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Return of the .35s?



I'd been there an hour, shivering. November's ceiling hung close above, gray, cold, and wet. Fog now hid the few breaks in a tide of dark conifers below. What deer would choose this place? The heavy, shin-deep snow throttling my climb had shown not one fresh print. Last look. I swabbed the 7x35's glass with damp shreds of Kleenex and peered across snow-splotched rocks, dimmed now by a colorless dusk.

A limited run of Ruger No. 1 rifles was produced in .35 Whelen, a fine all-around big game cartridge.

Remington's .360 is a sequel decades in the making. And of a time perhaps too soon forgotten!

Slowly, now.... Wait. What's that?

The fork had come to eye earlier as part of a bush 90 yards off. Now it was part of a buck.

But it, and an ear, was all the bedded deer offered. My only shot was from the far side of an icy cut. Skidding down through the snow was easy enough, not so climbing out. Ice fell, rocks rolled. Too much noise! Scrambling back toward my perch, I caught him quartering off the crest down a steep pitch. The bullet struck; I ran the bolt fast. In great eruptions of snow, he plunged into a deep ravine, my follow-up shot over his back.

There wasn't time to wait and track. I descended in clumsy leaps parallel to his path. Down, down into the conifers, now black in approaching night. A ribbon of snow below windfall

beckoned. I took it across slope, closing on his route. By great good luck, I spied him first. A quick shot ended the drama.

My rifle that day was a Remington 700 in .35 Whelen with a 4x Redfield scope. The first 250-grain Core-Lokt had driven from a rear rib out between the scapulae to blast a chip from an antler base as the buck dived off the crest. A lesser bullet might not have brought the buck to a stop where I found him.

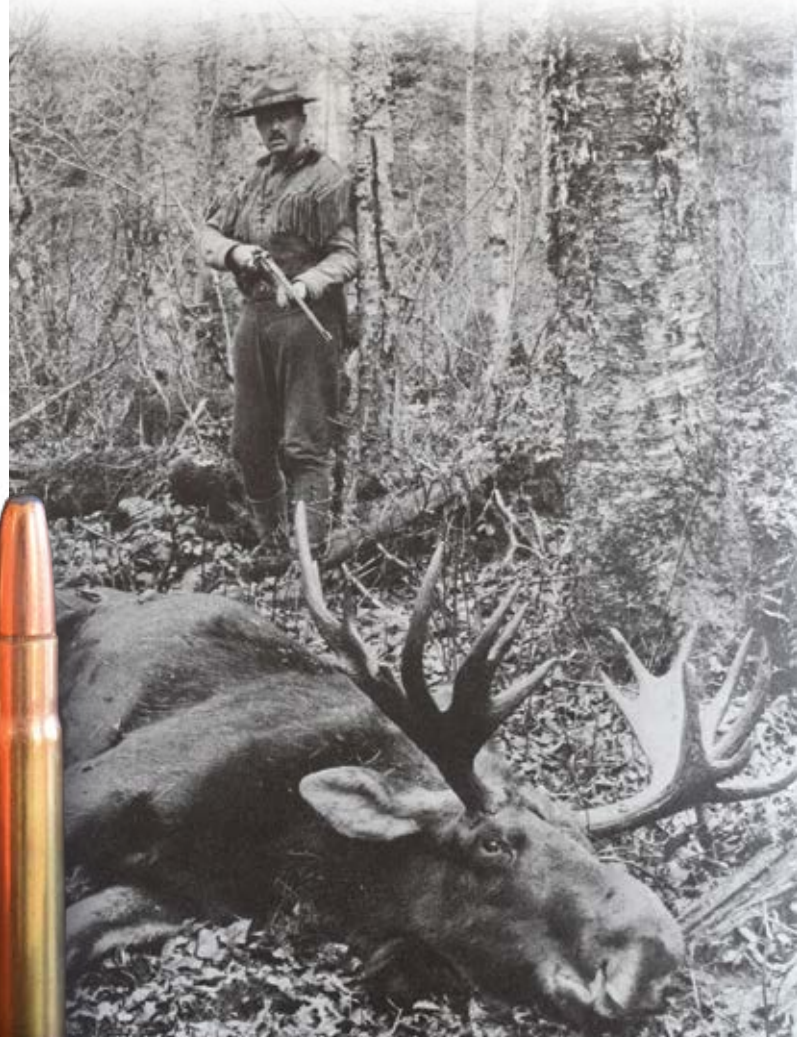
Remington produced its Classic 700 from 1978 to 2005. After 1981, it was offered in only one chambering per year. The .35 Whelen, developed in 1922 by James Howe of the gun-making firm Griffin and Howe, was named for Townsend Whelen, widely read firearms writer of that era. Commercial loads, however, didn't appear until Remington adopted the .35 Whelen in 1987.

It wasn't Remington's first .35, nor its most powerful, nor its most popular. Nor its most recent! After nursing the clan through the magnum age into that of javelin-shaped bullets pocking steel plates at four-figure yardage, Remington is trotting out another .35 for lever rifles: The .360 Buckhammer.

Legions of shooters will shrug. Not me.

Rifle buffs who can't recall Dinah Shore or Jimmy Hoffa, manual typewriters, tires with tubes, or lawnmowers without engines might dismiss .35s as outdated. Hardly—though they are indeed old. The first commercial cartridges with .358-diameter bullets were chambered in Maynard's Model 1882 "tip-up" single-shot rifles. The .35-30 sent a 250-grain bullet

Townsend Whelen, hunter, shooter and widely read gun writer, was the namesake of not just a .35 but also .375 and .400 wildcats on the .30-06 case.



James Howe is credited with developing the .35 Whelen, named for the gun writer of that era, in 1922. Remington was first with commercial loads, in 1987.



at 1,280 fps—barely above the speed of sound. The slightly longer .35-40 hurled the same bullet at 1,355. Both cases had straight tapers and, of course, used black powder.

Much more powerful was the smokeless .35 Winchester, announced in 1903 for that company's Browning-designed, box-fed Model 1895 lever rifle. The Remington-Lee bolt-action also chambered it. A 250-grain factory load clocked 2,195 fps. With 2,670 ft-lbs of punch at exit, it was an effective pick for hunting deer and elk at iron-sight range. Oddly, this .35's main rival was the .33 Winchester, introduced just a year earlier for the 1886 Winchester rifle, also a John Browning development. The .33 spewed 200-grain bullets at 2,200 fps.

These useful rimmed cartridges were followed in 1905 by an anemic semi-rimless round: the .35 Winchester Self-Loading, available only in the company's T.C. Johnson-designed Model '05 autoloader. Its 180-grain bullet limped out the muzzle at 1,450 fps with less than 850 ft-lbs of enthusiasm. Winchester stopped loading for it in 1920. A replacement, the .351 WSL followed in 1907 for Johnson's improved Model '07 auto. Though its bullet exited 400 fps faster than the .35 WSL's, hunters had little to celebrate.

Both rifles got most of their exercise in police work; both used .351-diameter bullets.

In 1906, deer camps were blessed with the .35 Remington, a rimless cartridge for (and introduced with) the company's Model 8 autoloading rifle. Later chambered in the refined Model 81 auto, it was also offered in the slide-action Model 14 and its popular progeny, the 141 and later 760. Remington's Model 30 bolt-action rifle came in .35 Remington. So would Winchester's Model 70, briefly, after WW II. (In an amazing fit of stupidity, I once passed the chance to buy a like-new 70 in .35 Remington, an exceedingly rare rifle, for \$400. No punishment for that blunder would be excessive.) Early on, this cartridge endeared itself to whitetail hunters in the 81 and 141; but it starred in Marlin's lever-action 336, whose long tenure began in 1948. Various 336 sub-models chambered the .35 Remington until 2011. Perhaps because the 336 was offered with 24-inch barrels, muzzle velocity for 200-grain bullets was initially pegged at 2,210 fps. But many 336s in .35 Remington wear 20-inch barrels. Remington and Federal currently put exit speed at 2,080 fps. Winchester has it at 2,020. Hornady lists 200-grain FTX bullets from a 24-inch barrel at 2,225 fps. In my youth, the



Marlin's 336, a 1948 rifle, thrived in .35 Remington until 2011, long after Remington last bored for it!

.35 Remington was considered more than a match for the .30-30. Many of the deer and black bears shot in Michigan fell in woodlands at short range. Bullet weight and diameter mattered to hunters more than ballistic coefficient and drop at 1,000 yards.

Winchester did not offer the .35 Remington in its 1894/94 rifles. It stayed with rimmed cartridges, from the original .38-55 and .32-40 to the enduring .30-30. Only in its last years did Marlin limit the 336 to the .30-30. While both Marlin and Savage competed ably with Remington and Winchester for the deer hunter's dollar during the early 1900s, neither came up with a .35 cartridge of its own.

Three other .35s from the era of the Great War included the .35-30/30 wildcat. A necked-up .30-30, it was reportedly fashioned to salvage worn-out .32-40 and .32 Special barrels in lever rifles. (In 1976, Arizona gunsmith Paul Marquart would barrel Remington Model 788 bolt rifles to .35-30/30 for use with cast bullets in Metallic Silhouette matches. An Ackley Improved shoulder added case capacity.)

In 1915 the brilliant but chronically unlucky lawyer-turned-wildcatter Charles Newton came up with the .35 Newton, on his big rimless .30 Newton case. Western Cartridge Co. loaded this round until 1936, but no

Remington's 760 pump was long a hit with deer hunters, in chamberings from .270 to .35 Remington.



The rimless .35 Remington, designed for autoloaders, thrived famously in slide- and lever-action rifles.

commercial rifle other than Newton's was chambered for it. With 200-grain bullets at 3,000 fps, and 250s at 2,800, this early .35 was ahead of its time. It hits as hard as a .338 Winchester Magnum.

The .35 Whelen, a necked-up .30-06 with no other change, was a popular wildcat in those days. After the war, a ready supply of military brass and 1903 Springfields and 1917 Enfields boosted the .35 Whelen's fortunes. Still it was six decades without a commercial home. Current factory loads send 200- and 250-grain pointed softpoints at 2,675 and 2,400 fps. Hornady offered a 200-grain InterLock load at 2,910 fps, but at this writing it is no more.

After using the .35 Whelen on deer and moose, I had a Remington Model 78 (a plain-jane 700 of the 1980s) barreled to .35 Whelen Improved. There's not much shoulder to improve, so gains are modest, but that 26-inch barrel squeezes 2,750 fps from 225-grain bullets, 2,600 from 250s. Still-hunting through deep snow in Washington's Blue Mountains one fall, I caught a five-point bull flat-footed. That Whelen Improved jerked the rug from under him in a blink.

In 1955 the .358 Winchester appeared. A necked-up .308, it fit every rifle action

that accepted its parent. Winchester offered it in the Model 70 Featherweight and the lever-action 88, Savage in its 99EG, R and RS rifles (and later in the 99DL). Browning listed the .358 in its rack-and-pinion BLR (BL-81) lever action. Winchester initially claimed this compact round sent 200-grain bullets at 2,530 fps, 250s at 2,250. Sadly, the 250-grain load has been axed, and chart velocity for the 200-grain has settled to 2,490 fps. Still, the .358 punches above its weight. It wrings a lot of power from short actions and to my mind should be available in more of them!

The belted-magnum tide that left Winchester's .358 gasping for air at market should have been a blessing to Norma's .358 Magnum. Brought to American shores in 1959, it was Sweden's answer to the .338 Winchester Magnum, announced a year earlier. Like Norma's concurrent .308 Magnum, its .358 has a case slightly longer than the 2.50-inch hulls of Winchester and Remington belted rounds of the day. Still, both fit any action that cycles U.S. short magnums: .257 Weatherby to .458 Winchester. The .358 Norma hurls 250-grain bullets at a posted 2,790 fps, packing well over two tons of energy. Curiously, however, Norma rolled it out as brass only—with no primers,

Savage's 99EG, R, and RS chambered the .358 Winchester soon after the cartridge appeared in 1955.



ABOVE: After WW II, "transition" Winchester Model 70s briefly chambered the .35 Remington. They're scarce! BELOW: A necked-up .308, the .358 Winchester suits any rifle that cycles its parent. More potent than it looks!



powder, or bullets! Gun-makers stateside demurred. The Danish firm of Schultz & Larsen built early rifles in .358 Norma. Sweden so chambered Husqvarnas.

I had a Mark X Mauser fitted with a Douglas barrel for this big .35, then stocked it in walnut. My work was hardly up to professional standards, but the rifle handled well and shot accurately. A Montana dawn found me huffing up a timbered ridge, opposite a herd of elk ascending a logged slope toward Doug-fir thickets. Beyond the scattering of perhaps 50 cows, a branch-antlered bull paced them. Scrambling to gain elevation for a clear shot, I flopped prone, panting, on a small bench. The bull was quartering steeply off,

obscured by slash or blocked by cows. Then he eased into the open at 300 yards. My Noslers were hitting on the nose at 200, so I nudged the crosswire of the 3-9x Leupold just over halfway up the shoulder and pressed the trigger. The bull collapsed instantly and didn't twitch.

In 1965 Remington fielded its short-action Model 600 carbine and two stubby magnum cartridges to feed them. The .350 Remington Magnum was more practical than the 6.5 in the 18-inch barrels. Three years later, the 600 series gave way to the 660, with 20-inch barrels. The mechanism for both hails from Remington's XP-100 pistol in .221 Fireball. Stiff as a headstone, it's a natural for short-action carbines.

Heavy 35-caliber bullets drive deep, break bones, to kill with quartering shots on big, tough animals.

In 1971 Remington discontinued these carbines but retained the .350 Magnum chambering in Model 700 rifles. Derided during their production run as ugly, with dogleg bolts, bat-wing front sights, and other non-conforming cosmetics, 600s and 660s in .350 Remington Magnum now fetch hefty prices from hunters late to recognize this .35's utility. The laminated stocks on Magnums are eerily attractive. They're also shaped for fast handling and sure pointing. Some years ago, Remington introduced a Model Seven bored to .350. It had a "retro" look, a tribute to its forebears.

The .350 magnum has treated me well. Probing the hem of a New Mexico hill one October, I tip-toed through dusty pine litter toward a patch of tan. My 200-grain bullet left at 2,700 fps to catch the six-point bull in the forward ribs. I've no recollection of this elk on its feet after the impact. Such is the effect of .35 bullets. Remington, maddeningly, no longer lists .350 factory loads.

Loud and persistent wailing followed Winchester's 1963 overhaul of its Model 70. Less widely reported but as irritating to the faithful were changes to the Model 94. Two decades later, after a steady climb in market prices of early 94s, Winchester announced the 94

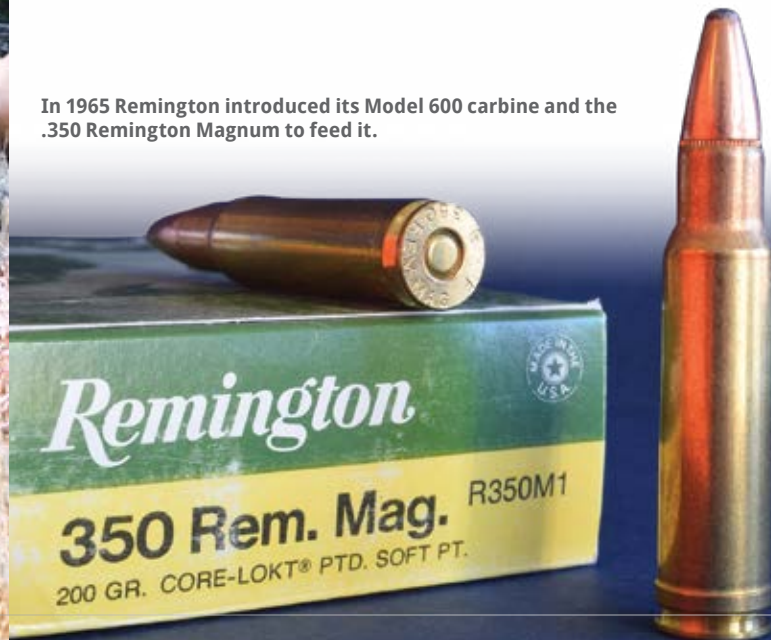
Angle Eject carbine, with a couple of new cartridges for it. The company's .307 and .356 were rimmed versions of its .308 and .358. The cases were slightly heavier, bullets seated deeper for the 94 mechanism. The receiver was trimmed on the right-hand side, and the bolt altered, so spent brass sailed clear of a center-mounted scope.

With a 200-grain bullet at 2,460 fps and a 250 at 2,160, the .356 hasn't quite the zip of the .358. (Subtract 120 fps from these figures for the carbine's 20-inch barrel.) But it still packs plenty of punch for any North American game. I bought one of these 94s right away, divining that no matter how useful, a .35 couldn't pay its way in an era of long-legged magnums. My instincts proved out. The carbines quietly left Winchester's catalog in 1998. In ammunition, only the 200-grain load remains.

The prettiest and most powerful .35 in my rack is a custom M70 pried from a friend at significant cost. Ace stocker Gary Goudy crafted the figured French walnut. It cradles a barrel in .35 Griffin & Howe—the .375 necked down. Ballistically this long wildcat matches the .358 Norma without breaking a sweat.

A cartridge that's almost a .35 almost bit the dust when in 1957, Winchester mothballed the only rifle to

In 1965 Remington introduced its Model 600 carbine and the .350 Remington Magnum to feed it.



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chamber it. The Model 71 appeared in 1935, to replace Winchester's Model 1886, officially dead a year later. One of the '86's most versatile rounds was the .33 Winchester, sending 200-grain .338 bullets at 2,200 fps. An elegant lever-action like its forebear, the 71 was bored only for a new .348 Winchester cartridge, with .348-diameter bullets. A 150-grain softpoint exited at 2,890 fps, a 200 at 2,530, a 250 at 2,350. The heaviest bullet had superior sectional density and a Sonny Liston punch, with 3,000 ft-lbs at the muzzle. Sadly, Winchester dropped that 250-grain load, with the worthless 150, in '62. During a 22-year production run, 47,254 Model 71s were shipped. The .348's big .610-diameter rim (same as on the .33) was ill-suited to most other actions. Rumor had it that on special order, Winchester built a Model 70 in .348, but I can't verify that.

Legions of hunters plying elk cover in the Pacific

Northwest and northern Rockies have carried Winchester 71 carbines and rifles. Scratching for college tuition, I had to walk past well-preserved 71s at gun shows. Then four C-notes would have bought one. Now, alas, clean 71s fetch five times that much!

Winchester's recent .350 Legend is an almost-.35, too. For .357-diameter bullets of 150, 160, and 180 grains, Winchester claims speeds of 2,325, 2,225, and 2,100 fps. Introduced in 2019 for deer hunting where states permit straight-walled rifle rounds in traditional shotgun-only areas, the .350 Legend churns up 1,800 ft-lbs at launch, clings to 1,200 at 100 yards. That's about what you'll get from a hunting load in a .44 Magnum carbine.

A .35 bullet isn't intrinsically deadlier than a .33, a .30, a 7mm, or a .270. What smaller missiles lack in weight, they deliver in velocity. To send a .35 bullet with a ballistic coefficient of

.400 as fast as a 120-grain .270 bullet, you'll endure clavicle-cracking recoil. A .35 that causes a flinch isn't your friend. Lightweight .35 bullets curb recoil—at the expense of the sectional density you need for deep penetration.

Especially on durable game and with quartering shots, bullet speed may be the least costly sacrifice. Even at Mach 2 impact, heavy bullets from the .358 and .348 Winchester, the .35 Whelen, .350 Remington, and .358 Norma break bones and plow deep wound channels. They also rely less on textbook upset than do smaller bullets and can better afford weight loss in tough going. The .35 Remington tumbles whitetails as handily as its powerful siblings drop elk. With 200-grain bullets at 2,200 fps, the new .360 Buckhammer is no hotrod. But it out-runs its 1906 forebear and will surely prove a fine deer cartridge too.

Ballistic coefficient is not the only measure of a hunting load. ■



ABOVE: The rimless .358 Winchester feeds without a hitch from detachable boxes, here on a Browning BL-81. BELOW: Remington's new Buckhammer has a straight case, outperforms the .35 Remington and .350 Legend.



Six useful .35s



.35 Remington

.358 Winchester

.358 Norma Mag.

.350 Remington Mag.

.35 Whelen

.356 Winchester