

6.5 REMINGTON
MAGNUM



6.5x55 SWEDE



.264 WINCHESTER
MAGNUM



6.5 CREEDMOOR



.260 REMINGTON



.264 LBC-AR



6.5-284 NORMA



THE 6.5 Saga

A once-neglected bore size seems to be getting some serious traction nowadays.



The .264 Winchester Magnum (center) trailed the .338 (left) by a year and preceded the 7mm Remington Magnum by three.

When the .30-30 courted deer hunters in 1895, it had little competition. Thirty-caliber cartridges got another boost when the .30-06 became the U.S. service round. The first magnum widely chambered here was the .300 H&H. While smallbore centerfires advanced on a .22-caliber track, big-game hunters latched on to the .30.

The .270 broke the mold in 1925. Flat-shooting, with the power for elk-size game, it outperformed the 7x57 Mauser. Not until 1962, when Remington announced its 7mm Magnum in a new Model 700 rifle, would a big-game cartridge enjoy such acclaim.

In the mid-'50s Winchester fielded the .243, Remington its 6mm. Remington adopted the wildcat .25-06 in 1963, three decades after the .257 Roberts upstaged the .250 Savage. These .243- and .257-bore cartridges shot flat but had little recoil. And they toppled deer and pronghorn.

THE .264 WINCHESTER MAGNUM

Bracketed by the mild 6mms and .25s and the .270 and 7mm Magnum, 6.5mm (.264) cartridges fell flat. Surplus 6.5mm Swedish Mausers sold at a steep discount with battle-weary .303 SMLEs and 8mm Mausers. When Winchester announced its .264 Magnum in 1959, the 6.5's star might have risen. Based on the compa-

ny's belted .458 Magnum hull introduced three years earlier, the .264 Winchester Magnum is nearly identical to the 7mm Remington Magnum in profile. Bullet diameter differs by just .020.

But instead of promoting the .264 as superlative for deer and elk—as Remington would later hawk its belted 7—Winchester billed the .264 as a deer and varmint cartridge and came out with full-page ads showing the .264's muzzle end-on with the caption (as I remember) "It makes a helluva noise and packs a helluva wallop!" That's how I got my first exposure to the .264 Winchester Magnum. It struggled at market. The 7mm Remington Magnum almost killed it.

While the .264 all but matches the big 7's starting velocities with 140-grain

bullets, it doesn't easily handle the 160- and 175-grain bullets preferred by many elk hunters. Easily overlooked were the superior ballistic coefficients and downrange energy retention of the .264's 140s. Winchester put another nail in the coffin when it reduced starting velocities from 3,200 fps to 3,030 for the 140-grain Power Point. "Why, you might as well shoot a .270," exclaimed shooters. Indeed! To be fair, the .264 loaded to its potential and fired in a Winchester M70's 26-inch barrel can push 140s faster than even the original factory claims. With slow powders such as IMR 7828 and RL-25, I've clocked Sierra spitzers at over 3,300 with no pressure signals.

THE 6.5 REMINGTON MAGNUM

Remington entered 6.5 territory in 1966 with its 6.5 Remington Magnum, a belted round that appeared in the Models 600 and 660 carbines (1965 to 1971). The 6.5 (and its .350 Rem. Mag. sibling) employed the belted case that began life in 1912 with the .375 H&H and was trimmed to 2½ inches in the 1950s to produce the first short belted magnums. The .308-length actions of the 600 and 660 required even shorter cartridges, so the 6.5 and .350 have 2.15-inch cases. Ballistically, the 6.5 Remington Magnum matches the 6.5-284 and, in fact, beats all

other commercial 6.5s except the .264 Winchester Magnum.

Incidentally, muzzle blast from both the 6.5 Remington and .264 Winchester Magnums is grim in the short barrels many hunters prefer. (The Model 660 wore a 20-inch tube, Winchester's .264 M70 Featherweight a 22-inch.)

THE SWEDE AND OTHERS

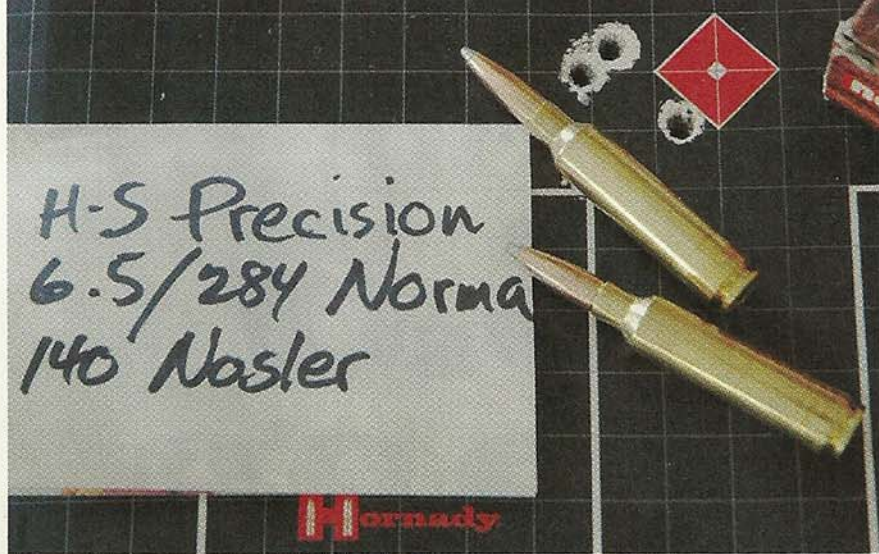
The more civil 6.5x55 Swede, developed a decade before our .30-06, can't match the Springfield's power. Still, it's surprisingly versatile. Traditional 156-grain RN bullets amble downrange at about 2,550 fps. Swedish hunters think that's fast enough. The 6.5x55 has killed more Scandinavian moose than any other round. I've used it successfully on elk, with 140-grain bullets at 2,650 fps. Intelligent case design means smooth feeding and efficient powder burn in short barrels. Recoil and blast are both modest.

Friskier than Sweden's 6.5x55, the .260

Remington is essentially the .308 necked to .264. It appeared in 2002. I expect the .260's modest success at market is the fault of its sibling, the 7mm-08. This do-everything round preceded the .260 by a decade and gathered quite a following. With 120-grain bullets, the .260 has a ballistic edge downrange. And 120s are certainly all you need for deer-size game. On the last day of a Colorado hunt some years ago, I spied a group of elk on

from a short 6.5? Join the growing number of shooters enamored of the 6.5/.284. This necked-down 7mm stared out as a wildcat in long-range competition, with bullets of high ballistic coefficient. While now such bullets are available in all popular diameters, the .264 bore has given us some of the most accurate. VLD (very low drag) bullets in 6.5mm keep the 6.5/.284 on the firing line.

Norma now loads the 6.5-284. So does



An H-S Precision rifle in 6.5-284 drilled this group. Norma now offers hunting loads for this outstanding former wildcat.

a distant ridge. I sneaked to an opposite ridge and belled the last yards in deep snow. Prone, I leveled the Kimber 84M and settled the Leupold's crosswire. A fat cow spun at my shot, dashed downhill, then tumbled to a stop in a flurry of snow. The 120-grain Nosler had closed the 270-yard gap in a heartbeat. Civil in lightweight rifles, the .260 is a fine round for the kick-conscious. It remains one of my favorite big-game cartridges.

Want more sauce

Black Hills. Lapua lists brass. I have two rifles in 6.5-284: a heavy sporter with a Savage action and a fluted stainless barrel by E.R. Shaw, and a welterweight synthetic-stocked bolt rifle by Ultra-Light Arms. Melvin Forbes designed the UL Model 20 action to accept mid-length rounds such as the 7x57 and the 6.5-284's parent, the .284 Winchester. Both my 6.5-284 rifles shoot 3/4-inch groups with hunting loads.

The current popularity of AR-15 rifles made a new, smaller 6.5 round all but inevitable. The 6.5 Grendel was spawned by the PPC Benchrest round. Its 1.52-inch case is shorter than the .223's, but loaded length is the same. The Grendel debuted in 2002, courtesy of Bill Alexander (Alexander Arms) and Arne Brennan, who'd chambered a prototype in an AR in 1998. Lou Palmisano had set the stage as early as 1984 with the first 6.5 PPC round. The latest rendition is Les Baer's .264 LBC AR cartridge, with a case essentially the same as the 6.5 Grendel's. Chamber dimensions differ slightly. These short 6.5mms deliver fine accuracy (using a bolt rifle, Arne Brennan fired a 600-meter group with the

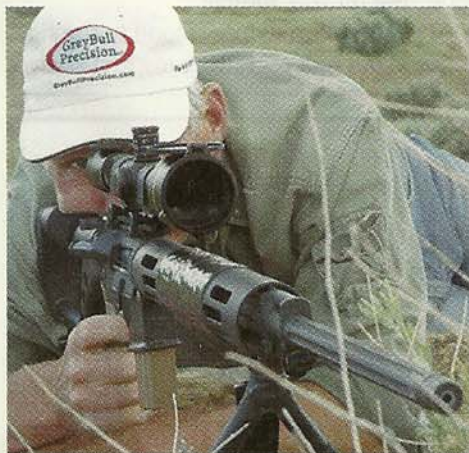
Grendel that miked less than 1.2 inches). Velocities range from 2,900 fps for 90-grain bullets to 2,500 for 129s.

ENTER THE 6.5 CREEDMOOR

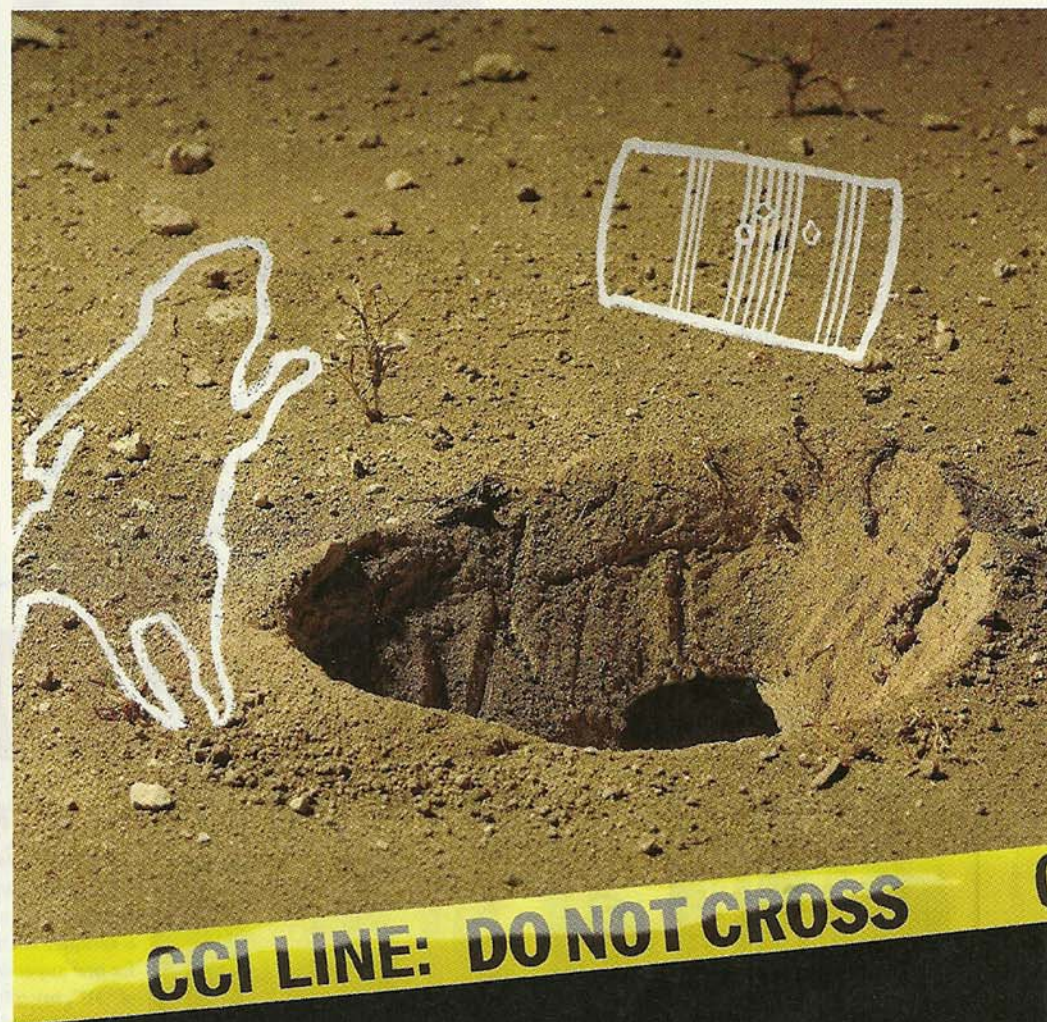
If any 6.5mm round is destined for success stateside, it's the 6.5 Creedmoor. Developed for target shooters and hunters, it has a shorter case than the .260 Remington, but the same .473 head diameter. Truncating the hull and keeping the shoulder well to the rear, Hornady's Dave Emory gave the Creedmoor greater versa-

tility. "You can seat longer bullets without exceeding permissible overall length in short-action magazines." But doesn't a smaller case put a lid on performance? Within limits, no—not with new powders fashioned to excel in tight quarters. Hornady had them. "We used them first in LeverEvolution ammo," says Dave. "Then we adapted them to the Creedmoor and next to our Superformance line." The 6.5 Creedmoor launches hunting bullets as fast as the larger .260 Remington.

Early on, I snared a rifle in 6.5 Creed-



The 6.5 Grendel and .264 LBC-AR function in AR-15s, affording much more reach and punch than available from the .223.



The .260 Remington (right) is one of several superb hunting cartridges to come from the .308 (left).

NO INVESTIGATION NECESSARY.

If you need forensic evidence to prove that CCI® loads are devastating on impact, then you must be shooting blindfolded. Take a closer look at our exciting new AR Tactical option and fill your magazines with this specialized ammunition. CCI now brings .22 Long Rifle ammunition to the AR platform. Any modern sporting rifle shooter will appreciate this fast-action, accurate rimfire technology.



THE LEADER IN RIMFIRE AMMUNITION®
www.cci-ammunition.com



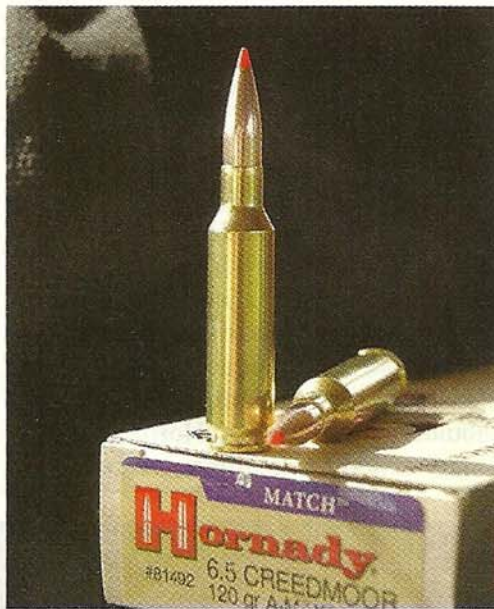
The 6.5 Saga

moor for an elk hunt. The cartridge had already downed deer, but the 129-grain SST was not a first-round pick among elk bullets. I would get close, shoot carefully. Magnum Research threaded one of its carbon-fiber barrels to a short 700 Remington action. GreyBull Precision supplied a 4.5-14X Leupold VX-3 featuring GreyBull's long-range reticle. Its 1/3-minute elevation stem sported a dial calibrated specifically for the 129-grain SST in the 6.5 Creedmoor.

With it, I pounded a 500-yard gong a half dozen times without a miss. In the field, of course, closer is always better, no matter how capable your hardware. Alas, when Ray Milligan (Milligan Brand Outfitting) and I spotted a bull, there was no way to approach. Dead-still air, front-lit ribs and a steady prone position coaxed me. "Remember how you and that rifle performed at the range," whispered Ray. I crushed the trigger. Dust erupted beyond the five-point. He sprinted, wheeled and crashed into the sagebrush. The SST from my 6.5 Creedmoor had drilled both lungs. The shot was twice as long as any I had attempted at elk in 35 years of hunting.

STRETCHING A POINT

During a South African hunt with a



The 6.5 Creedmoor has a short case to accept long bullets with high ballistic coefficients.

Thompson/Center Icon in 6.5 Creedmoor, I dropped a Vaal reebok at 250 yards, a mountain reedbuck a bit closer but with the same thunderbolt quickness. What were its limits? I traveled to another mountain range for a try at eland, a beast that can weigh a ton.

"It's too small," said my PH, Andrew, bluntly, referring to the 6.5 Creedmoor. And I had to concede that it might be.

When we spied a bedded bull far away, I elected to get close before deciding. Bellying forward alone, I eventually ran out of thorn. I slung up, steadied the reticle and chose to forgo the quartering shot. The wait began to tell on my muscles. At last the bull stood—then quickly turned and walked off, presenting no shot. About to despair, I glimpsed the tawny hide of another bull. As the animal came into a slot, it paused. I fired. *Thwump!* And the bull was gone.

Andrew and I looked in vain for blood. A half hour later, our tracker whistled. We hurried over, but my hopes sank when I saw a tiny drop. For the next hour we tracked the bull uphill. We pressed on. Suddenly, the thick spiral horns winked above a bush 90 yards ahead. We dashed forward, up, up. The great splayed prints showed that the bull had turned. It had vanished in a brushy canyon. We stopped, my lungs heaving. Then the eland appeared, lunging up the far side, 200 yards off. Jamming the Icon onto Andrew's sticks, I fired as the bull quartered away. Behind! I flicked the bolt, firing again as the bull gave us one final and fleeting look. The hit was audible.

We found him dying. I stood to the side, relieved but half regretting my first shot.



Hornady engineer Dave Emary was largely responsible for the 6.5 Creedmoor. He field-tested the round in a T/C Icon.



The author shot this Wyoming bull with a Howa rifle from Legacy Sports, in 6.5x55. A 140-grain bullet at 2,650 did the trick.

That GMX had landed well, centering the near lung, ranging to the off-shoulder. My final bullet had driven forward from between the hams, slicing the dorsal aorta near the spine. A lucky hit.

"An eland takes some killing," said Andrew quietly.

There's nothing inherently superior about a given bore diameter. Barrels and bullets of any reasonable measure can perform as well as barrels and bullets the next size up or down. It's by historical

chance that .308 and .284 have won favor. Had the same research and money been funneled into development of .311 bullets (per the .303 British round) or .288 bullets (as in the .280 Ross), we'd kill as much game and still shoot tiny groups. Someone has attributed the miserable standing of the 6.5mm and the 8mm among U.S. sportsmen to their use by enemy forces in WWII. But certainly shooters can judge cartridges on their merits.

Ballistic gaps between centerfire hunt-

ing rounds have become slim. Wedging in a new .30 is hard enough; adding a 6.5 to the list requires aggressive marketing as well as an exceptional product. Hornady has delivered both in its 6.5 Creedmoor, more than a century after Sweden adopted the great 6.5x55. The more potent 6.5s that have struggled during the interim include ballistically stellar entries. Their lagging popularity hardly makes them less useful than the .30s and 7mms that still dominate the U.S. market. **G&A**