

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

Marlin Leverguns...

BY: PACO

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The Marlin lever guns are some of the best in the world. When in the late 1960s they came out with the 336 chambered in 444 Marlin... I was first on line. And I have had at least one of the 444s, if not more, ever since.

It has always been back and forth between the 444 and the 45-70 for me (which they chambered in the early 1970s). I'm glad I have both... and glad both are winners in the sales department. There was a good deal of negative press on the 444 when it first came out. Stating the twist of one in 38 was too slow for heavy bullets of over 265 grains... that the lightly built 240 grain jacketed bullets blew up and gave surface wounds... that it was only 10% or so better than the 44 S&W magnum out of a rifle...that the rifling wouldn't shoot cast bullets well...and on and on... ad nauseam...

While all this was going on I was harvesting deer and black bears in the Virginia wilderness with bullets from 240 grains to the 265 grains, then up into the 300 grain cast bullet weight from a re-cut mold. Getting excellent accuracy with load development with just about everything I shot out of the 444. J.D. Jones honcho of SSK Industries... the makers of the T/C Handcannons... was so impressed with the 444 brass he has based a number of his Handcannon cartridge calibers on it.

The 45-70 on the 336 action was a instant hit. Again the pundits stated the death of the 444 is near because who needs a 444, when the 45-70 is available. Well we still have both 30 plus years later... and now even Winchester is chambering the 444 in the Big Bore lever action 94.

One of the things I like best about the 336 is the smoothness of the action. Keeping one at the shoulder and piping out shots just takes a little practice. The round bolt of the 336 is a wonder for that. Even the square bolt of the pistol calibers is very smooth.

One of the finest Marlin 336s I have is a 35 Remington chambered with a 20 inch barrel. I found out very quickly that the 35 Remington in a lever action was a balance of power and accuracy. Most of my readers know in what regard I hold the expression "Brush Gun". Any of these fine calibers with the right bullet and powder can hold their own to any non-belted cartridge of the same powder capacity, fired from bolt guns of the same barrel length.

Where I have covered the 444 and the 45-70 very well in the past, I have not done justice to the 35 Remington. I first purchased a Marlin in this caliber because I wanted to be able to use the components that I use in other 35 caliber guns... like my 38 Specials and 357s. We then lived in the wilderness...

I took one 35 Rem/Marlin and cut the barrel and tube back and the stock to 10 inches for my first daughter when she was small. Loading the 173 grain Keith cast bullet over 16

grains of 2400 gave around 1200 to 1300 fps with out any recoil. And she learned to shoot well with that gun. When she was old enough and her sister was coming up behind her. I suggested she give it to her sister and I would get her something else... but she surprised me... she bought a full sized stock and restocked it. With a small 4 power scope and full power loads she now can harvest most of what the lower 48 states have to offer. So I had to get a new one and do surgery all over again for the younger sister.

She too is now a grown lady and can handle full size rifles and handguns. The day she turned 21 she put in for her CCW and carries a small .380 for self protection. It's not my choice of a caliber, but she is a deadly shot... and with Cor-Bon ammo at across the room distances it will do the job if it ever needs doing. As the Good Book states... "raise them up right..." etc...

Over the thirty years of owning 35 Remington Marlins... I have grown to respect the round and the rifle. Since the cartridge case is so close to the 308 cartridge case head... (slightly smaller) I have re-barreled a number of these lever guns to other rimless cases. The best of the bunch was to 22-250 and 250-3000. I improved both chambers so the commercial rounds wouldn't chamber (longer necks in the Imp chamberings) and had two of the finest varmint lever actions I ever owned, even keeping the pressures down around 40,000 to 43,000 psi.

The 250-3000 Imp was a fine deer rifle in the Marlin... as well as a varmint killer. The 22-250 Imp gave the same ballistics as the 222 Magnum... very neat. And with the heavy weight .224 bullets like the 60 and 69 grainers medium small game fell to it. But the original 35 Remington chambering didn't have any fleas on it either. For example pushing a 150 grain 357 Mag bullet over 47 grains of H335 I was getting 2444 fps and that was out of the 16 inch barrel cut down for my daughters... 38.5 grains of the same powder under the Lyman 190 grain round nose hit 2322 fps... deer and black bear anyone...????

Marlin in the late 1980s had a 24 inch barrel half magazine 30-30 on the market. It was much like the Winchester mod. 64. Except the amount of wood in their fore arm and stocks... they were too generous with the amount of wood they used in those days. I always took a half pound or more off with belt sanders... today Marlin seems to be more sensible with their stocks...

My old notes on this 30-30 show that 42 grains of H335 under a 125 grain JSP bullet gave 3010 fps+... My, my... that sounds like a bolt action 270... almost... I easily got 2550 fps with a 150 grain spire point (point cut off for the loading tube) over 37 grains of H335. With today's nickel plated 30-30 cases and RL#7 powder I would expect to do better than these old figures... do you want a 24 inch half Mag 30-30 today? Winchester just re-released one on there mod.94... with both wood and synthetic stocks. (Midway sells the nickel brass).

When Rossi in the late 1970s hit the market with a 357 on a mod.92 action... Marlin tried a 357 on their small lever action action (beefed up 22 action/which was originally the 32 action)...it was an instant success...they went on with a number of calibers... 25-20... 32-20... 357... 41 magnum and the 44 magnum and now the 45 Colt. I tried them all except the 25-20..never could get a hold of one. But the ones I had were all the same in accuracy and reliability... excellent.

I have said it before the 41 Mag and 44 Mag Marlin I put scopes on were two of the most accurate leverguns I have ever owned. I used to take the heads off turkeys with them... neck shots with small four power scopes and cast bullets with load development were easy... And never... never believe all the crap you hear about micro rifling in Marlins not giving accuracy with cast bullets... it's not true. I never had accuracy problems with Marlins no matter their rifling type. They have had and do have, three different types of rifling by the way... that I know of... micro, a modified micro and a standard rifling... And now for the kicker... not counting my Marlins in fine 22 leverguns... I have owned (just went back and counted my serial number records) 78 Marlin lever action rifles over 30+ years! Some shot better than others... some were superb... some were not... but it is a spread you would find in any number of other manufacturers rifles with that number tested. I'll always have a fondest in my heart for Marlins no matter the rifling...

I have written of this before... I keep my Marlin levers ammo at or around 40,000 psi... the same as I keep my Winchester 94s ammo. Now the 1892 and 1886 designs and the Winchester 94 Big Bore actions can take more pressure... but that doesn't mean the 40,000 psi actions are not effective! They are... and with today's fine reloading components they far outreach the leverguns of the turn of the century thru the 1960s... in fact that is one of the problems today... the image of the lever action rifle has not caught up to it's performance levels of today... many folks still think of them with the ballistics of the past.

When you can drive a 110 to 125 grain bullet at or near 2800 to 3000 fps from a 30-30 that's a varmint load as good as the bolt action .224 calibers. Even better since there is more weight to the bullets. Remington years ago put out a strange 30-30 load... it had a sabot (pronounced sa-bo) with a 55 grain 224 bullet in it. It would give near 3000 fps from the little leverguns. The plastic cup would open when it left the barrel and the 22 would be on it's way. Accuracy was on par with what ever your 30-30 could give with regular loads. I played with them...they were fun... but I could get better service out of light weight spire pointed .308/110 to 125 grain bullets... one of my favorite loads back then was the Speer 110 grain spire point (with the point removed for tube loading) over 40 grains of H335. It was accurate out of every 30-30 I tried it in... and it broke 2950 fps from my 20 inch barreled 336/30-30. I imagine today playing around with A2230 or A2460 would yield even higher velocities. And some of these light weight bullets for the .308 bores are made as varmint bullets for the big belted .300 magnums so they can be effectively used as game bullets from the 30-30 class rifles. And since the flat top action of the Marlin allows for decent scopes... even longish ranges can be utilized, like in antelope hunting.

I have one of Marlin's new 38-55 Cowboy leverguns... it has a 24 inch octagon barrel. And except for the cross bolt safety, which is there because of lawyers not safety... it is as fine a levergun as you can buy today. Again cast or jacketed bullets work just fine... I have an old NEI mold that you put a piece of copper tubing into it and inject the lead and you get a 240 grain .375-376 jacketed soft nose bullet. Out of the 38-55 and the 375 Win BB I get excellent accuracy as long as the lead is soft. Then the bullet in the .378 bore of the 38-55 will bump up.

In our wet phone book tests this bullet is a performer... back in the early 1980s, I shot an elk that topped out to 600 plus pounds with this bullet from a Winchester BB 375. He was

going away from me at an angle that was fairly steep... around 140 yards away. The bullet entered behind his left rib cage going forward and smashed the spine where it connects to the neck. Instant demise. My reloading notes tell me the load was 42 grains of H335 and the bullet's velocity was just under 2000 fps. Probably around 1800 at the rib cage. The 38-55 had a fine reputation in the late 1890s thru the 1930s... the 375 in the 1980s was even better and the Marlin 38-55 today is in the same fine performance levels... If you don't cast Magnus Bullets makes some fine .375 to .379 caliber cast bullets at very reasonable cost. I have used them over the last year and I'm not easily impressed... but Magnus impresses me with their quality.

Marlin has made a small run of 41 magnum leverguns featuring 20 inch octagon barrels and that very deep blue... good wood and fine checkering. Loaded with Cast Performance heavy cast bullets... this little number is going to be hard to beat. It is also powerful enough for anything the Americas have to offer. A friend has one of these Marlins and he keeps mooching my Cast Performance 41 Mag bullets. I have seen some of the groups he has shot...2 inches at 100 yards with peep sights! Of course he has young eyes...

He is pushing the Cast Performance 255 grain LBT bullet at 1800+ fps with 22 grains of H110... I think that is an absolutely top load as far as pressure goes... I haven't pressure tested it yet so load very slowly to that level... I have pressure tested 19 grains of 2400 and that is right at 41,000 psi another top load with this 255 grain cast bullet. And this bullet is the WFN or wide flat nose, and it crushes big bones and penetrates very deep. I would carry it in big bear country. I like the 41 Mag over the 44 Mag... and the 45 Colt over both of them. But no matter which of the big three you choose, know that if it's a Marlin you really can't go wrong...

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