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Photos Courtesy of Author

ACCURATE HUNTER

**STAND
UP AND
SHOOT**

Sometimes there's just no option but to stand and shoot. Range is much more limited from an unsupported standing position, but with a bit of practice most shooters should be able to handle such a shot.





Working out with a Browning reproduction of a '73 Winchester and mild .38 Special loads. It isn't necessary to take a lot of recoil while practicing standup shooting...but at some point you must become absolutely familiar with the trigger of your hunting rifle.

The wounded buck had led us into tall CRP grass. We'd jumped him a couple of times, but that stuff is thick and tall, no possible shot. The last time was near the edge, and the buck ran across a mowed strip and paused near the edge of the trees. Coolly and calmly, Hornady's Neal Emery raised his rifle and flattened him. I should have paced the shot, probably 150 yards.

Standing, unsupported, it was an awesome shot. I don't know how many times out of ten he could pull it off. I didn't ask, because I have no idea how many times I could! For sure that was no shot to take on an unwounded animal, but we were down to the court of last resort—and that's where there is sometimes no option but to stand up and shoot.

The unsupported standing position, formerly called "offhand," is by far the least steady and least accurate of all shooting positions. As such, it is to be avoided—like the plague—if any steadier option exists. My old friend and mentor, the late John Wootters, once commented that he wished hunting rifles had a "cutoff switch" that would render them inoperable unless steadily rested. For sure there would be a lot fewer wounded animals if such a system existed, but this is one of (few) of Wootters' ideas that I don't agree with. Standing unsupported is definitely the poorest choice for shooting at game, but it has its places. When following a wounded animal all bets are off. The goal is to prevent the animal's escape and potential loss, and if the animal jumps the shot will probably be fast, and must often be taken from a standing position. There is also the chance encounter at close range, which can occur in almost any area with any game animal, despite one's best plans and expectations.



Many close encounters are a bit like this, fast and tense.

Finding a steady rest or assuming a steadier position requires movement and time. As we've seen in this column, both kneeling and the bent-knee sitting positions are very fast to drop into. However, both require motion, which may spook an animal encountered at close range; and in either case low vegetation may block a shot. So I believe standing and shooting remains a valid option in certain situations. Further, since it is by far the most difficult and least accurate position, it is probably one that should be practiced at least as much as any other shooting position. You always hope that standing unsupported is an option you don't have to use, but you should be prepared for those (hopefully rare) situations where there is no other option.

Unlike prone, sitting, or kneeling, the formal target-standing position is quite different from the standing position most likely to be used in the field. In the formal position, feet are about shoulder-width apart with the supporting-side toes pointed toward the target, the shooting-side foot pointed away at a 90-degree angle. The shooting-side hand and arm pull the rifle into the shoulder, the shooting elbow about horizontal for more leverage. The supporting side hip is thrust outward toward the target, with the supporting elbow resting on the hip. In some competition disciplines, palm rests are used, and in military competition, the magazine of an M14- or M16-series rifle serves nicely as a palm rest.

There have been a couple of times when vegetation precluded any other sound option and I've actually used the formal standing position in the field—but such situations are rare. More likely is a fast-breaking situation where you must simply mount the rifle and take the shot. In practice, this is actually a lot more like shotgunning than precision rifle shooting, and although that single bullet must still be placed as precisely as possible, this is often done at shotgun ranges.

As with shotgunning, body position is important; you must take an extra half-second to plant your feet. About shoulder-width apart remains ideal, and the supporting-side toes continue to point toward the target. But in this hasty (or lazy) standing position, the shooting-side foot is out at about 45-degree angle to the rifle-target line (right for right-handers, left for lefties). For the best support, it's important to get the supporting arm under the rifle, as near vertical as possible.

The isometric support of a hasty sling—which, with practice, also takes about a half-second to assume—can be really helpful. In really close encounters where speed is more of the essence, this step will probably be omitted, not only to save time but to reduce game-spooking motion. Practice with and without the hasty sling; you'll see a difference in accuracy. However, understand that standing is never perfectly steady; a wobble is normal. Competitive shooters try to reduce it to a small, consistent “figure 8” wobble—and then complete the trigger squeeze at the same point each time, essentially anticipating when the sights will wobble across the target.

That, for instance, was the recommended procedure for 200-meter slow-fire standing on the old Marine Corps qualification course, shooting at a 6-inch bullseye. That level of precision is generally not required for field shooting; surely at 200 meters (or anywhere near that) there must

be a better option than unsupported standing! If there isn't, then I'd argue there probably isn't a shot. Realistically, however, with practice, most shooters can achieve pie-plate or paper-plate accuracy offhand to at least 60 yards. This will cover most situations where there is no better solution, and some people can achieve consistency to 100 yards and beyond.

Part of all shooting practice is not just improving your skill, but also learning what shots you can do reliably and what shots should not be attempted because the risk is too great. This applies in spades to standing up and shooting. Like most positions, shooting standing can be greatly improved by shooting a .22 or air rifle—a lot. However, since the standing position incorporates some wobble, it is important to become absolutely familiar with the trigger pull of your rifle, so that you know instinctively exactly when it's going to break. Therefore, “dry-firing” in your basement or den



(check chamber and magazine carefully, and keep distance from live ammunition) with your hunting rifle is extremely beneficial.

Yes, there's a wobble. Practice will reduce it, but it's not going to go away. The trick is to make that wobble consistent, and complete the trigger press just as the sights are coming onto the target. The good news is that big-game animals have large vital zones, at least 8 inches by 8 inches on the smallest deer. So don't think precision; instead think “pie plate.” With practice, your pie-plate accuracy will improve, and if a quick opportunity arises you'll know if it's a shot you should take or not. Always be ready for that fast opportunity, but if there's any steadier option, always take it! ■

LEFT: My friend Darin Narlock takes an offhand-shot with a Browning AB3. Darin's a Minnesota whitetail hunter, no stranger to fast shots. He looks comfortable and is. **MIDDLE:** Standing position, right-handed, with a Dakota M76. As a lefty, I'm not nearly as good right-handed as the more familiar left side. Here, foot position is very good, but ideally, the shooting elbow should be more horizontal. **RIGHT:** Standing position, left-handed, with a left-hand CZ M550. This is pretty good form, with supporting elbow under the rifle and shooting elbow nearly vertical.

