

THE MODEL 70 WINCHESTER COYOTE RIFLE (AND SIGHTRON'S SII 4-16X42 MIL-DOT SCOPE)

By Norman E. Johnson

According to the sales slip from Minneapolis Hardware Company, on November 10, 1959, I purchased my first Model 70 Winchester rifle. The gun was a standard weight in caliber .243 Winchester, and it reduced our savings by \$116.95. That rifle began a love affair between the Model 70 Winchester and me. Little time passed before a .257 Roberts and a .220 Swift, both of which turned out to be fine varmint rifles, matched this rifle. Since those early years a good many model 70s have passed through my gun cases — several of which found a permanent home.

THE MODEL 70 ...

THE RIFLEMAN'S RIFLE

This subheading is a powerful statement to make in view of the many fine rifles made. Yet, some pretty illustrious riflemen consider those Model 70 Winchester rifles made before 1964 the best bolt action rifles ever produced in this country. The Pre-64 Winchester Model 70 is, by far, one of the most sought after collectable rifles today. I have personally regretted selling each and every Model 70 Winchester rifle

that slipped through my hands, and these have included rifles that would make anyone drool. Even as money was a bit short, there has never been any family discord when another Model 70 Winchester was brought into the house.

If my memory serves me correctly, the first Winchester Model 70 was introduced in January of 1936. The rifle was made in a variety of styles, including Standard grade, Super grade, Target grade, Bull gun, Carbine, National Match, Featherweight, and Varmint

weight. This included 18 chamberings ranging from the tiny .22 Hornet to the .458 Winchester Magnum. Some of these guns today command some fabulous prices.

It has been said by some that in 1964 the Winchester Model 70 rifle took an awful beating. Perhaps so, but after some pretty serious grumbling and the passage of time, U.S. Repeating Arms began to manufacture rifles equal in most respects to those made before 1964. As the post-1964 rifles were in-



This Winchester Model 70 Coyote rifle in caliber .223 Remington is fitted with a Sightron II 4-16x Mil-Dot scope.

troduced, many parts were stamped out and the stocks lacked the quality of the older models. Eyebrows were really raised as a push-feed bolt head and its recessed rim extractor replaced the old claw type extractor. Then, to inflict further trauma, in 1964 Winchester also dropped the venerable .220 Swift, replacing it with the .225 Winchester cartridge. Winchester had been producing a fine 26-inch stainless steel barrel in .220 Swift in both standard weight and varmint weight. I was fortunate enough to retain a couple of fine standard weights and a varmint weight as the curtain was drawn. But in the wake of all this, I purchased one of the new varmint weight .225 Winchester barreled actions and carefully bedded it into an old pre-1964 stock. I still have it, and few rifles I have ever owned perform much better than this rifle. There are at least two loads that will shoot under half minute-of-angle out to 300 yards. I have one five-shot 300-yard group fired with this rifle that a quarter will cover.

WHAT MADE THE MODEL 70 POPULAR

A careful glance at the Model 70 rifle shows a basically simple and sound action. The stocks were of American black walnut with no extraordinary checkering — just that which checkering is designed to do. The Model 70 ac-

tion is perhaps what sets it apart from so many others. It is a very strong action, with the older models having a Mauser-style claw extractor on a very strong bolt. The bolt peels off a round from the magazine as the extractor fits onto it and enters the chamber.

The bolt runs smoothly along the milled receiver with a positive function and feel. The magazine follower functions smoothly without tipping, and is attached via a zigzag, leaf type spring to the hinged floor plate.

The Model 70 trigger is basic in design and is unique. From its angled forward and downward body, a lengthy trigger protrudes downward. The forward part of the trigger engages the sear via a notch. Then, from the same piece, a threaded tang slants down and to the rear to retain the “pull force” adjusting mechanism consisting of an adjustment screw, spring, and three nuts. The whole thing resembles a piece from a jigsaw puzzle, but it is very simple.

I have adjusted Model 70 Winchester triggers down to a very safe and beautifully crisp pull under a pound. A handy person can accomplish polishing the sear and trigger mating surfaces squarely and smoothly, but a gunsmith should perform this unless one is experienced in this area.

The rearward portion of the bolt

shows the back end of the striker and the rifle’s three-position safety. With the safety lever located at the right side of the bolt the striker can be positively locked in an absolute “no fire” position. Rapping the rear of the striker with a hammer would fail to make the rifle fire. The three-position safety permits bolt opening and cartridge loading, and/or bolt removal with the safety at right angles to the bolt. Then as the safety is moved fully forward the rifle can be fired. Safety function is quiet if moved with pinched fingers, and is operable with a gloved hand. I have eased the safety lever silently forward as many a called-in fox or coyote stared me down.

The Model 70 Winchester action rests into its bedded stock essentially the same today as it did 65 years ago. Aside from the area of the rear, rounded tang, things are pretty flat and square. A massive recoil lug fits down into the stock recess with more than ample bearing surface of the receiver as the three stock screws pull the action downward. Pull from the three action screws from beneath originates at each end of the trigger guard and at the forward portion of the magazine tang.

As an accuracy nut I have always cast a critical eye toward the center action screw on the Model 70 Winchester rifle. The varying torque of this screw

has a definite influence on bullet impact and accuracy. Therefore, I have invariably favored a good, solid, two-point bedding system when accuracy bedding the Model 70. This involves bedding the area around the recoil lug and the rear tang. Bedding along the underside of the receiver rail and drawing the center action screw down usually doesn't solve any erratic bedding problems; in fact, it can make things worse. So, on most Model 70s I carefully relieve the wood-to-metal contact at center rail and allow the center screw to sort of go along for the ride — just enough torque to keep the trigger guard in place. It is not necessary or recommended to over-torque the rear tang screw on the Model 70 Winchester rifle, as this could produce a crushing action to the wood. Torque around 35 inch-pounds is about right.

A free-floating barrel has given me most reliable accuracy on most of my rifles, including the Model 70 Winchester. Also it provides most excellent point of impact over time. On the older pre-1964 standard weight rifles this involves relieving the wood around the circular barrel bulge that is slotted above for the rear sight and serves as a dovetail barrel tie-down block below. The improved accuracy result of the free floating barrel has been proven in a number of my Model 70 rifles. As examples of this, two of my caliber .270 Winchester rifles using Sierra's 110-grain bullet will shoot 0.625 MOA five-shot groups. The Hornady V-Max bullet will do nearly as well. I have used the .270 Winchester with these and other lighter bullet loads on varmints for years and it makes shooting them a pleasure. The last seven deer taken with one of my Model 70 standard weights were all one-shot kills. Two standard weight .220 Swifts perform very well with the same barrel channel treatment, and I always can count on excellent accuracy and reliable point of impact.

THE COMEBACK OF THE MODEL 70 WINCHESTER



The author got these four crows with the new Coyote rifle in caliber .223 Remington, proof that it's an all-around varmint rifle.

Following a fairly long period of discord among traditionalists, U.S. Repeating Arms Company of New Haven, Connecticut, brought forth the "All New Model 70s" more closely resembling the older model. They even offer the pre-'64 style bolt in some models, complete with claw extractor and other amenities.

Among the exciting new rifles by U.S. Repeating Arms is their Model 70 Coyote Rifle. When John Anderson, execu-

100 Yard Test Results - Winchester Model 70 Coyote Rifle Caliber .223 Rem.

Ammunition	Bullet Type	Weight	Powder/Weight	Velocity	Accuracy
Federal Premium	H.P. Varmint	40-gr.	Factory	3,528	0.750 MOA
Winchester Silvertip	Ballistic Silvertip	50-gr.	Factory	3,360	0.850 MOA
Hornady VX	Moly Coated	55-gr.	Factory	3,068	0.620 MOA
Federal Premium	Sierra GameKing	55-gr.	Factory	3,140	1.10 MOA
Federal Premium	Nosler Bal. Tip	55-gr.	Factory	3,170	0.800 MOA
Remington Premier	Green Tip	50-gr.	Factory	3,245	0.875 MOA
Handload	Sierra	50-gr. PSP	IMR 4198/22 gr.	3,240	0.750 MOA
Handload	Hornady	50-gr. V-Max	WW 748/27 gr.	3,250	0.650 MOA
Handload	Barnes	50-gr. VLC	IMR4198/22.5 gr.	3,270	0.550 MOA
Handload	Nosler	50-gr. Bal. Tip	WW 748/26.5 gr.	3,250	0.845 MOA

tive editor of The **VARMINT HUNTER Magazine®**, asked me to test this rifle, I felt both honored and qualified to do so. Our coyote season is pretty much continuous here in Wisconsin and the crow season was on as I received the rifle, so I envisioned some live target action in addition to some serious target work. Though I had several rifles in the works, I lost no time in getting it scoped and ready for testing. The rifle I received was in caliber .223 Remington. The Coyote rifle has a very attractive appearance with its noticeably dark brown, laminated stock, blued receiver, and matte, stainless steel barrel. The barrel is 24 inches in length with a 1:14" right hand twist. Magazine capacity is five rounds. Overall rifle length is 44 inches, making it very maneuverable in the field. The fore-end is semi-flat, making it easy to shoot from a variety of posi-

tions, including bench rest. Even though weighing in at 9 pounds, it doesn't feel that heavy. Balance is good.

This particular rifle has a push-feed action and a coned breech design (tapered entrance at rear of chamber). This helps to protect bullet points during chambering. Cartridge chambering was smooth as silk regardless of the ammunition used.

SIGHTRON'S NEW MIL-DOT SCOPE

With the Model 70 Coyote rifle receiver drilled and tapped for standard scope mounts, I chose to use Redfield two-piece bases and their standard rings for scope mounting. I decided to use a Sightron SII 4-16x with their new Mil-Dot reticle.

For those of you who may not be closely familiar with Sightron scopes, I'll include a brief history and update on this budding, relatively new com-

pany. I have used a number of Sightron scopes and they pass my tests — which are indeed stringent. The company began in 1994 with the idea of getting user input as a means of helping them develop their product. Today they have a full line of scopes and other optics, which are standing the test of time. As a varmint-target rifleman, I like their SII variable scopes, which are available in various powers ranging from 3-12x, 4-16x, and 6-24x, all with calibrated heads for parallax correction. I especially like their plex reticle that subtends approximately a quarter minute of angle. This type of reticle is ideal for both varminting and precision target use. Sightron uses calibrated target-type knobs on their scopes that are very low. Each positive click on their patented EXACTRACK system moves the scope reticle 1/8-inch at 100 yards and can be

counted on to repeat. The target-type knobs are quite low and don't stick out when putting the rifle in a case as some target knobs do.

When Sightron announced the Mil-Dot reticle I soon got around to trying one. The Mil-Dot is available in all three powers mentioned above, so I chose the 4-16x. One reason I like the 4-16 power scope is that four power is very suitable for close-in shooting and 16 power is entirely adequate for even my longest-range target and varmint shooting.

The Mil-Dot has not been available to hunters/shooters for very long. These reticles were most commonly used by law enforcement and military personnel. Actually the Mil-Dot range-estimating reticle was created by the U.S. Marine Corps for sniper use. The dots within the makeup of the Mil-Dot reticle are of a certain size and spacing to help in determining distance to an object or target. More simply stated, if one knows the approximate size of the target, the dot or spacing between dots can be used to subtend or cover a portion of the target and thereby assist the shooter in determining range. For example, the Mil-Dot is derived from the term milliradian, which is equivalent to 3.6 inches of coverage at 100 yards or a full meter at a distance of 1,000 meters.

To best become familiar with the use of a Mil-Dot reticle system I would suggest doing it with paper targets first. Then, from a sandbag rest, you'll soon determine its merits. Sightron provides a chart with each Mil-Dot scope showing detailed specifications in inches. When scopes are provided with Mil-Dot reticles, these reticles are based on specific scope magnification during use and the Sightron specification chart on page 40 clearly shows this.

As I got on with the testing of the .223 Winchester Model 70 Coyote rifle, I chose six brands of factory ammunition which I had available and several handloads. The bullet weights were all 55 grains or lighter. In this cartridge I see no practical reason to use heavier bullets for varmints because of the trajectory falloff. The table on page 38 shows performance information that is very favorable.

At the outset of the testing I did not follow my normal bore break-in routine, but did clean the bore regularly during the testing series. The testing was strictly "out-of-the-box" as the rifle was received — no accurizing or anything that would alter or improve such performance. Invariably the steps I often take toward accuracy improvement show noticeable grouping improvement in a rifle. Weather and wind conditions dur-

ing testing were, for the most part, favorable. (See results on page 38.)

As for varmints, the Winchester Coyote in caliber .223 Rem. is a worthy combination with good accuracy and flat enough trajectory, workable for most experienced riflemen. I sight all my varmint and target rifles at 100 yards and use the holdover method at longer ranges. This brings point of impact with a scoped rifle on at close to 25 yards as well and serves as a nice close-in calling combo. Out to 300 yards it's a matter of learning the trajectory of the bullet being used. As a good choice for coping with wind drift and trajectory, it's hard to beat a good 50-grain bullet in this cartridge. Both the 40- and 45-grain bullets perform extremely well in the .223 Rem. cartridge and are a good choice in extending the range of this smaller case. Several bullet manufacturers offer these bullet weights.

I managed to kill a big 50-pound coyote with the Model 70 Coyote, and lots of crows. Any of the bullets I used killed crows, even with marginal hits.

The Winchester Model 70 Coyote rifle gets my vote as a fine varmint rifle, and with Sightron's Mil-Dot scope, I'd put it up against a lot of them. It makes shooting a lot of fun. 🦋