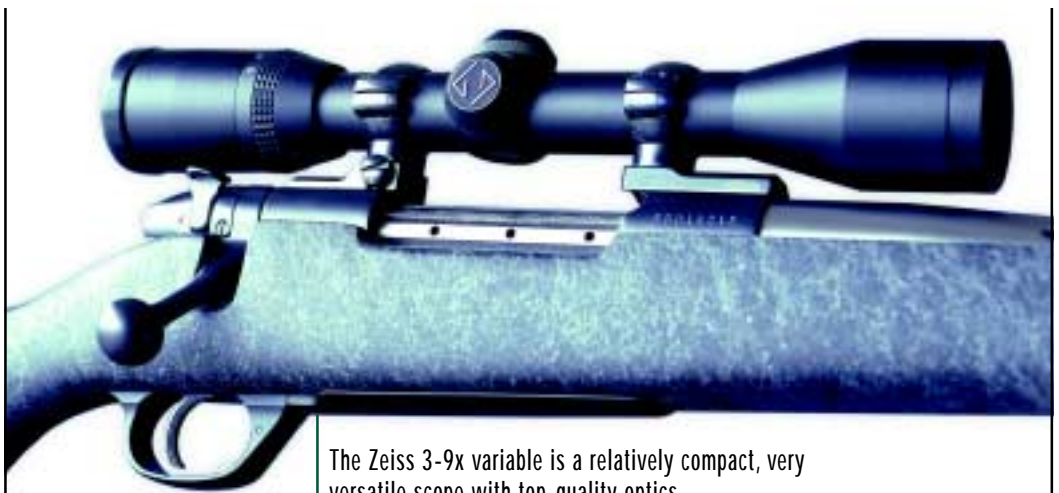


THE BEST SIGHTS

target. It was the first Aimpoint sold in the U.S.

Aimpoint refined its "G2" sight and in 1983 brought out the Mark III, with internal adjustments and a dot that automatically dimmed for dark conditions. The Aimpoint 2000 followed in 1985. Unlike its predecessors, it had no base. The 1-inch tube could be mounted like any scope. In 1987 Aimpoint came out with its Model 1000, designed as a budget-wise alternative to the 2000. It offered nine click-stop light settings and an integral Weaver-type base. In 1989, a smaller battery case made the 2x Aimpoint 3000 lighter and more compact. The 5000, essentially a 3000 with a 30mm tube, came two years later. Field of view increased 20 percent. In 1998 Aimpoint put an XD (extreme duty) diode in the 5000. It generated three times the brightness using a fifth of the current. Battery life jumped from 100 to 500 hours. Aimpoint's next sight, the 7000, is in prototype stage as I write this. It's sleeker, with a diode that offers 20 times the battery life of previous LEDs. A standard 3V lithium camera battery gives you a visible dot for 20,000 hours on the low setting. Figure 1000 hours at the high setting. Batteries drain only when the switch is on; they last the same number of hours whether you use the sight minutes at a time or leave it on for weeks. The Comp 7000 has double the range of windage and elevation adjustment of earlier sights: 4 meters at 100 meters. That's more than 140 inches at 100 yards!

The Aimpoints cost more than most red dot sights. The main difference is in the front lens, whose red tint reflects red light so the dot appears brighter. That's a common feature. What isn't common is the *compound* objective lens, which corrects for parallax. A "singlet" lens will still reflect the dot produced by the diode in the rear bottom of the tube. But the angle of reflection varies. The Aimpoint's "doublet" brings the dot to your eye in a line parallel with the optical center of the instrument. With an Aimpoint, where you see the dot is where you'll hit. You can shoot as you might with a shotgun bead, both eyes wide open; and except with magnification, Aimpoint sights impose no limits on



The Zeiss 3-9x variable is a relatively compact, very versatile scope with top-quality optics.



Weaver's new 6-20x40 Grand Slam scope, here on a .240 Hawk custom rifle by Fred Zeglin, has raised ribs on the power dial and the objective sleeve for easier manipulation.

eye relief. Your eye can be 2 inches back, or 10, and you'll see the same field. The dot appears in the same apparent focal plane as the target. There is no faster sight. I've shot moose in dark timber with the Aimpoint and found it superior to iron sights or scopes. It is not as precise as a scope at long range; however, you'll find it easy to hit with to 200 yards.

Though several other firms offer high-quality red dot sights, I prefer the Aimpoint. For close-up killing with rifle or shotgun, especially in poor light, it's hard to beat.

BURRIS

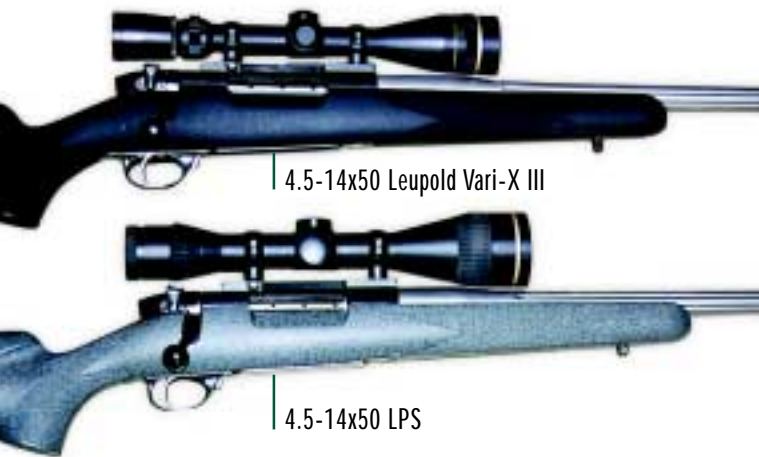
331 E. 8th St., Greeley, CO 80631,
970-356-1670, www.burrisoptic.com

The extensive Burris scope line includes Fullfield II scopes, with improvements. The new scopes have lighter internal parts, for a weight savings of 25 percent. The turrets feature finger-adjustable dials, and dial graduations are set at an angle so you can read them from behind the rifle. Turrets on Fullfield IIs

have been moved toward center to give you additional ring surface on the tube. Fullfield IIs are also more forgiving of off-axis eye position. Finally, Burris has made power changes a snap on Fullfield II variables by incorporating the power ring into the ocular bell. All you have to do to change power is twist the bell. Reticule focus is virtually unaffected, because the quick-focus eyepiece must turn 4-1/2 revolutions to cover its range of six diopters. From low to high power, you change just one diopter.

Last fall I hunted pronghorns with a Burris Fullfield variable that had a new rangefinding, range-compensating reticle called the Ballistic Plex. Unlike other reticles that help you with long shots, this one is remarkably clean, with just three hash marks on the lower stem. I used it to kill a buck a jump shy of 400 yards. Ballistic Plex reticles are available in 3-9x40, 3.5-10x50 and 4.5-14x42 Fullfield II scopes.

My Burris 4x Fullfield, atop a Winchester 70 in 7mm Remington



4.5-14x50 Leupold Vari-X III

4.5-14x50 LPS

Magnum, is an ordinary sight but a good one, and a bargain. Some time ago, in a canyon off the Snake River, I sneaked up on an elk I'd spotted from far away. He'd made cover, though, and I had to go in or go without. The bull scrambled clear on the other side of the canyon and headed for the ridgetop. I sat, snugging my sling. He stopped at 300 yards, sharp in the 4x. I fired, and the 160-grain Jensen bullet took him down. The 6x40 Signature would be my pick if long shots were the rule.

BUSHNELL

9200 Cody, Overland Park, KS 66124,
913-752-3400, www.bushnell.com

Last year, Bausch & Lomb and Bushnell hunting scopes came under one name: Bushnell. In my youth, B&L's label meant high-quality American optics; Bushnell imported cheaper Japanese glass. The Elite 4200 series now tops Bushnell's impressive array of seven scope lines. A 1.5-6x 4200 ranks among the best big game sights in my rack. There's also a 2.5-10x on a 6mm Remington 700. Recently all Elite 4200 scopes got RainGuard lens coating. Developed at Bushnell to improve your sight picture when scope lenses get wet, RainGuard's hard, slick surface encourages water to "bead." It works well!

Decades ago, I bought a 4x Bushnell Scopechief. My first high-quality scope, it proved a smart choice. I remember a blacktail buck that came out just at dusk, a dim target in the distant trees. By that time I had a variable scope. At 5x, it really brightened that treeline. I steadied the crosswire and squeezed. Flame shot from the .264. As my eyes recovered, I saw the buck streak

through an opening—then turn in a circle and drop dead. The 140-grain Power Point had shattered his heart.

Scopechiefs are still made (variables only) in magnifications ranging from 1.5-6x to 6-20x. Latest models have a quick-adjust ocular. The entire ocular housing turns to change power: a great idea! The 3-9x40 is my favorite, a good-looking scope with finger-friendly knobs.

Bushnell was the first company to offer a holographic sight, a compact unit that projects an image of the lighted reticle. It's a terrific sight for handguns, and recommended for shotguns. But you must lift your head off the shotgun stock to put the reticle on target. That takes some getting used to. You may not *want* to get used to it. The current Holographic is two-thirds the size of the original, and cheaper. It lists for \$269 instead of \$369. It also has a lower reticle setting to improve your aim in dim light.

KAHLES

2 Slater Road, Cranston, RI 02920,
800-426-3089, www.kahlesoptik.com

More than a century old, the Austrian firm Kahles recently came under Swarovski's high-powered marketing machine in the U.S. Four 30mm scopes joined the line: a 1.1-4x24, 1.5-6x42, 2.5-10x50 and 3-12x56. Lighted reticles became an option. Kahles also offers 4x36, 6x42, 8x50 and 3.9x42 scopes. New for 2001 is a 2-7x36. It's a scope I recommended to the Kahles people some time ago. To my mind, it has the ideal mix of versatility, brightness, power range, and compactness. It looks good on any rifle. Probably those Austrians already had it on the drawing board . . . Kahles deserves plaudits for its loyalty to the 4x36 and 6x42 in a market dominated by variables. A Kahles 4x36 was my pick on an American Hunting Rifles CZ550 in .270 Howell. A couple of years ago I was sneaking through lodgepoles on a steep slope when I spied an elk in front of me. Actually, there were lots of elk. Fighting the urge to shoot right away, I eased to the ground, prone. As the first elk met the intersection of my crosswire, I fired. The woods erupted with elk. I lost sight of the cow I'd shot as the herd crashed

away. Confident the 140-grain Swift had finished my hunt, I traipsed over to find the carcass. There wasn't any. No blood either. I circled the bedding site. Nope. Then I took the herd's track, a great furrow plowed across-slope through mud and snow. I almost missed her. She'd sprinted 20 yards, then tumbled down the steep face to lodge against a tree.

LEUPOLD & STEVENS

PO Box 688, Beaverton, OR 97006,
503-646-9171, www.leupold.com

Leupold's market share and reputation are the envy of the industry, and the company works hard to protect both. To its credit, Leupold has retained many of the practical hunting sights that predated some of the features now common on other models. The 4x33 and 6x36, at 9.5 and 10 ounces, are among the lightest full-size scopes. Though they and the Vari-X II 2-7x apparently don't match Vari-X III scopes for brightness, you'll seldom see the difference. My only criticism of the old models is mushy adjustments. Among Vari-X III's, the 1.75-6x32 and 2.5-8x36 excel for all-around hunting – though the 3.5-10x40 (like the 3-9x40 Vari-X II) are run-away best sellers.

The company's Long Range scopes have 30mm tubes with target knobs for a tremendous range of adjustment: 65 minutes of angle! Objective (parallax) adjustments on these scopes – 4.5-14x50, 6.5-20x50 and 8.5-25x50 – are turret mounted for easier manipulation. If you "set up" on a ridge before dawn of the opener, hoping to spot a deer or an elk on an opposite slope, these scopes have merit. Slimmer in profile are Leupold's Tactical 10x40 M3 and Vari-X III 3.5-10x40 Long Range M3. These 30mm sights have lower knobs, calibrated 1 minute per click of elevation, so with most loads you can adjust point of aim between 100 and 1,000 yards with one revolution of the dial. Other tactical scopes feature M1, or standard quarter-minute, adjustments. All are available with mil dot reticles.

Incidentally, the mil dot reticle is becoming more and more popular among sportsmen. "Mil" is no reference to the military—though that was where this

range-finding, range-compensating device evolved. Mil means milliradian, or the space between 3/4-minute dots strung along a standard crosswire. One mil is 1/6400 of a degree in angular measurement. That's 3.6 inches at 100 yards, 3 feet at 1,000 yards. To use this reticle as a rangefinder, divide target height in mils at 100 yards by the number of spaces subtending it. You get the range in hundreds of yards. For example, a deer that's 3 feet at the shoulder (10 mils at 100 yards) appears in your scope to stand five dots high, so you divide 5 into 10 and come up with 2. The deer is 200 yards away. You can also divide target size in yards by the number of mils subtended and multiply by 1,000. Variable scopes with mil dot reticles are typically calibrated at top magnification or 10x.

For hunters who prowl the woods, Leupold offers scopes with short-range parallax correction. A 4x33 fixed power, and the Vari-X II 1-4x and 2-7x come with heavy Duplex reticles. To my delight, Leupold reintroduced its 2x20 Compact scope, adding it to a line that includes a 4x28, 2-7x28 and 3-9x33.

I made my longest shot ever on big game with a Leupold M8 4x,

holding about 20 inches high and nearly that far into the wind. My .270 bullet smashed the buck's heart. But it was my third try, and it later occurred to me that a deer missed two out of three times is too far to shoot at, with whatever scope you have.

NIKON

1300 Walt Whitman Rd., Melville, NY
11747, 516-547-4200,
www.nikonusa.com

Last year, two new Nikon rifle scopes appeared. Both the 3.3-10x44 and 5.5-16.5x44 had 1-inch titanium tubes. Sadly, the hype directed annually to such innovation bypasses practical sights that deserve more attention from big game hunters. Specifically, the Nikon 4x40 Monarch UCC (for the lens treatment, Ultra Clear Coat) ranks as one of the most overlooked bargains in the industry. It is among the brightest 4x scopes I've seen. You can buy this Nikon for around \$300.

SCHMIDT & BENDER

(New England Custom Gun Ltd.,
603-469-3450)
www.schmidt-bender.de

Timber hunters will appreciate a new 1.25-4x scope from Schmidt & Bender. It has what the firm calls a Flash Dot. The dot is actually a tiny

mirror at the center of the crosswire. The scope's LED switch controls the light source, adjustable for brightness. S&B also has long-range and tactical scopes that verge on being over-engineered. Some have 34mm tubes. But you won't find finer optics anywhere. Maybe the best buy among the costly Schmidt & Bender sights is the 4x36, a bright, no-nonsense scope that you can order with one of nine reticles. Other smart choices: the 6x42 fixed-power, and variables in 1.25-4x20 and 1.5-6x42. One-inch tubes are standard on fixed-power scopes, 30mm on variables.

I visited the Schmidt & Bender factory a long time ago and recall thinking it looked like a clinic. It was small, immaculate, and white. Intelligent-looking men in white frocks manipulated expensive-looking machines with practiced dexterity. The scopes were handled like newly minted infants.

SIGHTRON

1672B Hwy 96, Franklinton, NC 27525,
919-528-8783, www.sightron.com

Last year, there were four new scopes in the extensive Sightron SII series, most of them specially designed for precise shooting. Hunter-class benchrest shooters

This grizzly fell to shots from a .300 Remington Ultra Mag at 80 yards, where field of view was suddenly much more important than resolution.



NEW SCOPES FROM 2000

A list of the rifle scopes that appeared in the year 2000 reflects the leanings of the market toward more power and bigger objective lenses. Oddly enough, you may shoot better at game with more compact sights of relatively low power. Remember that a deer 300 yards off looks as big in a 4x scope as that deer appears to the naked eye at only 75 yards.

MAKE/MODEL	POWER/OBJ. DIA. (IN.)	FIELD (FT.)	DIA./LENGTH (IN.)	WEIGHT (OZ.)	PRICE
Burris Mr. T	2.5-10x50	35-10	30mm/13.5	29	\$2129
Burris	6x50	15	30mm/13	18	\$683
Burris	8-32x50	13-4.5	30mm/18	27	\$999
Burris Fullfield	1.75-5x20	65-23	1/10.5	10	\$374
Burris Fullfield	3-9x40	31-13	1/12.5	13	\$356
Burris Fullfield	3.5-10x50	28-11	1/13	15	\$496
Burris Fullfield	4.5-14x42	25-9	1/14	15	\$545
Docter Optic	3-9x40	31-13	1/12.5	17	\$378
Docter Optic	3-10x40	34-12	1/13	18.5	\$626
Docter Optic	4.5-14x40	23-8	1/13.5	21.5	\$652
Docter Optic	8-25x50	13-4	1/16	26.5	\$901
Kahles	1.1-4x24	108-32	1/11	15	\$722
Kahles	1.5-6x42	72-21	1/12	16	\$832
Kahles	2.5-10x50	44-13	1/13	17	\$999
Kahles	3-12x56	38-11	1/14	19	\$1110
Leupold	6x42	17	1/12	15	\$628
Nikon Titanium UCC	3.3-10x44	30-10	1/13	20	\$899
Nikon Titanium UCC	5.5-16.5x44	19-6	1/13	20	\$939
Nikon Buckmaster	4.5-14x40	23-8	1/15	19	\$401
Schmidt & Bender FD	1.25-4x20	96-30	30mm/11.5	14.5	\$1480
Schmidt & Bender PH	3-12x50	33-11	30mm/13.5	20.5	\$1285
Schmidt & Bender PH	4-16x50	25-8	30mm/15.5	27.5	\$1555
Schmidt & Bender PH	2.5-10x56	40-12	30mm/15	22	\$1325
Sightron S II	6x42	20	1/13	16	\$291
Sightron S II	4-16x42	26-7	1/13.5	16	\$403
Sightron S II	6-24x42	16-4.5	1/14.5	18.5	\$354
Sightron S II	6.5-25x50	15-4	1/14.5	19.5	\$422
Simmons WE	1.5-6x32	72-19	1/11	15	\$290
Simmons WE	3-9x42	40-13	1/13.5	17.5	\$300
Simmons WE	4-12x42	29-9.5	1/13	21	\$365
Simmons WE	6-18x42	18-6.5	1/15	26.5	\$365
Swarovski PH	4-16x50	27-8	30mm/14.2	22	\$1440
Weaver Grand Slam	1-5x32	71-21	1/10.5	11.5	\$430
Weaver Grand Slam	4.75x40	26	1/11	11	\$360
Weaver Grand Slam	3-10x40	35-11	1/12	13	\$380
Weaver Grand Slam	4.5-14x40	23-11	1/14	17.5	\$500
Weaver Grand Slam	6-20x40	60-5	1/14	18	\$500
Weaver Grand Slam	3.5-10x50	31-11	1/13	16	\$460

got a 6x42 with a .375 dot reticle and 1/8-minute click adjustments. The mil dot in the 6-24x42 is calibrated for ranging at 24x, not the standard 10x.

Most Sightron hunting scopes are big, though they have 1-inch tubes. Three years ago I ordered a small one to take to Alaska. The 2.5-7x32 shotgun scope that came had a crosswire with an open diamond in the middle. It didn't look useful. But one morning after days in a leaky tent battling storms, I saw the clouds part. Immediately I spied a grizzly. My partner and I scurried across the hills through wet willows and stopped 80 yards from the bear. But the brush was too thick for a shot. Then the wind gave us away. The bear vanished in the thickets—but as suddenly it appeared on a distant hill and bedded! This time the stalk finished better, and my partner clobbered the bruin with his .300 Remington Ultra Mag. The bear, mortally hurt, dashed toward cover. I swung my rifle like a shotgun and fired. The other rifle boomed at the same time. The bear dropped dead. I found that diamond a much faster option than an ordinary crosswire. I sort of gathered fur inside and swept it along while I pulled the trigger. The scope withstood Alaska's incessant rain. It's bright and it doesn't cost very much.

SWAROVSKI

2 Slater Rd., Cranston, RI 02920,
800-426-3089

Swarovski has re-engineered its PV 2.5-10x56 scopes to make them lighter and shorter. The Nova-A (1-inch) line used to include fine 4x32 and 6x36 scopes but, sadly, now offers variables only: 1.5-4.5x20, 3-9x36, 3-10x42. The PF 6x42 is the firm's surviving 1-inch fixed-power sight. Most Swarovski fans use a PV scope: a 1.25-4x24, 1.5-6x42, 2.5-10x42, 2.5-10x56, 3-12x50, 4-16x50 or 6-24x50. The biggest are heavy, if optically superior. I like the 1.5-6x PV—enough that I put one on my pet elk rifle, a .30-338 built on a Model 70 Winchester action by Rick Freudenberg (freudscustomrifles.com). The only thing wrong with this combination is that I haven't yet found an elk in front of it. Maybe some day. In the meantime, I like to look at it, and ogle its tiny groups. I can't imagine a better scope or a better rifle for elk.

WEAVER

201 Plantation Oak Dr., Thomasville,
GA 31792, 800-285-0689,
www.weaveroptics.com

The latest series of scopes from Weaver is now a year old, with enough field time to have proven itself. The Grand Slam models include a 1.5-5x32, 4.75x40, 3-10x40, 4.5-14x40, 6-20x40 and 3.5-10x50. All have one-inch, one-piece alloy tubes, quarter-minute finger-adjust dials and quick-focus oculars. Fully multi-coated optics give them an edge on Weaver's K and V Series scopes. Rubberized power rings with numbers on angled ribs make magnification changes easy from behind the trigger but also add bulk.

The Weaver K2.5, in all its humility, still looks good to me. I grew up when Weaver K-models were as common as Peters shotshells. I had a Weaver K4 on one of my first rifles, just like every other kid who couldn't afford a Redfield or a Leupold. Not that we thought spending \$59 for a scope was wise, even if you *had* the cash. The K4 gave as sharp an image as you could want, and it had a steel tube, something we thought an advantage in those days.

One bitter November morning, I crawled out of bed and fired up a '61 Dodge. Half an hour later, I stood, shivering, between wheat stubble and woodlot, plotting my next move. Then I saw it. A deer! My K4 showed antlers, and the icy Michigan wind was forgotten as I hauled the Mauser onto my shoulder. I can't remember my shooting position. But I held high because the deer looked far away across the stubble. When the rifle recoiled, the animal paid no attention. Disbelieving, I fumbled another round up the pipe and aimed again. The crosswire wasn't very still. Boom! This time the deer lifted its head. Obviously, I wasn't coming close. In despair I tried one more shot, centering the ribs in my scope. The buck collapsed. I raced over without marking the animal's location and spent the next 20 minutes wondering if I had fired at a phantom. But eventually I found my prize only 160 yards from my stand at wood's edge.



The Nikon 4x on Wayne's Dakota 10 in .280 is a brilliant fixed-power scope. Versatile too!

ZEISS

13017 N. Kingston Ave., Chester, VA
23836, 804-530-5841,
www.zeiss.com

Zeiss is now a century and a half out of the blocks and worth about 2.5 billion dollars. It has an earned reputation for top-quality optics. Indeed, Zeiss innovations have moved the industry. As early as 1904, this German giant was building variable rifle scopes. In 1939 a Zeiss engineer found lens coatings that boosted light transmission. In 1988 Zeiss was the first to apply phase-corrected coatings to binoculars.

Unfortunately, Zeiss scopes are expensive. Happily, they last a long time. Zeiss may still be the only optics company that offers a lifetime *transferable* warranty with its scopes and binoculars. Hand your Zeiss glass to your son or daughter, and the warranty goes with it! I regret that my favorite Zeiss scopes have been discontinued, thanks to a buying public that no longer abides fixed-power sights. I paid a lot for the two Zeiss 4x scopes in my rack, and am glad I did. One is on a .350 Remington Model 700. When I toss that rifle up, the sight picture is so sharp, flat, and bright, I think for an instant I have new eyes. It's not the lightest of scopes, but neither is it too heavy. It can be mounted low. If I were limited to one hunting scope for the rest of my life, this would be on top of the short list.

More modern Zeiss scopes include the VM/Vs: 1.1-4x24, 1.5-6x42, 2.5-10x50 and 3-12x56, all with 30mm tubes and T* lens coatings. I especially favor the 1.5-6x. The Diavari VM/V 3-9x42 and 5-15x42 also have the premium T* coating but feature 1-inch tubes. I used the 5-15x on a pronghorn hunt in New Mexico. The Diavari C 3-9x36 is an American-made Zeiss that

you can buy for a song—well, almost. The ZM/Z line, also assembled in the U.S., has a first-focal-plane reticle that changes apparent size when you change the power. That makes for thick reticles at high power, slender reticles at low power. Usually, you want things the other way around, for accurate shots at a distance and quick shots in brush. But front-plane reticles can be used for rangefinding at any magnification because they stay the same size *relative to the target*. The ZM/Z line includes two Dialal fixed-power scopes: a 6x42 and an 8x56. There are three variables: 1.5-6x42, 2.5-10x48 and 3-12x56. All have 30mm tubes.

The big, powerful scopes popular now can help you shoot precisely at the range. But shooting and hunting aren't the same. It may be that we'll eventually return to rifles that feel lively in the hand and jump to the cheek like a fine bird gun. Shooters who buy them will want smaller scopes. They'll find big ones too bulky for the scabbard, too heavy for the hike, and as esthetically pleasing as a lumber rack on a Ferrari. (Weight in the sight raises a rifle's center of balance, so it handles awkwardly too.) They'll miss the wider field of view and generous eye relief of low-power scopes.

"A real marksman can hit with any rifle," an old hunter once told me, swabbing the lens of a well-used Weaver K4. "And any sight." A self-styled expert on rifles, I laughed him off at the time, confident that better gear would make for tighter groups and more center shots. It did. On paper. But in the field my mentor rarely missed, while I embarrassed myself often. "If you spent as much time shootin' as you spend shoppin', you might do better," he observed. He was right. ▲▲▲