



*The celebrated 7x57 sired a clan
now shadowed by 6.5mm cartridges.
Fame can be fickle!*

Known as a "classic sheep cartridge," the 7x57 has been upstaged by friskier 7s, like Weatherby's.

Where Went The 7mms?

Theo Potgeiter and his American client were looking for kudu when the rhino came on. No heavy rifle at hand, Potgeiter stopped the beast at 12 steps with a 7x57. The hunter assumed he was using solids, “but it was a softnose that penetrated the skull.”

Spain’s army adopted the 7x57 (7mm Mauser) in the 1892 Mauser rifle’s debut year. But soon Spain supplanted that arm with the 1893 model, forever to be called the “Spanish Mauser.” Brits would take up the 7x57 in 1907 as the .275 Rigby. Famously, Jim Corbett’s .275 Rigby killed man-eating tigers. A 173-grain bullet at 2,300 fps was lightning on skids during the adolescence of smokeless powder!

During the 1960s, Potgeiter had great faith in the 7x57. After all, had not W.D.M. Bell used this modest 7 to topple elephants? In the ivory hunting era, its mild snap and recoil had permitted a series of careful brain shots from one position—sometimes from a ladder—to kill several

bulls quickly. Those days were long past. But reliable, inexpensive ‘98 Mauser rifles and widely available ammunition still endeared the 7x57 to professional hunters and sportsmen, if primarily for plains game.

Stateside it faced extinction. “Seems it’s time someone said a kind word for the fine little 7mm Mauser,” wrote Jack O’Connor in 1952, lamenting that “if something doesn’t happen quick” it was going the way of the 6mm Lee-Navy and the .256 Newton, both “dead as the dodo.” Five years later O’Connor would be hospitalized for injuries suffered in an auto accident.

The 7x57 (left) first served Spanish infantry. Later a hunting round, it sired the .257 Roberts in 1934.





ABOVE: After punching this 100-yard group with open sights, Wayne believed in 7x57 magic! BELOW: Every ammo company offers powerful, accurate loads for the top-selling 7mm Remington Magnum.



After a glimpse of this bull far off, Wayne stalked to within 14 yards, shot it with a 7mm Weatherby.

He claimed his recovery began when his friend, gunmaker Al Biesen, brought to the room a 7x57 Model 70 he'd built for Jack on the last barreled pre-64 action Winchester would produce in that chambering.

Huskie 7mms had been around since the turn of the century, when F.W. Jones designed the .280 Ross for Eley and Sir Charles Ross. This English round appeared in Canadian Ross straight-pull military rifles in 1906. Its 160-grain bullets measured .288 in diameter, not .284, per 7mms today. While at 2,900 fps they upended thin-skinned game, hunters coursing lions and other formidable creatures perished when those speedy softpoints came apart.

About 1912 Holland & Holland introduced its .275 Belted Rimless Magnum Nitro. Its .532 head was that of the .375 H&H, a concurrent development; but the 2.50-inch .275 hull was .35 shorter so didn't require a magnum action. Two years later Jeffery formed the .280 Rimless from its .333. In 1917 German firearms genius Wilhelm Brenneke announced the 7x64, beating Remington's similar .280 by 40 years!

During the 1920s and '30s, U.S. wildcatters used a variety of cases to develop other frisky 7mms. Few gained commercial status, but Western Cartridge briefly loaded the .276 Dubiel. It sent .288 bullets from modified .300 H&H brass. (In mid-century, this .300 and its .375 parent would sire the huge stable of 7mm – and other – belted .30-06-length rounds known then as short magnums.) Shortly after WW II Phil Sharpe and Dick Hart fashioned the 7x61 Sharpe & Hart on an experimental 7mm French military round Sharpe had discovered as an ordnance officer. Beginning in 1953, Norma loaded the belted 7x61 for the Danish Schultz &

Larsen rifle. At 2.40 inches, the S&H case was .1 shorter and had a sharper (44-degree) shoulder than Weatherby's 7mm, its only commercial competition.

Field & Stream shooting editor Warren Page and western gun writer Bob Hagel favored the 7mm Mashburn Super Magnum. Based on the .300 H&H hull trimmed to 2.635, this was the middle sister of three hot 7mm wildcats from Art Mashburn's bench, and by most accounts the best. Page hunted with it world-wide, pushing 175-grain bullets to 3,050 fps. Evidently he considered heavier missiles. In a 1953 note to R.T. Davis, M.G.S. Bullets, Page wrote: "Art Mashburn and I have done a few more shenanigans with [his 7mm Super Magnum], and I'll probably have to rework all my charges ... with 160- and 195-grain bullets [and generate] data on 180- and 200-grain slugs."

Vom Hofe's rimless 7mm Super Express, circa 1956, and the later 7x66 Randall, a necked-down .300 Winchester, perform like the Super Mashburn. Better known among frothy wildcats, the 7mm/.300 Weatherby scares the pants off big game; but most early attention came from long-range target shooters. Of course, its 3.85-inch hull requires a long magnum action.

More practical for hunters is the 7mm Weatherby Magnum, one of my favorite game cartridges. Aside from radiused shoulder junctures (signature Weatherby), this 1944 development is nearly identical to Remington's 7mm Magnum, which it predated by 18 years. While Norma loads gave the Weatherby more pep, proprietary status snuffed its celebrity. A 7mm Weatherby in my rack hails from Kilimanjaro Rifles, a firm Erik Eike bought to build semi-custom sporters. His

talented craftsmen mated my Dakota 76 action to figured walnut. The barrel wears a NECG banded sight.

Early postwar wildcats included the 7mm/.348 for Winchester 1895 and M71 lever rifles. Milling the rim adapted this round to bolt actions; however, a necked-down .30-06 offered the same performance. The 7mm/06 and .285 OKH (O'Neil, Keith, Hopkins) acceded to Remington's commercially loaded .280 in 1957. Three peas in a pod. The .280 was later but briefly re-named the 7mm Express. The .280 in my rack, from Montana Rifle Co., sends TSX bullets into teeny groups and elk to the freezer. P.O. Ackley's .280 Improved gained enough fans that in 2008 Nosler began loading it. The 7mm Gibbs, also a necked-down '06, requires handloaders to establish a false shoulder for headspacing before fire-forming to move the shoulder ahead. In characteristic exuberance, Rocky Gibbs claimed 3,100 fps with 160-grain bullets,

In 1963 Winchester announced its .284, whose rebated rim and larger hull yielded the capacity of the .280 with brass short enough for the then-new models 88 lever-action and 100 autoloader, both built around the .308 cartridge. The .284 sold modestly. It got new life among long-range target shooters who necked it down to form the 6.5/284. Stronger sales blessed the 7mm-08, a simple but eminently useful 7 on the .308 case. A hit at its 1980 debut, it was easily added to cartridge lists for all short-action rifles.

A couple of decades later, the hunting world was awash in 7mms, from the 7-30 Waters on .30-30 brass to Don Allen's 7mm Dakota on the .404 Jeffery, both from the '80s. Half a dozen others would trail the 1996 introduction of the 7mm Shooting Times Westerner, a necked-down 8mm Remington pioneered by gun writer Layne Simpson. His colleague and long-time 7mm advocate Jon Sundra came up with the 7mm JRS, essentially a .280 Ackley with a 35-degree shoulder moved forward .050. As with the Gibbs, a false shoulder is

needed to headspace before fire-forming cases.

No recent wunderkind, however, has approached the popularity—or eclipsed the utility—of the 7mm Remington Magnum, announced in 1962 with the firm's Model 700 rifle. The 700 was a cosmetic upgrade of its immediate forebears, the 721/722, circa 1948. The new cartridge was essentially the belted .264 Winchester Magnum (1959), with bullet diameter bumped .020, to .284! In a fit of marketing genius, Remington got Wyoming outfitter Les Bowman in ads to convince hunters its new 7mm shot as flat as a .30 magnum but kicked about like a .30-06. First factory loads featured 150- and 175-grain bullets popular for game from deer to grizzlies. Winchester had chosen 100- and 140-grain bullets for its .264, hawking their speed and, oddly, the rifle's blast. Hunters demurred.

The 7mm Remington Magnum filled a yawning gap in the nascent clan of short-belted magnums. Norma's .308 Magnum had equal reach, a tad more punch; but Browning's Belgium-built Hi-Power was the only well-known rifle stateside to chamber it. Ammunition was costly and

Salvaged by Sevens

While there's no magic in 7mms, I've seen them pull their share of fat from the fire. One morning high in the Wallowa Mountains, as I scrambled across scree into subalpine fir, a tall-antlered buck erupted from underfoot. My 7x57, a trim Ruger No. 1A with a 3x Leupold, swung and fired itself. The big animal somersaulted, sliding to a stop in an avalanche of shale.

A Kimber 84M in 7mm-08 helped out when in Namibia a hunter paunched a blue wildebeest. On its track, our PH spied a sliver of shoulder in thorn at nearly 300 yards. Rifle braced on a tree and sticks under my right elbow, I sent a 140-grain Nosler. "Thwock!" The hunt was over. A zebra hit mid-ships by another hunter sped across a broad pan, pausing at well over a quarter-mile. Too far. But a crawl ate just enough distance that my Mossberg had a chance. With half a meter of air between withers and crosswire, the 7mm Magnum hurled a 150-grain bullet through the shoulder, felling the beast.

In Idaho's Frank Church Wilderness with a Winchester 71 in .450 Alaskan, I hunted the conifer patches in vain. At last my pal and I spied a bull far down a ridge, nudging his cows to timber. Without a second's pause, Ken thrust his re-barreled Ruger No. 1 at me. "Go get him!" Sprinting to cut off the herd, I was gulping air at 330 yards when the bull offered a last glimpse through charred 'poles. An AccuBond from the 7mm WSM staggered the animal; a follow-up dropped it.

More than either the bull or rifle on that hill, I remember Ken's instant generosity. The slightest hesitation would have cost me a chance. The last day my friend stretched his pet 7mm nearly 400 yards to kill a five-point bull. Nobody could have been more pleased than I.



A Ruger No. 1 in 7x57 rolled this fine timberline buck in Oregon's Wallowa Mountains – at 15 yards!

hard to get. The proprietary .257, .270 and 7mm Weatherby Magnums appeared only in Weatherby's German Mark Vs. Remington's 7mm Magnum attracted shooters loath to endure the bruising swat of .30 magnums hurling 180-grain bullets—specifically Winchester's .300, introduced in 1963. In a lightweight rifle, this 7mm has little more bump than a .30-06.

Theo Potgeiter's American client on his '63 safari carried a new 7mm Magnum, a Remington 700 BDL with a 2

beat 175s off the blocks by 100 fps. They reach 300 yards with a ton of energy, 300 ft-lbs more than round-nose 175s. I like 150- to 165-grain pointed bullets for their high sectional densities and ballistic coefficients. Unlike heavier bullets, they can be driven over 3,100 fps from Remington's 7mm Magnum. Result: flat flight and high energy retention at distance.

Years ago I descended a deep draw above Hell's Canyon to root out an elk I'd spied from above. Curling wind gave

1990s showed it trading "most popular" title with the .30-06. Since then, the .300 Winchester Magnum has slowly eaten into its lead. In 1963 you could buy a Remington 700 BDL in 7mm Magnum for \$154.50. A Winchester M70 in .300 Magnum cost exactly the same. Both rifles also chambered Winchester's .264 Magnum.

I've killed elk with other 7mms too: 7mm-08, .280, .280 Ackley, 7mm Dakota, 7mm WSM and 7mm Weatherby Magnum. Hit at ranges from 30 to 330 yards, none of these beasts moved far enough to require trailing. This small sample is no proof that 7mms of all stripes are ideal elk rounds—just as Bell's exploits don't establish the 7x57 as an elephant cartridge. On the other hand, 7s generate less recoil than .30s and .33s. Most

of us shoot better with rifles that don't kick hard, and follow-up shots come faster.

You could say the same about 6.5mm rounds dominating campfire chat these days. Still, at some indeterminable point, you'll cross a red line on the bullet weight spectrum. I've seen elk fall to 100-grain bullets and to 300-grain bullets, from bores as small as .243 and as big as .458. There's no perfect bullet or cartridge. But a bonded or partitioned 160-grain missile clocking, say, 3,050 fps from a 7mm will kill handily as far away as most hunters can hit elk vitals, without savaging the shooter. Years ago Page and Hagel found a 7mm cartridge with this delivery irresistible—as do savvy hunters now. ■

<i>Cartridge</i>	<i>Bullet weight and velocity</i>	<i>Recoil energy</i>
7x57	145-grain @ 2,660 fps	15.0 ft-lbs
7mm Rem. Mag.	160-grain @ 3,000 fps	26.7 ft-lbs
.30-06	180-grain @ 2,700 fps	24.0 ft-lbs
.300 Win. Mag.	180-grain @ 3,000 fps	33.7 ft-lbs

½-8x Bausch & Lomb scope. Its first target, a gerenuk, collapsed to the shot. The hunter was pleased—until he discovered his 150-grain bullet had struck a horn 9 inches from its base and "had merely knocked the animal unconscious."

Other 150s in the vitals dispatched game as big as an eland that scaled a ton. There was no failure with 175s. One shattered the shoulders of a big leopard, killing it instantly. Hand-loaded 140-grain Serras performed well too. A waterbuck fell to a single shot at 400 yards. In his notes, the hunter raised the need for heavy *pointed* bullets in factory loads.

After time afield with this 7mm, I asked a supervisor in Remington's ammo section why it wasn't offering a bonded 160-grain spitzer. The reply: "We had lots of blunt 175s on hand." Remington's bullet selection for the 7mm Magnum would grow to include 160-grain Swift A-Frames, Nosler Partitions, and Remington's Core-Lokt Ultra Bonded, all of which

the bull my scent. Catching him sneaking ahead, I flopped prone where I could see a trail hooking a distant point. Charitably, the animal paused there. A 160-grain Swift from my Winchester M70 sped 290 steps to smash the spine between the shoulders. The elk died right away.

Some outfitters taking clients armed with the 7mm Remington Magnum early on reported losing game to the cartridge. Probing, I found instead those clients were taking shots at distances beyond their ability to hit elk fatally. Many hunters during the 1960s had grown up killing game at iron-sight ranges. For some, a 7mm Magnum was their first scoped rifle! Starstruck by the belted case, rocket-like speed and exuberance in the shooting press, they forgot that all bullets trace parabolic arcs, and that for hunting, marksmanship matters more than what's in the chamber.

Many elk hunters now adore the 7mm Remington Magnum. My surveys in the

*Remington's
7mm Magnum,
and the 700 rifle,
arrived in 1962.
This superb
160-grain load
came later.*

