

Calibers for Dangerous Game!

RIFLE

Sporting Firearms Journal

**SAVAGE
SMALL
GAME
MODEL
25!**

**DZ Arms
No. 3
Hepburn**

January 2009 No. 242

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RIFLE

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The Savage Model 25 Lightweight Varminter features a Leupold 4.5-14x 50mm VX-L scope in Warne rings and a Weaver-style base. The DZ Arms No. 3 Hepburn .22 rimfire features color case finish by Doug Turnbull Restoration. Savage photo by Stan Trzoniec. Hepburn photo by Yvonne Venturino.



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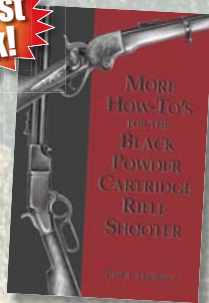
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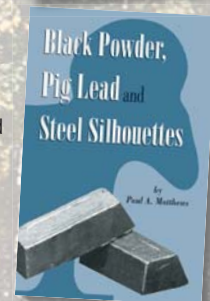


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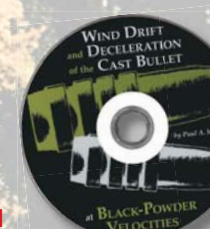


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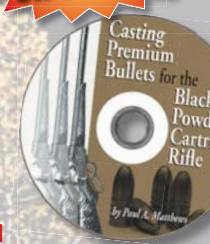
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READY, AIM, HELLO?



Ron Spomer

States that are considering making it illegal to use a cell phone while driving a motor vehicle might want to extend that to load testing at the bench. This could prevent inadvertent attempts to fireform brass beyond its stretchability or to lap barrels beyond their caliber.

Just this morning I was working with 5 rifles, 10 different handloads, 8 different factory loads and testing a new Vortex scope. I'd mounted the scope on a Jarrett Beanfield rifle in 7mm-08 Remington, because said rifle is consistently accurate. It groups .5 minute of angle (MOA) with handloaded Scirocos and 1.0 to 1.5 MOA with most factory loads from a solid bench, but I was shooting off a Shooter's Rest portable field bench, which proved surprisingly solid and steady, but probably not the equal of a concrete bench at a real range.

To kill two birds with one shooting session, I shot Hornady Custom factory ammunition with 139-grain SST bullets to see how well they'd group and how fast they'd clock over the Shooting Chrony. Five, three-shot groups ranged from .820 to 1.9 inches, but each was fired after a gross scope windage or elevation adjustment of 4 inches. It may have taken a shot for the scope to settle in. Most groups showed two holes close, one out, usually the first one. The scope tracked nearly perfectly otherwise, putting its last bullet into a hole fired from the first group after I'd come "full square," so to speak, with the adjustments. Velocities were hovering right around 3,000 fps, too, with no signs of excessive pressure. Cool.

I was also testing how accurately my old Dakota Model 10 .25-06 single shot would fling Nosler's Custom 110-grain AccuBond and 120-grain Partition factory loads plus Hornady's Custom 117-grain SST factory loads. Each was potential fodder for upcoming pronghorn and mule deer hunts.

The Model 10 has a tendency to put its first shot from a cold barrel about an inch higher than subsequent shots, so I was shooting it once, then letting it cool while I fired three-shot groups with the Jarrett, cranking adjustments into the scope between groups. I'd just put the 7mm-08 up and laid the .25-06 on the bags when my cell phone rang. It was my wife. Did I need anything from the garden



Close-up of the ammunition involved in the switcheroo foul-up. Similar ammunition boxes, same color bullet tips, throw in a distracting phone call or two and . . .

store besides the irrigation extension pipe? And don't forget to stop at the post office to pick up some "Hold Mail" cards. Seconds after I hung up,

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The aftermath of using a cell phone while testing loads – 7mm-08 fired in .25-06 Remington!



A .25-06 Remington case fired in a Dakota Model 10 after the 7mm-08 had been fired in it indicates no increase in headspacing.

my daughter called. Would I pick up a dozen eggs on my way home? Oh, and some butter.

Eggs and butter, eggs and butter, I muttered to iron in the memory as I stepped back to the bench. Check the Chrony screen. Ready. *Eggs and butter, eggs and butter*. Load cartridge. *Extension pipe*. Align sights. Squeeze the rear bag. Relax. “*Hold Mail*” card. Relax. Steady, pressure, BANG. There had been two holes about 1.5 inches above the bull and .5 inch apart. There were still two holes. No way could the shot have gone high enough to miss the paper. Must have enlarged one of the other holes. Great group! And the velocity was . . . WHOA! 3,030 fps? That was about 150 fps faster than the 2,864 fps average I’d been getting. The Hornady ammunition had been pretty consistent, too. Oh well. When I dropped the breech, a blackened primer fell out. Yowser! Hot load indeed. And then I read “7mm-08” on the headstamp.

For a split second I wondered if I were still back in bed, dreaming bad things. No, I was awake in the desert living bad things. I then leaned back and looked over the barrel, expecting to see a split if not a gaping hole. But it looked fine. I tilted the barrel up and pushed the lever all the way

down, and the 7mm-08 brass slipped right out, looking like a rimless, slightly undersized .45-70. The bore was clear. The rifle was in one piece. I was in one piece. I wouldn’t even have to call Brownells to order a new Shooting Chrony, because it was-

n’t scratched either. Somehow a .284 diameter bullet had accommodated itself to a .25-caliber bore. Where it landed and in how many pieces is anyone’s guess.

Thank the Lord for thinly jacketed, soft lead core bullets. I

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don't believe a Barnes X or Nosler E-Tip would have made the same journey without grossly rearranging the narrow-gauge tracks.

Having escaped that "senior moment," I patted myself all over, found no blood, so cautiously got back in the saddle to send another (doubled checked the headstamp first) 117-grain SST .25-06 Remington down-range. The three-shot group finished at 1.3 inches, about par for this rifle.

Back in the reloading room, I measured the .25-06 cases fired before and after the "7mm-08 challenge" with a Stoney Point Headspace Gauge. They showed a consistent 2.049 inches \pm .0005, so it appears there was no stretching of the barrel threads or setting back of the Model 10's breechblock. For all its trim elegance, this is one strong action. The "fireformed" 7mm-08 case at its widest diameter just forward of the web measured .476 inch compared to .469 inch from the .25-06 brass. At the beginning of the shoulder, the 7mm-08 went .442 inch, the .25-06 brass went .443 inch.

So, class, while your professor (absent-minded and/or nutty) did prove through this experiment that you can fireform 7mm-08 Remington factory loads in a .25-06 Remington chamber, there is insufficient brass to complete the shoulder and neck. So don't waste your time.

And when you're at the bench, turn off your cell phone. Class dismissed. R

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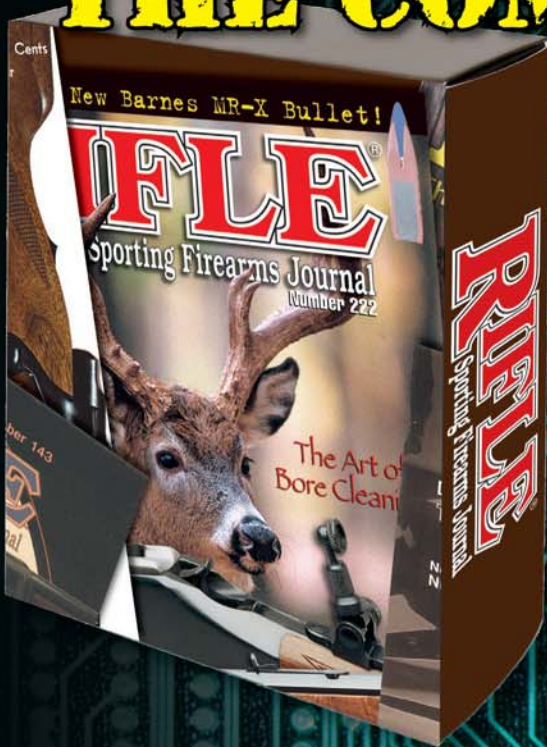
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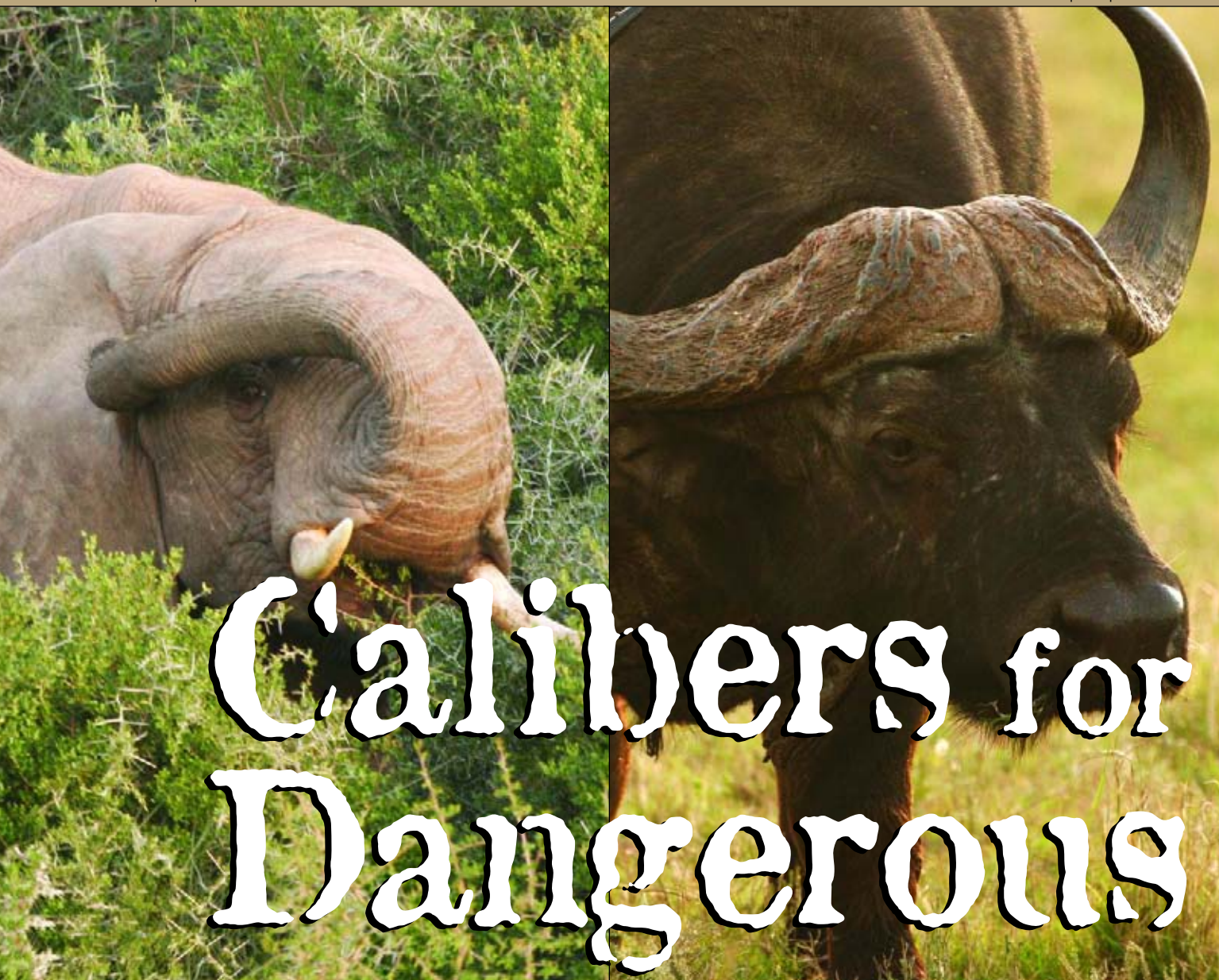
Ganyana

There are few things that hunters seem to argue over more than caliber choices for dangerous game. The web is full of chat forums where the most commonly debated topic is some variation of “what to bring to Africa,” and over 50 percent of the e-mails I receive are along the same theme. America has always loved

“Bigger and Better,” and most of the conversations revolve around calibers well over .40 – but increasingly, I hear of African Professional Hunters (PHs) having to shoot their clients’ trophies for them. I have several good friends in the industry who are brilliant hunters who have reached the conclusion that it is better to automatically back up the client on lion, buffalo or elephant than to muck about looking for

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Calibers for Dangerous

wounded animals, or even worse, risk losing the trophy. Over the years I have watched many men turn from enthusiastic young PHs to more cynical, stayed men.

The evolution of a PH goes something like this: When he first gets his license, he works hard, getting the client into a good position for the perfect shot at the animal in question. If the client wounds it, he puts in days tracking it down and doing his level best to ensure that the client gets his trophy. Then his enthusiasm begins to wane, as he sees his older colleagues doing half the work but earning far more in tips than he is. It begins to dawn on him

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Game

that a good trophy in the salt is worth far more to his wallet than a fantastic follow-up with a heart-stopping charge at the end of it. Even worse, the older PH doesn't even work to position the client for a good angle shot. He finds the right animal and relies on his bullet to deliver the results if the client cannot – and as a result are often more successful than their harder working but less savvy juniors. Finally the young PH gets tossed or scratched by something nasty and all pretense goes out the window, and he learns to hang on the trigger so nearly simultaneously as the client that the client doesn't even know he has been backed up!

Personally I have issues with shooting my clients' animals, but after many years in the game, I fully understand why so many of my mates do so. A lot of it, though, is the client's fault. He arrives over-gunned or, occasionally, under-gunned for the game being hunted and cannot deliver the goods when the time comes. I also hear and read of just how "tough" African game is compared to everything else in the world. I am not convinced. My father is an old professional ivory hunter from the 1940s and 1950s, and he used an 8mm Mauser for everything, including the elephants. By the time I was growing up, his main quarry was cattle-raiding lion but included the odd recalcitrant elephant bull that kept breaking the dip tanks or raiding the orchard. I never saw an animal need a second bullet (although all got a "finisher" just to be sure).

As a young cadet national parks officer, I started out with a .458 only to suffer bullet failure on my first ever elephant and had to finish it off with my 7mm Mauser. I "graduated" to a lightweight .375, but after my first buffalo cull found a nice 9.3x62 that served me well on subsequent buffalo eradication culls, and then the rest of my parks career.

Several facts stand out in my mind from those years of dealing with problem animals – namely, shot placement and bullet construction are far more important than caliber! I very nearly received a quick face lift and tummy tuck from an angry

Big Cartridges for Big Chores

Calibers for Dangerous Game

lioness that two of us failed to stop. I was using a .375 and my senior colleague a .458. The lioness took four reasonable hits and came on, but both of us had run out of softpoint ammunition in dealing with two other lionesses and were down to using solids. I can emphatically state that a .458 Winchester with solids makes far less impression on a lion than a good 7mm softpoint!

I have also killed elephant and buffalo with 7.62 military ball when necessity dictated instant action rather than returning to the station to pick up a heavier rifle. Of course, a national parks officer isn't hunting. It was shooting for rations or dealing with problem animals. Sport be damned, only results mattered and with the least expenditure of time and energy as possible. Still the ultimate objective of both a visiting sportsman and a parks



Not all brass monolithics are created equal. These failed on elephant.

officer is the same – a cleanly dead animal. I have, consequently, carried those prejudices across from parks to professional hunting.

I must point out that there is a world of difference between a “hunting rifle” and a “stopping rifle.” Elephant cows and wounded lion, leopard, buffalo or hippo in thick cover is the domain of the stopping rifle – anywhere, in fact, where you can be attacked from a range of 10 yards or less and the brush or grass prevents a clear shot at a vital area. In parks, each station had a



“Jesse” gun – an 18-inch barreled Army & Navy double rifle chambered for .500 NE. They were short, handy and in matters of self-defense, the recoil was hardly noticeable. They lacked the penetration necessary to take a big bull elephant from the front, but that is not what they were made for. They had a tendency to double on you, but that was fine as well considering the circumstances. I never used one.

As a young cadet national parks officer, Ganyana started out with a .458 only to suffer bullet failure on his first elephant.

I owned a .450 NE and a .404 as “stopping rifles” to back up my 9.3 but never used either of them on an animal. When things went wrong, I had either a 9.3 or a 7.62 in my hands, and those are the rifles that sorted out the problems. After each close call though, I went over to carrying the heavy rifle for awhile but soon drifted

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This is what elephant skulls do to bullets (photographed from two angles). Only the .375 on the right penetrated sufficiently.

back to using the 9.3 – until the next time!

A client coming hunting in Africa does not require a “stopping rifle.” He is hunting and, provided he does his part half-way decently, there will be no scratching around in the thick stuff for something wounded and nasty. If it does come down to that, it is the PH’s responsibility to handle any “stopping” that needs doing. If a client is truly after a great trophy though, it is imperative that his chosen caliber be able to put a bullet into the vitals from any angle.

A client coming hunting in Africa does not require a “stopping rifle.”

I have had clients arrive on elephant hunts carrying a .45-70, without appreciating that the round, no matter how hotly loaded, will not penetrate a big bull elephant from a frontal shot, which is the shot presented in at least 30 percent of the cases. By all means, use your favorite lever rifle if that is what you wish to do, but understand the limitations you are imposing on yourself . . . and the PH. For elephant and rhino, the criterion for a client’s rifle is penetration, followed by penetration.

For our elephant culling programs, we used the .30-06 with 220-grain A-Square monolithic solids or Soviet armor-piercing

didn’t drive a 570-grain bullet fast enough. Come to think of it, even from a 24-inch barrel, they were marginal and required a good bullet to be considered satisfactory. For a client on an elephant hunt, a .40-caliber rifle is perfect and a .375 perfectly adequate assuming good bullets.



7.62x54R ammunition. In a decade of culling, 30,000 dead elephants indicate this combination works. At the same time, the .500 NE Jesse guns proved they were not up to big bulls. From the short 18-inch barrels, they just

On buffalo, penetration is often vital, as invariably the bull you want is always standing at a funny angle. For many years, European clients would arrive with boxes of Winchester Silver-tips as their “premium” ammuni-



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Calibers for Dangerous Game

tion for buffalo hunts. You could safely take a buffalo bull with a .375 Silvertip, provided it was absolutely broadside. As soon as the angle wasn't perfect, it was going to need a PH's bullet to prevent a long and messy follow-up. Many of the old-time PHs recommended nothing but solids for use on buffalo, and consequently caliber choice started with .416 and .404.

For a client on an elephant hunt, a .40-caliber rifle is perfect.

In the twenty-first century, there is no earthly reason to use a solid on a buffalo unless you are using something marginal (like a client last year from the UK who brought a Martini Henry BP rifle). There are enough good bullets out there, and it is simply a case of matching the rate of ex-

pansion of the bullets to the impact velocity. For rounds that have a high impact velocity, like the .375, I have a distinct preference for monometal hollowpoints like the Barnes TSX. For slightly slower rounds like the 9.3 or .416, the Woodleigh protected points and Nosler Partitions are fantastic – and there are many other very suitable choices. Why am I so strongly opposed to the old advice of solids on buff? Mainly because I have seen how long they can live with a hole through the heart. A .375 round-nosed bullet makes a very small hole (see photo), which seals each time the heart pumps. I have seen more than one buff still full of fight 20 minutes after taking a heart shot with a solid. As a PH this isn't good for my nerves and also increases the chance that I will have to put a bullet into the client's buff. A good softpoint (or monometal hollowpoint) will deliver a dead buff within 100 yards or so. There's no awkward follow-up, close enough to hear the death bellow, etc. Give me a quickly dead animal any day!

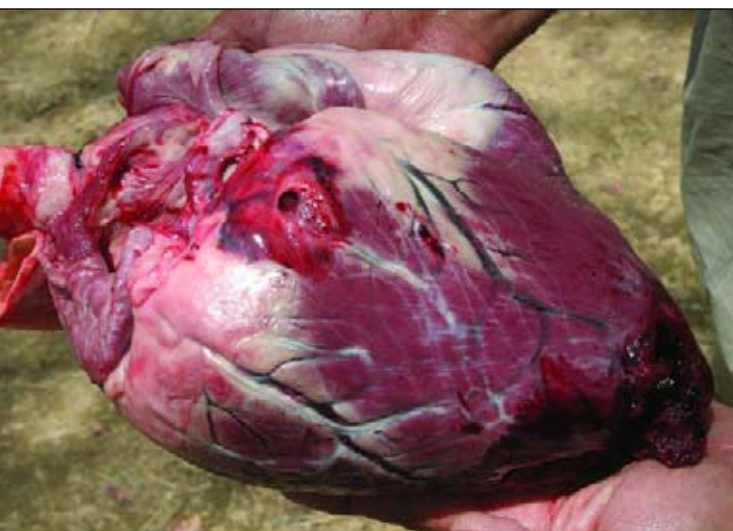
Hippo? For a client shooting one in the water, any good hollowpoint or soft from any rifle



This .375 solid stopped inside a tusk!

from .300 magnum up will do the job adequately. Shooting one on land at dawn, dusk or in the fields at night? I must say I like big, flatnosed solids in my own rifle. For a client? If he is using a rifle like a .375, then I would still advise a bullet like the TSX. If he is using something like a .458 Winchester, then the flatnosed monometal solids (like a Barnes Banded Solid) would be my advice. The .40 calibers? I think the old idea – often also applied to buffalo – that one should start

The top hole in this buffalo's heart was made by a .375 roundnosed solid. Twenty minutes after the first shot, the buff charged and was stopped by the second shot – a Norma Oryx .366 bullet. Note the difference in effect.



An old lioness had turned to man-eating. Note the large exit wound from a 9.3 Oryx bullet to the right of the sight and the small exit wound from a .416 Barnes TSX just left of the rifle.



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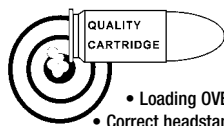
with a soft and have solids underneath in the magazine in case of a charge or follow-up shots on a fast departing animal is probably the way to go. Of course, when using a .416 double, I have the luxury of a soft in the right barrel and a solid in the left and can choose as the situation arises.

Lion and leopard? Two different animals in one. Soft as anything you are likely to encounter when taken unawares, their chest muscles form quite a considerable barrier to bullets if they charge. They are also distinctly susceptible to "shock" (however you wish to define it) from a high-velocity rifle. Slow-expanding bullets like the Barnes TSX seldom open on a lion that is shot over bait and even less so on leopard. I have enjoyed good success with the Norma Oryx bullet on lion from my 9.3 but, for the average American, would tend to recommend something along the lines of a Swift A-Frame or Nosler Partition. They're guaranteed to open and will also make it through under any situation from any angle. Neither of the cats requires a particularly powerful rifle, and a .300 Winchester Magnum would be my advice for leopard, and a .338 Winchester or .375 H&H is all anybody will need for lion.

Bullet impact speeds make a significant difference on cats. Ideally you want the bullet to land at over 2,250 fps (i.e., velocity at 80 yards must be over 2,250 fps rather than muzzle velocity). Like buffalo, this is an important consideration for a client. It is always much more satisfactory for both PH and client to have the animal go down virtually instantaneously where you can see it, rather than experience the joys of a terse follow-up. Clients may find a follow-up exciting, but for me the novelty has long since worn off. Bring a high-velocity round and dump the cat where I can see it, please.

So, at the end of the day, if you are buying a rifle for an African hunt, what would I recommend? The answer is simple. The biggest caliber you can shoot well. For most people this is a .375 H&H. African big game hunting is not a long-range affair, and flat trajectories are irrelevant. Consequently, the old .450/400 or .404 loaded to original specifications (400-grain bullets at 2,150 fps), and both enjoying a wide resurgence, may be better choices for the "average" African buffalo or elephant hunt. In terms of recoil they usually offer less felt recoil than a similar weight .375, due to their lower muzzle velocity, but definitely hit harder on elephant or hippo than the smaller round and about the same as a .375 with good bullets on buff. Of course, the .404 can be loaded up quite a bit and then there is nothing to choose between it and the .416 Remington/Taylor/Rigby/.500/416, etc.

The .416 class of cartridges offers a noticeable increase in "stopping power" over any .366/.375 round, and to me is the dividing line between a "hunting" caliber and a "stopping" caliber. By all means, bring bigger if you wish, but *only* if you can shoot it well – offhand and from shooting sticks. What you can achieve from the bench is irrelevant in the field. There are many new and interesting cartridges available for the man who wants something a bit different – and I, for one, now carry a .500/416 as my main rifle when backing up clients. But the reality is, the .375 H&H and .450/400 are still the best choices for a client coming to Africa for big game – the same as they were 100 years ago. 



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