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Norma Reprises African Success with American Line

Terry Wieland

The most remarkable ammunition success in recent years is Norma's African PH line, introduced in 2007. Intended originally as a "prestige item," it quickly took off, spurred by rave reviews from professional hunters, writers and safari clients.

American PH Ammo Encore

A prestige item is a product intended not to make a profit – although profits are always welcome – but to polish the manufacturer's credibility and the attractiveness of its other lines. Quality is the goal and nothing else matters as much. With African PH, Norma of Sweden spared no effort. Everything from cartridge cases to bullets and to the design of the boxes was aimed squarely at users of big, expensive rifles, heading for Africa on big, expensive safaris.

At a rough price of \$200 for a box of 10 cartridges, Norma did not expect to sell a huge amount of African

A Weatherby Mark V is shown with Norma American PH .270 Weatherby Magnum ammunition. In preparation for a trip to Alaska, it shot consistent three-shot, one-inch groups. Inset, Norma's African PH ammunition was intended as a premium line.

PH, but it moved out the door with gratifying swiftness, even in such rare cartridges as the .500 Jeffery and .505 Gibbs.

Torbjörn Lindskog, Norma's now-retired CEO and the executive largely responsible for the line, told me in 2009 that the company was astonished by how much of this premium ammunition it sold. The American importer had difficulty keeping it in stock. Buoyed by this success, Norma turned to the market for hunting ammunition for American big game and came out two years ago with a comparable line called *Professional Hunter*. It is differentiated from standard Norma ammunition by its box design, which bears the logo "NormaUSA."

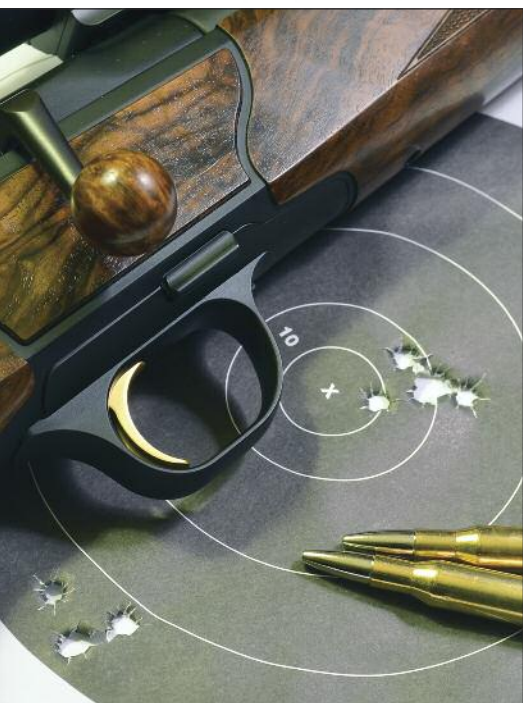
If this seems like too much detail, in discussing a particular line of ammunition – a line within a line, so to speak – it pays to make sure people know exactly what you are talking about. For the sake of clarity, we'll henceforth call it *American PH* to differentiate it from Norma's target and specialty ammunition and from its African line.

As with the African calibers, there is much more to American PH than a new name and box design. Ron Petty, Norma's American representative, says each caliber was matched with the right bullet at the right velocities for the most common American big-game uses. "It was tailored specifically with the American hunter in mind," Petty said. "Bullet selections were made to coincide with function needed for North American game."

In the past, European ammunition makers have tried to make American hunters use what Europeans use, and usually at a premium price. American hunters,



American PH Ammo Encore



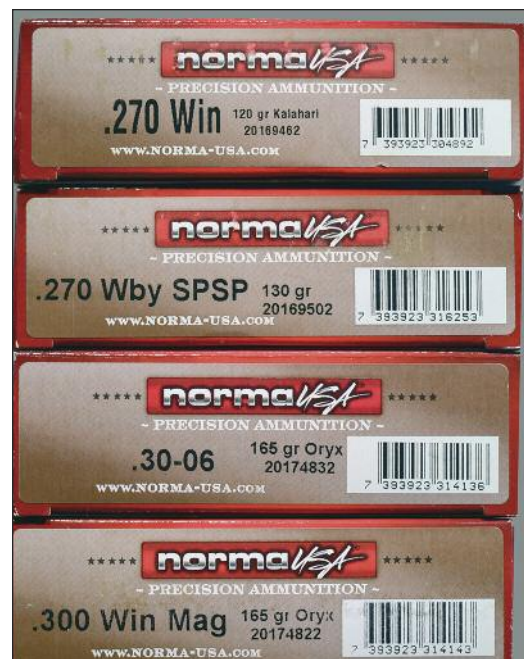
Norma's American PH .270 Winchester load with a 120-grain Kalahari bullet averages .75-inch, five-shot groups at 100 yards from a Blaser R8.

however, have their own ideas about what works and what doesn't. The most obvious example has been efforts to interest Americans in long, heavy bullets at velocities

that are modest by our standards. I remember, years ago, buying 7x64 ammunition (identical ballistically to the .280 Remington) with 174-grain bullets. It was not a hit, although I expect some was sold just so owners of rifles in that rare caliber could get some brass to reload.

In the 1980s, Norma was the only source of brass and ammunition in 6.5x55 Swedish (except for Dominion in Canada), and its offerings were geared largely to the requirements of the average Swedish hunter of European elk (moose). Bullet weights were 139 to 156 grains. The published velocity was 2,790 fps, measured in the 28-inch barrel of the military Swedish Mauser, but in a 22-inch barrel, the 139-grain ammunition achieved only about 2,200 fps. This was a far, far cry from what American hunters expect of a 6.5 – and was expensive as well.

The Canadian load was a 160-grain roundnose bullet at about the same velocity and was intended for use by Canadian moose hunters armed with the common military-surplus Swedish Mauser. It was very effective for that purpose, and for many years the record for an Ontario moose was held by a lady who shot her bull with a



Of the new loads, these four cartridges were tested.

Swedish Mauser. Canadian hunters, however, tend to accept what the factories offer. Americans do not.

"American hunters today demand match accuracy in their hunting ammunition and 100 percent weight retention in a hunting bullet," said Don Heath, the Zimbabwe professional hunter who is now Norma's R&D manager. "Our goal is to give them that."

While some Americans are willing to try heavier bullets at lower velocities, most still insist on light-to medium-weight bullets that sizzle out of the muzzle. As the supplier of Weatherby-brand ammunition since the 1960s, Norma is no stranger to high-velocity loadings. The Weatherby line has featured Hornady bullets from the very beginning, later adding Nosler Partitions in some calibers, and most recently other premium game bullets as well. Weatherby ammunition has always delivered the advertised velocities and has been among the most accurate of factory ammunition to boot.

Norma has put that knowledge and experience to work in the American PH line. The ammunition I have chronographed, in several different cartridges, has delivered the promised velocities, or close to

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Norma American PH Performance

| cartridge | bullet (grains) | published velocity (fps) | measured velocity (fps) | largest group (inches) | smallest group (inches) | average group (inches) |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| .270 Winchester | 120 Kalahari | 3,250 | 3,059 | .823 | .681 | .752 |
| .270 Weatherby Magnum | 130 Norma SPSP | 3,280 | 3,272 | 1.563 | 1.563 | 1.563 |
| .30-06 | 165 Oryx | 2,960 | 2,798 | 3.522 | 2.432 | 2.977 |
| .300 Winchester Magnum | 165 Oryx | 3,200 | 3,116 | 3.476 | 1.808 | 2.642 |

Notes: The .270 Winchester loads were fired in a 21-inch barreled Blaser R8 with a Meopta Meostar R1 (1.5-6x42 RD) scope; .270 Weatherby Magnum loads were fired in a Weatherby Mk. V Custom with a 26-inch barrel with a Zeiss Conquest HD5 (2-10x42) scope attached; .30-06 loads were fired in a Remington 700 with a 24-inch barrel with a Leica ERi (2.5-10x42) scope; .300 Winchester Magnum loads were fired in a 23.5-inch barreled Mauser M12 with a Meopta Meopro (3.5-10x44) scope.

Be Alert – Publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors in published load data.

Heath's "100 percent weight retention" in mind, coupled with excellent accuracy. Let me say right here that, while I admire Norma's goals in this regard, I don't hold my breath waiting for such performance from any factory ammunition, or any handload, for that matter. There are too many variables. However, Norma has gone to enormous pains with the Oryx, and based on what I've seen, I would say it is in the same class with such great bullets as the Swift Scirocco II and Federal's Trophy Bonded Bear Claw.

The Kalahari is a uni-metal bullet designed to expand rapidly into six petals, which it sheds in the wound channel, leaving a solid slug to penetrate deeply. In this way, it achieves the two goals of a hunting bullet: rapid expansion for shock and deep penetration for a killing wound. Having used bullets that do exactly the above even though they were not intended to, I'm not sure I agree

them. This always varies because of such factors as barrel length or temperature.


For big-game ammunition, absolute velocity is considerably less important than the choice of bullet. The two critical elements to consider in a hunting bullet are its suitability for the game animal and its ability to perform properly at the expected velocities. Norma has gone to great pains choosing bullets. Some are its own proprietary bullets; others are pre-


mium bullets from independent makers.

The American PH line includes 54 loads in 31 different chamberings, from .223 Remington to .375 H&H. Most are loaded with Norma's own bonded Oryx bullet, but there are also some loads with its Kalahari bullet, as well as standard soft-points and hollowpoints, and even a couple with full-metal jackets.

The Oryx is a bonded game bullet, carefully designed with Don

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American PH Ammo Encore

with the concept as a deliberate goal, but I'm willing to take Dr. Heath's word. Such performance would virtually duplicate that of the Nosler Partition, which typically opens quickly and sheds

about 40 percent of its weight, leaving the remaining slug to penetrate.

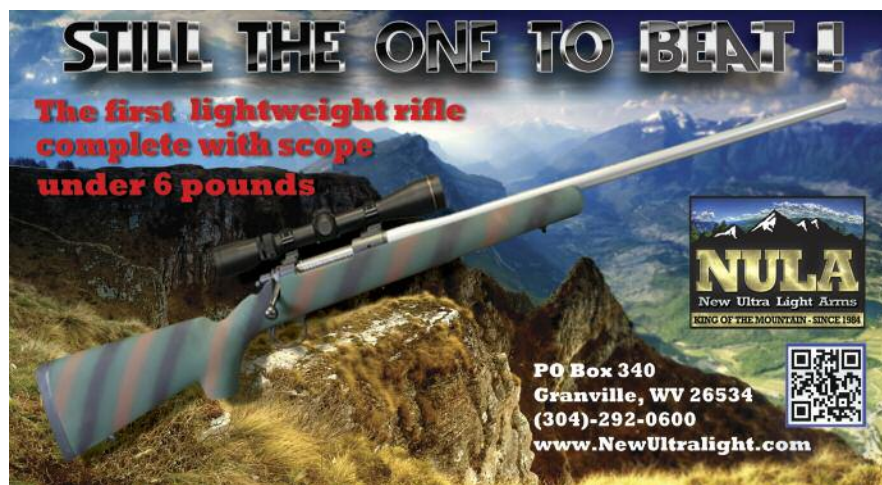
Not all calibers in the line are loaded with the latest in bullets. The 6.5 Japanese and 6.5 Carcano are loaded with Norma's old standby, the 156-grain Alaska soft-point, while the 7.65 Argentine and 7.7 Japanese use the standard 174-grain Norma softpoint. With their modest (2,400 to 2,500 fps) velocities, these cartridges do quite well with these bullets.

It is a ritual in the gun-writing trade that new ammunition must be taken to the range and test-fired, which I did, within certain limitations. At the time of writing, American PH was in short supply, like every other type of ammunition in the country. Obtained was a variety of calibers in several different loadings, and four were chosen to work with.

These four (.270 Winchester, .270 Weatherby Magnum, .30-06 and .300 Winchester Magnum) are cartridges for which I had modern, factory rifles. I standardized the test at one box (20 rounds apiece), from which I had 5 rounds for sighting, 10 rounds to shoot in 2, five-shot groups, back to back, and five shots for chronographing. The groups were shot in one range session, allowing each rifle time to cool a bit in between groups. This method loosely replicates the worst situation anyone is likely to run into in hunting, firing five shots and then, 15 minutes later, firing another five.

The results, including details of each rifle and scope used, are in the accompanying table. They require a few comments: All four rifles were shot as they came out of the box. Three were factory rifles, one was custom. None had been "accurized" in any way.

In terms of velocity, the .270 Weatherby Magnum delivered almost exactly what the factory specs call for, but then, it has a 26-inch barrel. The other three fell short, most notably my .270 Win-



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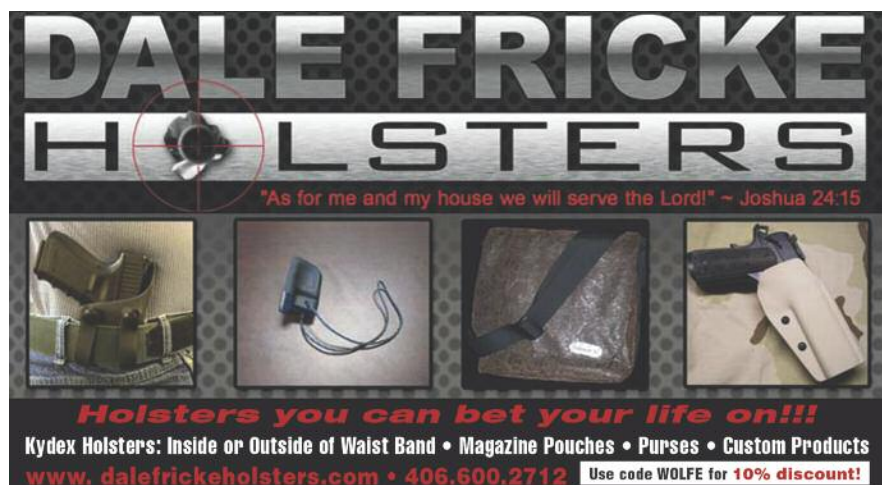
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chester, which has a 21-inch barrel, and the .300 Winchester Magnum (23.5-inch).

Accuracy ranged from extremely good (.270 Winchester) to puzzlingly bad (.30-06). I have no explanation for the performance of the .30-06, which shot a terrible first group, then improved mightily in the second. The .300 Winchester Magnum was decent in the first group, then strung badly with its second.

The .270 Weatherby Magnum was unbelievably consistent, with two, five-shot groups of identical (!) size. (That's never happened to me before.) The .270 Winchester, shot from a Blaser R8, was superb – an average of .752 inch, and remember, these are five-shot groups, not three.

The reality of such tests is that they may suggest much, but they prove nothing. Just because the ammunition performs well in my rifle doesn't mean it will do just as well in another, and the same applies to poor performance. Every rifle has different preferences in bullet type, weight and velocity.

One thing that can be learned in such a test, though, is the consistency of the ammunition – whether it delivers the same velocity shot to shot or whether it has great extreme spreads or unusually high standard deviations. This Norma ammunition was generally very good in that regard, which suggests it will deliver acceptable hunting accuracy in any good rifle and may well be superb in individual rifles.

Of the four, the only combination I would not go hunting with tomorrow is the .30-06. Perhaps I should write that one off to operator error, while I check the whole rig over to see if I can discover the problem. As the long winter months beckon, it will give me something to occupy my time.

Compared with previous tests of nominally premium hunting lines from other manufacturers, Norma's American PH was far above average. R

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