.375 Holland and Holland Magnum

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Photos courtesy of Author

One hundred and one years old and still going strong, **the .375 H&H was introduced in England in 1912 and first loaded in the United States by the old Western Cartridge Company in 1925. It remained the most powerful standard American cartridge until the introduction of the .458 Winchester Magnum in 1956, although Roy Weatherby surpassed it in velocity and energy with two proprietary .375s: The .375 Weatherby Magnum, his improved version of the H&H, in 1945; and his mighty .378 Weatherby Magnum, in 1953.**

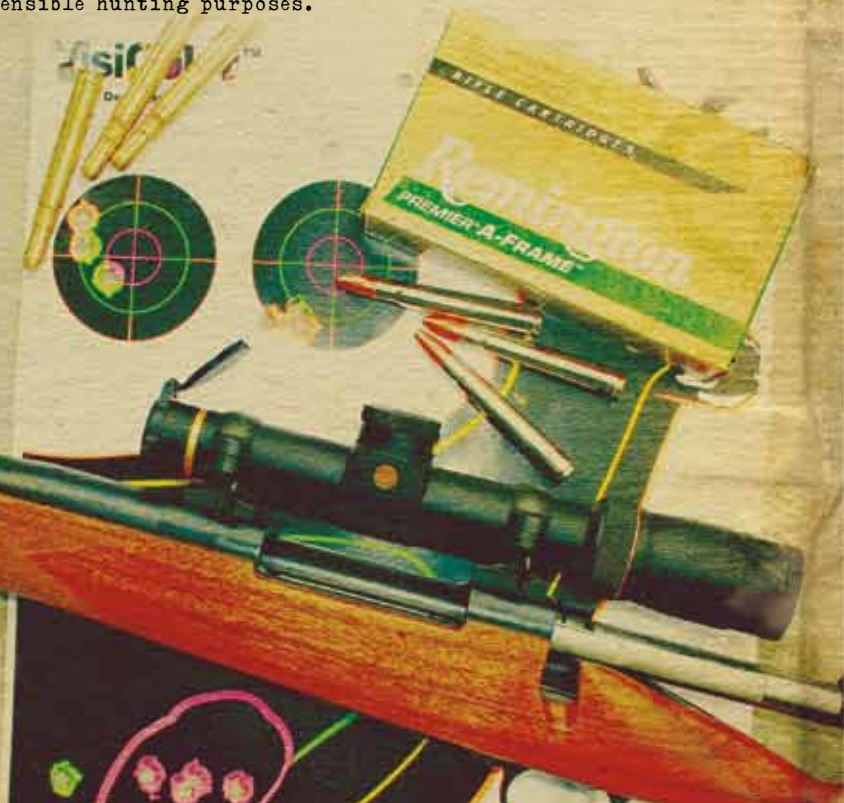
Today there are quite a few cartridges that are more powerful, but I think it can be reasonably argued that the .375 H&H is the most powerful cartridge that has a legitimate place in North American hunting. Even then, its genuine application is limited; it is perfect for the biggest bears, a good choice for bison, and reasonably well-suited for walrus and muskox. Altogether these animals represent a tiny fraction of North American big game—and yet, the .375 H&H has maintained its popularity for generations. It is chambered to many bolt actions and most modern single shots, is loaded by all major (and minor) ammunition companies, with a wealth of factory loads and a rich selection of bullets available for handloaders.

In part this is because the .375 H&H is also a worldwide favorite. It is the smallest cartridge that is street legal for dangerous game in all African jurisdictions. Although quite powerful, it is relatively mild in recoil. Most people who actually need a rifle of this power (and most who do not) can learn to shoot a .375 H&H. Add a couple hundred feet per second velocity for the faster .375s and the trajectory gets flatter—but recoil quickly becomes an issue for many shooters. Drop a bit of velocity but go up in bullet weight and caliber to a .400 or

.375 H&H CARTRIDGES
In North America the lighter bullets are probably the most useful, but for sure, sharp-pointed bullets should be chosen for better ranging abilities.

260-grain Nosler AccuBond | 270-grain Hornady Spire Point | 300-grain Barnes TSX | 300-grain Swift A-Frame

BELOW: My Montana Rifles .375 produces the kind of accuracy I expect in a good .375, clearly suitable for any and all sensible hunting purposes.



On the sticks with a CZ 550 .375 H&H. The .375 is fairly manageable, but still not pleasant to shoot from a benchrest. The bench must be used for sighting in, but practice should be done from other shooting positions.

Empire rifles .375: As with all cartridges, accuracy varies from load to load, but usually ranges from good to spectacular. The bottom right group from this Empire .375 measures about a quarter inch, pretty strong for a big bore with low-powered scope.

.416, and recoil still goes up significantly, but the trajectory becomes a lot more curved.

This last may be one of the most important attributes of the .375—it hits with marvelous authority, but shoots flat enough to remain extremely versatile and doesn't kick the shooter into next week. The most standard bullet weights today are a 270-grain slug at 2,690 fps and a 300-grain bullet at 2,530. The lighter, faster bullet develops 4,340 foot-pounds of energy at the muzzle; the slower 300-grain bullet, 4,265. Obviously this is significant power!

In Africa the 300-grain bullet is generally the most popular, partly because it can be mated with a non-expanding solid of the same weight, thus with the same general point of impact. For North American hunting, we have almost no use for solids (maybe only for walrus), and we're much better-served by choosing more aerodynamic sharp-pointed bullets. As to weight, because of higher ballistic coefficient (BC), the trajectory curve of the heavier 300-grain bullet isn't much different from that of the faster 270-grain bullet: With spitzers or semi-spitzers, sight in 2 to 2-½ inches high at 100 yards to be dead-on at 200 yards. The drop at 300 yards will be 9 to 11 inches, clearly suitable for everything the .375 is ideal for and actually flat enough for an awful lot of North American hunting.

While there isn't much on this continent that the .375 is really necessary for, a huge part of its charm is there isn't much it can't do. Over the years I have used it occasionally for elk, moose, and black bear—it hits with dramatic authority—and when I was a magnum-crazed kid, I used it for sheep, caribou, deer, and pronghorn. Overkill? You bet. But on smaller game, it hits hard without damaging a lot of meat (which is part of its utility in Africa as well).

In Africa I generally prefer 300-grain bullets, mostly for compatibility with solids (which we use not only for elephant and hippo and backup on buffalo, but also for the very small antelope).

In North America a well-constructed 270-grain bullet is plenty for even the biggest bears; despite greater velocity and initial energy, it has a bit less recoil than the 300-grain load. If you happen to have a .375 and wish to use it on game lighter than it was really intended for, then there are some lighter bullets that reduce recoil, allow increased velocity, and flatten trajectories (at least at moderate ranges). Some of these are: 235-grain Speer Semi-Spitzer; 235-grain Barnes TSX; 250-grain Sierra GameKing; and 260-grain Nosler AccuBond. None of these are loaded by major manufacturers, but all are available to handloaders and can be loaded by smaller suppliers. I don't personally recommend bullets lighter than 270-grains for big bears, but if you want to use your .375 for elk or moose, these lighter bullets make the .375 even more versatile. Across the board, accuracy is generally good and can be astonishing.

Its tapered case is indeed archaic—but it feeds well, and if you blow it out to modern styling you may not like the recoil that comes with the increased powder capacity. The .375 H&H's one significant drawback is that its 2.850-inch case requires what we call a full-length action, meaning that it cannot be housed in standard bolt actions intended for .30-06-length (2.5-inch cases) cartridges. Since shorter cartridges have been the rage for many years, this means it is not compatible with a number of modern bolt actions. The fairly new .375 Ruger solves this dilemma with a slight bonus in velocity—but not enough to substantially alter performance or increase recoil. However, there are many actions that will house the .375 H&H, and it remains our most popular powerful cartridge. It is not only a standard chambering for most manufacturers, but throughout the world, it is the gold standard for utmost versatility. ■

The .375 H&H remains the favorite among Alaska bear hunters for our biggest bruins. Boddington used a .375 with 300-grain bullets to take this whopper on the Alaska Peninsula back in 1981.

Because of its long hair, the muskox isn't as big as it looks, but it's a tough animal that falls into .375 territory. Donna Boddington used the slightly less powerful .376 Steyr to take this fine bull in Greenland.